

The week after.....

Fifteenth Day (3rd Monday) After Classes

Catherine and William had agreed to meet at the river park if the weather was agreeable. It was indeed a nice day, even warmer than what they might have been expected. This time, William fetched the take-out of a mixture of seafood offerings at, what was becoming, their favorite Chinese eatery. Catherine would pick up William at the usual place, outside their first eating establishment.

William was still uncomfortable with their meeting arrangements, feeling like a mangy skulking cur; offensive to the many; worthy of castigations of the most vile sort, and of course, a raining down and pelting of stones.

He was glad to see Catherine, however, and confided in her these unwelcome feelings.

Catherine responded with her usual aplomb, dismissing the seriousness of his concern.

“M. D., our time in the sun is such an insignificant thing compared to all the things that require man’s attention, if man is truly serious about making this planet a better place to live – FOR ALL, Mr. D., For All. Besides, we are doing all we can not to flaunt our relationship.

“My family is the most important concern for me. I presume you will meet my sisters this weekend; even if they are uncomfortable with the whole idea, you will be able to rely upon their discretion. But I feel positive about them, once they have met you. My father is of course very solicitous concerning his daughters. Fathers want the best for their daughters, No! But, I believe, if he sees that I am happy; that is, not troubled, not unsure or insecure, and that my education is only being augmented, he will withhold what he might feel are his parental prerogatives to defend me against what he might view as unwise involvements. My mother might become a tiger; there isn’t much you can do with tigers, but avoid them.

“As for my peers, and the rest of the world, we shall see what we shall see.”

“Catherine, you seem a bit cavalier.”

“Not at all Mr. D.. I am aware of all the things that trouble you. It is you I wish to put at ease, even if you believe I am being naïve.

“Enough of that; we don’t have all that much time to be together; lets not churn up ourselves with things that cannot be changed.

“Besides, I believe there are other churningings that do not strike so close to the bone, but maybe far more require our attention, where perhaps if we persist, we might yet affect a change.”

“For example?”

“There are many Mr. D., mostly bureaucracies that set out to deny others, cruelly, and for no good reason; what I identify as man’s inhumanity to man.

“I hadn’t been thinking of anything in particular, but with the author’s help, I am able to summon one that arose in one of our lectures, concerning nations and borders. The tale told in this case dismayed me. It strikes at the heart of something so odious to me, I can barely contain my anger. A newly married couple found their way out of dictatorially beleaguered Burma (Myramar), a doctor, a pathologist, and his wife. They had obtained separate visas to two different countries, the USA and Canada; he to the US, to visit, with the intention to emigrate, and she to Canada, to study. She, a student then, with a time limit on her visa. They accepted this arrangement because they wanted to get out of Burma, where their lives were put at risk by not supporting the ruling dictatorial regime. As a doctor he qualified for immigrant status, but she did not as a Burmese national. They had been married for only one year; she could not be considered a legitimate spouse until they had been married for three years; she could only emigrate on quota for Burma.

“They were able to visit from time to time; that is, he would leave the US to visit her in Canada, which was easier to do than for her to visit him in the US; the two governments viewing foreigners very differently. While in the US the doctor applied for immigrant status. Meanwhile, she finished her course of study. In theory, by the terms of her Visa she was required to return to Burma. But she appealed to the Canadian Government, requesting asylum as a political refuge. This had to be investigated; meanwhile she obtained a temporary work permit to do research in the field in which she had received further training in Canada. As the time limit on this permit was nearing expiration, she was still faced with a return to Burma. Her hope was hinged upon quota, and/or remaining out of Burma long enough for her marriage eligibility to be fulfilled. She had applied for an extension to her work permit. She was afraid to apply for ‘political refuge’ status, feeling it would jeopardize her eventual immigration to the USA.

“Obviously two people who did not wish to return to Burma. Eventually it all worked out, but at what cost? They ended their protracted sojourn with residency in California, and as often happens, a la El Norte, not particularly happy in la la land. They would prefer the customs and the pace of their own native country,

but want to enjoy the freedom they feel in the USA. I wonder how they feel now beneath the yoke of the Patriot Act?

“People are people the world over. Are some better than others, more desirable than others? It would seem so. It is understood not all people can live in the same place. It quickly becomes overpeopled. A dilemma.

“What bothers me most is the thought of those redundant functionaries, bureaucrats, sitting (on their asses) in their little offices, in their swivel chairs with their cup of coffee, or engaged in some hanky-panky, dawdling through the day indifferently, while these people’s fate is toyed in the balance. Not unlike 1984. We imagine, since Big Brother, à la the bad guys in the Soviet Union, did not succeed, that we have escaped such bureaucratic entrapment. Perhaps it is not so manifestly obvious, but we are still under the thumbs of bureaucrats, with an increasing tendency toward control from the ‘control addicts’. The control addict is a person who sits on his butt in his swivel chair, drinking his coffee shuffling through a pile of papers with people’s names upon them requiring the stamp of that individual’s office. Without the stamp some individual is paralyzed, frozen in space. The stamping is a necessary discretionary act, but also an arbitrary one.”

“Catherine, there is something oddly inconsistent with this wearisome tale. While ‘these people’, seeking refuge, are put upon the rack, who, by the way, perhaps not incidentally, come with skills, with professions, with jobs even, and the ability to speak fluently the language, our government, immigration, still allots some 50,000 entries by lottery. Those who would win the lottery do not have to have a profession; speaking our language is not a requirement; and if they do have a profession, there isn’t any guarantee they will be hireable in that capacity. So they enter the country basically as welfare cases, until they find some way to make a living. Even with the Patriot Act in place Congress has not done away with the lottery. One supposes there are no lottery tickets issued in Arab countries.

“Such things are not meant to make any sense. The right hand of indifference does not know what the left hand of power (control) does to torment humanity, and the left hand would think the right remiss in not doing its utmost to beleaguer their hapless charges. Brutal unconcern; man’s inhumanity to man.

“Hmn, Catherine, I remember something that happened to me when I had decided to leave the employ of the US Government. I had enlisted in the US Navy to avoid the draft during the Korean debacle. The war phase of that debacle ended while I was still thus employed, not through any effort of mine. When the war phase was over, military readiness devolved into the chickenshit petty details

of military life. I was ill-suited enough for military duty, always standing watch with an empty clip in my sidearm. But when there didn't seem to be any purpose for what I was doing or expected to do, I decided to leave. Well, you do not simply pack your seabag, and leave the premises. At least not like the job I had at the cannery on the bean line which was so noisy, a person could not concentrate, a place I walked away from after two hours, out of the building, out into the wide open world, never to return. In the military this would be considered AWOL, which earns for one something dire; (only W gets by with an equivocal justification). So, instead, you go to your Company Commander, seeking a transfer to some place where you can do what you were trained to do, without success, following which you tell him you want out. He sends you to a military hospital for evaluation, perhaps as an unpatriotic 'nut case'. Thus, as an assumed 'nut case' you are housed like a 'nut' in a cage where you can't harm yourself. Then you appear before a tribunal of 'nut' analysts, some of whom are more patriots than nut docs. You are asked leading questions by the chief 'nut' analyst 'why?'. Regardless of how you answer, the answer is interpreted and fed back to you as what you are supposedly saying. 'Putting words in ones mouth', to which I reply, 'You said that, I didn't'. Then having to listen to the nut expert's assessment of my answer, 'In other words you are right and everybody else is wrong.' Upon signal, one is delivered to one of the tribunal for eventual disposition, which might involve the 'nut ward' in a more specialized military hospital, or simply a discharge after a certain waiting period. If you opted for the hospitalization, you might be cured, after a lengthy dose of patriotism. Or given a medical discharge after an undetermined length of time exposed to unspecified treatments in Hippocratic patriotic humanitarianism. In choosing the first option, getting out as soon as possible, you are expected to sign a release form which states you were a 'nut case' when you enlisted, thus releasing the US Government from any liability for your condition. It is understood your government is no longer grateful for time served. It did not occur to them that whatever condition a person might have had, would certainly be exacerbated by a tour of duty in the chickenshit US Military.

"The final act is one that still haunts me. After the waiting period, which consisted of remaining on the hospital grounds during the day, mostly engaged in some activity in the occupational therapy department, one was given leave at the discretion of the tribunal member. I was fortunate in the one who had volunteered to assess my mental condition. He told me that one month was the usual time period for an assessment. After that, with all the papers signed, one would receive a discharge

from the military. Since I had done nothing to discredit my service, I was awarded an Honorable Discharge, with a notation derived from the BUPERS manual, that I was discharged as sane, but with a condition present at the time of my enlistment, for which the military would accept no responsibility; in short I was designated a 'schizoid personality' of dubious value to the Military. I would be denied any further military benefits, and my obligatory Inactive Duty time would be waived. In short, the military and I would permanently sever our relationship.

"All seemed to proceed in order. However, after release from the hospital, with the directive from the tribunal that I was being discharged, my base commander still had to sign the discharge papers, before I could be fully released. All seemed to be going well; I was saying my goodbyes to the few shipmates who would recognize me as a human being who simply wanted out, and who congratulated me and wished me well. Then I cleaned out my locker (packed my seabag), went over to personnel to pick up my signed discharge papers, only to find that the base commander had pulled a Major Major on me. The disappearing bureaucrat decided to toy with me. He forced me to remain one more day in the military. A purely spiteful arbitrary 'control addict' thing to do; and inhuman. I was fraught with worry concerning the power the military had already exercised over my life and my choices with regard to my life, a series of rights they assigned to themselves while denying them to me. The Commander exercised his authority arbitrarily, causing me much grief, so much that I was about to call the member of the tribunal to get some relief. It was only at the very end of the second day as I waited, what seemed interminably long, in the personnel office, for the official signature, that the signed paper was presented to me.

"Brutal', and 'cruel' is the only way to describe that individual.

"I had always characterized my relationship to the US Navy as 'They needed me like they needed another deadeye'.

"It wasn't the only time I would be confronted by people who assume some power over one's life. I was arrested for trespassing by a very vindictive person, and placed in the custody of the police who put me behind bars. I needed to make three court appearances before the person who arrested me made an appearance. In between each court appearance I was returned behind bars as the incorrigible trespasser. The judge was a municipal judge, and a friend of the person who arrested me. Both the judge and that person were in collusion to harass me, as some kind of undesirable. The judge asked me in court, why I didn't live like 'decent folk', while the vindictive one was accusing me of

prowling, and being a 'peeping tom'. Unmitigated license to accuse and terrorize an individual.

"Catherine, both of these experiences made a lasting impression upon me, regarding the arbitrariness of my fellow man, fully extending into and affecting his official capacities. Rotten lousy human beings. I have had recurring bad dreams over both experiences."

"Mr. D. these tales serve to amplify my concern over man's inhumanity to man.

"That another 'human being' can function in such a manner does more than anger me. It is not only thieves, rapists and murderers who deserve harsh punishment.

"After all, what is it we expect of another 'human being', another human face; upon whose discretion one's life becomes dependent; whether as a welfare recipient, or as one seeking refugee status; or common human decency?"

"We suppose rules must exist to somehow set boundaries to all human endeavors, but we know from our own experience the first boundary must be placed upon the public servant. That servant should never be allowed to become this frightening entity, the arbitrary bureaucrat. Any bureaucratic decision should not be left up to the discretion of some idiot. It should always be immediately rejected if it denies another's basic humanity. Any individual public servant who violates this precept should be removed from his or her official position. Out onto the street upon his ass.

"Pie in the sky I realize, and difficult to draft a legislation that would make mandatory something that undermines the 'power' of the bureaucrat, assigning him to the commons on his ass."

"I imagine it is a mistake to think of these kinds of entities as human beings. They, simply put, are not. Once we realize they are not human, then it is possible to deal more confrontationally with them, disregarding any appeals to their 'humanity'. If they want to behave like 'control addicts', and act inhumanly, we can only hope to bring about the worst for them.

"Catherine, a serious social problem that is solved succinctly with our basic maxim, 'No Dominating'.

"Catherine, one might design a computer program that would replace the bureaucrat."

"Mr. D. it is the 'humanity' that we want in place. Perhaps the computerized bureaucrat would be more indiscriminate, and less objectionable than a duplicitous and mean human face. But, alas!, my good man, not satisfactory to me. I want the 'humanity' to go along with the human face. But, but, do not mistake that what I say is not without despair of it ever happening. Mistake not what I infer when I use the word 'humanity'.

“Mr. D. it saddens me to know you have had these experiences. To know and suspect ones even more terrible, and yet, even more terrible, ad infinitum, down to the incarceration of individuals upon suspicion, or beating prisoners of war, mostly ‘innocent’ people, or victims, with every right to decency and respect. ‘Humanity’ cannot bear up against such an onslaught; it cannot. It is too savage, too malicious, to be found in conniving vengeful brains, with a mean spirit, behind it.”

“Yes!, Catherine, it is often so.

“There are times when I transit the border between two supposedly friendly countries, that ought be even more friendly than those in the European Union, that is, with less troublesome history than they, when I am surprised by the meanness that is developing; not necessarily between the two countries, but the paranoid USA doing something, and the Canadians reciprocating.

“I leave my little place where I want to be, a place I ought to be for all the reasons people gravitate to such places. I should not need to explain why I am there, as though I have deserted my supposed homeland for another; or that I am hatching some plot to overthrow the US Government, or that I am into smuggling drugs; or that I am consciously subverting the laws of Canada.

“I obtain a passport to ease my way; but it does not ease my way. Everything is computerized; they know all they need to know about me on both sides, all my habits, the vehicle I drive, how many times I have crossed the border; perhaps a helluva lot more, (I learned I did not have a criminal record [fancy that!]); but none of that eases my way.

“The bureaucrat with a badge, a Kevlar vest, and a gun, stands in the way. I need to alert myself to the fact that individual is not like me; and not to expect anything human from him or her; but to expect something untoward, unfriendly, unwelcoming; and even threatening. Intimidation and Fear are the tools of their trade. Excuse my French, but Phhhittt! Always the step backward toward darkness.”

“Well, Mr. D., if they would only know you as I know you, as an incurable romantic.

“How do you suppose they would treat me?”

“I can’t say. One must remember, they are nearly subhuman at times. They are arbitrary; or rather, ‘discretionary’. They are bureaucrats, with teeth. You would mean nothing to them. All your grace and beauty, your intelligence, your refinement; zilch; except as something for their pleasure. To them, you are something to scrutinize; hesitancy, averted eyes, stammering, body language, and how you answer a question, maybe a second time, and so on. Phhhittt!”

“Fatefully Inevitable, Mr. D.?”

“I’m afraid so.”

“Maybe they need people like us on the border.”

“Like you, maybe.”

“I could not knowingly lie to you, misrepresent myself to you; make up a story I thought you wanted to hear.”

“Why not, like you?”

“Because there is huge difference between you and I. You could do it; I could not.”

“What makes you think I could do it?”

“Because you have what it takes to do anything.”

“I can see this conversation is not going anywhere.”

“Catherine, I suspect, it could never go anywhere. We are so far from where we need to be. Not you and I, especially, but as a civilized thing; truly civilized, as in civil, civility, real civil liberties, civil rights, real civil law, and so on; common human decency. Yes! on the surface we pretend to be there; or are forced to be there; but underneath something seethes, something primordial. The facade crumbles, falls away, and we are left with a monster.”

“Do you suppose we could become monsters, Mr. D.?”

“We don’t want to go back there. Probably we cannot. Even in an act of self-preservation. We are made vulnerable by our susceptibility, our training, toward a belief in this other thing, to which we might submit out of cowardice and convenience, which we have chosen to identify as ‘free choice’.”

“I don’t know if I believe all you are saying. I can imagine myself becoming quite fierce, maybe as fierce as a monster; as opposed to being passive, if it came to something crucial; like when I had had enough of bureaucratic hassling, for example.”

“That would not serve your interest; and I believe you would be a lot more cautious than you intimate. You would know, or at least sense, in that situation where they operate, they have the ultimate power; they could shoot, or they could handcuff you and march you away to the dungeon.”

“After 911, the US Border people were paranoid. Whilst stopped and sitting in my trusty vehicle at the checkpoint (Peace Arch), I was told to turn off the ignition. To pull on the lever to open the hood. After shutting the hood authoritatively, peering in the rear, under the canopy, there seemed some concern about the contents. Obliging I was about to leave the vehicle to unlock the canopy when, with the door opened about ten inches or so, this brute put all his weight against the door, slamming it shut against me who was pushing it open; a moderately painful and shocking experience. My government! What’s new? Of course I cowered,

handing him the keys almost as if they were a kind of poison. He wasn't interested.

"Lately I have shown remarkable restraint; when they ask me stupid questions, when they wish to detain me, when they ask me to pull over, when they put the dogs on my vehicle, when they send me inside so they can pretend to inspect my vehicle, I show little impatience, little quizzical expression. I sit almost impassively, watching them go through their maneuverings, their pretendings, their stares meant to intimidate, to unnerve. I know what they are doing, it is sort of ritual with them. Even if it means I miss a ferry, or feel arbitrarily detained (one time for 3 hours by the Canadians). (how could I feel otherwise), I try to stay cool, knowing they can't keep me forever. They will tire of their little farce, meant to intimidate, to irritate, to shake me up, to make me bolt for the door. I wait patiently. Even after a reasonable amount of time, I do have the right to remind them I am still there, and ask for some remedy"

"What, no smile for the lady with the gun. No charm, Mr. D.?"

"Very funny, Catherine. You know I wouldn't dare, however tempted."

"What if she smiles?"

"Very dangerous moment. But I have noticed that a woman has a harder time being an asshole, when it conflicts with her natural empathy."

"Oh!, so you have got that figured out, have you? How sure are you?"

"You know, the female has been capable of some pretty abominable killings, not necessarily during wartime. I mean to say she has it in her, and not acting out of self-preservation."

"It is my turn to observe this conversation isn't going anywhere."

"I think we need to get on the author to come up with something better."

Author: 'You are doing fine without me'.

"Since the author is coping out, I suggest we snuggle."

"That requires restraint, like crossing the border."

"Oh! Mr. D., you; you are something else."

"But you have already crossed my border. Don't you want to remain in my native land, where there are no obstacles to your freedom of passage, freedom to roam? Hassle free; even full of anticipation, and desire for your appearance, your company, your blushes; Hmnnn! your caresses and kisses?"



“I shouldn’t end this declamation leaving the impression there aren’t any good people serving in the ranks. The last time I passed through the border, the agent first remarked, “You’re kind of lost aren’t you?” I realized it was not a challenging or an offensive remark, so I responded in kind by replying ‘Not really, but I am returning home.’ He asked what I had been doing in Canada. I informed him I had some property on an island, even giving him the name of the island. Then he wondered if I had ever got interested in the islands between Mapleton and Cushman. He then mentioned there were abandoned houses there. I had to focus for a few seconds, realizing I hadn’t been to the coast in a while, but remembered Ken Kesey in the opening of *Sometimes A Great Notion*, describing the Stampers shoring up the pilings of their houses on the (Siuslaw) river. I mentioned this to the Agent. That seemed to satisfy him; he waved me on. Simple is as simple does.

Sixteenth Day GAN?? Interlude??

William wanted to reveal to Catherine his more or less pressing reasons for returning to the island. He had hoped she wouldn’t be offended. He will need to compare their two lives in a way that it would become obvious to her they might not have a future together.

So when Catherine arrived at the park once again full of enthusiasm and bloomings, she was somewhat dashed to be confronted with his sober mood.

“Mr. D., got a tooth ache? No. Why so glum? No smiles for your cuddly friend?”

“Things overcome me Catherine. I feel I need to make some things about myself very clear to you. In particular, why I want to return to the island. Believe me, it is not to avoid you.

“I have grown very weary of the struggle, perhaps weary because of it. Not that there isn’t also struggle there, and a struggle to get there. It’s a matter of energy, which in me seems to be waning at an unaccountable rate.

“I strongly sense my failure to execute the grand design. From that failure I wish to escape, to escape ‘my’ accountability.

“There I will be able to mumble and grumble to myself without bothering anyone, and mostly unbothered by others. I can also escape into the boat to get further away

“Mr. D., permit me to interrupt; is your wife part of this scheme of things?”

*Leaving Port
Saving The World*

*Setting Sail
Requires Courage*

“No Catherine, she has had quite enough of my sour disposition.”

“Suppose she was to change her outlook regarding you; maybe she loves you very much after all.”

“Perhaps, but there is more to it than you might imagine.

“You have observed how your parents relate. You have indicated your mother harbors things. She gave up something in order to get something else. The giving up of something is never actually given up. It is not easy to sacrifice oneself for another without harboring some form of resentment. Also when your mother gave up this something she did so with certain expectations. Well, your father is who he is, despite any assumptions your mother might have made regarding him, and what expectations she might have had. She expects him to conform to her expectations.

“This happens in every relationship. When the bleary-eyes phase passes, we are left with who we are, and the other person becomes who he or she truly is. While attractions may remain, maybe even love and/or passion, it becomes more abstract, maybe more reserved, maybe even a beginning of withholding something, some turn-off because of the other person’s habits or manner of insisting upon certain things. Some of those goodie goodie feelings must compete with a host of growing petty annoyances.

“I think of Dylan Thomas’ Under Milkwood where he has Mr. Pugh dunking Mrs. Pugh in bat soup. Yes!, still a twosome, but Holy Christ! I never thought of my wife that way; but the annoyances many times dulled the ardor, for each of us.

“Justifiably, she would challenge me to review who I was, what right I had to speak, one so riddled with quirks, and manners and habits that would offend any ordinary person, which she had endured. The question would arise in me ‘What are we doing together?’ I did not want to answer to that kind of challenge. I felt an especial guilt that I could never completely rationalize. We did not have a child, mostly because of me, I suspect. I always felt badly about that, even for a few selfish reasons; perhaps only imaginary; but they were there all the same. She never raised the issue, because, perhaps, she had applied her own rationalizations, after the fact. It all falls into the realm of ‘Never Know’.

“Anyway Catherine, I’m a selfish no good in a relationship, despite my consciousness of the need to be otherwise. I know how wonderful you are Catherine. I am bleary-eyed. I would never want to look upon you through a microscope; examine you too closely. I’d rather fade out with a horrible pang believing you to be perfect in every way. I would not want to be around you long enough for your disenchantment to arrive.

“Catherine, there is wisdom in these words.”

“But Mr. D., I believe there were so many good things between you and your wife. Knowing you, without knowing her, I suspect you appreciated all her finer qualities.”

“Yes!, that is true, as I might in anyone, if I cared to do so. It is the grosser shortcomings that appall me. My own too.”

“Mr. D., I question your use of the word ‘gross’, but tell me more about the child thing, the rationalizations, and why you felt badly.”

“When my wife and I came together there were already the two children from the previous relationship, as it turned out, to be in our custody, which fell to her to absorb, which she seemed willing to do. But in a way it was like looking after her younger siblings all over again, without the experience of motherhood. Worse, all the baggage from the bad relationship had come with the bargain, plus my own disenchantment with the child thing; dealing with wills bent by circumstance. I had no reason to believe things would be any different; more children to compound something I had already screwed up.

“We both rationalized that the lives we were leading would necessarily change if we went the child route. I felt differently than I spoke. My wife’s happiness was important to me; if she had insisted things might have been different; but I was careful never to lead the discussion in that direction.

“As it turned out she did have her career in science, a fulfilling experience in itself that would not have happened. We did things on the boat we might never have done. I was able to leave early my place of employment to mess around with my dubious muse.

“As time wore on, she discovered a health problem that was acquired genetically, that she might have passed on to her own child; not to mention the genetic quirks I would have, and have already passed on. These are all rationalizations. I had also thought of her being alone at the end of her days.

“To answer the other part of your question about feeling badly. Whenever I see a father and a child, especially a father with a daughter, the apple of his eye, what happiness it brings him, even subconsciously. Even extending that something to my wife, the fulfilling of something, and the potential for sharing of something with a child. I could still imagine this to be true for myself, something I did not enjoy with my own child because of all the horror in the relationship with the mother, who was always defending the boy’s unruly behavior, and always insinuating my relationship to my daughter was sexual.

“You know, enough to enrage anyone, perhaps enough to murder someone. Believe me, Catherine, there are few things that could be more horrible than the anguish in these circumstances. Even though, as I say this, I am keenly aware there are people

whose lives were subjected to such suffering by the whim and hand of man, utter betrayals of all that we have assumed to be human; still the anguish to be living through such hate in a family situation cannot endear one to anything.”

“Wow, Mr. D., I think I begin to imagine your pain, and your feeling of loss.”

“Everyone’s, Catherine, Everyone’s!”

“I believe I can begin to imagine your dread at feeling accountable for what might happen to me, as a result of my involvement with you. I believe you to love me so much, you cannot imagine any aspect of confrontation that would be beneficial to us. The harm to our relationship frightens you. Perhaps you are holding on too tightly. You cannot direct that which is undirectable. It must flow, follow its own course. You want some kind of certainty that nothing negative will happen; you want to know this beforehand.

“What did you know beforehand with your other partners?”

“Nothing, of course. You followed your emotions. None of it was rational.

“Mr. D. despite what you say regarding the loss of your daughter to the forces of circumstance, knowing you as I imagine I do, I cannot envision you not being there for her; when she was sick, you worried, when she was out in the world you did all you could to protect her, perhaps even overprotected her, which she probably resented. I know some of this from my own relationship with my father; but I have never had cause to resent him; he enjoyed his daughters, leaving the discipline part to mother, which of course we instinctively resented.

“Perhaps you are a little too bleary-eyed when you see what seems the easy confident relationship between parent and child, wishing it could be you.”

“When it seems to work, it is nice, Yes!, and something one might very much desire. But I know it does not work too. Children become battered emotionally in the wars between parents; and sometimes physically. Children are molested by that apparently caring loving parent. So, I idealize something every time I see what appears to be that closed confident, perhaps vulnerable, space between parent and child; sometimes I envy it so intensely; but I find myself wanting to know the degree of bond, the ultimate part of the bond; how real is that bond? Can it be as it seems? Yes!, I might answer; and there I am, in my imagination wanting to test the bond; what a burdensome thing. All because of my failure to achieve the same? How mean, and contemptible!”

“Mr. D., you are too hard on yourself. You are a protoplasmic entity; you are engineered to respond, you do respond, you must

respond; you cannot always be hiding behind your brim, or the page. You see, you want to see; when you do, you respond, you feel; as do I, Mr. D.

“Mr. D., despite all your daughter’s resentments, she would have to be a pretty empty-headed individual not to have been impressed by you. Yes! perhaps you were too much for her, too overwhelming. I can imagine it thus. The worst of it all Mr. D., has been your own lack of self-confidence in what you were doing, which she probably sensed; you gave her an opening to escape your very own rationale; your doubts were a relief to her. This was not an intellectual thing, but a felt thing. She did not love you for your doubts; that is, your vulnerability, perhaps she felt betrayed by them. You were not this invincible tower of strength; and you could not win against her mother; your weakness was glaring. All very freeing for her.”

“That’s a slant that never occurred to me. But I did say something to her one time which I have regretted ever since she told me the impact it made upon her. I was so frustrated with her, long after her mother was out of the picture, when one day I exclaimed, ‘You’re so much like your mother.’ Very much in keeping with what you had to say regarding her detecting in me my vulnerabilities. Her mother had been institutionalized for suicidal tendencies; her mental instability somewhat in question. So, my daughter did feel vulnerable, or susceptible, to her mother’s condition, she had her doubts about herself, which, when I delivered my coup, stuck a nerve. Very foul deed on my part! While I was instinctively reacting to her in the moment, she felt the sting far beyond what I had intended. Indeed my daughter is a difficult case, sometimes very rational, and at other times emotionally distraught, seemingly manifested in some serious health problems, and horrible migraines, and even manifestations of auto-immunity, all of which are, to me, of psychosomatic origin. Her religiosity is another matter that confounds, perplexes, and disturbs me.

“My guess is that it’s all a bit dreamy. I study the photographs of her, her growing up, all so fleeting, all the while I was struggling with myself and my relationship to her mother. I see someone I loved a great deal; who could not love her? I did worry over her. But I do have to recall how difficult and stubborn she was; and how much she resented me. In a way, the religion thing destroyed something in me. She was not daddy’s little girl. She had become some kind of freak. The only redeeming thing about her early years was her tolerance of my insistence upon her learning to play the piano, which she did to a credible degree for nine years, until she left home at age eighteen. But of course, it was another of those things that she resented, because, even though daddy was

approving, he was reluctant to listen to some of the shit that was called music. Even religious tunes would have been preferable to some of the contemporary 'soul' of the twentieth century. After she left home, the piano seemed to pass out of her life; only briefly did she get to play all the shit music; even that passed from her life.

"She 'fell in love', or imagined she had fallen in love; another God damned disaster; she was married 'In Jesus'; if you can believe such a sanctimonious pile in these days of Enlightenment."

"Mr. D., I believe you loved that girl. I believe your emphasis on the music training was purely motivated; perhaps as it was with my parents; knowing that I would always have something that I could do with myself, for myself. Both my parents had received music training, revealing that it was something they only began to appreciate later in their lives; something for the quiet times.

"All three of us learned to play an instrument; it became a family thing; everyone participated. We did our groupies; sometimes they were fun, other times not.

"Since my entry into college I have not played much; there hasn't been the time, and I haven't made the time.

"I never felt the need to get into the religious thing, although my peers were always trying to persuade me of the Jesus thing. I attended church a few times with them, but could not stomach the biblical stuff, and the admonitions to hell. It all seemed so out of touch with reality. Needless to say Mr. D., you have my deeply felt sympathies.

"Despite what I have intimated with the Sunday School thing, both of my parents were essentially irreligious, without openly mocking others beliefs. None of the three of us have been drawn in that direction; perhaps because there hasn't been any need. We are moral people, we are ethical people, we are reasonable people without all the fire and brimstone; in short, we are responsible people. Fortunately our Constitution has placed religious freedom high on the list of freedoms. It does not mandate that one should be religious. After all the centuries of inquisition, and heresy, burning of witches, and puritanical condemnation, it is a welcome relief for the ordinary person, who might not jive to those tunes.

"A theme for that Great American Novel, Mr. D.?"

"You mean, the Great American Debacle? Besides, it has been tried with the Scarlet Letter and the Last Puritan."

"No, Mr. D., I am being serious.

"I know we haven't discussed the Great American Novel in any depth, but it is not an untoward thought. Is there a Great American Novel? Who would you think of?"

"I can't think of any that would encompass the whole of what we were or what we have become? I'm sure there isn't anything

that would embrace the whole story, even if one followed a family from beginning to end; there have been so many transformations in assumptions of what we are all about.

“But if I was inclined to select one author above all others, I would choose Herman Melville, because I feel I am more affined with him, even though he is placed in time, in his time, like Charles Dickens is placed in his, regardless of what eternal themes he was trying to explore. It is the depth of his questions, and the nature of his search that excites me. But I seriously doubt if that would embrace the American theme. Following upon the moral and ethical theme as found in religiosity, Nathaniel Hawthorne embraced a slice of that America in the *Scarlet Letter*.”

“I suspect I know what you mean, there are many authors who depict a slice of the whole, attempting to make it a representative thing. There are others who write of the human condition regardless of where it is found. Is there even a composite when these are all put together? Starting with Thoreau, Hawthorne, Melville, perhaps Whitman; Mark Twain; Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dreiser; London; O’Neill; Lewis, Thomas Wolfe, Steinbeck, Stegner, Agee; of the more modern ones, like Kerouac, or Burroughs, Kesey; Kingsolver, some I won’t even mention; I feel a lot less clear picture; perhaps because we have become more unclear in what and who we are.

“But Yes!, perhaps we should be depicted as the nation that took everything for granted, and lost it in the process. Our forefathers, oddly, mostly aristocrats, stumbled into greatness; they propounded well from English hand me downs, and things fashioned from whole cloth, into a very seemly garment. The essence of these still prevail, although there are those of the new baronetcy want to undermine them, want to deny to the riff-raff the same rights and benefits, as they deem have accrued to them and them only. Sharing the profits, whether of wealth, or democracy, is not to be automatically apportioned in fair measure. The garment has become threadbare.”

“Most artfully and clearly expressed, dear Catherine. A theme for our time.”

Seventeenth Day Evening

Catherine felt obliged to attend a recital of one of her sorority sisters, a music major, a girl she liked for her individuality, and her flair for music, her love of unusual sound, a girl who wanted to play all the old instruments like the crumhorn, the sackbut, shawm, curtal, the hurdy gurdy, gittern, dulcimer. Her concert

included pieces played on each of these instruments, the tunes themselves from another day, often played in a minor key.

Her time with William would be short, even though he too attended the recital, sitting some distance from Catherine.

Like a noxious bothersome pall, William was still anxious to speak to her regarding thing some things that still weighed heavily upon him. He hardly mentioned the mini-concert, which he had enjoyed, even while being distracted by his thoughts of her, and how he would say what he felt needed saying. Even though the time seemed inappropriate; out of synch with the rest of the day and the evening, and what had already transpired between them.

But they had walked down to the river bank for the two hours that remained of the evening. The recital had been scheduled as a requirement of the girl's honor's thesis, at an odd hour, early, abruptly after dinner. William felt better as he approached the river, and their sitting place, where she had previously leaned into him, after their quarrel, in one of their wonderfully quiet times together.

"Catherine, I have kept something from you, not with the intent to deceive, only somehow selfishly wanting to be swept up in this rapidly evolving relationship, which I felt at any moment would end. I must tell you of my health problems. I have selfishly avoided telling you of them. I have so wanted to get to know you, I have cheated on my responsibilities as a decent conscionable human being. I have betrayed your trust. There isn't any excuse for not informing you sooner."

"Do tell, Mr. D."

"Regarding my health problems, some of which one might expect of an old geezur; I seem to want to characterize myself as a 'bucket of bolts', some kind of thingamajig. I have had much difficulty with my back in the lumbar region requiring two surgeries to remove parts of herniated discs. I have had a mechanical aortic heart valve installed, a mammary bypass. I have been irradiated for prostate cancer, which may be recurring. I have had emergency surgery for an intestinal blockage, and have had laproscopic surgery for a double iguinal hernias. I need to take medication for the heart valve, for high blood pressure and for cholesterol. I might be considered a thing that is kept alive through medical intervention.

"While I have been going through these interventions, remodelings and restorations, my attitude has been mostly good; that is, I have wanted to proceed with life afterwards, though at times the recovery was not always smooth. Upon learning of the heart problem and the prostate problem, initially I became

somewhat depressed. But taking action seemed to alleviate this latter. My wife was also very concerned; we shared these very unhappy moments.

“Since the heart valve is mechanical, and essentially a foreign body it is subject to failure, and requires careful attention; even though now I rarely think of it. I am more concerned about the prostate thing, the PSA readings, which have not leveled off after the radiation, but continues to rise. There are times when my back gives me serious problems.

“Despite these things I try to and want to look ahead to other things than worry over health issues. But I know that it is ‘fatefully inevitable’ that I will have to deal with them, perhaps a lot sooner than I desire.

“So I have been truly unfair on two accounts, by even considering entering into a loving relationship with anyone, carrying such baggage, but mostly by not even telling you of this state of affairs. Its so unconscionable”

“I don’t know what any of what you tell me means. But, I don’t sense when might have been an appropriate time to reveal such things.

“While potentially dismayed by any kind of such information, it does not change anything for me. I feel what I feel for you. I suppose it might have been appropriate for you to tell me these things at an earlier time, but I do not judge you for that, and I doubt it would have lessened my interest. I too have been swept up in something that I have encouraged; perhaps unwisely.

“How serious is the prostate condition?”

“I may be dealing with another slow-growing tumor, or the same one, not effectively eradicated. The treatment for such a condition is not good. There is some thought that a salvage treatment is not advisable, that is, more radiation. Surgery seems out of the question for its own set of reasons. At this moment in time the only interventions seem to be hormone treatment, or cryoblation, each of which will turn me into a eunuch, if it works, and I can survive the side effects. Of the hormone treatment, there is some possibility such treatment can be carried out intermittently, allowing me to regain some normalcy until things begin to change again. This is only a possibility, not a given. Still another option is to do nothing until the tumor wreaks its havoc and I decide to end it all, if I am able to decide such a thing.”

“It sounds potentially serious, and life threatening.”

“I’m sorry to be telling you these things. I have been very selfish in all of this. Without intentionally deceiving you, I have withheld something vital for you to know. I might have simply disappeared

*Leaving Port
Saving The World*

*Setting Sail
Requires Courage*

without a word; a man of principle and courage might have done so.

“If you were to become enraged at this belated admission I would understand completely.”

“Oh! Mr. D., I do feel many things at this moment. I do not feel enraged. I do not want to judge the timeliness or untimeliness of what you have told me. I am saddened of course to hear of your ongoing concerns, not so much for myself, but for you who must endure them.

“If you had simply disappeared as you say, what do you suppose I would have felt; and imagined?”

“It does not change how I feel about you. If I chose I might feel deceived, but in some ways I am grateful for the delay, because of what I too have wanted to happen. I do not know whether things might have been different if I had known earlier. I suspect not. I might have rationalized such information as I have everything else in order for us to proceed with our relationship, something I have come to greatly desire, and yearn for ours to continue.”

“Catherine, dearest one, may you always be so expansive and willing to be forgiving. I feel I do not deserve any consideration at all. Such a selfish act.

“As long as I have entered this confessional state, I feel obliged to continue with more, to clean the slate entirely.

“Catherine, even though it may seem mostly inappropriate, at this particular time, on this particular evening, I have been wanting to confess to some other awful thing. I realize I am almost egomaniacal. Conceited. God, even Grandiose. Wanting to have an opinion about everything, whether I know anything about it or not. When I stop long enough to realize this about myself, I want to crawl away inconspicuously, do a disappearing act. I seldom reflect upon this condition, seldom ask ‘How can I (we) be made this way; what purpose does this serve?’

“I know I am not alone in this, but I am this way; that bothers me. There is so little that I actually know. Much of the time I spend in a frittering idleness when I could be informing myself; myself at least, even though it serves no more purpose than to amplify the bullshit I spew.”

“Good Gosh Mr. D., Isn’t this all sort of sudden?”

“What is with the author anyway; he must be running out of things to write!

“But, before you begin to flagellate yourself, it should be noted that nobody knows what it is you want to know, which is



essentially the unknowable. To find the perfect solution, the perfect words, maybe. To try to word your way to a kind of truth that cannot be expressed, because it cannot be known. I feel for you in your quest. I too reach beyond what I can know; to want to speak about that which cannot be known.”

“Don’t be trying to make any excuses for what is inexcusable. If the truth is so unapproachable, it must mean it is inutile; why are we wasting our time searching for it? I doubt terribly the validity of everything I attempt to say. In my head some things seem so clear, but when I review what I have written concerning anything that seems important enough to write about, what does it say? Badly written, convoluted, trying to be logical, rational, to prove a point that may not be the point at all. In the end, how relevant to what it is I want to say? Am I missing the truth in trying to be clever?”

“Mr. D., I do not view you in this manner. What you say about yourself, any self-conscious person who is at all honest might say the same thing. I believe I would have to say the same things about myself. Maybe it comes with the territory.”

“But, Catherine, the difference between you and I is your integrity. You do not bullshit as a matter of principle. You always proceed from a position of knowledge, relevance, credibility.”

“Mr. D., I was unaware that I was made of such stuff. I am not aware of your lacking in integrity. Mr. D., in my view, the basis of our compatibility is founded in our perceptions of things, our sensitivity to certain things.

“You may feel, that because you cannot persuade your fellow man of something, that you are a bullshitter, a failed bullshitter at that. You don’t want to be regarded as an incompetent impotent bullshitter. Yes! that does frustrate you, but must it form the basis for an attack on your ego?

“I will not even mention what kind of bullshit passes as truth; where real egos stretch the point, truth isn’t good enough for them.

“OK, say you don’t have all the facts; somebody else has a better mastery of the facts; but is that somebody else better able to draw a conclusion from more facts, than say the person who intuitively things from only a few facts, or perhaps none at all?

“If you feel you are a bullshitter, and it bothers you to be one, don’t say anything; become a piece of stone.

“Mr. D. underneath it all, you do have a great deal to say, whether in the form of bullshit or in the form of the highest truth known to man. Your remarkable sensitivity to balance, to order, to symmetry makes you also sensitive to imbalance, disorder and asymmetry. It is a felt thing to you. You need always to be translating feelings, your intuition about things into words which only partly say what it is that needs saying.

“Again, being aware of this, you fall into the asking of a myriad of questions, the questions framing the thought that cannot be expressed as a certainty in itself, as an assertion, because you immediately sense there is another side to every thought expressed; even as simple as the other person’s view of the same thing. I sense more of this in you than any amount of bullshit.

“You may feel the questions are annoying, nit picking, semantic considerations that may not be particularly relevant to anything. Even if that was true, with you it is part of a process, it is part of how you arrive at your destination; you must plod a good deal of the way. But once you are there, you have brought with you the tale of the journey. Was it an interesting journey? Mr. D., to me, it is an interesting journey. Why? Because I am seeking the same destination. Yes! I may arrive there in another way, but being human, I cannot but regard that other way as all that different.

“Perhaps, Mr. D. I am ‘gifted’ in some way that helps me to escape some of the plodding. I have started early, with natural tendencies, natural abilities. I have exploited these tendencies. Yes!, I want to know everything, but I have discovered that no matter how much I know about something I cannot know it all.

When I set down to write something about what I know, I must also possess a mastery of the language, if I expect to communicate anything of what I know. After I have done my very best, it is, after all, only ‘my’ very best, which may not be relevant to something I want to achieve. My kind of ‘bullshit’ Mr. D.”

“I know you are doing your very best to make me feel better about myself, without coddling me. But you see, I carry about with me a ‘bullshit’ meter. It is always turned ON when I listen to another’s yammer. There are times when I truly marvel at another person’s ability to say what he or she feels, even if it not relevant to the matter at hand; even though my ‘bullshit’ meter is registering in the Red Zone. When it hits the Red Zone, a message comes on screen which cautions against meeting bullshit head on with another kind of bullshit, regardless of its coherence. It cautions against fighting bullshit with bullshit. But there are times when the bullshit is so thick one must wade in as a matter of self-preservation.”

“Sounds very comical, and smelly, to me. What happens on the meter when you start to bullshit?”

“Most of the time the ‘override’ function takes over. Conceit, Grandiosity, Egomania are ignored until it gets to the point where the next override kicks in, when I am about to self-destruct, a beeper goes off, telling me I am about to drown in the ordure. ‘Pull Out!, Pull Out!’ flashes on the screen. By then, I have made an ass of myself. I realize it; I want to get out of there NOW! But it is

usually too late; I must endure the accompanying embarrassment, the internal sickness brought about through shameful self-flagellation.

“You would think I would learn, but I don’t; I get sucked in by the egomaniac within me, that tawdry little presence that thinks its ‘Can you top this?’ opinion is what will inveigle his fellow man towards the light, and toward an unparalleled admiration of me.”

“When you get to feeling that way, Mr. D. come see me. I promise to make it all better. I know you to be a little different than you see yourself. However, I do agree, there are times when a person ought keep their thoughts to themselves. I do not mean that in an admonishing way. It may be more practical. By not saying anything you may help your own cause, through the inadvertency of another’s faulty bullshit; and if it is as part of a groupy, somebody else might say better what it is you want to say.”

“I know you are right in what you say, Catherine.

“But I am me. I started out long ago with my deficiencies. I can remember when I was in the third grade, in Mrs. Northey’s class, in Uxbridge primary school in Massachusetts, the night of a party, about which I became very excited for some reason. Well my excitement got the better of me. I arrived on the late side, and I felt everybody else, my fellow schoolmates, were all awaiting my arrival. When I did arrive, I announced, ‘I am here!’ which ‘went over like the proverbial lead balloon’. Like Icarus flying toward the sun, I plunged to earth. At least I never approached my fellow man in that manner again; even though I still seem to presume upon him with my deficiencies.”

“Mr. D., I’m sure you felt badly that night after your fall. You are not alone. I can remember a few occasions when my enthusiasm for something, maybe some ‘great’ revelation was met with little amazement by my audience, perhaps only my sisters or my parents. I know the sense of deflation. But I learned from it to be better prepared the next time.”

“Catherine, see what I mean about integrity. I only learned that I did not want to be embarrassed, temporarily. It seemed I gravitated naturally toward embarrassment.”

“Well, I don’t know Mr. D., I guess I felt stupid at times, but I soon got over feeling that way. The people I associated with, let me off the hook.

“Mr. D. there is a lot of noise generated by the seven billion occupants of this planet; and most of that noise is pure bullshit; and, nowadays a lot of it is Bushit. We need to counter this phenomenon as a matter of self-preservation. Yes! it seems such a waste of time and energy; but we are not willing to trust to other’s good intentions in all things. We must defend ourselves in what we

might perceive as an onslaught, a barrage of bullshit that compromises our tenancy on this planet. Everything passes; little that man does has any permanency; by letting ourselves get swept up in the moment, we become something not of our choosing.

“Mr. D., to backtrack; I hope you have not been feeling badly about some the things you have said in our conversations. You can trust me to do one of two things; to question whatever you have said in order to elicit the tenor of what you wanted to say, or I can assume that I know what you are trying to say, without any further comment. But, we are in a position of trust. I trust you and you can trust me.”

“Good God, girl, what are you doing associating with an old bullshitter?”

“I might try to humor you with a silly answer like, ‘I happen to be in need of a very high grade stuff with which to fertilize my garden’, or I might say, if the ‘foo shits, wear it’; but resorting to this kind of vulgarity makes me feel, perhaps like you feel when you feel when you have ‘overspoken’ your self. But I am more inclined to answer with something that forces you to realize I do not look at you as you look at yourself.

“Nobody, but nobody, has a monopoly on the truth. Not you, not I. We have to live with that knowledge. We might view it as tragic that all these 7 billion brains cannot figure it out. Especially since those brains are often used to create intolerable abominations. Time passes, we pass. If we were truly objective about it, we would realize that we, as a species, have trampled something during our occupancy of this planet, we have also ransacked something irreplaceable. I believe our evolutionary prospect is squandered in bickering.”

“How I love thee, Catherine. Truly, you are such a wonder to me.”

“The feeling is mutual Mr. D.

“Do you feel better now? Has your self-image been placated by your Confiteor.”

“Only by your Absolution, Catherine.”

“Mr. D., you do not need to feel badly about anything around me. Be yourself.”

“Catherine, there is such a thing as decorum. ‘Be yourself’ sounds OK in theory.”

“What theoretical basis do you offer to refute my proposition?”

“The sauntering old geezur answers, some that would be most obvious, of which you are fully aware.”

“Between friends, Mr. D.; between friends., I know I need not elaborate.”

“Catherine, suppose I was to choose an inappropriate moment to embrace you and kiss you; would that not upset your sense of decorum?”

“Most likely, Mr. D., I would respond, simply because I like you. Knowing you to want to do things in good taste, I can trust you, but if you were to surprise me at an inopportune moment, I would not think less of you. After all, I am the one who has encouraged this relationship. I cannot be arbitrary about my role in this endeavor, nor can I take what I want and throw away the rest. This bears upon your health problems as well. I am not inclined to throw you away.

“But, Mr. D., since our time draws nigh, before my moment is lost, I will reveal that which I can express to none other; I love you, Mr. D.. Dream upon it, my good man; in those dreams do all those inappropriate things that offend your sensibilities; like embracing me and kissing me, celebrating every moment of your life. I believe you would tire of giving it before I would tire of receiving it.”

William put his arms around her, pulled her close, kissing her fervently, she melting in his embrace, return fervor for fervor.

“We are alive!, Mr. D., We are alive!, we are celebrating!”

“Concerning your health problems; don’t keep them from me.”

Eighteenth Day, After Classes

They met once again in the river park with their take-out seafood. William had volunteered to fetch the life-sustaining morsels. They had arrived independently at the park.

As they met, Catherine, who was there before William, rose to meet and greet him, without checking to see who might be about to observe them; so eager was she to hold and be held by him. She was feeling especially vulnerable, without being able to attribute her feelings to any specific thing. It was the first time she had these feelings. She realized they had grown so very close after the weekend; their intimacy was implicit. Perhaps it was the intensity of the feelings, her inability to control them that troubled her. Had she imagined some sudden end stemming from his precarious health? She needed to be near him, touch him, hear his voice reassuring her of something she couldn’t explicitly identify in her self.

All that he had awakened in her, or that she had allowed to be awakened in her, became something beyond anything she might have anticipated. She realized a certain dependency, or unspecified attachment; a linking of him to those feelings, the feeling of the

wholeness of them as a unit, a pair, a couple, and how wonderful she felt in his presence; comfortable, happy, fulfilled in some magical way; even more alive than she had anticipated. Her mind leaping every which way, sparks flying, zestful, reaching beyond herself.

Perhaps it was this reaching self that brought with it certain insecure feelings; the heights. She had wondered again if the revelations about his health were affecting her.

If suddenly he was gone, as though it had only been a dream dematerialized, caused in her a momentary panic, somehow forced to cope with an unanticipated loss, as though the line holding her back was severed, she now plummeting into a free fall.

But no, she was more self-possessed than such would seem to suggest. However, for the first time she felt some urgency to talk with him about their future, which she was beginning to realize, must include something certain, something definitive, not something open-ended, a 'we'll see what happens', or a 'no commitment' relationship.

So her greeting was fervid and intense, somewhat surprising William; he sensing some inkling of her feelings. But he welcomed her embrace and her fervid kiss, and the lingering firmness of her embrace, which he enthusiastically returned.

"So very glad to see you Mr. D."

"Likewise, dearest one. Is something troubling you?"

"I hope not; but we'll talk about it tonight. Very glad you are here now, and that I will have this opportunity to reveal something to you."

Much more at ease, Catherine inquired after what he had brought along. He offered her the backpack in which he had carried the take-out. Then he began the makings of a fire. Catherine had set down the back pack on a table, then came over to him, kneeling behind him as he was bent to the task of fire-making, she putting her arms around him from behind, laying her cheek against his shoulder blades, hugging him.

"That good, huh?" William inquired.

"Affirmative, Mr. D."

"Will we talk about that as well?"

"Especially, Mr. D."

"Tell me about it Catherine."

"When we are settled into the evening will be time enough."

"I'll set things out while you are busy with the fire."

"This all sounds so serious."

"Perhaps it is, Mr. D."

The fire was soon self-sufficient to be abandoned to the forces that gave it reason to be. At that very moment it served as metaphor for William, along with a sudden revelation. He began to suspect and realize what might be troubling Catherine. She was in love for the first time. As brilliant as she was, mind over matter was deprived of its persuasions. The fire had flared up, consuming the tinder of one's being. William must be careful not to add to the flames; he must encourage a clean, even, smooth burn. He must not alarm her, he must not jeopardize the wonder that she felt, even her wonder at what she might feel independently of him. Perhaps his revelations regarding himself, caused her to feel all too vulnerable; even abandoned.

As he approached the table all in readiness for a good feed, he placed his hand on her shoulder, "Catherine, I thought of something now, while watching the fire begin to surge into a life of its own. It occurred to me that you are falling seriously in love for the first time, and like the fire, when it found some drier, more flammable tinder, with sudden illumination, burning with brilliance and flair, and added heat. For a moment I thought of you as those flames.

"I thought there might not be any cool ardor possible for you at certain times. That your emotions do run high, that you are cautiously yielding to something totally new within yourself, perhaps dangerously, a danger you might instinctively feel because you are no longer this self-contained being, an engine in control of self, an assumed self, pursuing some predetermined way. There you are; out there somewhere, having left behind this something you were, this comfortable being. Now, upon unfamiliar ground, like walking in the night in a strange place, alert, anxious, but needing to get somewhere your being has urged you to go; and in a direction it wants to go, even though the ultimate destination is unknown."

"I like your description of the fire. Perhaps it is like that in essence. You are right in guessing my preoccupation. I know we are becoming committed. I don't feel insecure about you; or myself, for that matter; I mean, in terms of that emerging commitment.

"But something is soon to change; I know I am jumping ahead.

"I am not concerned about my sisters' reaction; I trust them implicitly; but I am even prepared to withstand their disapprobation, if that prove to be the case, and others, as well. That is how much you mean to me.

"Mr. D., I know you have been in love before. I don't think of myself as being jealous of those previous loves; I haven't any right. But I suspect you still love your wife. Somehow I do not find myself jealous in that regard either. You have told me about that

relationship. But I probably heard only what I wanted to hear; careless, I realize. I allowed myself to go beyond caution when we went to the ocean; as a matter of fact, I desired something. I do not regret one moment; I could never.

“But suddenly a feeling came over me, like a cold chill we might have felt up on the mountain the other day. I thought of the reappearance of your wife, and what that would mean. Or the appearance of someone else that caught your attention.”

“Catherine, if we run into trouble in this discussion we can always blame the author; but I’ll try to respond to your deep concern.

“I cannot account for the number of times I have fallen in love; obviously it is possible to ‘fall’, if that describes what happens, more than once; so there is some question about the idea of ‘one and only’ and ‘eternal love’. It is seemingly true that one love does replace another; you know that expression, ‘love cures the wound it makes’. Is it possible to love two people at the same time?

“I will try to be as honest as is it possible for me to be.

“There are many very beautiful women in this world. Beauty forms its own attractions; and I know I am susceptible. To wit, clearly evident as the initiator of our relationship. You most definitely caught my eye, as much as might a blinding light. It might be said the same thing happened with my wife.

“But there is something that happens, when reality resumes its preeminence; like the things we notice, after the swoon and the blurred vision passes, and we begin to notice all the ‘imperfections’, if you will, the moles, warts and pocks, the body odors, the crooked tooth, the asymmetry of the face, and the body. The statue descends from the pedestal, for closer scrutiny. Then she (he) farts, uncontrollably.

“Is one repelled? Most likely. But she is self-conscious about her farting; she is embarrassed, she apologizes profusely with a red face. She rushes to open the window, she swings her arms wildly to dissipate the noxious penetration of the atmosphere, to dispel the gloom. She is smiling, with tears in her eyes.

“But if it was you, you might burst into laughter, and you might say some wise thing to disarm the offended nose, the disturbance of propriety. You might even produce a bottle with some magic elixir to chase away the olfactory demons.

“My wife has always been circumspect about farting, but I could usually tell; and when I have quizzed her about an odor, she was usually in denial; a moderate taste of veniality on her part. But I have a double standard. I relish farting, although around you I try to be different, however dishonest. I suppose once I start cutting loose in your presence you can figure the romantic phase of our

relationship is over. I will say that is not nice, and it is not intended as way of communicating something. It's that I relish the act. I have a friend who is quite earthy in that regard, and seldom makes any bones about the relishing part; he simple says each time 'Oops!, carpet frog.' I guess I learned my approach from my father who even tried to make his expulsions of gas into music, or Morse code. Is that to say my father was good for something?

"I will not digress, Catherine.

"Have I begun to notice your imperfections?

"Are we born with that Jungian thing, the archetype implanted in the genes to assume a shape within our person? Is it ever present before us? That it appears as a holograph to be superimposed at will upon the exteriority, seeking a perfect match; that is, is it always active subconsciously, detecting variance, non-conformity? Suppose a perfect match is found, but it still farts, then what?

"Of course, Catherine I notice things; and believe me, you will have a lot to notice about me; one of these days!"

"What have you noticed?"

"I guess I led myself into that one. But I will answer it in a way you might not expect. As I look at you, I am not inspecting you, but I am observing a reality that quite entralls, and confounds me. You might say, you have been singled out as the one who will submit to the scrutiny, the one who will form the object which we must know, that exists outside of our self, that entices our self from its cave, its hidyhole. For some reason our eyes are keenly discriminating every detail, partly in wonder, and partly in confusion, and partly to prove that nothing is perfect; 'Hah!, told you so', confirming an instinctive belief that 'nothing is perfect'.

"Is that unfair? Can I truthfully answer your question, about the slight overbite, the slight lisp, the nose only minutely setting toward one side, the two eyes slightly different in their shape, in their location, the one iris with a spot of a different hue; the one corner of the mouth slightly more expressive than the other, revealing sentiments barely concealed. The face so slightly asymmetrical. All astoundingly lovely, as a whole, because of the you that animates it.

"I'm trying to describe the powerful starkness and deliberateness of reality, and our ability to grasp it. But don't I, at the same time, overlook every detail. After all, I am not doing a sum of detractions, seeking to find as many as possible until the detraction meter goes Into Alarm mode.

"Shall we proceed further into the remainder of the anatomy?"

"Might as well."

“Your proportions fit the archetype; your height to the archetype’s liking. Your feminine attributes answer to the model set before it. Your shoulders are sublime in their fineness, your breasts are so very firm and youthful, shapely, and distinctly perfect in proportionate measure to the remainder of your physique. Your arms and legs are full and shapely, athletic in their suppleness and sleekness. Your abdomen, your hips, your gluteus maximi, all curvaceous, your feet and toes, perfect little feet and toes, your ankles and wrists slender, your knees and elbows matching in line all other parts; and your miraculously expressive hands and fingers, your posture refined, reflecting an acute possession and projection of person, and personality; and your hair, so river like. All so very beautiful and desirable. But there, behold, a mole, an anus, a pubis, the sweat glands beneath the arm pits; and an aroma, the aroma of you, masked ever so subtly with that fragrance you don.”

“Mr. D., you do amaze me. I am wondering if you are holding in reserve some excuse to throw me over.”

“I would say the contrary, and would expect I have given you the license to examine me.

“Catherine, it is not in me to deny you upon any pretext, first, because I am smitten beyond recall; and second, because any grounds for denial would serve doubly for me.

“The threshold of acceptance has long been crossed; the door has been closed.”

“Likewise, Mr. D. Now that I have discovered myself in you, and you in me, coupled as it were, bonded; and only insecure because I want it thus, and not to change for any reason.”

“I would offer promise, if it was mine to know it was possible to do so; but in as much as it is mine to do, I offer it.”

“Upon that note Mr. D.” Catherine threw her arms around William, hugging him tightly, pulling him toward her urgently, reached for his lips, kissing him passionately and fervently.

“Once again, Alas!, time to go.”

Nineteenth Day The Sisters

“Mr. D., I would like for you to have your own experience of meeting my sisters for the first time. I mean, the first impressions and all. But I feel somehow I must also warn you.

“Theresa will not be a problem. She will be very open and respond naturally; not judgmentally. I feel you will respond to her immediately, and like her immediately.

“Lydia will be more difficult. I should first say I think she is the most brilliant of the three of us. That is, her intelligence, as a measured thing, her IQ, her SATs, her grades, all the indices we use to measure such things, she excels. She has a very good command of the language, I mean this in the sense that she is very refined, like she easily gravitates to semantics, and definitions, to precise meanings. She challenges other’s lacks in these areas, sometimes annoyingly. Actually, a little bit like you at times.

“She is also what others might call ‘high strung’ . Very intense. Almost too sure of herself; I don’t want to say ‘haughty’, but the word comes to mind, maybe even an austere cold beauty. But when she becomes too emotional about something, she often becomes nearly hysterical; and at times sobs uncontrollably. I feel such compassion for her at such times. That such a brilliant person apparently loses her grip. But because she ‘breaks down’ does not seem to affect her. She seems relieved afterward, more relaxed, more openly warmer, sometimes apologetic. I love her intensely at such times.

“I also think of Lydia as the most beautiful of the three of us. All that intelligent refinement is reflected in her features, almost flawless, like the functioning of her mind. Her body is so perfect, no unevenness, no blemishes in her skin. The right height, the right proportions, almost statuesque.

“Since all three of us have had athletic proclivities, her body is electric and firm, and developed fully; but a feminine body, not apparently muscular, but the strongest of us three. With a fierce grip. Theresa is the most fluid, most supple, the most agile. She is also the heaviest; not quite so lithe in appearance, more rounded in every way, her features, her whole body; yet she is not heavy, or overweight, to put it another way.

“I believe Lydia will be very hesitant with you, and you with her. Despite my cautions with regard to her, I know her to be a most loving and caring sister, no less loving than Theresa, who is always in your face with sweetness and light. It is so very easy to warm to Theresa, to hug her, embrace her, to wrestle with her, to knock about with her, to be ‘physical’ with her. Whereas, Lydia requires coaxing, but she never goes all out as Theresa does. Certain kinds of physicality make her feel uncomfortable.

“Lydia is one helluva tennis player; precise and clever. She might have become a pro, but the sport seemed too involved in its peripherals to interest her, beyond having fun; besting her sisters, for example; and slaughtering mom, who is good intense player, also very precise, but obviously not quick enough for her quick witted, and athletically more agile daughter.

“Mom still whips Theresa and I, mostly with her precision. We get our jollies with mom, however.

“So Mr. D., be prepared for two very different people. I would say Theresa and I are more alike in our way of responding to others. Lydia is nearly set apart from Theresa and I, who are temperamentally very unlike Lydia.

“I would say that Lydia’s refined physical beauty, and her carriage, are very entrancing, very arresting, captivating; and in some ways oddly formidable, too perfect. Theresa on the other hand, no less attractive in my eyes, has that cuddly appeal.”

“Catherine, how would you assess yourself.”

“Mr. D., I’ll continue to permit you to do that for me; I find that most satisfactory. I would only add, as I have previously indicated, I feel comfortable with who I am, and how I look. I do not feel I lack anything, or to put it another way, I do not feel a need for improvement physically. I feel fortunate that whatever is physical about me does not detract from what I am or what I feel about myself. Does that sound a little too arrogant and too confident?”

“Well deserved!”

The Sister’s Arrival

As much as Catherine wanted William to accompany her to the airport, he refused. Yes! he would love to see the three of them greeting each other, but felt it was a special time. She should be fair to them by adequately preparing them for what might prove a difficult encounter with the old geezur.

“But they will ask.”

“So much the better if they do.

“Yes!, my guess is they haven’t the faintest; they are expecting someone entirely different. Someone without two heads might have been a clue, but they don’t have a clue.”

“Alright Mr. D., but I am disappointed”

“I think you’ll thank me.”

“You could always come, and stand off in the distance.”

“I don’t think I could trust you, if you knew I was there.”

Catherine beamed when she saw her two sisters. She waited beyond the barrier anxious to embrace them.

It was a glorious time for them, hugging and hugging, and hugging. The three Hugs. Or Three Graces. Several people were taking in their excitement, and doubtlessly, their outspoken beauty.

It was Lydia who ventured the question, as they were waiting for the baggage. "Well, where is he?"

"I persuaded him to wait until I had a chance to brief you. I know you both to be very open-minded; and have been very accepting of your big sister's whims throughout our lives together. You love me, and have my best interests at heart.

"Even with those caveats, you may find this a 'difficult encounter' as he himself said."

"Geez, Kitty, he does have two heads?"

"No my sweet one, he has only one. He is Caucasian. He is not a cripple. He is 56 years old. He is a writer. He is tall, and fairly trim for his age. A rather nice looking fellow. He has an extremely seductive intelligence.

"For your information, he has not seduced me. If there has been any seduction, it has come from me. But I have tried very hard to make it seem mutual.

"Yes, we have made love, a totally wonderful and beautiful experience for both of us; last weekend on the beach.

"Very soon after I met him, I have wanted to share this person with both of you, my two life-long intimates."

Theresa, with a serious look on her face, wondered aloud, "This sounds pretty serious."

"I am inclined to say so. I haven't any idea where it will all lead.

"I am open to whatever happens.

"He will be leaving to return to his island in another country after you leave. He has stayed here as long as he has in order to meet you, and all of us could spend some time together. That is my wish and my hope.

"I do not want him to leave, but realize I have no right to ask this of him. I know already I will miss him when he leaves."

"Oh! Kitty, I hope you are not going to be hurt in all of this."

"Tess, he is a very refined individual, very delicate of feeling. We have talked at length about your concern; it is his concern as much as it is yours."

"Meet him, be with him for a while before you make any judgments. Please do not judge me too harshly – yet!"

Lydia chimed in, "I'm willing. But Kitty, you are a surprise!"

Theresa added "I'm willing; I'm also very curious."

"OK, here's the plan. We go the sorority, get you settled in our guest room, then we prepare something to eat at the sorority, or pizza delivery, or whatever. Maybe, only the house tonight; I know some of the 'sisters' will want to meet you. Probably after breakfast at the house tomorrow, we will be gone most of the day. Probably the same for Sunday, until it is close to the time for you to leave.

“None of my house mates know of Mr. D.; they might suspect that someone is occupying my time, but they do not know. He does not come to the sorority; I have driven to his apartment only once, but usually we meet somewhere; if we go to his apartment it is in his car. When my sorority sisters probe into my private life I let them know it is private. However the house mother met him when she returned on the Friday night at the end of spring break. Mr. D. I had dined together at the sorority; we were still sitting at the table, as we often had, and do, discussing any and everything that comes to our minds.

“They were introduced, followed by a non-interfering remark. ‘Continue as you were, I’m going to my room’.

“Once again the three of us met in an unannounced encounter, when Mr. D. and I were sitting by the river where she had also wandered in one of her walks.

“I know the house mother trusts me to make the right decisions; she has not questioned me in depth, but has conveyed her suspicions, and concerns, to me.

“Do you have any other ideas?”

“Sounds OK with me.”

“Me too.”

After her sisters were settled, they agreed to make something for themselves. While in the kitchen and busy in the dining area, the sorority sisters were coming and going, meeting, joining in. A couple of them were teasing about Catherine’s mysterious absences in the evening, wondering if Lydia and Theresa could shed any light on their sister’s night life.

More or less innocent nonchalant dismissals of probing questions seemed to only barely satisfy the nosy older girls. They knew better than to press any issue against a sorority sister. Loyalty to a sister was part of their credo, as well as respect for their privacy.

Later, as the evening wore on, the three got together in Catherine’s room.

“I’ll tell you one thing about Mr. D.. He is great supporter of Toni Smith. As a matter of fact, in one of our conversations he named a particular maxim we were discussing the ‘Toni Smith Doctrine’, not inappropriately. He showed me one of his shorter manuscripts, in which he includes the famous picture of Toni with her head turned aside; and beneath it her statement to the media. That is only part of the manuscript; some parts of which are very moving, and very thought provoking. You will not find anything like it anywhere. I have the manuscript in my room; he has

insisted 'for my eyes only'. Before I would feel free to show you, I must ask him.

"So, dear sisters, if you impress him, as I'm sure you will, probably charming the proverbial 'pants off'n him', I will ask him if it is OK to let you read the manuscript.

"I know he will love you as he loves me. He already thinks of us as the Three Graces."

"One Grace, and two holdouts."

"Speak for yourself, Lydia."

"Wha, Theresa the Swoon!"

"Hey!, you two. No barbs thrown at Mr. D.. For one thing, his age deserves respect."

"I guess I can't imagine a young woman, myself anyway, getting hung up on an old man."

"Well, you are not alone. He says the same thing, and refers to himself as an old geezur. Don't think he isn't aware of all the implications."

"I would hope so. He has some responsibility, even if you are of age."

"Dear Sisters, it is my doing. I am the one who encouraged the relationship. He has been very circumspect from the beginning. It is me who would not let him follow his scruples. I headed him off every time he tried to withdraw."

"I suppose the love-making was your idea too", Lydia interjected.

"Yes, it was. All the touching, the hugs, embracing, and kissing were pretty much at my instigation. Yes! the final scene in the dunes on the beach, I had planned, like a very naughty woman. But I had such feelings for him and such desire for him, I did my part to pursue my own feelings. I knew he had reciprocal feelings that his sense of propriety prevented from being expressed. I trusted him not to hurt me in any way, knowing full well what his feelings were regarding me. He did not hurt me. Quite the opposite."

"Wow Sis!", Tess exclaimed.

"Sounds weird to me." Lydia scowled.

"I knew this might be a stumbling block. Is it possible I could ask you to refrain from any more comments until we have had time together. Unless of course you would rather avoid the whole confrontation. We can spend our time together, without Mr. D. Without talking about him. However, I promise you, if you are the wise loving sisters I know you to be, and will honor my wishes, I will give you ample opportunity to tell me how you feel and what you think before you leave. How does that sound?"

"I'm OK with anything you suggest", Tess assented.

“I don’t want to spoil anything for you, Kitty”, Lydia acquiesced.

“Alright, after breakfast, we will meet Mr. D. at a place by the river where we often sit. We could drive to the mountains, or head for the ocean, they are about equidistant from campus. Or we could sit by the river and talk, talk all things, holding back nothing. But no insults, no ‘dirty old man’ stuff. I’m the ‘dirty young woman’ if it comes to that. I want you guys to get to know one another. you will not regret it, I promise.”

“OK, I don’t know about you Tess, but I’m ready for some sleep. Its been a rush rush day.”

“I agree Lyd. I guess we’ll beddy-bye sweet Kitty, and sweet dreams”. Tess threw her arms around Catherine, hugging her and kissing her with deep affection. “Its truly wonderful to see you sis.”

“I needed that, my love.”

“Will you accept something from your knarly reserved Lydia?”

“Oh! Gosh, with all my heart, Lydia” They embrace, squeezing each other tightly.”

“I needed that too, love.”

The sisters departed to their room.

Catherine was suddenly weary, somewhat worn down by the anxiety. She did not want to shut off her sisters, but she did feel defensive; not how she wanted to feel. Maybe tomorrow will be better. It had better be. She realized her position could become precarious if either one of her sisters reacted negatively to the whole affair. She knew she would defend Mr. D. against any assault attempted by her sisters. She felt that Theresa was more inclined to accept Catherine’s will in the matter. She tended to be the most open of the three, the least quick to denounce others. A very sweet sensitive person, and very responsive to others, a good listener, and ready sympathizer where it was warranted. Her fine intelligence was always alert, keenly observing the nuances in human relationships, wondering about attractions, and repulsions, loves, hates, jealousies, whether founded on reality, or in a wild stressed out imaginations. Catherine trusted in Theresa, more than in Lydia; Lydia was too quick with her assessments. Only rarely regretting them. She relied heavily upon her intuition, which she claimed seldom failed her. Her rationales for her assessments were most always after the fact. In fact Lydia was often right on the mark with her intuition. A somewhat scary insight into things. But she needed Lydia to keep it to herself until the four of them were apart.

*Twentieth Day, (3rd Saturday)
Mr. D. Meets the Sisters*

If the weather was nice, Catherine and William had agreed they should meet by the river. A sunny morning, William had gone there early to await their arrival. After an hour or so, he heard the bubbling chatter of the young women's voices approaching.

Catherine found him where she had expected. William rose to meet and greet them. She introduced all around with handshakes, giving William a reassuring hug.

The quick looks of appraisal were flashing in all directions, all pretty much true to character; Theresa curious, Lydia reserved, Catherine noting their response, as well as William's very appreciative looks.

Mr. D. immediately scrutinized the girls for their resemblances. Indeed, impressively as lovely as their older sister, without makeup. Whether or not out of character, Catherine was the one to add a little color to her lips, from time to time. The sisters were as tall as Catherine, carrying themselves nonchalantly, while their femininity projected itself most alluringly, without added emphasis. Each with shoulder length full bodied hair, Theresa's similar in color to Catherine's, while Lydia's was nearly black.

After a few long moments of silence, peering at the river, Theresa, ever the initiator and spirit of things, spoke up:

"It seems I must break the ice.

"Kitty, I love you from the bottom of my heart. I believe in the purity of your heart and soul. You are my idol. I am your champion.

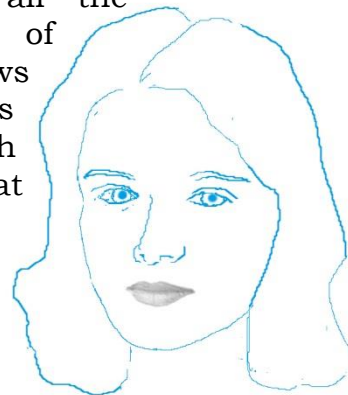
"My first eye contact with Mr. D. was an immediate engagement of earnest looks and warmth. I have not turned back from that.

"Kitty, I do not question this relationship. I cannot.

"I do not know enough to know of all the permutations of attractions, and repulsions of human interactions. I do not know what draws you together in the particular, but it is obvious by the way you look at each other, touch each other, there is a trust and an intimacy that cannot be faulted.

"I see no error in this combination. I see a happy and confident sister, proud to share this person, this man, with those whom she loves the most.

"I could not in good conscience live happily, rest



easily, if I did not support her in her heart's desire. I love her that much."

Lydia's response:

"I want to be completely open and honest about what I think and what I feel. Some of what I think cautions me not be judgmental. Some of what I feel must answer to caution as well. At this point in time, I would be reacting, perhaps unfairly.

"I too love my sister from the depths of my being.

"Ever as long as I can remember we three have always supported each other as part of a deep affection and unbreakable bond. 'Together we are invincible' we would often say of ourselves.

"What I think now, as part of a caution is to believe in my sister's wisdom, in her feelings, in the purity of her spirit, and in her love; that she is not a different person, or that she is unduly influenced.

"What I might think otherwise must remain unsaid for now.

"What I feel is more difficult to hold in abeyance. Part of what I feel is this love for you Catherine, my sister, my bosom buddy; my youthful enthusiasms, and joys, all my assumptions, are united in the three of us. I feel a definition of self therein.

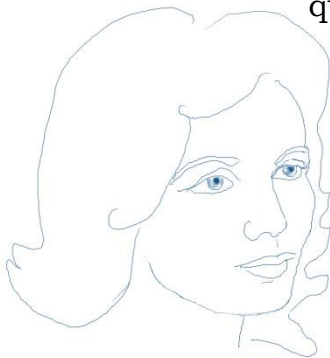
"Also what I feel is something that does not set well with, partly, a sense of propriety, and partly, what I imagine to be something I cannot imagine myself doing.

"In saying these things, I know there is an element of judgment, and an element of revulsion, both of which I want ever so much to avoid.

"I want first my sister's happiness. In her achievement of a certain kind of happiness through this relationship, it is not what I would have envisioned. I say this knowing full well I have no right whatsoever to impose that vision upon you Catherine. I must

question from where did that vision come. I think I know the source of a good deal of that vision. At this point I still favor that vision, if for no other reason, than I cannot envision another, without prejudice, I hope.

"I realize we each of us will eventually become something that fits with our individual natures. Some of this will come about by choosing, by determination and dedication, and probably by opportunity. We will be defining ourselves. I feel this already after my own separation. When Catherine went away to school I felt an ache, a loss of something. When she came home, the ache went away, only to return again when she went away again. Then it was my turn. I went away; I did



not stop to think how Theresa might feel. For her a double ache, and a double renewal. This may set the stage for the remainder of our lives.

“I know I harbor many preconceived notions about many things, mostly because it has been convenient to do so. This is not acceptable, it is intellectually dishonest. It is my task to search beyond these preconceived notions for the truth of things.

“If I am guided by this last, I know I will eventually resolve these conflicts that trouble me now.

“Mr. D., this is to say nothing against you at all, nothing prejudicial. I realize you are a person in your own right; whom I have no right to criticize. I believe you have Catherine’s future uppermost in your mind and would do nothing to jeopardize that future. I believe also you would do nothing to cause her pain or harm.

“I realize that the two of you have not entered lightly, frivolously, unconcernedly, into your relationship.

“More I cannot say at this time, other than to reiterate my deepest love and affection for my sister, for both of my sisters.”

With that said, Lydia became visibly emotional; almost lachrymal.

Both Catherine and Theresa engulfed their sister with lingering hugs. William was also visibly moved by the entire performance, fighting back an emotional outburst of his own, but not able to control the tears that began to form, and roll over his cheeks.

Catherine, looking his way, seeing his tears, broke away from her sisters to embrace him.

William, with a somewhat broken voice, said “Too too much! You were completely right about your sisters. Wonderful, wonderful, people.”

“I am very pleased we have come this far. It means we can relate, we can converse, we can have a chance to get to know each other. Maybe we will begin to understand new dimensions to the human soul. I have complete faith that Lydia and Theresa will respond to my desire for amity. I believe it is also their desire. How about it Lydia?”

Still fighting back her neartears, trying to bring herself under control, Lydia nodded assent. “Yes, by all means” spoken with sincerity.

“You Theresa?”

With a big grin on her face, “You can count me in.”

With that, Catherine wanted to change the subject to something they all had in common recently, that also brought her parents into focus. “You know, I told Mr. D. the ruckus we had over Toni

Smith, where mom took after me like I was a subversive. How you both came to my defense. How meaningful that was in our young lives. I told him how it separated me from mom, she always trying to work within the system, and I suddenly expanding beyond the system. It was a crucial argument, because with it came revelations, both for myself, and for you two.”

Theresa Livens The Discussion

Theresa took the bait.

“I didn’t tell you, but in our Senior Social Studies class the Toni Smith protest brought on a rather provocative and bitter debate. There were those who wanted to crucify Toni, others who wanted to kick her out of the country.

“But the most eloquent part of the debate came from her defenders. Of course I was amongst them. I got in my two cents worth about rights and the real meaning behind democracy. Of course I was booed and branded unpatriotic.

“The teacher stepped in, defending what I was advocating, open-mindedness, and wanted me to speak more, to elaborate. So I recalled our arguments with mother, telling how the assumptions, interpretations, and perceptions of our basic rights, basic human rights, became a divisive issue in our otherwise unified happy household.

“I told her how Kate unstintingly defended Toni Smith, and how mother reacted, how mother tried to draw us in against Kate, when it all backfired in mother’s face. We three took sides against mother. The very first time we did so, without budging. Mother was angry. Father made the mistake of chuckling when the siblings got the better of the parent. How mother exploded in his face.

“I explained that I revealed these family details only to dramatize and emphasize the seriousness of the debate. I said it was not only Toni Smith, and



that it was not only Catherine Tellerman, but it was what these symbolized, and how every individual might feel inside when his government does something that horrifies him or her. They did not symbolize unpatriotic feelings; if anything, the very opposite. Blind adherence to a pledge or a code, or a blood oath, or waving a flag, are not the things that make up a democracy, or a nation of free people's.

"It didn't improve things at all to explain any part of it. Taking stock of those who were most outspoken against Toni, I would be inclined to agree with the famous observation, 'Patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'. All too many were non-committal, waiting for one side or the other to win the debate, so they could jump on the band wagon.

"All in all, very disappointing."

William was more than intrigued with Theresa's revelations, also moved by her courage. Impressed by her sober reflection. He thought admiringly, all very notable in such a young person; a truly hopeful prospect.

"Recently, in my travels I encountered an individual whom I thought might be more reasonable than some others, but who in the end proved to be a what I must term a loyal reactionary 'rednecked' patriot. I was surprised by the vehemence expressed when I mentioned the courage of Toni Smith to do as she had done. 'She owes her allegiance to this country. There are other ways to show disagreement with the government than mocking the flag, and mocking the patriotism of others.'

"I argued, of course, that it does not specify in the Constitution any prohibition against, or that one is to be prevented from protest and dissent, whether or not it involves the flag or rituals surrounding it. In fact quite the opposite may be true; in fact, the Declaration of Independence holds certain truths to be self-evident, one of which clearly states that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive to these self-evident truths it is the Right of the people to alter or abolish it and Institute new Government. Further emphasis is added that it is their Right and Duty to throw off Government that abuses and usurps its privileged status. Obviously we need to recall those formative days.

"Our current government wants to institute amendments to the Constitution that make sacrosanct all associations with the flag, the pledge, and the anthem subject to the same grave punishment affined with treason. The symbol is more important than the substance. Toni Smith has made it clear that the substance is vitally more important than the symbol.

“Our current government wants to ossify the nation under a very crude backward set of lobotomized moral suasions, reflecting the narrow ignorant intolerant bigoted meanness of its proponents.

“‘God Bless America’, sums it up. Watch your back.”

“Mr. D., I mentioned your writing by that title, wanting to share it with Tess and Lyd, but indicated that I wanted to ask your permission, since you admonished me with ‘my eyes only’.”

“I suppose since this is one of those ‘getting to know one another’ gatherings, I should be open to as full an interrogatory as possible, leaving ‘few stones unturned’. I will leave the decision to you Catherine. You must realize not any part of it should be made public until I am safely out of the country. I feel you are assuming certain risks by sharing the manuscript with anyone.”

“Mr. D., I haven’t any intention of broadcasting your work. That is for you to do. I honestly believe my sisters would abide your wishes - to the letter. I also believe my sisters are kindred with us in this matter, and would appreciate this opportunity to expand their perceptions about which you have only now spoken regarding the Right and Duty of every individual. It is vitally important. There is something crucial in all of this.

“We might be an endangered minority. If we wait in the wings for a change to happen by itself, be assured nothing will happen. That is not my opinion, it is the judgment of history. There are those in power, who will use the power to further their agenda. They have a distinct advantage; and they too can employ the very same language of the famous Declaration to promote their agenda. Currently they are using a kind of an implied intimidation, operating under the guise of Homeland Security, and the Patriot Act. The Homeland will not be secure until everyone is on their knees.”

“Tough lady you got there for a sister, No!?! See what a liberal education will do for a person. Turns ‘em into radical thinkers, almost as impossible as their adversaries.”

“Mr. D., don’t do that to me.”

“Your sister is very sensitive to my testy challenges.”

“Mr. D., you know perfectly well how I feel.”

“Yes. Mr. D., why do you taunt Catherine?” asks Theresa. “She is saying the same things as you.”

“I am chicken feed compared to the thrashing she will take from others; regardless of her sincerity; and regardless of the truth of her words.”

“But she is not saying them to someone else, she is saying them to us. Is what she says less important because she says them to us? Do we josh and chide her for her seriousness?”

“Is it necessary to play the ‘devil’s advocate’ in this conversation? Kate doesn’t need to be put on the defensive, and her words don’t earn a mocking or belittling by anyone, least of all you, whom she loves and trusts.”

“Hah! Theresa, her enemies will not be so polite.”

“Now you mock me. Its now two against one, and although Lydia has been silent, I believe it will soon be three to one. You will not stand up to it, I guarantee.”

“Hold on Tess, Mr. D. admits to cynicism, regardless of the people involved. Ideas are fair game, they set their own rules of engagement, apart from personalities. He is right about my sensitivity, but most of that sensitivity is in the form of a sensitivity to him, and what he is thinking of me. I accept his thrusts at assumptions, and misplaced zeal. Yes!, it is sometimes not easy for me to separate myself from his criticisms, which I often feel to be unfair toward me. I would appreciate a more tactful approach. He doesn’t realize how earnestly I am in his corner, that I am also a contributor, as well as an ally.

“We have talked about this Tess, and eventually we will sort it out.

“I know that affection confuses the argument. If I was not emotionally involved with the person, I would not be hurt. I guess I am asking to be considered an exception, but I believe Mr. D. sees that as an invalid ruse to seize the moment. Truth should always be in the forefront, even when we do not know what that truth is.”

“With you Catherine, I am very susceptible; perhaps more to you than the truth.”

“Mr. D., I think we both know differently. I believe you consider protecting and furthering our relationship to be paramount. But for some reason you cannot restrain a methodology you have used for a lifetime, toward a world, the world of Man, that you consider treacherous, and somewhat evil.

“I know you do not think of me as evil, or treacherous.”

“I like this conversation”, Tess speaking once again. “You two mean only the best, especially toward each other. I can see that. I am willing to trust to that. More in common, more love and good will; rather nice to see, sis.

“Mr. D., I would not want you for an adversary.”

“Hardly likely, Theresa. With you, I’m a pushover. But do not assume that I always mean the very best.”

“I think Lydia should be the taskmaster in this discussion.”

“Why me?, Lydia responds sharply.

“I thought I had made it clear enough that I was reserving my judgment. I don’t feel any need to comment.”

“I’m sorry sis, I didn’t mean anything in particular. I was simply attempting to draw you into the conversation.”

“As you know Tess, I am not shy when it comes to expressing my opinion. I thought the discussion was moving along very nicely without my input. I felt I had already said a great deal.”

Tess went up to her sister, putting her arm around her waist, hugging her, holding her there, with more squeezes. Lydia reciprocated, kissing Tess on the cheek. Catherine came up to them with her arms wide, hugging them both.

“I will say one thing’, Lydia offers from the hugging threesome, ‘I am sympathetic to the symbolism of Toni Smith, and to the implications for everyone else. I like the Toni Smith approach better than the Michael Moore approach. However, there is no formula for protest or dissent. Often it is spontaneous, and reactionary. Sometimes we are left no alternative.”

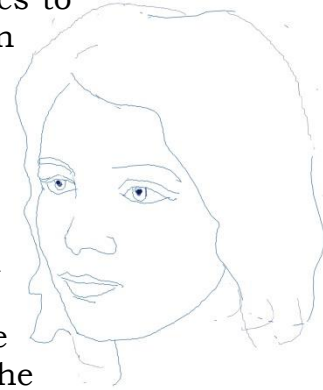
“What disturbs me the most about how our system of government operates is the power concentrated in so few individuals, somehow becoming more and more reinforced, incommunicado, in those individuals. I think it is fair to say this condition carries with it the greatest potential for usurpation, transforming ‘we the people’ into a frighteningly dubious gambit, maybe something lost to us forever. I think that is patently wrong. We must always retain our right; it is sacrosanct. We should never be denied the right to act in our own behalf. Our wisdom may be greater than theirs in that regard. It is necessary that our right to decide be recognized always. That we should be presented with all the information that affects our life and limb, and be allowed to decide for ourselves. It should go without saying that we do not owe any allegiance to something that ignores us and betrays us. As ‘we the people’ we do not empower our leader to act on our behalf without our consent, especially when it acts without even feeling the slightest obligation to tell what it is up to.

“If our leader does not want to inform us, and seek our consent, and give us the right to our own life, then he ought to take a powder.”

“AH! Patricia Tellerman, ‘Give Me Liberty Or Give Death’ No armchair liberal here.”

“Watch yourself Mr. D., you can ill afford to alienate any one of us. Your margin might be a precarious 2 to 1, subject to change at a moments notice.”

“Catherine, my comment was complimentary. Reflecting upon an inspired and inspiring delivery.”



“Mr. D., your jests, your free associations, may, in your strange way of thinking, not be intended as sarcastic jibes, but they become slippery little things to people who do not know you. Even as I might pretend to know you after such a short while, I sometimes do not know where you are coming from.

“What you must understand is that we are only beginning this sojourn into a critical assessment of our country and its government. We are troubled by what we do not understand. We have assumed much, and have many expectations, but repeatedly we find our assumptions challenged, and our expectations going for naught.

“Maybe it is right for you to feel a certain way, perhaps frustrated and jaded by a lifetime of ruined assumptions and defeated expectations, and to try to cast this spell over others who are not willing to adopt that attitude. Maybe you feel if they adopt your view early on, they will be spared any further painful disappointment. I somehow feel this approach is not valid. We require your indulgence NOW.”

“Like the man said ‘You won’t have me to put up with anymore’ very soon.”

“Mr. D.! Bad Bad attitude. Not very adult, I might add.

“You know, you can trust me. I do care about you. I do care about what you think. Even more than you will acknowledge.

“So stay with us in our concerns.

“Furthermore, Mr. D., recall what you have read in my recent manuscript, which echoes much of Lydia’s concerns.”

“I warned you Catherine of my deep dark cynicism. I guess I don’t actually know how it affects others. Maybe I don’t care.

“As I said to you in the very beginning, that first day, I find you a very lovely person, a beautiful woman, with whom it has my good fortune to meet. As it turned out, to enjoy far more than I would have ever anticipated, even in my wildest imaginings. Further to have the additional pleasure of meeting your sisters.

“I know, in my saner moments, I will reflect upon this experience with a kind of disbelief, as though it never happened.

“We have both realized that the author is toying with us, feeding us to the lions as it were.

“Should I be grateful that he has given us life, and a persona? I’m a kind of Faustian creation. You seem far more complete heroine than Margaret. Maybe this last is the result of the woman’s movement. Maybe it is the result of the wondrous thing that lives in the human imagination, the author’s imagination. To give to the other half of the species something beyond her sexuality, to partake of her intelligence without prejudice.”

Theresa could not contain herself. “Mr. D., Catherine, what is this mumbo jumbo about the author?”

“I don’t know quite how to put this, Tess. But we, all four of us, are not real, we are part of a writing scripted by an old geezur who carries us around with him in his computer. When he feels inclined he resurrects us from the hard drive to bring us on screen for more of what we are doing, even at this very moment

“But, oddly we become as real as any other person we might read about in the media. We transform the words into people in our imagination; these people we have created from words, whether as objects described on the face of the planet, or described as fictional beings within a novel, let’s say, they are both the same kind of reality, constructed in our brains, from the raw materials of our own selves founded in our experience, to be understood within the confines of that experience, to be stored there for a time, perhaps throughout our whole lifetime, but perhaps forgotten along the way. Certainly by the end of our turn, irrelevant.

“Perhaps we are more beautiful, fuller, more well rounded, than in real life, but once having entered the mind, imagination, and memory of others we have become; Just like that!

“Are we understood as fully as we are created, are we embellished beyond what is written upon the printed page? Even if we seem improbable, though not any more seeming so than some who are described as living upon the face of the planet, are we not imagined anyway? After all, there is no real way of discarding us once we have passed through the eyes into the brain. Even though the judge instructs the jury to disregard the last statement, how many do?

“Though even grossly improbable, do we not stir something in the reader, get under his skin, so to speak, exposing his narrow view, his prejudices? Do we not enlist his sympathies?

“If I say to you Tess, Lyd, that you are not real, but a conjuration, but whether real or not, that you live nonetheless, are you going to dash yourselves to pieces, angry at such a denial of your right to protoplasm?

“Do you suddenly feel flat, flat like a page, reduced to words? What is the difference between what is conjured here and what is real? Tangibility? The printed page is tangible.

“You might imagine the reality to be a little old man, an old geezur, sitting somewhat in the dark, which he seems to prefer, looking out with only a glimmer of light upon the world, and upon the keyboard (for he is not a typist), as he pokes (hacks) away at the keyboard, producing character after character, ascii code after ascii code, in one long line, a linear array of these coded things, like a string of ATGC nucleotides that form the DNA molecule,

coding for amino acids, and reproducing in mind after mind a kind of life that becomes more fixed in our memory than all the fleeting images that our awakened state produce, the latter lost to us because we do not concentrate upon them the way we do this written word that demands something of us to produce the very creation that attains to life within us.”

“You are telling me that is all we are, a conjuration. That you are not my sister, that the life I have led is only the rattlings in an old geezers brain.”

“Our old geezur doesn’t even know what he will write next. Its all formative, we are formative, Yes!”

“But sis, rattlings?”

“Will you protest? To whom would you protest? If you could would you attempt to erase this dialogue, this string of ascii codes from his computer? Of course, you cannot.

“Its like any other ‘creation’, for the lack of a better word. But, others who might catch a glimpse of this ‘creation’ upon the computer screen, or upon the printed copy, might attempt to destroy it for all of its improbable distortions of what we claim, and often assert to be right and proper; would that satisfy you? Would you want that?”

“OH!, Geezzz, I don’t know, Kitty. You seem so accepting of your fate. You mean, even these words that I speak are something that emerges from the pokings of an old geezur filling the tedium of his existence with me?”

“Tess, in the old days, even before the alphabet, man was ‘creating’ ‘realities’ with his depictions, scratchings and colorings upon cave walls, on rocks, in his sculptings, even within and upon less permanent materials. Even with the finally evolved alphabet, and all the meaning preserved therein, the setting down with rudimentary juices and parchments, before inks and papers and pens, even after these became more available, the labor involved consumed great amounts of time in rewriting, rewriting, and finalizing, even before it could be disseminated. Then came the printing press which made for mass reproduction of the final product of this other laborious activity. The only way we know of things is through the printed word; otherwise all our history, our remembrances come to us through oral history, a history that inevitably changes from orator to orator. Through the printed word, we are able to present a consistency in our record.

“But to leap ahead into this time, our time, we have developed the computer. Even now the blind are ‘writing’ manuscripts with voice recognition, a technology we may all use to spew out our creations, spewing as we do our manuscripts through the more laborious poking on the keyboard, and as we have with inkwell and

quill. What portends for the future beside a world overloaded with an immense pile of what, garbage? Are we to become garbage? Will all those tales from yesteryear become garbage?

“Is there some kind of message that is intended to emanate from all this ‘creative activity’? Are we intending to shape a world, a ‘better’ world, or are we simply telling it like it innocuously is?”

“Or does reality present such a challenge to our imaginations, such a desire to grasp, to understand, to formulate, to reorder, to conjure scenarios, to make order out of chaos, to project the I upon that reality, to feel the fit of the circumscribed I in that great outer world, to become unified within it, to be a part of it, a desperate desire to become, and be experiencing and to become an integrated and effectual part of it; that we must deal with it?”

“Holy cow, sis, my mind is leaping leaps as you speak.”

“Mine too, Kitty” Lydia finally interjects. “This whole notion of conjuration, that I am merely a conjuration, this me that is not wholly defined, but something that appears through a frosted glass, an unclear shape, yet a shape that is perfect, without blemish. I am your sister, the more defined one, the one of whom you have spoken, the one who has said so little in this tedium, avoiding scripting of the author.

“I must know that I am speaking the words of the author, not my own words. I am a mouthpiece for something, What something? I cannot look upon my nakedness without knowing that the eyes of another are already stripping me of my privacy, removing all the blemishes, or seeing them all, all their imperfections, because I cannot be real without them.

“Should I care since I am not real anyway? Let the author titillate himself with my body, revealed to his eyes alone. Should I care if he makes of me his most perfect creation?”

“Don’t fret, Lyd, he has already transgressed upon propriety, to such a degree that he has tested every reader’s credulity. He has made me who and what I am. He has conjoined me with Mr. D., albeit not unpoetically, not insensitively, not ignoring moral suasions, but still he has presumed upon the reader.

“The reader is being left with the distinct feeling there is little separation between Mr. D and the author, that they might be one and the same.

“That being the case, Pygmalion has been turned into some kind of lascivious senile old thing, having abandoned all delicacy, all sense of propriety. He has rent the fabric of plausibility, notwithstanding all his seeming concern for violation of all human sensibilities.

“But you should realize, he does not flaunt by intention, he does not ignore seeming propriety. He does not go off the deep end,

losing all control. He realizes the validity of his message treads on a kind of sacred ground, that acceptance is very tenuous. The message is important. He wants it all to hang together, to be coherent, to challenge all assumptions that come to us by rote.”

“I assume you have learned all this from Mr. D., I mean you are complicit in this with Mr. D.?”

“Yes, of course.”

“Well, if I have any say in this diatribe, I think its disgusting.”

“Lyd, you are angry that you are not this unique individual with your own life and your own thoughts. You believe you are a mouthpiece for something that would only partly define you as a person. You resent being naked before the ogre.

“My complicity has to do with love. Narcissistic though it may appear, ‘it is what it is’. More or less a myth? But all suppositions we make with regard to reality have the potential for being described as schizophrenic. Which world do we actually inhabit, on the face of it? The conventional world? Or the one that grows within us shaped by our own sensations, albeit, constantly referred to and compared to the conventional one?

“They prescribe pills to deal with the demons that inhabit us. Reality pills. If these don’t work, and we don’t seem to be able to function in the conventional world, they put us under lock and key, uniting us with all those others who cannot survive in the conventional world. We become prisoners locked within ourselves, until we are ‘cured’, or until we die. While the great mass of mankind moves on toward an unknown future about which he can only guess, schizophrenically guess, another real world parallels it within institutional walls.

“You and I, and lovely wonderful Tess, and the old geezur, and his alter ego, the author, rumble along in our desultory little side trip while the rest of the world goes where it knows it is going, trampling us underfoot, with its conventionality, and its chosen mode of schizophrenia.

“There are some aspects of reality we can test with touch, to confirm something about it, through its tangibility, let’s say. But even though we love each other in an imaginary, beautiful way, sisterly, maybe a little bit exaggerated, hugging and squeezing, we are not tangible to one another. We become an unresolved ache yearning for the reality of touch.

“Even Mr. D. and I in the sand dunes, was only a figment, a wonderful fulfillment in another world that cannot exist as described. A prurient adventure if you will, in a conventional world that also did not, and does not exist.

“As I speak, or as the author persists in his denouement, the impossibility of narrating a credible script slips away, risking us to an oblivion from which we can never be rescued, for soon the author will be gone, and with him goes us, all of us, down to the last word.”

The ever spontaneous and exuberant Theresa jumps in, “I’m willing to take my chances with the author. I want to be able to follow on with how the author has drawn me. The enthusiastic one, the one who can endear others through my innocent response to so many things. I can be beautiful too.



“So, I dance through the void. How many do we know who acquiesce to something they do not understand, conventional or not? How many, out of Fear, will not lift a hand to fend off the demons that haunt them? Paralyzed. Mesmerized. Confused, Ignorant, even.

“I suppose the reader will wonder how a mere teenager can ask such perspicacious questions. Is ‘perspicacious’ too ‘big’ a word? Does it annoy the reader, exposing him to a kind of embarrassment, an apology of ‘ignorance’, driving him to the task of opening a lexicon, breaking the flow of his thought? Should I have identified my self as an egg head, a smart ass? How can a mere teenager be such a smart ass?

“Well the smart ass asks questions that come into her head? How many knuckle under to the persuasions of the outside? The vast majority. The wonder of this script is that we don’t have to. If we did, we would appear hopelessly boring. Why should we be made to trudge through all that formula stuff, pretending we understood a smattering of reality as it should be, or as we, pathetically, find it? To try to make something believable, even when we don’t understand one damned thing about reality? All this pretense about understanding, by mimicking nature at her worst. The dull uninspired worst. People dragging their lives after them in some kind of hope they will find some kind of relief, a release from the tedium of having to transport this carcass through so much bullshit.

“The more I think about it, the more I like the beach dune skit. My cardboard sis was turned into flesh and blood. Surely a piece of cardboard could not feel the things she felt. Oh, sure, she might have dallied with something more her age, to satisfy the reader, to offer the reader a different kind of catharsis, a more hypothetically believable catharsis.”

William joins in with his two cents. “Either the reader reads on or he stops reading on. If his sensibilities are affronted, revolted,

then he leaves off, complains about impropriety, about the license of authors, and turns on the TV, to take in, in all probability, an abominably stupid piece of conventional uninspired and uninspiring formulated pap. 'Our mortal half-hours too often prove tedious'."

"Ah!, I recognize that phrase Mr. D., Catherine responds; and recall the rest of it, 'We demand eternity for a lifetime, when our mortal half hours too often prove tedious'. How sadly true.

"The author of that observation was writing fiction too, was he not? Or was he describing something so utterly tragically real? As we understand it, even to the point of fearing it to the very depths of our soul, eternity is a very, unimaginably, very long, long time. Yet we do fritter, even us ones who profess to be aware, we fritter. He frittered his time away with Yillah. Wonderful and sad too.

"Hey!, Lyd and Tess, I am referring to a conversation Mr. D. and I had had much earlier; before you came.

"The reference is one of the least noted works of Herman Melville, titled 'Mardi' where the quote concerning mortal half-hours appears; and also wherein the beautiful elusive Yillah tantalizingly appears, then disappears from the life of Taji, one of its heroes. It is the search for Yillah that carries the reader from episode to episode, island to island; as he searches much of a strange world is revealed. Along the way, much in the way of philosophy is discussed, and much in the way of wisdom is imparted. A fantastic tale, totally unreal.

"Hah!, everyone, we are all mixed up in there together, Yillah with us and us with she. All in one brain, the brain of the author, and consequently in mine, and now yours; all, all transgressions upon reality. But a reality not as tedious as it is thought provoking."

William speaks again, "We must be cautious to a degree. If we attempt to understand everything in absolute terms, we risk what happened to the protagonist in Zen and the Art Of Motorcycle Maintenance. If we chase after Yillah or the White Whale, we are doomed to disappointment. The unattainable and the unknowable. Our brains cannot embrace it all.

"There is no overload switch in our brains, when too much is too much, we crash. There is no restraint placed upon yearning, there is no restraint placed upon love, and as many times none upon hate, and other strong feelings which will eventually destroy us. We drop from emotional and spiritual exhaustion, and at times we simply step over the precipice, so driven are we to end the irresolvable. To do anything less would mean we had not lived this one and only life. So it seems to some of us.

*Leaving Port
Saving The World*

*Setting Sail
Requires Courage*

“Some will argue this is impossible, that we cannot contravene the survival instinct; only pure madness will cause us to leap. But there is also pure desperation; and grief, the grief that comes from not knowing; still a being that has a great need, a need so great that even survival is of no consequence until the need is requited

“Not far-fetched at all. Very close to those who yield to their sensations, temptations, allurements, fascinations, romantic yearnings, fantasies, attractions, magnetisms. Some external, some internal; some fatal.

“We believe that if we follow the line (straight and narrow) we will avoid all this turgid trauma, that we will be rewarded with what has been projected by others, those whom we don't know, true believers, con men, con women, facilitators, teachers, parents, the all-knowing, even bosom friends; politicians, the well-meaning, doing-it-for-your-own-good, and by God, the Law, and by the Law, God.

“Swallow the hemlock, if you don't like the advice, or the message.

“Sound pretty grim, sound ‘fatefully inevitable’? The chorus, not the cheerleaders, chant in the background.”

Catherine answers him. “Mr. D., the three of us are not where you are”. She looks at him earnestly, speaking into his gaze. “Our lives are untested. At least, to my knowledge, my sisters lives are untested, mine is only beginning to be tested. I have yielded to something. I do not have regrets, as yet. I am not driven by some mad urge to possess that which enchants me. What has happened to me is only a beginning, not an ending. I realize that desires, and feelings have risen up in me seeking something; a desire for nearness, a new and different loving, and companionship. My whole being has been stimulated in new ways; I am responding to something within myself, also something outside of myself. Perhaps they are seeking a unity, the within and the without. There are no rules to be followed, no guidelines; if anything, a trust in another person, as I reach toward that person, a desire for reciprocity. It has been so. I do not fear abandonment, or betrayal, or a misplacement of trust.

Placing her hand upon his arm, peering at him through his reluctant gaze, “Part of my test will come when you return to your island. I have had an inkling of what it will be like. My life and mind have expanded and deepened in knowing you. My body responds to your presence with an urging that I feel is natural. I want our relationship to grow, relying upon each other in a special mutuality of feeling, to become something meaningful in our lives. When we are together, walking, talking of ourselves, quietly looking at each other, I feel a peace, and an inner happiness which turns

to yearning when we are apart. I've learned to resent the clock on my wall because when we are together it races, and when we are apart it hardly moves.

Dropping her hand to her side, and looking aside, as though to imagine something more distant.

"As much as I would try to deceive myself that the world is a pretty place, I know it also to be a gruesome place." Looking up at him again. "We have found in ourselves, and I have found in you, something that transcends this immediate concern, and demand, of the world. But it does not lessen my commitment to understand it all, to express what I think and feel." She turns to face her sisters. "If anything it increases the energy that I feel I can devote to and the dedication required by the whole prospect of outerthness, that world that desperately needs so much, that needs the emphasis of humanization, way beyond what we have achieved."

Looking at both her sisters, and William, "Even this is only beginning to take shape within me. The words are still wanting. As they appear, I question their validity, their ability to express and persuade."

Theresa moves toward Catherine, raises her hands to find Catherine's, takes them, stares into her eyes with such incredible warmth and devotion, her own eyes lachrymose, "Oh! Sis, You are my one own true love. I so hear and relate to all you say, all you say to this man, all you say about your self, and your desires. You want so much of everything. You are so alive in your own cool steady way, knowing within that it is intended to be as it is. You do not flaunt or affront others, you reveal who you are, and how beautiful you are, how utterly human you are. How I want that for myself, to be this natural being that you are. To allow to happen what is me, to become what is me."



Catherine and her sister embrace rather fiercely, Theresa beginning to cry softly. "I love you too, my darling. And I know you, of all people, will become that person whom you so desire to be, and will perhaps succeed better than I in my desire to become who I am."

Lydia has been responding to all of this, her expression changing rapidly.

"Mr. D., the time is nigh."

"If I have your permission I would like to show your ms. to Tess and Lyd."

"All I require is your discretion."

"Be assured, doubly assured, triply assured."

“We will do breakfast at the sorority. My sisters will need to pack their stuff. We’ll see how the manuscript reading goes.

“The girls will need to be at the terminal by five.

“We’ll make up and pack some kind of lunch.

“I’ll try to bring them here tomorrow between ten and eleven.”

To her sisters, Catherine indicated it was time to go.

Theresa approached William, offering her hand, “Mr. D., I enjoyed very much meeting you, and will hope to see you again tomorrow.”

“Theresa, it has been my pleasure entirely, meeting you both. A truly amazing family. I do look forward to more tomorrow.”

Whereupon Lydia also approached William with her hand extended. “Mr. D., to me, a most unusual circumstance. I must admit to reservations in regard to Kate’s judgment, but am charmed all the same.”

“Lydia, I ask nothing of you.

“Your sister’s happiness is very important to me, I would do nothing to jeopardize her happiness, or her future.”

“I know that Mr. D., and believe you mean what you say.

“Tomorrow then!?”

Catherine looked upon the exchange between Mr. D. and Lydia with restrained silence. She had hoped Lydia would be a little warmer, but was grateful that she was cordial to Mr. D.

She was hoping to interest her sisters in William’s manuscript when they returned to the sorority.

“I’ll say Goodnight, Mr. D.” She came to him, putting her arms around his neck, hugging him slowly, waiting for him to respond. He gave a quick embarrassed hug; then withdrew, “Good Night, Catherine. Its been a good day.”

“Yes, it has, Mr. D.”

Theresa broke the silence on the way back to the sorority, “Kitty, I think Mr. D. is a remarkable person.

“You know me, I support you, as my sister, and as someone I love, in your relationship to him.

“My hope for you is that you will not have to spend a lot of your time and energy defending this relationship; that you will be able to live a relatively normal life.”

“Thank You Tess, for your support. I don’t expect much in the way of understanding from my fellow man. My family is the most important part of my life, my emotional life; from where I draw my strength; from love. I do not disregard this latter; as a matter of fact it does trouble me, because I realize I may have flaunted some

value system that we have shared; a value system we have not questioned, but which now lies exposed to the unknown.

“It must not be construed as a reflection upon the family, by anyone. That part I will defend. I will not attempt to defend the relationship itself. To me that would be pointless. I don’t intend to parade myself; quite the opposite.

“Every attack on me would be an attack on Mr. D.. He does not need to be confronted by a mad crowd after our asses. He would withdraw from the relationship if this kind of thing ever got started. I’d never see him again; because he would disappear. I would spend my life looking for him.”

Lydia then entered the fray, “Kitty, Yes!, a value system. We are hearing a lot about ‘family values’ these days. One might assume anything from that phrase. Yes! I have assumed some things, that I would call ‘values’.

“OK, so we have ‘values’ somewhere out there to guide us. They are not enforceable, in the least. We might use a term like ‘conformity’; implicitly we are expected to conform – yes - to a certain set of values. If we do not conform, we become suspect, we are criticized, and ostracized. That old ‘different than the herd’ thing. Of course, that isn’t fair or right. It might serve a purpose in a herd of sheep, or caribou, or wildebeests, but what purpose does it serve for mankind?

“Yes!, Mr. D. is a very unusual person; I can see immediately his attraction for you. Ordinarily I would find him a most interesting person; but now something else enters into the picture; not the contravention of values, but ‘character’. ‘Leave my sister alone; where’s your sense of decency?’ come to mind. Of course I do not want to say this to him; he would run away, and you would hate me for it. So I hold my tongue; I try to think ‘human’. This is a human being. My sister is a human being. What is it to be a human being? We cannot go about creating a human being from parts, excising those we do not like. A person is a whole of whatever he or she is.

“As God knows, I have my faults; do I want someone tinkering with my faults, always pointing them out to me?

“Being a Golden Ruler for the most part, realizing there is some kind of reciprocity at work in that term, I do not feel comfortable imposing what I am on somebody else. But for some reason, we withdraw the Golden Rule when it becomes convenient to do so.”

“Lydia, thank you for those words. They are earnest, and appropriate. I do not fear your judgment in the matter, because if



*Leaving Port
Saving The World*

*Setting Sail
Requires Courage*

ever there is a judgment, it will come after considering everything; and I am sure it would only be conditional; for, as we heard from Mr. D., which I also believe, there are no absolutes in this life.

“You could never resort to either/or, which is the basis for most of our Law. Ossified right or wrong does not suit any one of the four of us.”

The author inserts a reading from the First Afflatus: The Holy Bible of bureaucratic explanations meant to thwart inquiries into nefarious activities.

“Reports that say that something hasn’t happened are always interesting to me, because as we know, there are known knowns, there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; that is to say we know there are some things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns - the ones we don’t know we don’t know.”

Further amended, *“There’s another way to phrase that and that is the absence of evidence is not the evidence of absence. It is basically saying the same thing in a different way. Simply because you do not have evidence that something does exist does not mean that you have evidence that it doesn’t exist.”*

