While I was walking

Jeannie Fairfax Goodman

The University of Montana

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University of Montana
WHILE I WAS WALKING

By

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I have driven down to a fishing access in the Bitterroot with my Tibetan dog. Thirty minutes of mincing through brush-goosh and wild rose thorns--I am in a bog of fallen, rotted logs very near wisps of the panic-stricken Bitterroot River. I've seen a pileated woodpecker flashing through high-up cottonwood arms; four crashing, sloshing deer; and a placid eagle, not soaring, but out morning shopping, languidly flapping between very tall broken-off deadstand. I have come to Poker Joe's to think and to be by water.

I sit balanced in a bog full of logs that have toppled and dropped from water-rot. The smells here are clean and full. It is a flood year, a year of largesse. I am content to stay among triangles of sunlight and log wet. My little lhasa wanders, finding it dull to sit; she climbs, burrows, investigates. On her explorations she discovers a fish--not swimming, but fastened, drowned and rotting in a glass-green bankside pool. I hum a tune about a rotten fish; I think of Mr. Noir in Paris.

I first met Mr. Noir at a renters-aid office, the Département de Sous-Direction de Logement. I explained to the receptionist my not being allowed telephone service. Because I hadn't the papier-du-louer which my landlady would not give to me, I could not prove to France-Telecom that I was living somewhere and paying rent. I needed a phone and had come to this agency after two arduous and frustrating trips to the phone company. Much later I learned one might have easily solved
this problem illegally. The chairman-director of an English school in Paris explained to me, "You could have gone into any papeterie, bought a pad of the slips, and filled one out--however you liked. Yeah, it's illegal, but easier."

"See Mr. Noir," said the receptionist, looking back down at her work, "in there. . . ."

I turned the hall corner and entered the enormous high-ceilinged main room of the department of Sous-Direction-de-Logement. That means the department which (under or over) directs all matters of lodging. I soon came to believe they'd left Direction entirely out of it. Mr. Noir was old, a bit stuffy, seemed dependable at first. He greeted me cordially and asked many questions. He wanted to know whether Americans really drink as much milk as he'd heard, and why we taint our beef with steroids. When we eventually discussed my problem he seemed to listen.

He heard that I was alone with two sons in Paris; that my landlady, a witch, was taking advantage of my isolation and my trust by not providing me essential proof that I lived somewhere, was paying rent to someone. Madame la sorceress was tax-evading. Since no one could prove she was renting, she felt free to leave absurdly damaged plumbing unrepaired, and had refused to fix electric wiring which had proven alarmingly inadequate. There were burn marks in the fuse-box closet.

I was without a telephone or credibility. I must also have seemed naive. Mr. Noir was beginning to ooze, "I will help you. I will come to your aid. I will get
you the telephone. I will meet you Wednesday next week . . . you have the word
of Mr. Noir. . . ." Mr. Noir was, indeed, black. But aside from the fact that I
found his name amusing in the circumstances, Mr. Noir's actually being black
made not much impression on me. I had been raised all over the world and did
not notice color much. Besides, his personality overrode his appearance.

He was thin, Mr. Noir, thin enough so that he ought to've seemed trustworthy,
yet he did not. He exuded an air of Unctuous Bureaucrat, an air of Not-Too-
Quick-On-The-Uptake-ness. He had the air of a man who counted on petty,
unfounded social myths and weird ideas like "Hey, I get you a phone and you
become mine from desperate gratefulness."

A few musical notes, a simple little song filters in . . . DOING THE METRO
HOP.

Mr. Noir, Jean-Baptiste, if he is to be believed, told me three times to meet
him. Each time I hopped over the Métro gate (one must make these little
économies) at my own stop, changed at Nation and again at Buzenval, then
came up and outside to the soiled, never sun-lit business section of the twentieth.
The streets were one-way, very narrow. The buildings were not at all quaint. The
air was cold and thick with blowing precipitate. Mr. Noir did not appear. I went
back and forth, searching through the crowds between France-Telecom and the
Métro, then returned to the flat in the eleventh. I was anxious to be back in
time to meet the boys at their school when they were let out. I found this all extremely annoying; none of it was easy.

Why was I chasing this rotten fish, this *poisson pourri*? Because I was new to the system, I was *une femme isolée*. I had come over without any connections and had not yet learned that it is always most advantageous when dealing with bureaucracy, to bend, or cut across, or go around The Rules: to cheat.

Many daily experiences seemed designed to teach me this lesson. For example: the experience of finding myself, or all of us, at the Métro stop without tickets. My stop didn’t sell tickets. Or, what if one of my boys, Oliver or Tom, had dropped his? At our Métro gate we were first "forced," then habituated ourselves to jump. We’d jump over the stile one by one, like little sheep in a dream. If we were tired or loaded with packages--books to return, lunches to eat in gardens--Tom would jump the gate then circle back to the exit and stand so that the automatic doors would let us through. Then Oliver and I would trot in quickly, and we’d all run together to catch an in-train. (In a way, I had "cheated" in order to get our visas. After months of serious delays and long-distance calls to the French ambassador in San Francisco I had finally told the voice on the phone that I would be a student at the Sorbonne (true), but that the boys would only be staying with me "for two weeks." The visas came through immediately.

In a way it made no sense to cooperate with silly rules. The unwritten law was: People who do cooperate will be harassed and punished. (That was certainly the case with my experience acquiring the telephone.) And there didn’t seem to be
much danger involved with going on "the other side of the law." Once, coming back from bank errands, the Métro control caught me for being in first class without a first-class ticket. At L'Opéra station I had sat down, exhausted into first-class seats. These are exactly the same as second-class, except they are situated at the center of the train, and so are easier to board; and they are less crowded. When the train had passed two more stops the control came aboard to check tickets. I was ready. I had papers, but none with my address. I showed him my passport and my student card, marked Sorbonne, and gave my address as one street over. I truly had no money with me, so the bill was mailed to a place at which I would never reside. I was only minutes late arriving at the flat.

It was not the first time in my life I'd gone against the rules. But most of my current adventures seemed to be teaching me that honesty really doesn't pay, didn't matter, would have been a mistake. Nevertheless I was not comfortable "becoming dishonest," as I called it to myself. I was hesitant and stammered when, back in the U.S.A. the question put to me most often was, "Wasn't it the greatest FUN?"

Of course there were good things about our life there. Life offered many sweet compensations, miracles, little gifts and dreams. On my own street, most of the children kissed me. Regular, both-sides-of-the-face greeting kisses. Daily kisses from Ming (Chinese), Sadi (Algerian), Sebastian (French), Barbara (Haitian), and Giles (Madagascan). I was maman to Oliver and Thomas. I was happy to be
kissed. I liked being kissed in the normal goings-on of a day. Oh, but the kisses of children will not fix plumbing. Kisses cannot do the work of lime-green tubing.

I am on the way to the Gallico on Faubourg St. Antoine to buy what I have seen in the window yesterday evening. With four feet (two meters) of clear acrylic tubing I will fix The Bath! I will fasten one end to the sink hot water tap, letting the tube carry hot water over the toilet into the tub. To fasten the tube, I will use a combination face-cloth and hair-tie mechanism. It hardly drips and it will disconnect easily. Voilà! I am gaining on the witch. That's the good news.

The bad news is when I go out the door and down three flights of les escaliers. On the second landing there are empty syringes. There were boys here last night near the basin on the landing. I feel very shaky, then angry. Then, shaking with anger and fright-induced purpose I go—instead of to do my errand—straight into Bar Amicale. I must speak to Diab, the North African, and use his telephone. I must report this to the police of our quartier.

Diab and I speak of America. We discuss her effect and attitudes in Algeria during and after World War II. Discussion is a must as an opener. To discuss is a minimum perquisite; especially before asking a favor. Etiquette is due. Then I can tell him about le traffic, the drug trade on the stairs of our building. He brings the phone and sets it before me. It is difficult getting through to the station. I talk first to an operator, next a receptionist... I tell three people the story, the time, the location, "Yes. The eleventh. Yes, Rue St. Bernard... Yes,
Madame, thank you. Good morning." Diab is concerned for me and he is angry. I pay for the use of the telephone and thank him two more times. I pay for the coffee and drink it all. It is bitter. It is stimulating.

I am even more strongly motivated. To be without the phone is miserable, unjust, unsafe! I must have a telephone. I am ready to try again. Although it will probably be, as usual, quite hopeless and draining, I go once more to the agency whose job it is to solve my little ennui. I am on my way again to see Mr. Noir at the lack-of-direction-de-logement.

I make the trip a third time by Métro, changing at crowded République. Climbing the smeary steps up into the real world, I pass a very pleasant flower stand and the now familiar magazine kiosk. I notice that the Gaullishly handsome magazine vendor, whose eyes hold mine as I pass, is sporting a soft-looking, beige colored cashmere neck scarf of unbelievable, adorable length. This time Mr. Noir leaves his office with me, saying not a word to his réceptioniste as we exit. We chat, traveling the three-quarters of an hour, the three station changes to the ugly quartier. At the phone company he speaks to the secretary, flirts with an assistant, and signs a paper freeing France-Telecom to bend the rules and give me a phone. (One is given the actual telephone.) I am actually given a telephone. Service will start the next day. It is over. It is done.
In the Métro, Jean-Baptiste holds the phone. He holds my arm. He holds the attention of a woman in a wine-colored overcoat who stares at me and smirks as the train jerks away from the station, as Mr. Noir begins to describe all the places he will "one day" promenade me and the boys. I think of Bonnie Rait's song, ME AND THE BOYS. I hum it interiorly, staring back at the woman's eyes--she has the very dark circles that betray a clotted ilio-cecal valve. Mr. Noir talks on, "... to Giverny, to the Children's Park at Bois de Boulogne..." I begin listening when he changes category and tense. He hasn't said "one day" in a while. Suddenly he is speaking of THE PRESENT.

"What?" I say. "Pardon?"

"You have beer?" He leans close.

"Now? No. I do not have one." I shake my head, inch backwards. There are times when one profits by speaking in the native's tongue. I can say whatever silly things might extricate me, and saying them in his language, seem actually to be trying to do my best.

"No," he endeavors, "at your HOME. You HAVE BEER!"

"OH! Yes, I understand," I take up the box of phone. The train is slowing.

"No. Never." I look at him solemnly, "I had never thought of that. I never brought BEER to our house." I was indeed achieving success at appearing stupid. Unaware. Quite simple.

"Oh," he essays, "then you will come with me now to..."
"Oh, look! I change here—THANKS SO MUCH—My boys are getting home
now—one must fly . . ."

I jump.

"Good afternoon." Feet on the station floor, I turn to wave, and, just before the
doors come swooshing together he says—he sounds thoroughly unperturbed—he
says, "I have your number!"

Oh, Dolor. Dolores. Dolorum. I had gone into all this—had packed and taken
two boys to Paris with no help and few plans—yet somehow expecting the best. I
wanted to be, knew myself to be, capable of getting us what we needed. I had
begun bravely and continued to act brave, but courage was draining out of me.
My spine was a stem losing turgor. But I was somehow also losing softness. By
midwinter I began knowing a hardness in myself, a hardness which contracted my
entire insides and might be starting to make me look like others on the Métro.

These bad times, that November certainly, were times I needed to be able to
stand again at Hoodoo Pass, or Glen Lake, or St. Mary's peak or up on the hill
over Holter Lake.

A man said, "Similitude is the precursor to ownership," meaning: If a place
seems just like home to you, you are about to begin to claim the place.

"Similitude," I mused, "I don't feel any." Not with a place where four feet of
concrete floats between me and the Real Earth, the earth I like having my feet
on. I wanted, I needed to eat again at Chico Hot Springs and meet sweet people
who would not hit on me. I needed to walk to the top of a mountain and "de-
contract," as the French say, to relax and not be guarded. Instead . . . a hardness grew.

At Luxembourg Garden there is a thin, long, iron-fenced lawn, or *pelouse* for children to walk on. A sign explains that it is forbidden for anyone not under the age of six years to sit on the grass and such sitting by *enfants* will only be allowed on Saturdays and Wednesdays.

When no one is near me I back up to a tree, a large chestnut in the middle of the lawn. I press my spine against it.

He'd said, "I have your number. I will telephone." I was of two minds. On the one hand he HAD gone over people's heads. He had cut through red tape. I did feel grateful. But why was this wiry and not-at-all avuncular species of bureaucrat moving into peacock-strut position? I believed my best instincts had taken over and saved me.

After I'd left Mr. Noir I was elated, ashamed, exhausted. I came home by Ledru Rollin and entered the handsome cafe by Blvd. Voltaire. The owner, the husband of the hollering red-head, served me a glass of red wine and a sandwich he made then of paté and new bread. The box of telephone sat on the chair beside me. I'd had a small victory, yes. I had surpassed odds. I had persevered, yes. And I was unhappy. I resented Mr. Noir's ability to have such a bad effect on me. I hated his attitude; I hated his being nearly able to make me feel slimy,
cringing, indebted. I hated, hated, hated how I felt, but I could not see any way that anger toward Mr. Noir could possibly help me.

"Help me. Help me, please!!"

I addressed the Saints over Paris. I addressed my Guides and Spirits in case I had any. I addressed the moon, because it was the same moon I had danced beneath many a December 21, to welcome the lengthening daylight. I asked for help in a level tone; I figured: "With some help you can get back to a former strong position and be again, unbowed."

We read in the two-franc *Pariscope* that an *archevêque*, a semi- or under-pope, would be presenting parts of Christ's bones for "all the world" to kiss on Palm Sunday, over in the sixth, at Notre-Dame. (Back in the states I had been singing at mass for three years, ever since I had enrolled the boys in a Catholic school where we had been welcome and happy). BONES-TO-BE-KISSED, AND-ALSO-WITH-YOU, a little song for going across the river.

We deliberated; it would be a long day, and there would be massive crowds. We mustered energy; we brought along apples and buns. We arrived in time. Thomas, my youngest boy, was very excited. He is irrepressible, but also conscientious. He stopped, perplexed, at the aisle. He took in the situation and reported, "MOM! People are kissing it and HAVING COMMUNION--I haven't DONE my official first communion. What'll we DO?!?!?--I can't cheat the archbishop!"
I drew him, speaking in the nonstop, child-calming TONE, and with very authoritarian-sounding assurances, over to the narthex. We had a talk. He was insistent, but we arrived at an understanding. He wanted this. His heart was ready.

So, in love and awe, back straight, eyes shining, Thomas progressed with his brother in the holy queue. He kissed the relic just ahead of me, received the sacrament and was blessed by the archevêque who met my eyes and nodded. Tom took his first communion on Palm Sunday in Paris at Notre-Dame, and kissed an ancient, improbable part, a very old, but multiply and soberly blessed bit of God.

That was some help. And now that we had a phone number we could legally join the libraries. We joined three. I read an Italian, Aldo Carotenudo. I paraphrase his intriguing idea: In a crisis or challenge situation, by NOT jerking quickly to one iron-clad view, by, instead, holding the right to remain open you may arrive at, or make available, a not-so-obvious alternative solution. Thus I posit: A person who waits to react is perhaps being brave.

The sun is slanting winter thin. I make the long but direct trip to L'Opéra. I have some difficult business at the banks, after which I will indulge myself by visiting a favorite place. I ride an escalator to the highest floor of Galeries Lafayette. There is a cafeteria on the top floor where store employees can rest and eat. At midmorning it is usually uncrowded. I take a small yogurt and a
coffee, then climb the one flight of stairs which leads up to the roof. I am in luck: the doors are unlocked.

All alone I scrutinize the tops of monuments. I am eye-level with the Opera's top-most gargoyles. The air is cold and thick and smells of dirty iron and dusty pigeon dirt. It smells of food, of voices, of dull machines, of wool and hair and the spices of dinners from all sides of all the tracks anywhere. In a way I am on top of another mountain.

I descend. Galeries Lafayette is a huge, domed, seven-storied, international department store. When I am inside, it seems to me that everyone in the world is in there. It is an on-going theater-piece with continual added distractions. Sometimes I ache with envy to see perfect, lily-white hands selling 400$ scarves; or I feel smart and lucky to be finding a fine but bargain-priced coat for one of the boys. This day, the day of The Rubber-Band Girl, I was down on the ground floor in hats. I stood still in front of an oval mirror.

I was pulling a black veil down to my nose, noticing more how the world looked through it--the world looked geometric, lined by parallelograms--than how I looked. The Rubber-Band Girl came right up to me. She was a girl/woman with shiny black hair and straight-across bangs. She lumbered past racks of wool tams and berets, making straight for me. She sang. I heard her coming and was at first confused, until the head-voice explained, "THIS IS ENGLISH NOW. USE THE ENGLISH SIDE OF THE BRAIN." She arrived and stood, nearly toe-to-toe, in front of me, "HALLOWE'EN, HALLOWE'EN," she explained.
"Pardon?" I stalled. This was happening much faster than the slow pace at which I had been working my way toward the exit. Two rather young women came up behind her, "This is Helen," they introduced and, "We love taking Helen shopping." Meanwhile Helen had taken my hand in hers and was gently giving me five rubber-bands, assorted: fat and thin, red, blue, and brown.

"For me? Oh, thank you--do you REALLY want to give me all your lovely rubber bands?" I was as pleased as she was.

"She loves her rubber bands," one of the girls said. "She can spot them half a block away, honest. Come on . . . Come try on hats, Helen. Here, try this peachy one." Helen had a strong will, apparently, though she seemed very sweet, very generous. "I'm RESTING," she said in a decisive tone of voice, planting herself in a molded chair beside the changing booths. Then, in a rather loud voice, she began announcing: "ALL STAND AT THE LINE, NOWWWWW--go! AND they're off, folks . . . and these guys here are coming along and HERE'S Alfred. Good, Alfred. HERE'S Tommy, Robin, Jacob, Cissy, Francis, Lenora, Bill Johnson, David. GOOD going, David . . .

"ALL STAND AT THE LINE, NOWWWWW--" she began again, a little more quietly. Her companions, trying on hats, explained. They had all three been, the day before, to the Special Olympics' races at Helen's school, in St. Germain-des-Près.

"And that Helen, boy, she likes to memorize her special days, yeah . . . oh, yikes! There she goes again--HELEN!"
Helen sped away, more quickly than I would have imagined she could, and came back from behind a cigarette-ash can. "Got one!--Got another one!" She plopped back down and rested with her rubber band. "We love taking her out," said the girl who had decided on a navy tam. She turned toward me, "she likes you. Helen must like you a lot to have given you those."

When I started back to the eleventh the sun was already slanting. The air was colder and the wind seemed molecularly bonded to the fumes and street dirt. That day I bought a *carnet*, or notebook full of tickets, and I did not hop the gate.

The phone was ringing as I approached our landing on the third floor. "Hello? Oh, hello Mr. Noir. Jean Baptiste. Of course. No. I was going out just now. Swimming. I swim. I SWIM," I repeated. "And can only swim from 4 till 5:30 . . . at Georges Rigal. Yes, sorry. Yes I promise I'll speak to you soon. Yes. Sorry. Thank you. Bye." In truth I would walk to the school just down our street to pick up Oliver and Tom.

I did swim, usually. But not anything like as regularly as I had in America. Before going to Paris I swam at least every other day . . . I would look at the water ahead of me and tell it, "I am swimming to France."

Now "swimming" necessitates a very long walk--sometimes a run--uphill along Rue de Charonne through markets, past Métro entrances and across Blvd. Voltaire. Inside Georges Rigal, the community pool and gym building, I pay my money, then ask the
gardien for a bag. I change clothing and give the gardien the bag with everything I have in it. I wash, then enter the pool area.

Although the black lines look the same the world over (something I keep under me and move along), there is no order in the way we swim here. At Georges Rigal one swims in chaos. There are no roped lanes, there is no diligence. People scream and splash; movement is random and arrhythmic. We really resemble—but are noisier than—a laboratory Petri dish. Magnified germs we are, all colors. Lovely brown Arab and Chinese children jump and push horizontally, as seen through the micro. Large boy on slow inner tube sloshes North to South, then off the slide . . .

Besides there not being any lap swimming at Georges R., the dressing rooms are combined during the winter months. That is, one side (men's or women's) shuts down, to save money I presume; and everyone goes all together to dress and wash. I love to swim, but find I don't always have a solid enough persona, a thick enough aura, to want to go through it all regularly. I can usually manage swimming against the splash and happiness of the other swimmers, but I can never consider it relaxing to stand in my worn swim suit, trying not to pay attention to bathing with (never less than) six men rinsing, all in a line, with me. It's getting so that the only swimming I really enjoy is in my sleep. I dream of Georges Rigal.
I hear the click of metal on tile as the lifeguard walks around the pool, letting a buoyant belt drag Bink . . . Bink . . . Bink . . . behind him. I float on my back, alone over the undisturbed clear black lines. Bink . . . Bink . . . Bink . . .

The lines, I realize, waking, are quite straight when the water is undisturbed. I can still see them. But when the water’s roiled you could easily think them jagged or wavy. They seem to hop and dance. How do people paint things like this?

--I have to get up and get the children breakfast.

Mr. Noir thinks he looks solid to me (like the straight line), but I only see him flighty and jumping all over the place.

--We’re out of chocolate; I can make them tea.

Mr. Noir thinks he looks flashy and dashing and fascinating (like the dancing lines) up there on the surface. But I know deep down underneath in him is something all-dark, solid and unremitting . . .

I’ve gone from swimming in my sleep to philosophizing. Must I see two sides to everything, even Mr. Noir?

It is still dark. Suddenly barrels of broken glass crash into the metal bed of a truck. I run to look from our third-story windows. "Boys! Boys! Come see this, wake up!" It’s the glass factory’s trash day! A dump truck stands directly below. Above it a crane tips a very large, top-filled barrel of glass down into the truck’s basket. A steady stream of glitter and AMAZING noise continues for two long minutes . . . It crescendos and ends with the truck engine revving, the crane gearing down, and the screams and honks as people in cars backed up in the one
lane canyon of street become passionate with the thrilling, outrageous shriek of it all.

This is the way the boys go off: I kiss them out of the door of our flat, then wrap a coat around me, throw open the french windows, lean over the ancient iron railing and wave them to school. The boys pop out of the huge ground floor door and appear, very small now, down in the street. Tom is always first. Oliver ambles. "GOODBYE! MMMM! I love you tooooo." I pull in the doors, it is cold, and I fasten the latches. My phone rings.

"Oh, Margaret, hello," it's my English neighbor straight across the way--but she is crying! She tells me, "MY husband's already gone off to work, the baby's got to be taken to the creche, and I'm . . . vomiting, oh, it's really awful . . ." She cries again. "And now I have diarrhoea as well . . . and company's coming and I need to go to the market."

"I'm coming right now." I slam down the phone, pull on tights, a skirt, a heavy sweater. The phone rings.

"Hiyee, where shall we go on Sunday?"

"My neighbor is vomiting," I tell him and slam down the phone.

What a day it was, cleaning, wheeling the two-year-old off in his stroller to his nursery school. Then I rushed to the Wednesday market to find the yellow, good-tasting North African potatoes she wanted. She was SO sick. She ended up not having the dinner guests, of course . . . We were such friends then and ever after. After she'd let me nurse her and all.
Late that afternoon, at 3:00, when I still had an hour before I'd walk over to meet the boys, I ran a bath. The hot water took a long time, but was entirely worth it. I sat in the tub for 20 minutes and was really content then. Margaret had let me help her. A life-long friendship was beginning. I'd had to talk to many new people at the Marché d'Aligre and had searched for a new vegetable. I had done well. And I was in warm water, at peace with myself.

The telephone rings.

Gathering one of our new cheap Haitian cotton bath towels around my waist, I step out of the bathroom and cross the boys' tiny room in three steps. I bring the receiver to my very clean ear. He is shrieking. He is sticking me with well-sharpened, well-aimed attacks. He is (IS HE?) stinging me with horrid accusations. I don't catch all of the accelerated français, but the general energy and intent seems very clear, "You have treated me un-nobly!--led me on! You OWE me . . ." I hardly notice setting it gently down on the rug, and I swim away from the phone. I hum a little tune about a rotten fish. I twirl, I glide like a dancer--no, like a breast-stroker--through afternoon beams of sunlight . . . The noise of Mr. Noir . . .

. . . recedes.
LUNAR EVAN LEARNS FENG-SHUI

Lunar Evan is pale—not as the grass under dead leaves is thin, etiolated, but pale, as if what illumines him has traveled far and is not solar or lunar, but is a zodiacal light. Evan worked in a daycare for privileged children. Life is full of irony. He had to get experience here in order to qualify for his university entrance, in order to train so that one day he could teach third-world children, or public-school children, or homeless children.

These whined. Edna Calligary whined if her hair was not smooth, or if her gloves became wet. Bertrand Scott begged "more cookies, more cookies!" at 10 a.m. snack. Janey Jasper's boots had to be clicked shut, each clasp. If it wasn't done for her, she stood scowling, implacable, "Mommie does!" she ordered.

Evan was sure that needy children wouldn't have learned imperiousness. They would be Sharon, Jack, Janet, or Luciano, Carlos, Jorges—grateful, receptive, intuitive, and self-reliant. He would come home tired, but enthusiastic. Not like this: tired, and doubting, and angry, and self-righteous. "I'm no better than they are! I hate my own disposition here!" He wondered which direction these children slept in at night.

He had read somewhere about Fung-Shui, the Chinese art of geomancy, how placement of objects or furniture in a house can bring bad luck or insure good luck to the occupants.
Evan went to the library. Miss Kanoby listened to his question with staring eyes, firm lips; she hissed "no such thing in the world as Fung-Shoi. It's Fung-Shui." But it wasn't. It turned out to be Feng-Shui.

He read about rules for the house:

The bed needs to face the doorway of the room, but not so that the foot of it is in a direct line with the door. The desk of the student must not be situated so that the student's back is unprotected.

He read about the history of landscaping:

The landscape teems with life: demons, guardians, spirits of the mountains, pools, springs, trees, and rocks... all of these could become objects for veneration, fear, or placation...

After reading all the available books on Feng-Shui and ordering more from inter-library loan, Evan visited the second-hand stores on Alder. He liked a small, beaten end-table and a napless red velvet davenport. Sitting on that sofa, he felt himself slightly tilted forward, "about to eject," he thought, "ready to go." Lying down on it was very comfortable. Evan is very tall and tends to drape himself over furniture like a basking lizard. It is one of the few ways he lets down, one of the few comforts he allows himself.

"But it looks so odd there," Chancey said a month later. "That's very odd--its cutting across the room that way, and the lamp won't plug in anywhere near there. . . ."

At first Evan didn't answer. Then he drew an official boy-scout compass from his coat pocket. "Lookit. Look at this, Chancey: it's exactly east and west. This line going through and down the length of the sofa is exactly, precisely on the
true east-west axis: much healthier!" He was patient, "and the mirrors, across from each other by the front door--hmmm, I hope the beer advertising doesn't deter--this gives the occupants Peace of Mind every time we pass between them."

Evan read from his book,

"To be in the right place, facing the right direction, doing the right thing, at the right time is, then, a cross between being practically efficient and being ritually correct. It is being in tune with the universe . . . (Stephan Feuchtwang) . . . many look for Shangri-la on the surface of the earth, others voyage within for illumination. . . .

. . . it goes on. . . . I just want for things to be perfect, sweetie. Perfect. Perfect."

They had met two years before in Boulder, Colorado. Evan had been in love with her then, but Chancey was in a long phase of attracting husky, handsome, needy alcoholics. She just wanted to be buddies with Evan. In Missoula he wrote to the Messenger: "Here is my ad for your lonely-hearts club":

Mildly bizarre grad-student seeks strong, sensible, serious girl for companionship.

He had herbal tea with three of them. Naomie was a shot-puter; that appealed to Evan, but she had very chapped lips, and her armpits stank. "Musty," Evan called it. Evan kept in touch with her, as he admired her honesty, but there was no chemistry. Samantha glided like a zombie, had beautiful eyes and, for the first hour, murmured softly between gritted teeth at him; they agreed to drop it. Heather never returned his calls. They met, but try as he might, never met again.

In September Chancey appeared at his door and told him, "I saw the ad and found your address in the student directory." She walked right in the door with
celery and cantaloupe from the farmers' market, silk shorts from a street vendor on lower Higgins. She said, "I missed you, Lunar Evan." She was all through with Colorado.

(Chancey was born where? I do not know. How? Feet first, after 36 hours of labor. Consequently she feels diffident and searches for Peace and for Calm. Chancey is the essence of whatever Evan is the shadow of. She is sunlight and directness, she is impetuosity and luck. She is spontaneity equipped with inborn, unquestioned trust. "If faith is a thing thought about, trust is the same feeling strong and naked and acted upon--so fast, even before it can be a thought," Chancey told Evan.

Evan begins the renewed relationship, open, trusting, but repressed.)

That autumn Chancey liked to roam along logging roads until she rounded the sunniest bend and, from there, climb the muscular, plump curves of the mountain. She looked for the place where she'd be held, nestled, nested. She would lie that way, on a high, high haunch of terra firma and communicate with the sun through her eyes and skin, the earth in close touch with her spine.

"See, when you're tired, you can always connect with Earth energy, Evan. It's better than eating; cleaner, quicker. Draw the energy up through the soles of your feet, then from your sacrum, slowly all along the way to and through the top of your brain, your ancient old animal brain. There, see? See how strong you feel?"
He liked that. And he liked being with her, but always sat away from her under a ponderosa, or inside a thicket of larch. "The sun will give you cancer, Chancey. Don't you know enough to be afraid?"

At first she laughed at Evan's conscientious, rule-following tendencies, and she defended them and defended him in her mind. A couple needed to be balanced. Her impulsiveness required his fervent regard for detail. Most of the time. But every now and then a pressure grew that felt like surface tension, like liquid about to spill over.

She was cold in the winter and moved the fuzzless, heavy sofa toward the south window of the living room. She was knitting, learning a complex Isle of Skye pattern when Evan surprised her. She was pleased, and her small face grinned at him. He noticed how lush her hair became, back-lit by the thin winter sunlight. He couldn't reprimand her then, but thought, "what a conflict."

Like the body, any house has orifices, doors and windows which need to take in the flow of ch'i which must then be circulated without stagnating to enable the house to breathe. However, these openings must be well guarded against the direct ingress of any "secret arrows" . . .

Occasionally they go to lunch downtown, often to the Greek cafe on Higgins. One afternoon at the end of the meal, they take coffees. It is Evan who is delighted when a minute map of Crete peaks above the tipped coffee in his tiny, ornate cup. "Oh, I'll be wired now," Evan smiles, then he becomes somber, "I'll be really wired."
"Don't look so serious." Chancey's eyes are round, steady. "I'll take care of all that mis-fired energy." She stands on tiptoe as he pulls on his long, shawl-collared sweater. She licks his earlobe, "I'll find some way to un-tensify you, detensify, non-contract you."

But Evan is serious, irritated, "Sex isn't always the answer, Chancey."

"No, stupid, but it's a fine way to get to the answer."

Chancey pulls the coverlet from the bedroom, makes a nest by the front window and sits there, cuddled, enjoying the morning light. "Why not on the sofa?" Evan comes home, smiles at her childishness.

"The sofa, due to annoying, but propitious Feng-Shui regulations, is in the wrong position!!!" Hours have been spent arguing, fighting over positions. Sometimes it's a joke; sometimes it's not at all funny.

She likes trying lots of "positions" to tease him. He chuckles deep in his chest, satisfied. He has his arm around her as they sit on the ill-lighted sofa, her head on his bony shoulder. Evan combs her thick hair with the long fingers of his pale hand, then, with a fist of it, he wiggles her whole head. He says, "Still, Chancey. Still."

She dreams of Giant Bubbles. A negro Santa Claus high on a hill, near a bucket he dips into. He makes giant-wand bubbles. Children wave their hands through chill air. They run and tumble down a colorless hill. Evan lands from a
pedal-powered, micro-light aircraft and, with a sword of recycled cardboard, he slays, he runs through the marvelous, fly-away bubbles. All the colors along the giant sides of the glorious bubbles are disintegrated, disappeared. "And where does all that wasted color go?" Chancey wonders, waking up.

"Evan, it feels like you want to undercut my happiness--it feels like my spontaneity is some kind of faith and your nay-saying is bringing me to my knees."

Evan was bewildered. Why, if he tried so hard, if he followed what he thought the rules were, why did he not gain?

Lunar Evan took a stress-management course. Someone said: Imagine a safe place.

You are perfectly relaxed. Evan thought hurriedly, "Then it can't have any furniture . . . it has to be empty. The desert of the Southwest.

"I lie next to a dry stick and feel . . . unattached. I feel lonely. The night is warm, the moon is full . . . a ring of faceless shadows forms around me . . . they like me and begin to chant and to circle to the left (square-dance ghosts!) . . . I giggle into sleep. I sleep and am renewed . . . A little dog comes and tells me she possesses the gift of prophesy but doesn't like to best her peers. She chooses not to show off her gift. Much later, iron bracelets fall down my arms, off my hands, and roll, roll off into the desert . . ."
After they make love, Evan wants to buy a whole house to live in with Chancey. Brick and roaming with verandas all around it. Sometimes he thinks of this when he sees her eat cereal. It crossed his mind once when he came into the apartment and saw beside the front door her small black Wellington boots.

Lunar Evan waits in the dead winter light, alone. He wonders, "Where is Chancey? What is she making happen now? Why is he letting himself be in this terrible position of not knowing? Is it worth it?" Is the ecstasy of his beginning to really know her worth this ravaging UN-knowingness? Now, in the grey light Evan stands to lose more than he’s ever known, felt. Now that he is opened, he might well be emptied, drained. . . . He decides the only way to gain anything out of his present condition is to hang tight; something to do with faith. He might choose to be peaceful, if not happy, while he waits.

Subtly the light changes, is glowing. The light grows until there is strong, unobstructed sun on the wooden blinds, through them. Evan knows she will be coming home any minute.

Before spring, even in early February, she began wandering the high roads again, in search of warming light, and she wanted Evan along . . . he still believing he must always stay away from sun. "There are rules. It has been proven, Chancey. People die from too much sun. Melanoma. Death. I have an aunt and a cousin dead from melanoma." He stayed under trees when she sat,
luxuriating. He called out, "There is no more ozone . . . the air is too thin up here in these negative ions. You could at least have eaten carrots!"

Right here, (if this were the movie, if you were lazier and not even reading this) right here is when the synthesizer begins to groan, very, very low at first. Now they are laughing, walking down the mountain road, Chancey and Lunar Evan, holding hands. A close-up shot not far away, of huge wheels churning, (churning is what movie-wheels do) dust, or grinding mud deep out of back-road potholes. One final view now: a ray of pure joy shining from Evan’s eye to Chancey--now we know they’re in true danger and right here the synthesized moan becomes discernible. The loaded logging truck (name, Adrienne) barrels down upon them, cannot stop its great weight coming down a steep grade with too much abandon. The driver (in a plastic baseball cap, team name not discernible sees them and swerves into a giant ponderosa, which makes a squeaky-yelling noise as he whooshes past and around the bend. Lying in the ditch a few feet apart, they draw a deep breath. Both are safe! Their eyes meet. They hear the rending as a large limb, torn by the top of the truck’s load rips free and falls--so straight, so unscientifically, bolt-straight downward onto Evan’s body.

"Severe necrosis. But for the clement weather, shock might have taken him. Good thing he lay in the sun," the doctor told her.
Chancey visits him and tells him about her other, her former lovers—not much, but enough to let Evan know and really be able to believe he suits her the best. Willie was tall, black, and much younger, and, "he drank much more than he came to see me." Craig was gorgeous, worked out, had a radio voice, but no long-term morals. Alex, a bisexual and bookstore owner, took her to openings, concerts, even a week to his condo (skiing). With Alex she noticed she did less and less on her own or with friends. Around Alex the real Chancey seemed to thin out, "I evaporated."

"Yuk, I feel awful, hearing this--why are you telling me this? Why?" His face was no whiter, after weeks in hospital. Chancey thought that odd.

"Because I admire you, because I'm all new now, anyway—you make me into a new person, Evan. Oh, Evan, I like who I am around you. It's my real, on-my-toes, challenged, clear self around you. You."

Weeks later, before going home, Evan begged his school-teaching buddies to move the bed. "It's either that or the way the sidewalk points straight up to the house, but the steps should be mitigating the straight line of dangerous ch'i. . . ."

They go up into the hills to spend a long afternoon for the first time since the accident; it will be a simple walk and a picnic. She sits, wearing shorts in a pond of strengthening, late-spring sunlight and is reading Japanese Court Poetry. Finding a sentence she must share, "Wow, in 523 a.d. they thought feeling was much, much more estimable than mere thought," she starts to call out. Chancey
looks over at him for a long time. Lunar Evan sits a little apart from her, just inside the edge of the forest shadows. He is wearing his old long brown shawl-collared sweater and his grey wool navy-surplus cap with the ear-flaps pulled down.
The man beached the boat and gazed at the blue-green gulf; there was nothing he could do to help the world. He had fished since early morning. After breakfast, he had unplugged the war on his way off the porch. "Excess Patriot anti-missile missiles had been . . ." "Stopped," he said aloud, stomping out; and then he'd fished all morning. Now, in addition to/as well as the Gulf War (not his gulf, thank goodness), he kept thinking of the Einstein article. "Grave. Grave." The war and the rejected/re-emergent Einstein theory seemed to be trying to defeat him.

In 1917 Einstein had worked out a theorem, then shelved it, concerning the existence of what he called the Cosmological Constant. He needed there to be this Cosmological Constant in order to make his mathematical equation (Relativity) come out even. What Einstein believed and posited was that the universe must contain a Repulsive Force, i.e., throughout the universe there must exist these pockets of negativity and evil. The man had read a British journal. Three Oxford physicists argued that the existence of the force represented by the Cosmological Constant would solve several problems with standard theory about the universe. "It should be taken seriously," wrote Estathiou, Sutherland, and Maddox. "It's a possibility that we have to take seriously." Einstein had eventually lost faith in the Cosmological Constant; he had decided that his assumption must be wrong. . . .
Not the man. The man believed. Looking out to sea, he knew. "Pockets of evil." He turned, carried the cleaned fish up to the outside (porch) refrigerator, then brought the bucket of fish-heads out to the only shady space on his front-yard dock. He knotted a length of cotton twine through one gill and out through the neck opening of a spot-fish. He lowered this into the non-warring gulf and waited, humming.

Yesterday he had been listening to the radio on his porch. He had crossed through the kitchen where fish soup simmered for their supper. From the doorway the livingroom was cool and dark, the only light dim through slanted leaf-sheaths. He stood watching.

His stripling son stood practicing ventriloquism before the full-length glass.

"Bababamamama," he appeared to murmur through his left hand. Head-to-foot two of him studied not seeming to be saying something. The man thought, "Is this because of the divorce?!"

Two bright heads turned to face the man, "Daddy! Watch!"

His left hand, held at shoulder height, was the puppet. Humming a nasally grunt, he swallowed water from the cup in his thin right hand. There was a pause. He bowed, a full, five-second bow. Head up, his look enquired, then brightened, "What do you think? When I'm singing, I don't really drink it. Cool, huh. Couldn't sing, get it? When I'm singing, I hold it in my mouth. I swallow
while I bow—you couldn’t tell. You couldn’t even tell, could you? Neat isn’t it.

Dad?”

The man nodded. The boy turned back to the mirror. The room was large and leafy green. The man nodded, "Yes."

Four in the pail, the man added giant crab number five. As the man added to the large bucket, the bottomers writhed—a clanking, armored, prehistoric writhing. Any crab who rose above was brought back by his peers. Bane of togetherness. Whenever any big or little individual managed to scrape or raise itself close to the high rim, a bottom crab reached up a claw and pulled him back. It was never the shortcoming—so to speak—of any individual which obviated his escape to freedom, but the tribal energy—the undivided group-urge which demanded togetherness, even if it meant being soup. Malevolent Bisque.

"So," he said aloud, eyes widened in disgust, "Estathiou, Maddox, and Sutherland re-believe in the Repulsive Force, do they? Negativity Center, hmmm? One less now."

He nudged the bucket over. The crabs plopped into and underneath the light green gulf and, sinking down, dispersed. They crabbed off (the man imagined). They crusticated sideways on the bottom, separate ways.

"So much for Dark Pockets."

The man above them, in the sun, put back his head and laughed. But tears were forming in his eyes as he said aloud, though no one else was listening,

"There you are . . . One for you, Einstein."
It was Autumn. "The earth is pulling us into herself," thought Angela. "I feel heavy, and I know I'm going mortally dormant; I am ready now to lie forever gazing up under ice." Instead here she sat doing sewing-cards in a daycare center, holding a cross-eyed blonde baby.

She remembered a "group" conversation during her prison stay. A man had interrupted her and demanded, "What if you stopped hating your mother for leaving you--what would you have to give up?"

So Angela wondered, "What if I do stop hating my mother for leaving us? What would I have to give up?" She hugged the blonde toddler. She thought, "I am not seeing things any less whacky than this look-awry baby. I am seeing my life from as warped a perspective. . . . And around me I see only dead air between empty trees," she interrupted herself. She had a way of going very fast inside her head and moving very slowly, very cautiously in the real, the physical, the outside world. "I must get done with blaming Mama for driving off at night--yes. Here. Very good! The way I yelled she had to drive out of my life!" She kissed the frilly yellow tonsure and concentrated on quieting herself, holding herself together.

Twenty years ago at night, a mother had disappeared. Two daughters were orphaned. One girl had believed this loss an unforeseeable accident; she grieved with understanding. But, the elder girl felt left-on-purpose. So the one with the faith in the absent mother continued doing well in high school. She married a
fine man and overprotected him, wanting this kind of treatment herself, you see, since she too had felt and suffered abandonment—even if only by reason of Fate.

Meanwhile the older, outwardly, and wholly mistrusting girl blamed herself and knew she'd surely done enough to make a sane woman turn and leave her. She felt all shame and guilt and quit school and tried drugs and became what she herself considered immoral because any reason to do right was now gradually, permanently, absent. She worked on and off at cafe jobs, then bar jobs, then as an exotic dancer. She'd moved through nowhere south Florida towns toward the beach cities, but the girl fared badly. She never wanted--nor was able to arouse sympathy. She eventually served five years in prison for grand theft.

The mother had driven with another woman to a nearby town to see a movie. That was what she'd told her daughters. And when she had been missing for ten years, when her daughters were about 26 and 28 years, changes began.

About this time a skeleton was recovered, found at the mouth of the Myakka River near the Gulf. It was believed to be the body of the friend of the girls' mother, but for some reasons the police never said for sure. No one was ever certain. The younger (married) sister said she'd known without a doubt that "something terrible had happened, that there had been some murder, some fantastic outrage," but within the year she left her husband and their two children, 6 and 8. There was one change.
The older sister, Angela, finished her time in jail, was considered rehabilitated, and was released. She began holding down good jobs, being successful at work, but she was lonely. She worked at an enormous miniature-golf course until a woman she knew from the laundromat told her how nice the people were at such-and-such a daycare. Angela applied for a job there and was accepted. Acceptance all around.

Five years go by, and finally Angela is seeing, kind of living with a plumber named Maitland Lansboro. She occasionally gets letters from her far-away sister whose last job was in Sri-Lanka. She had been an airport ticket salesperson. She had even been in charge of helping the planes to park; she got to put the wooden wedge against the front wheel.

Angela had a daily schedule—a life that she could like. She hummed very quietly to the young child in her lap. Her time in jail was burned permanently into her memory as not-forgettable, not re-liveable. The day they released her, she remembered going into a restaurant. She remembered wondering whether they could tell how insane she was—how insane (she was sure) she looked. "I can walk and speak, but please do not let anyone touch me. If anyone touches me, all of my fluids—my fast fires, my sick pus, my slow center—will burst out of the point of contact." Blind madness was raging throughout all Angela’s under-skin membranes. She was pent-up and knew her corpuscles would crack at a touch.
Oh, one eye-glance, one sweet smile, one near-brush touch of compassion and on that one spot of skin: Eruption: Angela's guts will out!

"Elephant finished? Shall we do ducks?"

The child had exhausted himself staring through his right eye--only at his work. He leaned against Angela's soft chest, clean sweat-shirt, and gave over to resting. Soon he slept; yet Angela continued holding him. She knew as well as anyone that someone cared enough to want him to be cared for during the time they couldn't be bothered with him.

It was after she changed to the daycare job that she began dating. She arrived at a time when she could be touched. Then, she wanted to be touched--and immediately. She dated every Peter, Dick, and Willie feeling nothing until one day she felt Maitland: listening. He was hearing her and knowing her and he was still around, in spite of thoroughly understanding her.

Angela came home from work early one Wednesday afternoon--the night Maitland always went to his poker game at Chucky Gunther's. She lit a golden candle. She melted it onto a Corelle-Wear salad plate and placed it on a cloth napkin at about the center of the patterned rug in the living room. She whispered. She made up a ritual. "I want a live baby, God. But I cannot do it to her. Everything so far has been decided; everything has always been done to me, in spite of me. So take this freedom from me. Give me a sign. Make something Yes or No. Show me." She stared into the flame, needing, expecting grace.
Maitland, it turned out, was supportive and divinely in love with Angela throughout her pregnancy. The rose on Angela's left breast, way out by the nipple, bloomed, and increased a quarter-inch in width as all of Angela got ready for production. Maitland had clean hands at the end of his plumber's overall sleeves. He made her milkshakes with eggs and nutritional yeast to keep her and the infant fed, "This says 2,000 calories now and a thousand more once you're nursing," he hollered joyfully over the noise of the blender. It was always hot; it was hard for her to eat enough. In the mornings, Maitland rubbed Angela's feet. He once pedicured her toenails. He dug holes on the beach so that Angela could lie on her stomach and bronze her "behind legs."

Near the end of her ninth month, a letter came from Madagascar. "Why I'd Rather Not Bother Being a Steep-Hill Climber, by your sister, Ashley." It was a silly diatribe against Risk from a sister who did all the risking in their blown family:

I look up and it's too much, suddenly. I know one step after the other will get me up there, but it's also unbelievable! How could I conquer that enormous amount of *Earth*—that vast, looming, giant hummock upon which human beings are only *ants*! So. I will stay right here down in the depths, perspective-less. Without perspective. Without overlook, without Promise—except the promise of Forever Remaining the Same. Why spend the effort? All that exertion will not tell me Anything for Certain. *No answers. No insurance,* that, with my body exercised and my mind changed, I will feel better permanently."
Angela thought it was a stupid letter, because she had been happy lately.

Except that she mistrusted the safe feeling. Security felt unfamiliar. Angela brooded. "That is the problem. I am thinking too much. Turn off, Mind!"

Angela's mind drifts as her own body begins work. Hard work. Satisfying work. Waves of work blotting out every thought--of cleaning these dishes, of sunlight, of Presence in time on Tuesday morning. She was singing? Crying? Swelling and sliding on solid-black liquid waves. Presence was her own blood pounding, and this radio-static sound of the ground coming up to meet her as she fainted.

Angela sat on the floor. She felt her brain beginning, trying to talk to her. She held the infant in her left arm, reached into the drawer by her head for the scissors and two green twist-ties. She tied the cord eight inches from the middle of the child and ten inches further along, toward what must be the afterbirth all over the throw rug beneath her, beneath the sink. She felt fine. She stood up.

She was thinking of--she saw her mother's back. She was feeling again how it felt that Mama had not kissed her. She could see her skipping out now--still, singing all the way to the car. The car door slammed like a lid over her and Angela began to cry. She cried and slid her daughter's wrinkled face beneath the clean, warm, unused dish bubbles in the kitchen sink.

Maitland stopped going to Chucky's; Angela was not prosecuted, but institutionalized. She isn't recognizing anyone. She only sits. There will be a divorce. While the divorce is pending, there is a newscast on Radio WKXY out
of Sarasota about a rusty blue 1970 Chevy just found with a small adult skeleton inside. The car has been raised up from out of the Myakka River, close to right under the bridge where Highway 72 crosses. The amazing thing is that the tires are still inflated. The bones from inside it have now been positively identified; but the name of the female, missing now for 16 years, cannot be released until notification of her relatives. There were apparently two daughters, neither of whom can be reached.
Domagne-de-Bagard, land of the bandits. Before the running of the bulls, before the fair has opened for the night, a woman sits along the counter of her booth in the warm late afternoon. With her left hand, she caresses her young son's small back, his thin brown spine. The air is very hot. Her hand moves slowly, lovingly along his bones and up into his lush, dark, curly hair. When she turns toward me, her face is without even a trace of curiosity or suspicion. She smiles.

That is how I photographed and first met Natalie. She was large, gentle, and sweet, but red-haired. Sebastion, her three-year-old son, had traces of Natalie in his wide, accepting face, but was built and complected like the ancestors of his tall, pale, Algerian father, Saddi, olive skinned with thick, dark hair and rich brown eyes. In summer the family traveled with the fair (la foire) all over southern France, northern Italy, and Basque Spain. In winter they made their home in Nimes, where Saddi refinished antique chairs and sofas in a cousin’s shop. I know all this because it was Natalie who helped me escape from France.

My name is Mattie—though Natalie always called me Mathilde—and I had come from up north, from Paris at the end of a wearing sojourn. I studied French while teaching English at a business school for well-raised boys. After two years of living carefully, deliberately, I grew impetuous. I'd accepted this invitation (although paying my own way), and had traveled south to this vacation "gîte" with a man I am now beginning to dread. His plan was for me to rest and "to change
your ideas." But Patrice has grown sullen down here in the South. He is stolid, slow, and dull like a bull. A mistake. Every day I walk away from the gîte.

I go up here to be away. I need, I love heights and excitement, but I like a little security, protection as well. So I seek declivities, little bowls in the earth, the beginnings of caves. From high, dry mountains, I can overlook and photograph the snaking river, the toy-model, middle-ages town. Along a 2,000, maybe a 100,000 year-old track I climb the hills above the river into Sauve. The earth is desiccated, crumbly. The leaves of these high-elevation bushes and the tight little trees are green-white and thin. The higher I go, the more rocks, the fewer the plants, the hotter the sky. Altogether opposite from the deep, lush river bottom.

If I veer to the left near the top of ridge, I will soon be at Mer-des-Roches, the sea of rocks. It is a desert/lunar landscape, bleak, exhilarating. From the highest points one oversees 20 miles of the Midi. I spend time here, too. But that day of beginnings, I bear to the right and come between deep old village walls--the edges of Sauve, and Max is standing in his doorway.

He has heard my steps, silent on dry dirt, begin to scrape on the road of deep, dug stone. "Salut!" From his arched doorway, Max interrogated me the first time, weeks ago, when I began to pass by. He was charming, most polite, but thorough in his examination of me (not many strangers appear on the mountain approach to Sauve). He was like a gatekeeper. Soon, thought, I was welcomed even by his son, Dominique, the potier.
Now Max harbors me, warm mornings, upstairs above the restaurant which Dominique’s wife’s family owns. We drink pastis or coffees inside the ancient rock-wall salon high over Sauve’s river walls. I write or simply sit to be away from Patrice and his anachronistic mother. Max asked me, "Tell me what you are resting from?" but I think, "wrestling from . . ."

He, and most of the entire small town have regarded Patrice during summers, recent years. He’s heard the term, "fénéant" in reference to Patrice.

"That means whining."

"Or n’er-do-well. Or coward," Dom offers.

"Oh, no--it’s just that he’s between jobs now, out of work . . . the family was back-stabbed by a new owner of the company who has made so many changes in the business." Always, my inclination to speak well of the poor underdog.

Just the same that term, fénéant hangs there in the southern air. Oppressive. I feel I must decide trying to wait out the two more weeks. I decide to be hopeful and patient enough to wait and to return all together, genially, to Paris amidst calm good feelings as we had planned. Why, then, do I not feel calm?

I feel full of too much energy. I don’t know why I’m nearly never tired. I’m always walking, climbing, paying attention, shooting, writing. I want to rechannel my mischievous inclinations more creatively than I’ve been doing, and I have improved along the way. I ought not be pent-up then, right? But I feel it.
In the salon Dominique is quiet, gently scraping nearly-finished bowls or not quite silently painting them. Between little pauses, he paints with whisperbrush sounds. Birds, outside, are noisier. Frenzied swallows swoop and dart from beneath the thick, thousand-year-old bridge. Sauve has existed since forever. Women have met at its well in the Place Central just like the women of the bible it seems to me. Just like their mothers and grandmothers they have marketed on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. Heads of families, the husbands and sons, barter, argue, and drink together at the center of town in light cotton shirts like men in south Mississippi. (We are all one.) Now strangers occasionally stray too far, to Sauve, "Forty kilometers from Nimes," Max says, "and nothing here but the thick, green river."

"Well then, have you written this morning? Good!" At noon Max walks me downstairs to the restaurant for lunch and for the deep red Midi wine. Then he wanders toward his duties, "mes devoirs." He is concerned with his granddaughter (Charlotte's) school behavior, so he has been observing class, and greatly disconcerting the young maitresse. Max strides with great height straight into the school room and then, installing himself in a large armchair at the back of the class, he allows his autocratic but sweetly paternal aura to spread in bright, gentle ripples from where he sits.
That first early evening at the fair Natalie and I talked for an hour. We met again next day by accident at the morning market; she was complimenting a vendor on his corgettes. That was the day we began our afternoons at the river.

We swim. We hold Sebastion, or float him on his yellow raft along the dark green, glassy water. The river is calm, its flow almost indiscernible. Nearly something stable, nearly something to count on. Long, light green branches reach and mingle with brother herbs over the cool water. We float and lounge beneath wide fronds, darting finches, the occasional swooping Kingfisher. Much, much higher up, hawks soaring through the heat waves of the Midi gaze down upon the wide yellow river plain.

We've brought a lunch. Sebastion eats and floats grapes while Natalie talks. He has a side pond all his own with red and green grapes for soldiers; his little boats are made of twigs with wide-leaf sails. At last Natalie moves him onto his blanket and pats him to sleep, rubs his back and sings about planting cabbages, harvesting radishes.

Her family lives in Lyons, "very, very Bourgeoisie." She shakes her head. "I left school before my bac--I married Saddi . . . it so angered them that I was seeing him. But he was handsome . . . tall, kind, and I adored him. He cannot do without me now . . ."

She seems so content with herself that I am envious. Well, both envious and repelled. I've been thinking I feel most content when no one needs me so much.
Natalie and I lie back along the river bank. Anywhere it is the same, women together, commiserating, knowing . . . The first thing Natalie asked me was, "about your lover . . .? We French must ask that first!"

I said—as Mathilde because Nat always used my more formal name—I said, "We never really spent time talking, you know? We went out for only three or four weeks in Paris. I'd been exhausted by the big city, confused, worn down, deranged, as you say. Here I am seeing my situation more clearly and "--Ugh," I leaned on my elbow, "--it's getting to be a dreadful view! Natalie, what does it mean, fénéant?"

"Never bucking up . . . never being authentic, do you see?"

"Patrice has a cousin named Guy. He is a lawyer, un avocat . . . he has very wide hips and kind of greenish lips—that is a heart disease I imagine—but I can't help thinking of him as the avocado . . . it's a kind of play on words, Nat."

I talk about Patrice and his mother, "she is proud, severe, charming— I no longer trust her . . . you know Natalie, I don't ever want to talk about all of this to Max and Dominique. I want to let them continue to believe I may be a woman in charge of her destiny . . . the less I say, the more likely it is they will accept me as intelligent and capable, tu vois?"

"But you are, you know, Mathilde?" Natalie spoke with enthusiasm. Her cheeks were red, and her eyes were bright. "You are here. In that alone you are unlike most French women. You won't be measured by the ordinary judgements--"

"How--"
"For you to be here, in a foreign country, alone (no one ever sees you with le fénéant) you must be brave, fierce, proud."

"--Stupid! Don’t forget stupid. Always, normal people are frustrated, disgusted by thinking I’m here alone. It’s never been cool to be autonomous . . . people feel threatened or angry or that I must be some kind of renegade or artist . . ." 

"I could not do it."

"You see!"

"Saddi and I fight about you, I admit it. I argue that you really aren’t trying to change me. That’s his only worry, he claims . . . and for that attitude of his, I will stay by him, with him, forever."

"I’m lost--"

"Because he worries I would leave him. It is because of his feeling worried that way that I am bound to stay."

I, little alone and lonely American, I, began to feel a queer constriction high up in my nose, like crying starting.

"So, when he stops to worry--if he isn’t worried--does he cease to care . . . about you, Natalie?"

"Then. Well . . ." with a decisive nod, "then I will come to find you and visit you and give him a scare he deserves!"
A photograph:

That evening as the fair was opening and a band warmed up on the stage, in the open place rimmed by chestnut trees, the town's only Down's-Syndrome boy, Georges Gaston danced slowly, delightedly back and forth, back and forth, in the arms of his older brother, Philippe, who is always with him.

Then, in the stone corral between the stage and the river, the girl cows, the *vachettes*, were sent out and chased (it seemed to me, insensibly) by dull, excited boys. Patrice and I had walked down together. The frightened, alert, young, jaunty, black, female, quick, intelligent, wide-horned, handsome cows were not quickly exhausted. Yet that energy was being wasted. I tried telling Patrice, "Any innate sense of direction is being thwarted or mocked--" (though I could only manage "blocked" in French) "--by stupid teenage hormones."

"This is *sport,*" was all he said, "according to our people. The cold English ideals have not yet penetrated the Latin South."

Although at that point I was still trying to find a way to find him reasonably intelligent, I snapped, "Well, is this the best thing they can find to do with their drives?"

For a long while he said nothing. This was normal. He turned and was walking up the hill toward the old center of the town. Over his shoulder he said curtly, "Follow."
We sat at a café, not talking, mostly fuming. A small crowd collected and stood around looking on as a man from the fair ate fire.

It is later, during the mid-summer sunset, and we stand, not speaking, at a piled-up barricade. The top of it is head high, and I must climb it to see over. At first there is nothing to see but the empty space. Quickly a very large and solid black bull runs, chased by older youths from around the side of the post office. The scene seems in slow motion entirely, but the animal moves surprisingly fast, and the crowd hurrahs the young men who escape its horns. They must harass it. Wait. The bull is more disoriented than angered.

"He is starring in a what's wrong with this picture?" I murmur in English, no one comprehending . . . Here is another stuck photo that will freeze in my mind: a moving, massive, matt-black male abruptly plants himself, installs himself implacably on strong legs just beside the central village well. For an instant, and through dust theatrically illumined by the setting sun, the fountain can be heard to trickle gently, quietly. The animal swings his head wide in a gesture of doubt. For a moment he poses in mute inquiry. The light is leaving. The scene darkens even while he stares through the close, hot, dust-powdered evening air. Then, it continues.

At the gîte I have begun sleeping on the back terrace. I have dragged out three cushions and a light blanket—I made excuses to Patrice and Sylvie (who tightened
her lips as she saw me)—I said something about "liking the terrace and needing the stars." All acceptable lies include a little truth.

From the bedroom, a heavy door leads to a rock ledge high above Domagne-de-Bagarde's pool and fountain. It is a moorish pool, there to reflect the deep sky, the mossy walls, the quiet certain spout of clean water. In the rock wall near where I lie in darkness, I have seen a light green phosphorescence. It is an inch-long, fat and hairy worm that glows, all by himself!

I wrote in my daily journal.

The morning kitchen atmosphere is tense. I am no longer revered. Meanness and tastelessness are seeping through the seams of this happy vacation environment . . . (Dominique thinks I was seduced for the sake of American teeth in breeding). Between Sylvie's catty and envious remarks about Americans, I detect longing, somehow. Longing and delusion, social climbing. (Dominique says you never realize how envied you might be and how some people will do anything to profit.) Natalie agreed, "They want something." I told her symptoms, suspicions (sometimes I have to ask her to repeat, slowly. I misunderstand her Midi accent). Now, it's as if I am beginning to be punished—Sylvie sneers. I privately suspect Patrice of pederasty—his eyes linger after Olivier, the landlady's twelve-year-old son . . .

I didn't show these writings to Max, but I sang about heights, coming along my road into his town. "High rocks and the moo-oon and the starssss--I would be neeeear them!"

He laughed, greeting me with the kiss on both sides of my face,

"What have you been writing?"

"The start of something. Nothing."
"Show me, Mattie, hand me your notebook. May I?"

"Not yet."

I shook my head, and Max challenged me, "Then go and show me what you know—with your photography."

Perhaps I take pictures to get ideas focused. There are a few hundred "mind-photos" stored inside me. Things I've seen one time, but which stay in my heart forever, frozen-in-action, color-enhanced and permanent. Three of them:

A bee-man lifts a queen and 10,000 disciples from the deep-shuttered window of a summer house near Alsace-Lorraine.

A cowboy in Miles City, Montana kneels abruptly beneath the back of the chutes; he is panting, the heartbeat loud in the photograph. He crosses himself, rises, turns away.

Leon, a cat, strong and white, lies along a branch in the woods at eye-level where I sit, brooding. He seems a calm center against all outward frenzy . . . I watch him, large and white, his eyes the same spring green as the moss on the long limb. Leon blinks and he says to me, through the forest air with his languid look, "Between the blows, Peace."

I store these scenes unwittingly. Photos never taken, never forgotten. I see them again at any given moment, inside my old animal brain.
In Bagarde my eyes saw, instincts felt connections. There were connections, obvious to me, between circumstances, motivations. Patterns emerged as shapes, as conformations whether I wanted this to be true or not.

Patrice and his mother had cooked up a plan that served me as entrée. For starters, there had been promenades in Paris. Visits to symphonies and the opera house which I could not have afforded. What harm in going, I had asked myself. Domagne-de-Bagarde was the soup to sweep me up in, or to soak me. "Come visit our gîte--how else would you even visit the Midi? Think of the experience, the photos." What harm? The meat course, the entrée would be le mariage.

Patrice and Mathilde. Sylvie would have a U.S. citizen for an in-law (all Americans are wealthy, too bad they all drink milk and never discipline their children.) All of her family would benefit, travel, maybe live in the States. All would undoubtedly prosper. Dessert would be served in America--Sylvie would own all that she now imagined--what a dish. Yum. Yum.

Two nights earlier, cleaning up after dinner together, Sylvie was smiling, "You can have cute babies with him . . . Patrice has never before seemed so . . . blossomed."

"But I can't have any children. Something--"

"Nonsense! You might adopt."

"I don't think so . . . I think I get enough of children teaching school. Those are my children."
"Natalie, am I being presumptuous? Paranoid? They both tend to fatness—how shall I avoid being dinner? Why do I feel like prey?"

"You are, dear. You have reason. They are doing this to you, Sylvie is doing this to Patrice."

"After the children thing, Natalie, guess what she said to me! Three minutes later, she made a remark, 'His stomach, we call that a *coussin d'amour*, a love cushion. Do you enjoy that?' Nat, I just looked at her. My animosity showed—she said, she picked up a knife we had just washed and said 'Cut it off, then!'"

Natalie hugged me, "Does he have feelings, communications with you--no, he has no true feelings for you. *That* is why you don't feel he has feelings for you."

"I don't! He hasn't."

"He's being driven by his *maman*. We French do obey our *mamans* . . . or we suffer. Patrice is a beast, but--a cow, he has no power behind this. She has him eating out of her hand."

"She *always* has him eating . . . *and* drinking . . ."

I returned to the *gîte* just at dinnertime, sure that a scene would be brought on by my intentional lateness. I doubted I would stay calm if attacked. With great dread I arrived in the doorway. Sylvie was actually shrieking. Patrice, who was bandaging his mother's leg as she sat hollering instructions, spoke to me in short, clipped speech. He was much aggrieved, "There was a fire. Hot grease. You do nothing. Always, nothing. She was cooking for us and is burned."
Sylvie was alternately moaning, crying, and loudly bellowing as her son helped her into the Citroën, his expressions tragic, put-upon, heroic. They drove away. I did the washing up in peaceful silence, mopping the (no-longer-dangerous) grease from the tile floor. Cold now. Slick, hard.

From the terrace I watched lightening striking over the mountains. Very gentle, indeterminate thunder rumbled, far away. They were very late coming in. Patrice, winner of all bad luck, had torn a great hole in the car’s canvas top parking in haste and without prudence under a too-sharp, too-low limb at the doctor’s. So it was stormy inside and out. In the night when the wind became high and wild, I awoke, expecting rain. Not yet.

I walked away in the early morning, before they awoke. I climbed the hill straight up from my ledge, not even going into the house. I was ashamed of my gutlessness, but even more afraid of my—what? I couldn’t face the morning in that place, with those people. Finally gaining the path, I walked very quickly. Twenty minutes along the track into Sauve I had to climb above a stricken tree, blown down in the night’s violent wind.

Max wasn’t up; I took a coffee near the center of town, then, arriving early at Dominique’s salon I asked, very apologetically, if I might take a shower there. I’d never done that before, and it did me some good. When I came out, Natalie was there looking quite exhausted.

"Sounds like things were awful everywhere," she said, offering a very wan smile. Sebastian had been sick all through the night. It was his stomach.
"I must rest sometime, can you sit in my booth this afternoon? It will rain, we won't make much . . . I must sleep."

"Oh, yes, of course--I can come now, Nat--"

"No. Not for two hours. In two hours I'll send Saddi to open for you."

Dominique stood staring out of the window.

"When the rain comes, it will be a relief."

So, I wrote. Dom potted. Max was with Charlotte, making her clean and rearrange the shelves in her bedroom.

Then late, at four I met Saddi at the booth, and he opened it, showed me the till. He patted me, went off relieved, to his pals playing boules in the Place du Parc. No cows now. I watched the men, old and young, men of every disposition--as anywhere. These studying their game, the shining, silver ball. They measured, quibbled distance, won and lost bets. Dead still and silent while the shot was made, they exclaimed, breaking into excited movement soon as metal "plunked" onto white sandy dust, or "chinked" if it touched the competitor's ball.

Children came first, to the booth. I thought of Sebastion, at home, exhausted. Saddi checked one time around six . . . he was so unruffled, content . . . reminding me of that white cat, Leon. That mind-photo cat, Leon, who was eaten by a female mountain lion in heat (she ate seven male house cats altogether on
that summer's night.) So how much longer will Saddi be able to lie around quietly?

I was looking at those mind-photos again. And always, always they begin to form a series like math sequences on children's I.Q. tests:

5, 7, 9, ___? 2, 4, 16, ___? rags, heat, compression, _____?

In the booth I listened to the radio and heard a story coming in from Nimes.

A local cleaning woman and laundress, "the least suspicious person," the judge said at the trial, has been arrested for starting deadly fires... there will be large photos in the valley newspaper... three children and numerous cats have died in a series of mystery blazes which now appear to have been set by the woman... who was finally seen and apprehended starting yet another conflagration in a back doorway of inner-city row houses. The 49-year-old Bonitrice Caltreau announced calmly to the judge that she had found great excitement in the fire brigades arriving.

The radio signal faltered, then finally failed. I switched off the set.

The storm came. The men drew away from their game then, under the trees, laughing on the afternoon's wine in their light-colored shirts sticking cool to their chests in the downpour. I lowered the shutter and closed the booth and locked it. Dominique appeared; Max sent him down to help me; he arrived just as the rain began in force. We ran and ran through the water through the parc and across the bridge. The river mounted from lassitude to powerful largesse. The huge chestnut trees along its wall shook, glistened, bent as we flew by. He pulled me by the hand all the way up the streets to the salon, and I didn't mind. At the doorway, just inside of the rain, Dominique situated me so that I leant against the stone wall, facing him. A photograph: I see the lurid cover of a grocery-store
novella, *Romance in France! Passion in Banditland*. . . "Her back against the stone wall, Mattie feels the man coming toward her, nearer, larger, wanting Mathilde and knowing he will have her . . ." I laughed, Dominique did kiss me, and I liked it. "*Je pars,* I am leaving," I said to him, "soon." I squeezed his hand; I thought of his wife; I patted his back in a man-to-man gesture and gave him a look then. A "let's go in now and approach everyone there like we are two good men." So we walked into the large room where there were clean tables and fine aromas, the windows throwing an odd and eerie light as the water continued to move against them.

The rain settled in, and I started writing a long, long letter to Max. Then I slipped out and ran down to Natalie's wagon.

"Wake up! I love you. I'm going. I'm going now, on the bus, to the train station."

Nat woke up, began crying, and said, "I'm going to take you. I'm taking you all the way into Nimes. Wait 'til I go bring back Saddi. He can stay with Sebastion--it's his son, too--he can be the one that waits--I want to be with you as far as Nimes."

We drove their old Peugeot to the gîte and, what luck, no one was there. I got in with my key, and we hustled my few things into the car. We were laughing, a little drunk on excitement, change.

"Shall I pack this alcohol as well? It's THEIRS."

"Yes! and bring the fruit--you must have it for the train."
"Take this ham, Natalie, for you and Saddi. Not Sebastion. Have a picnic in the hills."

"Where do you think they are?"

"He's torn his stupid car--I don't care where she is, the fat Nazi-from-Alsace. I'm worried, Nat, and I'm happy!"

"Hurry."

We dashed to the car for the last time. I ran back to lock up, and Martine Hortense, a sister of the proprietresse called from a window, "Are all of you leaving? They'd better not try sneaking away! Where's Sylvie, anyway?"

"No idea, Madame. Why are you letting yourself be upset?"

"Because she hasn't paid," shouted Martine. I got in, closed the car door, made a face at Natalie and said, "Well, I have."

I rode the train north, back to Paris, then east into Austria. At the French/Austrian border, where one changes actual trains, I made a call to Claudia. I had written down Natalie's address and began the first letter to her on that long train ride. We correspond still. The Austrian trains are so clean, spare, spotless. I was sleepy then, and vague with fatigue as we passed yellow cathedrals, palaces, red and white farmhouses while the train told me over and over, "We are out of France, we are out of France, we are out of France."

I was met promptly and welcomed well by my old friend, Claudia, who drove me to the modest family home. Her parents, downstairs, greeted me, welcomed me
and waved me upstairs where I fell into bed. The room was large, airy, light, fresh . . . Birds singing outside at nightfall there don’t make the same southern sounds I had heard, neither are they city birds. I slept.

I awoke on the floor of Claudia’s bathroom. She was leaning over, shaking me.

"I heard a loud bump. You fell! Look, you’ve fainted after being sick."

(A present from Sebastian!) It was true--I threw up, then lay down, unconscious, embracing Austrian tiles . . .

"You worried me."

"I’ll be okay in two minutes, Claudia."

I watched mind-photos:

Me, sitting up now on Claudia’s hard-tile floor in my soft, old, blue flannel nightie.

Me, alone, flying on the train away from France.

I see my old, white cat, Leon, the lean sides of him purring, puffing in and out, in and out, with great dignity.

With great dignity, the bull, who by his sudden, accidental balking halts the summer evening tumult, says to me silently, "stay still a few more moments." I smile, hearing.
I hear the humming as the bee-man reaches toward the chalet window and begins to bring down the bees. I smell the heat.

The clean, trembling cowboy finishes his prayer; and, still kneeling in the dusty grass underneath the high, wooden platform by the rodeo chutes, he glances once away at the open sky, then stares, for the instant, at me.

"I'll be okay now, Claudia. I'm up."
INCA VIRGIN I, II, III

I. What about? An Inca virgin's normal day . . .

Or what about when no Aztecs are celebrating? When no one's hair is being oiled and no one's body is being washed and polished for Perdition? What does an Inca virgin do before she's wanted for throwing down a pit? How does she spend these last easy days?

What do they teach her? Does she think anything? Is she healthy enough to think herself grand? Does she make herself useful? Is she weaving rugs, washing clothes against old stones until the day? Is she the sun and the moon (to someone?) or (just) someone's daughter? And
How does it move her--

The Terrible Brightness,

The jumping focus,

The glowing yellow outlines of
everything?

It mustn't be--

It isn't all illusion. There is also

Truth

in leaving . . . You've made all things

last--

The Glory, Height, and Splendor--A

Great time to disappear,

An Ages-long secret

of

Grace.

II. She said,

an Inca Virgin told me,

in a taped interview, one time

About the Terrible Brightness--
About the outlines of everything,

"I am

Deaf with the

Throbbing Shock."

III.  And--about men:

"This guy is so boring--what he says--

About his life--his lunch--

I detest that.

I hate him for verbally worshipping

me. The screwing's enough,

Just.

You know, words make gold an alloy.

Shit makes the mind

Blasé.

I mean male egotism, look:

Say it with

words . . . follow the bouncing ball and the gates will

Open. Blah-blah-blah You're beautiful. Blah-blah all

We talked about
Was you (sure, the French court when Henri II
Was king.)

Do it to them (her) and she

(they) will do it with you: a formula
to pry open tiny minds,
lustrous thighs

I die

A cynic," she said.
RAISING
SHEEP THE MODERN
WAY

Well mannered shrill voiced "nice-coat"

Children

Hate dirt, wear gloves, cry

When their hair is

Loose.

Ones with mothers who remember

Sticky times or still link laughter

And sweat

Roll messily down sand piles, cackling,

Clumsy with grace.

Oh, give the baby once

A messy fig. Kick the bottle into the stone

Fireplace.

Sweep your arm fast

'Til the glass flies onto the peanut shells.

Put back your head

Onto your neck

(On the neck of your youth) and laugh!
Forget: UN! DEUX! UN! DEUX!

There is beauty, yet, even in your back teeth.

Stars

Regard you.
THANK YOU, JOEL BLOCK

"When a planet's moon
gets inside the Roche* Limit *b. 1820
the gravity
of
The encircled planet
will tear it to pieces!

(Do Men Know This?)
DON'T YOU KNOW ANYTHING? RELAX, IF, FOR THE MOMENT YOU ARE BEING ADORED.

I had a cat named Leon once, and he knew all about
relaxing until
--well, I'll tell you, soon . . .

But first, against the fog and snow
Himself calm, large, and white, he lay languid
along the dark wet branch of a fallen alder,

I was in the woods and watched him,
eye to eye. He tired soon, bored quickly,
higher than I on his perch
let go his eyelid part
and rested there, in the evening (I'll always carry
the photograph in my head): The wide wet foggy air
where all was black, white or airy-lichen green. He
closed his eyes.

A mountain lion ate him--he, in low-key lust,
was too laid back. She, lovely strength in heat,
ate seven males one Tuesday. In my wildest, most threatened moments
"I've ripped the phone off the wall. No one can hear you now,"

--I remember Leon had the sort of disposition
whose control allowed him peace
between the dangers.

If there had been, if ever
there were a rod uplifted over Leon's head,
Between the metronomic blows,
Between the measured threats, between the horrors:
peace.
Between the hurts
He'd purr . . .
PIZZA PARTY AT DEAUVILLE

Once, having come down to Deauville for two days from Paris,
and standing in the bedroom door
in a strange juxtaposition
I visited with Bridgett.

Her blond, winning husband hugged
the front of me while her
dark, laughing lover hugged me from behind--all
proper this--four adults, only chatting before going out to dine.

"She's thin," they said. These two kind
grown-up men, and me, we
all three visiting with Bridgett
while, as I remember, she gave full attention to the child.

I, in between, I
felt the tummies of
prosperity
about me and I
balked. They said, I thought
consecutively
Iamhun-garywhat Menare Iamhun-
garywhat

canwe thatmuch canwe

eat? fatterthan eat?

boys?