

The Coils of Eternity

- A novella in six parts by Hugh Fox -

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Part 1.

A WEEK before he'd left for Colgate thirty years earlier, Richard gave a strange kind of "performance-reading" (his term), a kind of "miscellany" (also his term), part readings on anthropology, part poetry, part prose, and the auditorium in the Communication Arts Building was almost filled. He wasn't just well-liked, but well-"loved."

And Eve had defied all conventions and come clothed totally in black suede and lace, not-quite five inch heels, flowing black suede skirt, black lace leotard top and then a black suede poncho that she'd designed and had made just for the occasion. She sat in the middle of the first row, startling the Jesuits and most of the audience, innumerable little pokings and starings and whisperings, "Who's that, anyhow?" "Eve What's-her-name? You know, she got her M.A. from here?" "What is she, a hooker or....?"

She uncrossed and then recrossed her legs.

He was right in the middle of a poem about Tiawanaku as the House of the Sun where Father Sun, at the end of the solstice year, mated with Mother Earth, and the New Year began:

Tia-wa-naku,
The Young Lord brings
Life,
Sun, to the Great Mother
at the pivot-point of the
year, and....

Then the uncrossing and re-crossing, nylon against nylon, like a zipper opening. And he stopped, looked down at her. The lighting was kind of strange, not a brightly lit stage and a dark audience, but the audience all bathed in a kind of eclipse-like half-light. He could see her, yes, see her and react, clear his throat, continue.

at the pivot-point of the
year,
and the New Year could (ascending the psychedelic
steps to loop out into
rebirth, re-creation)
begin.....

Loving to see him uncomfortable with her in the first row.

Loving to see him “hungry” for her.

She didn't even really understand why he was leaving. He certainly wasn't being forced out, something inside him wanting out, away from California. All the reasons, at least as far as she was concerned, didn't really add up, that his wife had gotten a job teaching math down at Long Beach State and was buying a house down in Long Beach against his will and he'd have to drive back and forth between Playa del Rey and Long Beach every day, which he hated, and he wasn't really “Catholic” any more and didn't feel comfortable at a Catholic university any more, and he'd reached the top of the pay salary at Loyola, and then there was the argument that he didn't feel comfortable in a “small” college at all, he wanted out, wanted to “de-ghettoize” his life, move into The Mainstream, whatever that was....

All superficially valid arguments, she supposed, but she still felt there were other stories on his seven-storey internal mountain, that she wasn't privy to, other twists and turns and ravines and caves that he wasn't talking about her.

And she wanted it all, no secrets, no separate identities, one spirit, one flesh, and the two shall become one, and what has been bound in heaven -- or hell! -- shall never be loosed again on earth, and if that sounded scriptural and biblical and corney, then so be it, that was scriptural-biblical HER.

She'd stood in front of her makeup mirror for an hour tonight, doing and redoing her face, the careful layers of plasticish, mudlike makeup annealed to her skin, the eyes carefully outlined, catlike lines out from the sides, subtle shadings on her lids and eyebrows, subtle ruby tints on her high, prominent cheekbones. She wasn't Person any more but Icon, the night wasn't just night but stage, and this whole lecture-poetry reading business was just the prelude to Act One.

Stupid idiot Puritanism, that's what it was all about, wasn't it? Augustinian Manichee dualism, Mind versus Body, Light versus Dark, Heaven versus Hell, as

if the soul were some sort of luminous animal trapped inside (remembering the Anglo-Saxon, which he, oddly enough, had taught her) its ban-haus/bone-house....

Well tonight was the night to demolish the bone-house and turn everything into a giant, rolling tidal way of mucosal slime.

Mother-Earth/Reborn-Sun.

And fittingly enough (he'd planned it that way, to be in tune with the theme of everything he was reading) it was the night of the Summer Solstice, that ultimate diaphanous extension of the year's energies before everything began to contract back to its depressing shortest-day-of-the-year beginnings again. Saint John's Eve. Wasn't it Sir Richard Francis Burton who was surprised that the same bonfires that celebrated Saint John's Eve in Europe were also lit in the middle of Amazonas, as if there actually were some sort of separation between New and Old Worlds, and they weren't all one seamless whole a thousand years before Columbus sailed forth into immortal ignorance.....

Richard ended the reading with a daring little poem about the death-resurrection motif in ancient Mediterranean-Middle Eastern myth, with strong implications that this whole death-resurrection motif had been the source for the Christian theology of the resurrection:

.....the rhythm of the year-death,
descending into Hell,
Odysseus
(descending into Hell),
Jason
(descending into Hell),
the tabernacles of the Year stripped bare,
and then the promethean fire-bringing
morning star rush to
rebirth,
the recoming of Adonis
Adon
Our (Printemps)
Lord.

Proud of herself that she picked up the play on Adonis (Phoenician) and Adon (Hebrew), even remembering the night he'd "lectured" her on the Phoenician spring-god, Adonis, and explained how close it was to Hebrew: "I mean Solomon was forever having chats with Hiram of Tyre. And their language...languages? It was about the same as me talking to someone from Northumbria, same language, different twist. Maybe even like a Texan talking to a proper Bostonian." At the Pieces of Eight. At the Marina. One of their favorite places to eat out at. She'd pay the bill one week, he'd pay the following week, which was the same as a perpetual

policy of each of them paying their own way, but the way they did it always gave it a sense of someone treating, built-in specialness, festivity.

And the Jesuits, instead of taking umbrage at Richard's heterodoxy, were wildly enthusiastic. Even old Father Cavanaugh, who would never have been asked for a passport in County Cork, Professor of Old Testament, one of Richard's best friends, he was up on his feet applauding, tears in his rheumy, guileless old eyes. Ah, they'd miss him. He was this bright comet that had streaked across their dark sky. She felt just as teary-eyed as old Father Cavanaugh, could have easily just stood there and wept big crocodile tears, but refused to give in to her emotions. She had her mask, her war-paint on, and she refused to sully or smudge it. Applauded wildly but refused, refused, refused to cry. Like he himself always said (about his own anti-climactic, low-key career) "It's not over until it's over!"

"It's a shame he's leaving," said Mrs. O'Malley, the Head Librarian in the Von der Ahe Library, as they filed out into the lobby for the little reception they were having in Richard's honor, one last thud, after the big bang of the lecture itself, "it's that silly ceiling they have on salaries. Especially if you have a bunch of kids like him....."

Not seeming to even notice Eve's Big Vamp outfit.

What did Mrs. O'Malley care? She lived in her own head. Nice woman. Simpática. But the world "out there" could have been just big blank spaces for all she cared. She was all card-catalogues and the Dewey Decimal System, "Which Dewey invented it anyhow, John Dewey, the philosopher, or Admiral George Dewey of the Battle of the Maine fame?" Ha, ha, ha, ha.....jocular about the most un-jocular things. But when you were looking up stuff on Amazonian mother-goddess pots, she was a real bibliographical tiger....

Out into the lobby, a couple of glances at her black lace-suede glory, more from faculty wives than faculty, there was a pause while everyone got in place, got a glass of champagne and a little dish (not paper-plates but real -- albeit the plainest white cafeteria --dishes) of goodies. Got the gooiest, chocolatey things she could find. Her little Jean d'Arc voices inside her telling her "Give into it all tonight. This is the one night in your life that you totally dominate!"

A confused babble, then a dip of expectation, and Richard came in and everyone started applauding again, he smiled, handshakes, embraces, kisses. You'd think he was coming back from some sort of triumphant lecture tour, instead of leaving, leaving, leaving forever. "Adieu! Adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades...up the hill side, and now 'tis buried deep in the next valley-glades. Was it a vision or a waking dream? Fled is that music. Do I wake or sleep?"

They actually had hired a little stringed quartet, placed them up on the balcony next to the big tapestry portraying the risen Christ that covered the whole back wall of the foyer. Now they began to play. (Something Debussyian, wasn't it? The

last string quartet? One of Richard's favorites....she'd gotten him various versions over the years. Which had seemed silly to her, but he'd convinced her: "Things never get played quite the same, in fact sometimes very, very differently. I mean you can always tell Bernstein's Mahler, the way he hangs on things, dwells on things, drags it all out, deep, melancholy suspense...meditation....")

And once the music began it became just another party, "unfocused," and Richard was free to come over to her.

"You did a beautiful job of distracting me, if that's what you were up to!" he said, smiling, popping a little pita bread roll with a salami center into his mouth, taking a sip of wine.

"You were great!" she said, "and I understood it all, even the Adonis-Adon bit...."

"My best student!"

Smythe from Philosophy passing by, not a line in his face or body that didn't point down, like he was made out of wet sandbags. "Great job, pal!"

"Thanks."

"Too bad you're leaving."

"Well....."

Eve suddenly feeling like a sleek, black, glistening, towering cobra with an outspread hood, hungry to strike.

"Listen," her voice suddenly secretive, secretory, umbrageous, umbra, penumbra, the eclipse was about to occur, "I'll give you, say, mmmmmm, twenty minutes of this transfigured glory, and then I'll be out in my car, parked just to the right of the chapel....."

Catching him off guard and enjoying watching his teetering disequilibrium, like a tightrope walker caught by a sudden strong wind while walking over Niagara Falls.

"Well, I don't know if....."

"You're such a gifted inventor, invent!" she said, suddenly put down her plate, and walked out into the night. Chilly. It was always chilly in June. The hot-spot in the year was September. L.A. climate totally divorced from the continental U.S., all Pacific Basin. If she took off from here, black night-hawk, bat, condor, and went straight west, she'd end up two weeks later in....Nagasaki wouldn't it be? Nagasaki-Hiroshima. Hiroshima, Mon Amour. Her favorite, favorite film. The

sense of emptiness, existential (and urban) isolation, and then, in the midst of the emptiness, Love enters, and.....

Easily walked down the steps of the Communication Arts Building, loving her highest heels, past the fountains, then right, past the administration building, cafeteria, down into the rose garden, L.A., the L.A. basin out there fuzzily in the distance, although there were days, just after a rain, when you could see it all as clearly as Chicago or New York, flying in at night, one of her favorite things to do, circle in on a huge, sprawl of a city and see it all spread out, yellow lights and tiny bug cars, the cities of God, man....god-man....really wishing she had wings now, black pterodactyl, up, up and away....there must be a way to keep him here, keep him from going at all. She was too tied into him. She should never have allowed herself to get so, so involved.

Getting into her car, sitting back, adjusting the seat down as far as it would go, an odd twist of exhaustion and over-excitement, hungry for him, almost ashamed of herself, after all she was as much a product of dualistic Catholicism as he was. Or at least was supposed to be. Who was it, Father Moriarty, who used to always say "Oh, the Irish were the lustiest people in the world before the Christians came. Read the Irish pre-Christian epics. The coming of Christianity was the most radical change that had ever been visited on any people in the history of the world."

Feeling very earth-motherish. The earth-mother as lizard, hedgehog, groundhog, spider, Mother Sea, Mother Cave. She loved the lycra pressuring around her legs and thighs. Rubbed her legs together a bit, for one mad moment (after a careful glance to be sure that no one was around) cupped her breasts in her hands. Stretch net bra. Not a detail lost, everything down to the last fiber planned so that she was uniformly soft yet firm, sleek yet yielding, covered with black films, fibers, her whole body whispering across the night to him "Touch me, touch me, touch me, I am yours," and, even stronger, oh, so much stronger, " You are mine...."

When he finally did appear, knocking gently on the window of her car, she was in a strange sort of almost trance-state in which time had become Time, feeling like God (an image she very consciously borrowed from Jonathon Edwards' "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God") looking down at the flow of events from a timeless perch somewhere in the hills of Eternity.

She opened the door and he got in.

"According to the record," he said, "I'm overwrought and unhappy and need to go down to the beach and walk it all off," he said sadly, reaching over and kissing her on the side of her neck as she jacked her seat back up and started the car, "so what now?"

"Can you just put yourself in my power, entirely and totally, just once?"

Which kind of amused him. “I can try. I’m in a funny kind of vagabond mood anyhow, casting off, ten years tied to the same pier and now.....”

“And what’s she going to do about her job?” Eve asked, hoping to hear that, no, his wife wasn’t going with him, the split between them had moved from merely existential to operational, easily imagining herself also leaving here, finding a job in, where was it, Hamilton, New York. Not the slightest idea of where or what Hamilton was, but she could learn.

“Well, she’s trying to get a job at Colgate too.....”

“And if she doesn’t?”

“Who knows....?”

Carefully pulling out around the drive that passed in front of the Spanish colonial chapel with its stucco walls and red tile roof, looking very much like a mission church interchangeable with its cousins anywhere from California to Southern Chile, some people coming out of the reception now, wishing she were invisible, could put up some sort of shield of invisibility around the car and slip by unseen, not wanting to have to deal with what people usually did or didn’t do, feeling, somehow, she was in her own ether following her own rules, a kind of extra-terrestrial who just hadn’t been able to (or wanted to) adjust to the ways of Planet Earth.

One trouble with driving a black Lotus, though, was that it attracted attention.

And as they passed one small group of people in front of the library, one of the professors (Jenkins? Poli-sci? She wasn’t sure) looked very intently into the car windows and saw Richard, shouted to him “Good job, pal....we’ll miss you.....”

“Professor Gossip. It won’t take him twenty-four hours: ‘You can’t imagine who I saw Dick driving away with after his farewell ‘performance,’ you know that blonde in the black leather, well.....” Richard laughed, “but I don’t care any more. It’s been more than a little medieval around here, the fourteenth, the greatest of centuries, and all that. You remember Coughlin, after he got divorced, what God has joined together, let no man rend asunder and all that, they actually edged him out of his job. He’s at Rohnert Park or something. Up in the Yeti country....., ” 80th street west, down to the Pacific Coast Highway, then south, “Hey, where are we going anyhow?”

“You’ve never been to my place, have you?”

“You know I haven’t. Manhattan Beach?”

“Palos Verdes!”

“Ah, one of my favorite places in the whole world. I used to go scuba-diving off Palos Verdes when I first came out here. One of the Van der Ahe boys was my student. No tanks. Just free-diving. Wet suit. Great, I thought it was really great, until the sharks started coming close, great big mothers, I never saw anything like it. Whale sharks. I didn’t know a thing about sharks, and I didn’t want to learn. At least not first hand. And then when they found this headless diver in his wet-suit, well, that was it for me. ut it was fun, all these big old goldfish, Garibaldi fish, and the richness of the sea-bottom, I was all set to get scuba equipment, the whole schmear, but after they found that headless diver.....”

“I like pools. It’s a great way to begin the day, “ she smiled, “it keeps me blonde...”

“Come on!”

“Really! I’m one of the black Irish, as swarthy as a moor.”

“Come on!”

“Come on, come on, come on!” she mocked him, reached forward and switched on the radio. P APC, Pacifica Radio. Perfect music, a rich tapestry, bejewelled music, like a bejewelled crown, she was terrible at remembering titles, “What is this? The name’s on the tip of my tongue.”

“Rachmaninoff’s Symphonic Dances. He was living on Long Island. All kinds of mental problems. Or I don’t know if they were really mental problems or ‘reality’ problems. I think if you really, really see REALITY that’s the biggest problem of all, see it all from ‘up there’ somewhere. Like my ten years out here could have been ten days....”

The music lurching crazily, then the fragment of a sad, romantic theme, like pieces of beautifully rich pottery, thinking of the Gulbenkian museum in Lisbon, all the rich glazes of the Muslim world....

Ten years as ten days. And another ten years like another ten days. And another, and another, and another...and then....? A sudden impulse to just pull off the road somewhere and park, go down to the beach, anywhere, expand the Now, like a high-speed photo of a drop of exploding water, turn Time into an exploding atomic mushroom. He was such an innocent and she felt so motherly, sisterly, like a daughter, best-friend toward him, every way she could feel toward anyone.

What a crappy way for it to end, before it had ever really begun.

Butterfly image. Blue butterflies. A flutter in an Amazonian glade, and then gone.....

But she didn’t stop, wanted to take him down to her place, her territory, sow her world with their imagery, as if, once it was sown, it would always, always, always

be there, as if nothing really ever 'disappeared,' you could still go through Roman North Africa and see the ruins, Balbeck, even Carthage now, the Carthaginian museum in Tunis...what was she saying to herself, that all she'd have after tonight would be the faint traces of ruins...? Wanted to ask him if he loved her, but was afraid of what he might answer, and even if he answered yes, he did, then what? Why hadn't she ever married, what kind of desert-hermit lived inside her soul that couldn't make contact, an inability to splice, bond, inter-link.....?

"I'm gonna miss you like hell, you know that," he suddenly said, unsnapping his seat belt and turning toward her, his hand lightly caressing her leg, "I don't know, you're so 'together,'" his hand moving further up her thigh now, pantyhose with a built-in open lace crotch, the voices inside her screaming at him Go all the way up, don't stop now, on the road, off the road, under the road, wir haben nur einmal, einmal und nichts mehr, gewesen zu sein, we have only once, once and nothing more, to simply BE... but he stopped, kissed her again on the neck, lightly fingered through her hair, "I really love you," and then retreated back to his corner, retreated back into himself, like time-lapse footage of a blooming flower run backwards.

Part 2.

"WELL, here we are," she said, pulling into the driveway, switch off, a profound silence broken by only a slight sighing of the wind through the pines and eucalyptus, and the waves beating against the shore in the distance.

"Wow!" he said as he got out and took it all in. Front light on. "Come on, this is some kind of put-on. It's some friend's place, they're away in Vegas for the weekend. Or you've got this realtor friend and the house is up for sale and....there's no way you're gonna manage this Pacific Coast Versailles on a high school teacher's, even assistant principal's, salary...."

The enormous brass torchier over the massive front entrance of carefully cut granite, with a faint hint of a balcony up above in the darkness, the entire facade brick painted white with a touch of mintish green, but not new either, textured -- almost as if on purpose -- by age, so the patina was rough and irregular, dappled and chaffed, hexagonal windows up above in the shadows, and the house itself going back, back, back....a hint of a garden wall extending out from the house itself.... Richard feeling overwhelmed by the immensity of the place....

"You know," she said laconically as she opened the door and they walked in to a domed foyer, a lyre-shaped double stairway in front of them in the middle of a kind of well, the walls of the "well" painted with immense scenes of what he took to be ancient Assyria, Akkad, Mohenjo Daro, Harappá, ziggeraunts and winged

bulls with human heads, tawny bodies clothed in rich reds and golds, but the images somehow aged and fragile, like the murals at Pompeii, “when my parents died, I came into a little money....”

“I guess so,” he said.

It was the house his parents had always dreamed of, every Sunday afternoon while he was growing up in Chicago driving out to Kenilworth and Highland Park, Winnetka, lusting after houses and the power they represented, his M.D. father never quite making it, always obsessed with accumulating enough to buy everything with cash, not buying their first house until now, out in Sun City. Of course, after his heart attack/retirement. It had to be that way, didn't it....?

“Who did the murals?”

“I did.”

“Come on!”

“I started out as a design student at the Rhode Island School of Design.”

“I thought you went to Radcliffe.”

“Afterwards....I always had all kinds of problems about career. I was the only child and my father really wanted to have a son with an M.B.A. from the Harvard Business School....I was always this kind of vagabundo....”

“A vagabunda,” he corrected her. “Sounds like my story.” Following her up the stairs past an immense winged sun-disk, winged lions, winged men with hawk-heads, watching the smooth, effortless flow of her legs in what should have been awkwardly high heels but which she wore as if they were tennis shoes. “I was supposed to feel the same kind of desperation my parents felt coming from an immigrant background, but I wasn't from an immigrant background, my usual Saturday night date was a box seat at Orchestra Hall, Chicago symphony, my ‘hangout’ was Le Petite Gourmet on Michigan Avenue....”

“I used to spend summers in Paris,” she said, waiting at the top of the stairs for him, putting her arm around him now, luxuriating in the feel of the suede as he curved his hand around her hip, “I don't know what I was supposed to pick up there, some sort of economic mystique....what I picked up was the Louvre itself, especially the ancient Middle East....my big compromise was to go into something as vaguely ‘functional’ as English. And I didn't feel the need to impress anyone, something inside me always wanting me to just be ME, whatever it was, haecittas, ‘as kingfishers catch fire, dragon flies draw flame....what I do is me: for that I came.’ You know....”

Going down a long high umber-colored corridor now, candelabrum up high above

them spaced so that there was just enough light to steer by, giving the place a kind of conscious catacombish feeling about it. Stopping, she was the aggressor, kissing him full on the mouth, holding him tight up against her breasts. Him responding in kind, enjoying the unexpected clove taste in her mouth, her soft hair falling loose now across his hands, unzipping her skirt and stepping out of it so that it was all nylon- and lace- encased sinew. He reacted anxiously to her smooth muscularity and balletic grace, reaching down to the lacey slit at the front of her pantyhose, barely covered by a stretch lace bikini. Her stopping him, starting to walk again, down to the room at the end of the corridor, opening the door....

What had he expected? Lace canopies and a huge white lace bed? Curtains and makeup tables filled with toiletries? But what it was was a large oval-shaped room whose walls weren't walls at all but rounded glass panels enclosing a semicircular greenhouse, with low, subdued lights in it, and a bed with a soft, fuzzy-shaggy black bedspread on it right in the middle of the green, exactly skin temperature so the temperature factor disappeared altogether and you were just There. Orchids, clematis, bamboo, papaya, all sorts of huge elephant-eared vines he'd never learned the names of....

Taking off her long silver earrings made up of scores of tiny shimmering silver squares, letting them fall on the black carpeted floor next to the bed. Lights out in the "forest" that surrounded them, closing the door and redundantly locking it, although there was obviously no one else, nothing else in the house to disturb them.

No hesitation now. Taking his clothes off, but she left everything on, lay down and waited for him to do whatever he was going to do, her blonde hair spread out in a nimbus around her head, her arms and breasts enclosed in black lace, her legs veiled in black nylon, totally confident, almost "cold," this was her territory, the waiting center of her life.

No music. Should there be music, he wondered as he took off his socks, then his silly boxer shorts and silly white T-shirt, obviously feeling uncomfortable for a moment, until she lowered the lights from a control panel at the side of the bed. And he came to her hard and ready and carefully pulled off her panties, reached down and began to gently massage her legs....no hurry now, no awkwardness, it was as if they had been doing this for a thousand years together....they were home, this was them, their territory, their instinct.

Mind off totally, shifted into a spidery, wolfish, owlsh automaticness, touching, tasting, her loving everything about him, and he the same with her, finishing once, easily, no "protection." She reached down and started to touch him all over again, oils on a little black cube next to the bed, patchouli, rubbing it all over him. Then she got up for a moment, a little music in the background, Debussy-Satie, but just low enough so that he could barely make it out, didn't even try to start identifying anything.

And he found himself able to start all over again. Eve's body hardly "body" at all, but some sort of lean, sinuous machine, all the tennis and swimming and bicycling she did turning every inch of her into pure curved energy, and, amazingly, her breasts were still full, the nipples wide and pink, obviously kept out of the sun, her skin as pale as paper, all the time wishing he were more "animal" like her, that he wasn't just books and footnotes but pools and running and gyms, so that he could match her grace.

*

WHEN he woke up the next morning, after the deepest, most joyous sleep he'd ever had in his life, full of dreams of a childhood he'd never had, patient, supportive mothers and brisk, sunny beaches, sailboats and starfish, receding tides, rich blood-orange sunsets, she was gone.

Which terrified him for a moment, as if he were still the boy in his dreams, abandoned now as he emerged back into reality. The greenhouse panels were open to daylight on top but otherwise the room was windowless. He fumbled around in his pockets, found his watch.

Almost eleven.

First thought, his wife: "She'll have called the cops by now," but, no, she wouldn't. She'd be down at San Fernando State College cleaning out her desk, getting packed, the kids would be home alone watching TV or maybe old Mrs. Gorman, their next door neighbor, would be there baby-sitting for a dollar an hour -- which simply meant she'd be sitting there watching TV with them, pigging up on whatever she could find in the cupboards. And she usually managed to find all of Richard's favorite little things -- little Japanese crackers soaked in sukuyaki sauce, or Japanese dried snacking peas, English butterscotch drops....

Got up, found the bathroom, razor as if waiting for him, performed his morning rituals, pulled on his clothes, opened the door.

The corridor exactly the same as the night before. Just a little light at the end.

"Eve!"

Nothing.

Down the corridor, down the graceful curve of the stairs, everything bathed in sunlight now. It was almost like coming back into the same bouyant optimism of the dream from which he'd just emerged. His dream-mother ought to be waiting for him at the door dressed all in 1920s white. That was one of the odd features of his dreams, he always dreamed "historically," back to the fin de siècle, as if he were walking into Monet's beach-scenes or gardens, across Whistler's Waterloo

Bridge, into a sunny Renoir beer-garden. In fact that's where he'd been in his dreams the night before, come to think of it....in/on Monet's "Beach at Calais." The painting that was in the Art Institute in Chicago. For a moment interfaced between Dream and Reality.

And then he smelled the coffee and toast and walked through the immense dining room to his left, a huge round table in the very middle of the room under a cut glass chandelier, covered with a crocheted tablecloth like the ones his grandmother used to make, mirrored panels all along the walls, French doors that looked out on a curved, sloped garden that ended in bushy boxwoods. In through the door into the kitchen. And there she was in a plain brown caftan and brown leather thonged sandals, her hair all brushed out, abundant, loose and flowing. Actually frying eggs, butter-soaked whole wheat toast already piled up on a white kitchen table covered with a white and yellow striped tablecloth that unconsciously (?) picked up the whole color-scheme of egg-whites and egg-yolks and butter.

"There's bacon too, if you want it...."

"No, no, everything's just...."

Coming over to her, her deftly turning off the burner and putting out her arms to receive him, folding into each other, neither of them ever having felt before that anything had been so "right," "in order," "together," as if their whole lives had been tunnelling toward this gloriously emergent moment, their hands exploring each other's bodies, grasping and holding, as if to reassure themselves that they were really there and not on the other, dream-side, of reality.

She started to cry, was instantly embarrassed, and then he started to cry too, not embarrassed at all, both of them laughing.

"What's all this about?" she said, holding on to him, holding on to him, holding on to him, nestling her head down on his chest.

"Les belles choses n'ont qu'un printemps, semons de roses les pas du Temps," he said, and started to translate, "Beautiful things only last a Springtime..."

"I understand, silly. In fact I think my French is better than my English." Tears ended now, out of each other's arms in a deftly choreographed flow. She slid the sunny-side-up eggs on to plates, putting the plates on plaited palm placemats, him somewhat reluctantly sitting down, cut off from her, deep inside him feeling that he needed to keep touching her to simply survive, like she was the Earth, the sole sanity and balance, and to be severed from it was madness and death. Silliness, silliness, silliness, but....

"Like my foreign students. I'll get someone from Poland who has studied English from grade one, and they'll say 'I first saw him yesterday,' and one of my native

speakers will say 'I first seen him....' So I actually have been suggesting that we teach English as a Second Language. 'I seen him,' that's practically standard English now...."

"But maybe that's the way it's evolving," he said unseriously.

Her very serious in her return. "What it's really evolving toward is Pygmalian. Proper Professor 'Iggins and endemically unproper Liza Doolittle. A kind of linguistic class-war."

He smiled. "You know what we sound like, don't you?"

"What?"

"Two professors having breakfast!" he laughed, and she came over and sat on his lap, kissed him open-mouthed, reaching under his shirt and digging her nails into his skin.

"Hey, that hurts!"

"The better to remember me by!" she said, and suddenly IT was there in their midst, the Fact that this whole reality, the sunlight and caftans and hair and sandals and smell of hazelnut-laced coffee and fresh toast and butter and eggs and the wind whipping the bushes around outside, was all as transient as the snapping of fingers, the blinking of eyes, and that that transience was simply an illustration of the even greater transience that surrounded their entire lives, that there was no holding it back, no matter what they did it was rushing inexorably toward its own imploding, internally self-destructing annihilation.

"I suppose I should make a call," he said abruptly. He got up and dialed his home phone, certainly not expecting Maria del Carmen to be there. But she was.

"Hi."

"Pero donde estas? Estas totalmente loco, te van a matar un dia, emborrachandose asi.... [But where are you. You're totally crazy, they're going to kill you some day, getting drunk that way....]"

"I'm in San Francisco," he said, "last minute impulse. I can't just leave without saying goodbye to Morris and the gang...."

"Screw them!" she said, "There's all the packing to do. If you don't get back here by tonight, te juro, voy a llamar gente para ayudarme, y tu pagas la cuenta, te juro.... [I swear, I'm going to call people to help me and you pay the bill, I swear....]"

"OK, OK. But ten years in California, what do you expect me to do, just twist my

nose and vanish?”

“You’d better twist your nose and get back here. Ten cuidado conmigo o tu pagarás duro, no soy la esclava de nadie. [be careful with me or you’ll pay dearly, I’m not anyone’s slave.]”

“OK, OK....I’ll see you tonight.”

And she hung up obviously as hard and decisively as she could.

“A really exemplary marriage,” said Eve. And they both laughed, back in each other’s arms again. “What’s this about your drinking?”

“Her fantasy. I think she picked it up from my mother. I really think they’d love me to be a drunk or some kind of drug addict, it’d make everything so much easier to explain, you wouldn’t have to pull in any big concepts, keep it down on the rat-maze level....pure behaviorism....nothing existential....”

“For me, the more complicated, the better. Are you really hungry?”

“Not really.”

“Neither am I. What are we going to do?”

“I think we should....”

“OK,” she said, and took him by the hand. They walked through the dining room, up the stairs.

“All this space!” he said as they passed Akkadians and Sumerians and Babylonians, flying sun-disks and hawk-headed gods, “It’s great!”

“My father got some kind of a ‘deal,’ he was always getting some kind of a ‘deal,’ some unpaid bill or something, and they paid him off with this house and he willed it to me and I came out here to sell it and fell in love with it and I’ve been here ever since. It’s a little spooky at night, alone and everything, and I probably should hire some servants, but that seems so un-egalitarian, and you start bringing in ‘outsiders’ and the word gets out that you’re all by yourself, you know what I mean. This way it’s just another house in the mists....”

“Of time,” he added on as they walked into the central corridor upstairs, kind of the backbone of the whole house, arms around each other, anxious, hungry, unashamed of their hungers.

“Unfortunately,” she added, “I mean ‘of time.’ Usually I love to see it all pass. I goad it forward like heels into a horse’s ribs, but this one time, if I could stop all the clocks and just keep it forever NOW....”

Into the second door from the right, all beige and pink. This was the room he'd expected the first time, as if he could necromantically peer into her soul and see what sorts of things her inner spirit would produce.

A big brass bed covered with a white ruffled comforter, pink satin sculpted drapes around the window, a big antiqued white makeup table over in the corner, an enormous wall-length closet, open accordian doors, the racks filled with rainbows of clothes, shelves on top replete with rows of shoes, a fluffy shaggy pink carpet under foot.

"It's like Bluebeard's castle!" he said.

They let themselves fall down on the bed together, like falling into a pool.

"Bartok. My favorite endless, cacophonous-romantic opera."

Which he laughed at.

"I thought I was the only one in the L.A. area who knew about such things...."

"Like Tchaikovsky's forever unperformed operas," she smiled, "or the rest of Humperdinck, apart from Hansel and Gretel. I'd like to impressario a Humperdinck festival. Schonberg Hall: Heirat wider Willen, The Konigskinder, Marketenderin..."

"I hate to admit it, but I've never heard of them."

"Nobody has. You can hardly find the scores."

"So there's a music room somewhere along the corridor up here?"

"Downstairs."

"The whole house in the form of a T, right? Another long corridor under the one upstairs, twenty rooms...."

"Twenty two."

Richard thinking, all this and you still can't hold back Time for a moment, for a moment filled with all his old dread of everything collectively running down, disintegrating, dissolving, feeling like he was dead, had been dead for a thousand years, already wiped out, erased, and everything he had ever been, felt and thought totally futile, no dent, nick, trace on anything, everything pointless and senseless. He reached forward, held her pulsating warmth against him, the light diffuse, foggy outside, contributing to the general misty sense of universal dissolution....

*

SLOWLY taking their clothes off, kissing and touching as they went, little bites and licks and tousling of each other's hair, as if they both needed to be reassured that they were still there and still happening, her mind filled with old stars and old houses, Mabel Norman and Norma Shearer, Theda Bara and Barry Fitzgerald, Gable, Grable, Garbo, Crawford, The Grand Hotel, Kitty Foyle, old crippled Dietrich fighting with her only daughter just before she died, as bitter as gall, Ava Gardiner living a stone's throw away from Kensington Gardens just before she died, not really wanting to know who had lived in this house before her, what things had happened in these rooms, on purpose shutting out all that collective past, it was hard enough to deal with the constantly-dissolving Now, both of them naked now, a touch of cold in the room, snuggling under the comforter, her snuggling up to him under his protective arms/wings, hearing Hansel and Gretel in her head now, Hansel and Gretel in the wood at night, the scene where the angels come out and protect them, "When at night I go to sleep, angels round my bed do keep...."

Keep, weep, sleep.

Part 3.

NOON when Eve finally opened her eyes and glanced at the clock on her dresser, Richard still asleep in her arms. Windy outside. That's what had awakened her, the beating of eucalyptus branches on the window, at first feeling infinitely sad that the morning had slipped away in sleep, but then thinking that it was better this way, it wasn't all just action and super-ego, but id, unconsciousness, let it trickle down into the lower reaches of their souls, their oneness, wholeness, night and day, you are the one, you and you alone under the sun....moon and sun....Ich liebe dich wie du liebst mich/I love you as you love me....

His eyes opening, although she hadn't really moved, hadn't done anything to wake him.

"Hey...." smiling, looking around as if he'd forgotten where and who he was, "what time is it anyhow?"

"Almost noon."

"Whatever happened to all that 'passion'?"

"Oh, I think it's still around," she smiled, reached down, touched him, and then

they made love, almost as if they were still sleeping, effortlessly, still in the Kingdom of Dreams, as if they both wanted the hard reality Out There to vanish and just be left intertwined forever like two spirit snakes on a winged caduceus. And then, when they had finished, not wanting to “wash up” as usual, as if love-making were some sort of hundred yard dash or tennis match, when they got up she sprayed them both with a little vanilla mist, pulling on a one-piece clingy beige jumpsuit and loose-cuffed beige boots, going into the bottom drawer of her dresser and taking out a pair of beige slacks and beige sports shirt with a dramatically cut open collar, beige jockey shorts and a-shirt, “Here, try these....”

“Your father’s too?”

“Hardly. No, I planned ahead....I told you, there’s a sleeping impressario-stage manager inside me....”

Opening the bathroom door for him, putting the clothes on the edge of the wash bowl.

“Meet me downstairs. The T-corridor. Third door on the left.”

“Is that where you keep all your shrunken heads?” he laughed.

“Kind of,” she answered and slipped out the door.

*

LIKING the way he looked as he came out of the bathroom and confronted himself in the long mirrors at the sides of her makeup table. The first word that came to his mind was “breezy,” like a beige sailboat. Young. Younger than he usually thought of himself. Un-libraryish. Movement instead of stasis. He liked the transformation.

Bundled up his old clothes, almost left them behind, but then decided to take them anyhow. Worried about Colgate for a moment. Left pretty much on his own at Loyola, he wondered just how “structured” his new job would be. Kept wondering. Did he have to leave, couldn’t he find “something” out here, just stay. Just be. Be himself. Let them be themselves. There wasn’t any money-need.

But didn’t know “how” to break with his wife, Maria del Carmen.

How do you ever break anything without war and pain? How does anything ever get “done” without spiritual violence? Thinking about the kids. Feeling trapped inside a system that disallowed divorce, as if he and she really were united in Heaven and could never dissolve their union on Earth, as if Heaven always had to take precedence over the Here and Now....whereas deep down he knew, at least

guessed, that Heaven was just invention, and there really wasn't anything more than these brief moments.

There never had been anything much between him and Maria del Carmen, except the newness of her "foreign-ness," and, for her, her wanting to leave Bolivia and stay permanently in the U.S., and he was her permanent residence visa, eventual citizenship. And now that she was "in," was already a citizen, and they'd had their three kids....everything slipping/already slipped into the past....

So easy to get married, so difficult to get out....

Down the corridor, tempted to start opening all the doors, but he was too honest for that, too honest, really, to be doing what he was doing here at all, although wasn't the greatest dishonesty in his life to stay put in his marriage and go from here to eternity pretending that there was anything between him and Maria del Carmen more than an abstract sacramental concept called (Un)holy Matrimony?!?! Here, however briefly, life was unhusked, unstabled, aloft, white water instead of stagnant pond.

Noticing, as he walked down the stairway again, that all the faces on all the figures on the murals looked uncannily like Eve herself, as if her projection back to ancient Mesopotamia had been complete and only a shell-self was left functioning here, back to the Time of the Gods, when, as he put it in Godspeak: Imaging the Neolithic, all the gods spoke in all the literatures, spoke and appeared and were THERE. And now, what had silenced The Divine....? Who was claiming that God (The Gods) spoke through him/her?

Finding the corridor artfully hidden under the curve of the stairway, the first floor stem of the T that was the building's center, third door to the left, cautiously opened it, awed by the immensity but even more by the silence, ears like a cat or bat, always painfully aware of the melange of background noises that subtly irritated him. Only here there were no cars whooshing by, distant trains, shouts, even birds, nothing got through, not even the angry Pacific that had to be just a football stadium's length away from where he stood.

Opened cautiously, and then went in.

An immense room. Two stories high. The third door from the left upstairs must have been....ah, there it was, up behind him, opening to a catwalk with a metal staircase leading down to the first floor, the entire vast room a gallery-studio, the walls filled with massive paintings, all interrelated, The World of the Great Goddess, The Goddess as Frog-Woman giving birth to Mankind, The Goddess as Hedgehog, The Goddess as Bear, The Goddess as Burial Jar.... one whole wall devoted to just the letter-symbols of The Goddess, spirals and meanders, triangles, hour-glasses, T's and capital I's, a whole visible-invisible sacred symbolic alphabet that scholars were just beginning to really SEE....

This was his world, really, what he'd devoted every spare moment of the last ten years to, spare and not spare, moments stolen from other things he might have / should have been doing, forever forcing himself into a hermit-like life, shutting out The Present like it was his worst enemy. Except for the time he'd stolen away to spend with Eve, those five dozen evenings in the last, what was it, eight years, since she'd first come into his course on "The Grammar of Form," and they'd started having coffee at the Student Union, then expanded out to dinners, then rare, special, sacral afternoons, never, until now, realizing that by injecting himself into her life, he may have been, must have been, blocking her from spreading out and expanding in other directions because this room, these paintings were all from the very center of his geist, gast, ghost, soul....

She was painting a large "abstract" picture of 's and 's.

"I suppose it spells LO-NU," she said, "I mean, if you compare it to Classical Cypriot...."

Giving his own classical "What do I know?!?!" shrug, realizing that in the quietude of her own scholarly solitude, she'd gone beyond him, far beyond him in his own special line of inquiry.

"I had no idea....all this...."

"Keeps me out of bars," she said, putting down her brush and coming over to him, folding into his arms, both of them feeling "whole" again, as if locked together they became some sort of new unified entity, both of them incomplete in themselves....

"I don't want to leave," he said, lightly touching, massaging her back, feeling her backbone and ribs, lightly running his hands across her breasts.

"So don't," she said firmly. "It's not like we have lives to spare, spend one unfulfilled and then do what we want in the next one, an infinite number of metempsychotic possibilities. As far as I'm concerned," her voice muffling down to a whisper, her eyes filling with tears, holding his up against her so he couldn't see the despair on her face, "as far as I'm concerned....this is it," then a shift down into even deeper solemnity, like the moment of consecration in the Mass, holding on to him so tightly that it almost hurt, "whatever we do now is all we'll ever have a chance to do....blow it away, and...."

Desperately, almost painfully spliced together for a moment In Memoriam, like the moment of remembering The Dead in the Mass, Kaddish, as if they were praying for/remembering themselves after their own future deaths.

Then a break, splitting apart. Her drying her eyes (and then his) with the sleeve of her jumpsuit. "You've got to see the music room."

“Hang around here long enough and you get an automatic M.F.A.,” he laughed. As she pulled him toward the door he objected, “Don’t you want to put your brushes in....I don’t know....”

“I’ve got plenty of brushes. What I don’t have is TIME.”

“Down” again for a moment. Disconnected thoughts/feelings, no man is an island, for whom the bell tolls, a rasping, cutting sense of the ephemerality of it all tolling through them both. Then an upsweep, cresting, out into the hallway, going past the next door, Richard stopping.

“What’s in here?”

“Just the library.”

“I want to see,” he said, opening the door, her not stopping him, flicking on the light. A single-floor room this time, the walls lined with book-stuffed shelves, a desk with a typewriter on it over in the far left corner, a table in the middle of the room filled with....filled with his books....copies of the magazines where his articles and poetry had appeared....everything he’d given her over the years....plus some things that he didn’t remember giving her....his first book of poetry....he’d had so few copies....

Imprints. Fort Dearborn Press, Chicago.

A book of poems about Pre-Columbian Chicago/The Midwest, the Kensington Stone, the Davenport (Iowa) Calendar stone....

Opened it in the middle, read at random:

Time Sacred undone,
the sacred cloth unravelled
and the sacred text unread,
swing in the cradle of the
sky between the coming and
the going of
the sun....

“Not bad,” he said, “but you’ve got to have a signed copy....” going over to her desk, looking for a pen, her face suddenly disturbed, like he was walking into taboo territory, “Where did you ever find the damned thing?”

“Oh, they have book-searchers....”

“You could have asked me.”

“‘Could have’ doesn’t count. And now that you ‘know,’ does it change the flow of things?”

The closer he got to the desk the more genuinely distressed she got. Stopping. Challenging her.

“Some ‘secret,’ ‘sacred,’ ‘taboo’ here?” he asked, finding a pen, signing the book, “To Eve, from Adam, Before the Fall,” and then looking at the small stack of white manila folders on top of the desk. Lifting up the top folder, a title carefully printed out in large letters: NOW.

“Please, don’t....”

All but coming over to him, blocking his reading. But she held her ground.

“I really wish you wouldn’t.”

Opening it up, reading the first poem:

NOW

Now and only now, falling back like a collapsing
dune into instantaneous
permanent
Then,
Now ignored or wrung out, filled and emptied,
Now worn or rusted out,
the end always the same, all sanity in the
HOW.....

Then noticing, written on the inside of the cover: “To Richard and No One Else.”

Richard touched. The ultimate cynic (the way he saw himself) deeply touched, everything in him jammed and stalled for a moment.

“You weren’t ever supposed to have seen that.”

“Domine non sum dignus,” he answered, “Lord I am not worthy,” three times, lightly tapping on his chest.

“Sometimes I’ve even thought of killing you.....us.....some sort of final pagan liebestod instead of just the horrible finality of emptiness,” she answered, rushing over to him in a flurry, holding on to him again, pressing him up against her, almost oppressive, cannibalistic, as if she wanted to devour him, he responding in

kind, as if whatever sexual union they had had was merely the beginning of something much more total, existential, as if they had been One on some spiritual-molecular level, and their oneness had been severed and split apart and they were both filled with some sort of crying primal need to return to their initial oneness....

Then (the image flooding through her of the scene in Hansel in Gretel, after the witch is dead and the children who had been turned into gingerbread come back to life again, for one long extended moment “frozen,” still “entranced” before they break into a victory song and dance) grabbing him by the arm, “Come on, I want to show you the music room....”

Out into the corridor, one more door down. He didn't know what to expect.

“What next, the opium den? Aladdin's cave?”

“Close,” she smiled, opened the door.

A Steinway grand piano in the middle of the room, shelves of scores, records, a big stereo in the corner, a violin on the piano.

He went over and picked it up, started to tune it.

“It's only been twenty years since I touched one of these.”

Careful, afraid of snapping a string, all “gut,” no steel. Which he preferred. A childhood and young manhood planted in front of a music stand practicing violin, good enough, by fifteen, to have launched into something professionally, but that's when he was supposed to switch into “science,” slide into Medicine, which he'd refused to slide into anyhow. All the time he was growing up, thinking he could be a conductor-composer, Debbyusian-Milhaudish....sound as Zen....and then....

Testing it out.

Good sound. Didn't want to look in through the F-shaped sound-hole and check, but suspected that this fragile, old curved and scrolled box of wood might be worth more than the entire rest of the house. Starting to (totally unexpectedly and necromantically, she'd been expecting something all glitz and virtuosity) play the Hansel and Gretel angel-song, When at night I go to sleep....first straight, then variations and embellishments, without ever losing the main line and spirit of the original, obviously able and tempted to turn it into marches and waltzes and polonaises, but holding himself and the music in, making it the thematic core of this, their whole film, angels watching over them as they went to sleep, as if that's what they should do next, sleep, again the Liebestod/Love-Death theme....

“A little Devil's Trill,” he said, allowing it to get elaborate for a moment.

Tartini. She knew what he was doing, turning the four strings into four separate instruments, slurring back and forth across them, a trill on one, melody on the other three, trills moving back and forth across the bridge, four strings, four separate voices, and bringing it down as far as it could go, almost cello-like in its resonance, slowly moving up, barely touching the E-string, the sound rising ethereally up, up, up into a ghostly soprano register, the angels there for a moment, hovering around them, protecting them from all evil, change, Time itself....

One last drawn-out E above High C, one last pizzicato pluck and that was it. He stood there for a moment, sad smile, pleased, but at the same time....

“Beautiful....” she said.

“It just makes me wonder. Roads not taken and all that. And we keep not taking them, ever after we know better.”

Putting the violin back on the piano, both of them suddenly depressed.

“I don’t know,” he said, glancing down at his watch, “maybe I ought to....”

Her hand across his mouth, blocking the word, as if blocking the word could block the reality.

She sat down at the piano, started to play, the music soft, measured and muted almost to the point of morbidity, peaceful, some little modern dissonances and artful slides between keys. For a moment he thought “Satie,” but it wasn’t Satie.

French. Twentieth century.

For a moment thought Milhaud, only Milhaud never arrived at this degree of “peace.” Chanson d’été....remembering one time years before opening the wrong door in the music building at UCLA, a rehearsal of the Chanson d’été, the music rushing out at him like water from a broken dam.

He sat down on an old love-seat in front of the record-shelves, turned off the musicologist in his brain. Whatever it was didn’t make any difference confronted with the reality of the WAS itself.

Letting himself slide down into the music like into a hot bath. Les Pas dans le Niede, Le Tombeau de Couperin. A kind of studied archaism, like Grieg’s Holberg Suite....

Feeling The Calm of the Blessed descend over him.

Then, his wife. Sundays, when he wanted to take the kids out to some concert,

ballet, recital, exhibit. Her always with the same cop-out, "I already had my 'culture' when I was a kid. If you want to take them, take them, I'm staying home." TV and half a chicken. As if there were a thing called "Kulture" that you stuffed yourself full of and then never had to eat again, as if there were a line between "Kulture" and "Life," as if sound and sensitivity, carefully ordered words, slashes and daubs of paint and twists and slices of metal, wood, stone, clay, plastic weren't a part of the perennially hungry "you," as if it weren't a continuous, expanding out-"flow," but programmed into carefully segmented educational units that came to an end when you "grew up." Process, not finality.

Whereas for Eve, it really was like in *The Red Shoes*, *Life-Art*, *Art-Life*, as if there were some sort of escape from Time, as if there were a Someone Up There with a big Book of Eternity keeping track, as if there was a whole other kind of open-ended, spiralling-out programming and a coding inside her waiting to be fulfilled, some other higher evolutionary Self that was trying to be born that she never ceased coaxing into birth.

And then Eve was finished, as effortlessly as she had begun. A moment's pause, as if her voices inside her were telling her to play something else. What other possible surprises could be there, hidden in her labyrinths?

Taking him by the hand, walking toward the far, wood-panelled wall. One of the parquet panels swung around and they were face to face with a door that (he couldn't believe it!) opened directly out into the garden behind the brick wall that extended out to the left of the house.

"The house is full of trick panels and hidden corridors. Houdini-ish. Gothic. The Diary of Anne Frank," she said.

Still cloudy, but the clouds suffused with sun, and the walls protected them from the wind. A little pond with....

"Carp?" he asked. "I haven't seen carp since Kew Gardens."

"Hungry bastards!" she smiled. A can of fish food on a stone bench next to a white-painted gazebo next to the pond. Opening it up and scattering it across the surface, the water suddenly coming alive with a swirl of mouths and tails and fins.

"The most human of all fish. I can't eat them. I'd feel like a cannibal," she said, lying down on the grass under a lush, feathery willow tree. Lying down, then second thoughts, getting up again, going back into the house and bringing out a thick wool blanket and a quilt, two pillows, spreading out the wool blanket first, then the quilt, carefully placing the two pillows at the head of the imaginary bed on the grass. Pulling him down with her, everything with choreographic "rightness," deftness, as if it were part of a ballet called, say, *Sur L'Herbe*/On the Grass. Style, everything style. Everything was style....style, tone, "how," the how

separating the apprentice from the master....

Snuggling together under the quilt, no “need” for sex/performance/tests now, just lying back, knit together. Richard suddenly feeling that there was nowhere else to go, nothing else to be done, the order of the day was the day itself, focusing down, down, down on her hair and face, the reassuring touch of her body against his, as if there never had been a Before, and there was no need to ever have an After. Seduced by The Moment, seduced by the belief that somehow it would all work out, God was in his (her) heaven and all was (would always be) right with the world....

*

AND then, before she knew it, he was sound asleep.

Part 4.

EVE imagined Richard dreaming of gardens: He was on a gondola-like boat, lying back, passing under acres and acres of blooming fruit trees, in some sort of psychedelic trance, happy beyond happiness, feeling the flood and surge of the water underneath him, the boat itself drifting as if guided by divine hands....then slowly the whole tree-boat scene disintegrating, like a picture puzzle with the pieces being removed here and there at random...

He opened his eyes. “I can’t believe it,” he said.

The grass filled with red lacquer trays filled with red lacquer-covered containers of food, a feast in red lacquer, and on blue, gold dragon-rimmed dishes.

“All my grandmother’s things,” she said as she started filling a plate with lo mein and pea pods, some sort of black bean sauce, “she was actually born in China, her father had been in the diplomatic corps when it still meant something to be in the diplomatic corps. And, no,” smiling a delicious honey-blond self-mocking smile, “I’m not going to go into some sort of Daughters of the Mayflower routine,” handing him a heaping dish, a little bowl of rice on the side, a big pot of tea doled out in tiny little dragon-swirled cups. “She studied Chinese, always tried to teach me, no past, present, future tenses, everything present, WO BING, [I am, was, will, might be sick,] only you have to sing it, pitch the core of meaning....if I

hadn't had her, I don't know....," the Lo Mein all squiggly and difficult, the sun behind/beyond the clouds, going down, the big clock in the sky, ticking like kettle-drums, giant tam-tams.

"Amazing!" he said, "Really amazing...."

"All from scratch," but not saying what she wanted to, something about having children. He already had three. When would she ever, if ever, have one, someone to pass the secrets on to, even the cooking, and....what....the secrets of movement and color, herbal arts, decorative arts, the zen of listening, thinking, coming back and forth out of The Nothing into the Everything, hiding the YOU under a rock at the bottom of your inner sea, as if selflessness was the first prerequisite for the true expansion of Self into the flowering Now.... "I don't know what to do," he said, putting his plate down on the grass and getting up, the massive shadows of the trees beginning, however fuzzily, to angle out across the grass. "Maybe I should...."

Angry at him for a moment, wanting to scream at him, "So go already, go back to your doom," but the anger itself, even as it surfaced, evolving into pity, or even stronger than that, a lamentation. Then going over and waiting for him to embrace her, which he did.

"You're so....perfect," he said, "not just physically, but....," smiling, laughing to himself, "I was going to say 'operationally,' everything you do, and the spirit behind and inside of it. It makes everything so 'right,' down to the most minute details. And there's a 'rightness' in me that wants everything you are, no compromises, hesitations, like this total acceptance....which I can never have with...."

Eve in a way accepting the role he was casting her in, "together" as so few are, and seeing him exactly the same, wondering, is idolatry a necessary part of any sort of total love? Even seeing his need to go as more virtue than vice, following some sort of ancient "code" within himself regardless of its consequences, loyalty not to the flesh or the moment, but to The Law in all of its unbending absoluteness.

Wanting to just hang on and hang on, hang on through all eternity, but when he made the slightest pull out of her arms she released him as if it had been timed, three, two, one....split.

Back in through the music room. Him sitting down at the piano for a moment, just a couple chords, "large," Schonbergian, dissonant, "You know, when I was fifteen, I was going to be a composer, period, and then in college I used to go over to the chapel, spend hours playing the organ, improvising, taping it all, Messié....," out into the corridor, walking toward the front of the house, "I suppose there's a thousand more secrets around here that I'll never find out about...."

“Nine-hundred-and-sixty-three,” she smiled and he put his arm around her back and she put her arm around his as they came to the underside of the staircase, then flowed around it, stopping for a moment, looking at her mural.

“Vasari’s Lives of the Painters, Dr. Johnson’s Lives of the Poets, Verlaine and Renoir....all the secret lives lived and the secret energies and -- what’s her name, Paul Claudel’s sister, Camille --” snapping his fingers, “Rimbaud the slave-trader, Satie in his sordid little room painting ties on his neck....Fantin-Latour’s group portrait of Verlaine, Rimbaud, Bonnier, Valade....all of them standing there already like ghosts...all the millions of years of ‘input’ to arrive at this moment, and then....”

Her wanting to scream at him, “So don’t leave, then. Let’s vanish from the face of the earth. We can vanish together. I’d do it,” but not saying anything, not that they’d need to vanish anyhow, it was so simple nowadays. In some places more divorces than marriages. What kind of antiquated system were they carrying around repressing them, like Blessed Matt Talbot wearing chains around his body under his clothes, his life a perpetual fast, starvation, taming the body in order to, what, release the white dove of the spirit that never got released anyhow, not believing any more, for even a moment, that there was a winged spirit inside that flew up anywhere at death, but that this was the only moment she’d ever have, ashes to ashes, dust to dust. Maybe she’d seen too many mummies. What if one of the pharaohs would wake up in the Brooklyn Museum and look around....

But she still wouldn’t protest, hold him back, as he moved toward the door, quietly saying, “I’d better drive you home....”

“I could get a....”

“I’ll drive you home.”

Decisive at least in this.

The day after the longest day of the year. Only subjectively, for her, the shortest day in her whole life.

Out the front door. Chilly. Richard gawking around at the house and the surrounding forest, the neighboring houses barely visible through the trees, in an overcrowded century, on the edge of an overcrowded city in an overcrowded state, his mouth agape at the luxury of such isolation....which, suddenly, she hated.

And the Lord said, Multiply and increase and fill the earth with your progeny....

Getting into the car, feeling the day contract around her/them, as she drove back to the coast and the Pacific Coast Highway, Richard still marvelling at the sense of the place. Which never left her either. Easy enough to imagine herself back in

the Pleistocene, the last Mastadons (which Richard believed had been killed off by Man) still wandering through these same forests. And then the “negritos,” the little black people, appearing. That was his theory, wasn’t it, that the “negritos” had been the first trans-oceanic voyagers to the New World....

Big Foot and Tiny Foot. Giants and Pygmys.

“I suppose if I kept applying to places out here, Long Beach State, Pepperdine, USC, UCLA....you know, I’m such an academic maverick. And if I’d gotten another degree in anthropology/archaeology. You know what Gustafson always said, ‘If you get a degree in everything you’re interested in, you’ll never have time to get interested in anything. We don’t have a thousand years. Besides, most of the stuff you’re doing isn’t set up as courses anyhow; it’s all new.... You know, like the connections between Aymará in Bolivia, and Turkish, as evidence of ancient migratory patterns....”

On to the highway now, North. Thinking to herself, What about moving to Paris, sell all this and get a house out in Enghein....or even in the heart of things, Cité, the Isle San Louis. There was more than enough money, all that was lacking was....

“Why not just write, continue your research, go to Paris. Or London. You always loved London. ‘So much to do, you can never do it all.’ Remember?”

“I guess,” he said vaguely. “You seem to remember what I say better than I do....I was just thinking about the kids. I can’t just vanish.”

“I can!” she said a little cruelly, “both parents dead, my only brother killed in combat, cousins I haven’t heard from for decades, uncles and aunts almost all dead, friends I can count on one hand...”

Suddenly the emptiness of her life opening up for her like it had never opened up before, the sky exploding and the giant curtain across the cosmic stage snapping open on an infinite, eternal, starless, black NIGHT. For a panicky moment losing control of/interest in the car, a sudden swerve, a horn, and she was shocked back into reality. This was the end of the affair, OK, no miracles, miracle conversions into becoming Realists. He was fuzzy, would always be fuzzy, Gothic, Nuestra Señora de Sueños Vacios, Our Lady of Empty Dreams.

“Are you OK?” he asked.

“You’ll do what you have to do, Dick,” she said, not exactly cold. But something had turned off inside her.

It was as if they were moving out of her Sphere of Influence and Control into that of Maria del Carmen’s. Palos Verdes was Eve’s territory, but the closer they moved toward the L.A. International Airport, the weaker her territorial controls

became; and there would be a line he'd walk over and he'd be completely free of Eve's powers, whatever they may be, in exchange for those of his wife.

She was filled with a sudden solid sense of resignation. "You think you're bonded forever, then a door closes....and it's Business As Usual and it has nothing at all in the world to do with you."

"Come on!" he objected, "be fair!"

Which got her mad, the words racing through her head, Fair? are you kidding, you come to me, ask for me, I give myself, you seduce me with words, I fill in with my body, there's this whole world between us, dense and rich and meaningful, and there's NOTHING between you and your wife but an immense con-game, her abortions, her age, the lies about her family, lie, lie, lie, lie, as if it's going to do those kids any good to be raised in in the midst of an ongoing war, as if I'm an escape for you to keep your sanity, so that insanity becomes the cure for insanity, like getting drunk to cure a hangover, can't you see the corridors you're walking down, the doors that are still to be opened....and if you stayed with me, you'd be HOME in every sense of the word, the hunter home from the hill, the sailor home from the sea, really til death do us part, no fakes or sleight of hand, just simple truth and reality....

But no, not a word to him except, "Not much further now. I'll let you off down the block a little, OK?"

"OK."

*

IMPLODING back in on himself, wondering how he could be such a coward, or not even that, simply rule- and routine-bound, predictable. The Ultimate Conservative, as if he had anything to conserve. Wondering if he really, really, really deep down had ties to Maria del Carmen that meant something, or was it just the tyranny of The System, no detours, a life-marriage/sentence, throw away the key....

Down Sepulveda, past the Broadway, Ralph's, Thrifty Drugs, suddenly thinking of the literally hundreds of ice cream cones he'd bought the kids there over the years, the best deal in town. You start a family, there's the Big Commitment, everything else is will o' the wisps, sirens luring you to the rocks of your doom. Already remorseful about this one break in his code that -- if he'd be honest with himself -- threatened to send it all, every last Thou Shalt Not, tumbling to the ground.

The irony being that he didn't really, really, really believe in it, believed instead that real divinity didn't come from Out There at all, but from the voices and the prods inside urging him to radically break with everything he'd ever been or believed. Going back feeling if not more doomed certainly galled with the prospect of more of the studied, distanced, punishing, sado-masochistic sameness that was the stock in trade of Maria del Carmen on a day-to-day basis.

Suddenly remembering the Lili Boulanger Eve had played on the piano.

"I didn't even know that Nadie Boulanger had a sister...."

His head filling with all kinds of names of avant-garde composers who had studied with Nadia Boulanger in Paris during the 1920s, Roy Harris, Samuel Barber, Virgil Thompson.....the list went on and on....as if anyone who had become anything had somewhere along the line been touched by Nadia Boulanger.

"She died at twenty-four and after her death Nadia stopped writing music too, the homage of silence."

"It seemed so 'polished,' 'mature'...."

Past the Westchester branch of the L.A. library system, into his neighborhood of cuteish little houses, an unexpected lushness of trees and exotic plants and flowers, remembering ten years earlier when he'd first driven out here from Chicago, after the long ride through the desert southwest, the sudden green like some giant Land of Canaan oasis.

"It was almost as if she knew she that if she were ever going to flower, she'd have to flower fast...."

Down to Jenny, his corner. She pulled over to the curb, he opened the door. The airport just a few blocks over. Always planes thundering in or screaming their way out, twenty-four hours a day. Funny how you get used to things. Planes. A poisoned marriage. Or now Eve. Feeling that if he had any ties to this world, to life itself, they were to her and only to her, everything else forced, false, all fluff, no substance. This was IT. And now....?

Getting out, standing there.

"I'll....ah....."

*

"I'M sure you will," she said. Reaching over to pull the door closed, gunning the engine, up, up and away, that was it, hating herself for her sudden hatred, or was it hatred? There was only so much she could take, feeling like she was a fragile, iridescent vase of Phoenician glass that had been taken up to the top of Har Karkom, in the Israeli desert, taken up to the top of the mountain and held over the edge of a cliff, and dropped and was still falling, falling, falling....hit bottom, shattered into a thousand pieces.

Pulling over to the curb, Eve cried like she'd never cried before, not at the death of brother or her parents or her best friend in high school drowned off Nantucket, age seventeen, cried without any attempt at restraint, couldn't have cared less who saw her as they drove or walked by. Death or worse than death, surviving without a WHY, feeling she should never have brought it to where she had, should have just left it Out There somewhere in the almost-complete twilight instead of into high midnight and the following morning, noon, afternoon, as if the one night and almost entire next day were a metaphor for her entire life to come.....

At the same time miserable that at least she had the memory, like Lili Boulanger....

At least the music that survived had survived, regardless of the whole worlds of might-have-beens that had never happened. Remembering the Roman ruins in North Africa, a ruin in a desert better than nothing at all, at least there had been voices and lives and....

Then it was over.

Moving to look at her face in the rear-view mirror, then deciding not to bother, there was no one to see her anyhow, no one but the gulls who, she was sure, would be all over the garden when she got back, attracted by what they'd left uneaten. There or already gone after a feast. Their uncanny ability to sight food. Streamlined haut couture vultures, that's all gulls were. And she found herself smiling as she turned on to the Pacific Coast Highway south on the way home.

*

RICHARD walking down the street seeing the van parked in the driveway: T. WEISS -- PACKERS AND MOVERS/ MOVERS AND PACKERS, WHICHEVER COMES FIRST. Which didn't make any sense. Like most of L.A. But it was funny in a dangling non-sequitur way.

The door open, Maria del Carmen in a white robe, bare white legs, her puffy little feet stuck into her favorite shabby flat black satin slippers that should have been tossed out years before, standing in the living room telling two small Chicanos

what to do, "Ciudadano con mis vestidos, no hay porque arrugar todo. [Careful with my dresses, there's no reason to wrinkle up everything.]"

The kids playing in the backyard.

"Listen, I didn't....," intending to confess everything. He was The Big Confessor, wasn't he. You confessed it and it was either forgiven or unforgiven but either way you could live with it. He couldn't live with lies the way she did, twisting up your whole personality so you had to selectively censor everything you said, never could just BE, BE YOURSELF, unguarded and spontaneous.

Her breaking abruptly into his little speech, "Tu creas que a mi me importa lo que tu haces? [Do you think I care what you do?]" then in her strongly accented English, "I don't give a crap what you do....me entiendes, me entiendes?[Do you understand me, do you understand me?] It's just going to cost you, that's all. Ya te dije que iba contratar alguien para hacer el trabajo que que rehusas hacer.... [I told you already and I was going to hire someone to do the work that you refuse to do....] it's going to cost you!"

"Cost US!" he answered flatly, "I guess we still are an 'us.'"

"Que? [What?] Un 'que'? [A 'what?']"

"Nada, nada, nada, nada," he said, "nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing....," going past her and the movers, out through the kitchen, remembering the feast he had left behind on the grass at Eve's place, out through the kitchen where he had done the cooking for the last eight years since they bought the house, the cooking and the dishes and the shopping and....

Nada, nada, nada, Our Father who art in Nada....

Then out the back door into the garden where the kids were playing around, on the overly expensive but beautifully-made wooden jungle gym that he'd bought the year before.

"Hey, you guys!"

All three stopping, turning his way, smiling. The yard itself a veritable jungle, banana trees, papayas, guava, bamboo, oleanders, even a small chirimoya that he'd smuggled in from Bolivia. Eight years of green-thumbing in a patch of what was essentially coastal desert, and now he hardly understood exactly why he was leaving, except, maybe, to get away from Maria del Carmen. Only at the last minute she'd gotten a job in the Spanish department at the New York State University at Oneida, and he knew they'd end up living next to her job and he'd be forced to make the drive, through the damned snow and "real" seasons. In Southern California it's a veritable continuum of a little colder or a little hotter, so

that the whole ten years he'd been there it seemed, honestly, like one not particularly long day.

Part 5.

"HI, Eve. This is Richard. I'm in town, over at Stein's place — you remember him, chemistry — in Ladera Heights. I'm on my way to one of those independent publishing conventions in San Francisco. Maurey talked me into a visit, and we went over to the university and I wheedled your number out of the secretary in the alumni office...

"I suppose there hasn't been a day in the last thirty years that I haven't thought about you, lots of days a lot of time....My address is still excruciatingly simple, the English Department, Colgate University, Hamilton, New York, one-three-three-four-six.... I love you. Take care...."

He hung up.

"I hope she's all right, nasty flu going around," said Stein, looking up from the evening paper which he read through as carefully as if he was going to have to take a test on it the following day.

Retired now from the university for five years, his whole universe had contracted down to newspapers and magazines and putting together albums of old pictures, scrapbooks of clippings, files of his old articles that had appeared in chemistry journals.

And just six months earlier they'd taken out a cancerous chunk of his lower bowel.

Seventy-four, eleven years older than Richard. Only Richard hadn't noticed the difference at all three decades earlier when they palled around, when Richard was still teaching at Loyola, and they had gone off into the desert in search of ancient petroglyphs and arrowheads and spear-points (which they usually found on the edges of dried lakes, mute records of successive glacial/interglacial ages), or hiked around up at Great Bear Lake, or surfed, or played tennis on the university courts.

Now, though, seventy-four seemed like a hundred-and-four. It seemed like it was all over for Stein. Nothing to do. Just the big old house and lots of memories. Kids both up and down the coast, but very little contact with them.

“She’s probably just out,” Richard said to Stein after a moment, concealing the spike of fear that shot through his heart.

Stein’s wife Miriam came in from the lanai with a basket of flowers in one hand. She’d never been a beauty. A big pimply nose and too-beady eyes, bad skin, widow’s hump at fifty, but now in her mid-seventies looking matriarchal and grand, her skin clear, not particularly wrinkled, her face and carriage taking on a certain long-suffering regal grandeur.

“Cheer up the table a little. We could use a little cheering up around here,” she said, going under the sink in the kitchen and pulling out a big Meissenish flowered vase, filling it with water and sticking the speckled tiger lilies and regular lilies and big, overdone, over-lush poppies into it, clunking it down on the table.

“Looks great,” said Richard to Miriam, then back to Maurey.

“I don’t know why I still run for the Board of I.I.P....”

“Which means?” asked Miriam, adding a little fern and some sprigs of anise in with the flowers, filling the vase out, her movements all deft, easy expertise, in spite of the fact that she frequently complained of “the crippling effects” of arthritis.

“International Independent Publishers....which, ‘translated,’ means ‘small, non-commercial presses,’ not necessarily losers, though. Look at Papier-Maché press, over a million copies of When I Grow Old I Shall Wear Purple.”

Maurey smiling, looking down at his baggy pants and shirt, flat, loose old leather loafers “When I grow old I shall wear....what would you call these....rags?”

“Well, if you’d iron things. I would, I always did, but....” Miriam holding out the hands that had been arranging flowers with such virtuosity.

“Well, at least I can get dressed up tonight,” said Maurey, “I want to take you out to a new place in the Marina — Lord Jim’s. Very exotic, your kind of place.”

“I saw the movie,” said Richard.

“Movie?”

“Conrad. Lord Jim. It was like a trip down to Belém or Cartagena....”

“Whatever you say,” smiled Maurey, getting up, patting Richard on the back, “you know how I am, anything outside of Chemistry....and even that’s changing so fast that....,” going off down toward his room, as he disappeared through the doorway, out of earshot.

Miriam whispering. "He's got this monster inferiority complex, mainly because of the kids. They always treat him like a dummy...."

"That's what he was saying yesterday," said Richard.

Miriam gave one last touch to the flowers. "Wear what you want tonight. He just likes to dress up. It makes him feel part of something again....I don't know exactly what."

"No, I'll get in to the swing of things," said Richard.

He started down the nearest corridor. The house was immense and full of corridors and bedrooms, workrooms, a rec room with a pool table and some old slot machines, a computer room, a pool in the middle atrium. They'd had five kids and back then it had seemed small to him, but now its immense emptiness was heavy and oppressive. There were never enough lights on and today it was cloudy and on the edge of rain. He felt rolled up in a heavy yarn of shadows, trapped in shadowy nets in endless tunnels inside a vast subterranean cave.

But then, as he opened the door into his guest bedroom, what had been Lisa's room, very wide and plush, all ecru and satiny, a big grey dressing table topped by a huge makeup mirror, theatrically rimmed with bright white lights, it was like a lithe, blonde, ethereal "presence" slowly took form beside him and he wasn't alone but, like they said in Bolivia, "bien acompañado/well accompanied."

Still there, as he got out of his own blue baggy trousers and matching baggy shirt and put on his favorite white shirt filled with a discreet grey grid, like spaced-out graph paper.

Eve. But not the Eve of thirty years before. Eve thirty years after.

There but not there. His imagination slowly beginning to reconstruct her, cell by imaginary cell....

Eve would still be blonde. And "flawless," whatever treatments and diets and creams and exercises it took. She was all inner-directed Will. Would be one of those older women you see now and then who look twenty from the back, forty from the front, but, in reality, are hitting their seventies. Mustinguette, Josephine Baker, Anaïs Nin....

What would she be now? Something like sixty-five, maybe a little more. A little older than himself, and he was sixty-three now, longing to retire, and he could, if he leaned on Lorna's more-than-ample earnings as an M.D. But he was so fiscally conservative, "a genuine tightwad," according to his second-oldest daughter from the second bunch (Pokey/Penelope, the graphics whiz in New York). Always figuring he'd better be able to get along OK on just his salary, you never knew what the future might bring.

Not that he and Lorna weren't OK. They were. But all the dragonfly electricity of the first few years was spent now and the marriage had become mainly routine, comfortable but still routine, like your favorite old shoes and favorite old clothes....did he really want to think this one out to its conclusions? When the old shoes and clothes got old enough, what did you do with them, huh?

Inertia. Most of what he did was sheer inertia. You get on paths, trajectories, and it's easier to keep on them than to desviar....how would you translate desviar? Swerve? Swerve out of the way.

Going into his old black leather suitcase and pulling out his fanciest tie, a gift from his youngest son, Robbie. Structure, that's all he ever thought about, "I need some new socks, I need some new shorts....," shirts, sunglasses. That was Robbie's middle name — I-Need-Some-New. And his mother always indulged him.

Luckier with his daughters than his sons. Richard III down in New Orleans gone jambalaya Basin Street native (sauvage). Maybe they'd talk a little at Christmas or Easter, maybe not. Still bitter about the divorce. Maria del Carmen, The Great Poisoner. And the irony was that she was at Colgate now too and they'd pass each other on the campus maybe a couple of times a week, and he would have been glad to say hello — after all, they had all of the Bolivian past between them. He almost felt like an Indian/Proto-Mediterranean himself by now. And the drip she'd married in the Physics department with his heavy, thick German accent, what did she have in common with him, but what seemed a mutual contempt for Richard?!?!

Jealous, that's what they were. That's what he figured. Lorna with her one-hundred-and-fifty-thousand a year galled everyone. And for a pathologist she was underpaid. Maybe it was true, like she always said, if she'd been male instead of female....

After he'd first moved to Colgate, he'd written to Eve. Two letters that came back. MOVED. NO FORWARDING ADDRESS. And he'd had a little prostate problem, they'd done a fine-needle biopsy, nothing cellularly wrong, told him to drink a lot of cranberry juice, and, the old, white-haired country-doctor-type urologist (who reminded Richard of his father) had coughed a little, looked down at the floor and said "And I don't want to know anything about your sex life, but the prostate is a gland, after all, and if you don't use it, then...."

Richard somewhat devastated by the move to upper state New York, immediately missing the ease of Southern California. Growing to hate the drive he had to make every day from Oneida to Hamilton, now that the cold was coming on (late October). Groaning at the menace of the heavy snows that he knew were coming and would keep coming and through which he was going to have to drive — at least four days a week. Eight trips. Hating the way Maria del Carmen had

(predictably) arranged it. Hating himself for (predictably) giving in just to avoid any elevation in the level of hostility that chronically existed between them.

And missing Eve.

He'd laugh at himself at how he missed her. Missed her ankles and the smooth lines of her legs, moved not only by the smooth intensity of the way she'd made love but by the holistic intensity of her encyclopedic interests, the munificence of her tastes, as if the palatial dimensions of her house were merely an extension of her capacious soul, everything so "right" and "in place," "grand"; but at the same time somehow "understated."

She never really left him, as if some ghostly her followed him through his days and stretched out next to him at night, flowed like a subterranean river into his dreams.

But then Lorna's needs slowly took over front stage center. Ghosts weren't enough. Or maybe he wasn't "developed" enough to merely live in Memory. And Lorna's needs too were so urgent and desperate he sometimes felt like he was being railroaded onto tracks and routes that he wouldn't really have taken if he'd stood back and really looked and thought about it. But he didn't. For the first time in his life he turned plastic. And perhaps, he thought, his plasticity was the result of that last night and following day with Eve. She had activated needs in him that up to then he had never even been aware he had. And if she wasn't there to fulfill them....

Lorna and he slowly became friends, then buddies, then a "couple."

Nothing intended.

Only, why hadn't Eve written him, ever? The music she'd played that last day, Lili Boulanger; he found himself in record stores special-ordering whatever he could find, listening to it and wondering how many lost geniuses like Lili Boulanger had been lost entirely, the whole concept of art and artists so fragile, everyone making art tending to slip back into the anonymity of a cave artist making an imprint of his hand on a cave wall....and then, like at Altamira, the cave is re-found, the air of the Twentieth century rushes in and a hundred-thousand years of creative impulses preserved begins to instantly fade.

Richard standing in front of the mirror in Lisa's room, adjusting his tie.

Simple dark grey stripes with a hint of a red center-line on a lighter grey background. Grey tweed jacket. Grey cap. Some sort of ersatz English country look that, somehow, was/had become him.

His mother's doing, probably, from the time he was born dressing him in English tweeds. As if, somehow, there were some sort of platonic noble English tweedy

Form that was the prototype for all the noble English tweed-types in this (lower) world.

How would Eve's voice be now? Old-lady throaty, deep alto? And her hands? He could just see the walls of bottles of lotions and creams she'd lotioned and creamed her hands up with over the years.

Giving a hard, mercilessly critical look at himself, the extra weight, the almost permanent look of anguish on his face, his dry, albeit scrupulously clean, hair, jowls and a touch of pot-belly. Not too wrinkled though. All that cabbage and vitamin C. And he always walked wherever he could, instead of driving.

Looking in the mirror and imagining her beside him, her blonde and his grey, her in all her svelteness, taking him in hand: "No more little extra cappuccino-breaks and swirled brownies, chocolate-chip scones, pecan pies and maxi-size chocolate-chip oatmeal cookies....start thinking endive, cabbage and tomatoes, you're going to have an awful lot of all three...."

Smiling a well-oiled Sir John Falstaff smile.

She had a tremendous urge toward Order. Old age/disintegration would have been Disorder for her; she would have done all things possible to push it back as long and as vigorously as she could.

Right now, for this occasion, she'd be wearing a light brown yoke-necked cotton blouson, loose and ample, and a matching skirt and brown sandals with just a touch of heel, discreet gold disk earrings.

And he'd turn to her and she would fold into his arms.

"I love you, I really do."

"And I love you too."

"We should have never split."

Her hand up to his mouth.

"Shhh...."

Maurey outside the door. "Ready yet? Can I come in?"

"Sure."

Eve totally there for a moment, and then gone. Only not entirely. Still a hum, a "presence" in the air.

“I’ve got reservations. You know how it is. Everything’s so ‘crowded’ these days,” said Maurey as he came into the room.

Looked great. An almost white, wide-lapelled suit with a shirt full of red palm-trees and rainbow-colored cockatoos, his flat, wide, usually sad face beaming now, playing the one role he loved most — the host, giver instead of taker, master of ceremonies, especially when the ceremonies were of his own.

“You look great!” he said.

“You too.”

Richard hadn’t noticed the Panama hat in Maurey’s hand, holding it as he was, almost behind his back, only now, as they walked down the hall back toward the kitchen, he put it on.

“A gift from David,” his oldest son, head of Pediatrics at Our Lady of the Angeles in Hollywood. “What do you think?”

“It’s YOU!” lied Richard, thinking, it’s you if you want to be a farsante/clown.

“At first I thought it looked a little silly, but Miriam likes it, so who am I to go against popular demand,” laughing, laughing at himself, laughing at the world, laughing in celebration for the fact that, above all else, in spite of his loneliness and feeling of isolation and his paranoias and fears, he was still alive.

“I think it looks ‘cute,’” Eve whispering into Richard’s ear, “ridiculous, but cute.”

Richard almost saying, “Eve says it looks cute,” but it would have been too much for Maurey to handle.

Miriam in the kitchen waiting for them, very elegant in a dark, plum, nicely draped, yoke-necked dress and matching stole.

“It’s drizzling again,” she said, “but I hate to take raincoats and umbrellas. If this gets spotted it’ll make an interesting pattern. You know, the ‘cruder,’ more primitive, the better....”

“It’s great as long as the whole hill doesn’t slide down into the valley,” said Maurey.

They went out the kitchen door, downstairs into the garage, a work area in the back well-stocked with electric saws and planers and drillers, where Maurey made (more like “had made” than “made”) little bird houses and fences for the backyard, decorative spindled triangles for around the eaves of the house.

Into their old black Cadillac. Another story associated with that. Maurey's son, David, had been leasing it and someone had run into him and they had three different insurance policies, and....

Richard in the back seat feeling anxious as Maurey beeped the garage door open and they slid out into the street and he could barely see L.A. spread out around and below them. It wasn't a drizzle but a downpour.

Eve like a ghostly muffler wrapped around Richard's neck, whispering in his ear, "Just relax, my sweet, everything will be fine, Maurey's a tiger behind the wheel...."

Smiling to himself, feeling almost schizophrenic. Maybe he could use a little Haldol....Cluserel....the stronger the pill, the better the hallucination that called for it....

Lord Jim's, just what he'd expected. All kinds of tackles and barrels all over the place, rough barnwood/old ship-planking walls, fake palm trees growing out of every corner. He and Eve had used to go to a place called Pieces of Eight down close to where they were now. Same idea. Only thirty years earlier, in the middle of his pirate years, all the Caribbean trappings had seemed somehow "real."

Almost keeping a space for Eve at the table. Wanting to get up and call her again. Maybe she was back by now. Maybe he could jump ship. A.W.O.L. Disappear right now. Go out for a smoke and disappear forever into her arms. And he didn't care how old or how young either of them was. The flesh didn't count, what counted was the energies wrapped inside the flesh, immortal diamonds wrapped in their poor, fallible, oh, so mortal wrappings.

Miriam wiping her hair and face with a couple of napkins as they sat down.

"It never used to rain like this," she said.

Asking Richard, as she refluffed out her hair and added a little daub of deep plum lipstick to her lips, "How do I look?"

"Great!" he said, "great dress."

"I hate to even tell you how much I paid. Neiman Marcus. I 'hover' like a hawk at the ends of seasons, waiting for the prices to go down...."

Another story.

Maurey a little miffed, censoring. "It's all so overpriced to begin with! The markup is ridiculous. You're doing them a favor to take it off their hands...."

“Two hundred,” she whispered, “down from,” a long pause, dramatic effect, “two thousand.”

“See....who cares....what did I tell you....”

Richard ordering a Guava Gulp, gin and guava “in a custom-made guava-shaped glass,” the menu read, which Maurey assured him was a treat: “....I could drink 'm all night.”

Miriam went up and got a stack of postcards with colored snapshots of the place all over the front.

“For the kids!” she explained. Although their youngest “kid” was thirty-two.

For the grandchildren.

Why not just say, “Because I want to! I love to send out postcards!”?

Maurey launched into a long lament about how everyone ignored him and how much he'd given everyone over the years, and how they still saw him more as a bank than a father (only he didn't charge interest/ maybe he should), and how long was he going to be around anyhow, for god's sake, the grandchildren needed a solid grandfather and grandmother to be around, what the hell was wrong with the world, in which family ties were all so monetary and stretched-thin, hardly visible, too bad he wasn't born back in prehistoric times when family was family and a man was a man....

Richard was hardly there at the table. His mind wandering back through the years, he and Eve in L.A., down in Venice, this coffee shop they always stopped in for cupcakes and coffee and then they'd go and walk along the oceanside and watch the skaters and walk down on the sand and watch the surfers, or lie in each other's arms like babes in the woods, babes on the sand....

That's when the real ties had been formed. The real love of ages, in those endless hours of innocence under the sun, caressed by the wind.

Part 6.

IN the morning, got dropped off at L.A.X. Waved goodbye to Maurey, tears in all eyes, Eve whispering to him, as he got on the plane, “It's true, at this point you never know which goodbye is going to be the last,” sitting next to him in the aisle on the flight up the coast, San Francisco International, the shuttle down to the

Fisherman's Wharf Holiday Inn. Horse Morse waiting for him/them as he/they checked in at the main desk. He/they gave Horse a warm hug.

Horse Morse's father had been a cowboy and he'd been raised in Montana, used to kid about how, when he'd come to San Francisco to be a hippie poet in the early sixties, it took him over a year to "dehorsify" himself.

"Good to see you."

Horse the hippie poet by night, executive director by day, all his hair and beard trimmed for the annual publishing industry convention, almost all white now. In spite of himself he looked distinguished, Abraham Lincolnish, maybe even a little like the original Abraham, gaunt and patriarchal, already much older than Lincoln was when shot.

"You mean 'us'," said Richard, pointing to the air next to him.

"Whose ghost is it this time?" smiled Horse.

"What do you mean 'this time'? I've never been haunted before."

"What's her name?"

"Eve."

"That old girlfriend of yours, from L.A.? She's been haunting you for thirty years!"

Richard realized just how much she had been haunting him for thirty years. "I got her phone number, left a message, gave her my address..."

"You're nuts! You've got it made right now, why rock the boat? Between the two of you you're pulling down two-hundred-grand a year...."

"If man lived by bread alone...."

"Pan-pan y vino-vino," Horse answered, the Cosmopolitan now, you'd never guess the origins of his nickname, night classes all the time in French, German, Italian.... "Listen, why don't you register and meet me in the bar. We can talk awhile. The rest of the Board of Directors will be coming in later this afternoon. But you're free....today and tomorrow.... I've put you down as M.C. for the day's activities on Wednesday. That's Lantz's day....you know his routine."

"Dinner tonight?"

"Seven o'clock. I've got this Thai place lined up...."

“Great.”

Horse pausing for a moment. The Great Ruminator, the Master of Second, Third, Fourth, Ad Infinitum Thoughts.

“What happens if Eve returns your call and wants you back, like the thirty years of separation are....,” he snapped his fingers.

“Let me ask her,” said Richard. To the shimmering ghostly presence hovering next to him, “What do you say to that?”

She snapped her fingers, smiled.

“What are thirty years in the infinite mind of Vishnu who dreams us into existence....?”

Richard simply repeating, “What are thirty years in the infinite mind of Vishnu who dreams us into existence....?”

“...as he sleeps on the coils of Ananta, the Serpent of Eternity,” Horse finishing out the line. Then getting executive-director-like, abrupt and bustling, “So, sign in, have them put your bags in your room for you, I’ll see you in the bar....”

“OK, pal.”

The desk clerk young, bright, blonde hair pulled into a sleek pony tail, flawless complexion.

As he signed in, Richard softly guessing, drawing on forty years of teaching, matching faces, bodies and careers, “So you’re studying modern dance at San Francisco State....”

“Close,” she said, “Berkeley. But I couldn’t find a job over there, so....”

“Originally from....?”

“You guess!”

“Nebraska!”

“Wow! What are you, some kind of swami or something. I’m from Iowa City. That’s pretty close.”

“You ought to see me do it with Turks, Egyptians, Uros, Aymaras, Kogis, Cunas....I’m in the comparative anthropology business.”

“Ahhhhh,” she purred, as if that explained it all.

Handing a bellhop five bucks to take his bags up to his room for him, feeling, somehow, very much at home here, back to his kind of air and sunlight, the cold slapping of the year-round wind.

*

INTO the woody, old English-type bar, Horse over in the corner, as usual nursing a big, inverted bell-shaped glass of deepest red port.

“So what’s doing, pal?” asked Richard as he sat down. The waiter came over and he ordered a gin and tonic, the same thing he’d been ordering in bars for the last forty years.

“The usual pre-conference jitters. And the ‘gang’ that’s taken over the publishing group is a thousand times more needlessly picky than any of us have ever been before. Trying to prove something....”

“To prove what, exactly?”

“That they exist, I suppose.” Horse smiled.

Especially Penny, in the new Chair One, a moon-faced middle-aged woman from rural Connecticut whose New York big-shot lawyer husband had just run off with his Chinese-American secretary. She’d taken a stack of courses on business administration at NYCC and now seemed to want to prove that she was some kind of M.B.A. Zen Master....

Richard had been Chair One for a year, but at the last meeting she very adroitly called for a re-vote and got him pushed out of the chairmanship slot, back to ordinary Board Member again. OK. Not that he wanted to be Chair anyhow. He didn’t. Only when he was in the Chair One slot, it was great for Horse. Richard let Horse run the show. No interference.

“I think Penny wants your job,” said Richard. “You’re not supposed to be able to adapt to her ‘corporate’ restructuring, and you’re supposed to quit, and she’s supposed to step in and take over. She’s moving to Oakland, you know that....”

“I don’t want to think evil of the woman,” smiled Horse, shaking his head. “I like to think of her as naive and foolish.”

Eve’s voice purring through Richard as the waiter brought his drink. He started to sip it, letting his tongue dwell on the exotic fuzziness of the gin.

“I hate this corporate nonsense-talk.”

“OK,” Richard said aloud, not to Horse but to Eve, looking like he was talking to a spot somewhere off his right shoulder.

“OK what?” asked Horse.

“Eve says that it’s all Out There, somewhere, waiting for us.... Let’s drink up and Go.”

Horse immensely amused. “It’s that bad with Lorna, huh?”

“Well,” said Richard, “she’s always on call, it’s all biopsies and autopsies and frozen sections, courses in cytopathology or tumor markers, immunohematology, hematopathology. I try to go down to the hospital as often as possible to have lunch with her -- but you sit down with your tuna-fish salad sandwich and cole slaw, and she starts in about cervical cones and uteri and colons, the four breasts she’s examined that morning....”

“Come on, let’s go!” Eve insisting.

Said Horse, “I sympathize. You know how it is with me and Jackie....”

Horse actually “in love” for a change, a Chinese-American girl with an M.B.A who’d been in Cafe Puccini looking for exactly what she found -- him, in all the glory of his bohemian romanticism. A bohemian romantic veteran of the bohemian-romantic wars, wounded veteran at that, a wounded, aging veteran, ready for a permanent rest in the sun on the terrace of the bohemian romantic home for bohemian-romantic war veterans.

“What’s the latest with her?”

“Well, Richard, she wants to get married, in September.”

“And....?”

“Why not? If I’m edged out as executive director I’ll have something to fall back on.”

“I don’t like mercenary motivations,” said Richard.

“Just don’t say anything to her about it when you meet her tomorrow for dinner.”

“How are we going to escape The Board?”

“We will! Don’t worry, we will! Or if worse comes to worse we can all have dinner together.”

Richard smiling now. "What an irony, that Penny's husband ran off with a Chinese-American too."

"And, yes, I have suspected a little extra acrimony in her attitude toward me because of my Chinese-American connection...."

Nos regards a l'éclat changeant son verts et bleus comme les ondes/Our shimmering glances are green and blue like the waves....

The music playing on.

Waves, foam, sunlight.

Horse and Richard were like brothers, had been like brothers almost thirty years, but sometimes Horse, under his romantic bohemian teakwood veneer, was plain old boring pine.

"You know, Eve would be, say, sixty-five now....no idea if she's married, married and divorced five times, ten kids...if she'd even be interested in me any more. I'm such an old carcass...."

"Oh, you're not so bad," said Horse, finishing his glass of port, the waiter automatically bringing him another, already obviously an "understanding" between them.

"Well....," Richard patting his slight paunch.

"Genotypes," answered Horse, "why fight it?"

"I suppose.... Hey.... Do you know the work of Lili Boulanger?"

"Sure," said Horse, whose apartment was wall-to-wall covered with CDs. "'Pour Les Funérailles d'un Soldat' is one of my all-time favorites." And he recited the lyrics:

Qu'on voile les tambours que le pretre s'avance, a genous compagnons, tet nue et silence....

"I'm amazed!" said Richard. Maybe he wasn't teakwood veneer at all but teakwood all the way through.

"Don't be! It was you who first mentioned her to me....decades ago....although I'm sure I would have gotten to her eventually. I've got this on-going love affair with forgotten women composers -- Germaine Tailleferre, Mrs. H.H.A. Beaches, Cécile Chaminade....even Clara Schumann....It's like, did F. Scott Fitzgerald influence Zelda's work, or did F. Scott learn everything he knew from Zelda, who was the 'real' innovator?"

Richard saying, "You're a funny guy, you know that. I'm always all set to write you off as this hopeless old rummy, and then...."

"I still am a hopeless old rummy, but you don't have to write me off," smiled Horse. Everyone in his family alcoholic, father, mother, two brothers. For years keeping alcoholism at bay by strictly rationing himself to one small bottle of port every night after dinner, but since the new Board had been putting the screws into him (and the organization), he'd been slowly allowing the heavy, gooey port to start to spill over his entire day.

Richard finished his drink, feeling an irresistible urge (not needing Eve's voice/presence, having plenty of his own) to get up and move..... "You won't be pissed if I take off for awhile...?"

"I expected you to! I just have to stick around to be here when the rest of the gang gets in. Penny -- predictably -- has all sorts of last minute changes to the agenda that she wants to confer with me about....so go ahead....I've always got this to play with...."

Pulling a little chess computer out of his pocket.

"OK, pal," said Richard, going into his wallet for money.

Horse waving his hand, nodding his head, half-closed eyes, "I'll take care of it."

"See you."

Horse already absorbed in his game.

And out Richard went into the arms of day.

"This is more like it," Eve, soothing, "my kind of place, my kind of day....," Richard starting to walk down toward North Beach, through the warehouse district, all kinds of fancy new places in old historic warehouses. Renovation, resurrection. That's what they should have done with Kansas City and Chicago and Cleveland and everywhere else where urban age weighed down heavily on whole areas made slowly more and more anachronistic in the post-modern, electronic age.

Post-modern, then what....?

Finding a little square facing the ocean. Mimosa trees, is that what they were? Boats out in the bay. An old bum who looked very much like a beat-up, lost-soul version of Horse, sitting a couple of benches down from where Richard sat. For a moment Richard thought it might be one of Horse's brothers. Probably not. Always afraid that Horse would fall over that edge.

Taking out one of the little spiral notebooks he always carried with him. One of his favorite rollerball pens. A new page, starting to write:

The Coils of Eternity

Ferret-faced Lili Boulanger.
The fusion-furnace of the sun.
Vishnu on the coils of Eternity
as valid as St. Thomas or Big
Bangs, First Movers themselves
unmoved, or self-generating
somethingness out of nothingness,
always feeling the pull in ourselves
back toward the nothingness of
our beginnings, then one step back
before we were, one step forward
to where we no longer are.....

Something overtaking him then, almost a vision, more like a knowing....

Aging platinum-blond Eve, driving. Pulling into the drive of her house, unbolting her titanium alloy bike from its rack on her white 1993 Mercedes 4,000, each twist of the butterfly bolt onerous and painful, her hands revolting against her....

“Stupid hands!”

Actually slapping her left hand as she untwisted the last bolt and lifted her featherweight bike down to the newly asphalted drive.

She stood there absorbing The Night and everything it meant to her. She knew the neighboring houses were there, on either side of her, through the eucalyptus and pine groves that covered the slopes of the Palos Verdes peninsula, yet there were no lights, no sounds.

It was as if the houses out there in the darkness weren't there at all, as if Orange County didn't exist, or Manhattan Beach, Long Beach, Los Angeles itself....

Richard's voice there suddenly, talking about ancient Indians, “Sure, they were doing some excavations for foundations down in San Diego and suddenly they started coming across charred Mastadon bones from sixty-thousand B.C....all kinds of lithic pieces....arrowheads, choppers, scrapers....skulls....”

Back sixty-, seventy-thousand years, and the forests were full of Mastadons and little furry men with long, stone-tipped spears. Man interfaced with Nature, the wild, wild himself, trying to tame it all with spells and incantations, drugs that brought him into a spirit-world and enabled him to step over the line between “human” and “animal” and become a kind of animal himself. Nagual.

Eve wondering if there really were Yetis in the forests of Northern California who had escaped the curse of evolution, interfacing with the divine-world instead of having moved into some sort of grotesque separation between the "I" and the divine "Thou" that she felt surrounding her everywhere there in the divine darkness.

Didn't want to go inside. Really wanted to walk out into that darkness and somehow merge with that force, power, vibrating "presence" that spoke through the sounds of the trees and waves against the rocks in the distance and in the vague, moving mists that slithered across the moon beyond the trees. The smells of the pines and eucalyptus were pungent....

She walked off the drive into the edge of the forest, reached down and picked up a long, curled eucalyptus leaf that she could suddenly see, as if her eyes were turning into bat- or jaguar- (Nagual) eyes, and put it in her mouth and started to chew it, its juices and vapors.

Aware of the snakes that could be there in the dark. Like the time they had uncovered an old Indian cemetery at the bottom of the cliffs near Loyola university, and Richard had gone down there with a shovel and a big black one had slithered out of the ground and Richard whispering, "Maybe there's a message here, that this graveyard shouldn't be disturbed...."

Smiled to herself at all the abstruse and useless -- but somehow intensely 'sexual' -- information she used to hear from him. All his theory about the extensive migrations of ancient peoples across the Atlantic and Pacific to the New World, turning the New World into the sacred continent that later came down in myth as the Home of the Gods, the House of the Sun, world-center, the Tropics of Capricorn and Cancer where the sun turned/pivoted in the solstice year.

Everything he'd ever said was vaguely and inexplicably sacred to her, as if he'd come into her world trailing clouds of ancient truths that somehow got to the hearts of matters ignored by everything she'd ever been taught, learned....and mainly discarded....

"Ouch, something did bite me," she said to the night.

Swooning then to the drive thinking that the asphalt was still new....five years old....five, thirty years, now, in limbo. Limbo!

She wondered fleetingly about Richard....the children he'd fathered, his marriage, his life....her shelf of his books, hidden, as if it were a crime to have them. The shelf was a Himalayan shrine to some local, private god....

Buzzing open the garage door. Stumbling now, she thought to leave the car out. Was it really as bad in L.A., she asked herself as she opened the "unarmed" kitchen door. Wasn't it -- at least out here -- practically the safest place possible

on a globe that, after all, was spinning around in space, spinning around other things that themselves were spinning, the whole thing spinning, spinning, spinning....?

The message-light blinking on her phone. Clutching the phone to her chest, she pushed PLAY and, heaving, heardnothing.

Richard understood. Eve's caress.

A moment before he could weep. Feeling that there had been but one climax in his life, one coupling that had really "meant" for him in all possible ways. And all the rest as substitutes, samples, glints. One time bonding whole, the others flawed, ill-fitting attempts at achieving. Like, being in a shady pawn shop and here's the diamonds, and there's the glass, and you know the difference and you buy the glass anyhow; it's the choice of the moment that you live with for eternity.
