

## “The Coils of Eternity (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 Johnathon 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 Couglin, 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.vBut 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. PAPC, 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 carressing 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.

**2009 Wood Coin: The Horny Play  
Boy Bunny (Jackalope) Gets Some  
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