

1 March '01 (Island)

Marie ended her life at age 39. December 15, 1971. That is, she leapt from the precipice into oblivion.

I now presumptuously ponderously disturb her RIP

Marie was of the Catholic faith. She lived in a childless marriage for 18 years.

I hope to learn some of the details eventually.

I attended high school with Marie. I was a secret, and not so secret, admirer.

I have described her elsewhere (Vercingetorix), with some inaccuracy. Although it was true, during our High School Senior trip, I really did walk all the way to the tippy-top of George Washington's big thing, holding her hand. In hindsight I should never have let go. In hindsight, I was the equal of that other guy, although he was voted the Neatest, Best Dressed, Nicest Complexion, Best Posture, Nicest Looking, Best Physique, Most Athletic, Most Popular, Most Energetic, Did Most For Class, Best Disposition, whereas I WAS merely the Quietest.

Recently I have been loaned some High School yearbooks that span in time, three of the four years we were in school together.

In all of the photographs contained in the yearbooks, there is not one where Marie is smiling. Not even smiling a little. In only two



pictures is she not looking directly at the camera. In one group photo of 19, only three are not smiling. In one group photo of 14, only two are not smiling. In five group photos she is sitting on the outside (at the end of the row) in front (only one in the

rear, still at the end of a row where her head is turned engaged in a conversation with her neighbor [something that does not occur in any other photo on the part of anyone). In a smaller group, she is sitting second from the outside in front. In the group of fourteen seated around a table she sits off to the side at the farthest end of the table. I stand behind her, also unsmiling. I do not remember Marie smiling, Yet, of the mentionable things about Marie, it is said she had the Nicest Smile; perhaps something she held in reserve, to preserve its effect. I do not remember her smiling while looking at me. She was also described as the Neatest, having the Nicest Eyes and the Nicest Hair, Nicest Hands, and Nicest Nails. She was pretty nice alright (in hindsight a lot of girls were pretty nice). In one photo, one can discern a ring on her left union finger, and a ring on her right pinky. She also wears a timepiece on her left wrist.

Was she reserved before the camera?

In my previous descriptions of Marie, I have noted her propriety, her circumspection, seldom given to frivolity. She was not, as indicated in another writing, a cheerleader.

In the class photographs, two consecutive of the three years mentioned, she is wearing the identical ensemble. A white blouse with a wide circular collar buttoned at the throat, covered by a sweater, which is buttoned in the front with only the top button fastened at the neck, below the blouse collar button. The sweater is open below that button into an upside down V, rising and falling over her bosom to descend to lie loosely over the hips. It should be mentioned in those days the social convention thought it risqué for a girl to wear the open throat to reveal even part of the chest below the neckline. (And imagine, in those long ago days preceding, of petticoats, exposing an ankle was risqué while the bosom couldn't be more prominently displayed.) She is seated wearing a pleated skirt that just covers the knees. She is wearing a loafer type shoe, without laces. She is also wearing white socks that reach up to where the base of her calves begin. The blouse and the loafers appear to be the same in both of these pictures. The sweater is dark one year and lighter the next. Her hair is shorter the second year. I liked it longer. The third and last year does not contain a group photograph. The first ever yearbook was published when we were sophomores, so one year of longer hair and one less year of age and information are forever consigned to oblivion.

While Marie's death occurred twenty odd years after our high school years together, it also occurred at a time when treatment of depression was even less perfectly understood than it is today, and not all that easily recognized. Some of the medications like

Stelazine and Thorazine, and perhaps even Lithium, not to mention shock treatment, produced terrible side effects, one of which was to make unrecognizable the person to oneself (herself).

We all wonder beyond any true understanding why a person takes their own life. They tried to say it was because of the miscarriage during the rubella scare (almost three years after the miscarriage [perhaps trying too hard to become pregnant again]. Or, it was because of the medication she was taking for her psychic and emotional problems, only making her condition worse. Yes! Why did Re Re commit suicide? Even the word doesn't get used. *Suicide* ! She died. When she died. After she died. It rhymes anyway.

Locked into a think, a desperation, an unresolved want. A child, perhaps. All else, ALL ELSE, of no consequence. I have failed. My body has failed to produce. What did God Almighty have to say, Re Re? I never called her Re Re, and I never heard her referred as Re Re, or addressed as Re Re, yet that is what her name was nicked, like my name was Louie, although all I remember is RED and Dirtyneck, and Shithead. That inner circle. Does one tend to remember only that which was demeaning? Perhaps, in the absence of the other. (Poetic license; the author is at liberty to answer his own questions.)

We are so presumptuous to believe that if only we had been there we could have offered..... What!? It only seems that some kind of sense might be offered. We might have saved Marylyn, our celebrity starlet, or Sylvia, our poetess, one having lost, through miscarriage, yet another to people the earth, and the other, deserting those two offspring, or Springoffs. Where do we locate the mean? It is not through sense, or sensible advice. What would I have said to Marie?

Perhaps in that long hereafter, we will meet to ascend hand in hand, that lengthy stairway to the Almighty. After all, what is not probable in our fancies? Perhaps my hand would not exude its nervous sweaty juices as before; as a fleshless entity, that is.

Perhaps you could confide in me in that other world what you could not in this.

This only world in which I still reside is full of sadness; more sadness than joy. So much promise is beleaguered by all the assaults upon our humanity, man against man. Although our meeting in the hereafter is improbable, yes, even impossible, though our bones were heaped upon each other, the vital thing would have departed; too cold to remain where it had been placed. Our great sadnesses here stem from our defeated fantasies, our

bitter cruel reprisals. We often desire the impossible. In vain we pursue things beyond our resources, our abilities, and the natural order of things. We will defend our behavior with a rash insistence upon what we believe to be our prerogatives (inalienable rights).

I take liberty in these fancies of mine. From a photo I attempt to reconstruct a person to whom I would speak. I might do the same with Sylvia or Marylyn. I would do so because, although I recognize the persuasions effected through those bouts of abject lonely depression, most likely I would want to be one of those who somewhat hypocritically counseled, "You have your whole life ahead of you." I know you feel marooned in some enormous overwhelmingly incomprehensible, cold and insouciant world. There is nothing warm you can reach out to touch in your longing, even someone only a few feet away, perhaps in the next room. Marie, one cannot be objective about the meaning of life, without life.

In our desperate moments we close off all possibilities. There can be no tomorrows. We lose our perspective; we lose access to our strengths. We can walk away, although that first step is full of 'fear and trembling'. But it is what we need to do. I'll repeat again that Greek refrain I have oft' used, "Fall down you may, get up you must!"

Moralizing is not what you want to hear. Many of us know better than you what you need.

But this is not the real world I am describing. The real world returned you to something more abominable than dust; that is what you received for all your troubles. After your body, that outer encasement, turned cold and blue, the real ravages set about to devour you. And you had thought you devoured yourself. Not so, in the real world. Maggots. All the mortician's arts go for naught. Lifelessness is. Prey for renewing. Even the dehydrated and mummified strike horror in their desiccated shrunken gauntness.

So, when you leave, you are leaving for ever and ever and ever, because you couldn't care. And there were no arms awaiting you to absolve the loneliness. Only the embrace of the endless cessation. No opportunity for remorse.

I cannot argue for life. For, to me, life seems to serve no purpose. Begetting is not a purpose. Considering the purposelessness of existence, how is it possible for anyone to entertain notions of life everlasting in the hereafter? Why this God-awful sidetrip?

We are said to have eaten of fruit of the tree of knowledge; thereby we have destroyed our innocence. We only imagine that we know things. We do know that death is everlasting (discovered in the apple?). If we did not know this very thing; and if we did not

know we were marooned, this selfish act of dissolution would not and could not occur.

Yes!, your desperate departure did not go unnoticed. And those of us who remember you, even only a little, as long as we are alive, we will wonder things we might not have wondered otherwise. It might be said we have knowledge of your death by your own hand. And though I know there is no purpose to life, you, I cannot dismiss, because you did give meaning, if not purpose, to my life. I held your hand, although I cannot remember the feeling of it, its palpable presence, because I was trembling with excitement inside, and although I cannot even recall that excitement, I do know that I held your 'nicest' hand with the nicest nails. I also fantasize that if I had really held your hand, with desire and conviction as my mother would moralize, "Faint heart n'er won fair lady!", that there might have been a different outcome. My mother would know because she was a Fair Lady. I was faint hearted in matters of romance. And my mother's won heart was slated for desecration.

So Marie, what if I had held on? And suppose I had won your heart with some kind of fervid pursuit. What would I have done to harm you, to bring upon you the same end result? What disgusting hurtful things would my father have uttered in your presence, maybe directed at you? And what would your father have said as he looked upon me? No compliments from any quarter? And your friends wondering what you were throwing away; perhaps your mind!. "Have you taken leave of your senses?"

Well, it didn't happen, as it was destined not to happen; as many things are not destined to happen. And I'm not speaking of the force of destiny as much as the way of things. I doubt it had little to do with having that faint heart. But suppose I had become very demonstrative. Suppose at the top of George's big thing I had gone down on one knee professing some undying love, pursuing some overwhelming urge to express thousands of unworded feelings; all in front of the whole world.

Suppose I was to do it now. What the hell, what would you have to lose that you haven't already thrown away? You might have been loved; I might have been warm. Yes! There I was, this pang, this unformed thing. What is love and warmth in such circumstances? Just some kind of all-consuming fire. One sees so many endings after so many beginnings, incompatibilities; broken dreams; love destroyed through the trials and tribulations of the very real world. Many, too many, expectations. What about all those glowing things they published about your man? Picture perfect, but rather awkward in the lair? Lumpen? Love is on its own in this, our very own demanding, one might say, *cruel* world.

(Re Re Thumping). Somehow I cannot imagine Marie humping; but she must have. If she and I had, well you know, IF, should I have hung her on the wall, like a picture? I remember later when Sonja asked, "Do you not desire me?" What was not obvious?

Somehow, despite all intentions to the contrary, I would have hurt Marie; myself as well. How could one do the one without doing the other?

Marie is a starting place for a lot of other stuff that is going on in my life. Other people might imagine there is nothing going on in my life. But for as long as I have been attempting to write I have more or less believed that any person place or thing can serve as a focus for what it is one wants to say. Its not just the saying; it's the questions that arise; more questions than answers (we often hear it said).

There are a lot of opinions out there passing as the truth. I reserve the right to question all such, to me, presumptuousness. Who can know the truth? Yes! Also I disparage all such presumption, what I assume it to be, albeit, 'hot air' (well, maybe not so 'hot'). We self-inflated ones cannot allow a happening to pass without judging it; offering our sage opinionated rather narrow prejudiced view with regard to it. Of course, such judgments are intended as understandings. What is to be understood? Often the result is misunderstanding.

I cannot question Marie. I cannot even question all those who knew her; or were hypothetically closest to her. If she had herself under lock and key, and if all those who knew her, or thought they knew her, or were most intimate with her, didn't, or couldn't, or wouldn't respond to her locked up distress, then how could I hope to learn anything about her? She will remain a mystery. Her life will have vanished without a trace. And I will have understood nothing.

So why bother? So why not ask why it is birds just fly about, appearing naught to entertain notions of suicide, even when they crash into the plate-glass window. Their life expires as though they were Marie. Pointlessly. What is the purpose of this dead bird that I hold in my hand? What was – to adjust the tense?

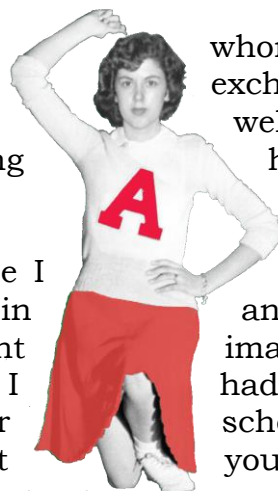
But because we are what we are, and who we are, we attempt to preserve images of our stay here. In the old days, we scratched images on rocks and cave walls; as a somewhat self-conscious activity. Aware of our own presence? Nowadays such activity is a full-blown preoccupation. We cannot leave enough insipid record of our being here. And by that I don't mean just carving one's initials on every tree.

We have thousands of photographs. My wife's family spawned a nest of photographers; partly because of the process, what was happening in the dark room. But a lot of the people stuff was fake; like CHEEEZZZ. Nobody wanted to believe that someone could be despondent when their 'pitcher was being took'. Nobody wants to take pictures of the despondent. Even me? The CHEEEZZZ bit is mostly unnatural. Marie wasn't too much into CHEEEZZZ. Life might be construed as unnatural. A lot, or most of what we do, may be regarded as unnatural. Maybe taking one's life, or committing suicide may be considered at least appropriately natural; or the natural outcome of living life on someone else's terms. Most of us lead our lives on someone else's terms. Such is the basis of our civilization. We do not tolerate anarchy; we barely tolerate idiosyncrasy; i.e. differences from our self-image; the ones that appear in mirrors and are sometimes revealed in photographs. As civilizational entities we are intended to become more alike than different. And the most natural thing for us to do as a civilizational thing is to commit suicide by converting the planet into a standard of living. In the darkroom one can alter the final product. He can ape the camera, or flip the bird.

You stepped off. Nowadays we hear of people wanting to get 'off the grid'. Most natural I would say. People feel uncomfortable with the notion of suicide. They say only, you died. Perhaps there is little relevance in making distinctions. We will not understand in any case, even if you had told us why.

It matters to me. And I cannot tell you why. Except if you were alive, some kind of conversation might be possible. You might say things to me that would ultimately mean something to me. I might be more apprised of certain truths than I am now. And I might see something in those nicest eyes that I hadn't noticed in my earlier rapture. As it is - darkness prevails. And you are gone FOREVER. As soon will be I.

There are others whom I would like to Perhaps they are dead as alone by himself waiting prevails.



whom I cannot locate with exchange some words. well. Eventually one is his turn. SILENCE

This all began because I and on, the Cheerleader in relevant or irrelevant noticed things. Somehow I of the Cheerleaders in our things I had written about

have been using, off an iconography of imagery. How little I truly had thought of you as one school. It was one of the you that was incorrect. I

discovered this after I had temporarily acquired yearbooks of those days together. I wanted a photo of you as a cheerleader. (This is your head atop Peggy S. [Photoshopped]). **Class Act!**

Now that I ponder more carefully, and view the extant images of you, I realize you might not have been the type. I don't know what I mean by that exactly. You were not demonstrative. You also seemed very proper, and not a flaunter, in the least. And, you did not seem a cheerie person. Perhaps there was some constraint arising from a family conflict; a father and/or mother who thought little of such activity.

But I was one who regarded the Cheerleader as a vital part of our social context, our ritual behavior. The Rah Rah thing emphasized by the movements of the female form somehow seemed right, although it was never involved in cheers for me. Perhaps a modest Can Can where a flashing of parts seemed Boom Bah.

But you were not a cheerleader. And the design and shape of the actual wearing apparel has suffered the superimpositions of time. A lot less provocative than I had remembered; more like gowns. Any activity of 1950 was only a transient phase, like baggy pants, shoulder pads and Frankie Snotra. So Marie, little did you or I know of the transformations of an activity that was bound for a greater glory.

I suppose the social context is the same. And I suppose there are those who are not in the loop. That is, there are cheerleaders and there are those being cheered. Even losers in the right social context are cheered on. But you have to be one of them in the right social context to be cheered as a loser. If you are one of those not in control of the social context, but are one of the many mere ones, who also serve by standing and waiting for the call, your status does not merit an inclusion in the cheering department. ALTHOUGH the social milieu requires an audience, spectators and volume, we serve as window dressing. The wannabes increase the volume with the insistence and persistence of the only somewhat immodest gyrating. Some wannabes were allowed temporary passage, but not real inclusion. Even the cheerleaders suffer within an hierarchy. That's the nature of the communal thing.

When one transposes then and superimposes it upon the now, I seem to understand the shootings in the school corridors. Inclusion and exclusion seem so arbitrary, not governed by rules that are written, but osmotically absorbed from within the milieu. Only 50 years ago some things seemed more possible than they do now. Seemed!?

We seem now to more readily acknowledge there is little place for us losers. A loser is a person who is inevitably excluded. An inevitably excluded person, despite all the fine things they can find

to say about him or her may change their status more by accident than by intent. The qualifications remain a mystery, and cannot be anticipated.

So when one opens up in the corridor or the class room with the bang bang, it must be viewed as an arbitrary act conducted against an arbitrary world. Perfectly natural. Tit for tat. One might ask: "Why is it so important?" Yes! Why had it become so important?

Most of us deduce an Identity Crisis? Actually a lack of self-knowledge. And a lack of a more all encompassing philosophical outlook. But one is taught to mirror, not to acquire self-knowledge, or to develop a personal philosophy with regard to them (the controllers) who might be exclusive. A kind of Xenophobia, fearing that one will see a monster reflected. There is less room (space) to act out one's Identity Crisis. And the human climate has turned Colder. Speaking of Global Warming.

It was simpler then Marie. 4 Billion fewer people. But you are amongst the dead. Was it all in your head? What is not self-evident in a threefold increase in number?

Could I have given you an identity that I could not give myself? It seems unlikely. But I have taken the cowardly course, willing to suffer the slings and arrows, for the little that remains, when, as a matter of principle I should attempt to elude their trajectories, by following your lead..

What would you have said to me if I appeared the day before your execution? Daaaaaahhhhh! Errrrrrr! Or Daaaaaahhhh? Or Errrrr?

What would I have said? Hello Marie? What have you been doing with yourself? A leading question? Actually on that date December 14, 1971, the day before, I was in the process of changing my life with another partner/companion who was not yet my wife. I would have been very remote from you in your hour. There would have not been any reason to be near you, unless you had summoned me, which may have been the last option you would have considered, since it existed as a non-option. We hadn't seen each other or communicated in 21 years. Like a premature *Ex Eunt*, a disappearance in the first act, first scene, before any dialogue had begun, an extra, pitched into the canyon.

Can you imagine this last: an extra being cheered as he or she is pitched into the canyon? (Remember Thumping!)

This reference to *Thumping* (another brief writing concerning things lived, but their cause unknown) is not incidental. The image recurs often enough; perhaps only suggesting estrus; some kind of

heat that ranges outside the cauldron we have built to contain it. "Put a lid on it!", we sometimes hear.

It suggests also that we do not all sit idly waiting for someone to come knocking upon our door. A friendly ministrator in glowing raiment. How simple if we could telepathically project into our environment a kind of straightforward unabashed, unselfconscious presence, announcing our wish to be fulfilled, despite our outward appearance. Quasimodos and frogs all. Would that be so different, however illusory, since most of our relationship to the world is already infested with a kind of fantasy (perhaps lunacy), than what we are already delusionally experiencing?

We enter the picture with an illusion based upon the illusions of others. Somehow there is supposed to be a model for all to follow. But the model, the mould for receiving our, anybody's, love, is not keyed to our ugly misshapen reality. Nowadays the beautiful is projected upon and imprinted into our desires, our very motivations. 'She is 'Beautiful'; we supply our own archetype. Like everlasting sweetness, like easily sated alimentary succorings with chocolate, should be answered all our stirrings within; just like in the media full of tantalizing celebrities. Even cheaply produced grade B movies where the heart is won, and everlasting happiness is assumed. We never see the next day when true reality sets in.

Cruelty sets in. Not objective cruelty. Just a response to the lack of fulfillment. A promise, perhaps spoken, is broken. Is that all there is to it? Bloody, sweaty, clammy, heavy breathing, grunts, powerful thrusts of body upon and within body. Pain and disgust.

Not always. But neither is it always what one had imagined. Perhaps seldom. Even with the Best and the Nicest. "A stiff prick has no conscience". Perhaps nature intended it as such, however crude. At sixteen, she, the anonymous she, was heard to ask, "Is that all there is to it?" Another birth followed, and another burden.

I am not a diviner of nature's intent. For I feel there is no identifiable intent, just like there is no identifiable purpose. So what does it matter?

If we are, by NATURE, conscionable, that is, aware and caring, desirous of giving pleasure as much or more than taking pleasure, then perhaps we have created our own reality, our own terms of fulfillment; rendering obsolete "A stiff prick has no conscience!". Truly loving the other; involving self-sacrifice. Sometimes the handsome lothario hero sacrifices himself for his supposed loved one (remember we are describing a model fiction) even with Romeo and Juliet (they were pretty people – No? Best and Nicest Again.) Was their night together all it was cracked up to be? (The Last Picture Show.) We leave off once nature's enticements gather momentum. We abandon the fiction. Not that our writers have not

attempted to describe certain acts with our limited vocabulary (a maze of runes and morphemes). The fiction is the easy part, although I cannot imagine myself writing fiction; even though my head is full of embarrassingly fanciful stuff; perhaps as much as my imaginary grasp of reality. Could I describe the act in a way that evoked the perfect union? Unlikely.

Why do I return to you Marie? To exercise the impossible, like any other contemporary fantasy? Why not? Were you not more real to me than any Hollywood image? And was I not even closer to Sonja?

I don't recall your mother Marie. But I do recall Sonja's mother, and I imagine Sonja as her mother. So I might assume your mother to be transformed by life to appear no less attractive than Sonja's mother, or Cunegunde's mother. Is that attraction linked to one's libido? Just a reality check. I cannot imagine my wife looking like her mother for whom I feel no attraction whatever. Although I see resemblance. Perhaps we look too closely. Of course, when we are IN LOVE, well, what can you say? We are not looking, we are being carried away in a blur of insides. Reddened. Later, after the release, we might look as one curiously looks, or absentmindedly looks, for the lack of anything better to do.

And what do I look like? Whom? Yes, like father, with perhaps shades of my mother's eyes. He was a cruel eyesore. Who claimed to my first partner that he had fucked Sonja. What was that rumor about a 'stiff prick'? Father not only exhibited a lack of conscience; for a self-styled artiste, he lacked in certain refinements. Maybe he saw himself as living a part (Gully Jimson). And perhaps there was an element of untruthfulness, like a fantasy of reversing the Oedipal thing, of the father screwing his son's wife (he screwed other guy's wives). He had to get his jollies (small man syndrome?). And a little truck with Sigmund added as a garnish. What was said, that Man had eaten of the fruit of the tree of knowledge, hence had destroyed the illusion of paradise? Just another self-styled realist with a cruel streak; a vicious demanding ego (Idiot). His son was later regarded as Oedipus. Dirty Bastard. May father roast in hell! My own son will wish the same fate upon the author, for other reasons.

Sorry for the side trip, or lapse; as an author I take some liberties. Perhaps a few more will follow into a seeming irrelevance.

Somebody said the sperm count was down; like maybe it is in rats when there are too many. Self-limiting? With AIDS, and a new barrage of diseases, and recurring resistant mutants of the old ones. You must admit some more thought should go into the presumption of *homo sapiens* (The Creator was in too much of a hurry). Consciousness means very little.

Have I lost my way? Have I abandoned Marie?

On a roll; a little momentum. Nothing, absolutely nothing, to lose. I had always believed I had something to gain by thinking and acting (behaving) in a certain way.

I have not lost my way. One cannot lose something he has never had. But now, there is more of a way, which may not be mine either. It is a manner of thinking and saying. Everything is framed in a question. One was chided when he repeatedly asked "WHY?" There was much that was not self-evident. What was not self-evident to me was often found not to be self-evident to others. Not being self-evident does lead to the question. But seldom did one ever hear "I don't know" even from those who knew it was more truthful to admit they didn't know. Much confusion arose from misknowing (Miss Knowing). That is, one was offered a True Believer's perspective, an opinion, a prejudice, a platitude, and dubious rhetoric, or faulty pedantic assumptions as the way to truth, or worse yet, a Biblical truth as a last ditch, against the wall, truth; and don't forget that mythical condition of anonymity, quoted incessantly.

Oh yes, I had heard that 'nobody has a monopoly on the truth'. But didn't pay close enough attention. I was like one of them; I had thought I had a monopoly on truth. But the more questions I felt obliged to ask really indicated that I was arriving further and further away from my objective. I did not have a monopoly; in fact the more I learned, I realized the less I actually knew.

If I had remained in my cloister with my little book, none of this would have happened; I would not have arrived at the end of the road, aware that I am 'dumb as a post'.

I cannot know what it would have been like Marie, you and I together. I cannot even imagine it. I can imagine a failure of a relationship for a variety of reasons. I cannot imagine a successful relationship, even with my impulse to unrealistically fantasize. If you had been truly depressed, like in a chemical depression, something wrong with your sodium transport, or an imbalance in your neurotransmitters, or serotonin levels, or whacked out hormones, jumbled synapses, what the hell would love, good intentions, self-sacrifice have amounted to (don't end a sentence with a preposition, asshole!). I would have made myself responsible; I was too ugly, too poor, sadly lacking in technique, riddled with inadequacies, however desperately I might have expressed my love. You might have developed an immunity to such professions. Most likely I would have failed you.

Perhaps what follows is not relevant, and may be judged 'in bad taste', but I'll confess my secret to you as I had to the analyst, the

same analyst who prescribed Quaaludes. If it was not so amusing, and somewhat prurient, however enlightening, I might let it pass unrevealed. The phenomenon known as ED (erectile dysfunction) has never applied to me. However another condition, to my knowledge, not acronymed, but added here for convenience, PE (premature ejaculation) may be said to apply to me. PE is relative to another condition known as 'satisfying the female'. PE has been much discussed by the great practitioners Masters and Johnson. Somewhere in all of the verbiage expended on the subject in pursuit of the objective of the perfect orgasm, simultaneous, is achieved through the act of coitus, between a male and a female *homo sapiens* (take note). PE, in my case, may be said not to happen before penetration, but sometimes soon thereafter, ejaculation equating with orgasm. If a female was dependent upon a lot of action to bring about her orgasm, she would be disappointed. Both of my children were sired in this manner, and with eleven years of partnership, I feel it safe to say that my partner at the time did not experience a decent orgasm. Marie, it leads me to believe, whether or not I might have sired children with thee, thee might not have been satisfied; not without much outside intervention.

As a matriculate in the Holy Establishment's School System of the State Of New York, there was never any such subject as Sex Education. Smart Ass that I was, I was expelled from school for blowing up a 'rubber', 'French Safe', condom, in Algebra class. Some of my fellow students egged me on and laughed loudly. Did you laugh Marie, or did I just follow form in your book. Could you suppress a laugh? That was the extent of my Sex Education in public school in the Holy Establishment's School System in the State Of New York. From my father, I received an abbreviated Sex Education "Find em' Fuck 'em and Forget 'em". Seemed workable.

There were many other considerations not accounted in father's succinct dictum. Finding a willing female, and satisfying her concern about pregnancy (getting knocked up), if commitment and undying love were not amongst them.

What nature assembles, let no man dissemble. Something like that. But all the words exchanged about 'love honor and obey' and 'let no man put asunder' probably has its utilitarian side. A strong commitment might assure for a better environment for the progeny that would ensue, even if all the other perfect conditions were not met. But if the progeny are exposed to the recrimination existing between two parents who cannot get it on, then what have we achieved? "You got me pregnant". (even though PE had occurred with or without any satisfaction for the female).

I did learn eventually, without Masters and Johnson, who might have been a couple given to Satyriasis and Nymphomania combined, without any conscious attempt at a perfect orgasm. It just happened. Some people say 'Shit Happens', others might say 'Fuck Happens'.

As I look back; what else!? Looking back, I recall Lee. We had ridden out to the lake in her sports car to look at (regard) the sunset over the lake. Sunset turned into evening and into darkness while we, perhaps with the aid of some alcohol, (an inhibition releasing agent) (perhaps mostly on my part) (I do believe Lee knew what she wanted, and why we there) (I may have entertained notions without any expectations); while we became engaged in some rather tempestuous smooching. Lee suggested we repair to her little house in the city to continue with our frolics there. They did indeed. More alcohol; how we got into bed I cannot recall (not by my initiative, I feel sure), all I remember through the alcoholic fog is Lee, nude, with her hair down, astride me, insisting that I 'diddle' her, 'not there', There!, before I entered her. This seemed to last throughout the night: not her state of Thereness, but, more than one occasion where the thesis was tested. On the following day, meeting her in our usual hangout with the other students, she asked me if I loved her. Geez, well, er ah, I couldn't respond but with great hesitancy, and can't remember how I answered. Answer enough!? But it seemed I was following the dictum put forth by father. As you can see I did not 'forget' Lee. I think it was she who found me, I feel it was she who led me to the bed, obviously not unwillingly, I imagine the fucking was a mutual thing despite the 'not there', 'There!' aspect of our involvement. Although later she inquired after my feelings for her, I suspect she might have been more in tune with father's dictum than I. Plainly speaking, I was not displeased with Lee. Its just that a big word "Love" was used which did not describe what I might have felt. It was a word rife with meaning that I was unprepared, or unable, to apply to the relationship. Lee and I never got together again, simply because I was spooked by the word, and its suggestion of commitment. Was she really serious? Perhaps there was some concern about pregnancy, since, to my recollection, there was no mention of 'birth control'.

Looking back, as I am now doing, Lee was an educational experience from which I am able to extract a lesson, only in hindsight. Most of it has to do with 'satisfying the female' in the manner, in her case, which Lee chose. Lee and I did not discuss things like perfect orgasm. We might have, if the lessons had continued.

Lee was part of a youth that seems to hold little accounting. As part of that unaccountable youth, I can remember Betty Elrod, whose portrait (head) I had modeled in clay and cast in plaster. She was a member of the same group which included Lee. I believe it was after Lee that I was doing Betty's portrait. Betty was not the forward young woman of Lee's proclivities, but she and I became quite friendly one day, which found us in this huge house, a house with other occupants, but with many rooms, some with beds, one of, upon which we found ourselves passionately embracing, fully clothed. I must admit that PE applied to that situation, WHOA!!? While fully clothed, but in the position. Betty not unaware of what had happened, uttered more than understandingly, "You haven't been with a woman for a while have you?!!". Betty might have become an individual with whom I might have sought further explorations, but we never came in that close a proximity again. I believe Lee could have been sexually promiscuous, but I believe she was basically in search of a compatible partner. Betty could have become promiscuous, except that she seemed entirely lacking in self-confidence. Lee was not lacking in self-confidence.

Much later, toward the end of my first partnership, which was most unsatisfying to both individuals, for a multitude of reasons, many to do with sex, I visited an analyst; and she, a distaff psychiatrist. We each came armed to our 'marriage counseling' sessions, she with her analyst's assessments, and I with my analyst's dubious assessments. I don't know what kind of sexually satisfying experiences her analyst could draw upon to guide her patient. My analyst, a male, was locked into some similar male problem as mine in his sex life; not being able to fuck his wife into an orgasm. It should be mentioned that both analysts were married to one partner at the time and both had produced children. My analyst eventually was sued for divorce. The marriage counselor was also sued for divorce. My partner's analyst remained united with her spouse.

The mechanics of fucking were more easily read about than discussed openly. Since Masters and Johnson, like Kinsey, had their heyday during my early years, reading about anesthetizing the penis (ludocaine) seemed a logical way to proceed; that was tried; in hindsight I wonder if any of it rubbed off on the other part of the equation. Of course, the limits and extent of foreplay, although considered good form, if not essential, were never discussed in any more detail than any other aspect of the sexual act itself. Whatever advise might have been brought to bear (bare), the application to the experience was certainly not very rewarding, and 'didn't do the job'. Manipulation of the clitoris seemed not

particularly successful as an alternative. There was some thought, mostly negative on my partner's side, that my member was inadequate (for bringing about a particular desired result). I wonder how many children have been conceived through a perfect simultaneous orgasm? I would be willing to wager, that, by far, the rate of conception (misconception?) is only achieved through the biochemistry of properly paired individuals, and that perfect orgasms are incidental to the process. Additionally, I believe that pure mechanics without 'love' would seem in the least a less satisfying experience.

Well, Marie, as you can easily see, something was lacking, but still produced offspring. Don't you wish?!!

I have heard an appropriate comment regarding another, "he got married quite early, but discovered sex when he was thirty five" (with another woman, 'splitting' with his wife of fifteen years), even though he had sired three children.

Perhaps the same might be said for me. My true spouse and I came together while we were still bound to others. We each split from the other, joining ourselves together. The word 'sex' was used to describe our relationship by my first partner's analyst. I would not have used that word; but instead would have used 'love', even though 'sex' eventually became part of our relationship. As I write, I am still in that relationship some 35 years later. Our sexual compatibility arises from what I believe to be a patient love on the part of my wife, and my desire to satisfy her needs. Did I discover 'sex'? As before I would choose the other word 'Love'. I would have used the word 'love', although unrequited, to describe my relationship to Sonja. Her relationship to me was not the same. Whereas with Charline the 'love' was mutual.

See how easy it is to get sidetracked. Getting it on with Lee, and Betty, and all that other dubiously relevant sex talk.

I shouldn't be bothering you anyway; you who chose the long interlude in limbo.

I suppose that is an unfair statement. I imagine you would like nothing better than to be roused, even by me, from the oblivion of the nothingness of your imprisonment.

Only He will take a life. Selfish bastard.

Yes! I have appeared to increase your longing for meaningful conversation.

Only He will give life.

They had told us about another life. They had promised us something they thought within their purview and power to grant; those black robed ones. The ministers of You Know Who. The Next Life. And I know you, as a Catholic, knew what the priests had to

say about how the lord viewed the suicide. Limbo, a half-way house; halfway between paradise and the nothingness you already felt; or halfway between confinement and freedom; forsaking the redemptions of the Almighty; and of civilization. Cheating the hangman, the 'grim' reaper.

Once we are awakened (and often when we sleep) (and often we are asleep when we are awake) we endure an anxiety, fearful of our own demise; at least unsure of why we are here and where we are going (even in our apparent stupor). We will swoon when any barnstormer, huckster, evangelist or holy roller, loosing promises of an afterlife, or anything beyond nothing, even coming back as a cockroach, so desirous are we of stuffing ourselves, and orgasms, and romantic interludes, and heroic deeds; and doing the work of You Know Who. We are all ears.

Would they do it again knowing what was going to happen to them; those annihilated through small pox, the ones who were gassed and stuffed into incinerators, bombed with incendiaries, or those who were nuked? Would anyone want to live just to end his days violently? How daring, suicide!

More bizarre; imagine being held in my arms, and feeling my yearning and passion.

Life must have seemed awful. Someone stepped on the bug that was scurrying for a dark place. There are people who worship those bugs, who envision their next life as a beautiful bug. But what comes after the bug? Being human once again? Life sucks!

So you think my script writing is trite, and saccharine. Imagine something so impossible as Marie and I. A tawdry little romance, meant to titillate? A workable fantasy?

The real part of the script ended at the top of George's big thing. The Best and the Neatest disappeared down the elevator, and off into the sunset.

Then I entered the "Faint Heart" phase of real life.

Then I gravitated to the Pillow phase of real life. Then there was some kind of fizzle in real life. Why not change the script?

On the cheap one could expend twenty-five cents for a huge two hour celluloid depiction in the dark; Hector in one heck of a dash to glory, carrying off Hectorine into that vanishing sunset. Rescued and loved forever. Dimitri Tiomkin enhanced the fanfare; crescendoed bliss.

If we did not take liberties we would not have any.

Louie, what are you on? Where are you coming from?

Poor Form, Durchanek.

I am able to write only as I do. In some respects I do not believe in what I am doing. I may believe in the message as a private matter. The message is never clear, because questions arise as I do

my thing. I can never isolate myself from the questions. So for me to lay it out there as an explanation is quite impossible. There is no explanation. There is only the construction full of questions. You want answers, you want persuasions, you want lies. Yes! perhaps you do want a credible romance (roam). It must be obvious that I cannot concoct a credible roamance.

A Romp In The Wilds With Marie. Trying To Turn Back The Clock. Trying To Turn Back The Title. The gun sounded, but some had already sprung from the blocks; the gun sounded again; they had to call everybody back for a fair start. No cheating! I would like to have the opportunity to cheat, just so I could make it all come out the way I wanted; breaking the tape. And you might have lived happily ever after. We could have been so close with all our secrets. Perhaps you had hair on your chest, or hair growing out of your nostrils or from around your ears. I would have asked you to let the hair on your head to be allowed to grow to fetish length. Like indulging a child.

This is not stream of consciousness stuff; it is more tightly hinged.

Where do we come from?

What are we?

Where are we going?

The floor is yours.

Soon enough Marie I will acquire answers to all those questions that reach beyond the (our) mere human intelligence. I would ask permission if I could visit limbo on my way to hell. Perhaps after we talked for a while you might like to join me in hell.

A good deal of life on this planet has been HELL (without knowing truly what hell is). I know I will learn that what I was experiencing on Earth will seem like Paradise. I know you have learned that already. Mortal Sins.

Its only because of you I am thinking and saying these things. If I visited your gravesite, I know what I would find. Not something immortal. A headstone, perhaps with an epitaph, and markings of time. Kilroy was here! I kissed my wife fervently (before we were married; when we were getting to know each other) in one cemetery, while in another, I touched her bosom for the first time (she thought me forward; I certainly wasn't in reverse; I was smitten; a lame excuse for inexcusable behavior?). We felt comfortable in the graveyard. We did not make love amongst the memorial stones. Not because it was sacred; just not private enough. We eventually found many other places that were not sacred, and were private. For me it was a kind of Heaven without truly knowing what Heaven is. But while we were following our

consciences, as people do, when they violate vows and basic tenets of civilization, as we are all prone to do, we were suffering the pangs, the pangs of all the famous lovers, which are also a part of our heritage, then it was I most ardently thought of suicide, as a blessed release from uncontrollable feelings.

I am wondering about that Heaven beyond, which I shall never experience, whether the kind of heaven I was experiencing on earth, that eventually subsides into something more mundane, if in that other Heaven one feels first love all the time, every moment forever. Now see, that's one of those things you have to go to heaven to discover for yourself. Like burning for eternity. Either eternal damnation or eternal salvation. All very extreme, because those Goddamned popes, priests, ministers, shamans, and other mail order parlayers of The Word have wanted to persuade. Let vengeance be mine! Kind of a dumb way to talk, really. But how else do you get the people focused? Fear works pretty well, then a kind of promise of love that doesn't exist in our solar system. A fairly effective formula, along with the Anno Domini calendar. Billy Graham, the Cracker, made millions with this simple formula. It's the year 2001, the year of the Space Odyssey after Armageddon; After Rapture! The Revenge of Paradise!

What man doesn't know, information to which I am privy, without being a mail order evangelist, is that a covenant exists in fine print below the other Biblical admonition to "Multiply and Subdue" that reads: *Do Not Fuckup Paradise!*

They might return both of us to Earth to spruce up the planet, as a form of punishment. Can you imagine spending an eternity cleaning up after some kind of filthy animal. They would send us to the State Of Texas for starters. Since we didn't shoot the bastard we get to swab down the joint as reward for our negligence. Yes! Even though we were obeying one commandment. Don't expect extra points for cowardice.

I don't imagine I have exhausted all the permutations of this kind of epistle to the dead. Haunted by things not done, that might have been done. Not regrets particularly, but a kind of want to know things, or an accumulation of things outside of the drab one sees of himself. If one had taken certain steps beyond a faint heart, all of his life. An IF!

There were those times when one did not need to venture much, when he suddenly found himself in over his head; or How do I get out of this? Another kind of faint heart; where one ran in the opposite direction. Whew! a narrow escape.

It was easier to engage in some exhausting almost impossible physical labor, or physical test of man against the immovable

object. Were you an immovable object Marie? All a matter of perception.

What were you, after all? Father would have branded you another small-town twat. Find 'em, Fuck 'em, and Forget 'em'. "Stand 'em on their head and they all look alike". When he stood mother on her head she turned into a dry fig. A real romantic, father. And a sadomasochist.

You see, this way I get to rant about father; I get to work off some of that ambivalence (and animosity) with regard to him; rather than being locked up in a mental institution because I was carrying this huge weight around, identified as a 'father figure'. My brother, who finally found a niche in psychology, discovered, by definition, that he was abused. A very comforting thought that excuses all of one's failings. But others who reach such a conclusion become suicidal, maybe because the recognition scene is rife with agonizing betrayal (the human kind).

Again, its all a matter of circumstance, and perhaps culture. If everyone is 'abused', as a matter of course, like in Calvinism, where a rod was used as a persuader of the young, perhaps as a form of encouragement, to learn faster, to get the message; and if everyone was receiving the same form of encouragement, then it was a cultural thing, an ambience, maybe like perpetual bad weather, then one might have not felt abused. And some people are more sensitive. Sensitive, lack of love, betrayal?

What would I have done, if one day I had had the unheard of unfaint heart to ask you to walk with me in the forest (assuming you had accepted, and trusted me not to molest you therein) and finally end on our doorstep, only to meet father where he might have uttered some insulting statement as only he could, aiming for an area below the belt, or waist, as it might be?

Hypotheticals, anyone? After the deed; the reprisal!

That, foul mouth, will forever
Appear and accompany you wherever;
Etched incisively upon your forehead,
The opposite of adulation you will come to dread.

It would appear that somehow I might have wrestled him and bound him, only to carve some scaring epithet upon his brow. This man doth blaspheme. Satisfaction guaranteed!

What we have here is pure fantastic fantasy. Marie and I in the forest, confronting the old man, wherein the old man got his cumuppins; but what happened to Marie and I after that? She might imagine me carving some epithet upon her tender parts if she had strayed. Well, what can you say?

Things have taken a new turn, perhaps engendered by this preoccupation. Instead of fantasizing during the waking moments, you appeared as I slept. There you were, visiting me. Not completely out of curiosity; you wanted to be there, some imaginary bond; or an incomplete statement; some desire for a 'closure' (that ugly overused word) to the nagging part of one's soul. You were less somber, but dressed as you did in those days when I knew you. You seemed warm and friendly, but still held in reserve. When I embraced you, which you seemed to desire in your frontal proximity, and as you were about to return the embrace, you hesitated, then withdrew. Some caution. Perhaps it was because of Charline, or perhaps it was because it would complicate or destroy the ethereal quality of what was happening. As I enclosed you in my arms, you felt real.

You stayed with us for a few days; we did some things together; went places together, just you and I; but always the caution, even though I could sense in you the desire.

You met other people, mostly strangers, maybe stage props, or extras. They seemed to sense your transience. They didn't know how to relate to you; they seemed baffled by my interest in something I could not have, somehow empathizing with my plight.

I didn't want the dream to end, but it ended as all dreams do with an awakening, and a desire to return to sleep to carry things further; but the dream became polluted with reality; I began to finagle the dream with wishful manipulations. I attempted to create a moment when your resolve would weaken; when you would allow an embrace, and a kiss, and would return both with passion and desire. But my awareness felt the whole fabrication as inferior to the dream, which was more akin to reality than the waking state (both are reality of course). In the dream there was a natural flow of morality, and a delicacy to one's feelings, a genuine concerned tenderness; The more awakened state dispensed with some of the frills.

But it all came to an end; either you went away as scheduled, or I lost interest in what was happening. Even though you brought about this wonderful moment, and even though I would have wished to have prolonged it, I allowed it to escape for lack of interest. That somehow doesn't seem like the truth. How could I not want you there, even as an untouchable haunting presence? It seemed I wanted something to last forever.

I have been consciously or unconsciously trying to relive something in order to alter reality, to make it come out differently. Perhaps the dream will be the closest I will ever come to you. And the dream will fade from my memory, as an insubstantial thing, an

intangible thing. But after fifty years what more could I imagine in my waking moments constructed of the fragments of my memory of those days that were filled with the unrequited longings of youth, than I could in the few brief flashes of a dream?

And how many countless dreams have there been of others whom I never knew in reality, ones whom I have embraced and who have embraced me. How many of them do I remember in the haze of dreams, marked only by sleep?

At least you came. And you were warm and friendly. Perhaps you wanted to let me know there was a place in your heart for me. Like all of us have places in our hearts for others, if only we could lead several lives at a time, to follow all their urgings and all the yearnings to know many loves, so hungry are we for love.

I wonder how much freer we become after we die. Are all the bonds broken? Was there no Leo in your life when you came to see me? Was there something about Leo, the Neatest, Handsomest, Bestest, that was lacking? Was there something in me that you regretted having forsaken? You too wanted another life to explore something that our rigid social mores forbids. Our desires transcend this regimented life.

If we are freer when we perish, I wonder if we will find each other? Is there a logbook of names, with places of residence in the ether? And will I be permitted to travel in limbo where you are languishing, imprisoned, punished for having taken your own life?

I guess there is nothing that will convince me a jealous avenging God would place such a creature as you, who showed nothing but propriety in both real life and dream, in an everlasting unhappiness. Even though I cannot know anything about this life as I breath, and as I will cease to breath, I know that reality is such that there are no avenging Gods. There is only a brief encounter with palpitation somewhere within a monotonous continuum, and that afterward there is only decay of what once was; endless transformation within a milieu of transformations, with no object in view. Waiting, waiting, waiting! Our consciousness serves only to torment.

I long for you Marie as I long for the truth; to know. And even when I come to know, what will I do with the knowledge? How will it serve me?

One of our schoolmates informed me of the manner of your suicide (Died at home {in the obit}). She died in the car in the garage with the exhaust piped into her vehicle. She also informed me of the manner of your sister's death. One of the rumors circulating when we were young might have been malicious in origin, wherein it was reported you had pushed your sister Shirley

down a flight of stairs. Whereas our schoolmate wrote she had died of polio. In any case life is sometimes full of sadness. Moreso, whether rumors speak truth or untruth, who knows really, but the tale claims you died. Was the polio thing a cover up for something more malicious? All those who might know firsthand are dead. Am I carelessly deducing things not in evidence; remorse perhaps, at assuming anything so horrible of you? Am I searching too assiduously for the precipitant to suicide; jumping to mere conclusions.

I would guess most of my curiosity has to be satisfied with the little I have learned. I don't know why we feel the compulsion to want to look backward, as though we might truly discover what life was all about. All we gather are impressions that might not be an improvement over what we already imagine, reality becoming second rate to our fantastic imaginings, or misrememberings; or misinformation; or as they say nowadays, disinformation, anonymously disseminated.

Our whole life is formed before we arrive, not as a series of recollections as Plato surmised, but as a series of impositions. The young mind is not in much position to question, it is so busy responding to the outside influences, doubtlessly passing as some kind of truth. The 'because I said sos' are intended to intimidate, not inform. Those attempting to intimidate us are afraid of losing control. If the parent, the teacher and society lose control of the child, they feel threatened, more threatened than by their own ignorance. If they can sustain their ignorance with some kind of weapon; counter threats, coercion, lets say, Flunking, or deadlier social ostracization, then they feel more secure. Don't ask me why.

I certainly was not in favor of the unruly child. I was not an unruly child. But I was not happy living within the milieu of set pieces, that, with time, have been overtaken (superimposed) by other setpieces. Conformity to a model (setpiece) is always the order of the day, regardless of its irrelevance. The objective is conformity, the part I found, and still find, difficult to accept.

Did you have some kind of reaction to your social boundaries? Ones that you could not objectify, or felt you had no right to question? Had you any inkling of the source of your despondency? I am assuming you were despondent.

Leave it lie! I am past recall. You will learn nothing from studying my bones.

I know that there are times when the impositions, whether placed upon us by ourselves, or through the medium of the outside, leave us distraught. We feel misunderstood, and alone. We either lose perspective, or discover that we have none, have never had any that wasn't someone else's. Those perspectives lose their

credibility; and there is nothing to replace them. All along we should have been more in tune with our selves, spending more of our time asking questions, not of our look-a-likes, but ourselves.

Some will argue there are no answers to those kinds of questions. But sometimes, in just framing the question, we have found our answer. How do we know we have found the answer? I suppose because what we discover through the process makes us feel comfortable. But we do have to make the effort to frame the question. In so doing, often we must confront or oppose the ready answers which prevail.

You could have asked; 'Why am I despondent?' Perhaps you knew; and perhaps you were too dominated by some preoccupation you could not release. Like the purported miscarriage. Not being able to conceive again. Wishing so much for something, the strength of the desire so unsharably intense, so unconfidable. Your whole life placed in the balance, your sense of self-worth intolerably diminished. Love-making (to put the best face upon the trying couplings) fraught with painful yearnings; and exhausting the soul. All hope for something vanishing as each day and each event passed. The glut of routine that brought no results, no rewards, but only more of the same. A sickness set in, the sickness of loneliness and defeat; leaden, burdensome, ineffectuality. Your daily doings almost completely unrewarding, no matter how important or how much others derived from your presence. You felt little and unwhole. Crushed. Impotent.

In another dream (you were not present) encompassing a later time, I was leaving permanently to go somewhere. There were those who didn't want to see me go; so it was a warm emotional affair. People were telling me there was a party that I shouldn't miss; but I told them I had to go. But later, I found so many last minute things to do, somehow telling myself it was not so important to rush. I had more or less decided upon leaving the next day. As I was about my business I had noticed two of those to whom I had said my farewells. They looked preoccupied; I hailed them. They looked at me as though "You're supposed to be gone." without much alteration in expression, unless it was to signify that I no longer existed. Anyway I informed them of the party which I still had no intention of attending; I wanted to lift their apparently lagging spirits, which obviously had nothing to do with me.

Coincidentally our common employer, now my former employer (also deceased), appeared on the sidewalk. We stopped to listen to one of his many humorous tales. Suddenly Charline was there interrupting him with her anticipations of the next phase of the tale, which sort of flustered the man. Then things fizzled.

In the end I was left with a strange feeling. Strange, as in stranger. I felt as a stranger, not because I was leaving, but because of the reaction of those who warmly sent me off and coldly wanted me gone; the same people. So I wondered if we are not always strangers to each other; or is it just me. I wondered how well you and Leo might have really known each other, after sharing the same bed for eighteen years. I wonder the same after sharing the same bed with Charline for thirty years. If one begins to doubt what he knows about the one closest to him, he must certainly doubt what he knows about others; hence his alienation, or strangeness. And what does he really know about himself?

So I reflect upon our days together, our teen years. On the periphery are other teens who were not in our class; those I remember for some odd reason, but cannot recall their significance to me; although there must be some special meaning.

And further I reflect upon strangeness, what one feels everyday, not so much to do with people, although somehow emphasized by people, especially after they leave a gathering; when at the beginning of the gathering there was an effusive show of recognition and welcome; sort of like the leave-taking embraces I was given as I was departing forever. A disquieting feeling of: I don't know anyone of these people; certainly not like I know myself, who must form the framework of any knowledge of others. How can I possibly know anyone else better than I know myself? And how well do I observe and fulfill the admonition "KNOW THYSELF".

I know these questions disturb your peaceful rest. You probably felt intensely some alienation that fed your inclination to disappear. Leave it be; I do not want answers now, full of impossible regrets.

Lately I seem to be involved in a looking back. Not unlike Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* (did you ever see any of his films?). Not long ago another dream seemed violent, wherein as I slept, I recall being in bed, a dark cloud appeared; even though it was nighttime and I was in bed, I was aware of the cloud. Then suddenly the whole scene with me in it, began to violently turn (as afterward I had imagined the force of a tornado), I could feel the turning, an engulfing feeling, and I was aware of Charline in another bed, also turning. Such dreams have a way of ending, like a falling or drowning dream must end, lest they become reality. I have been saved from huge waves, from falling cliffs and from whirling maelstroms. And unluckily, I was saved from actually kissing and fondling you. Reality would have found me wide awake from the sting of a slap. So perhaps luckily, I was saved from such a stern rebuke for my lusty animal advances.

But, in the end, I will not be saved.

What was it like Marie, inducing the big sleep? Were you aware of what was happening to you? Were you doped up? Was there a moment when you wanted reality to end and for a dream to take over; a reversal so to speak? Had you gone too far; or were you already really too committed? You did not want to be rescued.

Highly poisonous, odorless, colorless, tasteless gas. Combines with the hemoglobin of the blood to form carboxyhemoglobin, which is useless as an oxygen carrier. *Symptoms:* Headache, mental dullness, dizziness, weakness, nausea, vomiting, loss of muscular control, increased, then decreased pulse and respiratory rates, collapse, unconsciousness, DEATH. And they said you died.

Many of us have been there, but have stepped back.

I return to you as I would all the unknowns about life. You were one who was possessed of a shape, three dimensional; you walked and you talked, and for whatever tangible reason you tangibly held my hand for a short while. Selfishly I remember. You were not a matinee idol preserved on celluloid, projected upon a flat silvered screen. You were far more; a reality so close, however distant your inner orb. And how frozen I in all my inadequacies, and abject fear of rejection. How do you let a guy down without hurting him? You didn't hurt me when you ran off with the Best. You saved me from certain ridicule. But my mouth stood wide open.

I had yet to prove myself to myself. I was in no position to succeed, because I didn't know who I was or what I was. Even if I had become some kind of local sporting star or even more amazingly some local scholar, what would any of it have meant even if it had included you? Would we have moved on, or would we have stayed around, fornicating to the same dismal end?

My grandchildren were here this summer. For the occasion I had installed a basketball hoop (regulation height, and regulation distance foul line, regulation ball). When the children were here, we shot 'hoops' not very seriously, and not with a lot of accuracy. We tried farting very often as a pretext for missing shots. Eventually my shooting partners went away. But I still shoot hoops, a 68 year old shooting hoops, alone in the wilderness with sea very nearby. No cheerleaders. I probably shoot more hoops now than I did when I was on the basketball team at AHS. I make more hoops because I have fewer distractions; no pretty girls for example; nobody around for whom to make a fool of myself, like I'm sure I did back then. My 11 year old granddaughter showed me how to shoot hoops. She just doesn't give a damn. Its somebody

else's game anyway. She giggled, laughed, giggled, farted, laughed so hard she couldn't even throw the ball. My grandson wanted to do the fancy stuff, like dribble behind his back and between his legs, and twirl the ball on the end of his finger. Shooting hoops was boring in comparison. He farted too with some kind of noisy vengeance; a better farter than his sister and more timely Ha Ha. Of course my granddaughter denies she ever

Anyway, now its just me and the hoop. I miss my granddaughter's giggles. A nonsensical infectiousness. Life knocked into a cocked hat.

There you were Marie, a good catholic girl, screwing your heart out for eighteen years; nothing, but quiet desperation.

Instead of doing what you did, you might have taken the veil. But perhaps you had truly lost faith, after all those unanswered prayers.

Perhaps you sensed your anonymity amidst all the other perpetual brides.

With such vengeance did you repay them for deserting you.

And there was Sylvia, with animal passion lustily devouring the thing that swelled upon the great man. Birth, birth, and then none. Already a stupid mistake, the great man seeking adulation, thrills and elation with another pair of unencumbered legs; his bride a needful sort with emotional and mental problems, requiring too much of the great man.

And with such vengeance did she repay him for deserting her.

And there was Marylyn, everybody's girl, who sought to make herself complete with another great man. Yet another failure. Norma Jean on top of the world, frightened of the heights whereupon we had ensconced her, with her fading body, fell.

And with such vengeance did she reward those who deserted her.

I know this may not be the place for what follows; it is entirely possible I will relocate it after a time.

I have speculated upon what happens after the happy ending, the Hollywood happy, where they ride off into the sunset together. Not unlike Marie and Leo.

I tried to imagine what she might have looked like when she was younger, in her utterly magnificent bloom, that attracted many hearts. In her late forties or early fifties she still retained a prettiness, cosmetically enhanced, and a trimness; perhaps no less attractive to older eyes. Very blond hair, slightly beyond shoulder

length, perhaps with a touch of coloring now. But then, how describe what might have been, and so fleetingly. I know if I had caught sight of her then, I would have peered long and longingly, so alluring would she have been, her carriage tall and slim, not without some statuesque embellishment; her features, perhaps unremarkable only in that they were proportional without detracting, but when juxtaposed, animated with her sweet disposition, irresistible to a fault.

She chose a suitor, renouncing higher vows she might have taken, to become earthly bound to earthly ways and earthly things. And so did they evolve within a culture of doings of things in certain ways. She and her partner might have fulfilled "We two form a multitude" as they became the parents of the future generation; fulfilling the transient roles assigned to them in their imaginings. She labored in her father's business while her other half gravitated to the government job. He was passed over in promotion, deeming himself a failure, yielding to excessive imbibing as corrective to diminishment. All was not well, the script remanded to the anomalies of time. Had Blondie lost her allure? What he imagined he had lost, she had also lost. She did not succumb to potions, but to sadness, sadness enough to speak to me, the stranger. There I was again, a listener; there is such need for listening it has become a habit and almost a predilection, especially with the lovely forlorn. How is it possible? Dream away old man, have you forgotten the B.O. the halitosis and the farts? The after-Hollywood success story?

Not so with another combination. A dishwater blonde, slight of build without statuesque embellishments; perhaps conscious of her general unattractiveness. A person who was making something of herself, with perhaps some emphasis on self; trying to become an accomplished artist. With the so-called 'biological clock' ticking away and living through those famed anomalies and the pressing visceral urges she mated with something; it was unclear whether romantic involvement preceded the event. A pregnancy and a child were forthcoming. Then a period of adjustment, mostly practical in nature, devoid of apparent romance, and given to recrimination "You got me pregnant". Then perhaps a hiatus, an attempt to make something of what happened. Then, absurdly, a companion to the first; the fucking must have been pleasurable to its anomalous end. And finally a kind of splitting one encounters these days, as the parents could not agree on what is best for the children; the dishwater blonde, the one who was got pregnant, the superior combatant; mother's prerogative. Profound unhappiness as one tries to regroup until death do he and she depart, but long before. Smitherens. The last time I listened, it was "You got me

pregnant.” I have not had the opportunity to listen again. But it does not matter, that is, it is of little consequence. A happy beginning?, but not a happy ending. One did not allow enough time for fantasizing; the imperatives of the onrushing juggernaut filling in the blank spaces; a gasp of fulfillment before all else gives way; a brutalizing of the fantasy. Away from the curbside, the only subtlety; in an urban bed in an urban room, in an urban building so many floors up, with the curtains drawn, surrounded by stone, brick, mortar and cement fronted by asphalt and the refuse of the commons. The sound system beating banging away; the booze clouding the clarity of vision as the dishwater blond and her slope-headed smirk-faced consort roll in a gyrating embrace. Until death do us depart? Something utterly human about it all. A defining experience.

Gail Russell died August 26, 1961, aged 36. Marie somewhat resembled Gail. Gail, like Marie, died by her own hand. She drank herself to death. She was informed she could not have children. She was informed that if she stopped drinking her body might have a chance to repair some of the damage resulting from alcohol. It is opined that the sauce is often the cause of impotence in men. It might be asked what happens to the ova that have been pickled in alcohol. If a female develops only so many eggs, how is it possible to repair them once damaged?

I don't think Marie ever got pickled; perhaps her antidepressants were affecting the ova; why yield to life when there is none? Get A Life!! Perhaps you were a little before your time Marie. Now, the Catholic Church is under siege for 'unnatural' acts, under siege for irresponsible edicts concerning the purpose of fucking, and the need for more purposeful fucking; your beginnings Marie. And now, our stupid national debate over pro-choice, and anti-abortion, a most hypocritical debate. Is it Too Fucking Many, or Too Many Fucking? Anti abortion connotes Right To Life. The Right To Lifers do not eat meat, fowl or fish, they do not eat vegetables; neither flora nor fauna do they violate. They sustain themselves on bullshit. It is not clear what might be the purpose of their fucking, or whether it is always purposeful. And they are not averse to the advocacy of violence to save a life that is unborn. And when it is born it is abandoned to the private sector, where one will discover all the other millions of civilizationally abandoned (the social retards of RR), the legions awaiting their trip to the beyond where life (and love) will truly begin. Get Real, Life Sucks!

Marie, you were Pro Choice and Pro Death.

All I want to say to you Marie, a different societal environment might have offered a different alternative. I might have found you alive, perhaps separated from Leo, childless, abandoned, living in a circumspect hovel surviving on your Social Security and your pension, clinging to the little that remained of your life. When you, instead of Dorothy, might have received a phone call from me.

Instead I have created this fabrication full of dim memories, fleshed out with speculations upon reality and truth. The real dull truth might have discouraged creation of this opus: Marie.

For me, regarding you, time ceased in some yearbooks, frozen in photographs. There were others since then that don't even share in so dubious a capture, consigned as they are to imperfect remembrances. Frozen, fixed, the one and only, found adrift with all the other one and onlys in a universe of unknowns. Surely the meaninglessness of it all will end one day; all of our lives and deaths stripped of their moment through overwhelming redundancy, and the vicissitudes of cataclysmic events, mankind a mere finite stir on one planet in one solar system in one galaxy in one larger milky way in one small corner of one universe, a long way from heaven. The first traveler there has not yet reached his destination.

I seem to keep finding things to say to you, irrelevant as they may be. Besides having another dream with you, Janis, Dorothy and Franny, which seemed to provoke another aspect of our discontinuous relationship, I have, as part of that provocation, yielded to something beyond; this new theme.

Many things have happened in our, and the larger world. Population has tripled, even without your contribution. Perhaps if you had been able to make a contribution, a potential 'savior' for the 'second coming', let's say, so badly needed by this world, you might have lived to see him martyred in another cause, randomly killed in our increasingly violent world.

But you did end your life toward the end of the Vietnam fiasco. In those twenty one years you lived after our years together in that somewhat Pleasantville atmosphere of Amenia, events transpired of which I doubt we had the merest inkling. But already HUAC with the likes of Parnell and Nixon had been busy blacklisting people, mostly public figures and celebrities who showed communistic sympathies during the early thirties when the labor movement was gaining momentum and strength. After High School the Korean conflict began as an earnest test of wills of the two antagonists. That's when I joined to avoid the draft, not as a patriot to fight our nation's battles. During my 'service' time Joe

McCarthy was televised with his manic rants against other suspect, and not so suspect, members of our society, 'sympathizers'. Something worth fighting for. Then after many deaths and little accomplished it was over, each side dividing the 'spoils' in this case, the utter reality. And the Megatoning, with Hydrogen bombs, was heating up, and the confrontations continued in their all too stupidly human way. And the space race took our minds off the violence, and finally the fallout brought an end to the overt bomb testing. We lost a popular president to a violent 'polarized' nut case. Also we had entered the Vietnam era, for which there was no justification whatever. Perhaps Janis, the career military WAF, was the only person who believed in any of it, right or wrong, and could, with conviction, spout Love It Or Leave It. So many others became flower people, deserters of our beloved country, became Woodstockers, Monterray Popsers, Love-Inners, Hippies dressed most bizzarey, provocatively, flauntingly, and the Chicago Seven.

Then there was Kent State. A far more horrible thing than the devastation of the Twin Towers, which came thirty years later. And Kent State was not an isolated instance; the inner cities were a scene of inhuman proportions.

What was happening in Pleasantville? What was your thinking concerning all these events? Were you, or I, prepared to think of them in any meaningful way by our years at Amenia High School?

And since the abomination of Vietnam, others have followed, none the wiser. And all those 'taken for granted rights in perpetuity' are being eroded by the paranoia of the rich. The walls are crumbling. And there isn't anything anyone can do to shore them up. All must fall.

Anyone who exercises his right of 'free speech' to sound the Ides is considered an enemy of the state. An enemy of the state loses all his rights by laws created to silence him, to imprison him, to execute him (and the hers).

Where have we gone wrong? Is there any hope of avoiding the inevitable?

Our nation, Pleasantcountry, has sustained some terrible wrenches at the beckon of the Corporations who put huge sums of money into the coffers of elected officials to do their bidding. Many wars have resulted, bankruptcy has followed, both in wealth and resources, and in ethics and morality.

Marie, about these things you would have heard me wail and rail until death did us part, your depression deepening.

The author didn't know where this discourse with Marie would lead when he began. He supposes he should apologize for all the

asides and seemingly irrelevant detours. Perhaps he should revise what he has written; version 1, version 2, version 3, etc.

But this version with all its extensions may require some apologies. Especially the inclusion of Lee, to whom he may also owe an apology.

Lee was real, and may still be so. But the whole memory of the experience with Lee is being resurrected from the moments that were originally pickled in alcohol. There were so few years separating the school and Marie experience from the Lee and other intervening experiences. That very Marie experience, in its irreclaimable innocence, occurred, in what seems, another life. It has to be so. Can it be possible that, even after, you remained innocent? Like, did you and Leo ever discuss sex, had you had premarital sex, or other sexual partners? I cannot imagine it? The sorrier for you? 'Love' (sexual attraction?) may have seemed wondrous to you, and you unfolded as the occasion would warrant and permit; but, how was it, really? Had you imagined beforehand what it might have been like? Had you and your girl friends ever discussed the possibilities? Had your mother ever taken you aside? Was it all a kind of perplexing reality, natural, but somehow disgusting?

Lot was turned into a pillar of salt for doing what the author presumes to do. The author isn't any better prepared to accept what he knows of his consumed youth, except that he perhaps wished he could relive those days, mostly to be allowed to unfetter himself, to be allowed to follow a course not predicated in social mores, and hierarchies, and feelings of inadequacy.

All the poetry and all the high-sounding principles are so often reduced to the anatomical persuasions; the size of a guy's dick, or the size of a gal's boobs, or the size of the wallet. But so contrary are the winds that Romeo and Juliet are as easily housed in the fat and ugly as to make the whole preoccupation with romance seem absurd. Nature is replete with absurdity. There are so many, too too many of us, elbowing each other, parasitizing each other, exploiting each other, abusing each other. And we have dared to speak of brotherhood, and being 'all in this together'.

What magic then, this recall of you Marie, in your wondrous innocence, and I in mine. Not so wondrous, mine, so full of those awkwardnesses, the goofy Quasimodo, with the pimples, and the broken incisor, and the too often worn and doubly worn poverty of me. That one could love as any other, that one could fantasize as any other, without the lofty language of Will at his command. A pang! A pang! Salt in ones wounds, the pang! still exists.

There are no profiles of you; no photos of your bust, of your rear, of a more scintillating you. No cheerleader, no cheesecake, no

nude revelation. There is no recording of your voice. Just these few stills captured in some silver grain printed in cheaply reproduced dots on fading paper. The rest remains in the pillar of lost time, in diminishing light. And despite my knowledge of the not-knowing, I persist; I prolong this discourse hoping you will yet walk into my second coming, whereupon we may yet speak to one another of this whole event of our lives. Even though after speaking we will have accomplished little more than a sharing of something to which we cannot assign a purpose. Perhaps more than speaking might occur, because if we could so speak, what else might follow? And if the following tumbled us through space in some wild embrace, we would still crash to earth with our meager selves, perhaps sated with something that brought no relief from our forever ill-shapen, ill defined, human longings.

We might rise to reckon with the world, to infuse it with our spirit, to call upon love to remedy the pain of life, the interior life which is ours alone. I know you can speak to this Marie, and I would desire to hear your every word in this matter. Of your great pain. That even though you found relief of one kind, you realized afterward, an even greater pain.

If only we had not been given human life. Fulfilled as an amoeba; not envied. Imagine the colossal waste of all those lives that occupied so much space, that destroyed so much of the planet, that fulfilled so little, that envied and lusted because that is what was given them to do. How could we have so failed to fulfill the design our parts? And we presume to wax and wear superior to all those dumb beasts who share our occupancy.

He said Leave No Child Behind, Marie; then he bombed them; W. Is one child no better than another? Or are not all children alike? Why did you not adopt one of those?

When she stuck her head in the gas oven; when she swallowed the barbiturates with strong drink, when she swallowed all those aspirin after swilling the booze, when she ran the car exhaust into the closed car interior; they were cries for help. That failed!

Marie, my first partner called me before she set out to gas herself. Yes!, I found her in the little 67 SAAB; funny looking car really, and sort of funny with this person sitting in there with the vacuum cleaner hose running from the exhaust through a door window into the interior, with a rag closing off the opening in the window. Very funny and very pathetic. The car was running outside in the yard. Well, of course I got there in more than enough time.

Then I called her shrink to let her know. Shortly thereafter she was receiving the care she needed in the State Mental Institution,

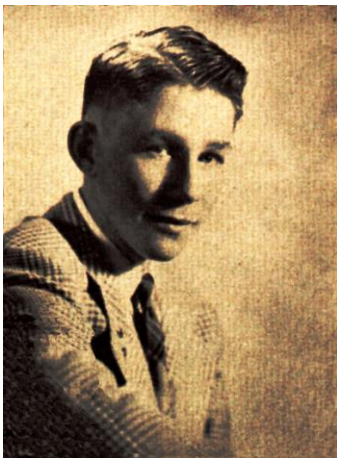
after being committed by the lady judge. I had to tell the lady judge that I was seeing another woman (Charline). She's still alive Marie, a survivor, and she didn't need me. And as the Gods know I didn't need her.

I don't know how close I came. But there was a period when Charline and I were involved in the intense phase of our relationship. When I was at the farm sitting under the pine tree feeling things I could not control, feelings I could not quiet, could not assuage, I thought desperate thoughts, imagining the ways to end it all; painlessly. Couldn't do it Marie. And I lived to be with her, to be happy with her; as happy as I might be with anyone I could love.

Yet, I have often imagined relationships with others. One way to complicate one's life. One, perhaps foolishly, reaches for something for which he cannot know the consequences. A passing fancy, a titillation, or a desire to lose oneself in some irresponsible activity involving his sensuality, excessively stimulated, and loved beyond all the unimaginable words. A self indulgence. Vanity!? Not so much vanity as sensuality; sampling all the chocolates in the box.

Something wantonly alive within us, something that defies mores, something without an embarrassing skin, or anatomical correctness. Something that ignores a controlled reality, ignores a set piece in a familiar confining sensibility, ignores consequences. We are the actors acting out the real reality, having migrated from the stage or screen to become what we have experienced in catharsis. Often the actor's real life pales before his own best performances. What are they trying to tell us? To live the imaginary life rather than the real? Why are we here envying, ogling these dubiously imperfect idols?

There we are, posing, situated on opposite ends of the earth.



And below, the ghost



of you.

In this craziest of worlds, I want to obtain more photos of you. Just to round you out; to get away from this flat surface.

Yes! I am crazy. An old crazy. My spouse would never read this kind of nonsense, because it tries too hard at a reality that cannot be. She would read about some guy in the 14th century that endures the pitfalls of a thousand romances. But this is courting too close to someone who is violating the safety and security of her heart and soul. She who might never deviate from the sacred path.

Where to leave off in these musings, these recallings.

You were the elusive, illusive, favorite. Despite the touching in George's Big Thing you were untouchable. A state of mind? An anchor for the oppositeness of our anatomical differences. I went to a movie with Janis. I went to a movie with Betty P. I went to the Prom with Ruthie C. She sat in my lap in a back seat on our way to a Presbyterian gathering. I lay beside Alice W in her front yard, fondling her beautiful chest. I played Post Office and 'pin the tail on the donkey' with Madeline M (geez what a development she was). And I took Ruthie K for a night ride in the 31 Chevy coupe, stopping to fondle and diddle on the way (I sure could have used some instructions for opening that can of worms). I doinked Amy W, after Chubby A, and didn't catch anything. If you had known some of these things, you might have been so filled with disgust, as I might have been; you would have squirmed at the thought of a filthy hand in yours.

Then, of course, there was the masturbation. As pleasurable as might be considered the act, it was always accompanied with guilt. There was father's rant about "you're brains are in your pee pee". There was the implication that the discharge of semen left one vacant upstairs. Father was anything but a monk; and what we have heard about monks and little boys, monks apparently didn't have any brains either. By inference father didn't have any brains; I wish I had thought of that sooner. That's the way it is, the good comebacks suffer with the delay. Not apropos! And besides, in the long run it doesn't matter. We all end up in the same place; at least, that is what I am hoping as far as you are concerned. I hope there are a lot of anterooms where just the two of us can get together alone to discuss this whole business of afterlife and beforedeath. It might matter to matter, that is, our transformed substantiality, the indestructible part of our physical beings, our molecules, the conserved part of a former existence, may mingle and unite to become a yet better transformation of matter. Vanity!

Where does it all come from, and what pertains; this static that emanates from this passing cloud?

I did dream last night a dream of Amenia High School. For some reason or other I was back there to attend a remedial English class for which I was late. It was difficult to find the room; the people I asked gave me a distance in meters and a directional gesture as though I should recognize every feature of their casual reference. A name like Huffnpuffstader painted on a door was mentioned, a name which I could not find. It seemed I would forever remain remedial in my learnings.

The whole outside environs was built up with imposing brick structures, the playing field engulfed in these monstrosities.

I do remember telling whoever was there to listen, to whom I could 'brag', that I had attended their school from 1944 'til 1950, when I had graduated from high school. It seemed like an important thing to mention, but went over like the proverbial 'lead balloon' as it did when I came to my third grade evening party announcing: "I'm here". Very flat responses; almost deflating.

There was no you; there didn't seem to be anybody except those few to whom I had spoken in some kind of dubiously functioning front office. I can only guess at the remembrance, since English was my weakest subject in those days, perhaps even weaker than Latin, which I flunked in my second year to retake in the third (did better on the New York Regents exam [just imagine everybody in the State of New York being able to speak the same version of Latin to one another. The whole State Of New York got to read Ivanhoe, Silas Marner, The House Of Seven Gables, and the Tale Of Two Cities, along with Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and the Rape of Lucrece]).

To backtrack a day or two to an unrelated matter. I was thinking about letting the Goddammed sword of godamocles fall upon W in the form of Monica Paula Jennifer Kathleen, with a little bit of Jessica, Donna and Fawn thrown in. And to hear him deny in his best Crawford drawl that he 'did not have sex with that woman' which would be a forthcoming 'did I not not say that I did not have sex with that woman?'. I want to hear him deny that he did not not use his pistol, his shooter, his membership, his member ship, his dis member ship in the NRA, the New Rightwing of America to fornicate with presumption. The NRA has close ties with the Promise Keepers who are the bedfellows of clandestine extracurricular activities. What's in a bedfellow? Can't keep their thingie in its holster. Forensick DNA specialists found a match between the stain (spilled a little) on her unmentionable garment and the stuff extracted from his preening comb. Smug self-satisfied idiot from a prep school; rich parents and all, buying prestige, did not not have enough smarts to foil the DNA men.

They wanted to get a court order to examine his holster. But the Supreme Court, very adept in messing in political matters, opined that a person's holster is protected under the fourth amendment. When the guys who wanted a peek argued that 'probable cause' was clearly evident, the court argued, it was not a conspiracy issue. The sleuths were busy hoping to discover a glove he might have used in a hand job, so they could prevail upon the court to reopen the holster issue.

Anyway, they found the comb instead. The sword of godamocles was held by a hair. What has Damocles got to do wit dis inquiry? Damocles was a sycophant of the Republican party.

Ouch! The sword hurt.

But you know it didn't do a damned bit of good to catch him with his pants down. His own party was not about to peach their prized sycophant. The independent council Moon fell upon the tart as an easy Lay. After that and a consultation with the Rove, W. went before the cameras to say. "For what may seem not a not inappropriate act, and seem not an embarrassment to MY office, and not a moral indiscretion, and not not a knotty question on the domestic side, not Lorra, my gosh, no not Lorra, who understands the public's desire to get a pound of flesh for Iwreck, does she not? Do I not not offer my most humiliating apologies for the upset it has caused youall?" "Jes' remember I did it for y'all."

Daffy sunavabish, no, Marie? You can't believe you went to school with such a one, and held his sweaty hand all the way to the top of the nation's capital attraction. Yuk!!!

Sometimes the smart ones don't fare so well; I remember the smartest guy in our class got pretty damned sick on booze when he was in the nation's capitol, so sick and cold, they had to put him in a tub of hot water. He was barffy sick, until his guts were turned completely inside out. That was the smartest guy in the class. Well, you know W. was a drunk, without having any smarts at all. So it takes all kinds; I'm one of them, sort of making an ass of myself in front of you; but you will not budge! I drink, darling, but not in excess. I'm neither smart, nor not smart.

Fun Huh!? Come on Marie, smile a teenyweensie little bit.

I saw that! Saved!

I can only hope you are not tiring of this. I am assuming you have little to do, and really welcome the relief from the long incessant hours and days, not unlike the criminal who has also taken a life and is consigned to imprisonment for the remainder of his natural life; how he might welcome any kind of indulgence, or recognition of his wasted, neglected, and forlorn being.

I do not wish to think of you as one so in need of my likes for some kind of relief. Without your consent, I continue as I have begun.

Yesterday we had a gathering here. Those who came indulged me a little by asking questions why I had not continued with carving. They thought me talented. I was talented in those days when I knew you, but had only inklings of any of my skills. As time wore on living long enough to explore those talents, which in their own right were seductions, perhaps leading away from other things I might have enjoyed as much or done as well, not explaining in any great detail the impact and influence my father had upon my direction in life, I ended here upon this page.

I do not wear well under flatteries. I become suspicious of motivations. But the questions were fair enough. And I could only answer them with the vanities as I understand them. We are given only so much time, and do not do well spreading ourselves too thin. If it mattered we might show more resolve, and more dedication to the one over the other. But here I am writing, something of only my little vanities, while others are regarding my past, urging me to pursue things that my energies and my dedication have deserted.

I know better than anyone what I have achieved in that former medium, despite chatter meant to enthuse me. The words come so easily to flatter beyond what seems appropriate. But one young girl, in regarding a steel dancer, a piece that doesn't mean as much to me as some others, only excepting the amount of heat and obdurate hammering it required to mangle it into its eventual shape, had very sweetly announced as she was leaving that she would like to take the dancer with her. I hadn't noticed that she had noticed, and she did not number amongst the flatterers. Sweet; Marie. I Now wonder how you might view what I have done. Tell me why that young girl's remark meant more to me than any of the others. Oh! I know that one other was sincere in a different way than base flattery. She too might have liked to take away the dancer; as a matter of fact when she overheard the young one speak, she said: 'After me'. That remark I treasured too. But I know it will remain where it is. People possess things, then they become inured to a presence, like I do the sea; it becomes a 'just there' until one becomes aware again. But these enthusiasms awaken apprehensions of eventual dispositions. Should I will the dancer to the girl, only to have her life around it fall into in a shambles brought about by the perversities to be found in the antipodes; and to have it mean nothing in the midst of all the sufferings of wants and needs and hurts and betrayals. Perhaps a pleasant memory of one who cared.

You will have to excuse me, Marie, but some of these things are coming too late in my life, and I do not know how to handle them. I was not prepared by anyone I know to take the up close, almost too personal flatteries. If these approvals had come at an earlier time, perhaps I might have been persuaded to follow another course. Perhaps they were not spoken so openly before, or I missed their import. I know there was encouragement, but one has to be receptive. There are too many things one can do with his life, and there is too little time to pursue all the interests, not to mention the pursuit of all the vanities.

And to further the import of that evening, another lady inquired after my involvement in this pursuit of writing; had anyone read my stuff? I mentioned my difficulties with having Charline read my work, and her not really understanding my lack of coherence, my flights as they were, my fanciful, jocular, stream of consciousness stuff, often obtuse, irrelevant, obnoxious and in bad taste, stuff; she the grammarian, perfect in correctness, criticizing the core of the man who has written in the only way that matters to him. I explained that our relationship could not endure Charline and I debating the merits of my style, hence I did not ask her ever to do so again. She professes not to object to my readings to her, as long as they are not prolonged. Anyway, the answer was basically NO!, others have not been exposed as you Marie have been to my ongoings. But I did explain to her what I was doing with this writing thing, that poor student of English, who had to learn the language on his own terms, who had to explore the Word for what it could express, not of fiction, but of reality. I indicated to her the gist of my questioning methodology, using you as some kind of ploy and prop. And she pegged me by saying that I was writing about myself. Well of course. There is no one else? MARIE!

Have I not written as much about you as anyone else; have I not plumbed your depths as a human, as an exemplary human? Is there anything I have said about you and I that is not sincere, and searching, caring, loving? Have I condemned you as might some brutal God who is jealous of what he perceives as his prerogatives? No, Marie, I long to hear your words, speaking your case, your anguish, which so much yearns and needs to be heard. I would be your most attentive listener. I know you took all your secrets with you. Your one lonely only life.

Dwelling on my discomfort with the flatteries. Marie, I know better than anyone, what I have expended in my work, the effort, the concentration, the accidents that have conspired in the final product. The flatteries may be genuine, a positive thing offered by those who feel they cannot do certain things however much they desire and/or try to do them. I suppose I should appreciate such

recognition. If you asked me why I do it beyond the reproaches of my father, I can only answer that sometimes it is enjoyable in many different ways, but to say that I do it for recognition would not be amiss. Of course we want to be recognized for who we are and what we are, we do not labor so assiduously for something less than praise. But father often spoke of the female flatterer as somewhat predatory; seeking something, perhaps unrelated to the work and its message. Father fell victim to the scintillations, to the wiggles, the red lips, the flashing parts, and the adulation; and my mother suffered the humiliations of betrayal and jealousy. I am always tempted, but know I would suffer Charline's pains, a person who has never caused me any pain.

Again, dream merging into awakening. I awoke to thinking about my interview with Edward Aswell as I had been reflecting upon the photograph of myself with Mrs. VanRosenhoogendyke, which I had unearthed for my granddaughter who had shown a fleeting interest in her grandfather's sculpting efforts (she was playing with clay in an artsy craftsy class in her last year of high school).

Edward Aswell was an editor at Harpers, an editor of Richard Wright and Thomas Wolfe fame. He is described as a conservative white, educated at Harvard. At the time of the interview I 'knew from nothin'. While in Oregon, I had answered an ad in *The Saturday Review of Books* that was seeking a live-in writer/caretaker for a property in Chappaqua, New York. Two months later in Upstate New York, while modeling the Mrs. V referred above, I had received a reply to my response to the ad. The missive had been mailed to Oregon, and eventually found its way to me in New York. A meeting with Mr. Aswell was set up for the Harvard Club in NYC.

I did not know anything about Aswell at the time; as a matter of fact I did not learn anything about him at all until I had read biography of Thomas Wolfe many years later; and still more involved material more recently. And he had already departed Harpers, and was also was dead by the time I sent some writing (*Knotted Twine*) to Harpers.

But the gist of the meeting is interesting. With hindsight I deduce that Mr. Aswell was a person seriously interested in literature, and in helping young authors, who in his judgment, showed prospects of having a very productive career as writers; perhaps mostly as novelists. And somehow revealing the American Experience.

Others feel Mr. Aswell took liberties with the posthumous works of Wolfe.

Since I was in the throes of my own indecisiveness with regard to any specific direction in my life, what he had offered me as a caretaker involved my decision at that time to pursue a sculpting career, he felt his place in Chappaqua unsuitable for sculpting. The whole matter might have ended there, or I might have decided to give authorship a second look, hence may have become a live-in caretaker with a fancy garret. However, such was not the case. Mr. Aswell seemed not to accept the finality of me at that moment, offering yet another avenue for me to pursue. He offered to pave the way for a Harvard education; the details of which were not discussed.

I do not know how much Aswell was prepared to indulge me. Perhaps further meetings would have been more revealing. With hindsight, I do not know what he could possibly have seen in me, especially after his exposure to Wolfe and Wright.

I reflect upon the experience now as I might reflect on the could-bes of a relationship with you. Which might have been more likely? It is easy enough to answer, Neither, because that is what transpired. But if I had accepted any option of Aswell's and presumably had much more contact with the man, my life would have taken such a different course, one which would have precluded this very writing. If the man had been genuine, and he had indulged me with encouragement, advice, and real assistance, I might have settled into some kind of more directed productive career. Might have!!??

A last refrain Marie, until we meet again. After I had learned of your death, I had tried to contact Leo, but could not access his telephone. I cannot remember who supplied me with you sister-in-law Dorothy's married name living in Connecticut. But upon finally reaching her by phone, we chatted about everything but you, but she did give me her brother Leo's phone number.

Dorothy, whom I have written of elsewhere, of course, was another of those peach blossom beauties that I dared not touch or address with any familiarity, so far above me was she. But she did tell me something, that if had known, might have altered my life in other ways. She told me. "You always had a twinkle in your eyes."

Some body was looking.

As a last word Marie.

There is much unhappiness in this world. In our country, much is made of the 'pursuit of happiness'. Much is made of 'eternal life', an eternal afterlife, where one will find a foreverness of happiness. Where one will be loved regardless of his deformities, his lacks, his quirks.

If such could be the case: it would be my wish that you would be one of those who would be made to feel whole, and worthwhile. And I would also want it to be known that I would want to go there if you were there. Perhaps one day you will give me the sign.

Marie, I have been unhappy. Many people I have encountered have experienced unhappiness; some, a terrible unhappiness. Often it is the woman who is unhappy; unhappy because she has been unable to fulfill what another had expected of her. A terrible sadness instead of a happiness. One becomes lost in the indifference, and scorn of another.

OH!, that one should suffer so.

No, it is not only the woman who feels unhappiness. The man feels unrequited, unfulfilled, in some way. The man might take to imbibing, he might acquire a fast red convertible, he may chase after another skirt, the femme fatal. But he will not become fulfilled, only older and more exhausted.

At such times one might think life 'cruel'. If it is cruel then, it was cruel in the beginning, when one was pitched out of the womb. To live a lonely life. All lives are lonely. Often they are unbearable in an isolation, trapped inside a skin that could not be otherwise. And within that skin a host of wants transformed into assumptions and expectations.

As I dare to look back upon my own life. You were an early heartthrob. A cannot know beyond that.

I stumbled into Charline in midlife. We are still together. I do not imagine I will find any greater happiness than I have felt with her as my companion.

Do I feel fulfilled? Does one ever?

There is much that is unknown, much mystery.

If you are to tell me that your greatest desire went unfulfilled, that you could not endure another moment with that knowledge, I will recognize you as a human being; a special kind of animal. There are other women who deny the animal. Who choose not to bear the fruit you so longingly sought. They will tell you there are already too many, or be damned if they would make of their life a drudge to another life. And there are many women who do not know, who live with doubts and regrets, and a sense of being unfulfilled. Even the murderer, and the suicide, is born of woman.

Such it is to be human. And being human, a special animal, they are privileged to take their own life. To condemn it. To say it isn't worth another breath of suffering and unhappiness.

You have denied your own life. But I remember you, regardless.