Lost and found: The uncollected works of Stephen R. Flick

Stephen Raybern Flick

The University of Montana

1975

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LOST AND FOUND:
THE UNCOLLECTED WORKS OF STEPHEN R. FLICK

By

Stephen R. Flick
B.A., State University of San Jose, 1971

Presented in partial fulfillment for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA
1975

Approved by:

Chairman, Board of Examiners

Dean, Graduate School

Date

June 15, 1975
"If you're going to live horse, you have to live grass." Gertie Gallardo

"Comparisons are a source of misery." Albert Camus

"Valium is the next best thing to a stable personality."

"Compulsory education is a contradiction in terms." Paul Krassner

"Is the bicycle dead?" Donald Barthelme

"I'll play it for you first and tell you what it is later." Miles Davis

"Anytime you're good you're alone, except in love and sometimes being good in love is being alone."

"Under the anger is the hurt." Carol Flick-Place

"Man's curse is to work, women's curse is to bear children. The worst curse is a life without feeling."
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With thanks to my parents, and to my teachers: Bill Kittredge, Dick Hugo, Madeline DeFrees, Earl Ganz, and especially Ed McClanahan who has helped me understand that finding a true voice is the heart of the story-telling act.

Of the material here presented, the following have been published, accepted for publication, or received an award:

1. Portions of a novel, *The C.O.*, in first draft form, were awarded a Wallace Stegner Creative Writing Fellowship at Stanford University, 1969-70.

   In second draft form, portions of the *C.O.* were awarded a Book of the Month Club College English Fellowship in June of 1970. My thanks. Without these, completion would have been difficult, if not impossible.

   A chapter of *The C.O.* in issue number one of *100 Flowers*, Palo Alto California, Spring, 1971

THE C.O.

((Virginia woke me up. It was dark and the air was full outside. She said she had a pain in her stomach, one that shot all the way down her spine. It depressed me. My defenses were down and I thought of how quickly we could die, how we live unconsciously with the benign hand of death at our backs. I was anxious for her and told her to call the hospital. Eventually she realized it was nothing but a tremendous bellyache. She lay with her feet up for half an hour until she went into the bathroom to vomit. My depression came not from reflecting on my death, but from being close to someone who would someday die, like Myrtle has.

Harvey! I'd told him an hour but after checking the clock, saw that I'd slept until three a.m. I thought about suicide listening to Virg clean her pipes, but a dread came over me, as if the idea itself possessed a power of addiction. I would need my own garage for suicide, something quiet and unobtrusive, and something besides a Renault to do it in. Myrtle gave me something to do beyond worrying about my own survival. It felt good to have that again.

Virginia wanted to know if I loved her. Now that she is asleep I have thought of an answer which is: lust is a
form of selection. It is the instinct choosing a partner. But lust is such a poor word. I mean the ability to desire a woman without knowing her, from her non-verbal effect on you. That feeling may be the only spontaneous experience we have left! We selected each other from a multitude of choices, choices I didn't even know I had...I'm so brilliant when alone, without anyone to distract me from my monologue.

In spite of my situation, I do a good job of keeping track of the days, cataloguing my nostalgias, and remain sufficiently aware of life to know when my rebellion and my creativity have done their usual job of cancelling each other out. I lie here looking at her.

Time is three-thirty a.m. Perfect for body snatching. Is this a believable act for my character now? Myrtle would have wanted John to come in a suit on a Sunday to wheel her away.

Fumbled in darkness for her keys. "Why don't you turn on the light," Virginia said. "Do you want me to go with you?"

"It's all right. I'm going to get Harvey. He'll wait in the car while I get the morgue key from the ward."

"You have to go back to the ward?" Her voice was full of sleep.

"Yeah. No other way to get in there. We should be here by five so if you want to come, you can."

"Please be careful, Paul." A kiss smelling of tooth-
paste, barf, sour tongues, then she was out on the pillow. I left her, she snored. Can I take that? Already doubts, doubts. She doesn't understand what I'm trying to do...

writing nude, watching, feeling my body like a girl might, feeling my erection which produces a pure gem of urethra cleaner on the tip. I gently lifted it off onto my finger, tasting part of it, rubbing part of it onto a page in my notebook think ? how about a page of this book smeared in semen? One for feces of the author, spittle, urine, hair from all parts of my body, toe jam, scabs and pus, snot, ear wax, sweat, dandruff, blackheads, whiteheads, and dingleberries -- a total human composite which accompanies the book? An honest book should have a page where the writer and the reader enter into a blood brotherhood, blood pricked by a pin, leaked onto each flyleaf as it comes off the press. Likewise, each reader lights a match to sterilize his needle, and mix his blood on that page. I'm beginning to sound like Harvey!

They teach men with strokes to walk again by starting them over, they crawl, they toilet-train, they play with blocks, they start from zero. Perhaps I can learn again too! Regress ourselves, shit when we want and play with it like Maggie does until we're satisfied, suckle at the breasts of wet nurses until gorged, until satiated and have the arms
of our parents touch us, caress us, kiss, fondle us until we learn to feel again. We'll stand up and sniff each other reborn, with every pore and nerve-ending connected to our spines -- every act of intercourse will be an occasion for release so magnificent, so unimpeded by past deprivations that so nourished and gorged in our bodies, our minds will carry out their portion of life in a clearer state of being than we ever imagined, using more than one-twentieth of the brain's power, we will find a way to use all the power...)

Harvey's house of palatial colonnade, lawn green sloping, charged darkness of barking dogs, Cade praying unknownest for chains on their necks. "We are Harpies, the good Harpies on their way to bury Myrtle," Harvey will say when Cade finds him sitting on the steps of the enormous house.

"Notice the Ionic Capitals on the imitation southern plantation. I told them it didn't fit but daddy-kins wouldn't have it any other way. "It'll Undermind your standing," I told him," Harvey will say pointing to the top of the pillars on the porch: "It's strange; I say I don't care about such things, yet I know better than he does what's right and what's wrong with it."

Gold wants to talk to Cade as he sits and waits for Cade to crawl across the grass. Cade will not want to talk, he will be looking at his watch which will then say quarter
to four. Cade will be thinking of the tribunal, the time it will take to get Myrtle's body out of the morgue, into the car. Cade will wonder if Harvey's marbles will allow him to complete the mission and why Harvey made him crawl through the grass. Gold will say it was his penance for making him wait so long. Harvey Gold will talk long enough to relax Paul. Cade thinks a lot but is not logical, while Harvey Gold's thoughts are scrambled yet he manipulates in a perfectly logical way.

Gold will talk about his father who can operate five factories all by himself but who will not be inveigled into a conversation with his son except through jail bars, in hospital waiting rooms, or the one time Harvey stowed away in the Lear jet which gets father from factory to factory. He will say that Paul Cade is the first friend to come visit him since he attended Community College two years ago.

"It's a shame you needed the push I gave you," Harvey will say guiltily, "but since it's partly my fault, I feel I should help you."

Cade will know Harvey has been sitting on the porch watching him crawl through the wet grass in the dark. He will be forced to think about the seriousness of Harvey's relation to his project of putting Myrtle to rest; will realize that he had been counting on Harvey's total manic energy level to get himself through the night, and that that was indeed a high expectation on his part. This will please
Harvey and, having established a limit of sorts, he will then create for Paul the necessary emotional atmosphere and ceremony for Cade to continue his plan. Gold is Cade's connection to the past, of which he is unconscious, but Cade is Gold's connection to the present expression of ideas. Gold will inquire as to the whereabouts of Virginia and will balk when told that she is joining them in the ride to the mountains. They will walk back to Virginia's car. Harvey will show Paul the dog pen operated by remote-control which would have let loose the animals had anyone in the house pushed a button near the heads of their beds. They will climb into Virginia's Mustang, driving exactly sixty-five miles an hour to the hospital. It will be four-twenty by this time.

"All I want you to do is wait in the back parking lot. Unlock the trunk and keep the lights off in the car. I'll get the morgue key from the ward. Hopefully there will be a guerney somewhere in the hallways so I can just roll her out. I'm not sure how long it will take."

"Will she be stiff?" Harvey asked.

"I don't know. How soon does rigor mortis come?" said Cade.

"At birth for some," said Harvey..."probably one or two
days. How long has she been dead?"

"A day and a half."

"Hmmm, she's stiff. I've been sitting home watching television a lot. I pretend I'm a housewife doing the ironing. I don't like what they're trying to do to me. I think we have to counteract that."

"That will have to come later. One correction at a time."

"You haven't said a word about my letter," Harvey said. "I never thought I'd see you again."

"What happened, did you lose faith in your method? Besides you have to help me now. I shock you, you shock me."

"Do you trust me?" Harvey said eagerly.

"I don't know...you have to help me follow through because I know you can't."

"I felt badly watching the two of you in session. It was like listening to a foreign language. I felt totally left out."

"The old man speaks Russian to his dog. Somehow it doesn't exclude you. He doesn't know we're coming but I'm sure he'll put us up, you'll like him."

"Is a snatch a felony?"

"I have to bury Myrtle otherwise there's no continuity, I'll end up being John or you or somebody else for the rest of my life."

They parked in the closest space to the door. "If you
see Security, just lie on the floor. In forty-five min-
utes start watching the door. I may need you to help
carry her."

"Good luck," Harvey Gold said fearfully.

"Yes," Cade said.

The hospital was easily entered. No guards were pos-
ted, no night receptionists. A light came from the admis-
sions ward and he could see the O.D. sitting in his office,
nearly asleep, reading a magazine. Paul grabbed a broom
and swept the floor as he walked.

The back door of the ward was seldom used. All front
doors of the wards faced the central part of the hospital.
The back doors emptied on the perimeter. Lighting mainten-
ance had neglected to replace spent bulbs which made it
comfortably dark to walk.

Resting in the stairwell, he leaned against the door,
his heart gunning at him so violently it clacked his teeth
 together. A faint chorus of gurgling greeted him as he
opened the back door to ward ninety-seven. The sound of
phlegm in tired throats like wet ping-pong balls tied to
their epiglottises, slapping back and forth. He began to
feel more secure -- no one who worked in geriatrics thought
in terms of outsiders sneaking in. Cade walked near the
wall until he came to the broom closet. He opened the
door soundlessly, then slipped in. He could hear their
voices coming from the coffee room. In the hallway the
lights were tuned to an eerie hue, refracting off the
sheets in a muted phosphorescence. Neon light spilled
from the nurse's station window into the darkened day hall.
It looked like an immovable ship's beacon from where Cade
peeked.

After a few minutes he opened the door and stepped into the hallway. He walked to the first dormitory where
Lydia Droff and Mrs. Tenny slept. They were both tied flat
on their backs in the high hospital beds. Lydia's wrists
and ankles were anchored by posie belts at the four corners
of the bed frame. He strained in the dark to see Lydia's
wizzened face.

"Lydia," he whispered, "Lydia, are you awake?"

"God who is it now?" she moaned, "God what do you want
from me now?"

"Lydia, it's me, Mr. Cade from the day shift. Don't
you remember me?"

"See what happened?" she said, her neck craned toward
him in the scant light, "you slipped up and they got you,
didn't they?"

"I came back to finish some business. You look like
you could use some help."

"Oh Mister, get me out of these things, will you?"
Mrs. Tenny and I asked for a glass of water and to go to the bathroom. This other man comes in to tell me I'm being too loud and that I'm bothering the other patients. He made me take some medicine, then he tied me up like this. Mister, I'm starting to get real sleepy, untie me, please?

"I'll take the restraints off part way so it looks like they're still on," said Cade. "I'll get them loose enough to slip your hands in and out."

He continued to talk quietly to her, even after she'd fallen asleep. Cade draped the canvas belts over her hands and ankles, gently looping them in their previous position. Olivia had been watching him, and even as he turned around to come near her, she stared at him, angry that he hadn't come sooner in the evening.

"You'd think this was a fucking concentration camp with a bunch of spies runnin' around," she hissed. "Now you know what I gotta' put up with night after night."

"Not so loud," whispered Cade, "it's bound to stop pretty soon." He froze while loosening Olivia's last tether. Someone was having a bad dream and commenced to moan. Whoever it was then began to bang the guardrails on the side of the bed. Cade leaped to the doorway and heard the voices of the night shift growing louder. He broad-jumped across the hall into the intensive care unit and rolled under the bed close to the door. From there he could see the coffee room door plus the front door of the ward. Both opened
at the same moment with Logan coming out of the former and Meadors Burner, trailed by his assistant, coming out of the latter.

"Any trouble?" said the night supervisor through his nose.

"Just one of the 'veggies' having a bad dream," Logan said. "Come join me for coffee, you two."

"Coming down off those nasty chemicals you took earlier?" Burner asked. Then, without waiting for his answer Burner said, "God, the smell from that woman is enough to make a body puke! Daley, Daley, let's crank a window open for a while. We'll take care of the smell and maybe if we're lucky, spare that poor woman from having to be here much longer, shuffling around this mortal coil."

"I'll never forgive myself," said the assistant as he rushed past Cade's head into the intensive care unit, "for not getting my nursing degree. Then I could have worked with the men; at least they don't smell so bad.

"I know what," said Burner leaning in the doorway. Cade's nose was inches from his foot. "Let's all go back to the doctor's office. We can get away from this smell and nurse the poor dear back to heterosexual adjustment."

He opened a can of room deodorizer which Cade could hear hissing above him. Drops of it fell on the floor where he lay. "There, that should get us through the night without vomiting." They opened drawers in the nurse's station un-
til they found the key to Graebner's office. He heard the ward door open and close. Then it was locked from the outside. He became aware of the constant backdrop of Geronsin's wheezing, the familiar carburation of phlegm and air in her throat, punctuated by moans from her drug-induced sleep.

Cade crawled out from underneath Geronsin's bed, sat for a moment on the floor, watching the hallway to make sure the night crew was gone. In the night light the skins of the old women were the color of packaged chicken reflecting pale yellow. He could feel the draft of cold air circulating around his legs.

As he rose a faint noise startled him. Beatrice Merson struggled with a plastic training dummy which she carried on her shoulder. It was the one used by the trainees for practice in giving enemas and bed baths.

She turned off the night light and put the dummy in her bed, turning him expertly on his side, tucking him like a malleable child into different attitudes of relaxation until he held a pose she liked. Beatrice ruffled the sheets, gave him a final pat on the head, then blew him a charm over the tiki god as though that would breathe some life into the plastic dummy. Cade watched her walk out of the dorm in the direction of the day hall and return with several blankets plus her small suitcase. She passed by again and seated herself quietly in the broom closet. The door was opened far enough for her to see down the hallway. She would
see everything he did.

"I still have the keys," he thought, "if she makes any noise I'll rattle them again." He stood up to leave. A cold blast of valley air whipped through the intensive care unit. The window handle hung from its socket where the assistant had left it so Cade closed the windows again, watching the faces of the sleeping women. "That's what happened to Myrt," he said out loud, "those fuckers."

((The morgue key was still in the drawer. They hadn't taken it back to the supervisor's office where it was usually kept. Ward door, look back at the broom closet, I waved to Beatrice. Outside down the hallway were doors 1. Men's bathroom, 2. Graebner's office, 3. Elevator. Walked on toes to elevator whose every creak seemed like a siren with my name on it. It came, opened and descended to morgue, that room already one story deep into dirt of the valley, more than six feet under, hallways painted nausea green leftover from the war, green like mucus.

Coldness of room. I began getting the urge to desecrate. Myrtle still there, her body still intact. I pulled out the tray, put her on the guerney clad in only the shroud, collected several porcelain jars full of brains meant for the med students, put them on the lower tier of the guerney
beneath Myrt and hauled ass.

"They're going to feel this Myrt baby." Good to talk again, a lot was left to say. Quickly onto elevator feeling strung out from anxiety, determined to add some finishing touches to the victory. Out of elevator, pushed hold and went back through the door.

Almost five. I took the porcelain bottle full of formaldehyde and brains and dumped it on the floor. Like pouring a bear without getting a head. The odor of bacteria attacking grey matter, catching up on their job prolonged for years by the chemical. I almost passed out. Left trail of liquid, gruesome stench, lumps of blue-veined brains once the purveyors of electrical impulsed in some misfit now capturing his vengeance with me. Took jar so discoverers could not rationalize the appearance of unconnected lobes.)

Cade heard the ward door open, the beginning of a moan like a cranked-up siren. It was a woman's voice. Cade choked; the door closed on the elevator but the scream still carried to his ears. The door opened on the first floor. Lobby to the left, he pushed the white-shrouded body into the hallway then ran holding on with his elbow.

Outside he yelled, "Harvey, open the trunk."
Harvey scrambled out of the Mustang and opened the trunk lid. Cade looked up at the windows on ninety-seven. Lights were flashing on in the dormitories one by one, a slow neon progression. Occasionally Burner or his assistant or Logan could be seen running past a window. The body was stiff and would only fit sideways with her nose pressed tightly between the top of the trunk and the spare tire.

"I'm going to hide the guerney in the bushes," Cade whispered hoarsely. "Start the car but I'm driving. They may call the cops."

Cade drove through an orchard which separated the two parts of the hospital, emerging on a small road leading to town. Harvey climbed into the back silent and preoccupied with the impending presence of Virginia.

"Those fuckers killed her," he said, "I saw them open the window in the room where she was. That's why she died."

Cade continued in spite of Harvey's silence. "I feel great, I've never had this much energy in my life! What I want to know is why did you write that letter? Why didn't you try and convince me some other way?"

"Catastrophe convinces. Besides your chance would have been past you. This catastrophe will convince them. It's a daisy chain of catastrophe. Now when you go to your trial..."

"Who said I was going?" Cade said. "I think I've done enough."
"You have to confront them," Harvey said indignantly.  

"What's the point? I have Myrtle, that's all I wanted. The other shit will continue even if I stay. Besides, you were right about changing those close to you. The institution can't change. Shit, Virginia left her old man for me."

"It's not the same," Harvey whined, "they have to know what they did."

"We'll build a life, stick together."

"What if the old man says no?"

"He needs us. We'll manage. You're dragging me down," Paul said.

"It doesn't sound the same coming from you," Harvey said, "it sounds crazy."

"It's your own idea coming to life," Cade said. He felt a humorous surge in his body, he had detected hypocrisy in Harvey. "Your idea and you don't even recognize it."

Cade guided the Mustang into the driveway. He turned off the motor. "You want to wait? I have to pack."

"Yes, I'll wait," said Harvey, "just part of your men- age."

"You said we should start a place where we could really help each other, remember? I never forgot that; I never forget things people say. It's about time for me to live some of my convictions, even if they're mostly yours. You could live a whole life in this country without any convictions at all except money -- you said that."
"I said that?"
"Yes... I'll be back in a few minutes."

Inside his room Virginia rested on her back, arms raised above her head on the pillow. Her right leg was bent so her foot rested on her knee, as if she were sliding in her sleep. She'd left her glasses on and the sheets were pulled down to her bellybutton. Cade looked and was excited by seeing her completely unaware of him. Her knobby breasts refused to flatten against her chest. They drifted pertly backwards toward her head. It would be easy to climb in bed and forget the whole thing, he thought. I can conceive of it both ways. He switched on the light.

"Oh God, what time is it?"
"After five. Are you coming with us?" Paul asked.
"You got my car, there's no other choice."
"Do you want to, honey," he said.

"Look, would you turn on this other light? That one's too bright. I should never have gone to sleep. I'm cranky."

She sat up rubbing her eyes. The bags under them formed two lines which curled under each other. Her hair straggled down.

"You don't get off on this body-snatch routine, do you?"
"Oh shit," Cade said angrily, "you're making me remember we don't know each other at all." He took the suitcase from the closet. In it he put underwear, t-shirts, a swimming suit, several turtle-necks, socks, and a shaving kit.
When he opened the second drawer down he turned to Virginia and said, "Come on, you have to trust me or you might as well stay here."

"Harvey's in the car," he said, "somebody may have called the police. It's important we bury her before it gets light. If you're going, get your clothes on. I'm leaving in five minutes." In the second drawer he had old papers from school but did not put those in the suitcase. He looked for the journal on the floor where he'd left it.

"Did you see my notebook lying around?"

Virginia froze conspicuously in the middle of fastening her bra -- the cups were turned around on her back facing him. "Well it was just lying around. I figured you wouldn't mind if I read it."

"It only helps if you know me already," he moaned. "Without the context it doesn't mean anything, it's only my problems. You were supposed to wait. Can't you wait for anything?"

"I'm sorry." She started to cry. "How else was I going to find out about you?"

"What else is there to know?"

"You could be some kind of maniac. You sounded strange in that book."

They finished in silence. Cade's refusal to talk made all their movements resound out of proportion in the small room. He had a short tape loop wherein he ditched her, buried
Myrtle with only Harvey and the old man to contend with. The accompanying feeling was bad, empty. Without a woman in the tape there was no openness, no completion. They crept out the door and down the stairs to where Harvey waited.

"Off like a herd of turtles," said Harvey. Cade whipped the car down a one-way street until a turnoff which led into the hills.

"Harvey, meet Virginia."

"What's your story?" she said.

"Don't play with me or I'll blow the whistle on you!" Harvey yelled.

"Can't you forget yourselves for a minute?" Cade barked. He turned the first hairpin and began the ascent into the mountains. Myrtle's body bumped against the trunk lid.

"Ahhug," blurted Virginia, clutching her stomach. "I forgot about her."

Cade was wide awake, driving the car better than it was built to be driven, as though his nerves had been grafted to the suspension of the Mustang. He felt fused to the road, noticing everything at once, the banking of curves, potholes, the gravel spots, yet he never crossed the white line; it was the rule, the limit. Five-thirty a.m.

"Harvey, can you mix cement?" Cade asked.

"What? I never tried. What for?"

"I can," said Virginia. "Charlie hurt his back once, right in the middle of pouring the patio. I had to finish
it for him. Did a damn good job."

"I figure it will take two or three yards of it to seal her up right," Cade continued. "I hope we make it before sunup."

"We still have more than an hour and a half," said Harvey, "or maybe more if he lives on the other side of the ridge."

Myrtle rolled again. "Can't you slow down?" pleaded Virginia.

"I know this road, I know this road," Cade said. "We stop trusting our bodies. I know this road with my body, I don't have to think about it."

Cade braked, double-clutched on the next series of hairpins, putting the Mustang into first gear to avoid losing momentum. The carburetor dries up then fills, jerking the car ahead into a straightaway. He shifts to second. The embankment is now to the right, steeply rising. A small buck drops onto the blacktop, his eyes glisten in the head lamps of the car which has peaked in second. Blinded, it freezes; Cade shifts to third before he sees it. A noise from Virginia's throat, a whimper from Harvey, and the stiff paralyzed arms of Paul were part of the tableau before it moved.

It is cut down bluntly by the surprisingly fragile ton of metal which gives way bloodlessly, bent to the radiator, radiator bent to resemble grotesque fountain,
punctured by the antlers of the buck, shot streams of hot water into the air, illuminated by the headlights. The deer's body twisted in front of them, his bulk careened off the grill, his head snapped to a sickening relaxation of bone and muscles. The Mustang, slowed by the impact and by compression, came to a halt yards later.

"My car, the deer," Virginia gargled, "my car."

"Oh shit, oh dear, a bad omen. My channels are opening up again," said Harvey. "I have to get out for a minute. Does anyone have a pill?"

Cade rolled the car backwards into a turnout.

"The cabin isn't very far away as the crow flies. If we just climbed the hill with her we could still make it by sunrise."

"We'll have to dispose of the deer," intoned Harvey, "you know how police minds work; if they see this, they'll trace the car and find out everything."

"Okay," Cade said. He faltered inside. There were no tape loops for what should be done. He noticed himself saying and doing things before running them through in his mind. The embankment was steep, there were tan oak and madrone shrubs. Thick underbrush. "You're going to have to help, Virginia."

She sobbed quietly. "Can't you just drop it now? I can't go any further with it, you have to let me go back."

False dawn, the eerie half-light of morning came from
behind the eastern foothills. "Come on, goddamit, let's go. It's not much further. Harvey, you take the deer. Virginia, you'll have to help me with Myrt."

"That fucking deer must weigh over a hundred pounds," Harvey said.

"Then just drag it as far as you can," Cade said calmly.

They got out dazedly, shaken with the image of killing. Virginia cried and Cade held her. Harvey sat in the gravel near the front of the car, and stared at the deer.

"There isn't much time to think," Cade said, "somebody might come along and then we're screwed. Come on Virg, get a blanket from the back seat to cover her with. It'll be easier if we don't have to look at her."

Harvey stood up. He took ten deep breaths. "Okay Cade I'm into it again," he boomed, "let's get this show on the road. I feel the sun coming. Everything must be in place by sunrise." He ran partway down the hill then stopped at a small rancher's road which forked towards the ridge.

"Looks good," he said, "it goes up, come on!"

Cade nudged Virginia in the direction of the car. He took out the keys then unlocked the trunk. Myrtle had tipped over an oil can -- her body was covered with black smudges. He pulled the shroud out from around her neck, wiping the grease off gently with the stiff paper. "Hand me the blanket first," he said, "then we'll life her out together."
She was stiff as a tool, the stiffness which preceded the ultimate relaxing, he thought, the last letting go as in sex or in meditation and he knew at that moment why men were afraid of those things. He tucked the blanket under her bony ass. She lay on her back and for the first time he stopped. He stopped to look at her face, to look for himself at what was written on it, the face he was supposed to know. He was aware that the tape loops had disappeared, that he had somehow made it into the present.

They had made him rush again, he'd almost forgotten he wasn't to blame. He'd seen them with his own eyes and knew they had all killed pieces of her.

He wanted a solemn, slow procession, a calm burial at the old man's cabin, the sealing away of an old friend, not the frantic push caused by the clock on the wall.

"Virginia I wrapped her up...come here for a minute and look at her face. It looks beautiful now, she's got nothing to hide. She's not crazy anymore."

The tone in his voice convinced her to come look. She shivered as the two of them watched the dessicated face of Myrtle who smiled.

"It's a road," Harvey said, shattering the silence.

"Does it go the right way?" Cade yelled.

"We'll have to take it whether it does or not," Harvey returned.

"Okay girl, I'll take the torso and you take the feet."
We'll lean her against the car until I lock the doors. We'll get our clothes later."

"This is revolting," she moaned, bracing Myrtle at arm's length, her head turned away. "How did I let you talk me into this? It's criminal. She ought to be buried now."

"What do you think I'm doing?" asked Cade.

They walked downhill. Virginia had a morbid fear of dropping the body. She moaned desperately every time her grip loosened. Harvey jogged back up the hill. "What if I can't get his head loose?"

"Cut it off, I guess, but try. We'll go on ahead around the first bend to wait for you."

Harvey jogged off without speaking. Cade and Virginia left the pavement and walked on the dirt road until they could not be seen. "Can we put her down for a minute?" she asked.

"What's the matter," he teased, "she only weighed ninety-five pounds the last time we weighed her."

Harvey struggled around the bend, his wild, kinky hair sticking out in all directions, the buck draped over his thin shoulders, so relaxed in comparison to Harvey's struggle to stay on his feet. The buck's neck wobbled and twisted in a full circle. "He's still warm," said Harvey, "it's the weirdest feeling." There was blood on his shirt, it drained from the mouth of the animal.
"Put him down Harv. I'll carry him for the next stretch and you help with Myrtle."

"Okay," he said. He ducked his head, thrusting the bulk of the deer onto the road. The sound of the body hitting the road made them quiet and slightly nauseated. It was a hollow sound of partially filled intestines being slapped, as if it had just started to feed.

"You shoulda' left him on your shoulders," said Cade. "It's harder to get him off the ground." Cade crouched by the animal, grabbed the pairs of lets, then slung the deer on his back.

"Just like the hospital," he said to Virginia. "Dead weight." Harvey went over to Myrtle's blanketed body without speaking to Virginia. He lifted her onto his shoulders but she wouldn't stay balanced there.

Virginia grabbed her feet and said quietly, "It's always harder to carry dead weight."

Each step from the highway relaxed them, made them less self-conscious. The forest seemed a place to hide, at first. They were surrounded by fir, pine, and oak, interspersed with redwoods. Dry leaves covered the road. The trail split up shortly. A sign indicated a creek but it led away from the direction of Nickcevich's cabin. Cade began to gasp for breath. He chose the path to the left which followed the slight cleft in the hillside.

There came to be vegetation on the sides of the road,
small bunches of waxen tan-oak leaves encroaching on the
dirt and leaf-littered road. Higher up and in the shady
spots grew ferns. He could tell the sun did not shine di­
rectly on this side of the hill. The canyon to their left
got steeper until it was almost straight down.

"Don't you think we should dump the deer now?" said Har­vey. Cade shook his head no. His shoulders began to
ache and he could feel the lymph nodes in his chest throbbing a split second after his heartbeat. They reached the
crest of the first hill where the road seemed to dip and
the walking looked easier. Cade stood in a deep trench near
the road, turned, and allowed the deer to drop off his back.
Then he lay on top of its swollen stomach to rest.

The still was fierce. For every stir of the oaks or
rustling of leaves, he inserted the sound of a human voice.
It made him want to hide, this substitution, the insistence
of his mind to humanize all the noises. A bird duplicated
the sound of a child. He looked into the sky, a sky pre­
scribed by trees, to see clouds tumbling in the current.
They looked to be only several hundred feet above the tops
of the trees. He knew if a swath were cut in the forest to
the left, they all might see the ocean.

He got up, squatted in the ditch, his back to the an­
imal, then hefted it onto his shoulders. They walked in
silence another hundred yards to a sign made of small, rus­
ted nails forming the words KEEP OUT. Here and there, parts
of the embankment had fallen into the road, exposing tangles of roots, loose shale, and limestone stuck between the coiling wood. The vegetation changed again. The trees were not as large or as numerous.

The light turned grey. Virginia stumbled, almost pulling Harvey to the ground with her. They could no longer see the eastern foothills where the sun was by now, visible. Underfoot, they trampled ferns which seemed to be urged on by unkempt, berry bushes. It smelled of golden maple; the leaves were caught in the change from red to gold and were covered with dew.

At another turn in the road, they noticed a decrepit, rusting shell of an abandoned car. Cade imagined it had been stolen and driven to the spot where it was stripped for parts...they could not tell how far from the paved road they were or how close to the cabin. Cade dropped the deer. He crawled down the shoulder to inspect the car. Harvey and Virginia watched him exhaustedly. The name tag on the hood was gone. He had to know the name of the car, as though knowing that would locate him either in the time of the car or the age of the forest they were exploring. The berry bushes left thorns in his pants; his legs began to hurt. He stepped inside on the roof, crouched down, then leaned on one arm to look at the name plate painted on the steering wheel. "It's a Buick," he said out loud. It relieved him to know that.
Harvey sat on the hillside, the deer now draped on his shoulders. Virginia and Cade hoisted Myrtle and started to walk. They passed a group of abandoned cabins the old man had mentioned. Cade looked for signs of life and yelled, "Anybody in there?" A crude basement was exposed. The floor was without support from underneath.

"We've still got to beat the sun," said Harvey, breaking the peace. The cabin was thirty-five or forty feet long with only two rooms. Two rusting sets of springs stood inside the sagging doorway, with three stuffed chairs, one of which sat in front of the window, facing the dry creek bed. Cade felt each artifact concealed a person hiding from him; they represented life unavailable to him. In tape loop after tape loop he was called upon to subdue people who didn't want him to bury Myrtle. They started to fade and crackle like old re-runs, their color blurred and pieces of magnified lint obscured the usually clear subjects in the tape. It amazed him to be so afraid and to know it. He imagined a traveller sitting at the empty window. A camper living off the land, thought Cade, who always imagined others freer than himself.

The road forked. To the right, the remnants of a road covered with tall grass, the beginning of another ravine, the continuance of forest. He walked left, where the road got more defined, a neat brown cut in the hillside. The forest floor was mostly underbrush; the triangular shaped
red leaves of poison oak reflected the oncoming light and gave a red tint to the underbelly of taller trees. Cade could hear the lizards, birds, and rabbits scuttling further and further into the underbrush on both sides. He imagined they could smell the death on their backs. They reminded him of his fear too much, fears that persisted even though he launched them out into the forest with their names. They returned with only echoes of his own paranoia.

The fresh road wound ahead of them, a scalp in the sides of the hill. At top, they lay panting. Signs of light increased. It seemed to Cade they were close to where he and Colonel had struggled. As they rested, birds decoyed them away from their nests which Harvey threw rocks at.

"They think I'm going to chase them," Harvey said.

"Look, tire tracks. Let's go," said Cade.

Three different roads branched from the one they walked. To the west, a startling view of deep canyons, ribboned with farm land, steep hills like the ones they just climbed, patches of green forest which punctuated the hayfields. It reminded Cade of the pictures he'd seen of Scotland in movies; or England; or parts of Australia. It seemed to him the feeling for his own terrain returned, a tie of geography he might have felt for his own country had this war not made him so ashamed.

"This is the road, this is it, I remember." Cade had
the deer again. His back ached and he felt as though he might collapse.

He was conscious of the sun. It seemed to be only several ridges back of them. Blood was flowing down his back -- occasionally he would feel the pricking sensation on his legs when the horns poked him as he walked. A surging of energy brought him to turn and look at Virginia and Harvey.

"Oh god," said Cade -- Virginia's face was flushed from the strain but her eyes blazed as though she'd tuned in to the purpose of her effort. "You both look so beautiful!"

They staggered off the road and took the straightest path to the old man's cabin. His car was gone. As they stumbled closer they saw Colonel, barking as he stood perched on the top of the living room table, his nose pressed to the glass, beserk from the sight of the deer.

"(Colonel could smell the blood. I put the deer a few feet from the bottom steps, walked to the back of the cabin where the old man left the spare keys. I picked up an axe and came back around front. They were mad the dog was keeping them out.

"I'm sorry, if you'll stand over there beside the door, I'll get him to go for the deer instead of us. He's already tried me once. Then we can get inside."
The axe was sharp. I knelt by the deer and began to skin it by slicing the neck all the way around. I'd never done it before. How easy it would be to give a shot now! Blood trickled then poured freely from its neck onto the ground. It soaked into the earth and made it darker. We could see the light. Colonel howled. I peeled back some of the flesh on the buck's shoulder then walked to the cabin door. Colonel went after the deer. His claws skidded on the slick wood of the porch.

"Come on, get inside before he comes after us."

"What about Myrtle," Harvey said, "he won't bother her, will he?"

"If he does, he's dead."

"I gotta get in," Virginia said, "I'm going to pass."

She went out on the floor. We put a pillow under her feet and covered her with a blanket.

Harvey glowed. His pale skin looked rouged, his proud coils of hair stood straight up on his head from the dew. We watched the sun begin lighting the woods down the hill from the cabin. Lumps of blood in our hair, on our face and hands. "My channels are open."

"We have to find that cement. We have to finish."

"Now that we're in here and the dog's outside, how do we get her buried without him tearing us apart?"

We turned to watch the dog, who looked more confused than primeval; he circled the carcass barking, whining,
nipping at its heels. He didn't know what to do with it.

"Will he attack us? We smell like deer?" I asked him. Harvey pointed to the old man's closet, to his clothes. I gathered up the old man's big coats and pants, bundled up three layers in case the dog did attack. I picked up the cement which rested in back of Nickcevich's shoes, and walked outside again. Harvey followed.

The old man mixed it in a pan. The hoe, the garden hose inside it. I ripped the bag open and began mixing. The dog circled me, the deer, Harvey and Myrtle as if we were the same creature. The extra clothes made it harder work. We looked like we'd finished a year's regimen of weight-lifting and protein pills. "Here mix this, I'll bring Myrtle over here, we're almost ready to put her in the shrine."

Myrtle lay only two yards from the deer. Colonel faced me on opposite sides of the bodies. I was more afraid this time. Slowly I bent down to scoop up rigored Myrtle but he charged, snapping at my face. He was protecting her body!

"Harvey, the goddam dog won't let me have her." Our bodies ached from the climb. We groaned. He came over to me with the hoe.

"It's starting to dry already. We'll have to do something soon. I'm dead."

"We'll have to kill the dog, so help me if he attacks again. Let's just beat the shit out of him, do you understand? It's past the time."
Myrtle's arm in one hand, weapons in the other I remember the warm air from the lower ravines tossing the trees above our heads. The smell of blood surrounded us. We lifted her together and charged.

"It's a pig animal," he said, "it's not a decent animal, it's a cop dog." He swung the hoe blade down on the back of Colonel. "Fucking dog," he screamed.

He went after it while I dragged Myrtle away towards the shrine Nickcevich's wife had carved in the redwood tree. The dog was ruining the ceremony.

I had to slide the body inside the partially hollowed trunk to stand her up inside the wood goblin's shrine. This was ridiculous, standing up? No rest. She wouldn't bend. The tops of her feet were ripped by the dog's teeth. Pieces of pine needles and dirt had lodged in her mouth, her hair; the blanket slid from her body and I'd wrapped it over her shoulders after catching familiar glimpses of her snatch and her breasts which were now hard and firm again, after all these years.

Outside I could hear the dog snarling or Harvey's feet trampling the underbrush trying to catch him. It wasn't going to work. The walls of the shrine were too fragile for a tomb. It had burned some time before the old man had built his cabin and its walls were only three or four inches thick.

I left her standing there and went outside. The cross-
legged god sat, covered with moss that reclaimed the wood. "Harvey, I can't seal her in with her standing straight up!"

"Do it any fucking way you want but the cement's getting hard. You do it quick or I kill this dog. He's a maniac."

"A shovel. We'll bury her straight, like everybody else. We'll put cement on her so the smell won't get out of the ground. And when she rots, man, there'll be a little death masque of her left!"

"Just do something," Harvey said.

The old man's only shovel was an old army surplus model, the kind that turned into a hoe if you unscrewed the mechanism. She had to be buried next to the shrine so I started to dig.

"Goddam, rocks and roots." Inches below the mulch was a tangle of redwood roots coming from all directions. I managed to clear enough dirt out to bury her while running back and forth to the cement where I sprinkled water to keep it soft.

"I like this, tired as I am," Harvey said, "at least I have a real enemy; no more bullshit paranoia, real paranoia!"

"Keep an eye on him now. I'm going to move Myrtle out of there into the hole."

"Okay, hurry."

I saw her on last legs, her face smudged from the oil, bloodied from stains on our shirts. Her face was battered from rolling in the dirt. It surprised me to see she could
still be bruised. Several nasty ones around her eyes and her temples. It was way past time for her. I slid her out feet first into the sunlight and climbed out the entrance way beside, shivering at the feel of her cold skin.

Next to grave I panic. "What do I do? do I put her in face down or face up? I ask Harvey. I never thought of it, goddamit, how do they bury people?

"It's up to you, you can do it your way, don't you see? It's all new."

"I can't decide," the tears come, I rain on myself. Exhausted, I sit next to her, my feet in the hold.

"Roll her in and see which way she lands. Bury her that way." He seemed so clear, calm about it. She tumbled with no sound into the shallow hole, face down. Relieved, I began to dump cement on top of her. The blanket came loose, exposing her buttocks and before I noticed, I had dumped a shovel full of cement on her back.

"She's dead, she's dead now, it doesn't make any difference if she's exposed. I'm not giving her a bed bath." It still hurt; what was her life? The grave was too shallow, she didn't seem far enough away from this world. She needed something to make her way. I fumbled in my pockets and found the hospital keys which I dropped into the hardening concrete.

Covered cement with dirt with rocks, leaves, sticks, trying to make it look as natural as possible. It was all.
Even the dog stopped fighting. Harvey and I shed the layers of clothes, put shirts over small shrubs, walked into the cabin holding each other up, nearly dead...and without speaking, fell asleep.}}
"Let me set the scene," Olaf said. He turned in the seat, the left side of his face illuminated, the right darkened. Light came from John Carp's expensive home.

"No, let me," said Deo Morte, "I even lived here for two weeks."

"Go ahead." Olaf gave in dejectedly.

"It's a whole ring of fairycitos, marichons, faggots, who have a very lot of bread and share this place together. Carp's got money from his daddy who runs a giant chain of grocery stores. They take turns bringing in young guys they make into houseboys. He gives the one he loves a ring from a box in his bedroom dresser. If you go in there you'll see."

"What did you do while you were there?" Olga asked.

"I just fucked a lot."

"Oh." Olga had not expected honesty.

"What did you think? I was after some bread for my funky butt. I was broke so I served it up to them on a silver platter."

"This place I gotta' see," Joan said and she opened the door.
"I can't imagine two guys together," Sylvie said, sliding out. You aren't gay are you Olaf?" she asked. She held on to the front of his sweater, staring at his face in the blue, half-lit street.

"Queer as a three dollar bill," Deo Morte answered before Olaf could.

"I'm as heterosexual as the day is long," Olaf told her.

"How long is that?" she said, letting him go after a kiss. Sylvie led them to the front door of Carp's house.

The man who answered the bell wore an apron and was very handsome. He was surprised to see Sylvie and looked over her shoulder at the rest of us. He was thin, five eight or nine, had sculptured hair with cheekbones that seemed to have been done by the same artist. His hair was fluffy brown cut a decorous length which would allow passage through a wide range of society. He lifted his brows at Deo Morte and said, "Well, what happened to you?"

"I decided to blow the scene," Deo said.

"Maybe the scene blew you, isn't that more like it? You better be careful with Reggie, he hasn't forgiven you for beating him up. You should talk to him." He stepped aside to let us in. Deo lowered his head like a bull and went through, rustling the apron.

A white Siamese inspected us at the end of the vestibule, from which we could see the living room. The cat
sniffed Deo Morte and rubbed his leg while it purred.

"Ariel missed you," said an older man dressed in an orange paisley jump-suit. It was unzipped to the navel and he played absently with the brass ring attached to the zipper. "I'm John Carp," he said, "nice to have you." He wore matching house slippers which covered his feet up to the instep. They slapped his heels as he led us into the sunken living room. His small shoulders were held far back behind the alignment of his head.

"What would you like to drink?" He presided over the glass bar. My stenotype rattled slightly on the glass-topped coffee table and he became aware of me transcribing.

"We hired him," Deo explained. "Remember the night we had the argument about found art? You said you'd front us the bread if we followed through.

"So I did." Carp eyed me over a forest of bottles, topped with thin, stainless steel pouring spouts. "My name stays out, even my first name. If Daddy ever found out... call me something flattering, make up a name for me."

Carp clapped three times. The sound was closely followed by the footsteps of the aproned man who gathered the tray of drinks against his belly then silently delivered them into the appropriate hands. A concerto by Mozart drifted from all corners of the room. Then, the lights dimmed.

"Like a goddam *Playboy* seduction," Joanie whispered, "where's the rolling bed?"
"Where is Mandalamente?" Carp sat cross-legged on the plush blue rug facing Olaf and Deo Morte. He was hairless, and the few dark strands he had on his breastbone, the tops of his feet, drew attention. He seemed to want the limelight and moved as if he believed someone watched. "I miss his insanity, his wit, his conversation."

"He's on the alcoholic ward at county hospital, driving drunk."

"Gawd..." The sound escaped gutturally from Carp's throat. "Ah, anything I can do? A phone call?"

"No," said Olaf, "he's lucky to be out of jail. It's just for the weekend."

"May I look around?" Sylvie asked, "your house is so lovely."

"Watch where you wander," Carp said. "Certainly you may look to your heart's content."

I heard Olga muttering, "Innuendo, innuendo."

Sylvie squeezed Olaf's hand as she stood, then let it go mid-air. Olga and Joan followed.

Carp lit a cigarette. He leaned coyly on his leg as he spoke. "Tonight's fantasy night. We've hired a couple to model and your friend Champion will do some sketches. Ron is the slave of the week. He has to do anything we say. He's putting himself through school living here...isn't he nice? You could have done the same if you'd chosen, Deo. How's the poetry coming? Found a publisher?"
"Yeah, it's called the Rip-On Press."

"Oh really!" Carp laughed.

"And our silent partner's the start of a whole new career," Deo said.

"Rip-On Press. You still believe you can break into print without sucking dick? The whole publishing industry is full of gays and reds." The words hung over Mozart and raped him. Olaf and Deo laughed nervously. The phrase tilted in the gentile air, a defacement.

"I've got a poem for the record," Deo said, "want to hear it?"

"Certainly..." Carp was on his feet. The music was dimmed and he returned.

"It's called the 'Gay Poem'," Deo said.

"Is this another assault?"

"Just listen and tell me if you like it. I promise I'll be a good boy. The intention is valid."

"Ron is a second degree black belt. We aren't as naive as before you came here." Carp lit another cigarette.

Then Deo read:

"Brucie blasted off
All he wanted was a mom.
Robbie tried to fill the bill,
Time ticked like a bomb.

Gorgeous George died in his sleep,
He took too many pills.
Mr. Bob rode off with Nick,
Who wouldn't pay the bills.

Daryl tried to see a shrink,
Who said that he was sick,
He offered doc a wardrobe,
To let him suck his dick.

Fellatio Jones wore leather,
And took it in his cheeks.
Bubba worked at I.B.M.'s
He engineered their leaks."

Every word since we'd been there seemed to break in half and go off in two different directions. It was silent when he finished.

"The rhyme goes with the melodrammatic undercurrent of gay life and undercuts itself. You have some talent... for a Mexican, that is." Carp laughed and clapped for Ron who offered us refills. I refused.

"These two need some of your discipline," Carp said to me."

"I can't write poetry," I said.

"You're the secretary to a bunch of half-baked talents."
I don't really expect anything to come of this, I just want to teach them something." He allowed himself a flamboyant gesture in the absence of the women. The doorbell rang. The girls came back to the living room with the other housemates.

At the door was the painter Champion with his models. He entered and hugged everyone. He was thin and wiry, with grey hair above his ears, wore gold-rimmed glasses and seemed to crack the thin ice in the room with his energy. He hugged Carp warmly, greeted everyone and seemed to be delighted by the presence of the girls. "I thought this would be another stag party," he drawled. His normal voice sifted through the jaded atmosphere adding the aura of a porch visit in a small Texas town.

"Olaf you devil, come by the studio," he said. "How's Kim?" Olaf asked. "Trying to decide if she'll have lovers or a divorce. She always doing an all or nothing."

"She's a masochist to live with you," said Carp, "but then you're one to have married her. She's the only woman I know with a Christ complex."

"Don't talk about my wife, now, when she ain't here," Champion said, "say it to her face." He set a small easel by the back window, put a soft blue light near his feet. He placed a large white drawing pad on the easel, some charcoal stubs wrapped in newsprint on the teakwood table in
the corner to his right. He stood talking in front of Olaf and Sylvie. "You've done what?" They came over to me. "That's like taking the paint brush out of your hands and hiring a truck to drive around spraying your canvases. How do you know what he's recording? if he's getting it right?"

Champion and I shook hands. "Hello," he said amiably, "I just don't think they know how to utilize you, that's all."

"Big Daddy footing the bill?" Champion asked. While Olaf and Deo nodded, he said, "Are you with Frizzy-head?"

"I'll never tell," said Olaf.

"Does Marlene know you're out hustling?" Champion asked. He seemed to be plotting where to put his energy on the basis of Olaf's answers.

"Marlene can't bitch unless she gets a divorce. We met the girls at the Wine Cellar tonight. I like Sylvie..."

"What about the blonde?"

"Going to meet her man in Oregon."

His models came quietly nude into the center of the floor. He left us then. "Make them comfortable," Champion said, "everybody strip...hardons have to leave the room...the human body is beautiful, you fuckups." Soon Champion had all his clothes on the floor and began to sketch.

"This is Gregory and Tatiana," he called out behind his easel, "you all have to chip in to pay their wages and some of you might try drawing or modeling yourselves. Feel free to join them as a composition."
Olaf came over and sat beside me. "I think I'm in love with that girl, Tatiana, but I can't tell Champion. He tries to ball every woman I go with."

The three women had a quick conference, disrobe with their backs to the room, and settle back on the floor. Olga picked up a pencil and a scratch pad. She and Sylvie were lovely, slim, and proportioned. I realized I was the only clothed person in the room. Once nude, it felt like nothing at all.

"I like your spirit scribe," said Olaf, "but your face is doing the hula."

"It ain't in the job description," I said. "They'll never believe this back at the courthouse."

"I'd like to see the typescript," Carp said after he'd given me the check. "Don't forget to take out my real name." I agreed. Three hundred and sixty dollars. By that time I had my clothes back on and was drinking coffee, wondering how I would get home.

"You just contact me every week on Saturday night and you'll be paid. I'm giving this thing three months then I want to see the results. You have other job prospects?"

"I can always go back to the pool."

Carp tore the check out. He wore a large bath towel and seemed to be the only one without a partner.
"You aren't gay by any chance, are you?"

"No," I said.

"I was afraid of that."

Deo came in the kitchen and smashed the wall with his fist. Carp clapped three times.

"You know what that puta' did to me? We were all set and she told me she had an infection."

"What kind?" asked Carp, his eyes masked. Ron was now behind Deo.

"Trichomonus, something about yeast. I said she was lying."

"Well, do something," I told her. "'I can't,' she said, 'I'd be unsatisfied.' Why did you take your clothes off? 'I wanted to be close,' she said."

"Come on Carp," Deo said with irritation, "if you can't get a woman, get a dirty old man!"

"Not alone, Deo, we're having company."

Deo Morte followed the path of Carp's eyes, turned around catching sight of his replacement Ron, the black-belt. "What for?"

"Action and reaction. You understand. Don't back out, it might be interesting." Carp began to slip out of the towel in a mock strip.

"Okay," Deo said, "I can't let this one go to waste."
"The issue in the seventies is not repression of libido, it's repression of anger." Disney Mandalamente had called the party and asked me to transcribe what he said from the psychiatric ward.

"My mother, I'm told, cried when she saw me in the crib. My father said I'd inherited the worst features from each side of the family: the beak, the complexion from mother's side; the bent spine of my grandfather, the straight, greasy hair. All I've had to go with is my mind and it hasn't been enough."

"Please help me," Disney said. His voice had the backdrop of another patient trying to use the phone.

"Olaf's coming to visit you soon, tomorrow morning."

"Thank God," Disney said. "This place is driving me crazy; nothing but Librium, the t.v. set, and a bunch of addicts from the Vietnam War playing ping-pong all night.

"I keep asking the hard questions," Disney said, barely able to breathe. "I've had the right to be free taken away and I have to give it back to myself. Do you understand?"

I told him to keep talking and to hang on. He wanted me to come with Olaf to the ward. "Wednesday at the earliest. I'm exhausted following these two around. I have to get some rest."

"That feels so late," he whined, "you know they don't
count the weekends as part of the seventy-two hour hold? Only weekdays." The patient continued to taunt him. Come on buddy, I heard him say in the background, I have to get out of here too.

"One more thing -- are you punching? There is only one benefit from being here. I know who my people are. I've seen them on the street, around the campus. I can spot ex-patients. It might just be the Thorazine shuffle, the snafu of the burnt-out nerve ends, or the vulnerable looks in their eyes. But the mad people are an ethnic group, more than the Italians. Italians aren't supposed to have breakdowns, they should have their mothers and wives to lean on. There's one Oriental on this floor, withdrawing from Pheno-barbital addiction. I'm the only wop...okay, okay, don't forget, Wednesday. I may hold class here. Tell Olaf. I may finish my Ph.D. thesis here."

"I won't forget; when are visiting hours?"

"Anytime after twelve. We have groups in the morning."

"Okay then, after twelve on Wednesday."

"Say hello," he yelled as the phone was taken from his hand.

"Come early," Olaf said over the phone, "the story I was going to tell you Saturday got longer. I need your help, we've got to repaint the car. I'll tell you why when you
"Here's what happened," said Olaf. He was dressed and looked better than when I'd first met him. "Tell it in the straight third person, without the quotes." He sat down with a little pile of paper, his coffee, and lit a Camel.

Tatiana and Olaf left the party and drove to her place. They tip-toed into the courtyard of apartments to a small lawn. They were both slightly drunk and glad to get outside into the air. She did a somersault and he could see she had no underwear. Like a father, Olaf asked her to pull her skirt down. Odd, since he'd only recently seen her completely nude while modeling for the party. She pulled her skirt down. She turned over once, twice, and landed lightly on her feet like a ballerina. He saw her bush and wanted her. He projected onto her the quality of fearless openness, the ability to stand nude in front of people without shame.

Olaf did his cartwheels expertly, like a gymnast. He went a step further and sprang to his feet from a prone position. He walked on his hands which trembled; his breath grew short and made him dizzy.

Tatiana tried one more trick; standing on her head. She couldn't get her legs up straight. Her dress slid down
her shoulders exposing her gorgeous roundness, her tits which dawdled like two cones almost in her face. Instead of enjoying the sight, he was nervous, her nakedness aroused the instinct of protectiveness, as if he were her father watching the world for signs of carnal intent directed at his daughter.

They walked barefoot through the dark neighborhood. She stopped to pick flowers. She held them in one hand, his in the other. She walked on his right side. Around them was the adhesive sighing of car tires and the smell of tomatoes from a factory.

"Who're you fucking?" she asked.

"A painter, a woman who's married."

"Do you love her?" Tatiana was only five feet one, but seemed taller. In Carp's living room, when she was posing in front of the blue light, she gave Ólaf the impression he was watching her grow taller.

"No...we got together when my first marriage was breaking up. It was convenient. What about your model friend?"

"He's gay. He loves himself." They came to a main thoroughfare and walked carefully on the sidewalk watching for glass.

"What's her name? you didn't say her name?"

"Marlene."

"Don't be so reluctant, I'm just tired of two week stands. This will save us a lot of time. I've done all the
trips. I quit a commune a few months back. I don't take any more dope. I used to be hung up on black men and I'm handling my exhibitionism by posing for art classes and going to Carp's house for extra bread when I'm short and kinky contacts...you want to come to the University this week and see me model?"

"I guess; sure. Would you cook dinner at my house some time?" Olaf asked.

"You have a house?"

"My parents died when I was seventeen so I bought a place with the insurance money. Lots of kids in it. Weird neighborhood; all the parents are going to pieces."

"That's funny, a poet with a house." They got to her front door. "Art 114, it's the main classroom. We'll spend the day at the beach somewhere, what say?"

"Monday. You all right?" Olaf asked.

"Fine. Just tired of being alone so don't waste time."

She kissed him, "And get rid of Marlene!"

He arrived early, carrying an artist's sketch book and several colored pencils. The art building was only several years old but already the rage of the students had been carved deep into the walls of the bathrooms and hallways. The janitors simply painted over the cavernous graffiti.

Tatiana was in the skylit room, dressed in a robe. She
talked to the instructor, a soft-bodied, bald-headed man dressed in a sweatshirt and pegged pants, with orange tennis shoes. When the bell rang he shut the door and Tatiana took off her robe.

"We'll do about ten, one-minute poses," the instructor said, "then two of ten and fifteen minutes apiece. Don't struggle with the short ones, do just the lines, the tone of the pose, don't worry about having a perfected sketch."

Olaf watched Tatiana's slow ballet on the small stage, surprised at how inventive she was with her attitudes. Each one presented a different problem to the students and he was confused by the non-sexuality of the context. She took a short break and he watched her hand a piece of paper to a student who brought it to him. He opened it and it said:

"This morning I was horney thinking about you. I masturbated in the car from Saint Francis Avenue to Fifth. Did you get rid of Marlene? See you after. Love, Tata."

He smiled at her and shrugged his shoulders. The note made him feel out of control, yet touched him because she was so honest and leading him into honesty. He'd turned off the phone that morning. A start; Marlene always called him Mondays. Seeing Disney in the hospital had depressed him. He just wanted to watch Tatiana and luxuriate in the warm classroom.

She put a pillow under her left arm, lengthwise on the podium, crossing her right leg over her left, draping her
right arm behind her. There was a compactness about her which warmed him, her short waist, the round calves, the large breasts set on her small shoulders. He watched the faces of the students, the men as they tried to sketch her. Several of them were stumped with the sight of her, as if her attraction were trapped between the stage and their paper, between art and lust.

He thought about writing a poem for her but that didn't make sense; she was already too important to write about and he was feeling some vague debilitation from the weekend, from his visit to the psychiatric ward. The thought of writing made him tense up in his neck and stomach. Toward the end of her first ten minute pose, the door opened and three black men walked in. He felt as if the room had taken a deep breath and had held it.

"Yes, may I help you?" said the instructor. All heads in the class turned in their direction.

"Say, you helped us right out, Jack." The one who spoke wore dark glasses, a denim outfit. His right hand was stuck in his pocket where it cradled his genitals. "Check out the tits on that white squeeze!"

"This class is for people who have enrolled for Art 212, Life Drawing."

"Well, this is a draw, man." Number two had a dashiki and a natural with the comb stuck in the back of his hair. He wore the same color tennis shoes as the instructor.
Number three was nervous, seemed shorter and more vulnerable than the other two. He spoke: "Give us some paper then, we're just here for the scenery."

"Say, Jack, some nice shades of pink," Denim said, "I'll draw that for sure, I'll draw that with my felt tip pen."

Olaf thought, "What need, what waste. I'm going to have to do something here. I can feel the need blowing this room out of proportion like a dead party, like dead people sucking..."

The instructor tried to assimilate them and had one of the students bring several sheets to them where they stood.

"Not here man," said Dashiki, "up in front where the life is drawing me, where the view of the bush is burning my mind."

"So right, my man. How come we never did this before?" Denim asked.

"You never understood the Une-eye-ver-city as a resource," Dashiki answered.

They tried to pass quietly through the rows of desks but Olaf could see they were high; it looked like they were stoned on reds and he remembered Deo's description of fighting on reds, how nothing hurt until the next day and you felt like you could go on stomping and ripping heads with your knuckles bleeding and you wouldn't feel a thing.

Denim took off his jacket. They sat barely ten feet
from Tata and Olaf could feel his heart rocking his whole body back against his chair. He lit a cigarette, eyeing the space between them and her, eyeing Denim's vast back, like a moving slagpile of black muscle. He wondered would it be all right, and what would it be like to be hit with all of that wall of force behind a punch. For all his time in the Navy he had stayed out of fights. He was five-ten and weighed one-fifty-five after drinking all weekend. He'd always talked his way out and managed his life so fighting could be avoided. He looked around the room for something to pick up. He felt frail, although he understood that he could kill; it was the not knowing what it felt like to be hit which held him back.

"White girl," Denim said, "want to pose with me?"

"Would that be a pose now, or a movin' pitchur?"

Dashiki took off Denim's glasses for him and said, "You know any white girl sits without no clothes on front of a bunch of fags must need something."

What fear this is, thought Olaf, what fear to care what's going to happen. He got up quietly and edged his way between the chairs, heading for the tank-shirted Denim who sat up and said, "I ain't never been with a nude woman before where I didn't do somethin'; you ever been with a nude woman and ain't done something?"

Dashiki said he was tired of looking and he wanted to touch. The quiet one looked sullenly at Denim, then caught
sight of Olaf's foot heading for the space in back of the chair where Denim's ass bulged. He pitched forward. Dashiki tried to catch him but missed. Someone screamed and Olaf felt like he saw the whole room at once. Dashiki stuck in his desk, trapped by the curved writing arm; he was turned halfway with his fists in front of his face. Olaf reached in and stuck him in the stomach; not even a punch but more like a shove, and Dashiki went down yelling as the plywood cut hard into his back.

Olaf hesitated, watching them, thinking they looked like three black dragons, their fat nostrils wide with surprise, their dark bodies swimming for a moment in the mud of their Seconal. He remembered the note then but that moment was lost like a vision of peace. Still a virgin fighter, he thought, move now or you'll get it.

"Black bastard children," he screamed, ranted as they ran after him, "I'm tired of this mess!"
"What's your name?"
"Puddin Tane...ask me again and I'll tell you the same."

"Get your clothes on idiot you think everybody
"Tony, keep your hands to yourself.

A blast of portable radio startled Webster. He lifted the earphones. "I want to tell you how I found Jesus! I got down on my knees and yelled for help..."
"Mmmmmm nice, that's a good girl."
"You're manipulating, you're manipulating again. Pete get this kid off my hands, I'm ready to kill him."
A child cried.

He pushed the button again, letting it run almost halfway through. "What is going on?" he thought, "I must be the only one who knows." He pushed the button.

"Want some bacon Mark? You love bacon." MaryAnn coaxed the child. "All you have to do is ask."
"You'll run out of gas if you don't eat," Pete said, "we'll make a deal Mark; you can have more attention if you eat."

Sound of spilling milk.

"Can we watch t.v. today?"

"Is your room clean?"

"Aw shit..."

"Hey Pete, you wanna' play smear the queer?" Jones Smith got up. He ran into the bright hallway saying, "Last one on the lawn is a butt-fucker!"

"Shit, I can't be last then," Pete said, laughing as he ran.

"I saw the fairies again last night," Larry whispered at breakfast, "they appointed me king again, for a second term."

"Why you?" Pete asked.

"Because I'm the only one who knows they're there," he said. Larry's face was like a small, short-nosed antelope. He was quick and nervous when all the kids were together. He had finished his food first. "There's one who wants to let me in his tribe but I haven't decided yet. I don't know if I want to be that small."

"I bet," Pete said. "You'd have other powers, though; it doesn't matter how big you are if you have powers."
He talked like a gay in the works, all the nasal inflections, the wrist movements; even the kids knew it. Smear the queer was invented for Larry.

"You're going to grow up and be very intelligent," said Pete, "it won't matter if you aren't six feet tall."

"Yes, that's what makes their offer so interesting."

"What do they do when they get together?" Pete saw Tony was jealous of the attention Larry was getting.

"They dance, they have music no one else but I can hear, they wear fine costumes, they chase off the bad spirits, and they eat good food. They have meetings too but that's just before dawn comes and they disappear to sleep. They elect officers and talk about which children at the Arc they're going to help."

"Do the children know when they help them?"

"Oh sure. Don't ask any more questions or they'll think I've betrayed them. You won't tell will you?"

"I promise," said Pete. He wondered again if he should interrupt the fantasy or challenge it.

"Sometimes adults don't get to see those things," he said. "It's nice you're telling me. I think kids get to see them because they don't have to worry so much."

Larry shook his head no. "Kids have the fairies to help them with their worries."

"Oh." He thought he was losing his imagination playing the straight man all the time. Trying to project a path
out of chaos. "I can't remember any partners like that; I should have had some."

Tony pinched Kathy under the table. The quiet was over.

"Tony, I wish you could get my attention some other way. You and Larry change places.

"If wishes were horses, beggars would ride," said Larry.

The sound of footsteps, breathing, a toilet flushing in the background, soft crooning sounds on the tape. Webster strained to hear what was being said. He pulled one earphone off, letting it dangle while he watched the view from the office. The night tapes were the hardest to wade through but he was convinced one of them would turn up something. I want the truth, he thought, the kind of truth I could never persuade anyone to tell me face to face.

The owl in the Oak hooted. It woke him every day. Last night he'd sat on Mark III until two o'clock, holding him and covering his mouth. Pete made him run laps, mop the floor, walk to the forest alone. Now he could hear tiny scuffling noises, tiny chortles outside his locked door. What he feared most was the whole cottage waking up and
and staying up all night. Without sleep he was a demon. Without sleep on Friday he became a volcano. The acrid smell of shit wafted to his face from the draft under his door. Mark had screamed for over an hour in the total darkness; had promised to be quiet if Pete would take him back. Then he screamed again. Pure psychotic will. Two days without food. They all decided to carry this out during the staffing but he ended up the one who tried to follow through. The hunger would break his defenses. He would have to ask. And who can do that?

In his dream he had thought of cures for Mark III. It was so clear to him what should be done but he woke to the smear on his door and forgot the secret. The dream showed a zipper running the length of Mark's body. He pulled it over the child's face but stopped when another, smaller version of the freckled red-head leered at him underneath, crazy and stubborn as the one he'd unzipped.

"Mark III drink your milk. You can't have a roll until you drink your milk." All the kids eyed him. They knew what was being done was all out warfare.
"Hafta, drinkmy, maaalk?" Mark said, pulling a booger. The counselors watched, sickened, as he held the long white strand he quickly spread on Cora's plate.

"Ca-ca boy," she screamed and hit him on the shoulder.

"Stop it or you're going to your rooms." The timbre of his voice was changing; the soft edge had gone and now he could make his words feel like rivets to the children. Tony rushed around the table but Pete caught him before he could get to Cora.

"Get another plate, Cora, I'm sitting next to Mark." Pete steered Tony to his seat and sat beside Mark. "You got the attention again, didn't you?" He wanted to turn on the television so they would all eat in silence. He was beyond food.

"Loo, loo, hoo, what am I to do?" Cora sang. She sounded like the barn owl. It was a mournful cry. Did she wake them all up? He resolved to find out.

"Cora, do snapping turtle," said Tony.

"You think it's neat to make her do crazy things?" MaryAnn said. She unfurled herself, stretched and spoke in a flat tone of voice to the kid she hated the most.

"That's like Jones telling you you're going to Juvey." Tony jabbed his roll. Jones Smith put his hand across Tony's plate and made a grab for the roll. His hand got slapped.

"Hey, leave my food alone," Tony whined. He stood up
holding his small brown fists by his hips ready to take on the larger black boy.

"All right," Pete said, "I'm going to cancel the beach trip if you don't shape up. This table doesn't seem to want a beach trip." MaryAnn looked at him with alarm.

"You mean," Jones Smith said, "when you came here, you was nice. Now you mean like the other counsellors."

"Yeah, I let you stay up all night and listen to your radio...I'm so mean," Pete said, relieved the fight hadn't gone on.

"This table doesn't want a trip to the beach," said Karl, "it's too big for the car. It can walk on water though." He cackled with his own literality.

Mark III reached for one of the rolls near his plate. "Pick that up without asking and you're going to your room and no television this morning."

"Hafta, drinkmy, maalk?" he said.

"Yes, absolutely." He wondered where MaryAnn was this morning, feeling the need for her energy. He looked at her again trying to remember it wasn't personal, that she had problems of her own. She seemed to be losing some weight.

Mark III snatched the roll and tore into it, his bright knowing eyes fixed on Pete who got up calmly and held him by the arm, the roll several inches from the child's face.

"MaryAnn get them all in their rooms. We'll eat one at a time. I'm sick of breakfast turning into a circus."
She stirred once more and told them to go. "No food," she said to Tony who tried to take his plate. The seven of them got up griping and complaining. After the dining room had emptied he asked her if it was a good move.

"Let's not talk around him," she said, "he's getting so passive-aggressive he uses everything he hears and turns it against us. Isn't that right, Marky-Darky?"

"Heyaahhh," he giggled, "hafta, drink my, maaalk?"

"Sure you know that," she said, "it's the rule, you've been here two years and you still say the same things, don't you Mark? Hope if you stay a baby you won't have to be normal?"

"Heyaahhh, wanna grow up and be a mayann."

"So you could beat us all up and tell us what to do?" she answered.

"Heyahhh, beat you ahupp..." He put his fingers in the milk and sucked on them.

"Nope, like a real boy," MaryAnn coaxed, "you have to ask like a real boy and eat like a real boy. Don't you want to be a real boy?"

"Heyahhh, wanna be a real boy."

"Then you've got to eat it right," she said. His eyes glistened. He could talk for minutes at a time like a coherent, put-together child, especially when the visitors came.

"Look." MaryAnn pressed her thumb under Mark's eye.
The dark circle grew white, half-mooned. "When he stays up so late, let's make sure he doesn't go back to bed. That way he'll be dead by bedtime."

"Dayedd by bedd?"

"Food and sleep and shit," she said, "that's how you let us know you're angry, right Marky-Darky?"

He smiled and laughed, looking at them sideways. He stared into space and tried to move quietly on their periphery. She spoke to let him know he hadn't faded into the wallpaper.

"He wiped his shit all over the door," Pete said.

"He'll have to clean it up again," she said.

"Hafta, cleanit, uppp?" Mark said.

"If he doesn't finish by twelve, he'll have to stay here. Anyway, I'm tired of him taking his clothes off in public. They're going to think we have some crazy children here." Pete and MaryAnn laughed, watching Mark's adroit eyes avoid theirs.

And then, when he had abandoned the idea that any one of the children could be helped; at the end of a day full of discipline and tantrums, when he least expected it, the children would open up to him with the advent of darkness. When he was most exhausted and ready to fold them away in their beds, a mood would snake over them all and they would
get soft, like children, they would wait quietly for a story or a backrub. They would even sing songs with Pusher when he came around to say goodnight. Jones Smith would forget to expose himself to MaryAnn and she could rock him in her arms while the gospel music shook the table.

Pete and Larry looked at a game donated by the Ladie’s Auxiliary. "The Game of Life."

The first section told you how much money you had to play with. Doctor; $25,000. Lawyer; $20,000. College Professor; $18,000. Teacher; $12,000. Bachelor’s Degree, $6,000.

"Where’s the one for counselor?" Larry asked.

"Let’s write it in," Pete said. "Counselor, $3,600 plus room and board."

"That’s terrible pay!" Larry was shocked.

"Aren’t you glad I like kids?" Pete teased.

"Bullshit," said Larry, "you just don’t want a regular job."

"Next you meet your Spouse. Spend five hundred on an engagement ring. Nobody does that anymore," said Pete.

They got to ‘Give Birth to a Baby Daughter’. It was right next to twin boys.

"They should have a space where you get a baby boy and a baby girl together so the mommy can get what she wants and the daddy can too. My mom thinks I’m a girl."

That afternoon they had played a game. Larry was the
prince and Pete was the servant. Larry used a stick for a scepter and they walked all over the grounds absorbed in the fantasy. In the bush behind the girl's cottage Prince Larry found a doll. He'd handed the scepter to Pete then began to stomp the pink rubber body.

"The doll is pregnant," Larry murmured when he was done and had the scepter back in his hand.

"Why'd you kill her?"

"The doll was pregnant with me," he said, "so I killed myself."

After "The Game of Life" Pete hugged Larry who pulled back the covers when he'd let go. "All the boys keep teasing me. They say my pee-pee is going to go back into my body and I won't have one any more."

"They're just trying to make you feel weird. You're just taking longer to develop. Everyone's different, you're just a late bloomer." Pete pulled the covers up.

"A late bloomer," Larry said, "like late flowers." He was drifting off to sleep. "I'll tell them I'm a late bloomer." Then he sat up and reached over to the game. He took a pencil out of the drawer then drew a new blank at the end of the game.

"Late Bloomer," he wrote.
The last one to give himself to sleep. Jones Smith. The last one to stop anything. He and Pete had one game together, played in the universe under Jones' bunk which was built with a thousand scraps of wood and traveled on with his Hot Wheels. They replayed the accident. That was the game.

"...the car goes ninety and there's the turn...you're the cop, you're chasing uncle Dwight, mother's screaming to slow down and give up but he's pissed and he won't."

"...I slide off the seat on the floor and I hang onto this sprang under the back seat. They we turn over like laundry and I feel like milkshake. Everybody's fly around but me..." Jones' car was lying on the same turn every night. Pete rocked his own-purple-fifty-five Chevy back and forth on the floor. Jones noticed he wasn't playing.

"Go on now," said Jones, "you got to pull up here to cover everybody up."

He tucked the boy in. They argued for five minutes about how loud the radio should be. Pete got a crayon and marked the volume where they agreed. It went up infinitesimally as he left the room. On the porch he watched the sun go. He could hear the farting of a child echoing in the toilet bowl like the barking of a seal.
After coffee, a porch sit. He smokes, feels the nicotine slide off his tongue into his stomach. He is mind-trippingly tired. Outside in the moon, on the ball field, something stiffened. He felt it bellywise like a tendril, a chord in tune with his own chaos, the cord which made him good with kids but which exhausted him so. Cora was standing nude over home plate. She took a swipe between her legs for a lickyfinger and squat over the dusty rubber game, dappling her ankles with pee and dirt. He watched her small hands darting over her body like bats. She stared up and away in the sifty channel of white, stale light. She heard him move strapped to the same tentacle by which he'd known her there. She moan in return, a hurt, angry animal whir, and she disappeared.

"Cora," he said to his own dark fear,"Cora."

He only housewalked, thinking she close by but tonight was no ordinary...led him by the barn where Jackson and wife and the kids, watched over by lightning-rod cross, kept their burros. He moved by it feeling the rough, weathered wood with his hands. Soon he was into the pasture walking up slope to the edge of the Arc and then he could see her sitting on the fence in the moonlight. He stopped and could hear another voice, a deep male voice talking gently and low. A figure sat on the wet grass just the other side of the fence. Cora had a large coat over her shoulders. He crawled closer. She was talking! He could hear her animal words
as she rocked back and forth on the fence's top rung.
Crawled he close until the stranger's face made him stop.
From town he'd seen the man, Scarface they said, burned in
a plane for World War II, the skin plowed from head to toe,
grey eyes curtained by eerie eyelaps from cheekbones to
eyebrow spots. He felt them three like caught in a moon-
tide, the father, the daughter, and the Holy Ghosty while
they murmured in outcast and he, jealous, but feeling right
as the duty watch, let him sleep, forgot the hard work of
makedo and make good, lay in wet sift of long wheatgrass
and passed away.

Cora. She find her Peter and do her dance around him
until he wakes away and back. "Loo, loo, what am I to do?"
she sprays the rhymy song. Sleepy gives her sweater for
skinny, I see her slit-middle and they walk downhill to her
cottage, his army on her backy like pushing a rocking chair,
she make the motion over and over own way, fist hitting
ribs like a tom tom. I know. I watch em all I wander and
chestpound too like crazy dingbats around, I know it all
they do playing peeky-feely and chase and good nights and
the times when scared. I'm no momma no poppa, I'm no touch
and no sleep and no talk. Nobuddy where a mam and who I
be buzzing. I Eddie the boy thing.
"What else can I tell you? If you came here ex­
p ecting you'd ever enjoy the countryside, forget it! I
don't ever get my eyes above child level until the sun
goes down. We go to Mendocino on the weekends, drink and
dance in the bars. They know us as "those crazy kid people."
We sleep at Van Damme State Park in my van. Or go to the
City. You'll be tested. Most people don't even last a
month. Cora wrecked the automobile of one counselor the
first week he was here. She got a crush on him. When the
weekend came she let the brake off in his Triumph so he
couldn't get away! He tiptoed off into the night and we
never heard from him again. If you last a month, you'll
last three. If you last three, you'll be hooked. Don't
take it personally, though. The secret is not to take it
personally. They hate someone else. You just happen to
be here in the way. Do you see what I mean?

"I'm glad you majored in Psych. You'll get along with
Webster. We're supposed to give them all a little test
when they get here but usually we fill them out ourselves.
Maybe you could do that? Don't look so shocked, we have to
stick together or our energy would be taken up with this
bullshit. In college you're forced to order the world from
the neck up. Most people can't take the discrepancy between
theory and practice, especially here. It kills them. Their
expectations are built up around order, around theory. Order
is at a premium here. You've got to work on your own. Some
times you'll be in charge of all fourteen, by yourself.

"It's not bad," Pusher says to the job prospect, "it's
like a family. Mueller likes to get stoned and dance Friday
evenings. He likes MaryAnn and Rose and the two subs. We've
really helped him a lot. (At this he grins.) He's
come a long way from that Freudian shit. He's into Jung
now and we argue radical therapies. We've done wonders for
him!"

Pete at night alone in the dining room; the sound of
the grinding refrigerators. Cars pulling into and out of
quarters making wine runs to Booneville, their lights em­
blazoning the walls, briefly.

He thinks, "How about your dreams father, talk about
when they fired you from the college and you had to work
in the factory? I feel like I'm in the same cycle, in
your footsteps. I don't mind that now, I don't have to
rebel against it like Pusher, I want to know it better.
Some footsteps are so large you don't know you're in them."

But he can't picture his answer. He sips coffee feel­
ing the openness for a moment, of having swept his father
out of himself, into the room. But the image disappears.
Meanwhile he stands in for seven fathers. Tony drew a picture of him today. In it he had a beard, black and menacing. He'd been shot in the genitals and blood gushed out from between his legs. He stares at the picture on the oak table. The Rolling Stones are being played at the party.

"I have two daddies," Kathy had said, "my telephone daddy and my real daddy. Which one are you?" she'd asked.

"I'm your counselor daddy," he told her.

He thinks of dream before waking to Mark III...the counselors are walking through a ward full of Mongoloids. One of them says, "I don't care, kiss me," to him. The Mongol's teeth are missing; he looks like an old man and sneers in that way. He gives them a speech: "The Mongoloids are a lost tribe of people who spring out of the wayward genes."

He forces himself to kiss the starved child, like a politician. Feels a tongue, smell of feces, wakes to the smell of Mark III's shit on his door.

MaryAnn got mad at him when he wouldn't cook this evening. "You think you'll grow tits if you spend more than fifteen minutes of your time in the kitchen."

"You forget I already do all of the physical work," he said, "it's only fair. Don't make me feel guilty about it unless you want to wrestle with Jones, play baseball, climb trees when they won't come in for supper and kick shit out of Tony."

She agreed but would not relent in front of the others.
She eyed his brown, bare legs, the growth of beard, the flat belly he'd gotten from the rope climb, the swimming, from hiking and moving incessantly after children from morning until night.

"You're losing weight," he said, "it looks good." He came from a divorce to the Arc, hoping to accrue fatherhood by being around real children. This way you could quit.

Once in the river she'd swum to him, putting her leg between his, making his hair stand on end. He didn't know if it had been an accident or not. Not long ago. She grew thinner.

Kathy conducted invisible symphonies and spent too much time in her room alone. She talked to him while Pusher played kick the can with the others.

"We're all God here, do you know that?"

"Do you mean we have a piece of god in us?" said Pete.

"No, you're God, aren't you?" Her eyes crossed slightly when she talked and every sentence was followed by 'uh-huh?, uh-huh?' until you agreed with her. She was going to be fourteen in August. The social worker from the state hospital had already shown her where she would sleep in the adolescent ward.

"No Kathy," he said, taking her arm.

"Yes you are, Tony told me. You think I'm crazy? My crazy?"
"Well, I can't understand you right now," Pete said, "what's the matter?"
"I'm not crazy, you just have to learn how I talk."
"Why can't you just tell me what you want?"
"To see if you're smart," she said. He was curious.
She knows what she's doing, he thought.
"What if I'm not smart? What if I'm dumb and you have to play it straight?"
"Then you shouldn't be a counselor." She lifted her arms and lowered her head. Before the music was supposed to start she looked up.
"Am I new?"
"This is your old trip," Pete said, "Kathy's old trip so she doesn't have to say her feelings. You're going to Napa and you're scared, huh kid?"
"Am I pregnant?" She grabbed his arm and made it rest on her stomach. She rubbed it around for good measure then tried to put his hand between her legs. He stopped her, hugging her instead.
"You're too young to be pregnant," he said.
"I'm going to have a baby, uh-huh?, uh-huh?"
"Let's go swing, okay?" He thought diversion, and I think I have identity problems. She'd had her period six months ago and they'd switched her medication from dexedrine to Thorazine. Some puberty, he thought.
"Uh-huh, Uh-huh?, uh-huh, right here in my tummy."
Have I been here a hundred years?"

"You're thirteen and you know it." They walked to the door. Rosalie was sitting quietly in the swing watching Pusher hide on the roof. Jones Smith caught him from behind and they raced to the home plate.

"I pray to you at night," she said. Her grunts filled in the spaces, constantly now, between words.

"You can pray for me, I'd like that."

"Have I ever been new?"

"Kathy have the other boys been bothering you? Please tell me about it, okay?" She was agitated. He looked at the clock to see if it was time for her medication. Close enough, he thought. They went back to the kitchen and poured her a small dose of liquid Thorazine. She mixed the orange juice in it herself, then swilled it away.

"Somebody's going to have a baby here," she said, "god has made her have a baby." She laughed hideously and rubbed her stomach, wrenching free from his hand. "If you're god, you did it."

"Let's go to your room for a while," Pete said. "You have to lie on your bed for fifteen minutes or no dessert." She dropped the crazy act, nodded, then walked her stiff little walk to the Troll wing and plopped down on her bed. She cradled the broken plastic doll. She put it between her legs and up her dress to belly.

He went back to the dining room after she'd fallen
to write the conversation down in the log book. A fight broke out on the ball field. Tony thought he was safe. He'd thrown a can at Jones and got two kicks in the stomach for it. Pete went out to help Pusher.

Pete stood in the counselor's toilet. He lifted a beer to his lips, listened to it sizzling in his mouth like a wave retreating over sand. He thought of Kathy, those puppet-head movements, her shoulders hunched up as though pulled by strings. He saw those small buds under her t-shirt; he shuddered, thinking about his hand between her legs. Once he had tried to show Webster what it was like when Kathy freaked out. "Just watch from the window," he'd said. Tony called her crazy and she'd gone into her snapping turtle routine; he told her she was going to the state hospital. It took him half an hour to calm her down. When it was over he went back inside to Webster's office.

"It's not the same child," he said. "She makes perfect sense in here."

Pusher made them all run laps for ten minutes. They started a new game. Hide and Seek. Pete came back in to check on Kathy who was sound asleep. Wake her? If she slept too long she'd be up all night. He threw the beer can in the small sack and threw it away. Tony would howl
if he found a can unless you gave him one. Pete walked
to the porch. Rosalie sat in the swing with one child in
her arms. He began to resent his role; never the intimacy
with one kid; the women counselors always did that, picked
on one favorite and showered their love on them. Once in
a while, like tonight, a few moments alone.

Rosalie was drifting slowly on the rope, her toe making
trails in the dirt. Cora cradled herself against the
perfect body of Rose, as if she was nursing. The noise of
the others playing Hide and Seek coursed through the
narrow arroyo like a raucous band of primates discovering
speech.

The sight of that peace upset him. He walked instead
out to the field and joined the game.
"I want to tell you how I found Jesus,
I got down on my knees and asked for help..."

The Staple Singers propelled him into Friday morning on a band of goosebumps. "Turn it up," he yelled down the hallway. Jones obliged, his old tube radio grunting and straining.

Acorns thundered on the cottage roof. He wanted to climb in bed with MaryAnn and all the boys together. He took a last puff and threw it in the toilet. Mark III hadn't eaten in four days. Pete kept him by his side to make sure the other kids hadn't given any to him. He had dragged him to breakfast on Thursday where Mark had watched the other kids stuff themselves on bacon, eggs, biscuits, tea and honey, and real butter; almost his favorite food, real butter.

"All you have to do is ask for it," Pete said, "remember you're doing it to yourself. It's your choice; if you talk like an eight-year-old. How're you going to grow up to be a man if you don't eat?"

"Wanna grow and be a mayann," said Mark. His eyes and nostrils filled with the possible satisfaction of eating. His stomach growled, he stood in his pants like a clown in a barrel.

After dressing he took Mark by the hand past the dining table to the bathroom. They were reviewing
his treatment program.

"Wait outside," Pete said. When he was done, he stood without flushing and began to wash. Mark III knocked.

"Want to see your poo-poo," he said. Pete was buttoning his pants when the child pushed open the door.

"What?" he said, putting his foot in the way. He leaned over to talk through the space. "What for?"

"Wanna see poo-poo," Mark said, pushing harder.

"Come on kid, I need privacy." Pete wondered, why not? What was wrong with it? It was situations like this which stumped him; you had to decide if it was therapeutic or if you just made the kid worse by indulging him. "Okay, okay, you can look if you want to.

He buckled up then opened the door.

"Ooooh, big poo-poo," Mark cooed as he did a kind of dance.

"Yeah, I bet you could write on the walls for a week with that," Pete said.

Mark bent over the bowl to sniff and as he did, tried to put his hand into the water.

"No kid," Pete said. He took hold of Mark's waist, "you can look but you can't touch. It's got germs on it."

"Like to touch," he said through his nose. His whole body stiffened in rebellion; the whole week without food leads here, Pete thought. "Want to touch it," Mark said trying to build a tantrum.
"No Mark," Pete leaned over to flush the toilet. "Say bye-bye to poo-poo."

"Bye-bye poo-poo," Mark said, wrenching free. He dipped his hand into the moving water and licked his fingers.

"No dammit, you'll be sick." He made him wash. Mark's tiny waist startled him from the side. The child turned the soap over and over in his hands until he'd made lather. Then he put the bubbles on his red hair and flipped his fingers at the mirror, splattering it with soap.

"Come on, that's enough, you're making a mess. Rinse off."

--He held and rinsed Mark's hands who did not pull away. Mark rested his head against Pete's lap and began to cry.

--Take deep breaths Mark, let it out."

--Take a deep pabrayeth? he asked between sobs.

--Let it up here, Pete said pressing gently on his stomach. He put Mark across his lap.

--The child began to sob, moan, cry, all together.

--Ya, ya, laaaaa, da-da.

--Who is it you're saying?

--Ya-ya, da-do, na-na," he cried.

--Say it Mark, just say mommy and daddy.

--La-la-na-na.

--No, he said, pushing on Mark's stomach, say it right.

MaryAnn came to the door but he saw and waved her away impatiently.
Mark wailed and made him shiver. It was so full of pain it made him wonder if he knew how to bring him out of it.

--You want your mommy and your daddy, he said.

--Ma-ma, Da-da, he gasped. Hungry, hungry. The words got clearer. They stayed together on the toilet for an hour; waves of crying passed over Mark. Pete held him and felt closer to him than any other time in the six months he'd been there. When it was over he washed the boy and asked him if he was ready to eat.

"Can you say, 'I want to eat?'" He lifted Mark up to look in the mirror. It was a brief peace Pete saw on the freckled red-head's face. They stared at each other's reflection for maybe a minute."

"I want to hee-ot," Mark said grudgingly.

"Close enough for me," Pete told him.

Eddie Omeha buried a can of peas in his special hiding place. He was winning the hide and seek game the way he always did, by going so far away and waiting so long, they all gave up on him. This time he buried something special; a broken, pink Barbie doll. He had written Rosalie on it's belly.

Then he snuck back into Troll house where he stood seemingly talking to himself.
"Push plays the can kick game. Big boys hurt in the bushes. Stay lost a long time. One day Eddie stayed here when the men came and put the drum sticks in the walls, the electric underground to Emma place. I see machine every day in Jo-Jo's room. Round and round. Never talk except to the burros and the Scarface and you on the round and round. Once upon a time there was an old, old man named Eddie. He was very big and had long feet and short feet. He lived in a strange house and knew someone was peeking on what he said. All his clothes were dirty and he was happy ever after. I'm no momma, no poppa, I'm no touch no sleep and no talk. I Eddie the boy thing. I know you're in there."