Spanish by fear

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"Spanish by Fear"

by

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Mary Rita Curran.
NEVER KISS YOUR MOTHER GOODBYE

Now, as I kneel by her
Mother and I are finally alone.
I've been wondering all day:
if a kiss would smear her makeup?
If you're allowed to kiss the dead?
In this alcove, the walls depicting acorns,
the flowers a waterfall pouring fragrance,
she might be sleeping.
Beneath her blue-flowered dress
I keep seeing a slight movement of her chest.
Leaning on the coffin,
my palm smearing the dark-mirror wood,
her nose is much thinner than I remember,
her dark hair more streaked with gray.
My lips touch her forehead
and I feel a prickling.
She's as cold as stone,
a stone so cold
at the base of my skull
it feels like a small chrysanthemum firework exploding
sending out spikes of golden, dripping light.
I feel as if my head
is being pressed against that stone
being crushed against a blank ending.

At night now
my mother's lips approach me
she kisses me and turns to stone.
"Mr. McSmall!" Cocacci yelled. Every eye went to the hunched form of Cocacci, the teacher, and then to the tall, mild muscle-boundedness of 15-year-old McSmall who was in the back of the room saying something to Dennis Smith.

Cocacci galloped down the isle, his hunch bobbing beneath his almost iridescent-blue suit coat. He grabbed McSmall by the necktie with his left hand and lifted him to a half crouch in the seat.

"Did I give you permission to speak?"
"I was just..."
"I don't want to know what you were just about to do. I asked you a question." Cocacci punctuated this by a swift movement of his free hand. There was a crisp crack as Cocacci slapped him. And then McSmall's cheek was a reddish color, and his eyes became wide and wet.

"Now I'll repeat the question in case you failed to hear it, or in the case that you are an idiot, which I suspect, you failed to understand it. Did I give you permission to speak?"

McSmall seemed to hesitate an instant, and then there was another, louder crack as Cocacci slapped him again.

"Well, McSmall, I'm waiting."
"No. No, sir, you did not give me permission to speak," McSmall said, his voice fragile. "Good. Now we understand each other. Now we can be friends," Cocacci said...

Sunlight had streamed in through the south wall windows of Manhattan Prep in Riverdale - the Bronx - New York on that first Friday morning in 1964. The door opened as the short, stooped man in his late forties hobbled in. Squinty eyed behind thick dark glasses, his naturally tonsured head bobbed as he walked.

He squeaked his name across the chalkboard and said, "I am Mr. Cocacci, this is Spanish Two, and all of you will be able to speak Spanish fluently by the time this term is over. Or else!"

When he had exploded at McSmall, I was working on the reading and workbook assignments he had just given, Cocacci had been copying the seating chart provided by our homeroom teacher. I learned later that McSmall's pen had run out of ink and he simply wanted to borrow another.

The $27.50 in old green bills my father had given me that morning had been turned into crisp new books. I had $3.75
left of my allowance from which I had to pay my own bus fare.

After my last class, I bumped into Sean O'Hann. I had to look up two inches to see his eyes. Weight-wadded muscles bulged beneath a grubby wrestling letter sweater. Grease held his blond hair in a cobra-head.

"Let me see your English books," he says.

There was a vision of knotted limbs in his voice. I showed him the five books I'd paid $12.00 for that morning.

"I'll sell you my old ones for $7.50," he says.

"I already got these," I said.

"You go to the book store, return the books for a $12.00 refund, give me $7.50, and Monday, I give you the books."

"I don't know," I said, trying to sound unsuspicious and wondering if I emanated a sense of stupidity.

"Don't you trust me? What do you think, I'm a crook, I'm trying to rip you off?" His voice was venomous.

"It's just I got reading to do for Monday," I managed.

His faced puffed for a moment. His tongue licked his lips as his fist clenched. And then he said, "Hey, I need the money today, now. Otherwise I could sell the damn books back to bookstore Monday. You gonna tell me you can't use the $4.50 you're gonna save?"

I didn't say anything, fearing my voice would betray me.
"I tell you what," he said, "You take your books back so you have the cash. Then you come home with me and get your books so you can do your homework. Okay?"

Homework would elude me on the extended bus ride. I could feel the two hours of waiting and transferring. But money and fear are powerful incentives. "Okay," I said.

After returning the books, we walked down the hill to 242nd St. and crossed under the subway station to the spot by Van Cortland Park where the Yonkers buses stopped.

I was hurrying, because a dirty green North Yonker's bus was belching exhaust, just getting ready to pull out, when Sean said, "Hey, I need that money now."

"What?" I said, "I'll give it to you when I get the books."

His snake eyes fixed me. "Hey man, I told you I need the money now. I got somebody waiting for me." He nodded his head in the direction of the green interior of the park. "You don't give me that money right now I'm really gonna be pissed."

Slowly, trembling, I gave him a five, two ones and half dollar.

"You wait here," he demanded. And I watched him go into the park. I expected him to disappear and not return. But instead I saw him stop not too far away near some guy lurking by a tree. I saw the money change hands and saw
Sean slipped a glassine package into his right sweater pocket and came back to me.

"Let's go," was all he said.

We had to wait for the next bus, though. When one finally did come, he took a window seat in the back of the bus. Stupidly, I sat down next to him.

"Hey man, just because we have a deal, you don't have to hang on me," he said. "What are you, some kind of queer or something?"

I got up and moved to a different seat.

Sean's house was by the bus stop. I was sitting on a worn beige couch. Sean had charged off down a corridor, and I could hear his plodding on the floor above me. No one else seemed about, when suddenly I heard the front door yawn open. I couldn't see who it was until she walked a little ways into the foyer. She was 5'6", slim, with cheek length blonde hair. She wore a blue-plaid Catholic girl's school skirt. Obvious breasts shaped the uniform's chaste white blouse. Above white saddle-shoes and blue socks a sinfully short length of pale white calf stood exposed.

She was halfway across the foyer before she noticed me. Then she walked up to me and said, "Oh, hi! I didn't know you were here. Are you waiting for my brother?" Her voice was a soft song.

She had light blue eyes and lightly freckled pale skin.
At first, she looked too much like Sean to be beautiful. Then she smiled. There was a melting sensation in the back of my skull, and I discovered my eyes automatically avoiding hers in embarrassment as if I had suddenly looked into the sun.

"Hi, yeah, I'm waiting for Sean. Is he your brother?" I managed to say, finally, and worked up the courage to confront her sexual intensity again. She looked right at me, and smiled.

"Yeah. He's my BIG brother," she said. There was something elusive about the way she emphasized "big," like a vague scent of fear. I didn't understand it. Nor did I have a chance to. Sean's voice boomed from the foyer.

"Jael! Leave the guy alone. He's only here to buy these books," Sean said. He held up the worn, scribbled on books as he thundered into the room. "I didn't bring him as a blind date for a desperate sister."

A flower-like something wilted in her eyes.

"I'm obviously not good enough," I suddenly said.

She smiled at me and the flower-like something bloomed for an instant, "Oh, I like him," she said, turning to her brother. "Please say you brought him for me."

Sean frowned. He walked over and thrust the books at me.

"Here's your books. You can go," he said and turned away and said to his sister, "How did your day go?" as if I
was no longer in the room.

Jael looked at me for an infinitesimal moment and then turned her rear on both her brother and me. She bent over, and lifted the hem of her uniform skirt over her back, fully exposing her milk-white thighs and a pair of light pink, clean, but far-from-new panties.

"I happened to be in the girls' can while some girls were smoking. Sister Mary Roberta came along with her pointer and all of us got it," she said. Her tone was matter of fact.

Her thin thighs were shapely but not completely unhairy. Across each of them, like a mountain range, were two thin, slightly raised red welts. I stared. Not so much because of the welts, but because, since I had reached puberty, this was my most intimate look at a living woman's genital area. The fact that she had panties on meant nothing to my male chemicals.

"Well, I'll see you," I said, racing for the door. I turned and glanced at them.

"Bye," she called. "Nice meeting you."

Sean glared. I let myself out, feeling hotly embarrassed.

From the time I left that living room, I kept thinking about her voice, face, eyes, the way she looked at me, her smile and, of course, her thighs.
Sunday night I was pumping bench presses when it occurred to me I could just simply ask her out.

I hunted her number in the Westchester-Putnam directory. My hands shook as I turned the pages. The first name at her address was only listed as P.

At a little table in my parent's bedroom with fingers like egg noodles I dialed her number.

"Hello," a woman's voice said.

"Mrs. O'Hann?" I asked, hoping my voice didn't reveal the nervousness I felt.

"Yes?"

"This is Eddie Marshall. Is Jael home?"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Eddie, but she went to the movies with her brother. Can I leave her a message?"

"No. I'll call back."

"Okay. You do that. I'll tell her you called."

Monday morning, in Getty Square, fate transferred me onto the same bus Sean O'Hann was on. The bus population consisted of a few other upper classmen I recognised from around school, My friends from class would be on the 7:45 bus. I nodded, "Hi," to Sean and sat a few seats down from him.

"Hey, Marshall!" Sean yelled.

He was looking back at me.

"I hear you called my sister last night?" he asked
loud enough to be overheard by all the guys on the bus.

"Yeah," I said, my voice softly cautious.

"Well, I don't think you should waste your time. After you left Friday she asked me, 'How'd you get HIM for a friend?' I don't think she was impressed."

I looked him in the eye, trying to brave out the feelings inside me. He was grinning at me. He frowned and turned away.

Then he called out without looking back. "Hey man, I'm just trying to save you the embarrassment of REJECTION."

A few of the guys laughed.

When Spanish started at 9:30, I was still thinking of Sean's words on the bus. There were six rows in the class and I was in the third from the window, three seats down.

"Take out your workbooks and open to the assignment," Cocacci said.

The guy sitting in the first seat of the front row by the window was little Rocky Bockwood. After we all had opened our workbooks, Cocacci walked over to him.

"Stand up," Cocacci commanded. Putting the hairy fingers of his right hand on Bockwood's chin, he said sweetly, "I want to be able to communicate with you in case you make a mistake. Comprende?"

Bockwood was trembling and said nothing.
"Cromprende?"
"Yes?" Rocky said.

The hunchback made an unhappy face at Rocky and the class.

"Yes sir!" Rocky tried.

"No hablo Ingles. As far as I know "Yes" is not Spanish. You must reply 'en Espanol.

Bockwood, trembling even more now, stood staring up at Cocacci, who still held his chin firmly. Finally, he squeaked out a feeble, "Si."

"Si, profesor!"

"Si, profesor," Bockwood said, adding punch to the words.

"Bueno," Cocacci said. Then, letting go of Bockwood's chin, he turned to the class and said, "See, Mr. Bockwood and I have an understanding. En esta classroom, todos los aluminos will halba Espanol. Comprenden?"

We all looked at him silently. His face did not change. "Comprenden?"

Finally a few of the guys understood and began saying, "Si..." and the rest of us joined in, "...profesor."

"Senior Bockwood," Cocacci said, now, turning again to the boy who stood just a few feet from him, "read us leccion uno en el libro trabajar."

Fear seemed to help Bockwood understand. He opened his workbook to lesson one and began reading. It was a long,
Bockwood began to read the question, his Spanish pronunciation awkward. The question was a simple one. It consisted of two sentences. The first one, a question, asked, "where did the boy put the book?" The second said, "The boy put the book___," with the where left out. The answer was "on the table."

Bockwood said with an amazing confidence, "en la casa."

Cocacci's hand snaked out, and there was a loud crack that shook Bockwood's face. I couldn't see the side of his face that had been slapped, but the side facing me went a very unconfident white.

"That is wrong, Senior Bockwood. We don't want to be wrong. Do you want to try again?"

"Ye...Si, senior," Bockwood said, his voice on the verge of cracking....

It took a long time that day to go down the row by the window and half-way down the row next to me. And the air had seemed to be as much filled with the sound of loud cracks as with voices speaking Spanish. But I wasn't called on that day.

He called on me Tuesday. But, despite the fact that I kept thinking of Jael and feeling sorry for myself, I had spent a great deal of time studying Spanish.

"Escriber en la blackboard the answer to question
I walked to the front of the room, barely shaking at all. He stayed by his desk to give me room to write. I wrote slowly and carefully so as not to make a mistake.

"Bueno," he said, as I went back to my seat and called on Jim Munson who sat behind me.

Thursday morning at breakfast my mom stuck her nose in, "Edward, is something bothering you? You've been moping around since you came home from school on Monday. And you seemed in great spirits over the weekend."

"It's nothing, Mom."

She was no fool. she shook her short blond hair and asked, "No trouble at school?"

"No, nothing like that," I said.

She smiled and was silent for a few moments. "Is it a girl?"

I looked up at her for too long. Her blue eyes widened.

"Do you want to tell me about it? I might be able to help."

"There's nothing to tell. I met a girl on Friday I thought I'd ask out. I thought she liked me. But I talked to her brother, and I guess she doesn't. So what's the use?"

"What did her brother say?"
"He said, she said, 'Why were you talking to HIM?' As if, you know, as if she thought I was a real jerk or something."

My mom stretched over the counter toward me. "When I was a young girl, your uncle Jimmy would tease me unmercifully if he found out I was interested in a boy. Did it occur to you that she might not have wanted her brother to know she was interested in you?"

Since it was Thursday, I decided to call as soon as I got home and ask her to go out with me on Saturday. I was a wreck during school. Fortunately I never ran into Sean. I agonized over whether she'd be home yet. I worried Sean would answer the phone. Briskly, finally, I dialed her number. It rang 4 times.

A female voice answered the phone.

"Jael?"

"Yes?"

"Hi. This is Eddie Marshall. I met you at your house Friday. I was waiting for your brother."

"Oh, yeah, I remember you. I don't know if he's home. I'll see if I can find him."

"No, no, no," I practically shouted, "Please don't. I hardly know your brother. I called to talk to you." My heart was beating wildly.

"Oh," she said, and it seemed to me that her voice took
on a warm, pleased tone. "that's nice. What did you want?"

"I wondered if you might like to go on a picnic with me on Saturday?"

There was a silence on the other end of the line. My future spiralled away as the moments stretched toward infinity.

"Sure," she said, her voice even warmer than it was a life-time before. "A picnic sounds like fun. Would you like me to bring the lunch?..."

I made that slow-moving bus smell like my bottle of Canoe after shave. At the seedy Yonker's Station, the salt and sewage smell of the Hudson overwhelmed the smell about me. She was already there.

She was leaning against the side of the train station in a light creme-colored sweater and brown skirt. There was a large brown supermarket shopping bag lying at her feet. She smiled at me as I walked over to her.

"Hi," I said.

"Hi," she said softly, picking up the lunch bag. "I'm all set." She smiled again. But I could see now there was somehow no joy in that smile.

"Is something wrong?" I asked, rushing over to help with the bag.

"No," she said. "I think you have to buy the tickets
on the train. The office seems closed."

The orange, knife-scarred door in the brick front was obviously locked.

We walked over toward the platform. She stared at our nearing, spark-throwing, train.

"Whatever you do, don't fart," I warned, snapping my fingers, "with those sparks you can go up like that.""

Her laugh was an arch of her eyebrows, a widening of her eyes, her mouth opening wide, and her upper lip curling, uncontrollably exposing straight white teeth. I found her awkward and beautifully human at the same time. Her laugh began as a bray but the sound was lost in the roaring decrescendo of our train.

"I don't want to sit in the smoking car, unless you really have to smoke," she said as she picked a doorway.

As she sat down by the window on the Hudson side, I could see there was still a tension in her like a wound spring.

I put the brown bag on my lap, opened it to the smell of chicken. "Smell's wonderful," I said.

She smiled - the tension gone for an instant.

"Do you have Cocacci's Spanish by Fear?" she asked.

"Yeah, that's a good way to describe it. I've never studied anything so thoroughly in my life."

"My brother had it. I'm taking it. I mean Spanish, not your kind. Though we have Sister Mary Roberta, Robby
the Robot, to administer pain."

I looked at her and worked up my nerve to ask the question that had been bothering me. "I was wondering though, I know she hit you when you weren't smoking. What I mean is, didn't you try and tell her you weren't?"

She gave me a surprised smile. "I did, but it wasn't any use. I've got her only for homeroom. And I thank God I don't have her for any classes, because she is just like your Cocacci in homeroom. I mean, this girl, Susan Endrez, had her hand up for about five minutes, during study time, because she really had to use the can. Well, Robby was correcting papers and didn't even look up and see her. Finally, Susan couldn't take it any longer and just got up and went. Robby gave her three strokes when she came back. But Susan said it was better than wetting herself...."

"Ticket please?" a uniformed man asked...

As the train rode up the Hudson I learned we shared the same Spanish texts and workbooks, and that she knew quite a few of the guys in my class from grammar school. We played a joyous game of identify the jerk. I lost my own nervousness and began liking her more and more.

"Phillipsburg Manor" a loudspeakered voice droned.

"Headless Horsemanville," I said, as I offered her my hand. She took it. I noticed hers was so small it was almost bird-like. Her wrist was thin and covered with soft hairs, but her hand was warm.
We were the only ones getting off at that stop. The train rolled out and we were alone. To the west, the Hudson lapped the shore. The sewer smells were mostly gone. Across the tracks, the red brick train station sat like a tombstone. To the east, a green embankment rose. We climbed old concrete steps to the top the embankment, and kept walking east through a tree-lined residential area. Kids played in the yards, men and women washed cars. I was feeling a sort of glow just being with Jael. But I couldn't get over the troubled look on her face. While wondering if I should just be blunt about it I accidentally brushed against her right arm just above the elbow and she winched.

"Is something wrong with your arm?"

"No," she said.

"But you winced?"

"Oh," she seemed to think for a moment, sucking in her lips, "I fell down this morning when I was getting ready."

"How did you do that?" I asked.

"Oh, it was on the stairs. I tripped on the stairs," she said, her face tighter than it was before.

"Is something bothering you? I mean you seem to be in sort of a bad mood. Is there something you can talk to me about?"

"No. It's nothing. I...," she stopped. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't lie to you, you're just trying to be nice. It's
just that it's something I feel I'd rather not talk about right now. Okay?"

"Okay," I said.

"I'm sorry, too, if my mood or whatever has spoiled this at all for you. I was really looking forward to this."

"So was I," I said. "Sister Mary Roberta hasn't been beating you again? Has she?"

She smiled. She began telling me more about Sister Mary Roberta. I tried to convince her, that her nun could not nearly be as horrible as Cocacci. I said Cocacci was meaner than a hungry polar bear. She said Sister Mary Roberta was meaner than a nun at the change-of-life. In the meanwhile, we found North Broadway and the great stone outer wall of Sleepy Hollow, decided to go south, and finally entered the cemetery by the small, locked Old Dutch Church.

"I suppose if you have him every morning and he always beats somebody that's a little worse than Robby. She only attacks when you break one of her cardinal rules."

"It's like having a class in sadism every morning at 9:30." I said, "If I was a masochist, I'd love it."

We walked up the hill weaving our way through the Revolutionary dead that surrounded the Old Dutch Church like the indians did the last soldier at Custer's Last Stand. At
the top, we found the Irving plot. The plot rose on a little slope above the path. It was encircled by a low thick green hedge. In the center two marble steps led up to a black, low iron gate with the word Irving on it. Behind it, beyond a clump of graves, stood the one larger headstone, bedecked with two American flags and fresh flowers. Next to it stood a giant of a tree that would have been a sapling when Irving was buried in 1859.

"I wonder if that tree is him?" Jael asked. "I mean the roots must have gotten into his coffin by now."

"I guess so," I said, imagining rootlets prying.

"I think that would be neat," she said, "I mean, to be able to have your body taken up into the life of something huge and beautiful and living."

I said nothing but just let my eyes wander from the wide base by the grave on up into the tops of the branches.

"I'm getting a little hungry," she said. "Why don't we eat here."

We sat down on the steps of the Irving plot, and I opened the paper bag. For me, there was a revelation in the unfolding of wax paper. Her hands had prepared the chicken I bit into. It gave me a feeling of a primitive earthly bond between me and this woman I was beginning to like very much. I was half-way through mine when I noticed a tall guy in khaki uniform stalking up toward us among the Revolutionary graves.
"Hey," he yelled, "what do you damn kids think you're doing? This isn't a picnic ground."

We jumped up together. I grabbed Jael's hand in my right hand, the picnic bag in my left and turned along the path in the direction away from the quickly oncoming man. We climbed a grassy slope between very old, partly buried mausoleums that looked like old molars in the gums of the earth. At the top, we ran with all our might down a long roadway between graves until we came to a wall of fir trees. We plunged through this wall and ended up in a grassy, graveless little clearing where we fell to the grass, panting and laughing at the same time, still holding hands.

"You're a lot of fun, you know that," I said, "but you didn't tell me your were a criminal."

"Hardened. I've a record of aggravated picnicking."

"My God," I said, pulling away for a moment, letting go of her hand, "you really are a criminal."

She looked down at her empty hand. Then she looked up at me. I moved back over to her and put my hand out and said, "for you I'd follow a life of crime."

She took my hand in her so much tinier one and just for the briefest instant squeezed it, then shyly withdrew it and looked away. At that moment, I wanted to kiss her. It would not have been a lustful kiss, but just a soft, light brush on the lips, just a try at sharing how I felt.
"I'm still hungry," she said, "so I'm going to continue my life of crime."

I ate, too, and watched her.

"Are you having a good time?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. Her smile said, "yes," too.

"So am I," I said. "I'm so glad I called you. Do you know I almost didn't call you?"

"No! Why?"

"Because I met your brother on the bus and he gave me the idea that you didn't like me. And..."

"No, I don't want to hear about it...," she practically shouted. A dark look back on her face.

"What? I don't understand?"

In a moment she seemed to have calmed herself. But the dark look was still partially there.

"I'd rather not hear what Sean said. It's just. He lies sometimes. And it's annoying."

She was quiet for a moment. It was like she was drawing inward. Then she seemed to notice me watching her.

"It's just silly brother-sister rivalry," she said, after considering me for a moment, "Let's talk about you. You look so strong. Are you into sports?..."

And she charmed me, and let me charm her into forgetting her problems. After the train ride home, I rode with her on her bus, because I didn't want the day to end. Too suddenly
the bus was nearing her stop, and we'd already decided that
I'd stay on it (It turned just a block ahead and went back
the way it had come - the way I had to go.).

"Could I see you tomorrow?" I asked, "I mean, I really
had a nice time and I ...."

"I'd like to but I have to study Spanish."

"That's what I meant. We could study together. We've
got the same book."

"Okay, you're on," she said, "can you come over about
noon?"

"Sure," I said.

She pulled the cord and the bus slowed and stopped.
She looked up at me, and I couldn't resist and bent down to
kiss her. Her lips met mine, for the briefest moment, and
then she was gone out the door.

I waved and waved until I could hardly see her house
on the corner, but somehow I knew she was still there
waving.

I went like a early-rising saint to the 7 o'clock mass and
was planning on taking the 10:30 bus to the Square to make
sure I got to Jael's on time. But at 9:30 the phone rang.
It was Sean.

"Hey, I'm sorry, but Jael's real sick. So she asked me
to tell you you'd better not come over today."

"What's wrong with her? Nothing serious I hope?"
"Just a flu I guess. She would have called herself, but Mom wants her to stay in bed."

"Well, I'm sorry she's not feeling well. Tell her that, and that I hope to see her soon."

"Will do," Sean said.

I thought it was rather nice of him to call for her.

On Monday, on the bus going home I saw Sean and asked him how she was. He told me she was still bedridden and not feeling any better at all.

My allowance forbade me from sending her flowers. I made up my own get well card and sent it to her.

On Tuesday morning I saw Sean in school and hailed him like an old friend. He told me Jael wanted to borrow my Spanish workbook, because she was falling so far behind she'd never catch up and really wasn't up to doing the work herself.

I hesitated. Cocacci called on everybody, almost every day now.

And he said, "I just thought you could give it to me this afternoon, and I'd bring it back tomorrow. But if you don't want to, I'll tell her, that's okay. She liked your get well card, by the way."

I was one day ahead in my workbook assignments. It wouldn't kill me unless I didn't get it back in time for Cocacci's class. I agreed to meet him that afternoon and
give him the book, and he promised to bring it back the next morning. "As sure as rain is wet," he said, "I'll return it to you in Lou's - the candy store at the bottom of the hill - at quarter to seven tomorrow morning."

The next morning I didn't see him on the bus, and he didn't show at Lou's. Desperately I charged up the hill and instead of going to my homeroom, found Sean's. He was there, and, fortunately, the teacher wasn't. I tried calling to him discretely from the door, but he seemed not to hear. Finally, I went in and poked him on the shoulder.

"I'm sorry, man, she wasn't done with it and wouldn't give it back to me. She told me to say I forgot it. What can I say?"

Brother Michael, the homeroom teacher, walked in the room and glared at me. I left and went to my own homeroom thinking, maybe, it would be better to just leave school altogether.

I decided to stick it out. Nobody had ever "forgot" his notebook. I knew the work. If he gave me the chance, if he read me the question, I knew I'd get it right. But I knew he might just make an example of me. I didn't think about that. What I thought about was Jael, Jael who knew about Cocacci, Jael who I could not believe had told her brother she wasn't done with it.

Spanish began. As Cocacci began going down the rows I
began to feel dizzy. It occurred to me to say I felt sick and leave. But, then, I didn't raise my hand. He was at the end of the second row, when there was a knock on the door and brother George, the principal, looked in.

"Eddie Marshall, would you come here?" He smiled at Cocacci who smiled back. Cocacci waved me permission to go. I charged to the door, hoping whatever it was would last until after my turn, after the end of the class.

Outside the door I jerked to a stop. Jael was standing there. Her arms were folded around my workbook. Her eyes were streaked with tears.

"Two minutes, young lady, no more. Then he's back in class, and you get back to your own school," Brother George said.

I couldn't believe it. I couldn't believe she was there, and Brother George had called me out of class to talk to her.

"What," I said, "How?"

"We don't have much time. He almost didn't let me talk to you. But I told him what I think is the truth and started crying and he let me see you. I wanted to give this back to you. I found it in my bookbag this morning when I got to homeroom."

"Weren't you sick?"

"Why did you think I was sick?"

"Sean, he told me you were. He called me Sunday and
then yesterday said you wanted to borrow the book and then today said you wouldn't give it back."

"He told me Sunday that you called," she said, her tears starting up again, "and that you said you didn't think you could make it after all. He implied you didn't want to see me again. I should have guessed he was lying."

"That bum. Why would he do something like that?"

She looked down away from me. "We don't have time now and I don't know if I can talk about it anyway. I just wanted to give you your book so Mr. Cocacci wouldn't hit you. Now I'm in enough trouble, and I've got to go back to school. I saw your book in my bag, and I knew you needed it, and I just walked out of Robby's class, and I'm sure I'm gonna get it when I get back."

"You didn't have to do that for me," I said.

"I had to do that for you. I like you. Wouldn't you have done the same for me?" she asked.

"I'd like to think I could be that brave, but I don't know."

She stood looking at me, clearing the tears from her eyes. "Oh," she said, "I never thought, maybe you should check to see if it's okay."

I opened the book. To my horror the pages for today's lesson were gone, torn out. She was looking up at me anxiously. I was going to tell her, and then I realized she had walked out on Sister Mary Roberta for nothing. And I
couldn't let her know that. "Looks okay," I said. "Can I call you tonight? I'd like to take you out Friday. if you're free."

A smile dawned on her face. "You still want to go out with me?"

"Despite your relations."

She bit her lower lip and lost the smile. "I'd love that." she said after a moment, "I'll be looking forward to your call."

"And maybe sometime we can talk about your brother?" I asked.

"Maybe sometime, but I don't know. You won't push?"

"I won't push, I promise." I said.

"I gotta go," she said. She smiled again and turned and ran down the hall and out the door.

I looked at the pageless Spanish book and thought about Jael going back to face Sister Mary Roberta. I turned and walked back into that classroom, not afraid of Spanish at all.

-end-
THE MAILBOX

On July 16th, I was jogging through the cemetery by Evergreen Street, thinking of Pam, when I saw this strange tombstone. My jogging was a first attempt at trying to get out of the heavy drinking rut I was trapped in. I was a sandy-haired, sweatstained figure, bounding along on grimy sneakers; my footfalls were the only sound among the stones. I needed the loneliness of the cemetery that day. I was hungover. And when hungover I'd often run into people who looked vaguely familiar, and I'd agonize over whether I'd embarrassed myself with them. Gasping for air, I shuffled over. The tombstone was earth-colored marble carved to look something like a mailbox with a wide slot just above the name.

Her name was Wendy Paterson. There was a deep finality about the carved letters and numbers that told me she had been just a few years younger than me and that she'd died just six weeks before. I noticed, then, that the mound was a bit higher than its neighbors, the grass the slightly greener color of a newer grave. I stepped back for a moment, in shock, as if suddenly learning that a good friend had died. I didn't know her, couldn't recall her name. I'm a chemical engineering student. I hardly ever read newspapers. Still, I felt a strange, uneasy curiosity
just the same. As slight breeze rustled the green leaves above me, I read the words just above the slot.

"I've died so young, I've hardly had a chance to live, to touch, to be. If you have a message for me, please leave it here. I'll hold it dear."

Her parents, someone, had spent a good bit of money on the thing, corny poetry and all. Kneeling, I peered into the slot, my right hand touching the upper part of the stone. The deep cold of the marble drained the warmth from my hand. As the sun was just right, I could see within the chisled letter slot the already weathered portions of two envelopes, one partially covering the other. For an instant I felt sorry for her.

Finally, catching my breath, and thinking how odd people could be, I continued jogging and went back to thinking of Pam.

Pam had left me in April. I had always been shy and slightly frightened by women. Pam had picked me up, became my girlfriend and then, without warning, dumped me for someone else. Because of her, I was spending too much of the limited money my Aunt Jane had left me for my education on beer. And I knew I had to stop.

The drinking had gotten so bad, that sometimes I'd wake in the morning hungover and be terrified because I couldn't remember much at all about the night before. On those mornings, I'd creep to the window and, with my head
throbbing, peer out to see if I'd gotten the car back, and if it was in one piece. That's why I didn't have the car now.

Over the next few days I couldn't get the mailbox, or Wendy Paterson, out of my mind. I wondered what she had looked like, what she had cared about, how she had died.

Now, I knew I could have checked the old local newspapers or asked around among my friends. But, because I was feeling very shy of people, I decided to do a private thing. I wrote her a note:

Wendy,

I sure wish I had had a chance to meet you.

Well, perhaps somewhere else in time.

Best,

Josh

I took it the next day on my jog. I had to linger in the cemetery for quite a while. Some old lady, fussing over flowers she was putting on another grave, kept eyeing me. Finally, she left. I waited a little longer until the traffic on Evergreen cleared, then ran over and dropped the note into Wendy's mailbox-like tombstone. It made a soft rustling sound as it landed.

Nothing happened for three long, drinkless, weeks: weeks in which I grew stronger, weeks in which I did my summer reading, weeks in which I thought less and less of
Pam. I hadn't expected anything to happen, but then there was, along with my mother's latest harangue about my car in her garage, this thin little lavender envelope, smelling faintly of lilacs, in my mailbox. I knew, before even looking at the return address, what it was. There was a note attached from the postmaster that said it had been recovered from the home of a local youth who had been arrested for ransacking mailboxes. The date on it was the previous May 14th.

Dear Josh,

I'll bet you don't know it, but we have a mutual friend in Dave Wilcox. In fact, I believe we were at a party together at his house not too long ago, but I didn't get to meet you. He told me that you and I share a similar interest in Iroquois false face masks. I wondered if you might like to get together and compare notes. Let me know. My number is 555-6957.

Sincerely,
Wendy

Dave was an English major and a friend. I had known him for a year. I vaguely remembered discussing my interest in false face masks with him at a party in my apartment. I thought her mention of the false face mask ironic. I really only had one. It was a brave's mask, called "Spoonmouth", painstakingly carved out of basswood by a man named Winding
River of the Shon-e-on-aka. The wooden, horsehaired mask had always seemed to have a hauntingly magical quality. It had horns, a bulging mouth and shadowy grooves arranged in a countenance designed to drive away evil spirits. The evil spirits this mask was supposed to drive away were those that caused an unhappiness of the heart. I couldn't think of anything more unhappy than somebody dying.

But, then, I began to wonder if it wasn't all some sort of tasteless prank. Had Dave set me up? I thought about that, and knew I'd have to find out.

Taking a flashlight with me that afternoon, I walked over to the cemetery. The cemetery was deserted and the street empty. Bending down, I clicked on the light and shined it into the slot. My note was still there as were the others and all looked undisturbed.

Still, I was sure that Dave had been playing a joke on me, and I was angry.

"What-ta can I do for ya?" Dave said, making himself comfortable on the opposite end of a stained, white, red-flowered, winged couch in his living room. Dave's lips perched open at the end of his sentence in a sort of smirking O. Despite the fact that he was only 21, Dave's brown hair was already receding. He wore glasses with wire frames.

"I want you to tell me about Wendy Paterson," I said,
looking him in the eyes. "You see, I put a note in her tombstone, and then I got this," Josh handed him the letter and the note from the postmaster, "and I wondered if maybe you were playing a little joke on me?"

Dave read the letter quickly, his arrogant look disappearing as he did. He swallowed. After a moment he said, "She was just a girl I met in a drama class." Then he said nothing for a long time; his thick hairy hands moving nervously, he turned, looking out the window.

"Listen, man, if this is some kind of joke, I don't appreciate it," I said, jumping up. "I mean, if you've been going through the letters in Wendy's tombstone and fooling around with sending out letters from her now...."

Dave whirled around, his eyes wild, and for an instant I thought he was going to hit me. And then I saw that the look in Dave's eyes was a deeply pained one.

"I don't know if somebody was playing a joke on you, man." He took off his glasses and wiped his eyes. "But it wasn't me."

Dave paused for a moment and then continued.

"I met her last spring in a dramatic speaking class I'd signed up for. I was reading one of my own stories and was as nervous as hell, and I really flubbed it. The teacher verbally cut me to ribbons in front of everybody, and I was so embarrassed I was determined to drop out.

"But, after class, this petite redhead comes up to me
and says, 'You wrote that yourself, didn't you?'

"'Yeah,' I said. 'But you don't have to worry about having to listen to me anymore, because I'm dropping out.'"

"'Oh, don't do that. I know your reading didn't go well,' she says, 'but I really liked your story. You're really talented. And you were just nervous today. I'm sure you'll do better when you get used to it....'

"I fell in love with her after that. The next class it was her turn to read. She had this book by a G. Green called THE ARTISTS OF TEREZIN. It was a book of poems and drawings by children in that Nazi concentration camp. She explained that most of the children whose work she was about to read had died there. But she said that she liked the poems, because, with what all those children were suffering, they still had hope. And then she began reading and the voices of those tortured children came alive. She had almost the entire class in tears.

"We went out a few times, but she decided that she and I weren't meant to be. She let me down easy, although she made it clear we could only be friends."

Walking over to a bookcase on the northern wall Dave pulled out a play program and handed it to me. Then he walked over to the window and held the curtain. There was a black and white photo of her and a young man on the cover of the program. I remembered the girl in costume from Dave's party. In the photo, she looked like she might be in love
with the boy beside her.

"I still saw her from time to time, as often as I could. And I went to see all her plays. She was a fantastic actress. You should have seen her as Juliet. But we saw less of each other this last spring. And then she ended up being a hit and run. Some drunk probably...."

Dave took his glasses off and openly rubbed the tears from his eyes. If somebody was playing a prank, I decided it wasn't Dave.

"I'd better be going," I said, "thanks."

"Hey," he said, walking over, "I'm pretty sure the post office note about a looter is on the up and up. Because I remember she did ask about you. I did tell her about your false face mask."

"You did?"

"Yeah, but one thing. I'm sure she didn't have any false face masks back then. And she told me she was interested in meeting you."

I wanted to believe Dave. Or had it all been a joke? Dave's, "Some drunk probably...", haunted me. I'd driven drunk. When I needed more beer, I'd hit the road no matter what my condition. That's why my car was down at my Mom's. That's why I was trying to quit. Had somebody, some enemy, figured a way to torture me? No, it didn't make any sense, but just to make sure, I called the post office. I was assured there had been some letters recovered from the home
of a mailbox looter. The man at the post office checked a list of victims. My name was on the list of recovered letters.

For days after that I couldn't get Wendy out of my mind. Finally, I slipped another note into her mailbox. This letter had a single hair sealed in one corner under the glue of the flap. Anyone steaming it open would never be able to replace it exactly.

Wendy,

I really would like to meet you, if you can tell me when.

Best,
Josh

Her second letter, with the same post office explanation for the long delay before delivery, arrived two days later. I called the post office. Yes, they informed him, the first mailbox looter had fingered an accomplice and more mail was found in his home. But I waited to open her letter until I was sure.

As I couldn't think of any other way to get it out, I used a piece of gum at the end of a long wire. I didn't care who saw me. My second envelope was still sealed and the hair obviously untouched. I dropped my envelope back in the slot and then opened her's. It was dated exactly three weeks after the first letter. The day before she died.
Dear Josh,

It's been a while without hearing from you, and I've decided to be honest. Women are supposed to be able to do this these days, so I'm going to give it a shot. But it's not easy. I find you attractive, and I would like to get to know you. I do have one false face mask. But I bought it just as an excuse to meet you.

I've enclosed a picture, so you can see what I look like. And it's okay if you don't want to meet me. I won't call or bother you. But I will set up a meeting to make it easy. I'm mailing this today, so you should get it tomorrow. So, it will be "today" when you get this. I hope that's not confusing. I'll meet you "tonight" at the corner of Evergreen and Holmes at 9:30. (I don't get off until 9:00.) And I'll understand if you're not there.

Sincerely,
Wendy

In color she looked much more fragile than she had in the black and white of the yearbook. I remembered something more about the party. I had been getting a drink, and she had come up to me and said, "Hi!" I had said, "Hi," and then because she was so pretty and I was shy, I had not talked to her.

But what did the letter's arrival mean? Was I supposed to wait for a ghost "tonight"? I thought about it for a while. And then a terrible vision hit me. It was the kind
of nightmare that a drunk fears more than anything else --- the unveiling of something horrible done during a blackout. And, because the blacked out portions of my mind were a guilty vacuum, able to suck in any horror, I had no idea if it was real or not. Suddenly, I saw her face, full of fear, in front of my moving car.

It took me a few hours to hitch to my folks'. I didn't bother stopping at the house to talk to my Mom. I went directly to the old garage where I'd parked the yellow '67 Mustang, a few weeks ago. The circumstances of the day I'd taken it there were as horribly fogged in my memory as the night that had preceded it. And ever since Mom had been pestering me to come and talk about it. I stood before the gray and white painted wood of the swinging doors, fumbling for the key for the doors, fearing what I'd find inside. I saw Wendy's face in front of the car. I felt and heard a terrible dull thud. The front wheel lurched, rolling over something, then the rear, and then I was speeding away.

I threw open the doors and looked down in self-judgement on the front bumper of the car. The doors banged against the side of the garage. A leaf blew up against the bumper. The bumper was clean and whole and its slightly rusty self. I put my face in my hands and thanked God.

To Mom's delight, I convinced her that I had stopped drinking, and she let me drive the car back. I arrived at the corner of Evergreen and Holmes at nine. As if on cue,
as I stood by the cemetery gate not far from where the mailbox-like tombstone stood, a fog rolled in. It blanketed the stones and road, and I could only see a few feet in any direction.

Nine-thirty came and went with nothing more than a few cars passing by. I waited patiently in the mist. While waiting, I had a chance to think. She had died the day she was to meet me. Was it early in the day? Had it happened when she was coming to meet me? Or had she been leaving, heartbroken and embarrassed, because I hadn't shown up? Suddenly a new weight of guilt clamped down on me.

I had just said a prayer, begging for a chance, to talk to her somehow, when I heard the soft sound of steps coming, coming toward me from the cemetery. I looked up beyond the fence, beyond her tombstone and cemetery path, and for a few moments could see nothing. I could only hear the sound of ever approaching feet, light feet, a woman's feet. And then there was a figure in the fog. It was gray and it was small and it was coming toward me rapidly. I blinked for a moment and grasped the fence tightly.

"Hi," said a voice. Its owner was an older woman in a gray jogging outfit. As she rounded the entrance to the cemetery she added, "Sure got foggy all of a sudden, didn't it?"

I couldn't reply.

When I went home, I consoled myself that Wendy hadn't
stood me up really. Her mailbox tombstone was within sight all the time. But, that didn't relieve my new feeling of guilt. When had she died? I kept hoping that she had not been killed after waiting unsuccessfully for me.

There was only one way to resolve it. The next morning I went down to the morgue at the newspaper. The papers weren't that old and were easy to find. My hand's shook as my long thin fingers turned the pages. Finally, I found it. It was in the paper the day after she died.

STUDENT VICTIM OF HIT AND RUN

A twenty-year-old coed died last evening, the apparent victim of a hit-and-run. The victim, Wendy Paterson, of 29 University Place, was found in the center of Evergreen St. at 11 p.m. by a passing motorist who called an ambulance. According to police, she died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital without regaining consciousness. Police estimate that the accident occurred somewhere between 9 p.m and 10 p.m. and urge anyone with any information to call...

I felt cheated. There was, it seemed, no way to solve the problem. And yet it tormented me. I needed to know, to have a bit more of her; I finally decided to go and see her parents.

Darryl and Marilyn Paterson were small people: he was
about 5' 6" and she 5' 4". In that lovely deep brown carpeted living room where I met them, they seemed as fragile as a reassembled pane of broken glass. The loss of their only daughter had broken them.

Mrs. Paterson clung to her husband while he said, "What can we do for you, son?"

"Sir, Mrs. Paterson," I said, "I'm terribly sorry about your daughter's death." There were tears in my eyes. "The thing is, I think she may have been waiting for me when she died. And I didn't even know she was there."

"I don't understand," Mrs. Paterson said. There was a quiet, understandable reserve in her voice, as if she didn't know what to make of me.

I handed them the envelopes, with the postmaster's notes, and the letters. I told them about my putting notes in her tombstone.

They seemed relieved and touched. Obviously they were the people who had thought of the tombstone. And, as I expected, they found a bit of consolation in my response to it. They read the letters and looked at each other in silence. Finally, they looked at me. There were tears in both their eyes.

"We wondered what she was doing there at that time of night," Darryl said. "It had puzzled us to no end. I appreciate your showing us this."

"It's just that it's killing me to think she might have
been upset that I didn't show up. And..." I stopped, thinking how awkward my choice of words was.

"No, Josh. No," Darryl said, "you shouldn't worry about that. God wanted her and he took her."

"Besides," Marilyn added, "you're here now. You cared. And that's all that counts.

For a moment I could see the girl from the photo in the mother's eyes.

"Just a minute," Marilyn said. She went through a doorway and returned a few moments later carrying something in her hands.

"Her letters said you liked false face masks, and she bought this one just because you liked them. I really don't like the thing. I think she'd want you to have it."

She handed me the light weight, carved basswood face with the horsehair hair. It, like mine, had been made by Winding River of the Shon-e-on-aka. A little tag was still attached. It was called "Moondancer", and it was a maiden's mask.

As I stood there looking at the mask, knowing Wendy was probably as kind and gentle as her mother, I regretted my coming. I was tormented even more by the idea that she may have died thinking I stood her up.

About a week later, I mentioned what I called "my coincidences" to a girl in the drama department at school. The girl had known Wendy. She told me about a 60-second
video screen test Wendy had made. I talked her into arranging for me to see the tape. She said, "I don't think she'd mind now."

The next day she led me to a little wide-screened viewing room, wound the tape to the appropriate spot and left me to watch it alone. My fingers trembled as I switched the recorder on.

Incredibly, on the big screen, the camera panned down on a living girl with red hair and twinkling blue eyes, who blinked and then smiled showing almost perfectly even white teeth.

"I guess," she said, moving her hands in an expressive circle, her voice clear but raspy, "I'm supposed to just give an impromptu personal talk about myself for 60 seconds."

She hung her head for a moment, as if in thought, then her head popped back up and her eyes were wide.

"I'll tell you about something I did. I wrote this guy, a guy I sort of met at a party. His name is Josh. At the party, when I tried to start up a conversation with him, he shied away. I really didn't know how I wanted to handle it, or if I wanted to handle it, and so I left him alone..."

The camera moved in for a closeup of her face which was now animated with a sort of confiding look. I couldn't believe that she was talking about me. My heart began to
hammer. The camera panned to profile. A sultry, sharing-a-secret look, came into her eye.

"...but afterwards, after the party that is, I found myself thinking about him. I don't know why. I mean, he's cute, but so are a lot of guys. I wanted to explore why I was attracted to him, so I asked one of his friends about him. And then I bought this kind of an Indian mask that he's supposed to be interested in. Actually, I didn't buy it only because of him but because I liked it too. I wrote him that I had a mask and asked him to call me. Women are expected to be more aggressive now." The camera drew back for a full view. She had a shy look on her face. "Though, I have to admit, I didn't feel completely comfortable about it.

"But, now I'm committed. If he doesn't write me soon, I'm going to write him again. I may even send him my picture."

She was quiet for a moment. I was feeling a tremendous pressure inside me.

"Because even if he turns out to be a complete jerk, I may at least learn something about myself by doing all this. I don't know what, but something."

She had her hands on her thighs. The camera zoomed in on her eyes. They looked intelligent and proud. She vanished and some screen test information appeared. But I could still see her eyes. They were wide and alive but the girl
was dead. I ran to the men's room and threw up.

That screening drove me crazy all day, and that night I dreamed about her. I was waiting, again, by Evergreen and Holmes in a fog. But this time I knew she was coming. And she did come.

"Hi, Josh, I'm sorry to keep you waiting so long."

"I kept you, I mean I'm sorry if I did. I..."

"No, don't say that. You know this is a dream you're having. But it's the only way I can talk to you. Did you ever notice how in dreams people often act exactly as you'd expect them to in real life? Well, take it from me, this is really me, as real as you're going to get me," she paused for a moment and looked into my eyes compassionately. "Now, I know this has upset you. And I'm not even completely sure why I wrote you. But I felt, somehow, there was supposed to be some connection between us. I don't know. So why don't you ask the question you've been wanting to ask?"

I couldn't speak for a few moments, I was so fearful of her answer. Finally I asked, "Were you waiting for me? Did you think I'd stood you up?"

"Silly," she said, bringing her lips up to mine, she kissed me, "I was hit just as I was arriving, I always knew you'd come." I woke up feeling her lips on mine, warm, sweet, and alive....

From time to time I take a letter or poem over to that cemetery, I guess I'm still hoping for another letter.

-end-

Dickie begins to run. The movement snaps Roy out of his worrying again. He was worrying about how the people he and Katlin sold their farm to (on a land contract) had stopped the payments. Slap-slap, go Roy's sandals on the sidewalk. His breath comes in puffs, sweat flows from him, pours, as they pass the police station. Hunger makes Roy's stomach growl. Had the balloons come down? If they had, Roy hopes somehow Dickie can still get them before someone else does. Roy thinks if he had the money he would buy Dickie a dozen balloons. But he doesn't even have the money for one. They were both supposed to be students now, that's how he and Katlin had planned it. But they were out of money. The farm payments, their income, had stopped. They couldn't get student loans until fall quarter begins at the University of Montana. And the idea of a regular job doesn't appeal to either of them. That's why Katlin entered the art fair.

Straining to get his breath, Roy catches up to Dickie at the next corner. Roy's hand comes to rest on the edge of Dickie's red t-shirt and the warm skin of his shoulder.
"See," Dickie says, blaming Roy for the empty sky, "they came down and I didn't get them."

Roy is going to say they'd better go back now. But something about Dickie's look of disappointment stops him. "Let's just walk over this way. Maybe we can see behind this building," Roy says as soothingly as he can, nodding toward the two-story funeral home across the street. The sun flares off the "Livingston-Malleta & Geraghty" steel letters like flames on a red brick oven wall.

"You never know," Roy says, "they could be hanging low just in back of this building, floating just a little too high for a man to reach."

"How would we get them?" Dickie asks.

"Easy," Roy says, "I'd pick you up, and throw you in the air. You'd catch the ribbon and I'd catch you."

The boy laughs and Roy feels a twinge of guilt. He'd encouraged the boy unthinkingly.

They walk east around the building and onto the sticky asphalt of its parking lot. Roy sees the balloons. The red, yellow, green, blue and the other red are still visible as dabs of color before the brown of sunbaked mountains, tethered together by the now invisible cream ribbon. Roy can almost sense their squeaking against each other as they seem to roll through the soft summer haze.

"Oho," Roy says, pointing. "They are blocks away." He puts his hand, again, on Dickie's shoulder and urges him,
gently, further into the parking lot for a better view.
"They're going up now, and it's much too far. We would have
needed the car. I'm sorry, pal. I'll buy you a balloon as
soon as I can, as soon as we have some money, okay."

"Hi," a gravelly voice says. Roy looks up at a tall,
thin, badly-shaven man. Pale flesh peeks out of a moon-
shaped tear in his dirty blue t-shirt. His jeans look as if
they have been sliding under cars for a long time. The
man's smile is pulled up over brown teeth.

"Hi," Roy says cautiously.

"Do you have a car nearby?" the man asks.

What kind of question is that? Does he want to rob me?
Steal my car? Roy quickly fumbles, trying to take Dickie's
hand without being too obvious. Finally, he has it. He
begins walking both of them quickly away across the parking
lot. "Not around here," Roy calls over his shoulder, not
looking back, pulling Dickie with an insistent pressure.

"I need a jump for my car," the man pleads. A great
deal of sorrow in the man's voice penetrates but doesn't
allay Roy's fear. Roy risks a glance back. A woman with
wispy, black hair and a long, pointed nose appears next to
the man. Clamped in the hook of her fingers is the thin
wrist of girl of about 5. The girl's blue tank top is rolled
up and wet above worn white shorts.

Dickie flicks his hand away and runs ahead.

"No, not that way," Roy calls, but Dickie is already
heading for Ryman St. And Roy resigns himself to going by the collection agency, the agency that keeps sending him the letters, the agency that doesn't believe he can't pay, the agency that wants to take back his boat. He bought the boat on credit only a few months before. Back then he could make the payments easily.

Roy tries not to. But going by the collection agency reminds him of the bills they can't pay. And the bills they can't pay remind him of the job interview yesterday, the interview he walked out on, the interview the personnel lady had forgotten. He didn't really want an eight to five job. If he had to work before going back to school, he wanted to try being a fishing guide. Now he wonders what will happen if they take his boat away before he can get the money he needs to get that fishing guide's license.

The smell of popcorn catches him a block from the art fair on the Courthouse grounds. Now he sees his wife, Katlin, standing in her uncomfortably hot, green, rented Holly Hobbie outfit. There was an additional prize for displayers in costume. Around her, some of her elaborately waxed and dyed batiks—the ones that aren't framed—change sunlight into color as they blow about. Beyond her, clusters of people buzz about the other stands. Roy can feel her wishing they hadn't spent the $40 on the booth, feel her weariness, because she has not sold one of her creations in the long day and a half of tending the booth, and feel
her hunger like his own stomach grumbling.

"Roy, Roy," Katlin almost sings at him as he walks up to their booth. "I sold two pieces while you were gone."

"How much?" he asks.

"One hundred and twenty altogether." Katlin says. There is a pride in her voice Roy can't help but feel, share.

"Checks?" he asks.

"One check for $40 and $80 in cash! Why don't you go over by the Army-Navy store on Higgins and get us some hot dogs. They've got a deal there, two hot dogs and a coke for a dollar."

"We can get some food," Roy says happily.

"And you can take your fishing guide's licensing test," Katlin says.

The four hot dogs and two cokes crowded onto his hands and forearms are threatening to topple as he hurries back down the alley. The mustard, sauerkraut and ketchup smells make his mouth water. Roy watches Dickie bite into one of his hotdogs and look up at the smoke-spewing stack atop the Oxford bar. Dickie, when he hard first sighted the balloons just a half hour before, had raced a man in his early twenties to the back wall of the Oxford when the balloons had seemed to be coming down. Roy had thought the hot stack would reduce the balloons to rubber. The young man had
jumped and not reached the edge of the roof. The balloons had heated, risen. And he and Dickie had followed them to that parking lot. Had the balloons led them there? Now, Roy remembers the torn-shirted man in the parking lot of the funeral home. Why, if he needed a jump, didn't he go out on the street and look for someone to give him one? Didn't he realize he'd get nowhere just sitting there on the curb?

Sharing the chaise lounge with Katlin, Roy gobbles the last red chunk of hot dog. His fingers touch the cool, ragged car keys in his pocket. They jingle as he takes them out. Maybe the guy was so down he was afraid to go out into the street and ask for a jump. I've been there, Roy thinks.

"Where are you going?" Katlin asks.

"Some guy asked me for a jump before," Roy says. "I'll be right back."

"Can I come Dad?" Dickie asks.

"No, not this time, son."

Roy hopes they'll still be there. He wonders once more if the man might try and rob him. He probably could have let Dickie come. They're sitting on the curb by a red, 1973 Chevy. Rust creeps up its fenders like starfish arms. The man and the dark haired woman are looking off into the northeastern sky watching the balloons. They turn together to look at Roy's car. The little girl is chewing on her tank top. Roy pulls his Datsun wagon in next to them.
"Are you going to give me a jump?" the man asks. There is surprise in the voice.

"Yeah," Roy says, through his open window.

"Well," the man swallows, shyly hesitates, "my battery's on the other side."

Roy pulls out and moves the car in on the other side.

"Let's try my cables," Roy says, slamming his rear gate shut and holding the grimy rubber wires out in offering. The man has held the one clampless black wire from one of his cables to his negative terminal for the past ten minutes. But the woman in the driver's seat of the Chevy can't get it to turn over. Roy had felt the anxiousness growing in them, their fear that at any moment Roy will give up and take his car and their hope away.

"I had some new ones, but lost 'em," the man says. He begins unclamping the three remaining clamps on his set. "Just when I needed 'em too. Wife left the ignition on last night."

The woman's cheeks move slightly, her dark eyes grow for a moment at the man in challenge, but she doesn't speak. Her eyes retreat resigningly.

"Yeah, that happens," Roy says. "Where did you stay?"

The man nods toward the sprawling white wooden building behind the parking lot. "The Poverello, over there. They let you stay there free if you don't have any money. We
Roy had wondered about the place, ever since he had driven by the front once and had seen in a rectangle of brown grass about 20 black-painted iron bed frames cast about like graves.

The Chevy roars coached by Roy's cables. The woman in the car gives it gas. Roy rolls up his cables.

"Hey, I wish I could pay you something for this," the man says, "But I've been here a month and haven't found work yet."

"It's not necessary," Roy says, thinking he has a nice smile. "What kind of work do you do?"

"Roofing. Did that in Wisconsin. Can't find any work here. Might have to go back."

"I used to live in Wisconsin. It's nice there," Roy says, smiling. He gets in the car and calls out the open window, "Good luck to you. Is the little girl clear?"

The man scoops up the child who is standing between the cars into his arms. He holds her tenderly. The little girl looks at Roy. "Were they your balloons?" she asks. Her voice is a low and timid child's voice.

Roy looks at her a moment. He thinks of saying, 'Yes, I guess they were in a way.' And then he thinks of saying, "But in a way they were yours." Finally, because she's only a child, Roy simply says, "Yeah, they were," and he backs away.

-end-
PINE CREEK

I look down for an instant at the map of Montana that doesn't list Pine Creek as a town. On my lap are the "Woodalls" and an "AAA" guides I had used to find the Paradise Valley KOA on Pine Creek road south of Livingston. I wipe the sweat from my forehead. The car is an oven. I'm aware my wife Pat has begun to make a turn because I feel the car move. I'm remembering the comfort of large modern grocery store back in Livingston, where we'd stocked up, and soaked in the cold air-conditioned air, and stretched our legs... I look up. We are approaching a old narrow, wood-floored bridge over the Yellowstone River. When I reach the other side of this bridge, I think, I'll be in Pine Creek. I'm frightened. Will he be there? Will he see me? I look down at the river. The August sun on the river, its surface wind-cut into scales, is sparkling like the backs of a thousand trout...

KOA

The brown haired woman behind the KOA office counter presses a button on the cash register and the bell rings as the drawer opens. She puts my money in as I pick up my receipt. This little wooden room smells of pine. I can feel
my heart picking up speed.

"Does Richard Brautigan live around here?"

"Yes," she says. Looking at me. She has pretty brown eyes. "I think he's still around. He stopped by the store about a week ago."

He's here. He's here. I'm going to get to see him.

"Can you tell me where he lives?"

AN EMPTY HOUSE

My wife and children are back at the campground getting ready for a swim. Clutching the wheel tightly I watch the mailboxes slip by on the right side of the road. "The last house on the right," she said.

There's a house coming up on the corner that looks like a two-story thatched hut. There are two older cars in a dirt half-moon drive-a-round. And then I see this is the house - the mailbox from the back cover of The Hawkline Monster is there, the words "Brautigan" printed in dark letters. Behind the roof of the house rises the tip of the "red barn" where he writes. Shaking slightly I pull into the driveway and get out. There is a sprinkler going in the front yard, watering lush, deep green grass. The screen door is shut but the main door is open. Someone is home. I look into an empty wood-floored room. I knock and wait. I knock again. My hope dies a little. There is no answer. There is no sound in the house.
BRAUTIGAN

I go back to my car. There is a road a little ahead to the right that rounds the side of the property. I drive slowly. As I turn the corner I can see behind the house. There is a short field in front of the barn. It's fenced in with barbed wire. The grass is cut. My eyes widen at the wheelless hulk of a black Thunderbird. There are two people lying on the shiny hood. I recognize him at once: Richard Brautigan and a beautiful, but not oriental brunette. Wasn't his wife in *Tokyo-Montana Express* oriental? Was he divorced already? Or was it just a story? They are drinking white wine from large, long stemmed glasses. As I pull over staring, the light of the afternoon seems to be caught in in the pale yellow of the wine. They look up at me. My hearts hammering, holding my copy of *Tokyo-Montana Express* and shaking slightly I get out of the car.

MENTOR

He's moves slowly, easily, putting down the wine glass as he rises. He hops off the car and walks toward me. His look is quizical but not unfriendly.

"Mr. Brautigan, I wonder if I might have your autograph?"

"Sure. What's you name?" he says, smiling, stopping just on the other side of his fence. He calmly takes the book and the pen from my shaking hands as if this is an age
old ritual - people coming to his fence asking him to sign a book.

"Dave, Dave C-U-R-R-A-N,"

He begins to write.

"I admire your work. In fact when I read....", I go blank for a moment, but then it comes to the tip of my tongue, *The Hawkline Monster*..."

He looks up from his writing and nods as I look at him, gathering my impressions. He is tall and thin with a slightly protruding belly. His shoes have obviously been intimate with a lot of road.

"After I read that I quit my job and starved for three years as a writer."

"You can't blame me for that," he says wearily but smiling.

"Oh, I'm doing fine now. Otherwise I wouldn't be able to drive around the country the way I'm doing." I point to the car with its car top carrier offering proof that his influence has made a success of me.

He smiles.

**AUTOGRAPH**

He hands *Tokyo-Montana Express* back. Inside I discover: This copy is for Dave Curran

"Welcome to Montana"

Richard Brautigan
Pine Creek, Montana
August 12, 1982"
It's the wrong date, Today is the 11th, but I don't mind.

MOSQUITOES

"I found you from directions you gave in the book."
He nods. He is still smiling and I'm relaxing.
"You didn't say that the mosquitoes were as big as mooses out here."
He gives me a stern look and says, "I didn't notice any mosquitoes."

HEMINGWAY.

There's a pause, lasting only a moment but seeming to me like a quiet eternity. The wind blows between us. His blond hair, shorter than it had been in the pictures on the books, whips in the wind. I know Richard bought this spread because Hemingway fished here. But he had never stood with his hero like this.

"I had hoped to talk to you, but I can see you're busy," I look at the girl on the car. His eyes go to the girl and then come back to me. His expression is still friendly. "Maybe I could come back tommorrow?"

"When?"

"Any time," I say, feeling guilty instantly for throwing the family's vacation plans to the wind.

"10 o'clock. We can have coffee if I'm around."
I put my hand out to shake his hand. His hand is
warm he does not squeeze tightly. His hand is small and freckled.

As I drive off I glance back. I see him get back on the car. The girl leans over and kisses him on the mouth.

10 O'CLOCK

I pull into Richard's driveway and get out of the car. "If I'm around," he said. His words haunt me as walk from the gravel driveway onto the path and up to the front door. I knock on the screen door wondering, "What if he's not here? What if he doesn't want to see me?" The wooden inner door is closed. Through small windows in it I can see an empty room. It is ten. I knock three times.

There is the sound of someone approaching the door. His face appears in the little window as he looks at me. The door creaks open.

"Come on in!" he says. He is dressed in a black Jack Daniel's Tennessee whiskey t-shirt and jeans.

INTERVIEW

He hesitates as soon as I take a first step into the room. For the moment my talk-of-a-life-time is suspended in time. "What's wrong?" I wonder.

"This isn't an interview?" he asks "I've been interviewed to death!"

"No," I said. Should I confess my attempt of the morning? I called Joan Adkins at "Writer's Digest" trying to
get an interview assignment. She wasn't in. Should I confess I planned to say, "I thought I'd take notes and maybe I could do an article on you" -- because I thought otherwise you wouldn't talk to me. But I decide to say nothing of that.

"I have some ideas for people I'd like to interview," he says. We stand just inside the front door. Bare wood predominates in the house with everything arranged neatly. A huge Japanese Rising Sun flag hangs against the wall in the back room.

"Oh," I say, hoping to hear what he wants to write about.

"Come on, let's get some coffee," he says, heading for the kitchen.

KITCHEN

The kitchen is neat but is crowded --the counters, under the cupboards are piled with dishes and spices. A table is covered with a red and white checked tablecloth and has a vase with some mountain wildflowers whose names I don't know.

Reaching into a cupboard Richard extracts two white coffee mugs. A kettle already hisses softly on the white stove. Taking the kettle he fills the mugs, then carefully spoons Instant Yuban into each.

"Do you want milk?"
"Sure," I say.

He goes to a small refrigerator and takes out a red & white quart carton. I put some in my cup and he puts the carton back. The refrigerator is nearly empty.

"Do you have any sugar?" I ask

Richard opens cupboards around the kitchen here and there. My precious meeting is passing and I am making no lasting impression.

"Here," he says, handing me a small bowl with handles on either side.

"Do you have a spoon?"

He finds one quickly in a silverware drawer.

"Thank you," I say, heaping sugar into my cup.

"Let's go outside," he says nodding toward the kitchen's screen door.

Taking my cup, I follow him onto his back porch. Like two friends.

TRUTH AND FICTION

"Well," he says, adjusting himself on the porch rail.

"What do you want to talk about?"

I'm comfortable in the one red log chair by the red wooded table. I look up at him. His hair is again blowing in the wind.

"I wondered if some of the things you write aren't true? Like in The Tokyo-Montana Express where you described
"I don't write about myself. The person in the books is not me," he insists.

"But, you gave directions. I mean, I was able to find my way here from what you said."

"I live in the real world. I have to describe something." He sounds almost cranky. Do I sound like an interviewer?

"I just sort of wondered," I say to appease him. And to assure him I was not an interviewer I explain how, while earning my degree in journalism and studying the new journalism, I'd wondered about the fine line between fiction and journalism.

"I don't write about myself, though, in my books," he says, his tone relaxed.

RED BARN

There is a pause. I watch him sip his coffee.

I look up at the red barn behind the house. Where the hayloft should be there is a picture window in what I assumed to be his writing office. I can see a world globe up there.

"Do you write in your barn?" I ask. My question has the hope in it that he might show it to me.

"Yeah," he says, His tone tells me he is not really interested in showing off his property like a museum tour
guide. I'm reminded I want to talk about writing.

WRITING

"When did you start writing?" I ask.

"I've been writing, oh, 30 years now. I started when I was 17," he says, looking off at the Absaroka mountains in the distance as if to call up the past. His gold framed glasses glint in the sun.

"I wrote for 15 years, supporting myself with different jobs, before Trout  Fishing In America was published." He turns and looks at me. He smiles. "I was 34 at the time and for the first time, for the next year after that, I didn't have to do anything but write."

I want to impress him. I've had a number of articles over the past few years in "Writer's Digest" I ask, "Do you read writer's magazines like "Writer's Digest"?"

"I used to but not anymore," he says, shaking his head gently.

REJECTION

"Do you still get rejection slips?"

"Sure, everyone does."

PUBLISHER'S WEEKLY

"I read somewhere, probably Publisher's Weekly, that Semour Lawrence, your publisher, has been dropped by
Dell. Will that affect you?"

"No, I don't think so.

I looked at him. I felt there was something insincere about his no.

SUCCESS

"Do feel that you've achieved success with your writing?" I ask.

"Success, I don't know what that is. I think I'm lucky just to be able to write. You might say, "Hey, you're famous," but I prefer the term notoriety to fame."

"Why?"

"Because in a way it was just a fluke. Success is all luck. A shot at the moon. It was just luck that Trout Fishing In America brought me fame. Success, I think, is what you make of it. Before Trout Fishing in America was published I was writing on the side and doing other things for a living. If I couldn't make money writing anymore I'd still be able to do other things, just so I could write. Sweep floors even."

"But does it have to be that way? I mean, I'd like to do nothing but write all the time."

"Not everybody can count on doing that for a living. When I taught classes on writing I always told my students to write for themselves. Because one of the major problems is that people don't read in this country today. You have
to write for yourself. If you want to write a movie and make a million dollars, forget it. I'm lucky just to be able to write novels. I have a friend in Hollywood who writes for t.v., just so he can write novels."

WIND

He takes a last sip of his coffee, draining the cup. My cup was sitting empty by the sugar bowl.

"Do you want some more coffee?" he asks.

"Okay."

He looks around and says, "I hate this wind."

I take my cup, the spoon and the sugar bowl and follow him inside.

KITCHEN CLOCK SHOOTOUT

It takes a moment for my eyes to adjust to the light of the kitchen. I happen to look up and notice something I had not seen before.

The kitchen clock has a frame around it. It also has a few bullet holes in it. There are bullet holes in the wall around it to, as if the wall has the disease that has spread from the clock.

As if in explanation the frame has a small plaque at the bottom with an inscription. "Kitchen Clock Shootout R.B. and ......." There are another pair of initials and a date, but I'm so in awe, so anxious to hear him tell me about it, I don't read them.
"That's an interesting clock," I say, turning to him. I want that clock. If you sell the house can I have that? I can see myself cutting the wall section out with a chainsaw.

"Yeah, let's go into the living room." He says.

IN THE LIVINGROOM

We both sit down on comfortable, deep wing chairs facing perpendicular to each other.

"I only wish you were more prolific," I say,

"Ten novels* and nine books of poetry aren't bad. Nineteen books in nineteen years."

"Well, I don't read that much poetry. I just wish you'd written more novels like Hawkline."

"I think that's enough. I've had time to do other things."

* This would have to include Revenge of the Lawn as a novel.

JOURNALISM

"Like what?" I ask.

"I taught writing courses at colleges and I've enjoyed that."

"That's good," I say, "I think journalism courses are better for writers. They teach you production. How to produce copy. If you can't produce you can't survive."

"I don't know about journalists. I taught a journalism
course. In it I mentioned the girl at the Washington Post who was in the news for making up a story about a little drug addict."

"I know who you mean, the young black woman who was going to get the Pulitzer Prize but then confessed she'd made up the little boy when they put her in jail for not revealing his name. I don't remember her name either."

"Well, I asked the class what they thought and none of them had an opinion. I wonder what kind of journalists we're gonna have in this country in 10 years," Richard said. It was the kind of comment on the world that didn't require a reply.

"But, maybe she was innocent?" I say after a pause -- the subject one I had given thought to. "I've always wondered if maybe she just said she made him up to protect the little boy."

Richard thinks about this a moment and then says, "No, too many people know, are involved in it, for it to be made up." His words have a this is final tone about them.

But how can you be sure? I want to say but don't.

**MONUMENT TO WATERMELON SUGAR**

We sit in silence for a few moments in that spotlessly clean, almost unlived-in room.

"I want to show you something," Richard says, jumping up and rummaging in a draw in a little alcove. He comes
back holding a little framed black & white photo. It is of a stone post with Japanese letters on it.

"Some friends of mine took it for me in Japan. It is a monument to watermelon sugar," Richard says, handing it to me.

I hold the photo very carefully and listened.

"It is made exactly the same way I had made it up for my book. I never researched it, but they made it just that way. See, my friends put a piece of watermelon in the picture for me, to show what it was."

I look carefully at the picture. There is a piece of watermelon at the bottom of the pillar.

"There had been a big cauldron they used to melt the watermelon down with there too, but during the war they melted it down to make bullets."

JAPAN

Richard gets up and puts the picture back in the drawer. When he comes back he says, "I really like Japan. My books are very popular there. But I haven't gone in some time because the flight takes so much out of me. And the sun follows you the whole way. I'm messed up for a week afterwards. The last time I went I had to fill out a customs report and I couldn't add."

I think of Richard flying for hours across the Pacific with the sun following him as we sit in silence.
"Do you hunt much?" I asked.

"No," he said, "I'm all hunted out."

YELLOWSTONE

"Where are you going from here?" Richard asks.

I tell him of our plans to see Yellowstone and drive on so the kids can see Disneyland in California.

Richard tells me about a place in Yellowstone with a hot springs where we can swim. He tells me to make sure I see a certain river in Yellowstone. But I don't hear the words. I'm too caught up in just being there to hear all Richard's words clearly.

THE DANGERS OF L.A.

"You know, there are prostitutes and street gangs all over California."

"It can't be that bad?"

"A friend of mine drove through town (L.A.) recently and saw hundreds of prostitutes all over. But those gangs are dangerous. They used to pick up the garbage every day but now they do it every three weeks because of the gangs."

"Really."

"Just be careful where you leave your car with that top. "It will just take them a few seconds with a knife to cut it off."

I have an sudden image of being stopped at a traffic
light, when suddenly a gang of about 10 crazed Californians of mixed races - all intimate with poverty - attack with flashing knives, and moments later disappear around a corner with the car top carrier and all that it possessed as I sit helpless with my family screaming.

"I used to live in New York. I know what it can be like."

I feel like I'm lying. I know it is dangerous in New York. But no one has ever attacked my car.

He seems to sense that what he has said has upset me.

"But, if you lived in New York, you know what it's like. You'll be okay."

But I've already decided to cancel the rest of my trip. And Richard is geared up for story telling.

THE DANGERS OF SAN FRANCISCO AND BOSTON

"San Francisco is just as bad. There is this place by Fisherman's Wharf with a very pretty beach. But don't go there at night," he says.

"I can imagine."

"One time I mistakenly walked in a bad part of Boston with a girl I was with when a gang of kids came up. They tried to separate me from the girl...;"

Brautigan paused looking off for a moment into that far part of time, and then comes back slightly unhappy with it.

"... but I managed to talk my way out of that one."
I look at him quizically. I know I'm asking a question with my look. But it seems that that is all he wants to say about it.

THE SAN FRANCISCO MAP INCIDENT

"Let me tell you a funny story about San Francisco, though," Richard says, "There was this guide book made up by the officials of San Francisco, with a map, which included the way to the Golden Gate Bridge for the tourists. Now the actual distance from the tourist hotels to the bridge was about three miles. But on the map they made it look like it was only eight blocks. And all the tourists thought, oh great, we can walk there. The only thing was that the map led them through the worst ghetto in San Francisco."

Richard stands up and dances slowly along the floor magically transformed into a tourist. "...on my way into the ghetto with my cameras swinging..."

"...Now previously all the criminals in the ghetto had to go out of their neighborhood to find tourists to rob. But all of a sudden, because of the map, the tourists came to them. The criminals were very happy. The officials had to change the map and put warnings out that tourists shouldn't follow the old map."

ON READING

"That's a neat story. You should put it in one of your
books."

"The problem is that people don't read in this country. In other countries they do, but not here. They watch television instead. T.V. is killing this country. Do you know there are foreign countries, like Denmark, where people read much more than they do here?"

PHOTOS

We both become quiet again. I am thinking that American society has let its writers down by raising their t.v. antennas to the sky. And then I think that a good deal of time has gone by and Richard might have other things to do.

"Can I get a photo of you by your barn?"

"Sure."

We walk outside again. I take two photos of Richard sitting on his barn steps. I'm annoyed by the face-in-the-hands pose he insists on.

"Could you take one of me by your mailbox?"

"Sure."

Richard and I walk around the side of the house. As we pass some clothes lines, another reminder of Richard's humanity, I tell him he could grow ginseng there. I talk about ginseng and Richard listened politely. I can tell our meeting is about over. I'm wondering when Richard will get around to forcing a polite goodbye.

In front of the house I take a light reading by the mailbox where I want to stand. "It's all set," I say and
give him the camera.

Richard stands where I just stood and snaps a picture of me by his mailbox. Only his shadow will appear in the photo. I wish my wife were there to take a photo of us together.

GOODBYE

"Well, thank you."

"Think nothing of it. Nice meeting you. Goodbye,"

Richard says and hurries into his front door, shutting the wooden door with the little glass window in the center of it not quite abruptly. I think of the march hare disappearing down his Alice-in-Wonderland hole.

EPILOGUE ON A VISIT

I look back from Richard's door at the family and camping goods all packed up in the station wagon. So far there has been no answer to my knock.

The inner door is still closed. But then I see Richard peeking out the little window in the center. He does not look pleased to see me again. He opens the door and sticks his head out. I read his expression as, "You were here long enough, why did you come back?"

"I just wanted to drop these off," I say, "There's more there than you'll ever want to know about ginseng."

Richard takes them without smiling. "Thanks. Have a nice trip," he says.
I'm thinking, "Can I get a photo of us together. But he is already ducking back inside, taking the newsletters I gave him. The door slams.

I guess he has to do that? Fans might never leave. I look back as I walk away. I can see Richard watching television. The images looked long and El Greco like thru the door window.

-end-

APPENDIX A: - HYPNOTIC TECHNIQUE APRIL 15, 1985

I didn't have any notes from my visit. All I had was the few I scribbled down in the car after I'd left. I didn't intended at the time for it be an interview.

So to recapture this story I went to a clinical psychologist who practiced hypnosis on April 15, 1985. Bravely I lay myself down on a soft leather couch that had shared the terrors of the mentally ill. I was a little nervous. Richard's death had upset me greatly. I was afraid I would relive the past and then resuffer his death. That did not happen. I never completely lost touch with the present.

The blinds were closed to dim the room. Dr. Zentner's soothing deep voice droned on. I drifted with it's flow, on a controlled journey back in time. And I did reexperience walking in the morning in a tent in Pine Creek. I felt cold in my sleeping bag in the morning. It was something I had
forgotten.

But we did not have enough time (and I not enough money) to completely reexperience the past. Dr. Zentner was forced to move me quickly through blocks of time and so few moments were felt as totally as the first waking moment in Pine Creek.

But I did have a tape of the hypnosis. And Dr. Zentner suggested I use it on my own to gather other parts of the past. It was very helpful and I recommend the technique.

There was one funny incident that shows the power of the technique itself. I saw the doctor on April 15th. In the past I was always busy doing (for me) the very unpleasant task of tax figuring. On the day of my hypnosis I had taken care of my taxes already. But when bringing me back to the past Dr. Zentner had me think back to "April 15" a year before. This made me uneasy. When he said to think back to "April 15" the year before that, I suffered some real anguish. Two tax years is too much!

APPENDIX B: BACKGROUND - SATURDAY, MARCH 22, 1975 IN THE PARKING LOT OF A MIDDLETOWN, NEW YORK MALL:

I discovered Richard on Saturday, March 22, 1975 in the parking lot of a Middletown, New York Mall, lurking behind his words in pile of books. The pile was in my car. The books were some my wife had taken out of the library.

He was waiting for me on the back dust jacket of the
The Hawkline Monster: A Gothic Western.

I wish I could have heard him then. I like to think he would have said, "I would have liked to give the young man some warning. I would have liked to have flashed an electric news bulletin reading YOUNG WRITER'S LIFE ALTERED BY.... But alas, there was nowhere to plug in the sign."

I almost put it back in the pile, not really caring for gothics or westerns.

I almost put it back but for the photo of the long haired author on the back with funny dark hat standing by his mailbox,

From the first page my weekend was lost to reading.

APPENDIX C: ON BEING A NOVELIST

1975

1) Dreams of being a writer had been lingering around inside of me like a bird of prey for some time.

2) I was formulating the cremes and shadows that make all women who think they are ugly beautiful for Revlon Research, Inc. in the Bronx.

3) I lived in Walden, N.Y and was commuting 70 miles each way to work.

4) My writing consisted of trying to tape stories while driving. It was too late and I was too tired, when I arrived home to do anything with them.

5) But after reading Hawkline Monster Richard rode with
me to work each day in my imagination telling me how great it was to be a writer, and that there was no reason I could not try to follow in his footsteps.

6) It was as if he had introduced me to some hidden devil, who tempted me with a book of my own with a photo of myself on the back standing by my mailbox.

APPENDIX D: QUITTING AT THE HANDS OF FATE

Just weeks after discovering Richard in that mall parking lot, on April 17th fate kindly hit me in the head with an auto accident.

It was not a serious accident.

But Richard was riding with me and I knew what he was thinking. There might never be a later for writing.

The next day I got my start on full-time writing with a letter or resignation.

For many long years after that my family and I were intimate with poverty.

APPENDIX E: HUNTING FOR PINE CREEK

By August of 1982 I had lucked out as a writer. Over the years of poverty, rather than give up writing, I'd earned an additional degree in journalism and learned every aspect of publishing from newswriting to advertising sales. After slaving away at various papers a specialized newsletter I had started on the side for ginseng farmers with a $120 investment became a big success. Then in its
second year the paper was doing well. We had new car and the family was ready for trip.

We had seen Custer’s Battlefield. Now the family's goal was Yellowstone, and eventually California, Disneyland and Universal Studios.

But I had come to see Richard Brautigan in Pine Creek. I was headed for Montana with a copy of THE TOKYO-MONTANA EXPRESS. After attacking the Custer Battlefield, we would circle south west toward the hot heady spray of Yellowstone and on the way scout for Richard Brautigan's home in a place called "Pine Creek".

APPENDIX F: - CLUES TO PINE CREEK

There were a number of clues to "Pine Creek" in The Toyko-Montana Express hidden among the pages like troutworms. Some of them besides the more obvious fact that he lives sometimes in Montana are:

P 112 "A Safe Journey Like This River" where he describes a little about his house, his front and back door and names some nearby towns.

P 116 "Crows Eating a Truck Tire in the Dead of Winter" he more specifically names "Pine Creek" as home.

P 135 "Times Square in Montana" describes the barn in which he does his writing.

P 148 "The Last of My Armstrong Creek Mosquito Bites" mentions Livingston Montana - the largest town near "Pine
Creek".

P 195 "Self-Portrait as an Old Man" mentions "Pine Creek" again.

P 204 "Turkey and Dry Breakfast Cereal Sonata" describes "Pine Creek".

In all just a few lines in a 258 page book. But I was Sherlock Holmes, determined to go trout fishing.

APPENDIX G: CORRESPONDENCE

The only further contact I had with Richard involved two letters that I wrote him.

The first included a cover from a copy of So The Wind Won't Blow It All Away. It was a request for an autograph. It was addressed to Richard Brautigan, Pine Creek in care of the Livingston Post Office. There was no reply.

Some time later I wrote again saying how my copy of Wind was naked on its bookshelf and was being teased by his other books. Richard sent an autographed cover back on the 28th of March of 1983 from Billings, Montana. There was no note. It was the last time I heard from Richard.

APPENDIX H: EPILOGUE: THE WORLD WAR 1 LOS ANGELES AIRPLANE REVISED

1) "...my favorite writer, Richard Brautigan, was sort of an inspiration for the story," I said.

2) My friend held the manuscript of STEFFI-EMILY AND THE GUMBALL MACHINE in her hands. We were going to publish it.
Brautigan like, we were going to pound on the nursery door of American literature.

3) "Didn't I read about someone with a name like that dying recently? Yes, it was in Saturday's paper. He shot himself."

4) I left her and went looking for the paper.

5) I found the paper and:

6) BRAUTIGAN FOUND DEAD; WRITER'S SUICIDE SUSPECTED.

7) I could see him dancing slowly along the floor of his parlor magically transformed into a tourist. "...on my way into the ghetto with my cameras swinging..."

8) I asked my friend to leave.

APPENDIX I: WISHFUL THINKING

Maybe it's wishful thinking on my part but I have wondered if it was really Richard's body that was found in his Bolinas home. It was a long time before the body was discovered. The .44 magnum was supposed to have done a great deal of damage. Could they identified the wrong body as him?

There was a movie out not too long ago called Eddie and The Crusiers, a movie Richard may have seen. In it, Eddie, stages an accidental (or suicidal -- it is not resolved) death. He does this because his life as an artist is over. The world does not appreciate his new work. We learn at the movies end -- years later when that work is finally
appreciated and the world is mourning his passing -- that he is in fact still alive.

I wonder if Richard could have done something like that?

-mayonnaise-