

The Senator

a novel by Allison Fine

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One: Rebecca

Object of Fantasy

Her faith in him had taken over as some kind of religion. He couldn't stand it—it made him feel inadequate, even more failed than he was. The specter of something to do, something he should do, ought to do, loomed in the distance. He hated to admit that being an actor sucked, he wasn't a phony.

I won't kiss ass, especially those Asses.

That's my boy, my boy, the baby I nursed until he was three with a full set of teeth.

“Mom, my agent says if I don't get my teeth fixed she won't be able to send me out on commercials.”

“So—what do you want me to do?”

“Nothing. Nothing you **can** do, that's for sure.”

“Is that a—a—“ she was thinking “hook,” but didn't say it.

“A what, mom? Words fail you?”

The jibe apt. She, the writer, would take it as his usual kick-ass anger.

“Look, there’s nothing I’d rather—“

“When the hell is your book getting published anyway? What happened to the so-called advance?”

“Oh, that wasn’t an advance. That was money this legislator paid me to shut up about his affair with an intern. Anyway, it wasn’t much--I spent it on back taxes and paid off my overdraft.”

The son kicked his cigarette butt out of the skinny fingers over to some tarnished yellow trash off to the side of the path they were walking. Why was his mother such a loser?

“I can maybe put you on my health benefits if I can afford my own. You know—“

“Aw, forget it.”

“Bitter, bitter, bitter.”

“Oh, shut up mom.”

“Don’t talk to me like that, brat.”

They loved each other—were devoted in fact. They just never saw each other. Devotion does that sometimes. Co-dependency is over-rated.

“I turn off here.”

A quick kiss.

“Bye mom. See you in six months.”

He hurried the other way on the path to the shuttle that would drop him off in China town to get the bus. From China Town to China Town—D.C. to New York.

Only thirty bucks--no loss there.

She was in love with a married senator-- it was fucking with her fantasies. He had taken over the slot the professor had. Professors were passive aggressive anyway. She preferred her abuse straight up. Now he was in her head, in her brain—he was also in her bed, but only in the mind. *Minds are dirty things anyway*, she reasoned and lit a cigarette—the cigarette she was not smoking because she was not a smoker.

God, does that feel like shit. God does that feel good. Breathing is great. Why am I doing this?

The brat called her cell phone.

“Stop thinking about that jerk.”

“What jerk? You don’t even know him!”

“Bye mom. Don’t email me—I’ve stopped my account.”

“What for?”

“Because I can’t stand hearing from you.”

“I love you, Abdul.”

“Aaron.”

“Abdulrahman.”

“We’re Jewish.”

“Oh yeah? Merry Christmas.”

It was five o’clock. Dark reached its fingers all over the sky and her meeting started half an hour ago; she was late because of the kid. She longed to lie down on the dead black leaves and die right there. Where was death when you needed it?

The senator was probably psychic. She could hear his thoughts in her mind— begging her to take her clothes off—no, no, begging her **not** to take her clothes off, not to show up at his favorite restaurant; not to show up at his house **for any reason**; (even when necessary and it was never really necessary) definitely not to break the boundaries, not to, not to—(*what about those bar dates with so and so, that intern, where you discussed her body of work, or whatever? Emphasis on body--never mind. How can you have an intellectual discussion about a twenty-three year old tall, blond goddess's body of work and ignore her body of body?*) *It wasn't intellectual—you poked her, don't lie.*

What's wrong with me? If fifty-something is too old what will happen when I'm sixty?

Wait a minute—if I keep smoking I won't make it till sixty.

Climbing the stairs up to the Russell Senate Office Building she held the cigarette underneath her coat so no one could see. Her I.D. swung from her neck like a scythe. Entering the outer office, she appraised the stupid seascape on the wall (*what is this thing he has about the sea and water? Is it because he's a Navy man?*) She was the oldest living mammoth in the office—everyone was younger than her except the senator— pushing 65—no likelihood of retirement there though—he was strong as an ox—worked out every fucking day—*his mother is 96, he'll live until he's a hundred. What will I be then? Will I be then?*

History has to live with what was here. Robert Lowell's voice slipped through her thinking. But the present, what does that live with? Is there any such thing as time? It's just an invention, anyway. Here I am, living the same fucking day, over and over and over. How long can I stand it?

She had been living Ground Hog Day for ten years, in the suicide phase now. The period when everyday is the same goddamn realization you're fucked as always—might as well die. Experiment with different ways of doing it—short ways, long slow ways, (*smoking*). The beauty of Ground Hog suicide is that you get to wake up the next day and do the same damn thing all over again. She, writing about *the skeleton keys*, standing up for her so-called truth and getting a vision of a hundred ways to die. *Life is overrated*, she decided.

So kill yourself today and then what? You wake up the next day and have someone tell you to go back and write research on how many children died on crack in Baltimore, Maryland from 1996 to the present. Put plenty of detail in it. What's the matter with you? Compassion'll get in the way of the truth, eh?

What's the matter with her? What is she, a horse?

Ride me, rise me, reach me, she's thinking and the door opens—light from the window behind his desk floods her senses, she takes a seat at the table. Perched in winged-back chairs her fellow speech -writers wonder what new assault will come from her lips this evening.

Her father had warned her about men when she was fifteen. Her budding boobs sticking out like projectile missiles—taut, firm, rounded, with the family's prominent nipples. Maybe they were erect. She couldn't remember back that far in that kind of detail. It's the kind of detail her writing teacher had once told her---okay they were erect.

“Listen, Rebecca.”

Rebecca Kaplan. They often called her Whiny Kaplan.

“Dad, I am about to be busy. Got a rehearsal tonight. Can you drive me?”

“Your acting can wait. Shakespeare can wait.”

“Shakespeare can—Chekhov can’t.”

“Rebecca, let me tell you something from my wisdom of forty-seven years.”

“Oh, great.”

She put the script down and looked up at him with her small, blue eyes, narrowed to just the right amount of disdain.

“Men only want one thing from women, Rebecca.”

“What’s that--cooking?”

“No.”

“Well, what is it, dad?”

He never told her. Now she was paying the price. If only he had told her, maybe things would be different. But then, 1967 happened and fucking, drugs and music became the new wave of feminism. The pill, the penis and her erect nipples. It was a match made in an abortion clinic.

Okay. She has not remembered this right. Let’s go over it again. That’s the beauty of Groundhog Day. Celebrate the moments of your life any way you want. **Your life your way.**

“Rebecca, listen, we need to talk.”

“Now, dad? I’ve got to learn my lines.”

“Chekhov? I love his work.”

“Like you know his work.”

“I’m a student of history, my dear, just like you.”

Rebecca rolls her eyes to heaven, if there was one.

Just like the night playing tricks on you

When you least expect it.

Bob Dylan's words hit her brain like nitroglycerin. Just a palliative—*infinity goes up on trial. This is what salvation must be like after a while*, Dylan screams at her.

“So what is the wisdom for today?”

“You're just starting to date now, Rebecca and—“

“I'm in love with the Beatles. I have a date with Paul every night. Bob Dylan wouldn't be bad. I kind like Gregory Corso.”

“The Beatles are not what I'm talking about.”

“What about the poets? The San Francisco beat bunch. Jack Kerouac?”

“Rebecca, I have something important to share with you.”

“So, what is it, dad? I got a rehearsal.”

“Put the script down.”

She looks at him with contempt. It isn't hard to do. Once a god, he is now a fallen idol, his arms and legs splayed and trashed all over the bed, a Bloody Mary in one hand and the channel changer in the other. *God I wish I could smoke in front of him—I need a cigarette bad.*

“Men are only after one thing, Rebecca.”

“What's that?”

“They just want—they want sex.”

“Oh, eeeou, dad. Uch. I have to go study.”

She leaves the room.

Looking back she gets it. Here was he, the fallen god-idol father fucking around on her mother, having affairs with that German woman and that other Jewish woman married to his architect—Barbara Goldman. Fucking her while working with her husband.

*I mean, here he was womanizing and warning me about **him**. All those meetings every night, even a busy man doesn't have a meeting every god damn night of the week. She and her manic-depressive mother hurting one another over dinner alone night after night. It was ugly.*

The phone rang.

“Rebecca, have you got the book *Mother Nature: How Maternal Instincts Shape the Human Species?*”

A fellow speechwriter calls her back to the present.

“I don't need to read that book—I wrote it.”

“Well, maybe so, but John said you had the book.”

“You want to borrow it?”

“Can I?”

This colleague has never had children—what good will this book do for her?

*I need to teach a class: *Staying Alive: The Ultimate Suicide*. Lowell was right, “it is dull and gruesome and then we die. Unlike writing, life never finishes.”*

Oh, but it does, a voice comes at her from the other side of her brain. That voice—her spirit guide she named Michael or just the God Damn cricket that sang “e-n-

c-y-c-l-o-p-e-d-i-a” in the Disney version of Pinocchio. Never sure, she decided what the hell, a spirit guide is a lot more interesting than a cricket.

“Life finishes, Karen.”

“What? God, you are so weird.”

“I’m in the middle of a project. Can I call you back?”

“Sure.”

No wonder she had no friends. In order to have friends you’ve got to be friendly.

In order to have friends you’ve got to be ugly. The thought slipped in, from where? Those little synaptic explosions of the mind firing off at will. Whose will?

Back to fantasy. There was something lovely about it: so safe, so real, and so not real. Some of her new age friends told her to stop it, *thoughts are things*, and Joann told her.

“I know, I know. Thoughts are things. But what does that mean?”

Joann dumped the laundry from her Sedona B & B, *A Touch of Sedona*, off at the laundry in Cottonwood in huge brown bags. The red rocks rose up in front of the windshield like giant rounded mommies and daddies humping. Joann, hurried as always, ticked off, with a mind full of lists, barely noticed.

“I love it here. I want to live here.” Rebecca looked at Joann for confirmation.

The B & B was up for sale.

“This place is not that great to live in.”

Yeah, Rebecca thought, all those mentally ill junkies and hippies, tourists, business people selling crystals and massage—it got boring. The toothless guy in the white robe haunted her. Still—the rocks, the energy—

“Does the energy of the vortex get a bit much or something?”

“Yeah, well, I don’t know. I just want to go and live with Mike down in Sonoita, you know?”

As the sun slipped out of the sky, the air cooled, the way it does in Desert Mountains, especially in Sedona. Sedona nights get cold, while further south in Phoenix and Tucson nights are deliciously warm, the sky replete with stars. Rebecca loved the hot nights of Tucson—riding out with the top down, meeting for coffee at the bookstore, going up Sabino Canyon and tracking phases of the moon. *Warm nights are beautiful; I want them for the rest of my life.*

“So when you say *thoughts are things*, explain to me.”

“You’re thinking about this guy, right? Your Senator. Well, in some part of his brain, maybe not conscious, he is picking it up.”

“So what?”

“So—it creates an energy field—pulls you in—creates some shit—you know. It creates an energetic vortex that you will have to be accountable for---somewhere down the line. You don’t **really** want to fuck him, do you?”

“No, not really. Yes. Maybe. If he offered?”

“He won’t,”

“Nope, he won’t.”

“Maybe he will. Then what will you do?”

“I’ll cross that bridge when I come to it.”

Joann turned into the parking lot of the Mago café. The bar, filled with Sedona’s finest, spilled out onto the terrace where people milled, talked and laughed, enormous margarites in hand. The bar was crowded with locals: the fittest, the brightest, the business people of Sedona drinking and making deals; looking hot, tan and ready. Rebecca felt her energy rise to the occasion.

“I just want to get laid.”

Joann laughed.

“No you don’t. Haven’t you done that already?”

Two weeks later she was back in Virginia and back at work. It was as if the trip to Sedona didn’t exist. It was a dream. She missed the desert terribly—worse than missing, it became a grieving, a longing—like a love affair, *so over*; still savored, tasted and remembered. The hot days, sun beating down on her back, colors of verbena, palm trees, blue sky, red poppies lining the road, the long vistas as she drove, stretching out to the Catalina mountains. Saguaros rising up in Sabino Canyon, talking to her of the long roads and ancient mysteries the desert witnessed before people piped water in from the Colorado River and made it inhabitable. Her marriage to the desert was for life—they were home together. Desert was the best fuck she ever had. Without desert it was just another day.

Over dinner at *Friendly’s* her neighbor Vera gave her little scoops of wisdom.

“I think this whole thing is just about money and power. And who has the money and power? The males. And who wants it? The females. And who gets it? Young women and men. End of story.”

“What about Hillary and Nancy Pelosi and Madeleine Albright?”

“Well, aside from Madeleine, those women got where they are by way of men.”

“That sucks. The only way to get anywhere is to get some man or men to mentor you and put you up. You’d think talent would be the criterion.”

“Oh, talent is fine, brains are a plus, but negotiation skills and compartmentalizing are a must.”

“And beauty.”

“Youthful beauty. We haven’t developed a construct for aging beauty in women.”

*I’ve never been one much for negotiating. I tell it like it is and let the chips fall.
Compartmentalizing? I am the queen of synergizing.*

Rebecca wasted her eggs and sausage, putting aside twenty-five years of exercise, non-smoking and healthful eating. *These are dangerous times, calling for drastic compensatory measures.*

“Young women only get it for so long—then they become old women and new young women come and replace them.”

“Hard as nails.”

“Yeah. We were never that hard. I can remember doing whatever it took to get some guy to ball me.”

“No kidding. We were naïve in those days—just learning you know. The tricks are much nastier now. A girl’s got to have her boundaries straight. Anyway, it’s politically incorrect to use your feminine wiles to get somewhere.”

“And the stakes are higher if you screw up.”

Vera bit into a piece of bread, trailing crumbs down her mouth.

“I don’t give a fuck. Just give me my retirement fund and my dog and I’ll be all right.”

She thought of her married senator—the boss was cute. He did look tired. Maybe he had prostate problems. His wife didn’t fuck him? Or else he had a libido the size of Texas. He liked her. She could tell. He kept slipping and referring to his ex-wife as his wife. *Because she was his wife. It was the other two ex-wives. Or three? How many wives did this guy have? Isn’t there a statute of limitations on wives?* It seems they did sleep together. She tried imagining them in bed, but the thought made her sick. He loved his wife—what could she do?

“You need to either get through this job, write the book you keep threatening to write or get out of town and have a decent life in the desert you fucking love so much. Or, start fucking so much in the love of the desert. You get my drift.”

“I get your drift, like the damn snow that doesn’t fall on Virginia. Yeah, this suburban shit sucks big time.”

They lived in Burke, not even D.C. Burke, safe, comfortable, friendly, *Friendly’s*, boring, a lot of trees, close to Giant and Blockbuster. It was Ground Hog day all over again. Didn’t she do the suburban thing raising the kids? She thought she was done with all that.

Fantasy.

She loved fantasy.

I love fantasy; it’s so safe. I can slip in and out of all kinds of positions and nobody will make fun of me for it. Henry Miller had it straight—we just want to be called whores and fucked in the ass, or pulled into a bathtub with our stockings on. Kate Millet

tore him apart—what was up with her? Just a horny old, feminist bitch. Oh, that is so unfair—so un-feminist. Too bad.

In her fantasies she was thinner. He was not younger. His age was fine. She just wished he'd sleep.

He wished he could sleep too, but everybody fucking wanted his attention, and *what's in it for me? I could retire and play golf full time if she'd support me. But the senate is so seductive—all those beautiful aides just waiting to play with me.*

“He knows everybody. I mean, Michael Jordan for Christ’s sake. He met Nelson Mandela. He knows Putin, Trump. I think he even met Brad Pitt.”

“What do any of those people have in common? Is he a rock star or a public servant? Anyway who cares who he knows? **You know him.**”

“Yeah, I know him.” She paused. “He has lunch with Hillary. He calls her Hillary.”

“He **works** with Hillary, dumb fuck—they are colleagues.”

They were in the car on the way to Ikea to buy duvet covers.

“Well, he has—“

“He has what—a big dick?”

“Yeah! Well, isn’t power the biggest dick of all?”

“God has the biggest dick.”

“Ok, I’ll grant you that, but why’d you bring him into this?”

“Because, for God’s sake, Rebecca—you are living a fantasy life.”

“**Hello.** Where have you been?”

Laura Nyro sang *Love is Surely Gospel. Love my love thing.*

“You know what, Rebecca my dear? You want to be the man; you want to **be** the Emperor. You don’t just want to stand trembling on the shores of the Emperor’s domain acting all coy and stupid. That ain’t you.”

“I can be coy.”

“When?”

They turned into Ikea where a huge mindless crowd awaited them--the place was packed. Rebecca wanted everything—duvet covers, a red hutch, some new dishes, a new set of pots and pans, a kitchen runner—

“Focus, Rebecca—you’re poor. I’m the one with \$150,000 in my retirement fund.”

“So what?”

They ate in the restaurant after buying the duvet covers. Rebecca bought black and white reversible and Vera bought red. Swedish food is small and clever.

She couldn’t wait to go home and enjoy fantasy sex with her senator. She had taken to calling him **her** senator.

“You’re going to sabotage yourself, Rebecca. I mean—suppose this gets out?” Joann told her in one of their weekly phone sessions.

“So what are they gonna do? Fire me for fantasy? Yikes. What about tall, blond so and so who met him in the bar and had artistic intellectual conversations about her body of work?”

“That’s her problem. She’s cold, flint, that smile of hers—“

“How would you know? You never met her.”

“You told me.”

“The weasel smile.”

“Contempt. The smile of contempt.”

“I call it the Satanic Smirk.”

It always helped to talk to Joanne.

I love my friends.

Last call for the Poverty Train.

She borrowed money from her friend the poet. He was never mean about it. It wasn't enough to live on \$50,000 a year—she had \$150,000 in student loans to pay off, she had back taxes from when Brain Dead married her, forced her into bankruptcy and took all she had; she had collectors calling her leaving messages with 877 numbers. *I need a brand new leopard skin pillbox hat*, she thought. The poet seemed to understand her financial titanic. She had been rejected and she needed help. And, let's face it, she wasn't faking it—she really was poor. It was sure no stone soul picnic.

Is there something wrong with this picture? A poet has more money than I do?

He's a Leo, Michael told her; they always have resources.

I want to be a Leo next time.

Fine. Let's see.

Great. Thanks Michael. Now about sex—

That was always the time when her spirit guide Michael left her consciousness. It just isn't the domain of spirit guides to be pimps.

I need a pimp. I need to be a prostitute. I need to dance naked. I need a cigarette.

She stopped at the University Giant and bought Marlboro Reds. Memories of the last time she did this—Ann Arbor, 1969. She was nineteen. *Have we regressed that far?* Taking a puff—*my god, this is almost like sex. Now I understand why people smoke: anticipation with no gratification. Our whole culture is sexually frustrated.*

“The phenomenon of latency,” Freud wrote, “the appearance of inexplicable manifestations which call for an explanation...the characteristic of compulsiveness.” *Oh fuck, that’s what’s wrong with Freud—he named everything and then left us all there at the yawning canyon of compulsion! Just left us there! Oh, analysis—yeah. Right. The analyst is always sicker than the patient. No solution there. Humanize the worshipped being. That’s it. I must humanize the senator. He’s transparent, he’s caught in the Jewish memory trace; he thinks he has to live up to the alluring task of the Jewish mandate, the Jewish history of the eldest son, the fucking invention of the first alphabet!*

Back home was better. She made coffee, smoked another few cigarettes, played music, wrote a little, watched CNN and collapsed into bed. An enhanced state of consciousness needs rest.

The “I” Can’t Do Anything About It At All

The Mystical experience is the gift of God.

Navigating through Safeway she spotted a few of her co-workers, thirty years younger than her, in the soup aisle. *Soup? They buy soup?* One of the twenty-two year old aides who weighed two and had big huge dark eyes and black hair—she looked like an Italian whore—told her that to lose the twenty pounds she gained all she had to do was live on coffee, cigarettes and chocolate. It worked for her—she lost ten pounds in two weeks.

“Yeah, well, you can’t fucking do that when you’re 56, dear, cause you’ll drop dead of a stroke or a heart attack or go into shock or something. Health doesn’t begin overnight, you know—it’s a long slow process of denial.”

“I don’t believe in denial.”

“Well, I don’t mean denying yourself or something, or your emotions or experiences or whatever—embrace that. Just deny the consumption of shit. I mean it’s all around isn’t it?”

“What?”

“Bad food, bad things to do to your body, bad relationships, stressful environments—“

“Oh whatever. If it gets that bad I just go find someone to have sex with.”

It was time to leave the grocery store with her yogurt, her pack of Basics and her lentils. No possibility of having intelligent conversation with a girl who believes in self-destruction as a way of life. Meanwhile she’s outside in the alley behind the bar next to the grocery store having a cigarette. *The present is always changing the past. I am destroying all that healthy work I’ve been doing. My skin will go bad—I’ll look like all those other smokers—those women who look like they need an oxygen tank. I’ve got to stop. After this pack.* She smoked Basics because they were cheap. *I’ll start working out again. I’ll ask Michael for help,* she thought, taking one long drag before stamping on the butt with her steel toed Montana boots.

Some people perversely enjoy suffering through life. Perhaps she was one of those types. It is the magnificent rationalization—the glorious suffering--a fictitious thing the ego does to convince itself that it is really working hard on life—tackling the genuine issues—when in fact, what it is doing is the exact opposite--escaping the real issues by pretending that suffering is a sign of evolvment. *It is not.* Suffering is just suffering, a delicious form of escape, a real pity party. What an illusion. *I need a therapist. Rent-a-friend. Destroy my whole value system and start again. When anything is to be done it should be done immediately. Act at once. No procrastination. Gives no time for the building up of all that useless reflection.*

She was addicted to reflection.

She received the email that evening.

Meet me at Politics and Prose 4 pm Saturday to discuss a new project.

She emailed back: *Yes!* Leaving out the exclamation point. Too much exclaiming was bad for the beginning of an ill-advised self-destructive love affair.

The city was dead as she drove down Connecticut Avenue. Traffic sparse, the lights of Christmas lined the streets. All the senators, lobbyists, congressmen and women, all the Washington pundits and players were home for the Holidays, except her senator, who was in town working. She was home and it was no holiday. The lot behind the bookstore was filled—she found a space next to the dumpster. *Symbolic?*

He was in the basement wearing a cowboy hat and reading the news. He looked up at her briefly, a serious expression on the normally impassive, intense features. She could never really picture his face—because of the personality disorder? *(He needs to shave—he’s starting to look like an aging hippie. He is an ex-navy man, for god’s sake.)*

His or mine?

disorder? *(He needs to shave—he’s starting to look like*

an aging hippie. He is an ex-navy man, for god’s sake.)

“Hi.”

“Did you order something?”

“Not yet.”

He put down the Washington Post. *No offer to pay, she thought, this is clearly not a date.*

Sitting down with her salad and coffee, she waited for him to open the dialogue. He continued reading the paper. No mystery here who was in the power position. Making people wait is a great male construct—she ought to cultivate it, but no one gave a damn

about what she had to say or her experience, so what was the point? If no one was waiting, making people wait was a ridiculous assumption. No one was waiting for nothing.

“I think your project ideas have some tantalizing aspects to them.”

“What ideas?”

“The visual descriptions of the Afghani children could be ground breaking.”

“It’s not like people haven’t read about genocide before, eh?”

“Don’t be flip.”

“Aren’t other writers writing about this?”

He looked at her, brushing his white hair back off his face. It was a feminine gesture. There was something lovely, teasing and passive aggressive about this man that turned her on. How interesting to find a successful male animal, a man who had obviously glided through the academic process, achieved the highest award, a PhD in Political Science; a law degree, published many books on stuff she couldn’t remember; written luminous work with inspired insight, knew everyone, accomplished success in academic realms, then changed his whole life and got elected to the senate. A war hero—prisoner of war, Viet Nam vet—a navy man who still felt comfortable in allowing himself to access the feminine side of his nature. This intrigued her. He was intrinsically fully sexualized, realized—a balanced male. She had entered the realm of complete fantasy. Making him into a God was her first step. *Was he Dionysus?*

The sexual attraction between them moved like the opening of a rose colored orchid. She imagined herself the stamen and he the petals closing in on her; enveloping her, choking her, cutting off her air supply. That thought came to a dead halt.

Annihilation did not intrigue her. Semi-annihilation did; but only accompanied with extolling her, praising her, worshipping her, praying to the Goddess of her muse. She saw herself completely warmed and enveloped in his arms. What he imagined she had no clue about. What was in it for him?

*She's like a deer. Thinks she's so strong and tough. I could show her some things. I've got to play it like a possum. No sense in blowing twenty-five years of work down the drain. Why do we have these roles—they are so confining. My greatest protection is just to play dead. Dead like a predator. Make her believe the game is over and it hasn't even started yet. I've got an act in the animal kingdom that could receive an Academy Award. Where did I get this gift? Certainly not from my father. Who then? God? Strategy. I can rely on this always. Warrior, playing dead when the enemy rears and outnumbered me. She's rearing up all right. Can't quite get a handle on all that energy shooting out of her. Got to contain it. Then in a flash I'll send out the war cry. No, use my brain God damn it, I'm not a salesman for Christ sake. **She's selling; I'm buying.** Got to remind myself of that. Victory is sweet when the strategy is mental as well as physical.*

“Close your eyes and try to dramatize the last scene when you witnessed the children being murdered, Rebecca.”

“I never saw it.”

“Pretend you did.”

“I was having a drink at the bar when this all went down.”

“That doesn't speak well for you.”

Damn him. He just wants to hurt me. I don't want to be hurt. I have feelings. I've got to defend my right to be! The best strategy is no defense. No excuses—got to play it for truth.

“Look, I just—I need to have a smoke. I'll be back in a few minutes.”

She rushed out before he could lecture her about not smoking.

In the back alley behind the bookstore she wondered what the fuck she was doing.

This was dangerous. She kept telling everyone she loved danger. Did she?

Back in the café he read an article about Putin's Kremlin. *Thought all that intrigue was dead. It's all about control. He wants to distribute resources back to the state, take power out of the hands of independents. The president is doing the same Goddamn thing—it's happening all over the world: the politics of property distribution. Can't get too worked up about this. Restriction is everywhere.*

After a few minutes she sat down again.

If I looked like that tall, blond goddess he's fucking this would fare better. I could be cruel and get away with it. Aw, what the hell—I'll be cruel anyway.

“I am not really into self-hypnosis Senator Riesman.”

“You can call me Ishmael. You did at lunch.”

“That's cause I wanted to impress you that I'd read Moby Dick. It seemed to be important to you.”

He did not smile. *Why doesn't he like my jokes?*

She's just trying to impress me. How boring.

He's so defensive. How uninspiring. He must be confusing me with someone who gives a damn what he thinks.

“OK Seymour.”

“If you keep making up names we have nothing to talk about.” He took a slow, calculated sip from his coffee. There was a whiff of fear in the air.

“Fine. Yevgenia!” She laughed. It was so funny. *Why couldn't he just loosen up?*

“Yevgenia is the feminine. It's Yevgenie.”

“Oh. I like Sasha. How about if I call you Sasha?”

He looked at her. *She ignores my correction. Sign of a woman who won't be stopped—won't allow me to undermine her confidence. That's good.* His silences were a terrific power tool. She never knew what was beneath them. Humor? Chaos?

“Leo.”

“Thank you.”

“It's a good name. Strong. The Lion.”

He smiled. That smile that said: *Thank you. I deserve it. I am so great. Stroke me.*

She liked stroking him. She also liked killing him. Which desire was strongest?

“So talk me down, Leo, into the pre-conscious state of childbirth.”

He picked up the newspaper. Discussion was over. *If she's not going to be serious about the work it's over.*

“I'm serious Leo, I am!” she said, picking up on his thoughts. “I just want to know, where can I go with this?”

“You can add all that other stuff I made you take out now. It will seem more relevant in the context of the moment. At first I think, she's faking it—but now I realize, it makes a compelling story and we need that in order to raise the money we need.”

“The moment?”

“The moment of death—faces ashen--murder.”

Yikes. This man is incredibly brutal, insensitive and sadistic or else I'm stupid or something. Am I missing something here?

“Look Leo, I'm not sure what you're talking about.”

He moved closer to her across the table and touched her forehead. It was a slight touch, very little really, but it opened up her senses with a suddenness that surprised even her. She could feel the energy move from his finger touching the skin, that small part of her temple next to her right eye, moving down her neck, into her breasts and her stomach and into that special place that became activated just below her belly button. Her cunt screamed for attention. He withdrew his hand, sat back and picked up the newspaper.

I feel violated. Did he just rape me? She thought.

Why does the state-owned media in Russian persist? He thought with irritation. *There can never be a popular revolution in this country without a horrific backlash of corrupt bureaucracy. Putin's making restrictive laws against political parties forming. What's changed?* He mused on the article. It concerned him.

Give me your hand, Leo; let me feel the blood beneath the veins. Give me your body, mind and soul.

He put the paper over to the side of the table.

“Want more coffee?”

What just happened? She felt about to cry—tears were actually just underneath the tightened stomach, ready to burst out of somewhere. She could not allow this to happen.

“Want some more coffee?” he repeated.

“Sure.”

I've got to get home and work on some things. Ideas coming faster than I can contain. She will have to go home or I can leave her here alone. Whichever.

His cruelty surprised her. She wasn't counting on that.

“I've got to get home and do some work,” he said, setting the replenished coffee mugs on the table. “You staying here?”

“I guess.” She looked down into the cup, hoping the dark liquid would swallow her up.

“Just go home, take the scene of the mass grave, the blood and guts of the dead and dying children; expand that into all the other stuff you wrote about—that surrounded it. You know?”

“Yeah.” She wished he would touch her just one more time. She reached a hand out on the table—maybe he would take it. He ignored it. They drank their coffee in silence, he in his thoughts; she in hers. In a very few, brief moments he got up to leave,

“Thanks for meeting with me, Leo. That helps. I'll work on it.”

He smiled.

“Good.”

He was gone. She was alone in the basement of the bookstore with her ghosts.

Sigmund not Freud

On the home front her eldest daughter had stopped talking to her, but the youngest told her she was studying astrology. *In medical school, MD/PhD in neurology and she's doing astrology?* Was she worried or complimented? After all, like mother like daughter. She hadn't done a reading for anyone in almost four years. Maybe it was time to get back into the game and make a little money counseling the miserable rich. She could put an ad in the Washington Post—not use her real name. *Madame Dostoevsky: celebrate the moments of your life.*

“Don't think so,” Vera told her. “You'll lose all credibility if anyone at the senate finds out.”

“Like I have credibility to lose?”

Virginia was starting to feel like Montana. She'd seriously wanted to die in Montana although she finished her first novel and twenty short stories there. Still—writing was not a compensation for life. Never would be. OK. She seemed to do her best work when she was miserable. *But I don't believe in misery and artistic expression. I think it's good to feel good. I felt good in Arizona.* But how much writing did she do there—really--a bunch of bad poetry, two un-producible plays and a load of crappy, weird memoir material. The real meaty stuff seemed to come in cold climates where the

people sucked and she was completely wretched. She never got thin in cold climates, men never dated her, she always fell in love with someone who thought she was ugly or someone ugly fell in love with her. Maybe it was cyclical, she decided. Now she was stuck here, researching and writing for a married senator. *A few years in Virginia and I'll be ready to go back to my apartment and hang myself. I've got to get back to the southwest and enjoy life again. By then I'll have a new book, more memoir, more stories, logged time in government and a publication contract. Money in my pocket! I can run for the senate. Ha. That would make him sit up and take notice.*

She fantasized the house she would build in the desert. She fantasized Leo coming to visit her in that house. She fantasized that all her bills were paid, she didn't owe back taxes, check systems didn't have her on their electronic data system, she was financially solvent, sexually permissive, economically secure, recognized as a writer, sexually satisfied and—sexually—and—sex---and--

The phone interrupted her thoughts.

“Hello.”

“What are you doing?”

“Writing of course,” she lied.

“Working on the scene--?”

“You bet. I nearly got it nailed.”

“What are you thinking about?”

“Georgia O’Keefe.”

“Stop thinking about her. Email the scene over to me?”

“I don’t think so.”

“Why not?”

“Why don’t you come over to my place and get it?”

He laughed.

“That’s an inappropriate suggestion Rebecca.”

“I’m an in appropriate women.”

“I see.”

“It’s inappropriate for you to call me at home.”

The silence. She hated it.

“Fine. I’ll email it tonight.”

“Good.”

That’s it? That’s all he wanted?

She was in despair.

There was no money. She had taken to bumming cigarettes off her friend Sigmund, the recovering alcoholic she wrote an article on for *The Higher Balance Institute Newsletter* out of Portland, Oregon for which she got paid \$10 and postage; and with whom she had a memorable phone call with Eric Pepper, President and Founder who told her in great detail all the intense moments precipitated by his “paranormal abilities,” most of which involved sudden and dramatic doorways into the multi-dimensional consciousness of his mind. She thought about changing her phone number after that conversation. Sigmund’s real name was Joey Chang from Brooklyn, but Sigmund sounded so much more promising. He was stooping to the Jews, making them

his “promised people.” His father Chinese; mother Jewish—he went to AA meetings every night.

“Can I go to an AA meeting with you, Joey?”

“What for? You’re not an alcoholic.”

“I could be, if I could just hold my liquor. Anyway, I like alcoholics. They’re humble.”

“No they’re not—they’re just beaten.”

“Can I—please?”

The meeting was held in the storeroom of Joey’s friend’s liquor store. She tried not to think of about the irony of this. All those alcoholics having to walk through the liquor to get to the meeting to talk about how liquor destroyed their lives. It was downright silly if it weren’t serious. *But how serious is life, really? My personal development has become the ultimate tool through which I can shove others through the doorway of profound and inspiring experience if I could just find the right program.*

Rebecca listened through the meeting and heard stories, stories that made her weep if she were inclined, stories that stunk of dirty places, ugly relationships, failed job prospects, drunken nights, lost memory, lost lives. Car accidents, one dead child, licenses revoked, court hearings and trials, careers derailed. Someone lost his three-year-old cousin in a parking lot, a dog died of heat exhaustion in a locked car, another went to bed in Spokane and woke up in Bartlett, Indiana, his sister dead on the car seat to him. The detritus of society sat in that room and they knew it. Some had been drinking so long their short-term memory was fucked. Others had long-term memory and their relationships were fractured. Along the way houses, children, wives and husbands were

lost; others never had houses, wives, children and husbands. It was the heaven of losers. She was one of them. The fact that she could identify with everyone one of these broken, disheveled people scared the shit out of her. What could she say to them? How could she counsel them? Her life was a stream of broken relationships, scattered jobs, lonely nights, addictive spending, poverty consciousness and negative thoughts. A loser doesn't have to come in Salvation Army clothes, she realized, a loser can come in Gucci boots and Gloria Vanderbilt Jeans.

In the midst of this she picked up on **his** thoughts. He felt compassionate toward her, nurturing. She'd emailed him her speech—the one she would be giving on the senate floor if all went well. *Maybe he's reading it right now.* She sat on the folding chair, smoking o.p. Cigarette after cigarette, hearing the recounted tales of those who not only slipped through the cracks, but also had pried them open, making them wider and more amenable to falling in. Thinking of cracks brought visual imagery to her mind: O'Keefe's "Tent Door at Night" the crack of blue inviting one outward from the blackness of the inside of the tent. A mound of black blanket jumbled up having held what? Lovers perhaps? A sleeping wanderer?

I want him to like something I have done, more than anyone else I know of. I want him to love my work—to see it as beauty, as light, as exciting, as tantalizing. I want him to be inspired by my mind and my soul—he needs to understand—I am the mechanism for his intelligence.

He was, in fact, not reading her speech at all. He didn't really care about the speech—if worse came to worse he could always get his long-time admin-assist to write

the thing. It was just a play to conquer the boredom that seeped into his bones like damp fog off the river.

The genesis of neurosis goes back to childhood. My God, I am still working on that material? He prints out the attachment she sent, picks up the pages, scans them, comprehends her work; leaves it. She is still so far from that place—he needs to inspire her. But I can't. It's simply too dangerous and anyway, I'm married. She sits there—her cute little face; that rounded voluptuous—I am in danger of tearing my mask off and stomping on it. This bodes no good.

The meeting was coming to a close. *In order for me to be an important advocate, a voice in this country, for the poor, humbled, teeming masses, I need a muse, someone who can be both muse and mentor: a man to take me to the next step. How can I do this without falling in love with him? How to do this without getting hung up on approval? Is it love or is it just the need for development? What is love, anyway?*

She decided sex with Sigmund was OK. He wouldn't say no and it was necessary. She had to wash Leo out of her head. *I'm gonna wash that man right out of my hair.*

In bed Sigmund held himself in check. She craved transformation but this man would not give—completely unable to reach her on any level. It bordered on tediousness—being in bed with Sigmund. All knees and elbows—

“Joey—could you—could you just get off of me?”

He rolled over, reaching to the nightstand to light a cigarette.

“I'm sorry,”

“What for?”

“For being sexually uninteresting.”

“It’s not your fault.”

“Whose fault is it?”

Lord knows, she thought, dark traces of the past, regions of the subconscious. It’s all so black and murky.

She drove Sigmund back to his apartment off Lee Highway. He was depressed; he lived in a basement apartment with three other AA people, a couple of cats and someone’s stray dog. The place smelled so bad she didn’t want to go in. Sex with him didn’t help her and it certainly did nothing for his self-esteem.

“Can I come to another meeting with you?”

“I don’t know—“ he said as he got out of the swamp green Camry.

“Well—why not?”

“Rebecca—is this some kind of joke for you or something?”

“It’s not a joke, Joey.”

“Stop calling me that. My name is Sigmund.”

“Whatever. Sigmund—Joey—does it matter?”

“It matters to me Rebecca. I think it would be obvious to you—if you were my friend.”

“I am your friend.”

“Yeah.”

He slammed the car door and ambled to his apartment.

She opened the passenger window and called out:

“Hey, Joey, come’ ere! Please?”

He walked back, leaning into the window.

“It’s damn cold out here, Rebecca. Whaddya want?”

“Look I—I have a vested interest in your recovery.”

“That’s great.”

“I mean it. And—“ *how could she tell him she identified with the losers at that meeting? That she was a loser too? Because maybe he didn’t see himself that way—maybe he wasn’t, but who can tell?*

“You work in D.C. Rebecca, you’re a fucking top aid for Senator Riesman, you’re up there. What do you want with me?”

“I want to see you again, Joey. I want to be your friend.”

“Oh, fuck you, Rebecca—take your charity some where’s else.”

He walked off, the black and white scarf she knitted for him trailing on the ground.

Emotional reconnaissance work was just not for her. But it sure was a vacation after the nasty shit she endured in Washington, all those gorgeous girls going after the power, even though she tried earning her way there, the sexual innuendo between her and Leo—none of it recognized, acknowledged or anything.

I have to have sex to make it—fuck my way to the top. I was always told that would screw you forever—that you never get anywhere that way. But look at all these women who do it! But they’re all married to power guys first. Something on the side is OK, but to make it your main squeeze? Forget it. I am out here blowing in the breeze. No one to catch me. Men hate women who are powerful anyway—power is not an aphrodisiac to men—just the opposite. What did Frieda Jellinek say? Oh fuck her, she’s

married. All these women writers that have their mentors as husbands. I hate them. If it weren't for Stieglitz, no one would ever even know who Georgia O'Keefe was. He made her; he sold her stuff. Whatever. I'm fucked. I know it. I can't even have a casual love affair without hurting someone or getting hurt.

Back at her place the phone had ten messages she didn't want to hear.

Wolf Dreams

“I’m making a trip to the Ukraine. Want to go?”

“Yes, ohmygod, yes.”

“You got your passport in line?”

“No, but I can get it.”

“Call Frank. He’ll arrange it for you.”

She was going as part of the entourage with Leo to the Ukraine.

“Is Lynne going?”

“I think so. We’re trying to arrange it with the kids.”

Fuck. Lynne will be there. The anorexic witch. She lives on bottled water and raw vegetables.

“Half the politics and twice the ass fucking,” Wonkette writes. Boy, is she right. But does she actually know how much ass fucking is really going on? Of course, with the current administration anal sex has become a religious rite only to be practiced by the church going regulars. In private. Publicly, it’s outlawed as kissing the devil or something. Oh, the devil is in the details.

She pressed the delete key on the research she was doing for Leo. It was crap. She’d have to start again. He was a stickler for all facts, everything to be backed up in triplicate. No sense in ending up confessing to a senate committee.

“I just did not get the correct information from my staff, sir,” she could hear his voice. Yikes. Staff. Could be her. *This will not happen. Not on my watch. Better go to Library of Congress on this one.*

“Germany’s got the go-ahead to create a new terror center,” Leo said as he passed through her little corner of a shared office to his office.

“Whoa—we going back to Nazis again?”

“Well, terrorism is everywhere.”

“Yeah, it’s everywhere as a thought construct. Great way to find an excuse to allow people to do things they wouldn’t ordinarily be able to do, like usurp civil rights, imprison people without due process, search records without permission—“

“That’s why you’re here, Rebecca. I like your thought process.”

He ambled his little ass and white-haired body into his office.

I wish I could fuck her ass till the cows come home. Shit. No sense in ruining a good game. She’s still got to be roped in for the kill.

*He is cute sometimes. Other times he looks like a tired old man. “Take this gilded cage of shame and set me free..” I should give him Annie Lennox for his birthday, which is, **wouldn’t you know**, three days after mine! We could be the Aquarian age!*

Sub-Chapter: Mechanism for His Intelligence

They went to dinner at the Capitol Grille. Tyson’s Corner was a zoo. He mastered the deep green Jag around the hellacious traffic, doing a u-ey at the light and whipping

into the front of the Grille. Gave the valet the keys and they swept into the lobby of the hotel.

Thank God I wore the Ferre today. It's sexy—it fits tight in all the right places and he likes that.

He took her coat off, appraising the body poured into the black dress.

“God, this place some has great food. What can I order?”

“Something healthy. I'm sick of watching you destroy yourself. Did you get the work done on the macro-economic stuff?”

“Working on it. Need some more research.”

He picked up his water glass. Rainbow colors from the light streaming through the window behind him reflected green, yellow, purple. A dappled color explosion in his glass. The light sent a sliver across the table making her shiver. What did this mean? Was it a sign? Would they finally make it in bed?

“I've got to go home for the weekend. We're planning the trip first of next month. Sam has a major thing going on at school—he's getting an award or something.”

“Wow. That's great.”

It's always good to show interest in their children.

She could give a shit about my kids. Fuck, she's not a wife—that's what we have wives for.

“We've got to get on this Faustian bid for world dominance.”

“One dragon at a time, Rebecca. You can't just kick down the door and throw away the key.”

“It’s a different kind of greed we’re dealing with now, Leo. It’s global, it’s nasty and it’s pan-generic.”

“Pan generic? What the hell does that mean?”

“I thought my thinking inspired you.”

“It does. You’re a dream come true—a pretty aide who can think.”

“I’m pretty?”

He looked at her with his usual blank mask.

“I thought you mastered your self esteem problems long ago, for God’s sake.”

“Well, I did. I certainly did. But at my age being pretty is not exactly what I am offering up. I am offering my intelligence, my insight—“

“We got all that. What’re you ordering?”

“Dry aged sirloin steak. Medium.”

“Appetizer?”

“I’ll drink it,” she said sipping her water.

“And?”

“South American Chablis. Dry.”

The meal went smoothly. He reminisced, to her complete boredom, about his youth in the fifties—discovering James Brown, the camaraderie of the boys at the Naval Academy—skipped over the Viet Nam years mercifully—Elvis Presley.

“You kind of missed the Beatles.”

“I missed everything. I was a POW in Viet Nam when all that shit went down.”

“I know Leo. You are my hero.” She looked at him with her best imitation of adulation, raised her wine glass to touch his whiskey and soda. Disdain crossed his hazel eyes; nothing turned him off more than the enthusiasm of an adoring woman.

Had she blown it? At least for lunch. *Is it me?*

It's not her. Why is she doing this? Why do women do this—lose their independence as soon as an attractive, powerful man comes into view? Men are from Mars, why can't women be from Mars? Why the hell should I learn about Venus? It hasn't proved fucking successful for them, has it? Damn. It's a man's world and thank God I am one.

*I hate men. They suck. They fuck and they suck. They know they have it and we want it. If only I could **not** want it. How do I do that? I should develop some meditations on how not to want a man—I could make a fortune. He's just not into me. Well, for God's sake—he is married—I mean, what am I doing? He's my boss, he's married and I'm—just an old woman doing something I should have done thirty years ago. But I was busy raising children and—*

“Are you having dessert?” he interrupted her thoughts.

“No. Christ no. I just got back on track working out and I've lost the ten pounds I gained this fall.”

“It looks good on you. You can afford dessert.”

“No, I can't.”

“Yes, you can.”

“Look, it’s my body, isn’t it?”

“It’s my lunch, isn’t it?”

“What do you mean it’s **your** lunch? Cause your paying or what? I mean, I eat what I want to eat!”

“You are starting to sound like a wife.”

“I am not a wife and I’m not your wife.”

“Damn straight.”

The waiter returned to their table with the dessert menu.

Wolf Dreams Redux

On the way home the texture of her mind cried, mourned, rose and fell like the last tide; she felt weary, wanted to cry but couldn’t, didn’t know what she wanted to cry about. The last moon in the sky drooped beyond her vision, she had a spiritual longing—something to connect to—something that was deeper, wiser than herself—something that would allow her to play this game from outside of herself, exterior movement of the game. Not play the game, exactly, but be in the game as an observer. Not an observer exactly, but a participant above the fray, someone who could emerge as a leader capable of bringing to the teeming masses the ability to rise above—

Oh fuck. She turned on the radio and lit a cigarette. As she was shoving the lighter onto the end of the cigarette in her mouth an abrupt thump jerked her forward. The car swerved—she just managed to control it back onto the road, but the wheel wouldn’t turn. She pulled over to the side of the road and turned off the ignition.

Getting out of the car, the lit cigarette fell onto her leg. *Shit*. She flicked it off. Traffic was passing by, honking horns at her. The lights were still on. She walked around the back of the car.

Fuck, I have a flat tire.

The tires were fine. She couldn't figure out what---

Her glance moved to the right and caught a glimpse of something glistening and wet—dark legs sprawled from underneath the car. As she moved closer she heard a whimpering and saw the dog wedged underneath her back left wheel.

“Oh my god.”

She knelt down and watched the labored breathing of the animal for a few moments. *What should I do?* Viewed in the lights of the car, the animal appeared almost ghost-like. Toiling to stay alive, the animal twitched, paws moving back and forth over the asphalt. A blood track left by the impact seeped out of its body flowing down the roadway underneath her shoes.

What do I do?

Headlights from a car blinded her. The car pulled up behind hers and a youngish man got out.

“Need some help?”

He approached. Seeing her bended over the wounded animal he stooped down with her.

“Oh wow.”

“I hit a dog.”

“That's not a dog.”

“What?”

“Look at the head.” He reached a hand out and touched the silver hairs of the animal’s triangular shaped skull. She looked again and saw the difference. This animal’s coat was thicker than a dog’s, multi-colored, light white and gray on the topcoat; darker layers underneath, thick around its shoulders. Blond, cream, ochre, gray brown black—all these colors wove a mosaic of hair on the back of the wolf.

“This is a wolf. You’ve hit a wolf.”

“How do you know it’s a wolf?”

“I know.”

“You live around here?”

“I’m on my way home from a meeting in D.C.”

“Yeah, me too. What should we do?”

“I know who to call.”

He flipped out his cell phone and punched a number. Turning his back to her she noticed his coat—beautifully cut; a light silver, unusual color for a man to wear.

She dared to look into the eyes of the animal. The wildness of its fear torched her heart to the core. Deep brown with yellow rims, slanted into the forehead—the animal was furious and stunning. It’s wildness forced her into a new recognition. *We are not like animals. Why do we insist on humanizing them?*

“He’s a traveling alpha animal, male,” she heard him say, “about eighty pounds or so.”

She looked out at the night around her. The light had turned—the blackness had the quality of a photographic negative—there was something not right about the

atmosphere. Perhaps this was a dream? The toes of the wolf were smooth, seemingly unworn, soft. She touched a paw and the animal quivered. She felt as if to witness this event was an intrusion on its private moment. She did not belong. Yet she did belong because she created it. Her stupid mistake produced this twisted moment of pain for an innocent animal. The road, rutted from recent rain and dirty snow, was mud splattered. Muck covered the body of the animal. She tried to wipe it off with her hand—as she pulled her hand away it was covered with blood. She could look through the hand—it was transparent. A frightening feeling of transportation seeped in, as if time had stopped and she had entered another level of reality.

The traveler tapped her shoulder. She jumped.

“The police are coming with the k-9 patrol car.”

He bent down and touched the animal.

“Easy, easy.” He touched the hind flank, feeling for the wound.

“He might not make it.”

“It’s a—boy.”

“It’s a male—yes.”

“I hit a male wolf.”

“You didn’t mean to.”

“What was he doing down here?”

“Hard telling. There are some wolves in the woods around here. There might be a pack living off garbage. Although, his being an Alpha, maybe he’s one of those lone wolves. The price of civilization, I suppose.”

“What?”

“That we’ve invaded their habitat and they have to forage for food.”

“We’re cruel,” she said, feeling worn out, washed up inside.

“Yes, we are.”

Cars stopped, lined up behind her car and the traveler’s car. Several curious people gathered around the site.

He stood up, a fortress of silver coat against the curious.

“No problem. An animal got hit. Someone’s coming.”

A fat woman wearing a coat wrapped tight around her large, protruding frame gasped.

“Oh my God. It’s a wild animal! You better be careful, you might get rabies or something! I know a friend of mine, she hit a beaver, or was it a possum— Van was that a beaver or a possum?”

Van stood mute.

The young man looked out into the night. Perhaps he noticed the atmospheric change as she had.

“When this is over, you want to go for coffee or something?”

“I’ve really got to get going. I’ll stay until they get here.”

“Oh.”

She wanted him to hold her inside of his silver colored coat. Envelope her in his arms inside of the coat, assuage her guilt, warm her; protect her from the icy cold air that stung her exposed skin.

She dared to look again at the wolf whose breathing was coming in gasps and rattles.

“He’s going to die. You need to prepare for that.”

“Okay.” A cry ruptured out of her with a suddenness that scared the people behind her.

“Well, you got it under control. Let’s go Fred.”

Fred and his fat wife left.

She cried without shame. The young man looked away. This was embarrassing but she could not stop it any more than she could stop the flow of blood surging from the animal every time it took a breath. As she looked up at the eyes of the wolf, she saw them glaze over with a cataract, the tongue hung out limply, touching the road.

“Oh God,” she cried, tears streaming from her against her will.

“It’s all right,” the young man said, not to her but to the wolf. He touched the wolf one more time and there came the silence.

“He’s dead.”

“I’m going to jail.”

“We don’t jail people for killing animals on the road. It’s just a natural consequence of life these days.”

She looked hard into the stranger’s eyes. There caught a glint from somewhere—probably from the streetlights—that gave his eyes a golden shimmer, just around the iris. What color was his iris? It was too dark to discern.

He rose.

Lights from the K-9 patrol car hit her face and blinded her for a moment. The car pulled up in front of hers. A woman officer walked from the car.

“Oh, boy. We need a couple of guys and a stretcher. Is he alive?”

“No, he just died,” the young man said. Rebecca watched the silver coat disappear into the night. His back to her, he waved his right arm as if in salute and left her alone.

“M’am? Are you OK? Is your car OK?”

She had forgotten entirely about her car.

“Try to start the car. Otherwise, I’ll call you a tow truck.”

She got into the car and turned the engine over. It started.

“Is there a dent?” the police officer asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t care. I’ll deal with it later. Do you need me to go with you or something?”

“No, that’s OK. We’ll handle it from here.”

All the way home the world looked like a negative. Lights were refracted. Sounds were diminished; the car quivered or else it was her body. Once home she ran a hot bath and sank into it, feeling grieved and numb. Life was a labyrinth of banded dark and light, the light of the silver coat, the dark of her responsibility.

OK. Maybe it did not happen this way. Maybe history is plastic; we can mold it. Maybe history is fiction, anyway. Life is fiction. Fiction is fact and our life stories are just made up. Time is no time at all; it is an idea, a construct. Time is part of a fluid crystal in which we swim. Like fish. We are fish swimming in time. I like that image. Eddington, that great scientist said, “ if space is “looking-glassed” the world continues to make sense, but looking-glassed time has an inherent absurdity which turns the world-drama into the most nonsensical farce.” So my life is a nonsensical farce, eh? Well, then, let the play begin! I mean the flow of time is the point, right? There is no preferred direction for

time to flow on the microscopic level, so equations of motion don't "give a damn whether time moves backward or forward," Eisenberg said. And so, let it flow either way. Cause and effect? What matter? Why not effect and cause? Causality is not one-way, "two events can occur with absolute simultaneity," Kim wrote in 1974, already. 1974—back then people understood concepts of time and here we are in the 21st century still grappling with this stuff? Maybe relativistic causality will stop me, but I want to see if I can rewind back—or let's just say, experience simultaneous causation. The paradox of time-asymmetry—that beautiful motion. Causality is transitive--let's go swimming.

The young man looked out into the night. Perhaps he noticed the atmospheric change as she had.

“When this is over, you want to go for coffee or something?”

He looked at his watch.

“All right. You live near here?”

“Burke. Just down the road.”

“I'm staying in Loudon.”

“Not far. There's a Starbucks up the road.”

“There's a Starbucks in China.”

They both laughed.

“Let's wait until K-9 gets here.”

“Of course. You can follow me.”

He nodded.

This is terrible but something good might come of it.

She stood up next to him, her shoulders at his chest. He was tall, on the thin side, with an expressive face and those bright eyes. His hair was long, cut in patches that lay down around and behind his ears, across his forehead. He had a strong jaw with a pointed chin. The plains of his face were angular but soft at the same time, as if to temper the masculine energy with something else--something feminine--intelligent, remote as well. His eyes had an almost feral look to them, as if he could scan the horizon; see at great distance, sense things only animals could sense. She looked into his eyes, searching for something. He touched her elbow with his left hand, withdrawing it quickly.

“Don’t be upset. This kind of thing happens. It just does. You and the wolf intersected.”

He bent down, removing his right glove and placing the flat of hand on the flank of the wolf. “He’s going to die. You need to prepare for that.”

“Okay.” A cry ruptured out of her with a suddenness that scared the people behind her.

“Well, you got it under control. Let’s go Fred.”

Fred and his fat wife left.

She cried without shame. The young man looked away. This was embarrassing but she could not stop it any more than she could stop the flow of blood surging from the animal every time it took a breath. As she looked up at the eyes of the wolf, she saw them glaze over with a cataract, the tongue hung out limply, touching the road.

“Oh God,” she cried, tears streaming from her against her will.

“It’s all right,” the young man said, not to her but to the wolf. He touched the wolf one more time and there came the silence.

“He’s dead.”

“I’m going to jail.”

“We don’t jail people for killing animals on the road. It’s just a natural consequence of life these days.”

She looked hard into the stranger’s eyes. There caught a glint from somewhere—probably from the streetlights—that gave his eyes a golden shimmer, just around the iris. What color was his iris? It was too dark to discern.

He reached over to her, pulling her up from her crouched position, then hugged her into his body tight. She collapsed into the warmth of his silver coat, his long arms wrapped around her, his right hand moving up and down her back. He leaned into her face with his head, his mouth right next to her ear, whispering:

“I love you, it’ll be all right, I love you.”

She let the tears flow until lights from the K-9 patrol car hit her face and blinded her for a moment. The car pulled up in front of hers. A woman officer walked from the car.

“Oh, boy. We need a couple of guys and a stretcher. Is he alive?”

“No, he just died,” the young man said.

“M’am? Are you OK? Is your car OK?”

She had forgotten entirely about her car.

“Try to start the car. Otherwise, I’ll call you a tow truck.”

She got into the car and turned the engine over. It started.

“Is there a dent?” the police officer asked.

“I don’t know. I don’t care. I’ll deal with it later. Do you need me to go with you or something?”

“No, that’s OK. We’ll handle it from here.”

He followed her in his car to the Starbucks at Burke Station. The two of them sat in the window, hardly talking, breathing slowly. It was not a moment to talk but to breath, exhale and wonder.

“I really like you. Do you want to see me again? Under different circumstances, of course.”

“Yes. You don’t live here, do you?”

“Baltimore. But I may be moving to D.C. because of the work I’m doing with Geographic.”

“Let’s hook up.”

They walked out to their cars, he guiding her with his arm on her right elbow, silver coat flapping in the cold, brittle wind. At her car door she turned to look up at him. He pulled her into his body; her breasts crushing into his chest, cupping his hands around her face he kissed her. His tongue was warm and tasted of coffee, sugar; cream and something else sweet she could not name.

“Thank you,” were her last words before driving off. She saw him in her rear view mirror, still standing in the silver coat next to his car, his yellow eyes beaming out from the triangular face.

Chaotic Life of the Unconscious or Carefully Constructed Psyche: You Choose

She quit smoking the day after she killed the wolf.

She never even asked the young man for his name or number. She never told him hers. It occurred to her they would never see each other again.

That night she dreamed. She sat in a classroom with Carl Jung as the teacher: tall, wire rimmed glasses, bald, wise and kind. There were five people sitting around the table—she sat on his left side—his heart side.

“Psyche, personality, persona, anima,” he was saying. A student next to her, a young man with dark hair, looked a little like Robert de Niro, began singing:

There's a line between love and fascination

It's hard to see on an evening such as this

For they both give the very same sensation

When you're lost in the magic of a kiss.

She looked at this young man with contempt. *Is he nuts or something? Carl Jung is here and he's singing love songs?* At this Jung laughed, the whole table laughed, everyone laughed, except her. She couldn't see what was so funny. *What's so fucking funny? I'm here to learn something.* Jung began waving his arms in the air. As he did so colors came out of his fingers, like the colors of cotton candy, pink, blue, yellow—a rainbow of colors painting like finger-paints in the air above his head. She looked; fascinated with the sky show he was painting.

“Conscious and unconscious do not make a whole when one of them is suppressed and injured by the other. If they must contend, let it at least be a fair fight with equal rights on both sides. Both are aspects of life. Consciousness should defend its reason and protect itself, and the chaotic life of the unconscious should be given the chance of having its way too—as much of it as we can stand.” Jung spoke.

She listened with rapt amazement. Carl Jung was teaching **her**. My god. The young man began singing again:

Too young to go steady

Too young I heard him say

He said we're not ready

But then why am I feeling this way?

Too young so he tells me

He says we'll have to wait

Why wait till it may be

Too late.

Carl Jung looked at her.

“Do you like his voice?”

“Yes, yes I do.” She was afraid to disagree. “But—“

“But--?”

“But—it’s largely irrelevant.”

Jung laughed again.

“Oh yes, it is so totally irrelevant!” The entire class laughed. Again, she could not figure out what they were laughing at. What was the joke? Exactly, what was so fucking funny? Was she the joke?

“I just don’t see—don’t see what’s so funny, sir!”

“Sir!” he shouted in the midst of his laughter.

“Oh, whatever,” she said, resigning herself to being the class shaggy dog story.

“Rebecca,” Jung said, looking serious again, right at her, his eyes boring into her psyche or her soul or whatever. “It’s the individuation process. Nothing to worry your head about; nothing to be upset about. The conflict arises between these two psychological facts: the Ego and the Unconscious. Work it out. You’ll see.”

She did not feel comforted. As she looked around the table, all the other students were nodding their heads, smiling, agreeing, as if they understood completely what was happening and what he was talking about. She had no clue. The door to the classroom opened and the young man came in wearing his silver coat. He pulled a chair from the corner of the room and wedged in next to her. She looked at him.

“Hello.”

“This is your uniting symbol,” Jung said to her.

“Huh?” she asked.

The man put his face next to hers. She could feel his breath hot on her forehead. He touched his lips to her cheek.

“Don’t get lost in the investigation,” said the young man with the silver coat. She looked over again at him, hoping to clarify this, when she noticed he was gone. Over in the corner of the room she heard a whimpering. When she looked around toward the

sound there was a small brown animal crouching there. It was the wolf, glistening wet and covered in blood.

“God! It’s the bloody wolf! The dead wolf!” she exclaimed. Jung smiled. His smile scared the living daylights out of her.

I’ve got to wake up out of this.

She awoke in a sweat. Stumbling to the bathroom and then the kitchen, she breathed a sigh of relief. *Thank God I am alive and not in that dream.*

Then the thought occurred to her, *well, yes, I am alive and I **am** in that dream.* It was then at that precise moment she wished so fervently she could call the silver-coated man and talk to him—tell him about her lapse in time, how she needed his help to mend her investigations, to read to her, to clarify the conflict between all this psychic factual dharma. What was essential and what did she need to throw out? All she wished for was the phone number—his phone, but then if she had it, then what? Would she really call? It seemed unlikely; the fear of his rejection so great, much too great to risk. It would have to stay in the realm of—what? Dream? Myth? Fantasy?

“I need therapy,” she told Joann on the phone, “where are you?”

“I’m in Florida taking care of my mother. Her boyfriend just had a stroke.”

“God. Is he in the hospital?”

“Yeah. She’s home, completely falling apart.”

“When are you going back to Sedona?”

“We’re closing on the B & B after New Year’s.”

“Yeah?”

“And then I’m moving down to Mike’s in Senoita. He just bought a hot tub for \$6,000.”

“What? Is he nuts?”

“Yes. I am really worried about his money attitudes.”

“He thinks you are bringing prosperity with you, or something.”

“Yeah, well, I am investing my money and he’s not going to touch it.”

“Don’t let him talk you out of it—that’s your security fund.”

When she got off the phone she wondered about the absurdity of her counseling her girlfriends to hang onto their \$100,000 plus security funds when she didn’t have a god damn dime to her name. Not only did she not have savings or a checking account, she didn’t have credit, she had enormous student loans still starving her monthly budget, back taxes from when she raised the kids, a long list of creditors and debts that demanded monthly payments—where would she go if she got sick, fell down on the sidewalk, couldn’t afford the rent—

“You’ll live until you’re ninety,” her oldest daughter dismissed her. “I’m really busy mom, can I call you back?” The daughter had a hectic hair salon to run. She never called back. The only way Rebecca could reach her was to call her at work; home messages were completely ignored. She was being ignored by her children her parents were dead—did the senator give a shit? She would die alone in a garret in the bad side of town, or worse—on the street, living on beer and crack.

Christmas over, Rebecca assessed her work habits and wondered whether she had begun to slack off a bit.

The only thing between homelessness and me is Leo.

As she thought this her cell beeped. It was Leo.

“Where are you? You were supposed to be here at a meeting twenty minutes ago.”

“I forgot.”

“You forgot?”

“I’m sorry. I’ll jump in the car—I’m on my way.”

“Forget it. The meeting’s over. Do you want this job?”

“Of course I want this job, what do you think?”

“Well you better get your ass in gear, because Janette is coming up at the rear.”

“I know Janette and she can’t do half the work I do.”

“No, but she can do it at half the price. Gotta go.”

She got scared for the first time about whether Leo would pick her tail up when it dragged. It had been dragging for quite a while and she’d better learn to pick it up herself.

Maybe it’s time to finish this damn book, get it published and be the writer I’m supposed to be.

She dialed Vera and got her message. *Damn, pick up Vera.*

I’ll start a blog. That’s it. Better than therapy and a lot cheaper. I can work all this frustration out on line—the danger is salacious, seductive, and succulent. I’ll name it senatoraide.com. I can say what I want, anonymously, of course—let the entire dish out. The whole nine yards. His suck and fuck moments with the weasel—his prurient and stupid comments made to whomever on the phone. OK, I was listening in—so what? It’s a safe kind of revenge. Got to get a new email address that isn’t linked to my ISP—whose

computer can I use? Oh, yes! My Freudian bad fuck Sigmund. Oh Gawd. She felt a moment of guilt referring to Joey as a bad fuck, but he was—what could she do about it?

Joey was home.

“Hey, dude! How are ya?”

“I’m kind of busy right now, Rebecca. Can I call you back?”

“You’re busy?”

“I have a girlfriend.”

“I see. Well, I’m happy for you.”

She hung up. *I am too old to be playing these games. I ought to be married to the Senator, living in a big place somewhere in Georgetown; having parties, entertaining visiting diplomats. What am I doing here? Everything I do should have been done thirty years ago. But then, hey—is there a time limit on when and how to do things? I am doing this because thirty years ago I was married and having babies. What’s wrong with that?*

Rebecca went around this thought food, chewing it up in her mind until it became ragged disorder, at which point she had to admit that her thinking had become a tattered mess of feelings—deconstructed, broken in the middle, sagging at either end, about to explode into a burst of creativity, song or despair. She did not have a preference for which. All the emotional turmoil of a lifetime mashed together inside the blender of her psyche—the result was a rather sickening green colored blob of liquid. She became the very sort of woman she would complain about—the menopausal, self-pitying regretful bitch. It was a delicious party to attend if only she weren’t giving it.

“I’m sorry.” Leo called back twenty minutes later. “I didn’t mean to threaten you.”

“Maybe I need to be threatened.”

“I do it sometimes and then I hate myself afterwards.”

“You live in a threatening environment, Leo. Everyday, all this partisan shit, filibusters in the senate—I just wish you dipshits would get together and run this country. Do something right for a change.”

“That’s the whole reason I left my cushy academic job and my beautiful place in Indiana, Rebecca, so I could do some good for my country—corny as it sounds.”

“You mean all Senators aren’t cynical, mercenary, money-grubbing fools?”

“That’s incendiary, Rebecca, and beneath you. Are you calling me a cynical, mercenary—what else you said?”

“I’m not calling **you** anything. I’m saying—I’m saying—oh, I don’t know what the fuck I’m saying.”

“Yes, you do. Go ahead, say it.”

“I’m saying that—I’m just a menopausal bitch and I can’t afford to lose my job.”

“Don’t you like working for me?”

At this point she realized some boundary had been dropped—Leo was breaking out of the carefully constructed mask and showing her the soft face underneath. She wasn’t sure if she liked it, and more to the point, she wasn’t sure if it was appropriate. After all, he was married, he was her boss; he was a senator in the most powerful branch of the most eloquent governing body of the most commanding nation in the world. She trod on dangerous ground here and she knew it.

“Yes, Leo—of course. I love working for you.”

“I have a tiny staff, you know. I’m not one of those guys with a big entourage or something. I like to keep it small and loose and tight at the same time. Know what I mean?”

“I live what you mean, Leo.”

“Yes. Yes.”

There was a silence.

“Do you like me?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean, outside of work, beyond work, that is—do you like me?”

She thought carefully about this. Whatever answer she gave would nail her to some cross for eternity, she was sure of it. It would certainly stop forward motion should she decide to get further into government.

“No. I do not like you, Leo. I am awed by you, scared of you, tantalized by your mind; secretly envious, inspired, transported, but like?”

“Are you planning to come into work today?”

“Yes. I was getting a few things together and heading out.”

“I’ll leave some papers on your desk I want you to read.”

“About the Ukraine?”

“That and some other things.”

“I’m still going aren’t I?”

“Air Force One is revved and ready.”

After the phone call she spent a good half an hour deciding which of her red sweaters she ought to wear. It was a red sweater day. Dressed, she spent a rather long time scrubbing coffee grounds from the corners of her kitchen counter top.

“What are you doing?”

“I’m just going out the door.”

“It’s time for lunch. I’ll be in the cloakroom if you need me.”

He had taken to calling her at home, a little too often and a little too personal. She knew that in order to move forward she’d have to stop this energy dead. This personal stuff had to go—whatever he was thinking, she determined to make the possibility between her and Leo road kill.

I am going too far with her. She’ll pull back; I can feel it. Oh shit—what the hell? She’s ambitious. Does that surprise me? Why would I want a stupid woman working on my staff? She brilliant, she can write, she can think—Life is like a rubber band—or for God’s sake, I sound those stupid self-help books Lynne reads. Love is like a rubber—a rubber—what? What kind of metaphor is there for love?

It was so unfortunate that Leo simply did not have in his repertoire enough poetry or literature, for that matter, to help him find the metaphors for love he needed to bring him out from the malaise of stupidity into the light of even minor comprehension.

Rebecca waited for the traffic to clear on 495—it was backed up all the way to Front Royal and she knew she had stretched the limits of what Leo would tolerate for lateness. *Rumi*, dog-eared and smeared with blue jam, lay wedged on the passenger seat between her Starbuck’s travel mug and the daybook Leo had given her for her birthday. Traffic was at a standstill—she opened a page at random.

*You have a source inside you, a cool spring that sometimes
Stops flowing, frozen.*

*Boy, that describes Leo to a “t.” He’s frozen solid. I wish he’d start something
moving somewhere—he’s like numb, metallic. Where the hell is the spring of feeling
inside that fortress?*

He paced the floor of his office as he thought. Memories, snatches of them, shredded his thoughts. Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, denying his love for the protégé Eliza, the cockney flower girl, the nothing, the—*I’ve grown accustomed to her face*—he sang. Raquel, the tall intern, entered as he stared out the window, back to the door, singing this song from a long-ago memory.

“Senator?”

He turned with a jolt.

“Am I interrupting?” Her little sarcastic smile burned a hole in his third eye, if he had one, if he even knew he had one. Which he didn’t.

“What is it Raquel?”

“Senator Lieberman’s on the phone.”

“Thanks.” His look sent her out the door.

Leo picked up the phone. This would be a long day and he needed a drink.

Rebecca burst into the office just as Leo was winding up the call with Lieberman.

“Don’t you knock?”

“Oh cut the crap Leo.”

“I love you Rebecca,” he said abruptly, shoving the phone so hard it fell off the desk onto the floor at her feet. She did not pick it up.

“What?”

“I can’t stand it much longer, Rebecca.”

“Don’t call me Rebecca, I hate that. Ms. Kaplan or shut up.”

“I want sex with you now.”

“How charming, Leo—what a courtship. Could we do it here or would you prefer my place in Burke?”

“I don’t have time for courtship.”

“And--?”

“Look—Rebecca—Ms. Kaplan--let’s not beat around the bush.”

“I’d rather burn the bush—got a match?”

“I see you plan to do your best Katherine Hepburn imitation.”

“Well, you aren’t any Spencer Tracy.”

“I’m better than him.”

“Yeah--? Says who?” She paused for dramatic effect. “Leo—isn’t this all kind of—I don’t know—déclassé?”

“Now you want to do Simone Signoret?”

“Jesus—what are you, a movie or a man?”

“I’m your movie.”

“Oh, shut the fuck up.”

She grabbed the phone and hurled it at his left leg. It missed.

“Why did you do that?”

“Because you’re scaring me—that’s why!”

“I thought you wanted this!” he shouted.

“Don’t shout!” she screamed. “I could lose my job, for God’s sake. And what about Lynne and Sam and the other one?”

“The ‘other one’? You still don’t know the names of my kids?”

“Should I?”

“You’re a bitch.”

“I hope so. I’ve been working on it.”

“Congratulations, you get the bitch award.”

“God, thank you thank you. My mother thanks you, my father thanks you and I—
“

“You’re fired.”

“What?”

“Take your things and clear out of here. I don’t want you in my office any more.”

Being out of a job was not in the long-term plan she had for herself. It fucked with her finances, but she found out when she went to see her taxman that she qualified for unemployment and food stamps. Now, if she could just tolerate alcohol she could slide down to total depravity and homelessness. The alternate plan could be even more exciting—live on unemployment, buy food at *Shoppers*, hit up on the Food Bank and write *the great American novel*. *I’ll call it Senator: What Goes on Behind Closed Doors*. *Of course it’ll all be about sex.*

Why Can't You Behave?

Two weeks into unemployment Rebecca began to believe in the idle life as a way of being. Work was certainly overrated. *Who said work was necessary anyway? Who invented it? It is so much more creative to do nothing.* Of course, she did not do nothing, she did a lot of things that normally made her feel guilty—mostly, she ate. The money from two past checks sat in her bank, idly waiting for her to spend it. Clothes she didn't need, but food? *We all need food.* She indulged her appetite at all her favorite places: corned beef sandwiches with Swiss cheese, thousand island dressing, potato salad, root beer (the regular, not diet) and new dill at the deli on Main Street, chips and salsa at the bar on Monument, she drank a Marguerite dinner in town one night until the bar tender cut her off. She had been oozing all over some guy in a suit until he sneered at her and told her to get a life. She had no memory of what she had told him.

When she stepped on the scale just for fun, she found twenty more pounds on her frame. Her size 8 pants were out of the question and her thighs screeched for room inside of her size 12 jeans.

Only I could gain twenty pounds in two weeks. Yikes. I'll never get anyone at this weight.

Sigmund called her.

Well, I can get Sigmund, but so what?

“Stress causes weight gain,” he told her.

“I'm not stressed, Joey—Sigmund—whatever your name is—I am having fun for the first time in my life!”

“You are a lousy liar.”

“What’re you doing for s-e-x? Still seeing that—?”

“No.”

“Wanna come over?”

Joey looked good when she opened the door.

She felt his biceps.

“Oooh—you bulking up?”

“I got a job at Safeway.”

“Is that good?”

“I lift boxes all night. How good can it get? One of the cashiers is cute.”

“Oh, cashiers.”

He followed her into the kitchen, which had, since her unemployment began, taken on the look of a magical displacement between art and chaos. The counter top and sink were piled with dishes covered with food in various states of hardening, there were empty Hagen Daas Ice Cream cartons strewn on the floor, coffee grounds and coffee filters filled with the detritus of dead coffee littering the small kitchen table, along with boxes of Lean Cuisine, Macaroni and Cheese (not the lean variety) and a departed piece of fish on the corner of the lamp.

“You’re going to eat yourself to death,” Joey stated with finality.

“Never mind. Want some ice cream?”

“No. You need to start working out.”

“For Fuck’s sake, Joey—I just **stopped** working out! Don’t try to make me healthy—I’m not interested.”

“I guess you’re interested in killing yourself the slow way.”

He noticed an empty flower vase a quarter of the way filled with deceased cigarette butts.

“Smoking too? It might happen quicker than you think.”

“I’m not in the mood for a lecture on self preservation. You want to have sex or not?”

“These kinds of come-ons are what I dream for,” he said, a small ironic smile on his face.

“You know you love me.”

“I’ve gotten better.”

“How’s that?”

“This girl—she taught me stuff.”

“Oh yeah? Well, let’s try it out.”

In bed Joey was the same as always. It was just not going to work between her and Joey.

After an aborted attempt at which he came just as he put the condom on, Rebecca rolled over and lit her last cigarette.

“I have to run to the store.”

“What for?” he sighed, a long, wispy rattle reminding her of stunning misfortune without authenticity.

“I need some fruit.”

“My ass. You need a fix.”

“OK! I need a fix. What’s it to you?”

“If I were half good in bed you’d be purring like a goat.”

“Joey—goats don’t purr.”

“Whatever.”

The guy couldn’t even speak a decent metaphor.

“I’m a lemon with you, but Barbara found me tragic.”

“You **are** tragic.”

She put on her coat.

“I mean—tragic in the good sense.”

“How can tragic be good, Joey?”

“Never mind.”

“If somebody thinks you’re tragic in bed—don’t you think that might be some kind of a warning sign?”

At the gas station she bought a carton of Marlboro Ultra Lights, a tin of Altoids and three cartons of Hagen Daas. It was destined to be another ice cream eating night. When she got back Joey had gone, leaving his wallet behind. Inside she looked at his driver’s license picture taken three years before. He looked like a kid just out of high school.

Damn, he is just a kid. What the hell—barely legal. Why does he always under perform around me? Maybe it’s me.

Two cartons of ice cream later she turned on the news. Leo was talking with Judy Woodruff about the latest tariff adjustments on Chinese imports. Blablabla.

He looks wonderful.

He wore a deep blue suit with a silver tie and his hair curled seductively just behind his ears. It made her want call and beg for her job back. When she got back Joey was gone and she did something she swore she would never do.

The phone rang six times before Sam's cracking voice answered.

"Senator Riesman's residence."

"Hello. This is—this is—" she faltered. "This is—um—the Senator's aide, Rebecca Kaplan on the phone. Well, of course, I'm on the phone, of course, talking to you!"

"Just a minute."

She considered hanging up when Leo answered.

"Yes?"

"Leo? It's Rebecca."

"I know who it is."

The silence became heavy with child.

"I—I—"

"Rebecca, I'm at home. We're just about to turn off the lamps and go to bed."

"All right."

"All right."

"I just—I just—I don't know Leo. I feel terrible."

"Terrible feelings come from terrible actions, Rebecca."

"What? What does that mean? Whose terrible actions, yours' or mine? I mean t must be yours because I did nothing wrong!"

"You need to feel terrible Rebecca. Sit with it."

The phone went dead until the voice told her *if you want to make a call, please hang up and dial again. If you want to make a call, please hang up and dial again.* She listened to the recording for a full minute before slamming the phone into its cradle.

I'm fucked. Things will never be the same.

Rebecca understood that the basic tenant of freedom of speech had become waiting for the other person to stop speaking so you could start your spiel. The values of the founding fathers no longer force us to ponder—we take it all for granted. Truth, a social phenomenon, is always a part of the jigsaw puzzle of personal integrity. The toxic by-product of American society is a huge desolate group of people who have squandered their basic human spiritual freedom by simply not giving a damn, passive people lulled to sleep without conversation, without reading, manipulated by the freedom to create absolute crap over the air waves. She began to know that without total reform her life was chaos—somehow the fact that Leo had fired her became a call to arms—her movement toward human comprehension and personal freedom. The crystal flute of her imagination had been set on its trajectory by the humiliating fact that sexual attraction between men and women was not equal and more to the point: it was not the same and never would be.

Two: Leo

Glass Surfaces

Leo stared at the computer, eyes glazed, mind going blank. Something on the screen plunged him into reverie—a state he most often carefully avoided, but descended upon him anyway at the will of some part of his brain he refused to acknowledge. Reverie, memory, whatever you want to call it, was not a particularly pleasant thing for Leo. It conjured up a test tube of un-hatched moments—moments that cascaded down the waterfall of his synaptic conclusions. He hated introspection.

Lynne, in this moment of memory, was wearing her little red and white checked shirt and the cutoffs he remembered so well. Nineteen, taut and tan—the perfect kind of girl for Head Cheerleader, which she was for Indiana State University, and filled with the hopeless enthusiasm and idealism of an education major. Wanted to be a teacher, hoped and dreamed of teaching Math to thirteen year olds just budding in their own dreams of sex, drugs and limitless possibility. In the 70's everyone got stoned before school—it was a coming of age ritual. He and Lynne had tried pot after she quit her grocery store job. Late one night, sitting on the roof of his parent's garage, they both took a couple of hits from the rolled joint his friend Bob had given him. Nothing happened except he got incredibly hungry and Lynne grew dangerously quiet. He grew to hate her silences. He could not figure out a way to penetrate that place where she went—*the hole of dark words*. Now, he found himself praying she would shut up, go there and stay there.

In 1965 he was just starting a PhD in English at Indiana State—maybe sitting on a great American novel or something. They were both headed for something else entirely—a particular kind of trajectory that neither one of them could have imagined. *How to take care of unrealized dreams?* This question continually haunted Leo, which was why he so carefully avoided memory and reverie—the danger of touching that grief too great to bear.

I remember her—that one luminous night at her parent’s cabin on Lake Michigan. She pulls her cutoffs over her gently sloping hips down to her thighs. I see the tan mark. From thigh to crotch her legs white as a Snow Bird. The blue veins in her neck pulsing, waiting for me to engage her secrets, penetrate that breathing desire, make her whole, make me whole—what was it we wanted then?

“Leo, for God’s sake answer!” Lynne’s voice ripped through his office door from the breakfast room.

Back in 1965 the news had come down from Viet Nam and he knew what the expectation was. His father, retired army Colonel stationed in Italy during WWII, had expectations of Leo. Kennedy was on the make for an intellectual think tank and Leo had dreams of maybe being part of that. Going to Washington, getting along with the military, playing tennis—being touted as a Jewish intellectual with a viewpoint. Kennedy

liked academics—maybe—or else he knew they could add something more than just paper to the whole deal.

Leo didn't like the army—he favored the Navy. Thought he'd look great in the Navy whites—fancied himself a Navy pilot. When the draft notices were getting sent out he had the talk in his father's den, the walls filled with history and political science and the requisite fiction: Shakespeare, Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Joyce. The library of a retired army man who liked nothing better than to read, putter in his garden and smoke his pipe.

“Leo, the army is hard working, solid, the fertile defenders of freedom.”

“Dad, I've thought about going into the Navy instead.”

“Instead of your PhD?”

“Yes. I don't want to study English anyway. I can pick up a PhD when this whole thing in Viet Nam blows over. Which it's bound to do real soon.”

“What do you want to study?”

“History. Political Science, maybe.”

“What about Lynne?”

Harry took a long puff from his Cellini pipe; the familiar aroma hitting Leo's nostrils, conjuring up memories of childhood walks in the woods, sitting outside the cabin on the lake looking out into the sun dancing with the water.

“I want to marry her dad.”

Harry looked out the window at the Birch tree with its Indian carvings. Fall had just started to turn the leaves golden, but the air was still warm and heavy with summer.

“I love Lynne, we love Lynne; you know that. Florence and I both think she’d make you a good wife.” Pause. “So, you want to be a Naval Officer?”

“I think that’s the way I want to--it will give me a good start. I don’t want to go over there as just any old grunt.”

“I worked my way up from being a grunt. The only Jewish grunt in the squadron, practically.”

“Things were different then, dad. It was a different war.”

“Damn.”

Harry looked backwards. Leo saw the familiar glaze come over his father’s eyes and knew he’d lost him for this conversation.

“When are you two going to tie the knot?”

“I thought December, after exams. Lynne’s graduating with her teaching degree in May. We can take our honeymoon in the summer before I join up.”

“This is all your mother’s domain—you’ve got to tell her, I mean, it’s her dream to plan the wedding and --“ his father began to choke up and Leo saw the wetness creep out from his father’s eyes. It made him uncomfortable enough to turn away, he just could not stand his father’s emotionalism, that manifestation of enlightened feeling that bordered on sentiment. Sentiment was just the sort of thing that got in the way of Leo’s life imagery. He saw himself as a perpetual motion machine, an 18th century model that had the eternal dynamics and structure enabling it to go forever. The question: *who am I?* was for some other person with perhaps less at their disposal, with an internal structure messier than his own. Someone like this old man standing before him—that stranded figure that held his magnetism toward love and hope of a by-gone undirected era--his

father, perhaps, a guy who drifted to spiritual directions, studies, reading, stories—a life that with its material comfort afforded some time to contemplate the very things Leo thought totally wasted time and energy. The goals of a good democratic society, if Leo were to set down his prescription for a future life, suspended themselves into one thing: Time. Perpetual motion, concurrent culture and Time. The addiction to freedom of time—the space to move inside of it all—arrogance, posturing and addiction to corruption—the design is the pursuit of the mechanics of right motion and action.

“Leo, for God’s sake answer!” Lynne’s voice ripped through his office door from the breakfast room. The narrative of his past stopped dead in its tracks. *How does she always do this to me?* It seemed to Leo that the past had more energy than the present. Lynne strode into his office without knocking. He half expected her to be wearing the cutoffs with those glorious legs, but she wore her flannel Old Navy pants that had been washed and bleached to the color of spit, her small breasts and nipples peeking out of the tank top. Seeing her nipples immediately brought the thought of Rebecca’s large melon-shaped breasts to the forefront of his mind. The intersection between the two sets of breasts made him angry. Why were women so different and yet irritatingly so much the same?

“What is it, Lynne? Can’t you see I’m busy?”

“Leo, it is not my job to be your personal assistant. Now, just answer the God damn fucking phone.”

“I’m not taking phone calls right now.”

“Well, it’s the President.”

“All right. How come he called on the kitchen line?”

“Because you’ve turned off your office line, Leo.”

Leo came out from behind the desk. He wanted to smack her, but he placed a hand on her hip and leaned over to kiss her instead. She turned her face so that his lips met her hardened cheek.

“What’s that for?”

“I love you.”

“I have to put another load of laundry in. Answer the phone.”

Her bare feet made the wooden floor squeak as she left the office.

Leo had no desire to reach inside to quell the tentacles of acid that gripped his stomach. The President would only call him with something important and he was useless in the moment and certainly had always been useless, really. He realized a long time ago that nothing he would ever do would amount to anything that anyone could call important or interesting or ground breaking, but he had an uncanny knack for ingratiating himself, a kind of sales technique he used with his mind and the sliding around of his mouth—he could use his face like a plastic art form—this talent really attracted the high and mighty—they quite liked having him around and thus were very disposed to do things for him. Doing things for Leo gave them a sense of disguised pity and satisfaction and it gave Leo power because after all those years of people stooping and bending around him, *falling all over themselves to accommodate me and make me happy and keep me from annihilating them with my nasty wit and intellect*, all those years of people fearing him while not even really knowing what they feared, made him something formidable, made

him into a man to be feared, but what to be feared for no one could quite put their finger on. But they feared him nonetheless. Tiptoeing around him with trepidation. Of course he had always had complete contempt for those who did this and most did, but Rebecca somehow slid inside of a pocket he had left unprotected and now it scared him because she was fired, he fired her, had to fire her, and that made her dangerous. She knew too much. *Would he have to continue screwing her or kill her?* The thought of joining the ranks of senators who had murdered their lovers gave him a pain in an already queasy stomach.

“Yes sir,” he said with his best unctuous voice into the phone.

“We’ve got a meeting of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and I’d like you there. It segways quite neatly into that bill and all those appropriations you seem to be enamored of.”

“What time? I’ll be there.”

Before putting on the tie he always kept on the back of his office chair (*never know when it will be needed—rush off and embrace the moment—importance of position—all that nonsense that is so not nonsense*) his right hand brushed a letter off the desk. There it was. One of those ubiquitous letters Rebecca wrote him warning him of this or that, objectifying something she discovered or uncovered or—whatever. She had dangerous written all over her face—squatting on it more or less.

All that stuff that came out years ago about you being a secret Pedophile and then that awful smear campaign against Senator M____, well you know who masterminded all that and now that he’s been run out of town (like me, I suppose) with his tail between his legs, he’s doing his damage out of his office somewhere in Utah, the shrewd rat-fucker,

we have a gullible press, they want nothing more than the advancement of their own careers and money of course, readers love to read that crap, the crap he gets them to write and he is going to go to town on you because you crossed him one too many times and anyway, you're in the wrong party as far as he's concerned. I don't want to see you get smeared up this way—you're too good, you're worth too much, and even though you _____me till the cows come home—whatever—we never actually consummated a promise did we? He's got connection everywhere but so do I. I didn't sever my connections and—

Leo read no more—in fact he tore the letter up in disgust and opening desk drawers in a fury found a book of matches and set the thing on fire inside the trash bin underneath his desk. Was this blackmail? *This woman feels she has a mandate for something, that's for sure, and hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.* With this he found the justification to do whatever he needed to do—in fact, the subtext of his theory helped him justify what he already decided to do anyway.

