

## “The Coils of Eternity (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.

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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 Nieve, 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 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....

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