

“To what do I owe this miracle”?

Peter’s sad and happy story

and by Charlie Woram and...

Leaves fell forming frivolous lasting circles before comfortably claiming their next residence the rain soaked earth. Half alive, full of life, Pete and Marie approached Eastport by the sea. Peter couldn’t feel his smile remembering the Eastport of his youth, a mysterious neighborhood where material dreams attend to their own recovery. Where despair is hopes tutor. And life apologizes only to its own comfort. The two lovers walked happy in their common effort.

An eighteen wheeler forced space aside jostling leaves, Marie’s blond hair reached for Pete eerily like the soft curtain moved by instruction of an unexpected wind. First one... they adjusted the backpacks against narrowing shoulders, two smiles- forgiving the tiredness of youth. They walked. Marie’s small body moved with the acquired eloquence of a mime artist. No actually natural dance of modesty and certitude. Peter winked at his lover, she smiled. Not satisfied she smiled to breathe again. Both the lively eyes of those who had been promised more than life could deliver. With each step walking Peter’s soft red whiskers moved up and down to either side, the leaves on the hillside the same. One step quietly another they walked. Walking they walked closer to Eastport by the sea. Pete’s lips tightened his eyes a slight gasp, without the whim of explanation the beautiful artist musician felt the unwelcoming of anticipation. Reality knew the better kindness. Walking all they knew they walked. The distance ahead memories thorn the State Police Barracks. Beautiful cars hushed by driven by beautiful people. The two travelers stood on the corner each afraid for the other. Their lives uncertain music a tentative melody. They stood the yearning of two lovers who had returned from Bar Harbor Main, a place of remedy, now back, trying to remember why they had left Eastport Connecticut. Their love is joyful, impractical presence, but enough Pete and Marie were home. And somehow were excited for this, two young faces and a

place called home. Life is purpose. Without hope despair would be lost...isolated. And there are miracles. We continue...

They walked the light heart of themselves past Best Hamburgers; the spiced smell of hamburgers stung their stomachs memory. Bent over the sharp hill, they walked. Death to the young is only a rumor worth the gossip. A vague close distant thing, an interesting occurrence that happened elsewhere away. Rock stars dieing their lyrics permit. Soldiers falling to the cadence of tooth n' popcorn. The pet torn apart, anatomies roadside lesson, touched with a long reverential stick, then the funeral. Mournfully brief vaguely festive. Always the flowers the last witness. The tears that stared back. Waiting for explanation. Grandparents die welcomed by old age; a home is sold life returns to the better. Death is only more when the soft-firm fingers hold their weight on you. The unexpected anticipated brevity. Followed by the full ambivalent absence. Are all our truths temporary? And incomplete. Pete should have known more about death. Instead he lived painted truly well and talked about singing. As if satisfied death went away, it seems death bargains with the living. Accepting sacrifices. There are remedies. Substitutes delays disguises. Possibly aware of these haunting thoughts Pete and Marie stopped. They are searching the warmth in each others face until the tender comfort became their own. And again death went away. What is patience to death, but us waiting for life? By and bye in the somehow of themselves they were content. Their direction rhythmically resolved. Loves companionship requires no bridges crossing. Peter's inquires about death were clumsy, unfamiliar... not easy to say our relationship with our own mortality is a singular conversation the rest of us are witness, sometimes fan to another's demise-thereby believing ourselves indirectly "awkwardly" eternal... at the least reprieved for another day. I really don't know as saying allows, ignorance isn't bliss but it can be helpful. Whatever death's original seed both lovers breathe as one.

Now on this warm day of wet and fewer shadows Peter and Marie have arrived. They said to give life another chance. Believing somehow they had indulged chance before. Walking still they walked tiredly. Smiling... happiness shared the contentment of each. Reflections glancing back alongside a half block of glass Pete made funny faces at his own changing image. Pork chops and dental floss on sale, inside the National Super Market Allen Aryus squirms motion to yielding advantage spying both

eyes to his next opportunity. The smart shopper squints reading the nutrition information on a can of imported sardines. Not satisfied Allen stuffs the can into the crowded pocket of his army rain coat after returning the fish to their mortuary shelf. Our friend Allen completes a quarter turn to the right before the tent like rain coat catches up to the cautious revolutionary. We will never learn whether Allen is a talented shop lifter, he's never been caught. Exiting the manager's office unescorted is the truer witness to the thrift. Allen Aryus slows nearing the stuffed olives, half a step and Allen's gait returns to its customary mournful weight, malnutrition's greed must be balanced against bulk. Walking away Allen follows his own smile, not a smile more a glance of satisfaction. Past the cash register, the anticipating shuffle of a hungry man. Allen sighs feeling the sun's hold on his face, thinking, deciding to conserve his energy to silence. "The Temple of the Lord will be feed..." Dave and Pete are best friends beyond year's counting, they say so. And knew it to be so. Love beyond promise secured by the occasional betrayal of those who lean merrily on the available drug. Allen truly loves Peter. Pete loves everyone. No one complained. Not even Peter.

Marie is giggling, balancing one long step with a shorter one, bouncing her shoulder against the baron's brick wall tossing herself back toward her lover. Pete's smile laughs, the eyes waiting for the kinder attendance, the birds sing to listen, the leaves play the crackling drum underfoot. All the sound images of God at play. A kind day unfolding beyond loves forgiveness. The baron's wall continues. As barons thrive their fraternity on this small planet, possibly an odd baron here in Eastport by God's sea. Wealth in cosmetics, a stranger to most every ones sight. Those given to the fever of conversation agree with the fiction that such opportunity allows. The sparsely veined red bricked wall persists soliciting privacy in exchange for attention. Oh yes the baron's mausoleum. Some of great finance do not like to leave death to chance. "In the event of my death," some say calculating immorality so favorably. (As if death might miss it's chance). The baron accepted death, but did not plan to relinquish comfort to eternity's intruder. Here we are the stately enclosure on the edge of Eastport's Cemetery, next to a patient pond, an imposing weeping willow offering quivering shadow's lasting mournfulness, all green of limb holding the cemetery together in one embrace. Now numerous gravel roads going nowhere having arrived from the same direction. Just beyond, no a little further,

past the impending tomb, the glistening pond. Reflecting the heavenly weeping willow bringing quiet down from the skies. Suddenly a busy road. Lives commerce validating progress's displacement. The mausoleum dressed in pink white marble was protected by a short angry fence that if dismantled could provide easy weaponry for gladiators waiting on nervous Christians. All this a considerable expense for the idyllic honeymoon or the baron's corpse. The beautiful place of sad repose was built slowly. Very slowly, I don't know why. A baron on a budget, a "tentative" disagreement with the Lord or the leisurely life carrying over to death? Eastporters seemed more relieved than envious when the monument was completed. The next rain proved the empty tomb leaked. Water tight was in the contract, the baron liked himself dry. Smiling laborers, interested citizenry, the baron all put in over time. Traffic again slowed passing the cemetery, polite wondering, and eager waiting. The Eastport News made no mention of completion. Folks must have assumed that the baron wouldn't die without having a dry place to go. But in the curious bargain of now, Peter, Marie continue along deeper into Eastport by sea. Well Long Island Sound but sea enough to those forgiven by geography. By the survivors telling the British landed cannon, musket in Eastport during the tenant contempt known by parade and failed exam as the Revolutionary War. Giving further celebration to the blood event, freshly painted cannon at Compo Beach points seaward, nearby, a kneeling Minuteman aims stationary eyes toward the discriminating golf course-serving to warn the British lest they return. For those who prefer other histories, the British aided by employed Germans and loyal Americans lost the war. And America became a country, someone said.

Peter tripped, grimacing hard anticipating the pain, more minor a shift of gravity than clumsiness, Peter was always ready to protest any pain to cover its pointless excess. He sings to his inner music, "You don't wanna fall behind on pain, no you'll never catch up..." Then he'd smile, the way Pete smiled. Peter is not a strong body like many of the various poetries who are bulwarked by wit's purpose. Our friend always seemed vulnerable where he stood. Then Pete would redirect himself as if startled by an electricity introducing notion's probability. Some practice as certitude. Isn't it so with all of us? No not so most of us arrive delivered of good caution, forewarned by encouraged conventions. Both roadside travelers tossed eyes away trying to distract their noses while

stepping past Friendly's Diner. Both knew the menu by taste and the infrequent cash opportunity. Next to Friendly's on the perpendicular glitter n' shine, stores presenting the various jewelries. Were welcome mats perfumed? A Buick old of blue and rust drives past, the bumper sticker. "Too much is not enough and more will never be." Marie and Pete are elsewhere the evidence of themselves. Across the parking lot, an intended row of trees assigned to separate the shoppers from two barn like buildings. The Player's Tavern and the Eastport Playhouse. Inside the tavern the sometimes sons and daughters taking a break from drugs, everywhere the warm reprieve of noisy words secured by sometimes promises. The Playhouse raised curtain on serious talent made more relevant by the happy-tragic dramas of the important audience. Wine intermissions interrupting the broader strokes: Eastport has a population of twenty three thousand not counting the teachers, cops, servants, mortgaged store owners, bartenders, landscapers and other professionals who couldn't afford to sleep over. Many stores delivering alcoholic assistance late beyond the moon rise. Did someone say one thousand AA meetings in Douglas County a week? The Amtrack takes the grateful to New York City. And sometimes brings them back. Those given to bragging about radiation insisted that Eastport and the joining Ames, Portstown, Fairbury, Weathers Field was budgeted for a decapitation strike during a nuclear war. The assigned enemy determined to keep the talented executives from recovering radiated ash to another day's glory. Nearby Southport middle class homes startled by nearby ghettos would have to settle for the firestorm. Continuing we walk, yes I must not remember to forget the Knoll Inn. Much of the unhappy residence of this true story. Once the ornament hotel for talent like Bella Lugosi who frequented in order to perform at the Playhouse. Now this last today the three story building is the uncertain shelter for the misbegotten, caves menace in the dark in the way the Knoll lurks to stand. A sad place lonely of its inhabitants waiting for permission to collapse. Rumors were made to speak that the City fathers allowed the Knoll to breathe so authorities could keep track of the unfortunates who had exercised their Constitutional Right to get lost in Eastport, Connecticut. Pete and Marie walked. More happy of tomorrow they walked. Their could be no substitute for Peter, five years past a recent teenager, talented alive, unique friend, beautiful he walked. No there could be no stand in for Peter worth the cautioned conversation. It is true that Pete and Marie loved one

another. Yale Universities scientist say that enough chocolate would have done the same. Not true. There is no chemical for what soul of love resides. Mystery solved by mysteries claim. Do not the ones who love themselves unguarded love the most, not tempered by reciprocal concerns. The sad lost lonely of food's regard unsheltered and lost again do not need loves lesson refreshed to know love once again. What less that is not love explaining God more enough. You smile to say there is no God. How do you identify what you just denied? What does the shared love of life say when death unjustly harvests? And they walked into the faraway approaching sun, the impatient sounds of drying leaves under brave and tired feet.

Pete turned to look but did not see to know Franklin Carpenter stabbing his green Alfa Romeo to a stop, frustrated the handsome lawyer had forgotten the cautionary yellow in Eastport endures for an extra two point one seconds. Franklin stares from under the visor at a mailman in long shorts trying to deliver mail to the Fitzgerald Funeral Home. A butterfly lost between season's searches for the absent flower. Two children hurry neglectfully holding their school books. Attorney Latch turns into his private parking lot. The "talented" attorney coaches the YMCA swim team. And curls his hair. Attorney Latch protects the guilty from the innocent, sometimes paid by both. He survives. A respected member. We will not hear from him again. Yet on this planet earth everything is perhaps except perhaps. Our nuclear family compels. The mime waves. A friend moves along inside a red Ford Mustang listening to The Happening. Her eyes lost away, she's gone. Distantly always distantly the old man walks. No one knows the old man therefore everyone does. Everyday the old man walks. Under the early sun late night's moon, the old man walks. Peter feels him. And turns the pain inside further away than not knowing allows. Tattered live's worn cloths walking against a weathered gray face. Walking nowhere. Already arrived one walk short. People amused by their respect honk their horns, not an unfriendly salutation. Marie speaks Peter is absent; the freckled face is visiting the incomplete places of youth. Peter is an angry young man waiting to forgive unexpressed anger.

Closing not far ahead too close to mothers food; the two hitch hikers feel their mouths, next to them vacant to the penniless the Pizza Parlor. Past now the Army Navy store, across the street the church like bank on the grass rise. Ahead fifty yards the

Cinema Center Pete can't read the coming attractions, "Kramer vs. Kramer" and "The Blue Brothers." John Belushi-Dan Akroid. A wind's shifting favor Peter holds his breathe, she watches Pete from a foot below, both smelling the charmed vapors floating from Mr. Chong's East Lake fine Chinese cuisine. The gentlemanly Philip Nice can memorize an order for six, return and with the ease of a tulip bending under its own weight place the correct steaming plate under your anxious eyes. I recommend the War Tip Har. Fan tail shrimp sacrificed for the occasion, cooked in an onion vinegar sauce, gently wrapped in bacon. Peter was not made for discomfort, though discomfort he was. Distracted shouldering past a middle aged athlete exiting the YMCA Peter notices a slim woman in a three piece suit, a silk red tie, leaning into a conversation, her plump cheek inches from a fanciful blue sign that reads "Crisis Intervention Center." The face lovely in its plumpness claims nothing and insists on everything. Her name will be Lili. Sometimes Lil or Lillie. Marie hand is coming down awkwardly In slow motion, uncertainly you might say. Not acknowledged...an incomplete wave. Noah and Dick Owen are crossing the bridge sharing an apple; neither pilgrim has noticed the trembling United Nations flags lined every four feet. Maria has spoken several words. Peter is watching the bridge carry Noah and Dick uninto the horizon. She listens to Peter's smile. What court Main Street America? What innocence not guilty enough? Pete feels a needle warming his arm, the smile is also gone. But the needle prick continues to crawl toward the brain. He's stopped. And let's go of the shoulder straps with two thumbs. Marie takes Pete's wrist in her small hand. "Come one let's go." One of them says. As if there was somewhere to go. Pete's lover cares. Her lips move one word below her own hearing. More word than hunger speaks. The seeming inversion of breathing itself. Some by different worship might have said medication. Same fruit different harvest. May God be blessed t. i. d...

Joe with an under hand pitch tosses the depleted apple bouncing three times on the surface on the sulphur smelling low tide scaring numerous families of fish, shrimp and fauna before injuring a young crab. (The crab will recover). Noah's eyes watch themselves following the splash. Noah is a short man who seemed to encourage quiet around himself. Noah those two large eyes of unease and distant patience, always appeared to arrive exhausted ahead of him. Noah always seemed, in the partial absence of

the rest of us, to be planning some futile escape. Please understand if by understanding you do I do not mean to suggest that Noah was amongst disabled. Separated from life like the rest of us, yes. An aesthetic like the rest at the Knoll Inn walking the barren desert of self. Could be that the most revealing difference between those at the Knoll and the thriving-dissatisfied others is that self disparity was not shared selfishly amongst the misbegotten, the ones lost of wandering. Like the many of most Noah was not simply Noah enough. But tomorrow is on the calendar. And there is laughter. And promises can be counted. And good dope abounds regardless of the pharmacy. Also "I" might be wrong. Certainly I most likely am wrong, those lost as found learn more by contradiction than affirmation. Noah, Dick Owen what others-always a friend less the friend to self. The saddened desperate eyes blind for what they saw. Still we loved. And died. Few complained. Actually most complain but usually a minor adventure.

Elbow to Noah's shoulder stands Noah's dear friend Owen Cage, a man who could be larger than his own body. An angry face tattered by some process of body, nearer to Owen than God it would be difficult but nonetheless wise to anticipate what anger might be released-though Owen Cage is a man of easy friendship. And loyalty. If you are attending an army or prison Owen is the man you would want with you. Owen could dispose of an itch by shrugging his shoulder once, over his collar would raise a portion of a tattoo that stretched down to the small of his back shaping into a target. In a respected gallery of tattoos, not art, more a formulation of impatient inks probably inspired by the drug opportunity of the day. But again not a target you would want to turn around with only one blow. Noah and Owen were to one another as the wind was to itself, a determinate fraternity whose unknowable roots were the friendship itself. Each of us had a story of origin, a divorce, a war, a ghost parent or the sum of an acquired life somehow subtracted from itself. But after the years which was cause to what effect, which was the poison to what antidote, the past strangely and effortlessly it seemed had been forgiven to the future. Not a bright future, but more the flux of what's next. Excuses long ago for most had been forgiven to the silence.

Noah and Owen invigorated by the apple, the two life forms knowing and lost have disappeared into themselves tracking rumors about good acid somewhere on the other side of nearby Westville. Pete is coming up behind Marie, crossing the street



toward the Selective Fashion's. Without announcement she is weightless familiar with the air, her arms floating like milk weed roams. More of space than time Marie is still a flight, now returning, coming down, and listening to Peter's cheers. As if two question could be one, Pete asked for a replay, with the quickness of happiness over lapping into joy Pete also needed, "the life expectancy of a mime artist?" The pretty lady shrugged both shoulders over her ears parallel to her undulating eyebrows. Peter's laughter applauds the lovely deformity. Peter hides his eyes nearer the sky before falling a quarter of his height into a diminishing half circle then slowly of body and reservation reclaiming his full height. Pete has freed his neck from his own tight grip, wavering, introducing the Tin Man unsteady at the batter's box. The world watches, Maria is enough, while Pete adjust the extra ordinarily large testicles kept from the public by Hollywood censors. Three locals glare a second glance already protested once. Marie is laughing, her hands together trying to pray the laughter to stop. Peter has swung and missed the same pitch twice. The eyes first-next the knees descending, arms part, politely begging an explanation. Befuddled by his own conjecture, one finger desperately back and forth, the soft face implores, offering adulation to Marie God can wait. She bends stiffly from her hips, scolding Peter's arrogance with a kiss. Not less the kiss Peter has already risen, ecstatic, giving direction to surprise, Pete is holding both of her hands flat ...offering himself the answer to her prayer. They know each others theater, the silence cheers. We continue...Marie restrains one scolding finger with the better hand. Punished to prayer's remorse again Peter is taller on his knees than standing up, imploring forgiveness the better friend. He lies. Her eyes expose the mystery the motionless lips reveal. Peter gasps, shame weighs more than his soul, then with the suddenness of unsolicited hope Peter redeemed of life or love (certainly not both)...rises ever so mysteriously slowly like smoke form a damp camp fire. Aided by the return of one of Mr. Chong's air born recipes. Standing the better height of them. Their hearts and lips do kiss.

Do you already sense to know Peter is a youth of talent, a generous withdrawal from the family genetic bank? Pete's Mom Amy Elizabeth has forty-fifty magazine covers to her good credit. Father is one of the same publications subtle cartoonists, cartoons people smile not understanding. Divorced of course still evidence of marriage. Amy Elizabeth no less the lady drinks. Easy annoyance uneasily expressed.

Pete's Dad swims the Y, Yoga's himself to contentment. The New Yorker is apparently faithful to its creative factory. Pete's Dad once asked I not mention anyone living or dead in this book. What mentions loves fair memory. Anyway today is the nearer of yesterday's tomorrow, Amy Elizabeth unknowingly is waiting for her son and Maria to appear. All will be happiness restrained.

Stimulated by the acquired anxieties Peter is practicing his first sentence to Amy Elizabeth, his Mom. On a small asphalt hill sits Charlie Winters, an excess of weight collapsed, coupled with the remnants of depression and welcome fatigue Charlie appears to be sitting more on himself than the cement. Charlie half closes his eyes lowering them away from the imaginary bird that was waiting on the tree limb, he pauses awkwardly before raising both thumbs to his eyes- wondering if both finger prints are alike. Charlie Chuck to some either to Charlie. He squirms his hips to cement. He glares back to the tree, the imaginary bird is gone. Chuck Winters sighs settling his disappointment. The Vietnam Veteran mumbles three now four words from two different songs, gingerly feeling his face like a blind man trying to decipher any facial expression. The corner of his lips, one eye, the eyebrows again, no nothing. Only fleshes warmth and distance. Chuck had been told by a four hundred and fifty pound psychiatrist that psychotics don't have expressive faces. He didn't want to believe the offered truth and has tried various approaches in an effort to clarify. Including sneaking up on a mirror when he wasn't looking. The tactile diary will continue. Charlie's search, the believing inferred, was important to this vague soldier. Whatever the pulpit of his customary pains Charlie is feeling peaceful. A woman polite and lovely has just asked him, "What are you thinking about?" He answered himself, "I'm thinking it's nice not to be thinking about anything." Chuck has now transported himself to an angelic clearing not far from the VA hospital of that day. He felt nothing but the haunting of the memory, a pressing against reality. Fear and sadness were miracles of self left behind in Saigon. Charlie knew about disappointment. If you were to ask him what he did for a living. The smile not a smile might have answered, "Waiting..." Five months earlier the veteran had made a good attempt on what was left of his life. An effort well rehearsed never practiced well encouraged. Since accepting the coerced invitation to his generations war Charlie had fourteen different diagnoses. Only one upset him. Almost vomiting after a psychiatrist

told in the early on of his journey that he was “normal.” He can still see the small doctor with a thinning face and a well behaved mustache. Twelve years later thirteen, five months ago, a psychologist had interrupted the modest flow of conversation and mentioned to Charlie in the soft voice of his profession, “You shouldn’t have children.” Already crawling on empty Charlie knew that moments command. He was dead. Only alive by the inconvenience of the next few minutes. The wooded clearing, life and karma have various names. Unable to purchase a rope for the easy jump, Charlie walked the woods barely feeling ground before cutting both wrists with a steady-deepening razor blade. The tired veteran sat down against the tree. Bleeding forgiving each breathe. The emptying minutes past death approaching, the mosquitoes began to rally to the feast. Barely upset, planning, not wanting to harm his dinner quests, Charlie rose incrementally kneeling to one foot. Now both holding the tree limb for support. And advice. Flying can be easier than walking, Charlie might have thought still attended by the growing list of companions. Most fingers trying to bring back which knots from the Boys Scout Manual, he twisted his blood shirt into a noose, brought himself to a trees advantage and after securing the shirt to the tree limb-lowered himself to hang. Weighted down by innocence and several unsuccessful diets the tree limb bent politely until it returned him to the planet earth. Charlie is learning suicide is privilege that shouldn’t be abused. Now unknowingly determined more of self than purpose, He’s pacing, the mosquitoes, a nervous chipmunk and numerous other of God’s children watching as the impatient soldier searches for more weapon than himself. Unarmed he turned fast as he did on Brian McMahon’s soccer fields trying to catch up to a pass from Jimmy Fabrizo. Relief, another of God’s opportunities. The ground shook an Amtrack train screamed past. Except for thinking Charlie didn’t move. Death delivered certain became death excessive. Charlie felt something of his face torn, the rest dragged-stretched across fifty yards of beer bottled, urine soaked rail road tracks. Can death claim more of us than we claim of life. Not aware that death had been satisfied, what remained was practice, Charlie left the woods of himself trailing blood. Walking until stopping a pharmacy and illogically asking for a non toxic poison. Rejected weary of success, tired of exhaustion Charlie has decided to drown himself in Long Island Sound. First stopping at a corner bar asking for a glass of water. Charlie was arrested by a Catholic. Hand cuffed and arrested no Miranda

right, Charlie listens to the cop (driving the slow of carefully) lecturing on sin and suicide. Is suicide illegal if you don't get caught?

Moments ago, earlier today, Charlie has shaken the hand of a well fed psychiatrist. He grimaces hard, a rare condemnation for the unsuccessful soldier, Charlie can feel-smell the unkempt waiting room the size of an older brother's winter coat, the doctor's office illuminated by darkness and the walls lined with death masks. Not former patients a tribe several miles south. Charlie Winters tried to breathe and did. He tried to forget and didn't. The ignoble veteran accepted the world as it bumped into him, what was unacceptable to many was reprieve however delayed or sublimated. Charlie grinned unhappily but happiness enough, a mosquito complete flown a circle two feet away, he offers an exposed arm to the lofty cousin. The mosquito refuses the invitation and heads west. Speculating if insects date, the soldier can feel the doctor's meaty red face chased by its own irregularly bald head, then the large hairy fingers sinking into Charles's unconsenting neck. Unaware of his own loneliness he smiles to practice, the man will sit on the asphalt hill for hours awaiting the world's offer, except for his own wakened dreams, rarely interrupted by sleep, the damaged veteran had no offer to make himself.

Peter, Marie and Charlie unknowingly parted, Noah and Dick Owen exchanged borrowed cash for Quaaludes, Allen Aryus is dropping a three inch wiggly into his opened smile and the mandarin Mr. Chong stands under East Lakes purple canopy, hands lightly on his hips, gleaming intent on Eastport with a gentleman butcher's eye for fat. The day's enfoldment continues. The handsome Franklin Carpenter reads a law book sitting next to Don Quixote. The alleged Charlie dog sits on the Salvation Army couch guarding everything against himself, always longing for his best friend Charlie Winters. Leslie Carpenter folded her body against the stove, round and round the prima vera sauce, the retriever Sammy watches sadly perhaps trying to remember a dream. Louie scores. A chipmunk anxiously tries not to listen Lili crack her knuckles between her legs, forty yards beyond Needle Park where Lil sits, a drunk in a tuxedo rows against the tide laughing. Lili breaths deeply, startled once the chipmunk disappears, a leaf falls on the bent shoulder. The young woman is reading her own palm trying to discern why she's alone. They near Amy Elizabeth's home. More leaves tumbling down kissing the ground, nearby faraway, his back straight against a hallowed

tree-death crossed its legs waiting. Waiting for us as we wait for life.

A glimmer hesitantly the sun edged away over God's troubled planet; moon rise sun set the night became our neighbors day, someone's troubled chore another's UN witnessed dream. The year 1981 was busy discerning pain. Our lives'commerce unnecessary pain. Since disintegration became value's caution we've struggled to overcome our success. Curiously mourning our failures more than progress. A demanding year for death, but even death had its disappointments. Ronald Reagan became President while the Iran hostages unfolded denying Jimmy Carter. The day's turn like falling leaves: Gunshots echoed amongst the ancient gargoyles of St. Peter's Basilica bringing the gentle Pope down. Nineteen percent interest rates cautioned America. Undistracted college students, early children of yesterday's hippies, prepared for greed's pragmatism, studying hard for the life they were already living. Gay cancer gradually, tragically became love's burden. Anwar Sadat rose full height to the gun shots accepting his fate, the assassins embraced their own. And didn't miss. A hansom anthropologist financed by George Lucas and Stephen Spielberg unearthed the Arc of the Covenant. President Reagan warned, aimed and fired twelve thousand air traffic controllers. Natalie Wood drowned in liquor and salt water. But not all was pain's toil. George Washington's teeth were lost again this time at the National Museum of American History. Buckingham Palace announced Prince Charles would marry one Princess Diana. What more not enough Israeli pilots destroyed Iraq's nuclear reactor. Bob Marlyie continued faithful to marijuana. And Admiral Rickover retired one trigger short of Armageddon.

The rest of us hesitated. And repeated our prayers waiting patiently for God to get it right... But of the now of then Peter stops next to the Little Book, thinking of his Mom. Maria has bumped into Pete, listening. "I wonder where the equator is today." The young traveler hears himself chuckle. "The walk across the street continues. A disjointed response. "Correct me if I'm wrong preferably if I'm right." Aware the birds are singing. Over there a child holding a compliant cat. The lovers move along no closer to home than yesterday, content with their lonely companionship. Next a strange sound. The initial resonance warmed the air, but further notice and the initial embrace became haunting. The unsolicited word was, "Mom..." A brief poltergeist followed by the exorcism of Peter's laughter, though such ghosts are not easily excused. Slowly to stay

quickly to leave a cold wind came by, death has accomplices other than ourselves. Marie watches Pete then pardons any concern. And the light came back to her green eyes. Amy's home grew larger, the two lovers walking closer to their unplanned anticipated despair.

"You o.k. Pete?" She asked thinking about herself.

"Always," Peter answered excluding himself.

Maria stepped sideways closer to Pete. If you were watching my friends from across the street, currently a stranger, you still might be able to distinguish between the anxiety and the joy of their union. As they closed in on Amy, the distance between their shoulders grew. All this to the angry company of their empty stomachs.

"Were here," Peter told himself. "Watch out," a loud metal sound, a bell. A chubby boy rode his bicycle through the opening between the two pedestrians. "I'm sorry," the blushing face implored looking back nervously at his pedestrian casualties.

"Don't be sorry," Pete sung, "be grateful." Marie stepped back onto the sidewalk. "That's a good omen," Pete offered with the fresh and subtle excitement reserved to introducing new facts. They both watched the child disappear around the picket fence.

They've arrived stopping again. Trying to wait, Pete has lowered his hand, deciding not to knock on the window. Marie lowers the back pack, each muscle a graceful witness to the descending weight until the luggage stops by her boots. Pete rolls his shoulders, raising his back pack an inch, holding on to the fifteen pounds. His freckled face a study in mischief and rehearsed machismo. Marie laughs and kicks Pete sideways. "Not so hard," Pete protests before the pain instructs. Peter examines his nonexistent wound. Marie moves...more the vague presence of intent filtering as light against shadow than any material reality. Whatever the magic much of the trip has been resolved to its antidote (destination). She inhales smiling disposing of more psychic dread. Pete continues to assess pain's allegory, source and consequence, the face of a soldier deciding between the bullet's injury. And consequence. "Oh come on," the mime speaks her sweet voice, the last sound more big sister than lover. Pete sniffles like Laurel and wipes at the tears with his fists, before casting his eyes to the Heavens for further instruction. All is changed mood is reality. "How come people don't wait for the results,"

Pete asks heavily. "What results," Maria follows. Pete answers, "the results to their prayers."

They're both staring at their own reflection on Amy Elizabeth's door. "I don't know," one of them quietly responds. The words lost as they are spoken.

Maria offers. "A Rabbi said prayers aren't answered they are the answer."

"Wow that's good," Peter is relieved. "I like that..." With his two thumbs Peter drops his back pack onto the small wood porch, a couple more inches and of Marie and one would have to jump off. Wanting to share her reward Marie touches her fingertips toward the stillness of Peter's face. Pete accepts love almost as easily as he offers, a reality of presence secured possibly by an abundance of trust that comes more from recklessness than any other preferred intoxicant. Neither wants to knock. The finger's climb as her heels rise over toes, the nimble body aided by gravities agreement and love. The happiness of youth kissed well of tomorrows love forgiven as yesterdays apology. Apology loves soliloquy. Did Peter once say why apologize isn't love enough.

Now the unwelcome place easily regarded. Peter's knuckles are going to knock, a knee wobbles attended by a wooden leg, Pete marches around himself. Maria jumps off backwards from the porch. The march of the wooden soldier ensues, stiffly proud; heroes never fail in front of audiences. The march ends continues as Lazarus must of walked dusting death from his body. Pete implores lives gift be more... now he bumps into and assumes the Mummy curse. She's laughing not wanting to. Encouraged of life and loves attentions Peter's smile levitates him four more inches. Mummy, soldier Lazarus the same. A moments reprieve, before they part again. Ones face the others legs both hesitating enough room for another. Peter doesn't stop, his eyes pause to watch as you would a flower. Pleased she is neither and both. He offers his lady a hand. Reaching through the dimensions. Until she flies coming down next to Peter. And herself. A soft touching not enough to waken an angel. Marie smiles beautifully. Accordingly all smiles reside.

Still before them the place of permanent reality, often forgotten as offered. She is willing to take risks, though certainly more calculated to practicality than her lover. Risk and Peter have the suggestion of assisted suicide. If Raphael needed an angels face to model, Peter's face stood well the offer. Red hair, red whiskers easily

tussled by a wind, a hansom face relevant to its own uniqueness and the humility of acme. The rest you will know as impression's beguile. Our appearance follows the trumpet of our disguise. Charm's mystery the mirror speaks. They are now both looking at each other as if trying to decide whose fear they prefer. If love had restrained reasoned logic would love become lives argument? All words about love caution hesitation do they not, only the embrace speaks.

Pete's lady wants to know as children yearn to insist. "Pete why do some saints have halos and others don't?"

Pleased with the opportunity Peter answers, "They need them to maintain there balance." Peter doesn't stop for Maria's response. "Sweetheart do you know what a riddle is..." She quotes their previous answer, "A question with an answer." Which Pete has already shook off like an impatient pitcher about to catch his own curve. "A riddle isn't... it can't be or it wouldn't be a riddle?"

"Pete I'm hungry." Without pause reality is back like the first sight of the guillotine blade. Pete is watching the door mat. WELCOME. The first five letters faded. Everything is intended our lives are brief, the story continues. Is not Karma God's motion disguised as ourselves. Unnecessarily disguised. Pete just touched the tip of his tongue, Marie exhales loudly, and Peter is wiping his fingers against the green flannel shirt. Anyone who rides the city bus, those who walk, the residents of the limousine, anyone of thoughts modest logic will tell you...there is no path from which you can not chase the devil away, unless you think you are the devil . But tomorrow is another day the night promises.

"Pete," Maria is nervous trying not yielding to scared. The word now is pointing at the foggy contours of a face disappearing behind increasing moisture. Pete laughs the first time we've heard these sounds. The glass squeaks back while Pete tries to wipe away the warm breath running into descending droplets on the other side of the glass. A finger bent into two thirds swings up and down finally leaving a clear trail. And two eyes less by sight than bewilderment search out for details. Mother and son have made contact. Fear, laughter, love, welcome uncertain understanding, each the denying claim of the other overlap into a happy moment. And mysterious.

"It's Pete Mom..."



“Mom...” Amy Elizabeth responds desperately working the door handle. Peter turns right is Mom turns left. Now push pull. Entry exit the same.

“Let me do it,” As children always sing when they know more than their parents. Having forgotten that compromise of the one is often compromise of both. The door opens slamming in place the distance of the security chain. Pete peaks into the opening. He inserts his leveled fingers to release the chain. “No Pete for God sakes, I can do it...” Mom slaps at the fingers with her own, missing two strokes of three. “Let me do it Pete,” Amy Elizabeth closes the door, Peter retreats quickly. “Pete you should have called first are you all right?”

“Peter Mom,” One word each. The door opens to the exclamation. Only two feet unknowingly perhaps Amy Elizabeth is standing in the doorway. Pete has stepped back twice bumping into her, the second time to see who he’d stepped into. Marie silences her own laugh with one finger to her lips. Amy steps out the doorway widens, no actually Amy steps back inside. Peter is half in and half out not sure which way to turn which way to laugh. Amy Elizabeth has opened her arms offering an embrace. Pete ducks backwards four inches, the knife in Amy’s hand misses flesh by two-three inches. Who counts inches in an American family? Everyone...

“You shoulda called Pete?” Amy repeats.

Marie has stepped back onto the porch. “Mom is it true that your adopted?” Amy is surprised she notices a knife behind Peter’s head.

“Hi Maria...”

“Mom what’s for dinner?” A mother’s response dissents visualizing the opened refrigerator. Twice Marie has said. “Hello,” Amy has heard her once and invites Marie inside with her eye. “Mom is true that you’re adopted.” Amy Elizabeth laughs striking at Pete’s remark with an incomplete swipe. Mom is backing up. Peter moves four more feet and twenty three years of memories. Marie hesitates as she moves; the caution of three becomes the silence of one.

“It’s nice to see you.” The voice is thought waiting for feeling. There it is a mother’s smile.

“Thanks Mom...” Amy’s face has turned quickly. Accusation’s fear whatever the seed more run than a turn of face. Peter laughs engulfing his mother in a warming

embrace. "I'm sorry I didn't mean to scare you." Holding his mother's shoulder, leaning back to allow the full breath of his smile Peter anticipates. "Yes Mom you already said you should have called first. But what's the point of calling if your going to answer the phone."

"Pete is still a funnyman," Amy Elizabeth nods once at Marie and keeps her chin down too long waiting for an answer. The chin returns adding, "Pete is practicing religion."

"I always loved the way you said real igion Mom." Peter's concern turns suddenly toward Marie, "Why do they say practicing." Maria is staring at the polished wood floor thinking about food, she comes up slowly and asks pathetically. "What?"

"Your being silly Pete." Amy Elizabeth intervenes.

"No I'm not, silly is fine why do they say practicing-"

"I give up-"

"You know the practicing physician you would think that after twelve years of advanced study they could do more than practice..."

"Oh o.k. I get it," Amy is distracted by her relief. "Wouldn't you rather be eating?"

"Great Mom I'll help you cook." Mother interrupts her impending organization. "No you won't Pete you're going to sit down right there." Pete walks past the offered seat following his mother into the kitchen. The words between them continue, a curious psychological aerobic of protest, complaint and the somehow of happy intermission. Who is protesting which is the complaint will remain unclear? Her eyes delivered from her stomachs interrogation-wander the details the personalized museum. The smells, the images sounds of an embalmed unreality. Gathered memories. Immaculate burdened memories guarded it seems from themselves. Polished back to the rumor of life by two black ladies who appear once a week from Southport to clean, sip booze and eat countless chicken wings with their employer friend Amy Elizabeth. Sometimes Amy rarely Liz. The ancient television is always turned on, tossing out static images before they disappear. As well dressed drunks lean on bars the record player leans slightly to one side. The polished reflecting floor, the looping record and perception conspire in creating the angle. The aggressively polished floors. Wall paintings. That one painting again, little

girl....Marie turns away. Five inches seven inches stack all Frank Sinatra LP's. Our Marie is at the book shelf reading faded unreadable book titles. Amy has stepped quietly behind her guest; the record player twists gears, the record drops to one side, the other now as the record turns with a slight upward inundation. One scratch two before the words begin to float the room like butterflies. Amongst those of temporal ambiguity Eternity is harmony. Maria listens to feel the words. The thirty year old oval screen plays it ambivalent light against the walls before cascading to the floor. And from there everywhere. The rocking chair, not the painting, the dieing doll on the motionless rocking chair. The smell that suggests camouflage, the large plastic dials on the television. One of the eyes hanging from the doll, the laundered white apron. Velvet dancing shoes. The eye hanging as if desperately looking for itself, an ironed blue dress. Dancing shoes the doll will never use again. A doll disabled by time and affection. Amy Elizabeth knows the doll. The love shined apron, love laundered blue dress. Frank sings love lost eternally appealing. I can see Pete's Mom is listening with her face. Someone sighs. The horror on the wall. The wood floor polished to suffocation. Not horror mystery the painting, one of Amy Elizabeth magazine covers. Was it the New Yorker? Is horror visited as delivered. Two very innocent very little girls separated by a white picket fence. They watch each other. One from the back of your head. The fence. One little girl pressing a doll against her hip. The other girl watches. Across the fence forever. The little doll looking back at you. Two funny unreal men unloading the moving van. Two new little girls. The unredeemable loneliness. Children's fear. She doesn't want to look at the doll. Only the eyes of one little girl. But both are watching. The large tree what's....She hears two words, "Blue cheese." The two words accuse one another, they're running making the fullest of their short lifespan. More sounds yielding oddly desperate. Angry? "No you can't stay here tonight." Incomplete words shadowed by intention. What is sacrifice without ritual. "Oh Mom," Peter's response waivers and is left behind. Maria imagines the faces watching the words, the tap dance persists. Which one has made nest of the other's spirit. Ambiguity can be sincerity. Love mask's remains delay. Is love denied still love? This play has no script , intuition directs, certitude abstains. Language suffers abuse. Often if our words true not less deceits consent zoo keepers would protect us. Mother and son a shared soliloquy. Souls buoyed by illusion. What does illusion really

mean? Love denied that hope can be love enough again? Then as if “from nowhere” had an address. The words breathe life to opportunity. “Fine Pete you both can stay. But only one night.” Pete’s Mom follows her good intentions out of the kitchen as overweight cops chase burglars. Two trips financed by practicality have been completed. Sheets have been piled on the convertible sofa. The second journey has been lost to intent. Pete echoes from the kitchen, “Thanks Mom your great.” Sincerely Pete is the near of always sincere. The next sentence is lost as spoken. Pete has stepped onto a stage, each hand ( a plate of food) a supporting actor. Pete winks toward his partner, using the plates for balance, he drags the metal chair out with a toe. Amy Elizabeth sits turning one shoulder trying to adjust her hips. Food and companionship, eyes bringing life to cheer. She sits as easily as if she had risen. The communal smile however absent is grace enough. Two inches of ham, un gassed tomatoes, accompanied by pumpernickel bread, Swiss cheese, baby Swiss cheese, pickles, I don’t know what...one is salami maybe and the under appreciated lettuce. The lovers appear as if relieved of guilt... after a punishing interrogation. The empty stomachs had claimed the entire voice to their bodies. The travelers have not eaten in a day and a half for two born in Eastport, patriots stern of body and purpose have given up secrets to less torture. “Dill pickles,” Amy Elizabeth says. Those of sound hearing can hear the eating sounds, internal and external. Maria swallows a second time before offering, “Thank you....” Mother hears the pleading appreciation. A smile hides the shade of lost tears. A woman loved but most likely not appreciated. But at least three sides to that coin. The food. All eyes are calmer as if a promise has been kept. Again life has meaning. Much can happen in eight minutes. Eternity has to begin somewhere.

“Is it true,” Peter wants to know speaking from the one corner in his mouth that is not chasing food. “Is it true,” Peter needs to know looking down at the soft round of his small pot belly. “That when you weigh yourself your supposed to deduct weight of the scale from your own weight?”

Maria laughs resenting the interruption. Amy has stopped eating; her eyes are lost now returned. She laughs some would say happily. Peter is pleased with his success. Very pleased actually. Amy Elizabeth congratulates her son with a kick under the table. “Your silly Pete.” She promises again. Amy gives further emphasis to her smile with the

sway of her shoulders,. “I’ll get the dishes.” Wanting to protect the left over’s. Peer wonders why he remembers. A song he wrote. “Amy my Amy.” He couldn’t remember if he finished the song. Pete signed and smiled simultaneously.

“Over somebody else’s dead body,” Peter says leveling both hands over his plate.

Marie adds to the rally. “I’ll get the dishes...really please.”

Some people prefer being out numbered when their not alone. “O.K. “the hostess nods a whisper. Marie sighs more mind and soul than respiration. Watching the food Peter rises uncertainly. The remains of a sandwich over his left shoulder, the opposite cheek releasing to the ways below. “Where are you going?” The question asks itself since no one seems to hear. Not entirely standing about to sit down, Pete leaves. A button pops, worn thread not protuberance, Marie convinces herself that Pete’s Mom didn’t notice the incidental disrobing. Pete’s in the kitchen. Marie is not prepared, Amy Elizabeth speaks. Her words re the fatigue of too much unresolved anxiety. “You know dear your dating a dead man.” The tone of voice to those unfamiliar. Matter of sad fact. Yet Amy Elizabeth might have been ordering a cab. Marie full of food feels empty, lost between two places of little return. The beautiful mime needs to move. “Where’s Pete?” Marie is being watched, little Raggedy Ann. No somewhere. She answers herself. “Oh the kitchen.” The ensuing silence twists over. And collapses flat on the table. Ten seconds have elapsed since the obituary. Peter’s girl is no longer hiding. Pete returns from the record player. Frank sings.

“Say its only a paper moon. Sailing over the cardboard sea, but it  
Wouldn’t be making believe, if you believed in me.”

Amy Elizabeth hears the music as...quiet. Pete smiles as sons unknowingly practice. Maria has returned to herself. All the happy regret of themselves. Frank is the only on who knows what to say next. Without introduction a psychic restructuring of the apartment. Uproarious laughter. All demand the culprit. Raggedy Ann searches to look, Maria the same. Amy is suspicious with her own concern. “I’m sorry I’m sorry,” Peter explains. “It was just a thought...” The laughter has not been explained, but forgiven. All sit on buttocks more comfortable by full stomachs churning. Marie accommodates tomorrow’s hunger by memorizing what she’s eaten. She belches politely her three finger tips touching lips as flowers hold morning moisture. Fleetingly eternally. Beyond the

window's frame. The darkening tide going away by its own resistance. Three row boats rising up then easily down unto the green waters. Gleeful families dancing creation to God's purpose. A crab followed by four young. A jelly fish embraces an exhalation and reappears two feet away. Everywhere elephant grass points at the reflected past of emerging stars. Civilizations of alleged bug's n' insects organize the impending night hopefully to their advantage. Creation prevails. Perched atop a twenty foot mooring pole, a retired sea gull, one foot tucked under wing, one eye closed to blindness. She is watching the three travelers search their lost lives, empty plates, damaged souls- unknowingly and defiantly waiting for the better explanation from God. Three spirits, Godsoulprints, guarded by a dieing sea gull.

The yellowing sun fades availing the moon a glimmers glance and hesitantly the sun edges over God's troubled planet. The many events of 1981, partial to themselves, hope incomplete able progress unfolding. They are rising from the temporary shelter. Amy sleeps night day's reprieve. The syrup pouring over pan cakes is louder than their tip toes about. She thinks about money. Broke has many faces only one purse. They smile. And ate again to their favor.( The eyes have it). Nothing moves. Small distant black eyes predominate, General Grant leans over the rim of Peter's wallet. One hundred dollars now one hundred and sixty. Smiles thrill approaching grins. Pete loves his mother. All is well addition is preferred. Pete writes three notes, one in extra terrestrial glyphic, one in meter, the third a cartoon panel. It will take Amy Elizabeth a month to find all three. Outside flowers remanded from a neighbor's foster care and arranged for Amy. Sentiment after sentiment searching for the same, a lasting place.

All done nothing settled, sometimes good intentions float on their own. Pete has promised himself sobriety, exchanging brew for a case of diet Dr. Pepper. Almost applied for a job. The lovers salvaged a water bed. Friends arrived. Most in varied states of despair. All embraces warm. And real. There was only one place to go. The Knoll Inn. For ten days and nights anyone "aided" chemically by more than the sometimes kindness of common sense Pete politely asked to leave. But chemical tides are mighty in America. Yes all receptive of good cheer and love preferred by the kinder measure knew Peter was back in Eastport. The Knoll Inn blossomed, all causalities forgiven to God. The next chapter begins while ending.

\* \* \* \* \*

The weary faces moved irregularly inside the twenty four hour diner, the less busy of dark outside, fading neon, the lethargy of the grave yard shift and the smell of warm grease all created a symphony of slow motion. Allen is waiting for Charlie while unknowingly he waits for himself. With a unique arrogance of movement Allen Aryus presses the record button with a little finger. Allen talks slowly. A dragging insistence, tired...pained drudgery . “Here I am Allen Aryus ,” The words begin as accusation. “It is later than three in the morning.” Time is the accomplice. (Allen keeps a library of cassettes, music, conversations and other knowing’s about). Allen continues a soft angry whispered thought trails each breath. “Yes here I am Allen Aryus at the twenty four hour diner in Southport Connecticut waiting too long for the insane Chuck Winters who is going to buy me breakfast.” Allen pushes-leans back, a defensive response to the last word. Allen rallies and reclaims the three inches, hope’s direction is more negotiable during the night morning hours. Allen’s heavy brown eyes wander impatiently. Now the eyes are predatory. Two booths ahead. Food an unfinished plate of food. Seven and a half feet. Allen’s forward lean subtracts a foot and a half. Both eyes one purpose, a frantic fray of detail, one slice of whole wheat toast, marmalade, seven French fries, inexplicably an entire sausage. Six feet short plus- minus the rules of civilization. In Allen Aryus’s revolution no one would go hungry. Upon need in the absence of food free cash would instruct direction. Civilization has been spared Allen’s efficiency the plate of food is being carried away. Lost to the further deliverance of words the tape recorder is turned off. As men recall the missed cue of a beautiful woman, Allen speculates about the left over food being taken to the kitchen. Without options Allen saddens. For this moment Allen, call me Al if you have to... is his own pall bearer. Food for some is companionship. He feels the saliva. More food passes bye, predator’s eyes now wounded, the eyes of a gazelle. A small waitress appears out of nowhere except herself. And the food is gone. Allen’s deadened eyes. The waitress leaves unaware that she begun her smile after turning around. “I’m waiting for a friend.” Needing a better distraction trying to avoid discomfort Allen watches his Timex, calculating the time needed to secure the abandoned food. No sooner said than undone, Allen’s anger has eased into melancholy,

depression's next door neighbor. Abruptly he reaches for his coffee. Well not quite a grab, but thereabouts. A thick lower lip strokes the rim of chipped ceramic cup, the food wait's Al's instruction. An attentive moth appears, good friend to the "lesser" creatures Allen greets the presence with a rare smile. A fainting separation of shadow and Light, smile enough. Satisfied the moth relocates to another portion of Heaven. Our friend congratulates himself his humanity, relieving the unwanted tenant a thought "good luck." Surprisingly the visitation of good feelings continues, the coffee warms. Intrigued, the first vapors of a new idea, Allen needs to know why everything can only be given away once. The diner glows, a well groomed mouse by the cigarette machine notices, Dave looks like the one Wizards depend on for advice. "If I were in charge of giving..." Al adds trying to encourage modesty to logic. The moment is gone the lose not worse than the French fries. The night pilgrim has turned the page. The sentence crawled away like an unresolved romantic fantasy. What if everything you needed was given to you? Dave knew additional thought would incriminate the initial effort. The eyes are half shut, the plump body is being prepared for the better taste of the last swallow of coffee, the sensuality begins with three fingers raising the cup, one ripple passed the lips then the next until all organs have been reminded of their existence. All's large body has become the holy respectable to the final swallow. Many have been sacrificed to the evolved God of the day with less intensity. And I might add it wasn't good coffee. One curtain call then another, Dave is in Casablanca peeking through the fog at the airport, Humphrey Bogart is urinating waiting for Lauren Bacall. Not one of the five endings that weren't used, Allen Aryus instructs himself to smile. And does. Scratching into his thick beard, under the chin, the cheek and the back of the neck ...trying to stay ahead of need.

"You shouldah waited outside Allen I wasn't inside." Allen imagines one of Charlie's erratic sentences. He's somehow usually on time. But maybe I got here early. So I'm not sure Charlie's already late. Unless this isn't Tuesday. I'm not leaving Charlie has to pay for the coffee. One thought collapsing against another: A tray of food floats bye. His olfactory genius strains to suffer. Al is explaining to the waitress she has the wrong table. God is unkind. The only twenty four hour Super Market deserving of shop lifting is one tough neighborhood two miles away. Allen completes a brief suicide note and signs Charlie's name. He's counting how many people in the last week starved to



death in American diners. An angry word hardens his lips, "They never count the near starves to death. Only the dead starve to death." Al punches the tape recorder to action. He wants his despair recorded, the unemployed revolutionary groans-unable to gather the words together that will spark chaos in the streets. If not on Main Street at least on stage. Allen rests his wrist on the microphone trying to record his thrashing pulse. Impressing himself has become difficult, Allen opens his eyes, drops his cheeks-trying to increase his peripheral vision. The next thought ends without remission.. Again his tape recorder is shut down. Allowing truth be fact the tape recorder was stolen from Charlie...with permission though the consent somewhat after the heist. A compromise was reached both agreed the recorder could remain stolen for one year. With a negotiable option for six months.

A cop rubs off a blood stain next to his name tag while he orders a second coffee hoping the waitress has forgotten the first. Fifteen feet from the plotting officer, also on a round stool, an unshaven salesman in his thirties is practicing his facial expressions against the mirror that runs across most of the diner. Intensity now disappointment chased away a calculating smile of satisfaction, the sales pitch continues. Short on commissions he will spend the night in the diner. He orders a bowl of chicken and rice soup and a side order of rye bread buttered, please. The old waitress turns around still writing. Red hair, a stark face beyond the service of make up, old further challenged by lives burdened necessities. The salesman quickly retrieves an expression from the mirror then glances over his right shoulder for witnesses, forgetting his shortfall, the "door to door" perfectionist wets his lips before smiling at one of the ladies. All three acknowledge each with the tightening of a different organ. The businessman has been reminded that he carries three dollars and sixty one cents. Trapped in the full space of his mind Allen has just completed an imaginary robbery, one weapons, a fork with one prong twisted back. Patience is faith with robberies profits our friend has ordered two cheeseburgers, fries, chocolate shake and the same to go. Allen's stomach growls enough combustion from food imagined to distract the deaf. The food thief raises an eyebrow, an exclamation to self critique, the meal should not have been ordered as part of the larceny. Eat first then steal. Dave informs the tape recorder of the insight, noted under the file "prison trivia." The mouse returns and watches Allen both undecided between concern

and suspicion. The cop adjust his genitals, God's mouse disappears in one turn. Allen is watching his own eyes reflected on the napkin dispenser, he breaths steam on the unpolished metal then returns to the self interrogation, "Mister Aryus to you," he says to himself. Slow movement sustains effort; Mister Aryus press the record button with his thumb. "How come people have to wait more than once for the same thing," he has asked too much question of an empty stomach, the pall bearer has returned. Allen exhales with twice the force he inhaled, committed he must continue, recorded gaps to the creative are twice the insult. "Is that why they call them waiters, they keep the people waiting. Do people who wait to long stretch like on the Concord." The next exhalation is less welcome than the previous. "What happens when people wait for each other, is that more waiting or less." Allen thinks.... why would they wait for each other unless they don't know their waiting, two people can't wait for each other unless their waiting for a third person somebody. That's right why would two people agree to wait for each other. Why isn't one waiting enough. Maybe long term like a soldier going to war and his girl friend. I'll wait for you she says, they don't both say it. So if one says it, it's for both, its assumed .But what if both are waiting, I mean its like a reckless coincidence. And she cheats on him stops waiting. He doesn't know . He's still waiting. What's happened to the waiting then, forget the people, what's happened to the waiting?" Allen expresses the last thought with the full depth reserved by most for the ideal of perplexity. "Of course she realizes she made a mistake while waiting fucking a landscape artist on an expired visa. What happens to waiting then?" He enjoys the ironic truth. The drama is assuming its rightful burden. "Can she catch up to the waiting...." A mental note is made to discuss this with Peter. "What happens to people who wait for Christmas and don't get anything." Al has turned his eyes to the side, demanding. "What's goen on with all the waiting. And what happens to the waiting if you don't get what you're wafting for? And people say whose he waiting for...himself? And the other one say's yeah. A male prostitute swings into the diner through the metal framed door whistling, "The Flight of the bumble bee." Al turns himself away from his eyes. Allen now talks to the recorder as he would an annoying pet. "I'm trying to be less waiting for Charlie Winters." He straightens his back, pinches his collar closed and concludes. "If I'd been late I would have gotten here to early to start waiting right off, that's right ... I would have just been waiting for myself.

And that's not why I came here since it wasn't my invitation so how can end up being the one waiting the most." Allen's anger revisits watching his own stilted reflection on the napkin dispenser. "And I'm in the hawk for a coffee I can't probably pay for." From the nearing distant past he hears his mother, "Don't play with your food..." His face tightens into a pointless complaint. During the interim Charlie has stepped inside, first wrestling with the push n' pulls variable on the door. Walking bending to his left Charlie had to look at Allen twice before the reality took form. Allen is not a young man given to motion, even when eating, but now we see the impatient friend toss himself at Charlie, "I've been waiting for you." The lunge is completed.

"You're lucky you missed me, I was outside waiting for you. But not long fortunately I don't like waiting I get tired. Anyway Allen of course you're waiting, what else you are going to do you got here before I did. And didn't know It...right?"

"Let's drop it o.k." Allen has made an animal sound with his eyes. Al distracts himself reaching for the menu. "Charlie let's have a quiet meal. Its better if you don't try to make sense at my expense." Allen realizes he's just encouraged Charlie.

"Anyway be the way Al why would you wait for me couldn't you divert yourself..."

Allen pushed the off on the recorder imagining that Charlie would stop talking every time he stopped the recording.

"Allow me to suggest Dave double check to make sure it's off you don't want record yourself eating when you're so close to yourself." Charlie stretches over the top of his wire rims. "Is that my tape recorder Allen?"

"No its mine." Allen wails at Charlie then to God. "It hasn't been a good food day and the day is already over." Allen is talking to Charlie while reading the menu. "How come you ask me a question and you keep right on talking. You should wait for encouragement or somethen."

Charlie clears his throat, he always does before he tries to assert himself and failure feels imminent. "Allen why do you talk to me like I know what I'm talking about. And you don't. Maybe I got the wrong chronology on that question." Charlie sneaks his eyes around the menu. (Allen only heard what he saw a hot fudge sundae). "I hope Al your not going to try to catch up to your hungers with tonight's menu opportunity?"

“Don’t worry about Chuck.” Allen reassures himself.. “You have enough money?”

Sure don’t worry I don’t want to appear hesitant, but I know how ungratefully starving you can get.” Several seconds pass to silence is interrupted. . “Order within reason is what I’m sayen. You know Allen I heard somethen uncanny today.” Charlie stops for encouragement receives none.” I heard a vegetarian is a person who eats things that don’t have faces on them.”

Dave’s face comes up over the menu. “I don’t need to hear that kind of stuff while I’m busy trying to decide.”

“Don’t worry around food Allen you have a pretty good recovery attention span. Maybe almost amazing. “Did you hear-”

“Let me concentrate on ordering o.k.”

Charlie grimaces finally feeling rejected. His fingers rush to the face feeling for the expression. “What’s the difference you never made a menu ordering mistake you regretted suffering. Anyway eating, I’m going to be probably silent.”

“People have their own style, I bet you had three meals today.”

“Why should I have to be forgiven having three meals today?”

“What ever. Anyway reading the menu completely is important that way you know what to order. And what you missed. It also helps getting the digestive juices stimulated.” The menu comes down fanning a breeze across Charlie’s face. “And do me a favor don’t make anymore of your vegetarian remarks like what little animal are you eating or...or the other ones.”

“Allen what stopped you anyway being a consenting vegetarian?”

“It’s harder being a vegetarian in a capitalist country that’s all. I know what I’m going to have, chewing flesh helps keep the stress in check.”

“I guess that somehow makes sense Allen I can’t imagine the United States army on soybean and cheese sandwiches. I bet vegetarians miss their targets more often. Especially the human target you know more than carnivores?” Charlie looks to the left, and whispers.

“Dave I just got a woman looking at me on purpose. And from a pretty convincing angle.”

“Don’t worry about it where’s the waitress?”

“I don’t know Al it was almost a focused stare with intentions. You hear what I said?” Charlie leaned his whisper toward Allen.

Allen stretches his neck tracking the waitress. “Don’t worry about it your probably just projecting.”

“You can’t use that one me Allen I taught it to you and I don’t think I knew what it meant. But could be maybe your right. No your not right how could I be projecting when she looked at me first. And ....” Charlie concludes dismally then rallies. “It was a good angle maybe even sincere. David did I ever tell you about the time I yawned. You know after being yawn free for ten years?”

“Yeah you told me several times...”

“I mean I hadn’t yawned in ten years since Vietnam. And there we are Charlie and me watching the Academy Awards, its almost incredible ten years. Anyway there’s Johnny Carson telling a joke like he’s remembering an experience right. He says...ever since I was a kid. Whenever I went to the movies and there’s a romantic scene. The kissing gets too heavy. The camera pans to the ocean. The waves start crashing on the beach. Till I was fourteen I thought foreplay lead to drowning. And out of nowhere I yawn.” Allen tries not to laugh. And succeeds. Charlie is laughing clapping his hands. “I can’t still get over it...insanity is pretty interesting isn’t Al?”

“How would I know?”

“Didn’t the police come looking for you with some kind of questionable sanity concern?”

“Looking isn’t finding anyway I was a kid that doesn’t count.”

A thin waitress arrives with a thick note pad and a two inch pencil. “What are you guys goen to have?” She switches her balance to her hip. Charlie has closed his mouth settling into silence. Allen begins to order the way some sing the National Anthem. “A western omelet with home fries, a cheeseburger with fries, lettuce, tomato and onion. And a Coke with just a little ice.” Charlie is watching every detail, the waitress mouths each words she writes. “And a strawberry shake.” Trying to ease the chore she raises the note pad closer to her chin.

“Allen kids...what do you mean kids don’t count.” Charlie looks up to the waitress for help, then returns impatiently to his friend. The waitress clears her throat and looks at

Charlie trying to redirect his attention. "I'd better order just in case I should. But please don't leave immediately with yourself after you think I'm through?" No one acknowledges Charlie including himself. "Let's see I'll have pretty much half of what my friend is having, a cheeseburger with the extra things lettuce, tomato and onion and a Coke half diet and half regular with almost no ice so I can get more Coke." The poor waitress begins her third page. Allen's tension grows, constricting the way people did when searching for loose change at a pay toilet. The lovely young lady snaps a smile her last sentence. She smiles down at Charlie who is already smiling back.

"Miss will you bring the omelet first with the shake, please."

"Sure," Most of her back is to Charlie when he begins in earnest, those with easier lives might say desperately. "Please Miss could you stay for a moment without leaving and help us here with a possible understanding concern were having." Realizing the waitress is confused Charlie clarifies. "You know my friend Allen here and I have one of those differences of opinion you might be able-

"Why don't you let her go and-

"No no David I know when you think your making sense and it might be something else entirely, working people can be helpful ...(Allen groans). "Yes well Miss my friend Dave here thinks insanity doesn't apply to kids, my friend here Allen actually thinks that children don't go insane. Just adults..." Most of Charlie pauses.

"What I meant," Al insists, "is that children don't go insane adults do that's all."

"Well that's what I'm saying and it's particularly unfortunate that you're trying to believe.... My God Al there's complete hospitals devoted to children going insane." The waitress's interest has grown. "Al there's even special little children psychiatrist to help children whose parents are suspicious about their concern." Charlie feeling somewhat derailed implores the waitress. "Miss can you probably please tell my friend whether you heard about kids going insane."

She nurtures the opportunity, the pencil eraser is in and out of her mouth. "Sure kids can go insane when they have to, but not like adults more shared... rattled like. But sure insane anyway."

"See Allen I'm regrettably correct."

The waitress has only stopped momentarily. She continues pleased with her

knowledge . “But babies don’t go insane you need to understand adults in order to go insane, right?”

Allen and Charlie stare at each other-acknowledging as much as a difference of opinion allows. Inexplicably Allen smiles, a smile that might have altered the course of a mugging.. Uneasy the waitress volunteers. “Listen guys I’ll be right back with your order.” She looks at Charlie. “Anything else sir?”

“ Oh God unless you under some kind of duress please don’t call me sir it creates a particular kind of anxiety in me that’s unpleasant.” The waitress nods. Charlie thought he smiled. Allen knows better than to react. Not needing encouragement Charlie adds, “And thank you for your contributions. And don’t worry I’ll catch you up on the conversation here in case you miss something of particular value.”

“Thanks,” She answers skeptically before deciding to accept Charlie’s eccentricities. She leaves thinking of her childhood....

“So you see David kids do go insane. Adults as a matter of fact go insane because they were once kids. I mean the unnecessary kids they were required to be so what’s the difference its all about delays.”

“Fine I’ll think about it.” He holds his arms against his chest crossing one shoe over the other. “I hope you have enough money?”

“Sure I have enough money how else do you think I’m going to pay?” (David’s smile rolls into a grin). “What’s the recorder for is that the one I kind of gave you?”

“I think we already had this conversation, I’m recording some ideas for my band, “Noise Boys that’s all.”

“Is that what you meant the other day Dave that Pete’s back.”

“Yeah Peter’s been back a couple of days he’s stayen at the Knoll.”

Charlie leans as close to his friend as the table will allow. “Did you notice the people here are pretty much tough looking, I mean in an available way not easy like. You know what I mean?” David watches Charlie casually those who did not know Allen would interpret as disdain. “Strange ah you agree people looking tough this early in the late morning. You’d think people would wait till sunrise. At least for an opportunity. Is Bob Player in the band?”

“Sure he’s in the band Bob is the best guitarist in Connecticut, me, Pete, Bob and

were looken for others.” Allen looks around. “You look worried Charlie?”

“Worried ah?” Charlie touches his face...

“I wish you wouldn’t do when you’re around people, people think you’re crazy.”

“Why should I risk defending myself....Allen I heard the other day that Pete is drinking?”

“I know your crazy but you don’t have to give everyone else a head start, especially when you’re around me for God sakes.”

“Calm down Allen what are you running for office, a part time vagrant calling another guy crazy what’s the world comen to again.” Charlie briefly searches out into the darkness. Allen takes a sip of water. “How about my question about Pete Al?

“Pete’s already doen drugs.”

“No you’ve gotta be kidding me.” The salesman and two of the ladies turned in the direction of the outburst. A nudge and a couple of decibels and Charlie’s response would have registered as a yell. Allen has retreated two inches into his collar. Charlie talks to an absent wiser presence. “Already on drugs Pete didn’t last long enough. Excuse my volume, Jesus Allen if Pete isn’t careful he’s going to get dangerous with himself.”

“Pete’s always goen to be usen drugs...”

“Don’t say that Allen maybe he’ll mature out of it somehow. I kind of hoped he’d recovered with himself in that Bar Harbor place. Pete I mean Al sometimes I think you’re unnecessarily practical ....”

“I wouldn’t worry about if I were you, Pete’s been usen drugs since he was a kid?”

Charlie looks away and returns. “You know prescription drugs is the fifth highest cause of death in America.”

“I heard it was the fourth highest -”

“ Maybe they found a cure...?”

Allen laughs once through his nose. “That’s a good one where’s our food?”

“I don’t know somebody should get a hold of Pete and medicate him somehow do somethen anyway. Strange ah Al pills chasen after pills its like-”

“Like modified euthanasia.” Charlie laughs repeating Allen’s phrase. “I still think there’s going to be a revolution?”

“A revolutions no good people will get hurt. And most of the people in this



country would probably miss it. Maybe they should medicate Pete for the benefit of the people around him and maybe Pete will get some of left over benefits. Not that Pete's gotta be medicated around me. Pee should be helped just for the purpose of living longer in case something comes along."

"I can handle my drugs Pete can't you take drugs because your crazy were not. You've never been around yourself when you're manic."

"Jesus stay on the cross or well do you again." Charlie follows his exasperated face around the diner. "Hell be damned Allen how much insanity concerns are you going to express for one night, your crazy I'm not. What was the other one yeah, you're not around yourself when..."

"I know..."

"No don't interrupt me it's my turn. Sure o.k. I understand your point about around yourself, but let me give you an available clue drug addicts are also crazy."

"That's baloney I'm-

"No its not you guys don't make the insanity assignments, they do, the out of control psychiatrist manual people do. They get together every how many years and come up with new diseases and update the old one make them more accessible..."

"Why do I listen to you no ones ever called me crazy."

"Of course you haven't made yourself available. Your like that tall black guy at the VA by the elevators a couple years ago, he said to me I'm not crazy, no he said there's nothen wrong with my head I use drugs. And I said what their not goen to bury your head with you."

"Charlie I can't talk to you if your goen to try to make sense."

"Allen I'm not making sense I'm telling you the truth." Charlie tries to catch up to his eyes. "Anyway what's the difference you gotta stay alive long enough to catch up with yourself. Sometimes you do and sometimes... You know what I was thinking the other day?" Charlie raises his hand. "No don't bother encouraging me I'm probably going to tell you anyway. Now if I can remember, sure that's it maybe, anyway what I was thinking the other day is that probably the most aggressive thing you can do in your life on purpose you know besides denying somebody else their body with no cooperation is waiting." David is startled by Charlie's insight. "I mean not outright circumstantial

waiting, but I mean out right waiting when you don't know what you're waiting for."

"That's funny it's like a shared déjà vu deal I was just talking to the tape recorder about waiting. But how about when you're not sure what you're waiting for and you wait anyway...."

"Well I don't know that's more like life."

"Yeah waiting is a trip like for the food right now."

Charlie continues. "It is kinda like a trip there a lot of variations on waiting and of course right off you start being pregnant for nine months before you know about waiting in order to be born involuntarily."

"Did you just hear what you just said forget it."

"Don't worry about it. Here's one for you from the other day, I think I figured out part of the riddle about the insanity deal."

"Is this somethen I have to listen to?"

"Sure what else are you going to do you've got to hear it to avoid it, right? Where was I? Right it goes like this there are two types of insanity there are the insane people like me and those that are collectively insane. And the problem people who are collectively insane have with people like me is that they suspect us of hording. I wonder if forgetting is a form of waiting AI?"

"O.K. you see that's a good one." Allen laughs again. "Let me ask you a question did psychiatrists ever change their minds about a disease a diagnosis. I mean once they came up with it?"

"Wow yeah.... And you know what I've probably got an answer. You know more than ten years ago when I started this insanity journey lesbians and homosexuals they said were insane. Now after all these years its no longer a disease they demoted it to normal just like that....As far as I know that's the only one, though I wonder what other ones they couldn't get the necessary votes for. And of course their the diagnosis that lost the popularity of the people. I mean the support."

"Is that true about homosexuals." Allen is impressed. "I just came up with a good T-shirt idea....Let's give God the week end off." Allen and Charlie's faces evolve to increasing levels of appreciation.

"But I thought you said there's no God or ..."

“T- Shirts o.k. and that’s not what I said exactly.”

“Here’s one on the front it say’s There’s No God and on the back it says in good nice small print, how can you deny what you just identified?”

“That’s not bad Charlie but that’s too many words most people don’t read that fast?”

“Sure they do fast enough if the other person’s walking slowly. And it could be a new etiquette thing if you’re wearing more than three words you walk slowly pretty much. Part of the day.”

Everyone knows how to change the subject on Charlie. “How’s Charlie dog doen?”

“I don’t know exactly last night I got a little worried about his bark actually. Charlie didn’t sound normal. Maybe I don’t know he was tryen a new bark or came up with an unfamiliar emphasis on an old one. So I stayed up with Charlie until he was convincingly asleep. I guess Charlie’s alright thanks for asking.”

“You don’t have to worry about Charlie he’s the toughest dog I know remember when he bit me?”

“Alleged dog sure you got bit you pulled his tale.”

“He was going into the garbage...”

“I told you when we were living together in the same place that we all had equal rights equal to each other and that included Charlie. You don’t do an unsolicited pulling of someone’s tale specially Charlie and not get a surprise. And its not like calories got involved in the bite...”

“It’s about time here comes the waitress.“ Allen is excited.. Charlie has begun clearing the space infront of him. The two cheeseburgers are intercepted before they reach the table. One item follows another until everything ordered is delivered safely. More than a third of the burger disappears, David breaths deeply. Charlie licks the corner of his mouth as he takes the first bite. The young waitress is genuinely pleased with her labor.

Charlie swallows then asks. “May I ask your name Miss?”

“My name why?” The waitress wonders pinching her name tag toward Charlie.

“So that I might thank you properly. I don’t like looking at name tags I figure

people are wearing involuntarily like unwarranted...?” Charlie’s eyes focus both on the little finger he’s licking and the waitress. Allen sighs diverting the waitress’s attention. Charlie pause three French fries extending irregularly from his fingers.

“My name is Karen,” Her attention on Allen has turned from cautious to critical. “It’s just that you’re hungry.” Only the waitress heard her own reassurance. Charlie swallows into his Coke. He tries to relax and fails. Allen watches the waitress watch Charlie who’s avoiding Allen.

Charlie swallows and appears to need permission from the effort before he can speak. “Don’t be concerned with my eating intensity Al.”

David cringes before protesting. “A substitute?” The waitress takes another step back. The young woman is concerned that something unnatural has been expressed. She rallies. “A substitute for what?” The five foot blond with green eyes has folded both arms against her breasts, two fingers tapping against one elbow. Allen bites his smile around what remains of the burger.

Charlie’s strained neuron transmitters gather together, converse and accept the challenge. “Ah substitute yeah right a substitute I guess for everything except food.”

This young lady is the sturdy of determined she sleeps through nightmares and hasn’t left Charlie and Allen. She’s now taller and asks,” Why?”

“Why,” Charlie holds the question. “I guess I’m not sure I think Al and I are forlorn.”

“Forlorn?” The word jumps from Karen’s’ lips like a flea’s reaction to flea powder. Whatever the reason she has just conjured a sexual position involving one too many elbows. David works his fork on the omelet. Charlie looks punished, he feels himself surrounded by the energy of a normal person.

Charity follows. “Are you all right?”

“I’m o.k. I’m a little stuck on what’s forlorn.” The hesitation works into the slow of one word then the hurrying of the next.” Forlorn I think kinda means that you’re suspicious of yourself. And you really haven’t done anything. Al might be able to explain it better.”

The waitress is now a nurse. “ It’s o.k. I understand.”

Charlie is relieved then perplexed. “You do what did I say?”

“What you’re saying is that you’re unhappy and one of the few things you enjoy is food.” Karen’s voice is a melody of first aide.

“Jesus that’s beautiful though I’m skeptical Karen of making too much sense especially on short notice. I mean if the results aren’t there after the sense part is over you wonder what’s left.”

“I think I understand.” Karen collapses into innocence

Charlie feels better. But he remains the careful of polite. “We still seem to be talking somehow, I’d like to share something I thought of the other day.”

“Sure why not we’ve already gotten past forlorn.” Allen offers after swallowing.

“Have we... sure maybe anyway what I was thinking. Right the one idea is that tips, you understand to the waitresses, are the only expenditures we determine ourselves.”

“Wow I think I know what you mean.” Karen responds.

“Sure everything else right what people pay for their shoes, the coffins, vacations, dental floss...everything except tips is determined by somebody else. “ (Both of word and eye Karen has said “Oh”). “And that’s probably why you’ve probably noticed some people get very involved with their tips. You know calculations, adjustments after the first effort and sometimes adaptations...”

“Hey yeah I know what you mean. Some guys leave and come back a minute later and put some more down or take some back. The only expenditure. “Karen searches her mind. She’s back. “That doesn’t seem right.?”

“No it doesn’t that’s what I figure, but there’s more. And it could be maybe the waitress bringing food, you know to a complete sometimes unfriendly stranger.” Charlie pauses breaths looks at his food and says....”it’s a Holy thing the bringing the food.”

“Come of it.” Karen laughs and slaps her thigh.

“No I can’t I’m serious. Sure when you think about it becomes unbearably obvious. I mean ask what Holy things do people.” Charlie holds up one finger. “Number one is bringing out life to the planet, birth right. The second is healing people up when their sick or in accidents. And what’s the third, that’s it right, bringing people food. And in case you didn’t notice most of all those things are done outright by women.”

Allen speaks up. “Can I interrupt?”

“No Al please Karen and I have momentum. And there’s a reason you haven’t said

anything till now.” Charlie scans Karen. Surprisingly Allen remains silent.

Karen interrupts both friends. “Guys hold on I’ll be right back.”

“You were going to tell Karen I’m a drug user I could tell?”

“No I wasn’t that I’m aware of Allen, but its true sometimes my words slip out on themselves, it’s interesting. (A sustained pause until Charlie interrupts himself). I wonder why they don’t talk about a lack of irresponsibility. What’s the difference a lack of responsibility and a lack of irresponsibility aren’t they the same?”

“Not hen’s the same everything converges. You don’t get the job if you lack responsibility then you can keep it only if you know when to lack irresponsibility.”

“That makes sense to me Allen I don’t know why. But you know the one that gets me the psychiatrist talk about an unsuccessful suicide attempt, right?”

“ So what?”

“Well why they call it unsuccessful if the patient lives don’t they have it backwards.”

Allen looks away into the distance and returns with much less effort than it took to leave. “It’s the airlines they call them near misses, but they actually are taken about near collision, they mess with the language that’s all. Their sayen if you didn’t kill yourself you’re probably still alive.”

“I see I still think congratulations would be better than... than welcome back too bad you were unsuccessful?”

“You mean good thing you were unsuccessful.”

“Right right Allen thanks for the assistance.”

Karen returns with two slices of pie. Charlie wonders. “Did at least one of us order those?”

Karen follows her smile with a blush. “ I thought I’d bring them anyway, their on me...”

Allen applauds. Perhaps the revolution can be delayed. “Wow,” Charlie cheers. “That’s incredible thank you Karen. You know what also I was thinking Karen that maybe restaurants should no could is better, they could have a room in the back where customers can’t video tape their appreciations to the waitress. And at the end of the day the waitress could take off her shoes if she wants to, put up her feet and watch the video. You know and just absorb the appreciations. I mean if tipping is enough....”Charlie

touches the pie with his finger.

Karen wants to know, "What do you think it means?"

"God Karen it's hard to know what anything means when I'm not sure what meaning means. Did I of already make that point? Nothing get's left behind eventually except maybe people, right?"

"Did I order a milk shake?" Allen asks the world.

Startled Karen adds an inch to her height. "I forgot I'll be right back."

"She's a good waitress." David offers mildly leaning away from himself.

"Allen their all good waitress's plus look at what Karen's' had to work with. You shouldn't say people who are helping you aren't good."

"Fine I retract... especially since I said she was good."

"I stand corrected thank God I'm sitting."

"Al I hope Karen's eaten otherwise her job would be unbearable some are denied food on purpose you know?"

"Tell me about it I think I might order another slice of pie when she comes back?"

"I don't know you might want to reconsider that other slice of pie, I mean people do die from over eating. And I'm sure it's not a particularly pleasant death probably in front of uncooperative witnesses. And you know what Allen I'm sure most of them were sitting in the same exact position with that expression of yourself."

"Charlie are you going to have the rest of your French fries."

Charlie is challenged- unaware of his own anger. "Of course I'm going to eat my fries David what do you think I'm going to create a foundation...a."

"Yeah I get it I'm still going to have another-?"

"Hell be dammed after what I just said. And you know what Dave most people who die outright from over eating probably die at one sitting not some kind of accumulation-"

"Do I have to hear this?"

"How would I know, but what I was sayen about its such a particularly unpleasant all around death because you die from the inside out not-"

"That's ridiculous everyone dies from the inside out."

"Oh no I don't think so. I really don't think so. Now I'm sure....All deaths are not

inside out, I'm sure. How about unwelcome gun shot wounds completely outside in...sure I know what your goen to say the delivery doesn't count as part of the actual personal death. But that's not true how about the people who die from shook because you missed them. And there's the murder suicide deal different delivery same results one more inside out than the other obviously. And how about an unfriendly poisons that out lives you because you die from some of those popular side effects... that's probably both. Here's one how about people who fall from those heights that's an outside deal specially if you die before you get from where your going." Charlie holds up one hand. "Don't stop me I'm still...how about being scared by someone you know from the closet instead of an unwelcome stranger. And that damned electric chair Allen that's outside in on several accounts, I mean your electrocuted without permission and your most likely dead around and near the surface of yourself before the electricity get's to all of you that's absolutely outside in. And how about the wife who kills you changes her mind and then revives you. Sure that's the clinger how can you come back to live again if it's all inside out they wouldn't be able to reach you."

"Are you aware Charlie that I'm not paying attention to you."

"Don't be too sure Allen-"

Allen inhales and responds.. "Everyone dies because their hearts stop beating or the brain activity deal where's Marguerite I mean Karen. There's somethen about dien that makes me hungry. Anyway if your right your also wrong a gun shot wound is inside out or the bullet wouldn't of hit you, its outside in if it misses and kills you-"

"No its outside in if it misses you and kills someone else then you'll have to wait your turn and the innocent by stander or whatever is stuck on an outside in deal specially if the bullet bounces of somethen."

"No I disagree-

"Well how about if the bullet goes all the way through how about that... Yeah how about that?"

"Oy vay what the difference-"

"Well if the bullet goes all the way through how can it be inside out. I mean is it inside out from where the exit part or the getting in part if the dame is done on the way out. It can't be both right ones doen inside the other goen outside plus also at which end



did the silly bullet hit one of those vital organs everyone talks about. I mean maybe the bullets already through with you, I mean kill you before it exits on its way. David what's a preposition?"

"I give up you know Charlie you interrupt too much."

"I know its inherited not really inherited kind of a family practice like dentistry. Allen maybe what I'm saying is that outside deaths are that way because mostly they are partnership deaths, there deaths that somehow got shared. Even if the sharing is from the elements like being frozen or that red die number two. Also then of course there's dieing from loneliness. But even then someone has to pronounce you dead, I wonder why they pronounce you dead do they think your stupid or what?"

Both friends laugh, "That's was probably an intentional moment of humor Al."

"Whatever it means it might actually explain why it's true, it's the only possible way to say it."

"Sure we get a lot of things backwards right not just ourselves through the organized word deals."

"O.K. name another backwards take your time."

"I don't know sure here's one...women want to be equal to men especially in this country."

"So how's that backwards."

"Well why be equal to men what's the point it should be the other way around (David is suspicious) men are supposed to become less I mean equal to women. Less violent and more tender. The gentler heart." Charlie's hand flow from his shoulder to his chest. "I mean Bob I mean Allen men must convince men to put down their weapons, themselves, or were not going to make it."

"Hey that's a good line ." Allen sighs and adds." I'm tired."

"Don't be silly Allen your just sufferen from conversation fatigue just be thankful you're not talking to yourself. You know if there's anything I say you don't understand you can always call the information ladies on the telephone. Especially around the late hours their more apt to cooperate when their probably more lonely around themselves. If your politely eager and you give them somethen good to participate with they'll join, its very interesting what happens sometimes when you talk to people."

Allen lethargically drags his answer out. "I'll try to remember that..."

Charlie takes a quick look over his right shoulder. "Allen don't look but I think you're in the very throbs of an inside out over eating death at this very moment." Charlie looks away again and comes back whispering. "I'm not being argumentative my former psychiatrist said I shouldn't get a not a job as garbage man because most people die in those dark morning hours." Charlie kooks at his wrist watch. "Right about now."

"What does that mean?"

"I don't know Elaine she's a psychologist she once had tears in her eyes talking to me. I still almost can't get over it."

"Your rambling is Elaine the one that got you a scholarship to Silver Hill?"

"Yeah I know a scholarship to a mental hospital. Almost curious right? And you know how they keep out middle class people like the teamsters with good insurance and dirty finger nails my God they tried to serve me breakfast in bed, anyway you gotta give this guy a thousand bucks in cash. And that's another one I can't get over you know what they guys name was...I forget. Unbelievable .... But it's the tears that is hard to get over. And that Mary Luminoso at the hospital came right up to me in front of other people and kissed once on the forehead. It was close to a miracle Allen no it was outright a miracle. You notice Allen how medication doesn't work against miracles?"

"Who's Mary Luminoso?"

"A social worker mostly luminoso in Italian I think means of the Light, it really was something else David that kiss its like I'd been found innocent of somethen no one told me I did."

"Did the tears roll down?" David slowly followed an imaginary tear down his face with his little finger.

"God no I would have run out of the place and applied for an alias, it's the roll that gets you. Did you ever notice that tears roll longer on women's faces than men's its like their in a hurry to get off the man's face."

"Women have make up."

"Not all of them not always and men have whiskers, check it out around your own travels and see what you come up with." Charlie squirms against his hips. "I want to say one more final thing Allen about the inside out death eating deal and that is that I'm

pretty sure that particular death begins around the anus of all places.”

“Grime me a break,” Even though Allen didn’t have a napkin in his hand he threw it down hard at the table.

“That’s what I’m doin Allen it makes perfect sense-”

“Problem is everything makes sense to you Charlie, you’re the only guy I know if you were being tortured the guy torturing you would have to take breaks.”

Charlie laughs tiredly his eyes half closed as Karen approaches. A cock roach watches Allen and Charlie nervously waiting for them to leave. “How are you to forlorn guys doing. Can I get you somethen else?”

“I’m not forlorn Charlie is...” Allen awkwardly defends himself.

“No thanks Karen were satiated could we have the one check when it becomes convenient?”

“Be right back.” The lovely waitress swivels around herself bouncing a sliver tray off her knee.

“Charlie your pie’s intact let’s split it, I’ll cut you choose?”

Charlie slides the pie across around the catsup bottle between two glasses. Allen stretches his sleeves preparing for surgery. Nothing human on Allen’s face moves while the knife works. The slice is complete. One slice is rolled off onto Charlie’s plate. “Allen if you ever became an over active burglar I know where’d they find most of your finger prints.”

“I know...”

“Your sad post office photograph would have peanut butter and jelly on its face.”

“And when they figure you out Charlie you’re going to make the FBI’s ten most unwanted list?”

“That’s a good one did you make it up or is it original? Allen do you know what a merchant of menace is?”

“You told me a lawyer.” “I heard you and Pete are going to Philadelphia to do a radio talk show about your nuclear war thing in Nam?”

“It’s not my nuclear war I wish people would stop sayen that it’s every bodies. Allen are you aware we ate more than our creations share.”

“It’s about time I haven’t eaten in what maybe seventeen hours and I never knew they were going to be only seventeen hours?”

“David where do people go in this country if there starven to death an emergency room?”

“Probably but you’ve got to prove your starven to death by dien before they’ll help you.”

“That’s too much might even be indirectly true, America ah Allen...too much is not enough and more will never be.”

“Tell me about it. Funny you supposedly been crazy and you and Pete goen to Philadelphia to talk to a group called Sane.”

“It means society against nuclear energy I think. Anyway I’m not insane I’m taken the winter off.”

Allen laughs into his napkin a muffled sentence follows. “Sometimes you make me laugh.”

“I’m sorry I made you laugh I know it’s not your preferred release.”

“How come Pete’s goen with you?”

“For companionship and to increase the chances of getting there...”

“I heard you marched with the Buddhists that marched through from Hiroshima for that nuclear freeze rally in Central Park?”

“I don’t want to talk about that you know they kicked me off the march like four times for excessive energy I think, it’s hard to get kicked off somethen that’s moven. Especially if you need to be there. I don’t know why I’m tired all I did today was stay alive?”

“Sometimes it’s harder doing nothing you leaving a five dollar tip?”

“Sure...”

“Your leaven too much tip...”

“Calm down it’s for Karen not you David.” Charlie stood up one foot at a time waiting for his head, an old man partially unshaven behind the cash register gestured to Charlie flapping the check in the air. The sound startled the door to door salesman; the cop has already left for duties unknown. The three ladies laughing while talking, one slapped the other on the back, the youngest leaned her forehead against the oldest ones

shoulder. Charlie paid the check and ran five feet, more a lumbering toss of self, in order to catch up to his friend.

“Charlie I want to make a suggestion that we observe silence on the way to your house, it helps the food digest itself.”

“I wonder why Karen didn’t bring the check herself maybe she was called away somehow. Silence didn’t we already talk about silence? Sure silence is good. Unless there’s a thought emergency like the last rights-”

“No silence is the deal there won’t be a thought emergency if neither one of us is talken.” Allen and Charlie are outside both watching the stars tiredly. Suspiciously, the run away teen ager across the street thought.

“It’s funny just this right now I felt like a bumped into a star that’s something. So what’s the deal unless there’s a talking emergency were both going to take turns together being silent is that the deal?”

Allen slid smoothly into the Datsun, “Right no talken unless it’s an obvious life emergency or you’ll just keep jabbering.”

Charlie closed to car door quietly and frisked himself for the keys. “I’m not sure I heard everything you said, but that’s o.k. or you’d repeat yourself and I mean you can repeat yourself of course if it was an emergency. I did get the word jabbering.” Charlie rounded his shoulders inserted the car keys. “I do want to say mostly David if you start feeling any part of that inside out death deal coming on just let me know and I’ll pull over. I’m sure you don’t want to die in motion stationary is better.”

“I thought we you were going to observe silence.”

Charlie gingerly pulled into the imagined traffic of nineteenth century Southport. “I was observing silence Allen but you kept stimulating me. Plus we haven’t actually begun the silent spree have we?”

Charlie drove through a red light. “Does it bother you Charlie that no one might love you?”

“See there you go again Allen and in potential traffic. Are you afraid nobody loves you Charlie...”

“The lights green Charlie....Charlie do you think you’ll ever get married?”

“I wouldn’t want to live with a woman who’d want to marry me. That’s from

remembering when Groucho....Anyway its true as thinking allows why a woman want to be would part of my life I'm barely part of my life."

And the two friends drove deeper into the night. The moon glowed. The car drove into the darkness. The conversation the silence of their despair.

\* \* \*

Charlie and Allen ambled back into the beach cottage. "What did you forget?" Allen asked. There was no answer walking up the carpet stairs. Charlie stopped to breath. And look. Al stood atop the hallway made narrower by the play of the moonlight against the dark. An uncertain sway of incandescent Light shadows. Allen added more word from thought to the darkness, the sounds grated tiredly in all directions. Charlie side stepped himself past Allen who looked nauseated with exhaustion. Charlie turned on the switch imprinting himself against the Light. The alleged Charlie dog followed his own melancholy groan leaping in full agreement with gravity and anatomy onto Charlie man. The two Charlie's embraced one another. Charlie dog kissed-licked the other alleged ones face, the distraction, the affection aided the veteran with his next breath. ""Charlie you shouldn't lick me outright with my unnecessary germs I probably don't even know about." Charlie man pushed himself to three quarters height. Charlie dog curled himself halfway around his best friend. He played his hand softly between Charlie's ears. Before the distracted humanoid could open and close his eyes, squint for a clearer image, Charlie dog tapped his companion's nose with his own. Full height there's only a difference of five inches. Walking to the gait of their appointed appendages the two friends moved in the direction of the star lit doorway. Al came slowly hard against each step, nothing of bone against flesh moved below his hips. They stepped out the door shoulders bouncing off each other. Two feet from the top step the alleged Charlie dog bowed down stretching his paws out stiffly in front his tired eyes. Charlie stepped quickly back inside and bowed down to alleged dog, his eyes leveling off at the knees. "Good bye Charlie I'll take us out for another longer walk when I come back." Both smiled as the door closed against its lock Charlie wherever the opportunity allowed followed Charlie dog's bow with his own, concerned that if undue respect might have been expressed. The lost veteran tip toed on the grass listening for his own foot steps, slowing to understand

why he was thinking about the poet who was buried standing up at Westminster's Cathedral in London, he couldn't afford the preferred horizontal spread.

"David do you know if there more dead people today dead than alive in America?"

"Dead or asleep (David yawns) for sure you know if they took all the cemeteries and put them together you'd get a cemetery the size of New Hampshire..."

"You've got to be kidding me you mean in the world or just America?"

"No just America." Charlie stretched his arm over the passenger bucket seat backing up into the driveways incline.

"You know in some countries you can only occupy your grave for so many years before they encourage you out. I heard they put lye in your grave to discourage you along. You know so you can decompose with dignity that way when its time for you to come out you wont disappoint anybody."

"Do they have a coming out ceremony?"

"Like a reverse burial I don't know but something would be nice don't you think?"

Both friends quietly worked out the details of their own funerals, each accepting the roll of pall bearer for the other. Charlie followed the hand tugging at his shoulder to David's face. "Damn Charlie you were in that state again I called you out three times. How can you drive that way?"

"I don't know a car helps I was just forgetting..." Charlie stopped a third of the way through a yawn.

"Forgetting?"

"Remembering forgetting what's the difference..." Charlie Winters turns into Friendly's parking lot, one hand over lapping the other.

"I don't know why you woke me up?" Allen is angry at being tired.

"Allen you got more than three hours of convincing sleep, if I got any sleep nobody told me. Anyway you know the sleeping deal at my place."

"Tell me about it."

"My psychiatrist person said if you can't sleep rest as much of your body that's available."

“How’d you know you didn’t get any sleep?”

Charlie is laughing at the memory. “You know they asked me that question that Yale experimental drug psychiatric place; the nice black lady asked me how you know you didn’t get any sleep Mister Winters. I said I didn’t wake up. I like it when those professional people, professional strangers actually, I like it when they can’t decide whether to laugh... You know what they wanted me to do?”

“What?”

“They come every hour into the bedroom with their flashlight right and they want you to raise your arm in the air if you’re awake or somethen.”

“That’s crazy sig hile them on your back.” Allen laughs.

“Yeah exactly...take my advice on your back specially don’t sig hile someone with your legs apart.”

“Damn.” David says to himself cringing. He recovers and turns toward his friend. “Did you sig hile them?”

“No are you kidding those people at the Connecticut Mental Health Center were somethen else and I still can’t figure out exactly what accept probably sane.” They pulled into the dirt rock parking lot of the Knoll Inn.

“While were on the subject of sleeping you’re supposed to squeeze someone’s toe to wake them up not shake their shoulder...”

“Gee I didn’t know that the big toe?”

“Yeah the big toe what else? Squeeze the big toe gently o.k.?”

“It makes sense David it’s probably the furthers point from your brain. You end up waking up in steps until the wakened part of the brain has given up on you?”

“Whatever I bet were the only ones here that are awake.”

“Toes next to ear lobes sure are probably the slowest to discriminate information specially unwarranted information.

“Charlie why do you talk so much?”

“It’s probably just my way of sayen somethen...” Charlie wonders. “Why?”

“Park over there.”

“Allen the days goen to come when you’re going to miss me and it’ll be too late because I won’t be around. I just had a thought why don’t you sleep in the baron’s



mausoleum? You could spare yourself the elements?”

“You can’t sleep in someone else’s mausoleum for Christ sakes there might be diseases spilling out of the coffin. Plus they might get you for trespassen, trespassen is bad enough they might get you for disturbing the dead specially a rich dead baron.”

“Take some Windex with you or Lysol you know its amazing Allen how comfortable you can get on short notice, ammonia’s probably cheaper. And I wouldn’t worry too much about disturbing the dead that’s more of a hand’s on deal its more like accommodating no sharing the dead.”

“I heard they got him dipped in somethen while the mausoleum get’s finished. You know how many pizza’s ham and swizz cheese with extra cheese you can buy for what got spent on that mausoleum. It’s bad enough when someone else spends it, but he spent it. Do you know Charlie if there’s a death tax?”

“I think so if you’re alive....” Charlie parks and turns the engine off.

“You shouldn’t have been driving so slow cops will think you were casing the place.”

“I don’t mind cops if their not violaten too many of my Constitutional rights. You know Allen there’s a cop in Weather’s Field that eats with his mouth open.”

“Really food or gum?” Dave taps his stomach. “I’m full God like’s me that way.”

“If God likes you what are you doen with me?”

“Don’t look but-”

“I know I know that ones on me I got slow self esteem. Wait Al don’t exit I just got an inspired idea I wanna make a pack. I somehow got this incredible nice and nephew and niece I want to give them a t-shirt I made up, also one for Kathleen I die in some unscheduled way.

“You mean hold on to them for when you die?”

“Yeah that’s it.”

“Your sister won’t let me come to your funeral she’s a fascist she doesn’t like me?”

“In the first place Allen it’ll be my funeral not my sisters. And in the second place my sitter Mary is not a fascist. My sister wouldn’t of done well in the Third Reich she

can't take orders."

"I know she'd be given them."

"Then it wouldn't have been a fascist place. Allen we should make believe were being listened to see how it affects our conversation?"

"That's paranoid I'm not interested."

"It's only paranoid if psychiatrists are involved as accessories."

Allen prepares Charlie with a patient smile. "You know it's a good thing you're not normal you got an excuse."

"Even if I were normal Al we wouldn't have much in common." (Allen raises his head laughing theatrically). "Your comen to my funeral wouldn be a problem Al if you don't do any shop lifting. I'm sure you wont have to there'll be food there. They do that after the regrets part."

"Last regrets." David corrects Charlie.

"That reminds me at the diner I started to ask you are in favor of capitol punishment?"

"For who you or me?" Allen turns his smile into an appreciative laugh...

Charlie stops his laughing to try to complete a thought. "Wow that was a good one Allen good thing I'm around when that happens..."

"What happened did you bite your tongue?"

"Yeah I hate that why does that happen it's riskier laughing in the dark. I'm not good bleeding internally." Charlie swallows the blood following its progress down his throat. "That previous-"

"Shih," David urges leaning himself out of the car.

Outside Charlie asks. "Why Shih..."

"I thought I heard somethen?"

"Are you sure it wasn't one of us." Charlie raises one finger to his lips urging his own silence. Both are stepping stiffly lower to the ground like burglars trying to work their own silence to the darkness. The irregular sounds continue. David is cautious. Charlie is squeamish. Both trying to maintain forward motion preferring retreat. Allen stops. Charlie's two eyes reach over Al's shoulder. "Why are you tapping your toe?" Allen doesn't answer reaching his fingers around the decaying corner. Both move their

eyes around the corner trying to leave them behind.

“Al there two guys fighting each other in slow motion.”

“It’s not slow motion there not making any noise?”

“Why are they fighting silently are they deaf?” Charlie asks himself already baffled by his own question. Both watch each blow as the nocturnal assailants violently try to occupy each others space.

David whispers. “You know Charlie Bruce lee was murdered by monks for exposing Kung Fu secrets.” Charlie manages a portion of one word. David continues impatient and disappointed “I’m goen...”

“Where Dave? Were already here?” One step and Allen has left the corner behind to Charlie. He walks light of the immediate reality, non chalantly, his forehead raised to the stars. A burst Charlie cringes (another implosion) as another air born cousin collides with the purple killer light. Charlie feels a glimpse of his own suicide listening to the hum in the darkness. A bloody tooth reflects light. Half a face sneering. A fist rises. And comes down sucking life out of the air. A shirt. Blood runs down dripping onto the dirt. The shirt is torn. Away from its white skin. A tattoo the moon light. Bleeding. Now a stomach groans. The eyes discover each other. Angrily. His mouth blood on the teeth. Perspiration maybe a tear rolls... Breathing. An ear is twisted away from itself. Charlie feels the pain. The tattoo reads. You can see only one word. “Government...” Breathing like after sex. Charlie holds his breathe trying now closing his eyes. Charlie’s moving quickly. Like walking a narrow path. Pete’s door approaches. “Why didn’t they make sounds?” His questions drift like smoke until it absorbs itself and disappears. Charlie glances away. The two are still fighting like two puppets that had lost the interest of their puppeteer. The veteran notices his hand knocking on the damaged door. “Why do mothers get a worse time in fighting than fathers?” Charlie answers his own knock. And steps over the elevated door frame. “Nothing about brothers about aunts always the mother fucker words.” Charlie stopped fast. He’d forgotten the rules of the darkness.

“It’s me.” A voice Charlie explains.

“Who’s me?” Charlie asks. He could feel the distance letting go of the few words. “Where’s me?” A slosh of the water bed. A partial left turn. “Pete it’s me I’m here...?” Half a step. Charlie’s head bobbles foreword. Freshly smoked marijuana crawls the air.

As if aimlessly instructing everything it touches. A match burst ignites. Excusing the darkness for less than half a second. The bodies on the partial carpet. Using each other against the cement for sleep. The dark is getting warmer. Where's Allen? Six bodies. Now memories lingering image, nine. Noah's face encircled with a beautiful smile. Still more exhausted battlefield than field of dreams. Johnny Bayer laughs sleeping. Charlie contributes his smile. "Dave," Charlie implores. Slowly using the word to feel for an available space. An arm. Charlie's strapped on an arm. Neither the arm nor its attendant parts complain. A delayed answer. Disinterested in a response. "Charlie?" Charlie waits. "Is that you David?" Charlie asks. Silence ... another match. Making stark brief light of the dark. Five feet below to the left. Dick Owen's unshaven face exhales. His chest raises the darkness. Exhaling.... "Charlie?" The one word was a question. "Pete?" Charlie's question a response. Two mice are watching with noteworthy concern. A body rolls over itself. Someone said. "Quiet," making the most of the quiet. With the least response. Snoring over there. Coughing... Stopped. The silence becoming heavier. A swallow ingests its own contents. Most of one word now incomplete. Charlie's hand reaches for the bathroom. The hand more lost than Charlie. A third match David's faces lighting a joint. Dick Owen's face. A twitch against a twitch. Noah's head is resting lightly on Owen's knee. A snuffle. Charlie's memory. Trying to retrace the exit. Going back in the dark. The redundant. Unrefundable darkness.

"How are you Charlie?" Charlie knew the soft hand belonged to the friendly voice.

"Pete..." Charlie's own smile felt good. Like he understood its directions.

"Who else let's go outside o.k.?"

"Damn Pete even though I was ready to get startled I almost got startled anyway." Charlie hesitates two breaths. The dark pauses like blindness waiting for a response from its eyes. The door squeaks opening to the moonlight. And Pete sneaks out of his own apartment. Charlie less than one foot behind, squinting, scratching the back of his neck with one finger to the rhythm of his thoughts.

"Pete hi again did I already say I hope I didn wake you somehow?"

"Nah don't worry about I was awake or should have been. Are we still going to Philadelphia do that radio show...?"

“The Sane radio show those people yeah I was about to ask you if you remember, but-”

“I’ll be dammed with cotton candy in my hand I forgot, is today Tuesday?”

“No I don’t think so maybe why?”

Pete frisked himself looking for a match. “No were o.k?”

“O.K. which one of us is ok? We are doing do the nuclear war thing?”

“Don’t worry Charlie were as good as on our way back.” Pete stuffed his hand into shirt sleeve. Grimacing stopping for a knot before coming out the other end.

Inhaling-exhaling closing his eyes against the grey smoke.

“And Pete don’t worry about your Mom while were gone. Your Mom and my Mom are having lunch at East Lake together today. They’re nice together.”

“I know that’s great,” Pete is sitting bent into a fetal position forcing his foot into a weathered boot.

“Pete are you worried were not ready with anything particular to say once we get to Philadelphia. Do you think...”

“No problem.” Peter climbs to his full height. Greets Charlie with his eyes.

“Don’t worry were cool.”

“Just like that Pete that’s pretty good.” Charlie looks away and comes back.

Thinking our t loud. “Ill ask someone to take care of Charlie...”

“What do you think you’d be doen Pete if you were on good available terms with yourself? And you know your body wasn’t on drugs?”

“It wouldn’t be me-”

“Isn’t that the idea?”

“Yes is no and maybe isn’t right Charlie?”

“Right...the free choice deal doesn’t seem to work too well if you ask another person someone else’s guest ions?”

“Charlie how’s your writing going?”

“OK so far thanks for asking Pete.”

“Pete you wanna hear a good one. I mean a potentially real good one?”

“Go head.”

“Right it’s a fantasy deal with an unknown woman that’s going to be in the novel

as we speak.” Charlie opens his feet apart a few inches for balance. “Anyway I go up to this woman I don’t know which is alright because we were just talking...”

“Is this going to be like sexual?”

“No are you kidding Pete I already said didn’t I conversational. Anyway where was I ... right I say almost whispering, I mean almost seductive Pete... sweetheart if you dream of me tonight will you let me know tomorrow if I had a good time?”

“Now you see that’s not bad Charlie... Who is she?”

“Pete I already said I don’t know her it’s a-”

“So are you saying you don’t have sexual fantasies with women you know?”

“Of course not Pete where would I get the permission?”

“I like it.” Pete looks back smiling. “Go ahead keep going.”

“What do you mean keep going are you saying you have sex and stuff with women you don’t know like even Liza Minnelli?”

“Sure all the time it’s healthy why not. She probably gets it on with anyone she wants in her head.”

“Well we don’t know that...”

“So are you saying...” Pete focuses his eyes away trying to order his thoughts. “What if your girl friend is sick and you can’t get it on are you going to-?”

“No that’s silly I mean if we have a past record of being intimate it’s o.k., unless we’ve got an agreement that’s different. I mean though I’d certainly wouldn’t do anything we haven’t done before. Then I’d call...”

Peter laughs happily. “No wonder you have such a high phone bill.”

“You what’s interesting and curious Pete sometimes they’re smarter than me in the fantasy...”

Pete mimics the theme song from the Twilight Zone. “But then again-”

“But everyone’s smarter at one point or another, right? Even when they’re alone. Plus you’ve got to have diversity otherwise....”

Pete nods. And tightens his eyebrows around his eyes. “I’ve been rejected in fantasies-”

“You’ve got to be kidding me Pete on purpose a woman?”

“What else one kicked me beat me up...”

“You’ve got to be kidding me? The way you are with women. How did you get her to stop Pete?”

“Don’t you ever get rejected?”

“No not in fantasies I reserve that for real life. I mean it’s not a reservation. I’m just available that way, its not like I got it scheduled. (Charlie wants to change from his own subject). I almost said Pete did you turn her in? But Pete actually you gave her the violence. Did you apologize to her yo9u know in person?”

“No I didn’t but I told her.”

“You told her what happened?”

“The amazing thing she’d had the same fantasy.”

“No Jesus you’ve got to be kidding ....With her doing the kicking the same number of kicks?”

“Her health insurance or mine, right?”

“Well I hope you two don’t spend too much time together. Actually you should. But with some kind of available help at least caution.”

“I’ve got to tell you Charlie I’m broke I’ll have to pay you back for my share of the trip?”

“That’s o.k. Pete you don’t have to worry I know you will anyway I should pay for almost anything since it’s my trip and your helping me out.”

“No I’ll catch up to you Charlie it’s our trip -”

“I’m not worried about it... no body bag no foul right Charlie?”

“Pete I hope. Actually forget hope. Karma right Pete?”

“Right ...”

“Pete I’ve got to ask you for the sake of precautions and thing like that are you heavily over drugged. I got extra ordinarily dizzy standing inside your apartment place and I wasn’t doing any extra breathing.”

“Don’t worry about me. I’m covered I’m just did a little weed. God look at that it’s the sun. Beautiful is the word let’s get closer Pete come on.” Pete bends over against the hill running toward Friendly’s dumpster.

“Pete how can we....” Charlie follows his own incomplete guest ion up the incline.

“I can see why the Aztecs worshipped the sun look at that...”

“Yeah I wonder why they call it the sun Pete did you know that the Aztec children had wheels on their toys, but the grown up Aztecs didn’t sue them at all...”

“Really I didn’t know that wow that’s heavy are you sure that’s true?”

“I’m sure pretty much I think I read it in a book called .A day in the life of the Aztecs. Pete you also know the Aztecs sacrificed people without a lot of their cooperation?”

“I would of loved hanging out with the Aztecs playing with the kids. An Aztec girl friend...”

“Yeah you would have made a good Aztec Pete, but-”

“Did you know their slaves captured in battles weren’t slave for life they integrated into the culture I think one became a King.”

“But you’d have to be careful about being sacrificed Pete. I don’t think you’d make a particularly good sacrifice?”

“Charlie you want to take a nap before we hit the road you look beat?”

“No thanks Pete I might fall asleep.” Charlie’s peering into his wallet counting tens n’ twenties. “My sister Mary will to take care of Charlie which is nice.” I; call from where we stop to eat... Charlie stopped and raised his eye brows Pete with increasing intensity. “Pete can you become an accessory to someone else’s urine?”

“Yeah you mean if you use some else urine to pass a test?”

“Not entirely.... Yeah that makes more sense. But Pete if you ever want to use my urine your welcome. I mean withon reason. But it is contaminated except with legal drugs. I mean that their obtained legally. There also available illegally.”

“Thanks buddy why don’t we pedal to the metal.” Pete slaps his hands.

Both friends next to each other took small quickening steps down the hill.” Pete I wonder what Freudian slips was before Freud.’

“Charlie can I drive?”

“Its better Pete if I drive first I’m already less tired now. Do you have a currently unexpired license Pete? You know what I mean?”

“Don’t worry about-”

“Pete getting caught especially in another state without a license upsets them



extra. I'm sure there's a reason, but they might not know it. I know your probably driving deprived from all the hitch hiking with you and Marie. Maybe on the way back we can stop at an abandoned high school and you can drive around until you're satisfied."

"You're kidding me right?"

"Sure if you prefer. But whatever we do we have to be careful we don't want to get the cops all alert and organized around ourselves. You have a license but probably shouldn't. You know how cops are they only ask questions they already know the answers to." "

"Were ok Charlie. This is goen to be good," Pete licked his upper lip.

Charlie hesitated before falling into the car. "Pete is their anyone you want to say goodbye to before we leave."

"I'll say goodbye to them after we get back." (Charlie mouths Peter's answer between a smile). "How about I drive coming back?"

"That's a good one Pete that way well be taking less unnecessary chances since we already got from where were going..."

"Great who said Charlie I hate it when people imitate me before I do?"

"What are the choices?" Charlie backs up into the empty parking lot without looking.

"What do you mean what are the choices?" Pete asks.

"You or me that's who, right?"

"You probably said it about me Pete I don't know."

"Do you mind," Peter reaches for the car radio. Peter's yawn falls gradually collapses onto the rest of his face...

Charlie worries. "Pete you know they can put you in jail if they get you without a license. And if it suits their predisposition they can put you in a mental hospital-"

"You mean you not me?"

"No I mean anybody they can put into a mental hospital. And sometimes just because they get precautionary about their confusions, its confusing. You know if they get you they can only keep you three days for observation, then they can keep you longer if they like what they see." Charlie adds absent mindedly. "And they mean your

observation not there's."

"I'm not worried--"

"I'm not either so far we barely started. What I'm saying if anyone get's the other one we should encourage them to let the other one go free that way I can get you bailed out if it's me."

"So I end up in jail I know I know--"

"I didn't mean to get partial Pete. But I want to make one more point you probably already know its better to plead ignorance than innocence. You'll get more out of ignorance. Yours you understand Pete?" They pulled into Main Street. Charlie wanders into another thought. And greets it like an old friend who doesn't recognize him.

"Don't get uptight and worry about me. How long do you think it'll take us to get to Philly?"

"Because frankly Pete I've gotten tired of being helped, it's gotten to be a bigger problem which somehow they seem to think is about me. You'd think there'd be somethen in the Constitution about being helped against your will"

"Probably it would fall under the right to assemble, if there's a right to assemble then there has to be a right not to assemble. When went to visit you at Shady Brooke you seemed to be having a good time."

"It's part of my problem having a good time when there's no apparent reason. Pete did I ever tell Paul Newman showed up at Shady Brooke he brought his buddy from World War II who was drinking too much on purpose. And you know what?"

"Go ahead." Pete slides down and braces his knee against the dashboard. "Gohead tell me about Paul Newman."

"Well its interesting right Paul Newman shows up out of nowhere. You know unexpectedly expect for him. First I have to interrupt myself to say maybe because of the privacy thing I shouldn't be saying what happened, but since I still seem to be talking I might as well probably continue--"

"The place must of gone crazy--"

"No a little normal maybe not too bad. So anyway where was I right...yeah so his buddy decided not to get whatever he was there for ... someone said Paul bought his war buddy a fishing boat in Florida which I thought was very nice." Startled Charlie sat up

leaned forward and turned to Peter in what appeared to be one motion. “I almost forgot my part. Which was actually no part Paul Newman walks past me and I almost said... poor son of a bitch he thinks he’s Paul Newman.”

“Wow I bet he would have appreciated that one why didn’t you?”

“I don’t know I got suddenly I didn’t” Charlie accelerated up the ramp onto the inter state. Watching the gas gauge then on coming traffic. Charlie added to the earlier conversation. “Yeah it’s better to plead ignorance....”

“Did you see that guy on the wobbly ladder at Cinema Center-”

“Yeah I miss the words-”

“Charlie in your travels did a shrink ever tell you might be suffering from multiple personality disorder.”

“Who me?” Charlie and Pete are laughing. “No I wish I could have gotten one of those multiple deals maybe I could get some time to myself. Pete one more thing if your carrying drugs maybe you should let me carry them since I’m licensed for drugs especially internally-”

Peter answered doing a drum roll on the dash board. “Don’t worry I’m not carrying. Anyway you’re probably the most disorganized person I know-”

“Yeah well,” Charlie begins hurt then adds defensively. “I’m actually only disorganized around people Pete not you. But what hope would I have if I were organized. I’d have no potential. Who would take the credit anyway?”

“Sometimes Charlie you make me think of Gracie you know George Burns and Gracie Allen.” Charlie slows down about to toss a quarter into the toll booth slot. “Did I tell you Charlie I’m thinking of becoming a celibate?”

“Really what are you celibating?”

I never saw him laugh like that. His laugh became a happy roar. Charlie gradually returned his eyes to the traffic after offering himself a congratulatory smile. Pete finally stopped laughing looked empty for a moment. “Were on the move unlicensed, unloved and under medicated. What five miles we’ve covered insanity, drugs, nuclear war, death, Paul Newman and his war buddy and multiple personalities.”

“I don’t remember death Pete?”

“You don’t have to the sucker overlaps.”

“Ohm,” Charlie groaned understanding as much by fatigue as intellect. The two peace travelers gave themselves away to the silence. Charlie finally interrupted briefly surprised at the sound of his own voice. “What are you thinking Pete?”

“Not much...”

“That’s nice...”

“Charlie let’s be upbeat I need a reprieve from around here.”

“Already sure Pete, but you just got here and you’re already due for a reprieve. I guess you just said so right Pete?” Pete stretched his right leg out to retrieve his wallet. “Pete do you think thinking takes up space?”

“Nah thinking creates temporary space.”

“Yeah that might be another wow. Pete which is your least favorite commandment?”

“Thou shall not commit suicide.”

“Is that a commandment it isn’t right Pete? Why are the commandments all thou shall not. Wouldn’t you think one commandment would be enough?”

“Sure like be polite. What did George Carlin or someone say Ten Commandments people idea they’ve got a choice?”

“Suicide is a sin if you get caught.” Pete laughs briefly. Charlie adds to himself. “Pete why are suicide notes so brief?”

Peter adds. “And more briefly read...”

“Damn.” Charlie is startled by his own thought. “We should spend some time on those t-shirts Pete just to I mean you never know when something-”

“I like one of your best is ...stop and I’ll shoot.”

“That wasn’t really a t-shirt it was more of a critique thing or maybe an apprehension?”

“The T -shirt companies name should be what, how about ...it’s not a t-shirt?”

“Oh that’s good you’re good Pete. Which one of mine is your favorite Pete besides the one you that you thought that wasn’t?”

“Forever doesn’t take as long once you get older...”

“I thought that one was yours are you sure?”

“No it’s yours ...If it weren’t for life I don’t know what I’d be doing.”

“That might be too long for a t-shirt Pete?”

“Allen and I talked about it. We could have t shirts for stationary people.”

“Sure the slow walkers we could ask for a slow walking t-shirt lane at the mall or-”

“I’ve got one for you on the front right,” Peter sits up and cups his fingers against his chest. “It reads I’m Unhappy and on the back I’m still unhappy. Actually the other way around.”

“Wow yeah Pete yeah and as part of the slow t-shirt lane there would be the custom...no that’s not good. And also Pete inside our t- shirts gets two sayings for one?”

“The other one we thought. I’m No good and underneath completing the circle. But I’m great at it.”

“Jesus Pete we might make too much money then we’d have to prove something-

“You might have that one backwards.”

“Might isn’t good enough for backwards?”

“Here’s one Pete wait first my lasting friend Carl in California saw a bumper sticker that was good it read...If You Lived in Your Car you’d be Home By Now. Maybe that’s taken.”

Peters laughing while trying to talk. “Here’s one cloning.... Cloning... You can raise your own Parents.” Pete pauses adding. “Damn.”

“I should say so Pete that’s a situation comedy minus the situation. What’s the copy right deal Pete you know you can protect somethen by sending it registered mail to yourself its date and sealed stuff like that....”

“Pete that is suicide illegal if you don’t get caught t shirt makes me think of the Diem brothers in Vietnam. The first news release was they were shot while attempting suicide. Stop and I’ll shot right?”

Peter is laughing theatrically covering his face. Slowly his fingers slide down his face while he speaks the first few words are garbled. “Are you afraid of death Charlie?”

“Funny an imaginary women asked me that guest ion just the other day, you know I was kinda supposedly talken to myself, anyway she came right out and asked. And just as quickly I said...well if you’re giving me a choice I’d rather have a pizza? ”

“Not bad at all Charlie....” Peter pauses before asking. “What’s death?” Pete begins rhetorically. “I mean pathologists re define update I mean until recently brain dead was based on only the top quarter of the brain.”

“You got to be kidding me the top quarter why that’s not even the best part.”

“You know Eleanor Roosevelt left instructions in her will to have her wrists slip because she was being buried alive.” Peter offers.

“Really wow-”

Pete adds. “It wasn’t uncommon at the turn of the century people would be buried with their hands on a rope that lead to a bell-”

“A bell atop ground whose supposed to hear it?” Charlie asks.

“If you’re rich I guess you station somebody above ground the butler reading the Wall Street Journal until you’re reliably decomposed.”

“Charlie I just came up with a great product concept....”

“No from car stickers and t-shirts to product concepts and neither one of know what were doen that’s pretty good.”

“We can hire a product manager on contingency we don’t have to cover the whole gig. You wanna hear the product concept.”

“Sure go ahead I’m ready?”

Peter spreads his hands apart slowly as if exposing a marquee. His words echo awe in the many directions of sound. “Portable chewing gum.”

“No?” Charlie is exasperated.

“Yes,” Peter’s promise is reassurance. “It’ll take the candy industry by storm I mean talk about product share.” (Charlie mouths the words portable chewing gum). “Right off people will wonder why the hell didn’t someone think of this before, here’s the commercial Charlie keep your eyes on the road were onto something big.” (Charlie swallows hard. His eyes are open beyond their tired slits). “A twenty second spot a tired guy walks out average guy good looking... The type of guy you see around right off you say to yourself this guy knows his chewing gum.” (Both Pete and Charlie chuckle). “He’s very tired guy dragging around the nine foot stick of chewing gum. The poor bastard probably has a step ladder to cut off a piece of gum from the top. Yeah I like it. A revolutionary new product. The guy tugs at the gum as the guy falls off ladder. The

commercial ends a little kid hands him a piece of portable chewing gum.”

“Damn,” Charlie calms down as quickly as he’d gotten excited. Now melancholy Charlie adds. “Pete it’s too bad were alone there’s nobody to appreciate us...”

“How about you and me?”

“Well sure of course were barely not enough. I mean we already know were here.”

Pete wonders. “I’m not sure?”

“Oh wow Pete I’ve got maybe a potential slogan. Were trucken Pete we’ve got momentum or somethen-”

“What’s the slogan?”

“Right right here it is....It reads... We don’t offer a money back quarantine. We don’t have to.”

“Not bad not bad yeah I like it good Charlie.”

“Pete now that I think of it do you think is suicide illegal if you don’t get caught is kind of maybe delayed humor maybe too-”

“Subtle...”

“Yeah subtle but also we don’t want to be causing people any more pain than they come with already. Do you know what I mean? And maybe jump or something.”

“Sure but-” Peter encourages the argument.

“Sure but there reasons for pain. We don’t want to be one of the reasons. You’re supposed to reduce the available pain in life not go the other way?”

“Maybe we can put a toll free suicide prevent number on the shirt. I’ll go along are you hungry?”

“Probably not I shouldn’t be Allen and I...Pete I just thought of something from before, I heard that you and Marie split up somehow and that you and Lili are dating... the reason I bring it up is that unknowingly maybe I shouldn’t have gone out with Lili... Do you understand? I mean nothing happened with me and Lili. Actually it did but not conventionally.”

“Don’t worry Lili and I are just friends.”

“Oh well that’s good I hope.Pete do you think I’d make a reliably good monster.”

Peter sits up to his smile. “No I think you’d have some problems on the other hand-”

“I hope you weren’t about to say that you’d make a good monster Pete? O.K. sure if you applied yourself and got off drugs. But a tipsy vampire approaching the poor ladies neck. You notice Pete black people don’t get to be vampire victims that’s taken discrimination a little to far don’t you think?”

“And what you think you’d make a good monster?”

“Maybe I would and maybe I wouldn’t.” Charlie is hurt by Peter’s emphasis. “Well to tell you the truth as opposed to whatever else is available I think the people I’d been assigned to scare would get annoyed with to me. I’d lose my monster status...?”

“You notice monster’s don’t date sure they get into that psycho Freudian babble about vampires repressed sexuality the blood the penetration-”

“I know I know that’s not even confused dating I think Allen and I were talking about that-”

Peter’s eyes follow the mischief in his smile. “Don’t you think I’d make a good dating monster?”

“Don’t be silly. Now you are kidding right the way women react to you without encouragement after the first date you’d loose your license to practice monsterring.”

Peter’s face becomes part of the stage of his imagination. “Can you feel Frankenstein limping along? And of course it’s never been established why he limps maybe the dude is a little hard. (Charlie blushes and quietly says “shit”). Anyway we’ve got Frankie on the loose again approaching the Norwegian village. Screams people are running. A guy’s screamed mother fucker Frankie’s back. A censor is rushed in but he’s too late. He’s the second victim. My God Charlie I don’t know if its in the script Frankenstein has grabbed the Mayor. The mayor’s wife leaning out the window screaming.” Peter opens his mouth drops his head back and yells. A passing motorist drives up, notices Peter’s face and disappears behind his acceleration. (Charlie interjects “She screams again right Pete?”) “Forget it screams isn’t the word for it, the poor Mayor is covering his ears tryen to escape. Then it comes out. Now people know. The shock the phobia is unbearable. Frankenstein turns the Mayor around holding him with one arm, he’s French kissing the fucking Mayor. The Mayors wife grins pathetically before she faints dangling out the second story window.” (“Damn” both Peter and Charlie anticipate). “Frankenstein is...”



“What Pete what?”

“It’s beyond belief... Frankenstein is humping the Mayor?”

“No Frankenstein is gay?”

“It’s nature’s way of maintaining zero population growth in Hollywood. Oh God no did you see that?” Peter covers his face.

“What? “ Charlie looks quickly over toward Peter. And just as quickly back to the traffic.”

“Frankenstein’s ejaculates look at the expression on his face-”

“No that’s not possible are you saying Frankenstein ejaculated that would-”

“The Mayor sodomized on his first day in office. And he won the election by only one vote.”

“But he might have gotten violated even if he didn’t win the election?”

“True true its Karma...” Peter adds dismally. “Sodomized...”

“Is that what sodomizing means Pete I’ve been meaning to ask someone?”

“You don’t know?”

“Well Pete remember I wasn’t born in this country.”

“Still you don’t know what sodomizing means?”

“No not actually.”

“Anal intercourse Charlie it’s anal intercourse.”

“Is that what the Bible is all excited about...Wow ...” Charlie looks away clarifying past events and conversations.”Pete do you think oral sex should fall under the freedom of speech deal or you know the right to assemble?”

“I can’t comment on that at this time.” Pete mimics John Wayne’s voice.

“Pete you shouldn’t mock John Wayne he just died there should be a hesitating period out of respect or something.

“You know Pete what I think Frankenstein I mean all that violence it wasn’t Frankenstein’s fault it was written into the script, it got imposed on him.”

Peter goes past amazed and settles for disbelief. “You’re kidding me...”

Charlie defends himself. “I mean fictitious characters should have rights, don’t you think.... I mean unreal Pete doesn’t mean non existent-”

“I’m sorry I didn’t mean,” Peter holds back further laughter. Charlie continues.

“Its o.k. Pete maybe it was just an available remark that got away?”

Pete tries to shift a psychic gear trying not to remember Charlie’s face. “What did you say happen between you and Lili did you go to bed with her?”

“Damn Pete I thought I was supposed to get some warning on those kinda guest ions. You people at the Knoll Inn get to that question awfully...no Lil and I didn’t go to bed or anywhere else. I mean we were in bed but no for any sex that’s how it turned out. What I’m sayen is were in bed and Lili says she’d like to get pregnant of all things. Just like that preg-”

“What did you say?”

“I think I said something like Lili that’s probably preposterous. I’d have to take care of the baby. Help raise the baby and all the other things. I’d have to be there for the baby and I’m hardly there for myself. Yet anyway. I think I said somethen else that might have been even more sensible maybe even practical?”

“Yeah what next?”

“Well actually Lili said out of nowhere word I probably maybe never heard that close to me, she said that’s noble.” Charlie tightened his grip around the wheel. “Nobel I said what do you mean... noble is risking your life not to run over an armadillo in Texas what you’re talking about is necessary.”

“That was it?”

“Yeah pretty much after that I stopped remembering except I drove Lil home to her Mom’s from pretty far away.”

“From pretty far away.” Pete echoes. “That’s pretty good....”

“I saw a bumper sticker once in New Jersey when I was trying to work as a chauffer, it read...Don’t steal this car it’s already stolen.”

Pete is laughing, clapping his hands raising his knee. Born free came on the radio. Pete shook his head and glanced out the window. Several moments later he came back from his journey, his tone serious. “Charlie did you know the VA hospital system had eighty thousand three handed and fifty five psychiatric hospitalizations in 1955.”

“Yeah...but why would you want to have information like that in your head Pete its bad for you.”

Remember a while back Charlie we were talking about your therapist at the VA in

West Haven? (Charlie opened his eyes and nodded). “What happened with her?”

“What I don’t know exactly...” Charlie begins to talk as people do when distracted by a troubling dream. “I was just sitting there, right. Going along talken in therapy. You know about us being together. Because I told Polly well before and convincingly that I was interested in her as a woman. You understand? And out of nowhere eventually Polly says like she’s reading a billboard I missed. ‘Therapy will end when you ask me to marry you.’ Right away I was shocked. I’m almost sure I didn’t say anything till I got home. I was that unavailable shocked which is unusual for me.”

“What you do?”

“I wrote her a letter and mailed immediately. Because I thought she meant like I either had to marry her or stay in therapy forever indefinitely.”

“You’re kidding?”

“No why would I be kidding I’m still not sure what the hell she meant. Polly wont talk to me in the hallway or anything, they’ve got transference things goen on I wasn’t completely informed about.”

“Maybe she just meant that if you didn’t stop perusing her she terminate the relationship?”

“How could I shut up I was in therapy. Oh wow Pete do you think that’s what she meant. Damn it’s been several years do you think she was just saying change the subject. I’ll be damned.... (Charlie’s amazement grows). I got projected right out of her office. Why didn’t she just...”

Several minutes of quiet ensues between the friends.

“Life ah Charlie what are you goen to do. Did you know that Lili got kidnapped as a child?”

“No kidden a child no less what was the ransom or is that a personnel question?”

“I don’t know imagine how embarrassing it would be in Eastport if someone was kidnapped and the ransom was a hundred bucks.”

Charlie scratched his nose. Charlie and Pete came up with a variation of the same answer. “The family would hold out for more....” Peter and Charlie applauded each others answer with laughter.

“Were we insensitive ah Pete?”

“No the statute of limitations expired were ok.”

“Honey why are you depressed your parents agreed to pay the ransom.” The previous laughter picks up again...

“Pete would you rather be quiet or talk about the Pope?”

“Let’s talk about-”

“Do you like the Pope Pete?”

“Not I’m taking the day off how about you?”

Charlie continues anyway. “Pete did you ever see a priest run fast?” I think it’s an issue of faith?”

“What do you mean an issue of faith Charlie?”

“Faith is a low motion thing, right?”

“Where do you get that what does faith have to do with motor activity?”

“I don’t know I always associated faith with slow motion especially amongst Catholics. Name me once if you ever saw a Pope run. Even recorded in history books. I mean even when their swatten bugs or reaching for somethen their doen it slow. No extra rush amongst Catholics shows a lack of faith if you hurry what else could it be. Impatience is the opposite of faith, right?”

“Are you sayen what that if a priest and I feel of a ten story building I’d reach the ground first.”

“Sure if you died before you reached the ground of course-”

“That doesn’t make any sense. Your pullen my leg. It’s probably an issue of fatigue even maybe humility. Not faith. Maybe Charlie it has more to do with all the cloths they have to wear specially the Pope?”

Pete I just came up with another t shirt. You ready? (Peter nods). “Here it is...if you worry you underestimate God.”

“Yeah Charlie it works. The words grow on you. I’d like one of those.”

“Great Pete I; make sure you get one. With a nice available image...”

“You know why that is Pete don’t you I mean the cloths deal?”

“Go ahead Charlie I’m waiting...You were going to say about the cloths.”

“Oh right...Well the extra excessive cloths because their not allowed having sex even with themselves. You see they ware the extra cloths to reduce contact when they

bump into a parishioner or each other or even with themselves like through a piece of furniture or even a memory.” (Peter is laughing). Charlie raises his voice. “I mean have you seen their underpants Pete?” Charlie waits for Peter. “Also Pete the extra cloths are to keep the unused Seminole fluid from leaking unto the church.”

Peter gasps for air. “Come on Charlie your given me a hernia.”

“Well you give me a reason why all the extra cloths even in the summer inside. And you didn’t tell me have you seen their underpants? What’s goen on with the underpants....?” It’s hard to tell if Charlie is angry or if he’s trying to overcome Peter’s resistance.

“Were you baptized a Catholic Charlie?”

“A little.... I heard Pete those priests they can’t even masturbate unless they get a dispensation from the Pope or some commission. And they won’t even consider it unless there’s an emergency or a death in the family or somethen.”

Peter hollers, “A death in the family.” Before he rolls into another volley of laughter.

“Well don’t take my word for it ask around I’m more than willing to be wrong-

“A masturbation dispensation.” Peter shakes his head.

“Ask around Pete it didn’t used to be they had girlfriends they had some council meeting hundreds of years ago. They even used to believe in reincarnation. And like I said I’m more than willing to be wrong for years I told people Katherine the Great that Czarina person from Russia died while having intercourse with a horse in her bathroom. Her bathroom of all places. And I was wrong I found out. Mostly wrong I think it was a cavalry officer. Anyway I was wrong. I was sorry. And I admitted as often as possible trying to correct the misinformation.”

“I heard that to about Katherine from several sources.”

“See what I mean stuff like that gets around worse than a virus. I felt awful passen information like that around besmirchen the reputation of Katherine the Great and-“

“Besmirch ah? What were you going to say Katherine reputation and...what?”

“And I guess the reputation of her horses?”

“Actually that makes sense to me.”

Charlie becomes concerned. “Pete what do you think should we say a prayer

about our trip? No let's save it for tonight. Remind me o.k.?"

"Charlie do you have any idea what's supposed to happen at the radio station once we get to Philly?"

"Funny I was just thinking about that before...I think I'm supposed to talk about that nuclear war thing in Vietnam when we accidently bombed the Russian Embassy in Hanoi." Charlie pauses and adds reassuringly. "I'm glad you're here Pete."

"Thanks buddy it's goen to be good I can feel it."

"Maybe I'll talk about the Ploughshare Eight Dean Hammer, Elmer Moss, the nun lady and the marine guy..."

"There the ones that broke into the General Electric Plant in Pennsylvania poured their own blood over a hydrogen plant and was arrested praying..."

"It wasn't a hydrogen plant I mean bomb it was a re entry vehicle you know that holds eight or nine hydrogen bombs and sends them in nine different elections--"

"Did you hear what you said?"

"What?"

"You said elections you meant to say direction..."

Charlie catches up. "Damn Pete that's a Freudian slip and a slide...Pete do you think they'd kill a Presidential candidate if he said he wouldn't use nuclear weapons or send people to war on account he was a Christian or somethen?"

"Sure if he was high in the polls."

"Maybe he just couldn't run because it was unconstitutional. Remember when Carter came up with the neutron bomb that would kill people but not destroy buildings and people got real upset..."

"Sure and they stopped the production of the neutron bomb. Carter said o.k. O.k. kill the people and destroys the buildings. And everyone started shouting four more years four more years."

"Did that really happen?" Pete asks.

"Yeah..."

"Pete nuclear war makes me hungry let's stop and get somethen to eat are you hungry?"

"I'm surprised your not paranoid I'd be if the same thing happened to me in Nam."

“Nuclear war spoiled me for paranoia terrified keeps me busy, I told you about the numbers right?”

“Do we have to the the numbers again? I mean what’s it all about Alfie?”

“Just maybe one more time you never know what we might come up with. O.k.? I’ll be brief while I’m talking.... Right let’s see if you take the culmination of the first World War add or subtract it from the culmination of the second World War or Nostradamus projection on the Third World War which is nineteen ninety nine, add or subtract you get all nines-”

Peter nods tiredly. “Which is the number of beginnings and endings.”

“Exactly and then the number gets mixed up with the words Hiroshima is nine letters, how many is Nagasaki and Los Alamos is nine, Manhattan project right is nine, the code name of the whole crazy operation was Great God K (Peter interjects “nine again”). Right Pete right but it doesn’t stop the scientists who went to watch the detonation flew in plane number nine or was it ninety one, the weight of one of the bombs, the size of the mushroom cloud was nine thousand feet, the number of people killed and homes destroyed nines all over the place. And more I’ve forgotten. And that not even without Nagasaki.”

“You know what more I read Pete?”

“What?”

“The day before the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima Mitsubishi sent a group of technicians to Hiroshima. And bam the place blows up. Tears n’ fire. So Mitsubishi gets it together and decides to get their technicians out and transfers them to Nagasaki the day before that place disappears-”

“Yeah and?” Peter asks.

“Well there were nine technicians...”

“You’ve got to be kidding me see what I mean? What I’m sayen Pete is that maybe are like this language like words but better because were not that involved with the numbers, they’ve got their own way. Maybe our words are just confused numbers or numbers tryen to escape?”

“Let’s see where we can go with that the oldest fossil of a human ape is what three hundred thousand years old and the little fella didn’t have a developed voice box. Which

means our ancestor was incapable of language -”

“Yeah but how about numbers one at a time?”

“They’d still have to enunciate, but o.k. that less of a challenge, one at a time. So what we’ve got these hairy cousins pre tool dudes on a hunt (Charlie watches Peter intently) they’ve got to know the difference between one saber toothed tiger and running into five of the suckers-”

“Exactly and sayen oh shit isn’t goen to help because they can’t... so?”

“They had some sense literal enumeration before cognitive language.” Peter is squinting trying to gather the clearer thoughts.

“That’s not all Pete you’ve got to wonder how did these guys with their families survive. I mean they got blunt spears no eyeglasses if they need them. And no shoes. And you see what they were up against. The woolly toothed tigers were the least of it there were a lot worse.”

“Where are you goen with that?”

“Well the numbers it had to be more than one at a time a grunt over there three and some kind of facial expression in the dark, there had to be maybe some kind of flow like that precognition stuff.”

“Right which they probably lost when they left the savannah and formed a social commune. I mean language is a linear casual system. And that speaks to time. Numbers don’t necessarily flow linearly specially in music? Who said music is applied mathematics? Maybe also at the time they started to domesticate animals like dogs.”

“What’d I tell ya Pete were onto somethen from t-shirts to time getten to the numbers? And of course Pete the cavemen didn’t need time nearly as much right? I mean hunt hungry sleep tired and don’t step on my toe. But once we were living together-”

“Polarization, cause and effect and opposition the hustle of society, a time ironic existence based-?”

“What do you mean Pete they had to-”

“They had to figure out how to exchange space for time or society was impossible, they supplanted the natural flow and cycle of nature, to our own preferred hustle...”

“And that couldn’t be done with numbers?” Pete interrupts himself.



“Why not?”

Charlie tries to answer his own question. “Well Pete because there not ambiguous enough. You can only argue numbers through words right. I mean what’s society all about uncertainty and like you said opposition?”

“Sure order, restraint equal enforcement sublimated through the chaos of competition.”

“And don’t forget assigned intelligence Pete, definitions and distinctions to say nothen of deciding who’s free?”

“What do you mean assigned intelligence?”

Pete think about it there are no smart people in this planet only smarter. You’re only smart if someone else isn’t. And you’re smarter than someone else without their agreement... It’s all about temporary. And that works better I mean numbers are allot harder to deny against or with other numbers than words. Like you said displacement.”

“Were getting ambitious-”

“Doesn’t matter does it Pete if were not gotten carried away with results?”

“I’m saying Charlie let’s stay focused.”

Pete continues. “Can you only affect the space time continuum just through numbers?”

“I’ve always been concerned about that space time continuum deal Pete. Well I don’t know about always. But how can there be continuing if like they say the Universe is timeless.”

“You mean because we devised time on this planet?”

“Sure Pete everything we experience in time including ourselves ends.”

“How about music is applied mathematics.” Peter looks tired.

“I don’t know about music Pete except the pleasure of it...”

Charlie breaths exhales forcefully then insists. “The Universe is timeless we exist in time we-”

“Are therefore out of sync without own residences the Cosmos...”

Wow Pete to the power of two on that one.”

“Excuse me for interrupting Charlie.”

“That’s ok Pete I wasn’t aware you interrupted. For sure we’ve become

enmeshed in time. Is enmeshed a word?"

"Like what do you mean?"

"Well Pete it's in the words. How about... She is late, you're late or being on time, he's early-"

"Where is she its eight o'clock? What time was he born, what time did he die starts right off at the begin ing with time."

Pete what kind of calendar can we have without time you know a non time colander what would it be?"

"Pete if the Universe is one location how can we relocate?"

"What?" Peter is startled. "Hit me with that one again Charlie."

"Do you really want me to repeat myself Pete?"

"No buddy I got it." Peter is thinking. "We die in space not in time. I mean if the Universe is timeless how can our lives end. Eternal ends without end..."

"Wow that's serious. I should pull over the car to collect these thoughts. People forget you know Pete."

Both friends begin the next sentence Charlie continues after waiting for Pete. "I heard maybe I'm wrong, but like the first suggestion of religion were alters made of bones like half a million years ago-"

"I think I know where your goen with that?"

"Where Pete?"

"The alters pre date the development of the voice box so our earliest ancestors relationship with God was numerical."

"I think I was going to say somethen about prayers. We should take notes somehow....Imagine first guy that came up with addition Pete-"

"How about the guy who followed with subtraction. I bet that guy didn't last." Pete laughs to himself."

"Pete I gave up a little when I read the women allowed themselves to be put into ICBM silo's..."

"You're kidding with the gun the key the...damn."

"You know what else eighty percent of the guys working in those silos in their spare time above ground are working for a master's degree in business..."

“What does it mean?”

“I don’t know. Nothen I hope-”

“Another karmic pattern, I bet your hungry Charlie?”

“When we get back we should call one of those mathematician people at Yale maybe an easy available physicists and ask them about nuclear war with all the rivers going backwards, those six months of nuclear winter, the food chain getting reversed and trillions times a trillion times of energy from all kinds of life forms trees, chipmunks, us and mountains over six months goen up into the Milk way and form a worm hole. Pete wouldn that cause gravity to get upset and collapse and the Milk way like disappear into a black hole?”

“Super novas are a lot more powerful than what you just described...”

“Is that the answer Pete. I mean one of the problems is we answer our own questions.”

“I hear you...”

“Me to...”

“Yeah but Pete I read that with enough electron volts whatever that means you can bend time, what if you factor that deal...”

“What do you mean by reversing the food chain Charlie?”

“What...oh I thought you meant me, no well it’s just that, eight hundred roentgens of radio activity will kill you and me Pete and all the cows and crows all the warm blooded alleged animals, but several thousand roentgens won’t even distract a lot of insects and I heard they multiply according to the available food.” Charlie inhales while sighing.

“Hell were already mutated spiritually the nuclear triad is an assimilation of ourselves...”

“Pete you know what I just realized you know what the anagram for Revelations is you the-”

“Sure I know what an anagram....You take all the letters in a word and create other words.”

“Yeah Pete it is the anagram for revelations is...reveal all the nations.”

“Jesus Charlie stay on the cross or well do you again. What’s the anagram of

Armageddon?”

“God,” Peter adds.

Charlie and Pete form a chorus. “Done...gone...mad.”

Peter corrects himself. Allowing the verbs are...” He rushes the rest of the anagram. “Are we done with God-”

Excitedly Peter,”Are we mad and also damned...”

Peter and Charlie turned to each other and both repeat,”Damned?” now a question.

“You know what I said at church once about revelations, Pete. They didn’t like it.”

“What?”

“I’d rather have a pizza.”

“That’s funny. I’m still on Armageddon. Did they ask you to leave?”

“Nah I left on my own. I’ve gotten good at antic paten. You say about food...”

“Pete I’m goen to give myself a wow. I just had a thought. When people laugh they are in the absense of themselves therefore the presence of God?”

“Jesus that’s a keeper Charlie.” Pete opens the glove compartment and peers inside. “People ask how’d you think of that. And they say...it came to me. Right?”

“People sometimes sometimes discriminate themselves their abilities.”

“More like modified euthanasia? Charlie what do you tell someone who says there’s no God?”

I’d ay Pete. How can y you deny what you just identified.”

“My turn to say wow. Is that an original one Charlie?”

“I don’t know can it be if the planet isn’t? I’m getten tired hungry thinken.”

“You mean most of the Universe predates the planet earth?”

“You know what Pete I’ve been worried about tickling. It seems to have stopped. I mean we only touch each other for a couple reasons. My therapist Elaine did have much on what’s happened to tickling?”

“Maybe it’s still popular in the orient, Africa-“

“That’s a nice idea Pete thank you. Pete you get smarter when you get excited

even scholarly. You're more intelligent than anyone I know specially on short notice. You're going to be great in Philadelphia, you got a better sense of drama and you're more handsome, it's true you're also insane but you're more on your own schedule. More a volunteer."

"What are you saying?"

Stay with me Pete. I'm saying you're less convoluted around unexpected strangers. I've seen you in action you know how I am around strangers, hell Pete most of times I'm one myself."

"What Charlie I'm supposed to do the sane interview right?"

"See what I mean you completed the sentence I didn't even start."

"No no I've got a better idea we both do the interview you're a partial mute since the nuclear war you're all fucked up you've lost the ability formulate verbs in your mind?"

"My mind?" Charlie asked impatiently.. "Pete don't be silly." (Charlie hesitates). But if it makes sense we'd better be able to fool ourselves first before we try to fool anyone else."

Peter didn't hear Charlie. "An involuntary twitch can be convincing. We walk into the station next to each other. I'm holding your left and I have my arm around your shoulder. Maybe a harness it's obvious your impaired... with a balance problem. You talk and it becomes obvious."

"Obvious can be tricky? No harness where we're going to get a convenient harness on short notice. And also Pete plus also what are the laws about impersonating a mute in Philadelphia. It might be a crime on a radio show. We don't know until we know?"

"I'm saying... whenever verbally you trip over yourself I start talking for you."

"There's another problem here Pete I don't know the difference between a verb and an adverb. I avoided grammar. And what's the point of twitching on a radio show?"

"It's a work in progress Charlie I said verbally not verb." (Charlie mouths the word "Oh." Charlie why not a ventriloquist... Beautiful you sit on my lap and-")

"Wait a minute Pete whose going to accept a dummy older than the ventriloquist?"

"What do you mean?" Peter smiles in anticipation.

"The dummy is always younger Pete haven't you noticed because the

ventriloquist makes the dummy so how could the dummy be older it makes no sense. If we were to go to travel around the country warn people about nuclear war we've got to be serious even make sense or-

Peter continues in a rhythmic voice. "One step at a time said the man nervously walking down from his own gallows who said anything about touring the country?"

"I did sure if it works in Philadelphia why not go around on my disability money warning people and stuff. But you've got to be careful imitating me too much you don't want to end up a confused version of me...Pete what if we become a success then what?"

Peter scratches his cheek lightly while talking. "You were never this upset about success before what's-

"We were never in this much jeopardy Pete?"

"Don't you want to be accepted don't you want to be respected Charlie?"

"Not if it goes on for too long?"

"Interesting answer how far do you think was from Philly?"

"I don't even know where it is Pete we're goen first to New York City-

"No that's o.k. were fine." The two friends drive quietly for several minutes before Pete asks. "Charlie what's your favorite recall?"

"You mean memory?"

"No you know recall like when they recall a car because of a malfunction?"

"I don't know about recalls you wanna talk about prisons?"

"Nah I don't feel like prisons?"

"Pete now I'm a little worried what's an adverb?"

"A word that modifies a verb, an adjective or another adverb."

"Pete it amazes me Pete you know that stuff just like that without any warning. Sometimes you just give me the quivers."

"Quivers your pullen my leg ah?"

"I wonder Pete why they say your pullen my leg instead of an arm or a pancreas. How'd they end up with a leg?"

"In the seventeenth century when they were hanging people without a drop from the gallows, you understand Charlie they'd just raise them, the executioner would become impatient especially if he had several on hand so he'd pull on a leg." Peter looks

down stretching his neck with one eye open and adds. "Stop your pullen my leg...."

"That's not funny is it true?"

"Nah...maybe I think so. You know what my favorite recall is...heart paces."

"I still think if they gotta kill people in this country they should do it with laughing gas. And with some kind of permission from the deceased. Did you say heart pacers that's unbearable..."

Charlie gingerly steps on the accelerator trying to figure out the anagram for patriot. Peter is rolling his neck in incomplete rhymic circles trying to relax. A car go bye at one hundred miles per hour. The veteran raises his hand touching his smile. Peter is thinking of Marie who is thinking of him. Pete grimaces trying to disregard the feelings of alienation... Charlie is back in Vietnam wondering about his mama son Sung Ho: An unexpected moment of clarity. Charlie's lips quietly hold the word wow. His eyes glimmer. Sung Ho used to call Charlie Uncle Ho which was also Ho Chi Minh's nick name, now Charlie is aware his friend and Mama Son was suggesting he was a member of her family. "Sung Ho liked me." Charlie whispers. "Pete we should never go to war with another country unless first we teach them our language." Charlie returns his attention to the traffic. I miss Sung Ho I hope I wasn't impolite. Charlie feels the echo of a tear forming in his throat.

"What did you just say Charlie?" Pete asks coming down from a yawn.

"A siren went by a while ago Pete we must be getting closer to New York City?"

"We should get a map of the east coast..."

"I hope that siren wasn't an omen I get lost in maps looken at them Pete I'm glad you're here again." Peter and Charlie drove for five minutes before they were surrounded by slow traffic. And towering building.

"What are your plans Charlie?"

"I don't know about Pete I'm just looking for one of those vertical garages that goes up then I thought we'd get out relax and find a place to eat maybe.?" Two blocks a red light turns green a slow left turn, Charlie hesitates before turning into a high rise parking lot.

Pete looks under the visor feeling the dampness. "It's like a catacomb don't lose the ticket if we lose the car I hope were not in it."

“And I’m not a catacomb kinda of guy.” A sharp turn another elevation. Higher they rose. Charlie remembered when he and Allen lost his car in Boston. Higher another left, the sun’s glow- briefly below Pete and Charlie’s shoulders.

“I wonder how long it would get us to reach Heaven Pete.”

They pulled into one of two vacant spaces. Peter hurried out of the Dotson, groaning stretching both arms high up on his toes. Charlie rolled out searching each pocket.

“What are you looken for?”

“I don’t know besides my wallet till I find it?”

“I’ve got the level and space memorized Charlie give me the ticket we’d better write it down also in case we get separated?”

“Your already practicing separated?” Charlie handed the ticket..”

Peter looks up with one eye, scribbling on the ticket. “I’m just being realistic.”

“Realistic that’s twice in one day....” The elevator door closed. Both travelers looked up as the elevator went down. “Pete can you tell if down feels the opposite of up?” Another level, a thump. The metal door opens gradually. Pete and Charlie take a long step out into the moist dark.

“What was your question Charlie ?”

“Were here apparently Pete.” Charlie raises his forearm to block the sun, stepping into the noisy ambivalent traffic. Peter half turned around himself walking backwards looking up. Charlie glances to either side , both elbows extended past his hips, his hands clasped behind. Two friends brother’s committed purpose. Stepping to the despairing rhythm of the city. The lost vertical imagination of man. Cars honking. The temporary intersections. All the a vacant eyes. Everyone alone. Hurrying. Charlie follows Pete’s f eyes across the street. A tall man, bearded-yelling at himself. Charlie and Peter look way. The woman is giving a man the finger. He leaves. She stares at the finger. A bus full of children dressed in ironed uniforms, slows. And stops again. The children are laughing. Eyes awake to life .Arms evading purpose in all directions. One child silent. Motionless. Sad lonely eyes. The bus is gone. Pete steps into traffic. His hands lightly stuffed into his blue yeans. Charlie checked the traffic for both of them. Merry traveler’s warm sun lost City. The same man shouting? A calico cat runs. Disappears consumed by the dark alley.



Pete and Charlie stepped. And the deepening sadness of the city. Their eyes unaccustomed to the loss. Angry faces. Searching for their angle's source. Across the two men hold their fist. Like unfamiliar mid evil weaponry. Each waiting for instruction from the other. "Pete?" Charlie asks. There is no answer. Two old cars collided abandoned. Smoke rising from the opened hood. A female taxi driver noticed Pete. And winked. Peter's lasting smile. She's gone. Peter and Charlie walking briskly. Past a mail box leaning to one side. Forty five degrees Peter measures. Walking as if they had somewhere to go. "Pete imagine..." The remaining words lost. Peter turns his careful eyes to Charlie. Nothing they decide, still walking. Time seems to move differently in new York City. Charlie looks over his shoulder. No reason is reason enough.

Both friends stop. Suddenly without decision. There was no purpose that might explain their attendance to that moment. Dwarfed by ugly buildings. Threatening the sky. No reason. Reason enough. Their eyes resting. Laughter over there. A gargoyle watching. Charlie swallows. Their eyes are back looking. The Snow White. Bar n' Grill? Charlie barely hears his own question. Pete and Charlie have arrived in New York City, Philadelphia a long way...away. Beyond the measured miles.

\* \* \* \*

Pete's climbing up the stairs became Charlie's crawlin, almost... Pete and Charlie approached their bedroom, the tattered steps resisted then heaved them back upward. Charlie's mind was empty. And therefore most likely content. Pete's cerebral residence wandered playfully amidst the plentiful toys of his imagination. The next few steps Charlie heaved to breathe, then seemed to concentrate in order to inhale.

"You know Pete if we were cannibals we'd be in trouble?"

"Why so?"

"I hear that because of all the stuff we ate, inhaled and everything else our bodies even dead wouldn't pass the standards of the Pure Food and Drug Administration...." Charlie pushed up with the hand rail.

"Speak for yourself Charlie. "

"I'm serious we even have too much plutonium. (Charlie stops. The loud exhalation released slowly). But I want you to know Pete if it ever comes to my eating

you I wouldn't do it without your permission even with French fries.”

“Charlie stop talking catch your breathe.

“I'm o.k. Pete it's just my breathing that's gotten in the way.” Charlie stops. Two steps higher Peter waits for him.” Pete you wouldn't eat me would you if you were starved. I mean if I'm deceased and available.”

“You bet I would...”

Charlie takes the next step pushing down on his knee. “Well I guess if you have to. But be careful Pete you don't want to get over medicated remember what happened to you on Thorazine.”

Peter stops and turns around. “Are you on thorazine?”

“No Pete but that stuff stays longer in your body than you do. Remember when I gave you some. And you ended up passed out in an ambulance on your lawn.”

“Yeah I remember you're lucky you weren't arrested.”

“Yeah malpracticing without a license...”

“That's good...Charlie did you see the desk clerks eyes?” Peter stares at his memory of the frail-yet stern old man constantly moving his eyes trying to avoid the diagonal crack on his eye glass lens. Peter laughs wondering if Charlie was trying to re position himself to accommodate the old man's erratic vision.

“Pete one of us at least should of asked for a room downstairs because-”

“I don't think this place has a first floor...”

“Of course they have a first floor Pete. Even cemeteries have a first floor. Oh you mean the lobby deal...”

Charlie cheeks puffed out . “Pete I'm so out of shape I couldn't hold up my end of a mugging.” Charlie whistles his exhalation. Pete and Charlie stop to laugh. “I'd have to ask the guy to come back...” Charlie looks up laughs to himself once more. “You made it Pete.” Encouraged Charlie is going to complete the next two steps.

Relieved the two souls walk the horizontal. “Did you just hear what I said, what did I say Pete?”

“I'd have to get in shape to die.”

“No I didn't say that you said that it's a good one, they should condemn the first floor at least that way we wouldn of-”

“Charlie don’t look but this might be one of those laws of diminishing return hallways? We should be further than we are?”

“Don’t kid that way Pete. And what were goen to be robbed and murdered?”

“It’s always robbed and murdered in that order isn’t it?”

“Could be people don’t want to touch a dead body that’s not there’s. I guess?”

“Charlie do you feel the corridor is expanding or contracting?”

“What do you mean as opposed to what other choices...?”

“Charlie?”

“Pete do you ever worry about being right?”

“Sometimes usually when I’m around other people like that guy downstairs...”

“I’d rather be murdered by a spooky person than an all around nice to meet you person.”

“I tried to look at him, but he didn’t want to make eye contact, why were you bobbing and weaving around like you were trying to dodge him?”

“Pete I think we got the making of a potential coincidence look this door number seems to match the key.” Charlie is turning the key leaning his ear against the door as it opens. Peter is pushing the door open with his little finger. Charlie follows Pete inside. “I wasn’t dodgen the guy Pete, look at this place its like walking into a water color. And it smells like baseball cards.”

“What you expect it’s a hotel, baseball cards? I don’t know motels always smelled to me like a nurse just after a shower?”

“Can an odor have a past tense; I guess a memory right...an odor memory?”

Charlie sniffed his nose around the thought.

“It’s not bad for what you paid Charlie not in New York.” Pete paused watching Charlie. “What are you doing?”

Charlie has unwrapped the glass in the bathroom, tossed the towel on the bureau and began to un make the bed. “I’m humanizing the place Pete excessive order gets to me...I hope you don’t mind, especially stationary order.”

“Oh,” Pete drops his head down gradually toward his shoulder following a paintings imagined progress of a sinking galleon. Walking toward the bathroom Pete keeps his eyes on the sinking ship. “Charlie did anyone ever ask you if you were

neurotic?”

“Ask...? Actually Pete they don’t ask they more like assigns. Sometimes they don’t even tell you what they’ve given you. They go ahead and give you a choice disease.”

We can hear laughter from the bathroom over a running faucet. Pete responds, but the only word we can hear is “hell...”

Charlie adds to himself examining his unshaven face in the small mirror. “Actually neurotic would be an improvement even though I don’t know what it means.”

Pete’s humming something Mozart maybe, the bathroom door opens Pete steps out ahead of a rush of steam. Charlie backs up looking around Peter’s shoulder, appreciating Pete’s performance art. A face one eye winking. Toilet paper eyebrows. A shaving cream reddish mustache peppered with shavings from Peter’s own beard. A cascading white beard. Punctuated with half tooth picks. Collapsing into the saddening expression of itself.

“Pete is there such a thing as temporary art, its nice becoming memory while you watch...fading memory right?”

Pete’s fallen unto one of the beds, bouncing once. “Pete I’m going to meditate maybe.” Charlie sits down on a cushioned chair. He falls back dropping his hands on his lap.

“What did you just say Charlie?”

“I’m saying thank you Marion....Marion’s a woman who helped me. Special Marion Lucas...”Charlie’s answer disappears into itself. A glimpse of the awed silence. A few minutes pass Charlie shift to another scene: Jimmy Fabrizo takes a pass from Donny Cloud. Andy Kydes is going to score .If Tony Signor doesn’t end the play forward. Andy gets around Jim Copeland, the ball flies. Tyler Lamar our all state goalie. Steals the ball from its own trajectory.. Charlie smiles. Wonderfully... Were we playing Staples? Charlie explains to himself. And waits for more. Reality intrudes. Jimmy Fabrizo was killed by mortar. Tony Signor went back for a second tour of duty, a green beret. Tyler a paratrooper. Jim Copeland shot. All of us in Vietnam. Coach King joined the National Guard. And offered Charlie a chance to join. Charlie turned down the deferment. For twenty years the only dreams of life and pride, the soccer games, the guys. One

friendship one team. The green grass the ball bouncing against the cheers. And Elenita. Charlie's mother and father at each game. Some survived? Charlie's lips barely touch the sentence. Charlie's own face is changed. Wondering about himself. "If you dream of me tonight will you let me know if I had a good time." The thought ends with Pete's mild snoring. Three steps the last one onto the bed without the usual hesitation. Examining the bed wondering about sleep. He closes his eyes, afraid of forgetting. Was... "Seven Coins in a Fountain." the theme of the high school prom. Lost quietly. Lovingly in high school Charlie sleeps. He slept surrendering existence.... Both friends slept until the moon delivered the stars to Manhattan. Charlie is waking. And will notice Peter sitting slumped over on the corner of his bed. "Marion introduced me to God personally Pete..." Charlie collapses below the level of his shoulders.

"You woke me up?" Peter groans.

"How did I do that??"

"You were talking in your sleep." Pete is stretching his arms forward.

"I don't talk in my sleep? I laugh Marion told me" Charlie looks around uncertain of what he's searching for. "Pete I should...forget it..." Charlie is yawning. Wondering when his mouth is going to come down. Charlie says to himself. "Sleep is good if you're not awake..."

"We'd better be hungry Pete its night outside." Pete pushes his foot into the boot. Charlie tries unsuccessfully to whip lash himself out of bed. Half a roll onto his other hip. And sits up. "What did I say when I was asleep?"

"Wayne I think whose Wayne...?"

"Oh wow Wayne..."

"Who's Wayne Charlie?"

"Wayne's a real nice guy who's no longer dead, I mean alive. Wayne somehow killed himself alone. I don't know. It's too bad Wayne." Charlie shakes his head. And stares at a hole in the carpet. "I wouldn't want to die unnecessarily Pete."

"Don't worry about your friend Charlie he moved to a better neighborhood?"

"We liked Wayne a lot at the VA. Why do nice people kill themselves?"

"Is that what happened?"

"Yeah alone..." Charlie doesn't complete the thought."

“Without death you can’t have life. “Pete offers absentmindedly searching around the room.

“Pete you know what a riddle is?”

“You told me a question with a riddle I mean an answer.”

“How come Pete I forgot I told you and you didn’t when it’s the same answer?”

“What are you doing Pete?”

“I’m looking-”

“For what?”

“I don’t know maybe just practicing.... There it is.”

Pete stops and turns to Charlie. “Charlie let’s remind ourselves were in New York, it can get extreme.”

“I’m not going to talk to anyone except you Pete. We should be o.k. Pete if there’s no time? Do you think time and death are interchangeable?”

Seemingly without decision they started for the partially opened door.

“Let’s leave time alone Pete?”

“What did I say Charlie? We die in space not in time? No the other way.

“Wow Pete here’s a good one. “Infinity is inescapably continues...what escape is death. You get it Pete?”

“If we’ve screwed up life we’ve we screwed up death...”

“Well not all of us-”

“Sure all of us ok not all of us... We later everything in time including turning death into killing.”

“Killing and dieing sure.....” The two friends are moving along. “Pete what did you just say before what if we forget?”

“The interesting thing about forgetting is that you can’t prove you forgot.”

“Hoch Pete.” The travelers take each step down together with a thump, Charlie four inches shorter than Pete.

“Were cooken Charlie...”

Charlie’s waits to interrupt. And doesn’t. “Don’t forget Eternal Pete. But Pete we should lower our voices. I mean implications we might be asking too much of thinking?”

“Implications?” Pete glances at his friend, misses a step before returning to the shared

rhythmn.

“Jesus Pete there’s no death what happens to the second coming deal.” Both friends stop, Peter’s hand is balanced on Charlie’s shoulder. “It’s the spherical Jesus the Light indistinguishable Buddha, Krishna and Mohammed...”

(Charlie is impressed). But what does spherical mean?

“Well ask them at the bar if they have a dictionary. Right?”

“Pete like I’ve been sayen churches are the only institution from which we don’t graduate, it’s beyond incredible. We’ve got to be careful Pete like you-”

“Why were we talking to loud-?”

Pete responds to his own concern. “You know what the Bible says Charlie?”

“Pete is their anything the Bible doesn’t say?”

Pete laughs warmly both turning to take another flight of stairs. “You know what I read the other day (Peter nods his head upwards) I read that Jesus never heard the word Christian while he was alive.”

“I bet he’s tired of being crucified two thousand years Pete. I told a priest person once I’d like to break into his church someday and put some band aides on Jesus...”

“What he say?”

“I think he went into slow motion. Father Paul told me when I asked him about locken the church, he said they used to keep the church open until they got some threats from an arsonist. I didn’t say Pete because I thought later- what you want the arsonist lose amongst your parishioners. An arsonist belongs in church right Pete where else? Where somebody can talk to him plus everything can burn from the outside in which is worse if you’re inside. Am I missing something Pete?”

“How about prison Charlie?”

“Well his first technically he’s not an arsonist more like an impending available arsonist. Speaking of arsonists Pete I could use a hamburger. Pete you know I finally figured out why they close Churches, Temples, and Synagogues after the Sunday deal...To keep the people out.”

Walking into the lobby Peter might not have heard. “Charlie you know what the anagram of the Rapture is...

The two searchers have walked past the front desk. About to exit into the

darkness.

“You notice Charlie people are always sayen they exited into the darkness it should be entered?”

“Pete you know what that nice Carl Sagan said in his Cosmos TV show...?”

“I liked it when Sagan said ‘we are all born of star stuff activity.’”

“Pete do you know to understand what the word proceed means?” Charlie is squeezing Pete’s arm. “Be careful Pete we’re entering the bar. There people here.” Both friends into to the dimly lit darkness of the Snow White. They raised a hip onto a stool. Charlie needed a second effort.

Pete rested his elbow lightly on the padded mahogany bar. “Proceeding? Charlie well you know words pre date the planet earth or we would be able to experience them. Extra terrestrials ah? How about God?”

“How about Santa Clause?” Pete adds stopping Charlie in mid breath.

“Right that’s a stall.” Charlie finishes his breath.

“Well maybe not Pete all that we do is partial and incomplete the same as displaced. And that includes knowledge if... our knowledge wasn’t incomplete and partial to itself we wouldn’t be able to have progress. If that’s-”

“Of course were-”

“Guys what are you haven?” A short heavily shouldered bartender has appeared.

“A Heineken a club sandwich with fries?” Pete answers

“Me to please the same except in place of the Heineken a half diet coke or Pepsi and half regular if that’s possible? Oh with less than extra ice”

The bartender nods. And adds. ”You got it...”

“Pete let’s not talk about time while were waiting for our food...”

“Sure?” Peter lights a cigarette.

“I somehow thought you stopped smoking Pete?”

“I was just...”

“Pete you wanna hear a good one from Mark Twain I mean I took this one personally..?”

“Go for it...”

“Right Mark Twain said are you ready for this.... Maybe on behalf of fat people, I



don't know anyway... 'Did you ever see a fat man leading a riot.?' Several in the bar including Peter are laughing. "I like it Pete right, until you know what my heroic buddy Richard said to me...o he's not leading a riot he's in the back trying to catch up." Charlie shakes his head remembering.

"Charlie what were you sayen about...proceeding?"

"Nothen just that I can't figure it own, you know, the purpose or the process of the word. How it's possible. What does it mean how can somethen be proceeding. What does it go past you? Can a word be proceeding if your not? What's with this proceeding deal? How can something be proceeding if you don't know where its goen to end up? Can you stop the proceeding? It baffles me Pete."

The bartender placed the beer, the pop and a bag of pretzels between the two friends.

Pete takes a gulp and wipes the suds from his mouth. "I bet you guys get into this kind of stuff in mental hospitals?"

"You know Pete when I started this insanity...I'll finish that thought later."

"Pete intuition deal, I came up with a definition for...how did that go. Right intuition is like faith except with none of the heavy lifting."

Peter tips the mug a small amount of beer suds drips down his chin.

"Who knows? Strange thing Pete were probably not qualified to have these thoughts, I'm medicated against myself. And you're like a volunteer self induced."

Charlie continues between sips of his soda. "I mean I'm unwelcome pretty much. And I don't even know where." While talking Charlie is looking around. Slowly absent mindedly. "Pete this would be a depressing place to be murdered."

"Especially if you're not the victim." Pete politely orders another beer.

"Damn I'm almost laughing depleted I just had a thought. But there's another one I want to catch up you just said.... No first the logic one. Are you ready?" (Peter nods his smile feeling the beer). "Here it is accepting that God created everything how can your Mom and Dad have you as their baby isn't that more than the predetermined everything?"

The bartender arrives," Your foods guys."

"What?" Charlie interrupts himself. What wasn't I goen to say." Charlie pushes his wire rim glasses back up his nose. "Just what you said made me think of my Mom

and Pop, they were like at a night club in Mexico and my father says-he comes up with a joke right... the next time I hear this band I hope I'm dead. And my mother antis up right away immediately - I hope I die before you do. Which is pretty good spontaneous stuff. But you know what next time out my father took credit for the good line. I still can't believe that and in the same intentional family." Charlie tries to stare away the injustice.

"Is that it your Dad ripped off your Mom's punch line?"

"Well yeah o.k. sure it's not a tragedy, but what is it in public no less."

Peter shrugs. "Pete I gotta say for every beer you have the chances of us getten to Philadelphia become less. You know how it goes the only way your not goen to have one beer is if you don't have any. And you've already had what two almost completely."

"I'm ok Charlie don't worry. I'm touch..."

"You're not tough Pete your nice. I learned in Vietnam tough is not having to be tough. Pacifism seems funny don't you think?"

"I'm listen Charlie have at it?"

Charlie tightness his eyes around his first few words. "Well it's like this....A woman that comes into my living room. I picked a woman for the favorable companionship. Pete I think your drinken is affecting my possible clarity. Anyway I can't convince this nice enough lady. She wants to kill me with an available gun. I'm in trouble. Now Pete I think in a situation like that its ok to become deceptive. Even maybe threaten her marriage but nothen works. And even though it's my fantasy she's still. (Charlie chuckles at his won observation). Nothen work....Now I'm a pacifist I toss my arms to either side... And I say shoot me, maybe. Anyway she does three times. I'm on the way down the carpet. You see it doesn't matter Pete if it's me or you or the bartender... the last available person we see is a woman we encouraged to be a murderess. And what's that supposed to be absence of violence. But if it was real obvious you can't disarm her. It's real simple...suicide is a lesser burden to God than murder. I'll kill myself and leave a suicide note to exonerate her. It's exonerated right?" (Pete nods). Of course she's interested. Why wouldn't she be? We agree on letting go of my wrists, wow that's a one sentence Freudian slip I meant I meant slitting my wrists. And you know what Pete?"

"What Charlie?" Pete holds back his smile.

“I finish with a damn laugh. I mean we half fill the tub with hot water. The lady gets me a piece of a paper and a pencil. I sit down stretch my sleeves getting ready for a better than average suicide note and you know what Pete? She starts talken. Rosie my lovely alleged dog is watching me maybe concerned. I can’t believe it. What are you doen, I say.? She says. I’m dictating your suicide note. I say the hell you are this is my fantasy.”

Charlie waits Peter turns his head to either side laughing mildly. “Charlie that took too long.”

“Your tellen me, you can’t rush life and death.”

“Why Charlie do you really think suicide is better than murder.” Pete bates his friend. “And you’re still in the bathtub bleeding her leaves early you can still escape with your life.”

“ That’s right I didn’t think of that. Escape with your life I like that one. Sure suicide is better than murder. I mean even practical. Your dead anyway. But if she murders you. It get crowded. The jury of where are my peers are all upset. The judge... Your family Mom coming to see you at death row. Forget death rowed Pete lets just make it prison. Pete murder always makes me hungry, especially mine.” Charlie signs.

While listening Pete had taken a note pad and pencil. He makes one more change. And underlines two sentences. “Charles you know what the anagram for John Fitzgerald Kennedy is, actually two?” (Charlie hurries an eager ‘what?’). Peter answers in a flat even voice. “John Fitzgerald Kennedy was killed by a Don.”

“Hell be damned Pete that’s one of the crazy theories.”

“Any Marilyn Monroe several days before she died she was going to hold a news conference.”

“You don’t want to make news if you already are. I don’t know Pete? Let’s not do Marilyn Monroe’s anagram?”

“Tell me about it?”

“One more time. The holiest words I know Pete I don’t know God knows. Did I get it right, yeah...? Pete you know why Baptists don’t have sex standing up? Maybe there should be a delay. I don’t mean to be unfriendly...”

“Go ahead Charlie tell me?”

The words seem to encircle Charlie's anticipating smile. "Because it might lead to dancen." Both friends shake their heads laughing. Charlie is covering his mouth with a cupped hand. "Not that I have anything about Baptists even if I did I wouldn't. Pete I wonder why the disease people say I have trouble concentrating I just concentrate on what I want, right?"

"Right on... You want to hear a great one from Rodney Dangerfield." Charlie nods holding up a thumbs up. "Old Rodney says I don't get no respect, right? Even as a kid I didn't get no respect. The kids in the neighborhood would play hidden go seek. And nobody would come looken for me."

Pete laughs under his breath. Charlie's one laugh diminishing into a cough. "That's a classic Pete. The missionary position." Charlie adds. Neither friend is troubled by the non sequiter. "Pete I've got another one a moment of humor from Henry Youngman on the Johnny Carson Show. I mean when I heard this one I almost turned myself in. Are you ready?" (Pete raises and drops his eye brows against his sad-gentle smile). "A husband, right... the husband right finally goes up to his wife. And asks her stuttering a little." Honey how come you never tell me when you reach orgasm." She says outright not waiten.... "You're never around."

Peter is still laughing. The bartender leaning over the sink wishes he wasn't laughing. One older gentleman is covering his face. The two women are laughing, their heads raised to the ceiling. Charlie's hand is on Pete's shoulder. "I wish I could laugh with you Pete. But I already got my full turn on this one...."

Pete bites into his sandwich. "Good grub Charlie thanks I've got enough for the tip..."

"Did one of us thank the bartender for the food Pete we might have been lost in thinken out loud or laughen?"

"I thanked him..."

"What did you say?"

Both friends continue their meal as the night continues its turn around them. And the rest of us. Charlie's manner of eating a study of efficiency. And assault. He slaps his hands over the plate. "You know what just dawned on me? No I'll get to that thought later. Pete because you're smarter with approved for intelligence-"

Pete has tried twice, finally interrupts Charlie. “What the hell does approved for intelligence mean -?”

“You know communicable-”

“Come on gimme a break communicable like a (Pete interrupts himself ordering another beer)...where was I?”

“I was almost joking maybe sharen is a better word. They say we only use five percent of their intelligence Pete?”

Pete’s laugh doesn’t get passed his chest thinking a second time of Charlie’s use of language. . “Imagine if we used more than ten percent you know what that means?”

“What?” Charlie waits. “Oh God your right ten might be too much (Charlie looks around)... a reduction might help?”

“Pete did I tell you about Reverend Sato from Hiroshima I liked him....”

Peter’s attention fades from the conversation

Charlie is looking at rotating fan. He’s wandered into a place of silence. Usually sponsored by fatigue. Peter is examining the lighting in the bar. Thinking actually the small wooded room is illuminated by darkness. The warm smell of alcohol flows. Other patrons drinking getting away from themselves. The bartender watches nothing. Weighted down by his job. Charlie is stares at a rotating fan in Saigon. Two enter the bar. A well groomed man in his fifties whispers in the direction of the erratic motion of a pretty woman. She reacts still angry from an earlier conversation. The bar glows reflecting . Softly the colored bottles off the mirror. Peter is tracking the flight of two flies. A man appears. Stops. Slowly canvassing. The bar continues its sad purpose. People unhappy in their anger. Aware. Suspicious of life.. Sad eyes lost to the past. Neglectfully contended. The future an impending modest interruption.

“Pete it’s horrible I can’t take it I’m going up.”

“No well get kicked out of here. Plus you can’t separate them.” Charlie sits back Pete hesitates before taking his hand from Charlie’s forearm.

“Damn Pete it’s necrophilia unregulated...” Charlie turns his closed eyes away.

“Flies don’t get into that stuff. Maybe he’s trying to resuscitate her?”

Not impressed with his first explanation Peter adds. “Come on who wants to have sex while stuck on fly paper-”

“You don’t know their alleged flies right, the one on top is trying to extricate his buddy you really thinks so Pete?”

“You might be right Pete. I would have done more damage tryen to help it could have been a disaster... or worse”

“Exactly also flies have extremely premature orgasms they would have been through by now?”

“Where’d you get that?”

“I read it in a book ‘My Favorite Orgasms’ by a dude named Stratel....”

“Your kidden?”

“Yes...”

Charlie looks back up. “Fly paper is a tough way to go.”The well groomed man is trying to follow the trajectory of Charlie’s eyes. Charlie says to himself. “There’s gotta be a better way to end your life than dien.” Energized Charlie focuses on his friend. “Pete why don’t you drink those non alcoholic beers instead. And rely on your imagination for the defect. You wouldn’t have to drink as much. And...?”

“Charlie did anyone ever tell you talk too much?”

“Quite a few people actually Pete. But one at a time which helps. My favorite one was this incredible nurse person, Kathleen. She just looked at me outright out of nowhere right she says Charlie you talk too much. And I said Kathleen you listen too much?”

“Another imaginary one?”

“Not really fortunately. Don’t you have any imagination friends Pete or-”

“Nah I have enough trouble with blood flesh and-”

“You should try a few imaginary ones Pete. Their more cooperative and their more apt to leave when you want them to.” Charlie laughs to himself. “And they always pay you back when they borrow money. Well not always.” Charlie laughs again this time with Peter.

“Pete wouldn it be interesting if people were different colors?”

“Don’t look twice Charlie they are...”

“Right right... Well? I don’t know exactly what I meant? Pete I’m sayen a prayer the two flies stopped moven. I guess he stayed with her to the end.” Charlie sighs.

And blows out his next breathe as if he were whistling.

“Fly paper is a touch way to go, I hope at least it’s scented in their favor that’s not asking too much. I wonder why she stayed.

Peter gulps his beer, life continues. “Charlie remember that company we were goen to start ‘designer scars’”

“Sure Pete it was one of our best companies...family scars, his and hers, sports scars, remember genital scars that one I don’t-”

“Remember update your scars, Catholic scars, the mal functioning zipper scars ...voting booth scars.”

“I don’t remember that one?”

“That ones current to now Charlie.”

“Current to now Pete?” Peter nods. “Pete its interesting how more people more likely collapse in their front lawns than the backs? Did we already have this conversation It’s hard for me to catch up to you if-. ” Charlie turns around defensively, feeling someone at his back.

Startled a man introduces himself. Cautious then friendly. “Hi my name is Julio. Where you guys from?”

“Ah... hi my name is Charlie this is Pete.” Julio accepts Charlie’s hand shake. “My friend Pete and I are goen to Philadelphia.” Pete’s salutes with one finger. “Hopefully? Julio do you happen to know how to get to Philadelphia from here Julio?”

“No I gotta cousin there. But you can get a map shouldn’t’ be too hard...”

“Really that’s pretty good thank you Julio. If you don’t mind my asking were you born here? Charlie turns toward Pete. “Do you have to be a citizen from somewhere?”

“If you want to be from somewhere.” Peter answers.

“I was born in Brooklyn my two brothers they were born in Puerto Rico. Glancing at Julio’s black leather pants Charlie asks. “Julio do you happen to know where there’s a gas station nearby that might have a map.”

Peter interjects. “Charlie don’t worry if we don’t get to Philadelphia-”

“Damn Pete how can you give up before we fail?”

And like a dream uncertain of its completion the bar persists. Heaving

throbbing spasms. Customers inhaling each others lives. Smoke curling against itself. Unintended patience. The old man waits. She won't arrive. A couple rises. Smiling from habit. Suspicious eyes follow another couple. A woman enters side steps inside. The old man. The young man. Alone...approaching. The well groomed one. The pretty one. Separate not apart. Smoke wanders over to the next table. Sure of itself like an old dog sniffing for a place to urinate. Words... Patrons sit like wax impressions of themselves. Not unlike the patrons of a hundred and fifty years ago, then an opium parlor. Two black lovers joust for advantage, they don't want. Thinking of past lovers. Neglected regrets. A theater couple appears. Each the ornament of the other They turn, leave. The Snow White bar and her customers. Eyes looking for a place to nest their disappointment. The night's lust. The Juke Box churns. "Impossible dream." The old man's left... Another pushes herself from the table. And doesn't leave. Doesn't stay. This floundering ship. Torrent seas dreams reprieve...

Twenty minutes had elapsed. Julio, Charlie and Pete had continued their conversation. A quick change of tone in Julio's voice. Draws Charlie's attention before he heard the entire invitation.

"Julio you gotta be kidded that's most ridiculous no its-"

"No Charlie man I'm tellen you right...really."

Charlie turns to Pete in disbelief. "Pete this is excessive." Charlie swivels around back to Julio. Let me try to understand in case I already-"

"You heard me right man."

"Don't be too sure Julio did you just invite Peter and me to your S and M date?"

Pete again tries to reassure Charlie.

"Pete no were talken about two people who might not even know each other flag latten each other on purpose." Charlie turns to Julio as a self conscious student might a teacher-asking. "The word is flagellating isn't it?"

"Is one of dem-"

Peter asks. "Charlie's how's that worse than Vietnam?"

"Exactly Pete their related. Pete I'm not even too sure which is the S and which is the M..."

Julio not wanting to understand adds. "Charlie I tell you man you will like this



lady-”

“A woman for Gods sakes who said anything about a women. God Pete all this and without one single omen?” Charlie turns away and protests an incomplete sentence to himself.

“Come on Charlie.” Peter implores as Julio slides off the bar stool. “Nobody gets hurt it’s a victimless crime.”

“All that means Pete the victim thing is shared. It’s multiplied not even added. Pete you can’t have a victimless crime even if your alone remembering.”

“Wait for us Julio,” Peter takes Charlie aside. “If you feel that way Charlie maybe you can help one or both partners, it’s a new experience.”

“They call them partners? Charlie reached for his wallet. Charlie has decided by not deciding. The bartender stepped though his grin whistling. Charlie paid the tab. Pete left a tip. Julio had already paid. Trying not to make any eye contact with anyone Charlie bumped into a table and two chairs. Pete is waiting at the door. A strange moment ...briefly the three seemed to take the bar with them. They’ve exited. The bar thanks them for their sacrifice. Outside the colder air. Reassures. Darkness breathing. Two smiles. The stars. Renewed purpose. Another chance.

Both friends looking across the street, Charlie still complaining. “Pete you and the beers you drunk are awfully quiet?”

“Were going to be o.k. Charlie I promise.”

“I don’t know Pete this S and M....Well maybe at least well have somethen to recover from...”

The three jump over a glimmering puddle into the street, Julio amiably asking. “Did you use any drugs in Vietnam Charlie I heard -”

“Only the drugs the doctor gave me.”

“A doctor gave da soldiers drugs your kidden me?”

“No well not to everyone. But they should of.” Charlie jumps onto the sidewalk. He hesitates before cautiously offering. “Nothen personal Julio I’m sure you have a well intended reason for your perversions. But how long have you been doen this S and M not as a kid?”

“No kids can’t do this stuff you know dat?”

Charlie asks himself. "I wonder if S and M is in the Diagnostic Manual."

Julio wants to know. "Whats da Diagnostic Manual?"

"Oh psychiatrists I think mostly get together every few years and decide what interests them..."

"What drugs were you doen in Vietnam Charlie?"

Peter answers for Charlie exaggerating. What truth is complete not a lie waiting to improve. "Julio Charlie's working with the Washington Post right Charlie?"

Charlie inwardly interrupts his own thought to express surprise. Julio speaks first. "No kidden Charlie is dat right?"

"No not working, I'm not sure what it is..." Charlie responds to himself more than Julio.

Peter continues as people recount tragedy minus all the facts, the screams and odors. The words become the antiseptic of a news story gone amuck. "Sure apparently g.i.'s killed in action were being returned to this country their excavated stomach chest cavities filled with pure opiates to finance illegal covert activities by the CIA their-

"No man you tellen me da truth the government-"

"No Julio come on Pete let's not talk about...Julio it's not the government it's not even the CIA some of them. Most of them at the CIA have jobs and families. And go to church on purpose their-"

Peter continues approaching soliloquy. "We were fighting in Laos and Cambodia hiring thousands of eleven year old mercenaries CIA's Air America was doing a million dollar bombing sorties a day, Congress didn't know, Congress provides the funding-"

"So dey used the smack. Damn. An cut it and sold it here. Pete you were in Vietnam?"

"No when I said we I meant the American people."

Julio moves over next to Pete whose putting match to a cigarette. Charlie's looking at his hands, he snuffles and runs the back of a fist against his nose. Charlie hears Julio again in disbelief. "In da bodies man dats-"

Peter explains first glancing away. "There was also a trial in Winston Salem North Carolina front page articles. We haven't been able to find out what happened at the trial.

Eight black Air Force Sergeants right were bringen in coffins full of smack into the country; the papers called it Dead Man's Dope. Maybe it was private enterprise? But the eight dudes had the entire network set up out from Saigon the transshipping point for the golden Triangle. It's unlikely--"

Julio had hesitated-stuttered before volunteering. "You guys should be careful jus because you have freedom of speech doesn't mean nobody's listen?"

Charlie and Pete look at each other, Julio adds. "You gotta be careful you hear wha I'm sayen? How many guys you got helpen you?"

"How many doesn't help...." Charlie tries to focus on his next thought. "One guy whose helpen Emile De Antonio he's like a movie director and writer."

Peter helps Charlie out. "DeAntonio was the only American director put on President Nixon's enemy list, he wrote and directed Rush to Judgment on the Kennedy assassination, Point of Order on McCarthyism... He was nominated for an academy award on the war in Vietnam, what was it, right The year of the pig.... Anyway De met with a CIA operative who was worken at the United Nations and found out the whole operation was called 'The Long Silver Train...'"

No more was said that could be heard. The three formed into a huddle of five. Darkness and desperate memories the other two attending. Their eyes cast down. Their lips moved to the dread fascination. Breathing steam rising over their heads like smoke from a fire. The unheard whispers gave way to quiet. The near of silence evoked an air of protection. It seemed irrationally the conversation afforded protection from the evil evoked. Sincerity transcends the truth? Charlie's voice rose from the quiet. Out of context and strangely not. Sound of words whose flesh tempered a pain unredeemable. "They took advantage of u s Pete the deal was dead... dead is done." The last six-seven words repeated. Time had given up on the three. And returned... "Were o.k.?" Some one said. Not an assurance. Something relevant and indefinable. Then Peter said as if from a distant interval. "What are you doing Charlie?"

Charlie told the truth the truth told him. "Nothen Pete I'm just waiting." (Adding vaguely) words non one heard.

The three walked. As choice allows direction. They walked bent into the night. Faces glowing with wet. Nowhere to go already arrived. The soft rain their labored

silence. Desperation proportionate to the unassisted value of their lives. They walked from the past. The present already gone.

Finally a human sound, Julio intoned. "I wish there was a God."

Startled Charlie's distracted childishly demanded. "What do you mean what's happened to God?" The fear waits for silence's favor.

Finally Pete is relieved to be laughing. Julio hesitates confused by his culpability. Now the loud breath of a smile. Then again walking. They walked. The easy rain falling. The three less the silence of themselves.

They stopped. Pete and Charlie following Julio's gaze. "Julio," Charlie asked. "Have you heard of the Ploughshare Eight?"

"Yeah the dudes and the nun that broke into the General Electric plant--"

"What's I mean that's incredible you know. I thought that been kept secret from people? How's you hear about--"

"My cousin was in jail with dem the same cell block is like a coincidence?"

"Wow I like those what was your cousin in prison for Julio?" Charlie asks.

"I don't know Charlie I think it was jus his turn--"

Julio adds. "Anyway what I was goen to say before is we are pretty much here."

"Here?" Both Charlie and Pete ask suggesting two different locations. Both drawing their heads back until they are reading the large neon sign, GW Building. God's world Charlie thinks.

"We got ourselves an S and M date?"

"It's funny ah Pete you can't libel the dead you can only kill them?"

The three have already negotiated half the steps leading to the encircling glass door. Julio is concerned. "Charlie you look like your going to puke?"

"No it's just me I'm breathen. Pete it's probably already not too late to change your mind I'm get the foreboding thing..."

"Were trucken Charlie don't worry?" Julio then Pete and Charlie rotate into the marbled building.

"I'm worried Pete but I'm glad I just saw an elevator. I wouldn't want to die of an unnecessary heart attach on the way to an unscheduled S and M date on the top floor."

"How do you know it's the top floor?" The elevator door closes jumps once.

Before Charlie answers.

“Strange things like mental hospitals are always on the top floor Pete people don’t want to pass themselves on the way down.”

Peter asks. “Julio are we going to the top floor?”

“Yeah man top floor man.”

Peter’s eyes run a half circle around the elevator.

“I hope were not supposed to participate?” Charlie asks everyone. Peter’s smile doesn’t reach his lips.

“Don worry about it man oh you goen to go paranoid.”

“Nothen wrong with paranoid Julio if you know the people involved.” The elevator stopped bouncing back against its own weight. Charlie felt the pressure up his nose. Pete rounded his shoulders. The elevator door opened stopping once before completing the open space.

“Don worry you guys goen to have a good time believe me.” Peter and Charlie leaned their heads one foot past the metal door and looked down the small corridor in opposite directions. Peter looked past pink marble striated walls to the ceiling and bumped into Charlie’s eyebrows coming down.

“I feel Pete like I just walked into an Aztec Temples?” Charlie bumped into Peter. Both went up on their toes to reclaim some balance.

“Pete did you hear that?”

“Guys do wha I do like dis...” Julio has positioned himself in front of a two foot square metal cut indented into the wall, centered in the enclosed area is an illuminated cut out of a human hand. Charlie thinks the hand looks frightened. Spread out in all directions. Julio placed his hand over the cut out urging his quests to do the same. Peter electronically printed himself as Julio stepped past one of two double doors-leaving the door open several feet. Unexpectedly the hands glow increased, reaching for Peter’s sleeve Charlie step’s retreat. Pete is standing sideways between the two doors. Charlie holds his breathe. The room depressed ten feet below where they are standing is filled with the ripe sweet scent of marijuana. The dark smoke seems to be levitating the vague images, Pete and Charlie are trying to decipher. Dimly lit computers. The smoke clears away around the swush of a cape. Julio’s grin disappears and reappears behind the

airborne cape.

Charlie is staring at eight computer technicians. "Pete their all wearing vampire capes."

"Puerto Ricans in vampire capes?" Peter adds amazed with the image.

Julio calls up from below. "Well what do you guys think of ma S an M date?" He strokes a computer terminal. Then in one motion Julio disappears behind another swing of the tape. Charlie was leaning forward squinting at Julio's teeth. Peter had held up the pinch of two fingers suggesting more time.

"Pete come out." Charlie insists. Peter resists until both friends are back outside. "Pete I'm afraid this doesn't make enough sense not to make any sense."

"Calm down Charlie were already-"

"Come on Pete trust me let's get out of here. While were still here?"

"Charlie lay back paranoid isn't your style."

"There it is the paranoid deal again. Pete let me tell you (Charlie looks at the glowing hand) all paranoid usually means is there's more to come." Charlie takes half a step back further from the smoke escaping into the hallway.

"Charlie this is getting interesting it really is...."Peter's eyes completed his thought more than the language.

"Come on Pete try some available logic, like two minutes o.k. one." Charlie's thumb and forefinger began chasing the other in a frantic circle.

Peter pointed at the wall clock with his face- insisting. "Go for it Charlie two minutes do your thing."

Charlie is glaring at his own his shoes. "Your two minutes or mine," he said to himself. Raising his face to Pete's eyes the veteran began. "I'm goen to assume you'll listen. Number one forget counting. It's like this Julio invited us here for a regrettable S and M situation, right? (Peter nodded). "What after or before one of us told Julio about the Vietnam heroin deal?"

"Before what's your point you're using up valuable time?"

"Not as valuable as it used to be, where was I right...Pete please don't interrupt unless either of us raise two fingers. Right... before....But Julio didn't tell us where we were goen. And who's in the S and M date. And where's is it-"

“So what are you saying?”

“I’m saying what I said Pete. O.K. sure all my friends were once strangers and Julio is a nice guy with a mustache and all. And then what our of no where except here....” Charlie shoves both hands dramatically in one direction. “And what do we have instead a suspicious illuminating ill fitting hand and eight Puerto Rican vampires smoking a lot of marijuana probably without permission from somebody?”

Peter is more cautious. “So they guy has a sense of humor?”

“And if he doesn’t or does and it’s still not the deal offered, come on Pete Julio get’s finger printed how come you and me had to.... (Pete agrees). “ And what to enter a marijuana festival with computer organized vampires?”

“The door wouldn’t open unless we were printed its security that’s-”

“But the door stayed open after Julio printed himself Pete. And instead of the crazy S and M deal after we started taken about Nam heroin we end up with what? Come on Pete you don’t give your finger prints to a stranger its bad enough when the cops take them and then keep the damn things.”

“You gave up your prints?” (Charlie shook his head no). “Its policy right?”

“Policy isn’t one of my favorite words. Like Louie says we should book.”

“Charlie for Christ sakes stop touching your face your maken me nervous. You’re probably wrong?”

“You know what that mean’s? Of course I might be wrong it could be a lot worse.”

“What?”

“It might be right. Pete I’m sayen were in trouble got left behind a little while ago. Maybe it’s all a lie. But these are not people you want to put in a postio0n of denyen a lie. Pete if these people decide to kill you, they’ll kill you in your least preferred way?”

Pete laughed once the second time out of fear. “Come on how do they find out your least-”

“They interview you Pete how do you think these people find each other. There crazy Pete. Charlie whispers. Pete what’s your least preferred way of dien?”

“Fine Charlie well talk about it downstairs. How did we end up in the elevator?”

“Nudges.... Pete consider one more thing in an S and M situation you might have

ended up on the wrong sided. I'm talken backwards involuntarily."

"What me getten raped forget it."

"Pete I'm probably more scared for you. You've got one of those s personalities that get's attracted on short notice to adverse things." The elevator stopped with a thump. Peter and Charlie walked shoulder's bumping.

"I hope your satisfied were out here in the drizzle. I think we should go back?"

"Sure if we go back they'll recognize you."

"What?"

"Why wouldn't they if it suits them. If they grab us Pete I might get covered with my available insanity. All you've got what I'm sayen is this isn't a urine sample situation. And remember you get smart under pressure that doesn't work to good around shared violence. Especially when you're the ones that's supposed to be shared..."

"I could use another beer?" Both friends start walking away.

"I'd like to go visit Laurel's grave Laurels the skinny one right?"

"What instead of goen to Philadelphia?"

"No both Pete but first I need some rest I'm tired from the sleep."

The two friends walked into the waiting night. They walked talking about their past... Strangely the two friends did not seem to be aware they were talking about the past. Cars drove bye. The hush of tires against the rain soaked asphalt. A car radio tosses out a rock lyric, "So ya think you're alive..." Walking nowhere already arrived. Still walking. Content with their friendship enough of life for the night. The stars bore witness. A half moon expanding. Sadly Charlie lifted his eyes, Pete was their waiting. "I'm your buddy Charlie" Charlie nodded. And took a long step over a puddle. "Me to sometimes Pete. But I'm your friend for sure always." Deeper further into the night closer to themselves they walked. Time less time's restraint... How long before one said. "Life is too much ah?"

The two night soldiers settled for a tired smile. Watching the pavement, they walked away approaching nowhere to go.

\* \* \* \*



Heated air, the cities memories made of steam's hot smoke rose from the ancient gutters, the two friends stood near each other, weighted down against a street light that's drawn the attention of a solitary bug...the three spoke the silent witness of good intentions, only the occasion of mild laughter suggested the grit of their friendship. The airborne neighbor stopped twice to watch the two strangers with concern. God's eyes are many. Hope is only one. Rested, exhausted, fed, lost as found, medicated by the pharmacy of uncertain choice, loved and neglected...the eternal soldiers of fading youth would continue their journey. Hope would remain like the evaporating odor on a cork. Alive enough of good that they were not servants to anguish. Lost yes not bitter they were in New York on their way to Philadelphia to warn the world of the unholy gathering, a mushroom so adverse to life.... A drug addict escorting a psychotic no one's hero's but God's. Our limiting song not there's. The same taxi driver passed by the stationary wanderers, more the loose change of curiosity than suspicion. He's gone. Curiosity was as much concern as a dragon city would allow. Cities desperately creating their own prayers need... The city that night. How many handshakes, how much love beyond obliging bodies, how many victims. How many thoughts held well by life's good reason, God's sound music heard. All sharing their perpendicular souls against time bought bodies while God's glorious planet Heaven waits the final turn. And so be so not so at all.

Soldiers tired on their feet are souls well rested. What strange creatures are we that occasionally we must be deaf to ourselves that we might listen to others? What lyrics deaf by mute? The two friends parted company, Pete a former classmate in Greenwich Village. Charlie rests against a bed as good as any place to wrestle spirit against flesh. Both one way not the other, allowing the torrent winds of Karma.... Karma does. Choice assails. God wait's for us while we wait for love. And suspicions fester be by bargain's fear easily wrought. As merriments writ allows and opportunity invites, before Pete and Charlie parted they completed a song, a news flash. Laughing they sang leaving more of the night behind the day approaching. Under the street light dancing they sang tap dancing in the rain. "The Devil is dead, the autopsy read, the Devil is dead....Fell in love with a cocktail waitress. The Devil is dead a burrito in bed. The autopsy read. Why persist by love they do it without me."

Hearing rumors of love, stepping to the night light (the stars own memory) blind by dream's allowance-the two travelers walked away seeking... May love be love enough. They were gone. What happened that night? Those of kinder scars might imagine gentler events. Otherwise frightening sounds. Loneliness preferring solitude. Blindness made harvest of vision. Charlie and Pete agreed to meet at nine o'clock in Central Park for breakfast. Practice being one being the other, then gather purpose. And head for Philadelphia. But Peter and Charlie.... Neither made nine by their attendance. By lucks insult Pete left Greenwich Village with less than he had taken. Charlie returned home as he had left by the curiously uncertain probability of himself.

Charlie used to say some are born wise others are born otherwise. Which one still the same not the other. Several days past the near of one week before Pete and Charlie would meet again. A gathering of the friends less friendships purpose. Love none the less. A couple of six packs well shared. Words made better by the sharing, Lili, Noah, David, Dick Owen...all had "broken into" the Eastport Playhouse to perform their lives to an audience of themselves. It would be a serious error to suggest the play had no merit. Here now better attended by your self. The play enfolds. No curtain rising but us.

Life rehearsed the play the same. Untitled except by chance. The artists working words shadow against the fading shade of each other's lives. Lost sincerity revisited. Time holds the space called a stage. Levity and horror preferred to life. The dark stage alight by flashlight. Several candles withering. The flash lights rush erratic lines exposing lively faces licensed by exhaustion. Beer cans the vague eroding limits of recklessness. The performers move.... Flashing Lights stopping to illuminate laughing lost sad faces rarely angry. Eye's discretion camouflaged by drugs. What strange dance is this....By reckless wit, Peter's bountiful imagination, insomnia lit by candle, fatigue, lustful body's odor rising....They all gathered to perform God's prayer on a burgled stage.

Pete tosses his hips off a leathered stool. Cushioned heavily against another's importance. "Strike that it won't work." Words echo Creation on the eighth or was it the ninth day.

Lili interrupts her own thought. And resents the intrusion. "If I can't pay myself who am I supposed to be..."

Pete shines himself and the wounded Lili. "Sweet heart we need a fictional character that might allow direction...?"

Lil turns away from herself. Allen Aryus speaks strongly. Accounting intrudes spreading realities legs apart. "If this thing gets produced what's going to happen to the profits?"

A voice off stage intones. "How do I love thee...." Allen shakes his head stepping into the half circle. Scratching his beard. Watching his slow methodical boots. "Profits important." David says to himself. The play continues allready started begins again.

Lili's face holds the flash light better than her angry hand. The dark blue lips deliver each word. "I still think we need a script?"

Charlie sleeps dismally between two teaser curtains, an awkward fetal position.

"Can somebody give me an answer to my question?" Lil insists, reason's hunger invites.

The audience now the stage. A voice rises. Performer enough. One word taken less as friend than friendship denies. Condemned now hanging legs quivering...life n' death speak the others oracle. "Question?" What more need be said. Intruder confessed. Banished after death. Silence now suffers the quiet. Lil join's Allen's inadequate circle. Harbor's weight: Charlie sleeps dream's forgotten. Light of foot and lofty purpose the stage paces Peter as he sings, "lovers loose change souls lost bargain." Now words. "The play doesn't begin the ending Edith Piaf sings, the second scene a three minute commercial for the play..."

"Wow that's good," some one compels.

"Its happenen," The blessed and mysterious Johnny Bayer sings slapping his flat foot against the stage. Winding the organ with his right hand. And stroking his goatee with laughter. And stroking his right hand.

"Nudity?" Who said as if feeling warmth for the first time.

Charlie Winters sits up against himself. "Nudity," he asks as some people request directions. "I have an idea..." Charlie gets down on all fours. Raises his head shoulder high, up one knee-he rises face blushing red. He smiles a breath a sigh follows. "The play begins with Peter on his knees praying." (Several words partially spoken protest

divinities intrusion). “There’s Pete praying a cigarette dangling from his lips...”

“I like it.” Who speaks again that listens still? What mysterious voice resides.

Several head’s turn with the suddenness of accusation.

Peter explains, announces, “We begin with a stream no a torrent of consciousness.” Peter adds to himself. “A torrent, yes.”

Charlie after closing a yawn. “Ghost without a sheet.” The chase begins. Souls have tongues. “Crucified,” now a woman’s voice. “Madonna and frightened child? “Where...Interred... exhumed...the same...anomaly... tiny bubbles...mama’s arch...probation...umbilical political...dieing witness...father forgiver...Christmas scar tissue-one way decay...brownies...dearly beloved where’s today...fester feisty.... All words now redeemed as forgotten.

Peter claps his hands once. “These players are on strike the play continues.” He winks at Allen whose smile is waiting. Extemporaneous... All attendant except Charlie. Snapping fingers, the other hand free at will Bent over in half dancing. Unaware together. Mati gra. Rain dance. Flash lights like an air raid. Lil’s face tight. Upward eyes closing. Past the ceiling Allen’s eyes rolling back. Coming .... Anguish ecstasy. Noah snaps his fingers. Missing once. Encircles his body... Bent over rising. Next. Stationary movement. Groans sounds. Grunts erotica. Gasp... another now. Johnny Bayer falls. Incrementally. Still falling. Quickly rotating. Dancing .... The horizontal. Two cock roaches escape his last rotation. One turns to look. We all seek explanation.

“We hold it together by narrative.” Lili grimaces.

“Yeah....”Pete agrees. As easily disagreeing. A candle falls. The flame survives, extinguishing.

“It’s an awful idea.”David talks to himself. Angry rising to full height.

“It’s not my fault Mama I didn have a train schedule.”

“But the baby is dead.”

“Is suicide....”

“If the Universe....”

Peter snaps and sings. Eyes bold eyelids closed. “A straight line begins by ending.”

Daddy daddy the fireman broke into the house should I call the police?”

“What’s John’s last name?”

“I’m afraid to die?”

Those last words were heard as silence allows no further word. Confusion a word resides once place. The ripple is complete. The dance stops itself.

Lili’s angry. A groan becomes the portion of a word. Peter stands feet apart. Fists tight at each hip. He exhales. And let’s go. He looks to see quite wonderfully.

“People won’t pay?” Not Allen’s protest...

“They already have...” Allen knows.

Owen Cage threatens reason. “Am I alone on this? Were supposed to be playing ourselves. What’s the point?”

“Exactly.” One of several answers. None enough. Accordingly enough.

“What’s the point?” Lili intones. Simultaneously she and Allen invite. Recenting the harmony, then “Good title for the play...”

Charlie’s on all fours. Looking up sideways. “I prefer...has anyone seen me lately?”

Someone “boo’s”....

“No.” Speaks more than one word. Someone has proof.

Noah is asleep turning to Owen in a dream. Owen listens in the dream. Lil hesitates. Charlie crosses-uncrosses his legs. Bob Player strums the loneliness of a guitar. A slap on the stage. Peter ducked. Lil is laughs. Emily Dickenson lover’s replete. Noah stumbles still asleep.

“This is how the play begins.” Pete explains for the third time. “It’s a one act play. Beginning with the third act. Once the play is complete. We meet on video forty five minutes. One stranger. Two members of the audience. That assembly comes up with the second act or the first or revitalizes the third based on our video conversation. Next performance the video is shown. One ticket gets them two plays.”

Lili is applauding. Charlie’s thumb is up. “Bring your own mother.” Johnny Bayer celebrates. “How does the play end?” Startled Charlie asks. Lili answer’s sliding Emily from her lap. “The play doesn’t end we do.”

“That’s right.” Peter knows. Robin speculates. Noah’s eyes open surprised with their own presence. Those eyes. World’s sees through them. What of God’s love before

expression. The warmer stage. Peter sits. Bent over on the stool. We all listen. Peter reads from one page. His left hand trembling like a frightened bird. "An off stage prologue." The fact of directions Peter begins. The spoken words that follow are more melody than the spoken words allow. Listening speaks...Magic's permit.

Hope lingers the happy tragedy will prevail? "Once upon a space not in time the brown sad leaves walked the sky. Falling. Incomplete spirals down ward toward the temporary ground. Half alive full of live Peter and Marie approached Eastport by the sea." (Marie is pacing away in her bedroom).

Lili stops. "Is this going to be a romance?" Which is the answer not the question? "I have a suggestion-

"The play is almost over?" Peter explains.

Lil challenges. "You said there'd be no ending."

"I said over not ending..."

Lil's realization. Lesser sparks have started forest fires. "Hey how about a funeral?" Some one brags death should visit.

Three lips rise to answer. She speaks. "Come on ah funeral that's a cliché"

"What's wrong with a funeral if you're alive?" Allen understands. Lil has finally opened a door. She peers inside. Herself. A glimpse of her assailant. Victim murder alike the same as all, Lili's face is still. Waiting further instructions. Years detour.

Near the exit sign a voice. "What's the title of this play?"

"That's it-

"No it isn't?"

Charlie suggests. "How about compromising...?"

Peter's face is a leisurely place, a beautiful stroll. A wonderful thought important now lost. Feelings claim. The face inhale's a sad relinquishing.

Another question that's the answer. "How about drugs?"

Off whose stage a polite reply. "I don't have any."

Peter explains. "Don't worry Allen?"

Allen hesitates, before accepting the invitation. Now Allen's smile. A rare. And mysterious occurrence. Not fleeting. A curious migration. Now a peculiar departure. It's gone. Returning one more glimpse. Bob Player has left always the guitar with him. Lili

is playing charades imaging her hands reflection against the unpolished floor. Noah drops two Quaaludes. One on his lap. Owen envies. Johnny Bayer and Charlie Winters will wait hours for their next thought.

Pete responds to a previous concern. “The question about drugs sure what if were raided. I bet Captain Smith will have someone here. So the only drugs are dropped before production.”

Someone left behind inquires. “You mean were going to do this before a real audience?” The word “real” stood bold and vacant.

Three mice now five continue watching the play with growing interest.

Noah head roll’s on Owens’s shoulder. Charlie worries without reason. Taking long strides Pete walks. Others are silent. Coincidence not consensus. Lili watches Pete. Allen stares at Lil. Both visions more the nest of emotion than life perceived. Owen Cage aggressively chews gum. Noah falls half the distance to his lap before awakening. One eye startled opens. The other eye reassured follows. A sneeze. Johnny Bayer both elbow’s on his knees. One eye trying to open joins the other. Noah’s fingers crawl into his shirt pocket. More habit than instruction. Three pills retrieved. Allen feels his mind trying to avoid Lili. The Knoll Inn residents preclude reality in favor of themselves. Good friends...companions of alchemy.

In the still darkness, the witnessing motionless dark, Peter aims a flash light over his upper lip. The eyelids glow. Soft white blue cheeks transparent. Exhausted eyes alive. “I have a thought.” Peter says. Only God is listening. Everyone else has made feast of distraction. Peter continues. Talking listening to himself. The eyes contentment compels attention. A flash light relocates. Distracted alone someone asks a question. “Who’s dieing?” No one answers. Allen stalks lighter on his feet than gravity allows, offers, “I have an idea.” Time abstains. Anyone listening is not. Allen will remember that idea five years later. When the most on that stage are in the fullest way gone. Lili makes belief of herself. Peter like a rabbit snuffles at his raised mustache. Charlie dream’s of himself awake. Noah and his buddy Owen shoulder to shoulder, sleep. The better of two than one. Friendship yes. Allen shifts his weight performing mind stunts for God. Fascinated the feeling, strange texture that something that is about to happen. Which if allowed space would change lives, revealing, value to those who can brave the meaning of their

flight. Allen's silencing dialogue persists unknowingly. Feeling death's holding. Allen appears to be the only one not tempted.

By what incongruity Lil protests, "Not me..." Allen's angry. Distracted hearing the passport of those two words. Feeling theft. He's unsure.

"What's up?" Pete asks. Accepting any answer.

What response there is still waits. For now boredom sacrificed to reality.

A rally of sound surrendering a thought... "Why not draw straws." Most everyone laughs thinking variations of "for what."

Lili catching herself away raises her hand. Not many years earlier asking the teacher for permission. She smiles at her fingers wiggling the air. "At the door as a service why not write obituaries for the living, they can leave there biography when they come in and their obituary will be posted on the wall when they leave."

If all the smiles in that room were one the devil would still be hiding.

"Obituaries for the living stay current for a quarter." Who said?

"Were cooken." Peter is the happy man on stage.

Allen rises to a point of order. "These are voluntary obituaries?" Allen applauds his own answer. "Yes." Seeing the pancakes stack in his favor.

Uneasily of their own excitement Johnny asks. "Do you think they'll go for it?"

"Are you kidding reading your own obituary?"

"Can you imagine the excitement?"

"Yeah man it's like immortality...."

"We can go door to door-"

"Imagine editing your own obituary in front of the kids-"

"Its perspective forget-"

"Sure a year book of the dead-"

"The living and the dead-"

"Another word other than dead could be helpful..."

"The rich would love to out live their art this is a close-?"

"We can have séances inviting living. You understand I mean backwards-"

"How about insurance-"

Charlie doesn't interrupt. "Does anyone know this rash?" He holds his bare arm



up to the others. Medical concerns do not qualify as thoughts.

“I’m goen home.” A voice complains.

Several rise. Lethargy apologizing motion. The muttering sounds of completion. Johnny and Owen turn a half slow circle, stop, and stare absent mindedly at their own seat.

Lil shouldn’t have asked. Just as Peter jumps of the stage. “Honey your Mom can be in the play.”

Peter’s answer is involuntary. “She wouldn’t know her lines.” Peter listens to his own answer trying to comprehend. Sensing a nagging-vague disloyalty.

“Well it’s extemporaneous...”

“Yeah I know.” P

Lil’s lips are still. Feeling Peter’s discomfort. “We should plan for the next rehearsal.”

Pete knows. “If we organize well lose any momentum we have.”

“I’m committed.” Lil is sure.

Lil continues. “Someone has to stay around to tell your story before you all disappear into a needle.”

Owen Cage turns under the glowing exit sign. “How can a kid like you tell our story?”

“One word at a time.” The best poet in the group answers.

“Charlie how about breakfast you look hungry?” Allen offers. “I’ll pay.”

“You’ll pay are you kidding?”

“Nah I’m not kidding I’ve got some bucks.” Allen is kidding.

“Pete I’m not a particularly good actor you know about this play?”

“Your fine Charlie their plenty of bad actors off stage...”

“That’s an interesting insight Pete.” Lil takes Pete’s hand, tenderly squeezing.

Charlie asks was in the dark. “Allen?”

Peter explains. “No I’m Pete that’s Allen?”

“Oh wow who should I apologize to?” Charlie asks.

“Charlie can I borrow some money?” Allen is on the hunt.

“What for Allen your idea of borrowing money is kinda one way reciprocal.”

Peter laughs. "One way reciprocal..."

"I need five more bucks to pay for our breakfast."

Charlie's distracted. "Pete maybe we should rehearse the play at the Knoll to reduce the breaking and entering deal..."

"So how about the bucks Charlie?" Allen's borrowing voice.

"David your borderline notorious I lent you a hundred bucks to buy whose record collection. And when it came time to pay or something you...Allen you take advantage and you probably rehearse it."

Peter invites. "I've got peanut butter and jelly at my place."

"Peanut butter has high cholesterol. Allen warns the world.

Lil's laugh dancing her lovely lips.

"Allen I'm not goen to lend you ten bucks but you'll treat for breakfast." "

Pete offers. "Dave you should write a column for the indigent." Peter spreads the words across the horizon with his hands. "Diet for the impatient revolutionary."

"I'm not impressed you ready Charlie?"

"About the breaking and entering." Lil announces. "Pete wouldn't do very well in prison that soft skin and those freckles." She goes up on her toes and kisses Peter's cheek.

Lil's lips still touching Peter protests the insult. "What are you talking about I'd do great in prison..."

"Lil can I ask you a question?" Charlie asks.

"Thanks for the warning Charlie go ahead?"

"When you were kidnapped and your parents paid the ransom did you get depressed knowen you were goen home?"

"What?" Lil's voice jumps trying to gather the memory... "No I don't know the kidnappers weren't that bad I think if anything they were more lonely than mercenary, they only had junk food that was a problem."

"I've got an idea for a diet book," Charlie is excited. "It's are you all ready... Never hungry always starved predicament recipes."

"What?" Allen needs to know more.

"You know, predicament recipes like if your husband is cheating on you there's some special foods. If your taken s lawyers bar exam."

“That’s insane.” Allen is upset.

Lili Disagrees.” I like it I do it’s great.” She pauses. “And I like the title...”

And there’s more I just don’t know it yet. But one more thing over weight people don’t have a weight problem starven have a weight problem.”

“Yeah I like it,” Peter offers. “Problem the predicament recipes people would know your cheating on your taxes, your wife by your diet...”

Charlie’s concerned holding back a smile.” I’ve got a question are you supposed to deduct the weight of the scale from your own weight?” Everyone laughs.

Pete wants to know. How many of you think I would make a good prisoner?” No one raises their hand.

“Give yourselves up I’d make a great prisoner...”

“Pete I don’t think your supposed to be a good prisoner. But Pete if you ever in some prison make sure you escape backwards?”

“Do you understand what Charlie just said Pete?” Allen asks.

“Wait maybe I don’t either? I’m sayen guys get caught after they escape-”

All three look at Charlie.

“I’m sayen is they should begin their escape once they get out.”

As if that thought invited silence, the four walked together, side to side the quiet of themselves. Charlie is dieing in a fantasy. David is eating Charlie’s breakfast. Lili is making love to Peter. And Peter is making love to his former lady, lover and tender friend.

Allen violates the quiet sanctity. “Escape backwards.” Allen looks for support. His turns his attention away.

Silence lost can not be retrieved. “Pete were you goen to say somethen?” Lil asks.

“Nope I’m o.k.?”

“You know.” Ads. “I just learned got something amazing about insanity?”

“About insanity?” Pete is hopeful.

“Exactly... Actually it’s not about the doctor (Peter nods) this is a documentary about China. Let me collect my thoughts. There’s this poor Chinese guy. He’s depressed right. And he tells the doctor. I mean the guy looks miserable. And you know what the doctor says. I’m sorry but we don’t do that in China. Your problem is you’re not at work

and with your family.”” Lil stops looking for a response.

Peter laughs. Allen waits. “Is this some kind of truth?” Charlie needs to know.

“No it’s true I saw the documentary-”

Lili is intrigued. “I wonder what happens to insane tourists,

Peter is thinking. “I thought diagnosis universal. You can get better by moving.”

“Well,” Charlie explains, “in real poor countries were begging for those people don’t go crazy do they can’t afford it...”

Actually Charlie,” Lili rethinks, “they probably do indicate symptoms they just don’t get treated.”

“What’s the difference Lil? And that poor guy from China if he wants to commit suicide he has to get a pass port.”

Everyone laughs except Charlie. They return to their walk. The silence catches up to them. The stars.... The wind a fleeting companionship. They walked empty of themselves alive. Life lost unforgiving. God’s lost children. Breathing thinking feeling. Each examining their solitude as for a final exam.

Lili asks. “Do you think its going to rain?”

“Allen wouldn’t it be great if snowflakes could speak Spanish?” Allen is not interested in bi lingual snow flakes.

Lili runs. Pete has run off and joined Lili. Lil and Peter are playing tag. “Allen look at Pete he’s out of shape.” Pete had been collapsing in degrees. We can hear him breathing fifty feet away. He twists his body seemingly trying to relocate his pain from one exhausted organ to another.

“I’d have to get in shape to die.”

“Wow David that’s a classic one almost maybe yes you know some Indians believe you should be in shape to die so you can get everything out of dien.”

“Is that true?”

“If what I heard is true it’s true.” Lili is holding Peter up against her shoulder. “

Lili and Pete approach Allen and Charlie.

Pete adds. “I know out of shape I’m twenty seven old I used to be younger but it didn’t work out.” Interestingly no one laughs.

Lil trying to lift a snowflake from the tip Pete’s nose, first one finger tip, a scoop.

Now a possible lift. All groan. David's eyes testify staring at the space between Lili's fingers.

Charlie congratulates. "You're ok Lili."

The four friends separate into different conversations."Lil and Pete smile and Oh shucks their way through their ritual conversation on marriage. Charlie and Allen are discussing breakfast as two soldiers might a battle that gets better with each telling.

\* \* \* \*

Remembering as memory hold's life's embrace. The four a sad cadence, walking. All watching the dark pebbled ground. Three minutes into this soulful interment and Charlie steps out in front of the group walking backwards. Pete is counting pebbles discharged of his steel toe. David canvasses the sky a fuller poetry than he does the store shelves. Charlie takes longer steps backwards to stay ahead of the other nightwalkers. "I've been meaning to ask?" Beyond the question's thirst no words remembered.

Peter's arm is fallen over Lili's shoulder, she leans her cheek against his wrist. And kisses his knuckles. A golden retriever runs bye and disappears behind the Tavern carrying his own collar between his teeth. Charlie thinks. He's escaping from himself. The four enfold the greater silence to themselves. The quiet accepts them gratefully. The stars millions of years behind their own Light glow. A seagull and her friend are flying toward the Beach. Perhaps knowingly guided by the Milky Way. Lili smiles waiting for the reason. Allen thinking of his family. Charlie is practicing not thinking about anything. The alleged Charlie dog worries about his best friend, listening for his nemesis Pretzel next door. Are you waiting for the next twist in your life?

Lillian offered a narrative on marriage and divorce. One words after the other. Early certain. "At the turn of the century one out of nineteen got divorced, now its one out of two who marries will divorce. When my daughter reaches my age it'll be one out of one, when her daughter my reaches thirty more than one out of one will divorce. Meaning to say that our grandchildren will be getting married for the same reason's we got divorced. Common sense uncommonly anticipated reinforced by logics weight unproven. Yet numbers know our eloquence words can only forgive.

A mosaic recalls: Allen looks at Charlie; Peter looks at Lili, after glancing at

Charlie Lil settles her eyes whimsically on Pete. Peter shrugs his shoulders winking at his lover. A loud sound for the night metal against metal near Friendly's. A young stocky Hispanic heaves a garbage can into the dimpsy dumpster. After the metals echo a slush of lettuce, cans, rotten vegetables, and uneaten food...an offering to the God's of waste and neglect... The garbage returned. Empty. A singular motion. Pete waves with a nod. The worker responds with an upward toss of his head. A black cat watches memorizing everything. Friendly's night light off then back on. After leaning into Peter's embrace Charlie and Allen turn around distancing themselves. Allen waves from his back. The two friends disappear into the traffic of themselves. And the night mist rising waiting for the sun, several words return above the hush of the others," Nervous numbers." Allen caught fantasizing about Charlie's funeral. The night's days continue. Love by any other name still love. What love forgiven still God's love?

\* \* \* \*

Pete and Lili are together not long after the stage performance. What was intended as sleep....

"Pete," In the nearing portion of one sound Lili is playfully seductive. "Pete how can you go from prison escapes, obituaries for the living, Chinese insanity, Charlie's medication protests, what else should I have forgotten-?"

"It was good... You forgot the inversion of divorce becoming marriage."

"Do you think we'd do good in a lifeboat?"

"What do you mean would..." Lili and Pete gingerly lock elbows and take an exaggerated step over the elevated door frame leading into Pete's apartment."

A light switch brings the two lovers together once again in artificial light.

"Pete if I were to describe your room in a novel?"

"Nope please don't describe my room were already here?"

Lil's already started. "A bathroom a guy with an average prostrate could piss across and still get splattered, the room smaller than the leaking water bed, a ceiling that looks like its been walked on, a carpet smuggled in from-"

What do you think my places looks like when were not here?"

“Wow oks a lot of what people express as fact o is really like presumption did you ever notice?”

“Don’t tell me about it.”

“Lili did you know that years ago psychiatrist were called alienists?”

“Get out of here that’s not true. I know each generation or three has there preferred psychosis. Is it true alienists?”

“Yep meet my alienist.” Peter offers. The next sentiment somehow related. “You want to masturbate me first?”

“Pete stay did you ever hear of foreplay. Sspeeding tickets are given with more what? Anyway it’s my turn to go first. Why are you suddenly into masturbation?”

“I should go first because I’m older, it’s a courtesy, I have fewer orgasms left...”

“No well flip a coin...” (Pete tightens his thumb under his forefinger). “Oh no forget the imaginary coin I always loose.”

“It’s an exercise in trust what’s unconditional love without unconditional trust?”

“Fine but I’ll flip and you call.” (Pete nods agreement and raises his chin in expectation). Lil takes the imaginary coin, more toss then flip, Lil slaps her hand over the back of her wrist.

Pete waits....”I wonder what the difference is between hesitating and pausing?”

“Come on,” Lil goes up on her toes. “I’m horney.”

“Heads...” Peter insists.

“Shit your lucky...”

“Lili do you know what androgen us means?”

“Of course I know what that and deal means.”

“Imagine this larger banner it reads in bold stark print, a metallic black glow...”Whose Penis is it anyway?”

“More live theater right o.k. I’m game but I don’t do windows.”

“O.k. o.k. sit down I’ll explain.” Lil is sitting on the corner of the water bed, both knees just below her breasts. Her hands together holding up her chin. One smile followed by the second.

Peter is whispering as his eyebrow rise. “Did anyone ever tell you are beautiful?”

“Wait a minute Pete I thought that was my line?” Laughter distracted by arousal... “You were saying about your androgynous banner gohead-.”

“Sure it’s like this I can see your nipples are erect that’s nice-”

Lili still busy with her last offering adds to her smile. “I aim to please...” She raises her shoulder in Pete’s direction.

“Come on let me protest I mean continue this is important, forget the banner it’s like this, I’m undressed (Lil nods attentively glancing at her nipple) you come around my back hard right so I can feel your pubic mound.” Pete hesitates against the image tasting his lips nervously.” Right I can feel your pubic mound your left hand is wrapped tight around my stomach, but not to tight, you’ve draped your hair over my shoulder. You understand your right hand is free moving slowly around, slowly and without warning you grab my penis. Well not grab you know the rest.” Peter tosses his hand up in the air like an eighteenth century dandy. Peter looks intensely at Lili. “Well what do you think?”

“Actually-”

You must have a better play on the angels than most women you’re a lesbian I understand you use each other as surrogates?”

Lil tried to get up pushing down on the water bed, she falls back still talking. “That’s sexist bullshit-”

“I don’t know. A buddy at her job there were these two lesbians. When lesbian number one was with a man lesbian two was jealous. But no problem when the contact was with a woman. When lesbian two was with another man no problem with lesbian number one, but when she was (Peter has stopped staring at the ceiling with two outstretched fingers) ...let’s see but when lesbian number two was with another woman who wasn’t a man lesbian number one got jealous...”

“Say that again...”

“Forget like who’s on first base with an erection in your hand-”

“Anyway how can I be a lesbian if I’m your lover?”

“You’re a condemned lesbian I mean converted.”



“Was that intentional?” She answer’s her guest ion pointing at Pete’s grin.  
“Anyway you’ve got it all fucked up why would lesbian number one become jealous when lesbian number tow is with another man and lesbian number two...wait shouldn’t you ask which man, anyway it’s all androgynous the penis is a secondary extension of the lover and-”

“Yeah but which one the male or the female?”

“Its reflex of the entire personality the genitals-”

“Do you think I’d make a good lesbian?”

“No I don’t think so. I need to think about it.”

“Why not it’s simple. I’m as sensitive as some women, less violent than others, more nurturing than... I’ve known so if I’m willing to keep my penis out of the sex act why can’t I be a respected lesbian. Sure I wouldn’t be popular I’d have to deal with slurs from the small minded, other than that I see no problem. “Pete opens his eyes and arms inviting Lili’s embrace. “What do you think?”

Lili shrugs. “Fine not fine I’m going to reserve judgment.”

“Are we ready...?” Lil’s hand is either masturbating the air, the same motion used to throw a pair of dice. “Strip those pants down honey...”

With as much mystery as motion Lili has turned Peter around. Peter looks like he just learned something about gravity denied him for years. Lil runs her hands under Peter’s shirt around his stomach and against his breasts. With moisture and lips she kisses Pete’s shoulder blade. Not in control Pete challenges his throat with a swallow. Lili’s wet finger encircles Pete navel while unbuckling the belt. Pete’s arms swing in award circles trying to reclaim lost balance. Retreat by any circumference eventually becomes advance. Artillery support helps. Pete has none. Pete’s memory braves the moment, recalling that kissing can be a control. He tries to turn around. “Stay where you are?” Peter’s pants are going down like the canvas on an unfinished sculpture.

“Give me some hard....”

“What?” Pete might have convinced a jury not Lil.

Kissing his lips softly. “Well honey?” Lili kisses and whispers.

Peter is trying to salvage reality, but Lili claims the silence. “Give me something to hold on to big guy?”

“Pete you’re still not hard enough?”

“I know I’m here to...”

“Come on where’s my penis. Is this your idea of stand up comedy?”

“Maybe if I were laying down-”

“I just thought of something....”Lili twists from sensual lover to palm therapist.

. The candles flicker flush small waves of light against their bodies. Lil groans.

“What?” Peter doesn’t want to know.

Lili laughs gently kissing Pete’s cheek. Lil had been stroking small circles with one finger around the head of Peter’s penis. Allowing that anatomy is symphony Peter has answered to his own song, his penis is erect. Pete smiles as magicians do after completing their favorite trick. Time, impatience and tactile pressure coincide. The deed is done. Pete looks sublime. Lili smiles anticipating pleasures turn.

Lil heard that voice before. “How about me?” Lili did not mean to sound like Oliver Twist asking for more.

Pete lowers himself into the water bed, one hand in front adjusting the fall. “Ohh wow...”

“You son of two parents...”Lil kicks Peter with the side of her foot. “I can’t believe this,”Lil protests to God. But the creator refers her back to Peter. “Come on Pete fair is fair.” Instead of language Lili hears three calculated snores camouflaging laughter. If Lili could see Pete’s face she would be looking at a contented face.

Lil is angry at everything on her side of the equator. She’s thinking, arms are folded-pressed against her small breasts. Lil’s face confesses her own stupidity. “This isn’t going....” Lil marches to the front of the waterbed, squats down and tosses herself onto the bed. The bed sloshes up and down and to either side. Pete absorbs the motion. The waterbeds tide mellows against its own tide. Lil rests her elbow on a pillow, resting her the side of her head on an opened hand, she plots. Thinking has limitations violence has none? She punches Peter’s back. Peter absurd the modest blow. How easily decision becomes the antidote to despair. Lili slides the pillow from under her head and cushions her hips. Peter’s eyes want to know. Lil breaths to relax, her lips unfold sensuality her legs open gradually. Lili caresses her nipples with two wet fingers. Peter’s eyes beg suspicion. The other hand moves against her firm stomach, past her navel, onto her

vagina. Lili yearns motion is satisfied. Her hand is inside past the lips of her wet vagina. The nipples reclaim their erection. More fingers, easier.... "Good," Lili introduces herself to her own companionship.

Guilt, sensuality, exclusion Peter picks himself out of a police line-up. "Do you want me to help you?" His voice pleads an invitation. By either thorn a distant voice. Except for the warmth, the body against a body, breathing harder, Lil says nothing. She is busy well received. Breathing more, faster. "Yes," is an instruction? Lili's body stiffens. Language is indistinguishable from the bodies thrust, Lili had reached orgasm. She let's go of the panty hose in her grip. Her body is returning to her. The eyes you know. Peter's waiting is in his face. Life for that moment beyond thought's explanation. Sweet Lil, astrologer, poet, accountant, pilgrim, lover and daughter. Lili and Pete lay there for whose five minutes. We sleep away if not by our decision then God's. Wakening refreshed to disrepair's next chance. Pete's soft untrimmed red whiskers move easily against his breath. Lili wiggles into the panty hose. She stops to examine Peter. The candles watch. Life waits. No one is forgotten. Looking over her shoulder she pleads, "God please take care of Peter." The candles are returned to the dark. Lili steps onto a rising sun. She smiles to think and wonder. The door open to the light, Lil locates a note pad. She writes. "I love you so." Lili kisses the note, wraps it around the candle. Tilts the candle down, letting the melted wax roll onto the note. And placed it next to Pete. Lil steps past the door frame, acknowledging that everything was in order except her life. Her back turned she closed the door. Lil turned back around. And stopped higher on her toes. David took two steps back realizing one should have been enough.

"Don't wake Pete up he's sleeping. I thought you and Charlie went to breakfast?"

"Don't worry about Pete." Leopards prowl with less effort. "Take care." She said less the effort.

"Sure..." Allen answered. Immediately becoming suspicious of his own response. He watched Lil walk away making believe he was responsible for her disappearance. And only his choice could bring her back. Three steps later and the portion of two emotions Allen wander inside. Trying to map the darkness against his memory. A musician's ear for tone, Allen resents Lil's suggestion that he would do anything to cause his friend discomfort. (Yet irritations throb and despair is the shared

menu). Allen's is a blind man's hand searching for the light switch. An unusual day's chance, bed, breakfast and shower. David wonders if he should knock. He accommodated what value his thought had to reality by knocking against the air. "Pete...." The sound was ghostly and loving sound. He only had for his dearest friend of those many years. Years of childhood, tempered adulthood. Mischief and chaos rarely betrayed to selfish advantage. Now Allen is trying to secure the images in the room according to scent. Allen is kidding. A tender snore follows Allen's effort. Pete needs his sleep. Allen feels the Salvation Army chair with the back of his legs and begins a descent.

I don't believe I ever saw Allen smile substantially. But if his lips were ever graced as such it would have been at Peter's side. There he sat the revolutionary minus the revolution nonetheless more soldier of the street than the rest of us, taking satisfaction in Peter's rest while fingering his pockets for the half joint put aside for the next escape. Allen worked his buttocks against the ancient cushion secured with newspaper. There are no distractions pending when the choice is weed. If Allen had a second cousin amongst vegetables, weeds, trees and legumes by association alone that flower would be marijuana. Allen discussed Mary Jane by the manner and song fathers reserve for their first born. Suddenly like a match a smile. His fingertips have located the joint. Not satisfied with one relocation when many are available to all of us, Allen is fantasizing a paralysis. His own from the neck down. He is reinforcing his descent onto the immediate comfort. Our friend had read that paralysis from the neck down doesn't exclude sex; otherwise he might have been less generous. Pleased with the disability the play continues.... Allen is smiling, twice in one journey God is at hand. No for now Allen won't lead his revolutionary brethren over the hill; he is satisfied to starve the criminal institutions through his paralysis. Details are unimportant, but the impending interruption was approaching that level of intensity. Without explanation Allen feels nauseous. Vomiting for our dear friend David is the extreme tax on nostalgia. Allen is tightening his stomach muscles attempting to bring rebellion to order. The buttocks again instruct the cushion. The stomach calms. Allen invites the feelings of a warm shower. No sooner said than undone the crisis ends. He bows his forehead to the God's of projectile vomiting. The dope is being celebrated between the fingers, where's the match. David is wondering if you need a high school diploma to become Pope. "The Pope might be a

better deal than paralysis.” God’s vicar excused from current company, an involved ritual is about to begin. Our witness is a man of patience, of gumption, what others discredit as annoyance For Allen hunger is warrant enough. His hungers many his sublimations few. Allen ate slowly. A mournful cadence. The difference was in the expectation Allen felt anyone who didn’t love him should. Without this loft Allen’s melancholy would be the greatest, in part as well, because our friend felt no bargain in the license of why. Love me ask no questions. The grocery hound, the woodsman, the musician, the cautioned taker of drugs. Allen might rely on the proof of your love, though he would not have to offer similar evidence himself. The inconsistency in this mystery was no problem simply excused as disregarded. About the norm for the day would you agree?. I miss Allen and the improbable gang. Survival comes with a price tag. It’s full weight beyond measure....

The ritual progresses, an imperfect square inch of aluminum foil is being unwrapped, his fingers move to the purpose like Baryshnikov’s feet. The eyes are a surgeons eyes unwrapping. Peter is dreaming a private school love affair. Lil is at work adapting. Noah is deep into a car engine, curiously the one who appeared the most wounded also was the one most employed. Owen Cage completes an uneasy drug deal financed by an advance by the Japanese rock garden. Mortician’s clients know less patience than Allen; this moment has known its indulgence for three days. Any mistakes....To whom do you apologize if you are your own worst enemy. The unfolding is almost complete. The many organs about to be alerted await further instruction, though this familiar departure has only one passenger. Allen licks the top of his lip thinking about Charlie, the irrelevancy bothers him. The aluminum foil opened is bent in half. The contents unspoiled to spillage. One breath as the weed is about to be poured into the small metal pipe. His chest heaves once to the singular laugh. (A private recollection). He freezes as if accusation and judgment were one package. All is well. Al is no longer looking at Charlie’s exhausted eyes, hairy eyebrows, the lips moving with unrelenting awkward precision saying nothing. Allen stops. And looks ahead to the darkness for calm’s instruction. He waits too long. Allen wonders why. An error. Another and the impending incantation would be ruined, the marijuana’s smoke itself might be tainted beyond its full God potential. The attendance continues...

Strangely for a young man of no home, but not homeless our buddy in the

near of always seemed sheltered. Whatever the rent, knowing the place of himself. Given his demeanor's disposition in another time, given different attire Allen would have remained as much a mystery in the breathing as the telling. Can't be sure. What really sings beyond the performance of Al's choices remains unclear, but no doubt a walk through Allen Aryus's soul is a labor worth the undertaking. Al is looking for a match. Allen might qualify as the Patron Saint of Weed and Some Lost Causes. On meetings testimony David would be kind to you. You would not be helped with your chores. But in Al's company they would soon seem less irrelevant. Leisurely shades would be more available. You would share your food. And your dreams. But enough of philosophy and other cautions. The impending voyager is still holding his albatross pipe. The finger has been sucked that the weed be moist and stuffed before its temple firing. Greedy hope less reason's carriage Al has estimated three tokes. The next moments have the feelings of alter, Priest and sacrifice. A devil's apprentice would not allow the fuller details. Allen remains calm, though eternity is not for the sitting position. But Allen usually easily mannered we can assume Allen can hold Heaven in any position. Except possibly the position of employment. The calm increases, even corpses insist on the movement of decay. The nostrils move, his eyes wait the dark anticipating the match. As ghost adjust their haunting the hand searches for matches. By alters witness the prayer is ready for fire. All events will conjoin? Though an arsonist's flames allow prediction, not so David... the fingers confess the absence of matches. The nostrils again, the cheek twitches involuntarily, the knee tighten-David is thinking. Only the pipe remains faithful to its assignment. The face inhales, thought seed's disaster. No iceberg sunk the Titanic...life confesses, truth assaults. Anticipation's void ferments. Those fraternally prescribed would not understand. Al's efforts have steered redemption from its chartered course. Hope foretells friendships burden.

“Pete it's me,” Allen's words beg logic will thrive reason well.

Pete's neuron transmitters build walls, trenches, moats trying to convert the intrusion to preferred sleep. Reality convenes the last word. Fuck is the word not said...the walls collapse, the brain concedes. “What?”

“Pete you got any matches?” Pete knows these sounds only trumpet one dilemma for another. (No match's good dope). Opportunity derives best from calculation, all

predators know. Now the raised paw before friendships lunge. “Got any for me?” This question all of self medication know...permit’s insistence.

“Just two tokes...” Two tokes one man. Joy’s garden up in smoke.

“The small drawer...” Deep acquiescence followed by punishment. “Don’t wake me up again.”

Trusted organs of direction, the hands move, wood-flesh, the drawer is opening what breast invitation feel like this....One opening, two hands, one strike oxidation warms Allen’s face. A huff and a puff. And Allen is cooking. Truly all silences are different from one another. This is the silence of dope in progress. The embers glow Allen inhales, inhaling more, reincarnation is at hand. He holding his breath, as his mother once held him from her wombs escape. Our friend exhales, delivered free to a cruel world.

“Are you sure Allen?” Pete tests the impossible. God rewards beggars....Allen will not. The scarf ice will not be interrupted; the obedient lungs are succumbing to the unwelcome smoke. The mind is confessing limitation to the brain. Eyes watering. Al coughs once.

Before the next admission, Al congratulates God without his lungs permission. “Good dope?” Pete’s question remains unheard. Allen’s eyes slowly close to keep the smoke from seeping out. The singular locality submits to the second toke.

Pete crosses his legs more of nerve than choice. “I’d share with you Al.” Once rejected pleadings can be the loneliest trail.

“I know...” What more need be said when the truth is unfair and honestly relayed. Anything else from Peter is abuse abused again. The inhalation holds. Pete collapses into Lil’s imagined arms. Al is yielding to the accompanied symphony of self.

“Shit...” Peter bellows as mountain climbers might just before the fall, hoping David’s laughter will deny a portion of the chemical nirvana. But there is no passport from where Allen lingers. Peter groans as road kill gasps.

“Yeah...” Fate and the weed have been congratulated, Gods excused. Those who like to catch cat fish can see David’s smile. Gradually a foggy curtain falls or rises, either one not the same. Reality is returned. Reincarnation suffers resurrection. Allen speaks as if confessing banality to reality. “I saw Lil just awhile ago...” Changing the subject, but

not the predicate.

“Good dope?” Peter asks hoping resentment will punish envy.

David nods. “Yeah...” He says kind of nowhere slowly.

What is forgiven not forgotten, normalcy returns, limping and lost, but evidence nonetheless? Peter asks as if the day were ended. “What you do today?”

“I don’t know nothen.” The answer almost sounds like an invitation to some vague activity that all might welcome joining.

Peter talks to the ceiling. “Maybe I’ll look for a job today?”

“Yeah...” Allen responds as it were a word. Adding hastily inspired. “Can I take a shower?”

Peter is weighing the opportunity, one wound begets another, that river of blood washes all. But Peter is not a lesser friend, kindness responds. “Yeah go ahead but don’t make a mess.”

“I won’t.” Allen is not surprised, yet thankful he’s been spared. He rewards with the merriment of a memory. “I forgot who told me this, maybe Charlie, anyway he got rejected from a job because he was over qualified.” Allen indulges himself imagining the greater details of the moment. “And Charlie said no I’m not I can get you references....” Peter’s warm laughter reminds him of the moment. Allen is going to go for the whole buffet. “Can I crash in your bed while you look for a job?”

“No not today Dave.” No means yes. “You know you snore like a mouse.

Allen rejects the most modest of rejections. “I know.”

David rises and stretches as Lazarus might of after Jesus’s interruption.

“You know once Charlie was shaving and he looked in the mirror and this mouse was matching him stroke for stroke.”

Allen wonders.” How do you know Charlie wasn’t imitating the mouse?”

“Because Charlie came first,” Peter answers.

“Oh,” Allen concedes.

Allen is shuffling toward the bathroom as if he were on shuffling rations.” “Pete do you think Charlie is delusional?”

“What’s delusional mean?”

“Charlie said it’s like a false belief-”



“You’re asking someone who might be delusional to define delusions?”

“Sandy you know upstairs told me Charlie used to be a spy of some kind.”

Peter’s critique is a groan. “Why is that Charlie’s delusion and not Sandy’s? Who do you think told Sandy?”

“I don’t know I figure Charlie told her?”

“Charlie didn’t tell her I did.”

“Who told you?”

“Nobody told me I did...Don’t you think they can do better than give a troubled person a disease?”

“Well you gotta give em somethen you’ve seen Charlie when he’s manic-

“Yeah like us on speed...”

“Yeah well Charlie’s nuts he told me drug use is a psychosis like paranoid people. I told him I’m not crazy I control my drugs not the other way around.”

“A psychiatrist would call that a delusion...” Peter rolls over onto his back.

“It can’t be delusional if it’s true.”

“It’s delusional because you think it’s true. Are you going to take a shower?”

Allen hand has been on the bathroom door knob for almost a minute. “Well I’m not delusional. You know I’d rather be deaf and blind in one eye than have what Charlie’s got.”

“Great Dave I’ll put you down for hysteria.”

“I’ll take it if it comes with Charlie’s money.” Al kicks his pants to the corner and rolls his underpants down. “And if delusions comes with it I want my own not somebody else’s...” The shower is turned on.

David sticks his head out of the bathroom. “Pete I’ve got a guest ion I’ve had for a long time.”

“What’s a long time?” Pete asks tiredly.

The quiet came and went pushing against both friends listened to the answer. “Tomorrow is as long time...”

. The stoic, intuitively patient David stepped into the shower after shrugging off his own testimony.

\* \* \* \*

What time past time knows best. Peter is watching his hand fly over his face forming a slowing arch. Descending unexpectedly spiraling downward until the trajectory collapsed on his exposed hip. The hand knew its purpose before Pete. (David is asleep). Lingering memories were summoned back, reshaped, tested until they assumed the form this reality expects. Lil had left. Allen's dope. The conversations. Value is added purpose is assumed. The room tastes like marijuana, the scent the partial ghost of the brief anger. "What time is it?" The sounds the barely of word. Asked with the disinterest of light dusting. The small yawn as relevant an answer as the absent clocks. Pete is stretching his arms inwardly. Until they are released under their own weight. A louder snore. One mouse ducks warning three siblings, they escape, small feet tapping away-following the instruction of past rehearsals they shared with their parents. Allen's teeth are grinding, the nose wiggles. Peter tastes his own smile watching the production. Pete stops to think about another life. While trying to make rhyme of imagination's motion. Continuing the naked interrogation. Pete stretches his legs. He challenges his limbs with an incomplete rotation. The left hand is tapping. What followed by sight's report would be difficult to believe unless you were prone to self deception. Language provides its own limitations. Strange motions. Pete's face a Nirvana's glee. One elbow is rising. A peculiar lift. Now graceful. The knee elevates over there. As if left behind the other hand had been rising. Hip up quickly shoulder down smoothly. The elbow notices the face. Standing motion no longer. Elbows up one shoulder down. Into the stream of sunlight. Disappeared. Briefly back. Taller coming down. One shoulder down further. Both hips reach. Delivering Peter from his unwilling feet. A dance no dance what else. Higher on the way down. Peter's stopped. Not at all. A stark pose. Three motions lost unreported. Off balance. A disagreeable twist like a whips snap. The body pauses. Stillness expects the eyes. Light's shadow consumes two gestures. Witnessed Eternal. Motionless not stopping. The finger the left hand. Right hand floating upward. Fingers crawling up the air. Stationary this body would make a firing squad nervous. Now moving. The anguished face. Now is then the entire body is hanging from coat hanger. Descending. The eyes closing. Ever slowly. One eyebrow twitching. What

movement not motion I know. Jesus is the face. One knee bolts out. Not ascending not descending. Eyes opening. I didn't see them close. The fingers longer pointing everywhere. Before gathering returned. What blood instructs this ritual? Peter's giggling tickling himself. Resisting permission. Peter escapes. The fingers catch up. What motion is this...the whip released from the flesh. The body laughs. Images lost explained to their own motion. Not mine to read. Gone between words delivery. Right there. This devil's physics needs God's consent. If words were motion. Your eyes would see. Listen the air is quieting. What answers ask that prayer's listen. What silence listens? All is changed. Darker. Unheard screams once children's laughter. Peter's body assembles by what consent. Pete is surprised. The body's heat remembers. We forget... Peter is watching the hands on his hips. Infinity knows what we can't explain. The dark has made way. Consensus return. Ordinary configurations... Choice prevails. Words incriminated incomplete. Magic's luster God's .Ours by deception's knowing. What source that is origin. Source enough. Motion's joy has left the room. What knowledge that is not waiting. Pete inwardly asks as if tears could speak. Peter further threads the light, his life un-lived. Looking away as if sight were vision. Search continues ended. All organs much maligned. Agreeably move. Foot high gravity yields away. Higher and still. Flapping. The other foot tapping. One tap two taps. One warning the other. The face, the eyes, one hand-rising. Ecstatically with each elevation filling with life. Until all bursts. Flying emptying running here to get away. The eyes are closed. As dead men see. Why witness death below life's bragging. The eyes returned unwelcome. The face is gone. Which hand a fist? Pete's body turned which way away. Half stopped. Deeper into the knees, the feet aborting. Which half not the other half. The eyes. Stop the eyes. Finally the hand is rising. Opening like early spring's tulip. The thumb gliding a celestial hitchhiker. The body succumbs to reason. Poe's tapping stopped. Peter breaths deeply. Returning to himself. One last enfolding. The arm is rolling downward pivoting into diminishing concentric circles. Slapping the naked thigh. After one last search at the stars. Breathing easily, returned, the eyes are calm. Life agrees time is temporary.

Returned enough not enough. The breathing pours out life. The self of God performed barely begun, Pete drops his chin-thinking (feeling)...as if Vicky had seen him. Peter's eyes are like bubbling brooks. Vicky shouldn't have left. The reality is

gone all that is left is the excuse, love. He looks down wan tingly at his body. Once God's as all that predates the planet earth. Before the joyful intervention. If it weren't for live Pete shrugs to smile. "So be so love forever so..."

Feeling the cold against his bare feet, he raises one knee, followed by the other. Just like life Peter thought, the dance still firing in his brain. Pete feels hungry, depressed, suddenly quicker than the turning of a page. He inhales and the lungs exhale for him. Pete bends down to pick up one sock, the shirt like a grave detail collecting battle field dead. The depression holds, reminding Pete there's nowhere to go. But the story continues. Not a story at all. The simplest of arrangements, the hands, a raised foot, stuffing an arm and Peter is dressed ready to greet himself. Frisking the pants pockets, the anticipated coins several times gone. Resigned and appointed Pete hurries one foot, another and he's outside. Peter and the sun squint at each other. A concerned fly having a bad day circles his face. Pete leans back; the eyes follow the little one away. Peter walks briskly, awkwardly, forward a little too either side, the head along for the ride. "It's going to be a nice day." Unconvinced not impressed with the inconsistency Peter walks away. Closer to the day's destiny. No closer to himself. The boot is down, two ants survive and continue their path. Pete walks the way he walks. Arms swinging long strides. Past the parked cars, running his hands down the shirt-ironing out a few wrinkles. Walking the elbows at times trailing behind. Peter stops at cautions request, the head, and shoulders reach out checking for traffic. Pete leaning loses his balance forward. Pete's arms falling, Pete's balance returns. Months across the street Pete sees himself with Vicky. Peter has nothing to say that feelings hear. Then there all gone. Remaining. Peter decides not to cross the street. Walking Peer struts. We crate the burdens we resist by carrying.

The hunger feels closer. The sun warmer. Ahead the Army Navy store. Peter thinks of employment. "Should any man close any door that God opens," Peter congratulates himself to the liberal thought. But would have preferred Danish. Two Danish actually and a glass of skimmed milk. Pete overcome by a foreign wave of practicality has just decided, "I'm going to get a job." The depression lifts as if to make room for irony. He wanted to say something, but whistled instead. His walk is livelier. Less the weight of life. Peter is spending his first pay check. A party, a gift for Mom. Pay Charlie, something for Dad. One practicality excused by the other easier than borrowing

a nickle from a beggars cup. Peter isn't surprised he has a job at the YMCA. The job interview was flawless. Not surprisingly Pete interviewed himself. "Pizza and flowers for Lil." His smile is signature enough. Pete is teaching disabled children Ti Chi. Walking alive full of life. One more nudge deeper into reality and Pete would have to confess himself a happy man. Peter walks unaware of the parade following. Caution is a good anchor, Peter spices this adventure. "I'm fired, no." The offer is refused. Without the truth we must deceive ourselves to lie. The anchor dropped as lifted, Peter has received an award at work. Saving the life of a part time employee. Peter had heard, good news can get better. He's one week short of a two week vacation. A moment too long cold stops his heart, the thought had intruded like a burglar." I don't know how to take a vacation? On purpose vacation as Charlie would say." In less time than it will take to read the next sentence the burglar has been forgiven the trespass. A promotion has been offered. Not promised, offered. Heaven on earth who needs prayer. There's a crisis. Pete grimaces and smiles. "Lord have mercy if Groucho Marx's isn't available." A middle aged woman dressed in a gray suit and perfume turns her head, watching Peter. Both are reassured. Briefly there's a question of missing funds. All who attended Peter's award ceremony, their sad yes, follow him as he walks into the manager's office. Pete files a brief protest to God. Prematurely Pete decides, he hasn't decided on his own guilt-stepping past Hoffman's Stationary. Twenty dollars are missing, Peter shakes his head, twenty around here doesn't explain guilt or justify exoneration. The haul has been increased, the list grows, personal garments are not excluded. Innocence is not an adequate defense, Pete is fired. Another cliché continues the rally. Not all news is bad. The Greeks who run the YMCA suspecting Peter's innocence and to assuage their guilt give substantial severance check. Enough cash. More Pizza's, other family members added to the gift list, the party grown in numbers. A chance meeting, the details are uncertain, time has elapsed. A fall from a horse. A brief marriage ending in a kidney transplant. And Peter is accepting an honorary degree from Goddard College. And there are two children. And both call Pete Dad. Glory is served. God is satisfied. Peter steps aside from the majesty and wonders if you have to take a urine test to accept an honoree degree. A block and a half away, half a block from the Little Book Store Mr. Chong's cooking has claimed jurisdiction over Peter's nose. Is all coincidence a brief residence,

Philip the gentleman waiter on his way to East Lake nods politely at Peter? Peter accepts the generous offer, it will be the brightest moment in Peter's day.

But Pete has requisitioned the future and has done well. Easily by the same avenue the visitation could have been much darker. A white haired man, tattered loafers, and three hundred dollar wire rimmed glasses side steps past whistling Mozart's Funeral Requiem. "Go Cougars Go..." The yellow high school bus, leaning slightly to one side, drives past promising havoc on opposing athletes. Amy Elizabeth is two blocks nearer. Hunger has given up on Peter. The sun persists, the amiable trees greet Peter as he steps bye. Why is Peter thinking about the chained linked fence that stretches two thirds around the Knoll Inn, much of that fence purpose restrained more by rumor restraint than metal. Why do fences only have one side? Why are unfinished fences never torn down? Pete won't submit to his own inquiry, a new Subaru drives pleasantly past, engine purring. The bumper sticker reads. "There's no such thing as a bad child." Peter's eyes follow the message as the vehicle disappears into its own forward motion. Peter felt good. The imagined good inside made its way out. And realized less contrast than expected. "It's going to be a good day," Peter promises God then himself.

Peter felt bold. And the real of good. "What I need is goals." Peripherally our lone traveler noticed the Little Book Shop. Ten years passed, Peter is stealing Abby Hoffman's book "Steal this Book." Twice both copies collected onto his mother's book shelf. Who else stayed loyal to the sixties? Why ask question when the answers don't deserve the questions. Walking closer to Amy's. Brave of heart, generous of soul. Well exhausted Pete moved on. Peter jumped, jack knifing, his body around a monster car that shouldn't of been there. You can't starve in this country without being harassed, Peter swore minus the slander. Insults burn too many calories. Those who talk to themselves in public are suspected of insanity. Charlie's warning came to Peter. Followed by qualification. A soft smirk repeated the memory witnessing Charlie's face insisting on it's truth. Pete stuffed his hands into his back pockets while crossing the street. Thirty five yards ahead Amy stepped out onto her porch. She bends over gradually with the year's permission. And comes back up looking. Peter's hand is rising to wave, the eyes not unlike the brave Minuteman at the beach. "Mom," Peter said as if someone might hear. Amy is back inside. A blue bird flew by searching for a friend, she recognized Pete,

expressed concern then flew away. Peter snapped his fingers missing intentionally. He had noticed the note secured around the candle, I'll read it later Pete thought walking with more restraint. A car honked its horn, the child one cheek pressed against the side window waved aimlessly. Again Pete began to dance speculation with imagination, which was invented first the key or the lock. The key invented by a man or a woman. A man of course women wouldn't have been allowed that much power. Look what they did to Eve. Peter almost stopped before raising his foot to the porch. Pete tucked at his shirt as if he were straightening a coat. And took the high step, the porch is now his, temporarily. Peter knocked quietly, more the resonance of fatigue than courtesy. The face waited one breath almost two. Pete's surprised the door opens. "Mom?" The room is unusually still. He rummaged about for the reason. There's concern. In three days people starve to death if they don't get some ice water. The floors been polished, with the explanation the room is returned to its previous self. "Mom," The word is incomplete. Peter's face is stopped one more time. The dolls been injured. Strange that Peter knew before locating distress. The shoe is twisted half off, inwardly. The TV's volume is off, the images chases each other erratically preferring the mirrored floor. Peter thought they were trying to escape the duplex. "Hi Mom," its me would have been redundant. Peter is imitating Samson, standing between the kitchen and the dining room. Bringing down the temple walls. Briefly Peter's looks at the refrigerator, you might say accusingly. The door opens, glass bottles clanking against each other. Pete is returned to life. Opportunity and privacy are everything. "Pumpernickel, ham, Swiss, fresh..."Pete continues, his voice, as if he's trying to decide on a name for his child. One twist Pete's opened the horse radish. His nose turns five inches with satisfaction. Peter gathers, talking to himself. "The only advantage to being hungry is eating." Peter pressed his upper lip against the lower, the tongue intervened and ended the embrace. One layer now several, Peter's breathing has increased. A decision is made progress will not be stopped to slice the tomato. Raised by comfort's excess Pete's looking in the cabinet for a toothpick to add relish to the sandwich meal. One hand two and the first bite Peter groans contentment is a friend. The guilt if any is excused Peter commits to take his Mother out to dinner. The invitation is amended, lunch. Mom's best customer tosses an olive into the busy mouth. More reflex than curiosity Peter opens a drawer, partially opened-inviting. Any expression is

incrimination, giving away the only witness to the crime, Peter's two fingers move toward a twenty dollar bill.

"Pete..." That sound from Mom always heard from all direction, the criminal hand has already retreated like a cobra lunging in reverse. Pete turns around mayonnaise on his mustache, the other hand holds the remains of the sandwich. Peter swallows the food now evidence.

"You made something to eat." Amy says as if such facts were Gods.

"Can I make you one," Pete's voice suggests the offer is the primary reasons for the visit." She is scanning the foods in disarray. "Don't worry Mom I'll clean up..."

"You bet you will buddy boy it's your mess." Amy Elizabeth explains her eyes resting on the cabinet where vodka takes up residence.

"No Mom I didn't touch your stash..."

"Stash," Amy repeats. Her balance is in question. "Pete how did you get in the front door?"

"I turned the door handle I'm kidding Mom the door was opened..."

"Opened..." Amy Elizabeth responds as if she were trying to understand the concept. Amy rallies maternity compels... "Pete you shouldn't steal from people?"

Peter laughs happily. A brief effort. "I don't steal from people Mom I steal from you..."

"Well that's a relief..." No sarcasm twists the reply. Best to keep it in the family.

"Anyway stealing suggests permanency I keep of list Mom, it's more like forced borrowing... more like displacing or relocating."

"Yeah yeah yeah," Amy Elizabeth sings finally happy for the company. "You're too smart for my own good."

Peter's wound is brief and won't require a tourniquet. "Can I make you a sandwich Mom?" Peter's voice leaves him behind by several years. A child again.

"No thanks dear don't forget to clean up..." Mom offers pleasantly.

Sandwich trails the embrace, Pete hugs his mother. "I know Mom I know..."

Amy squeezes Peter's shoulder. "Anyway... why don't you come for an early diner tonight what time is it?"

"Great Mom I'll bring everything I'll get some money?"



“No you wont here’s a twenty. If that’s not enough I’ll call and you can change some things-”

Pete feels the twenty in his hand, strangely he feels more guilty than if it had been ripped it off.

“Pete how’d you get into my duplex?” Mom tries again.

“The door was unlocked Mom I swear plus I know where you keep the extra key, everyone forgets to lock there doors. It happens don’t worry about it?”

“Their not supposed to Pete. I’m not either. For all I know one of your crazy friends will come in here and-”

“Come on Mom my friends are afraid of you?”

“No there not are they?”

“No Mom I’m just kidding....”

“Pete let me see that list,” Amy’s hand reached out as if it were in Pete’s hand. Pressed against the stove Pete couldn’t take a step back. “Mom I can’t carry something like that around with me there’s limits to nostalgia-”

“That’s enough....” Amy felt thirsty or hungry. “You’re coming tonight Pete bring a nice desert...”

“Sure Mom.” Pete embraces his Mom warmly.

“Take care Pete,” Amy...Mom smiles tiredly. Walking away she adds. “You’re too much sweetheart.”

Pete is reaching for the door handle from behind his back. “Tell me about it.” Peter turns around reaching for the handle. He hears his mother say something like be careful and tonight. Pete closes the door. And reopens it. “Mom I’ll bring some garlic bread...” Peter leaning forward is holding the door open waiting for a reply.” There’s no reply.

Amy stares at her doll, motionless on the rocking chair. She watches the television. And can’t decide why. Peter takes in the air outside. Pete decides on the library, returning to the Knoll risks the twenty dollars. Peter is returned to his canter and shuffle, long steps touching down on the planet in defiance of accrued probability. His face dormant in its contentment. I would have been awful on the Titanic Pete decides, another critical issue resolved, progress is at hand. I would have drowned in the bathtub

on the way down. “My Mom’s too much,” Peter brags taking a fleeting look at the window, fantasizing his Mom might be watching. Pete runs his hand quickly to his shirt pocket, one cigarette. Pete took the one lit the tobacco, preservatives and carbon monoxide. “Yeah the library,” Pete chased the smoke out of his tightened lips after the few words.

What the hundred and fifty yards along the back of the varied business, all retail, the encircled parking lot-next to the waters of Long Island Sound and in less time than it takes to smoke a second cigarette Peter is stepping into the library. Read the New York Times, Newsweek, the encyclopedia catch up on the Korean War. Peter thought why do they say killing time, not wounding. He sat between two bay windows, corners for privacy. At the minimum you have the better sight an assailant. Friend, memory or librarian. I wonder why they don’t offer a Pulitzer Prize for classifieds. Pete spread open the Westville Hour like a sheet he was about to drop on his chest. Here’s one: “Wanted white male with carpentry skills recently deceased.” Peter congratulated himself with a nod. Someone just evoked the library “Shush...” Pete got up, two inches before rest felt like the better companion than tracking the minor drama of the shush. Pete wondered how that sound evolved. Was it imported? There are other shushes, Peter determined. But the one in the library is at the top of the list. It’s the quiet. And the architecture. Pete thought of these things and tried to stop thinking. And there’s no gender to the shush, except you know when the library has let one go. The skinny old, young ladies are lethal. They never miss. They never need two of them. You can always tell the fraud. But that wasn’t it. Shush is a Universal sound like gunfire. Why do wars need at least two sides...? Peter continued the revelry. He just decided on the title to his autobiography, his smirk just chased the Cheshire cat from the imaginary tree, “White People Must be accompanied by an Adult...” Pete treated himself to a well deserved, “Yeah,” He quickly followed with his own, “Shush...” Pete waited for the quiet to be converted to form. Nothing, it would have been his third eviction.

“Excuse me sir...”

“Sure,” Pete leaned back to get a full sight of the librarians face She was too close. In the library proximity and incrimination lead usually to eviction.

She’s cocking her brain for another sentence. Here it is, “Several people have

complained....” The turn started at her shoulders and she was gone. Pete felt lonely. And disappointed. For Pete not a good combination. Librarians? They never get abducted by aliens. No history of rape. They never get fired. The images faded and reoccurred before disappearing. You never heard, former librarian arrested. A librarian with a tattoo? These realization, conjectures and conclusions began to bother Pete. Peter decided to stop the inquisition wishing he had taken notes. The lights flickered on and off. The library is closing? Pete got up from one side first. “I need a smoke,” Pete decides. There’s never been a fire drill in the library. Pete stepped past the same librarian trying to avoid her eyes. There’s never been identical twin librarians. Pete felt relieved to step out of the library.

Nice outside Peter felt becoming concerned the Eastport Food Center might be closed. He stepped out into the street behind a car. It wasn’t closed... Stepping back onto the curb Peter looked suspiciously at the library. What’s for dinner Mom, he asked himself. Deciding what to buy minus a pack of cigarettes. A salad, linguini, what’s the name of the sauce and the loaf. Acknowledging the bread Pete already had the head of lettuce. Accepting challenges Peter put the store clock on himself. Everything in twenty seconds. The trick is to scan according to color. Pete wondered if Joe was in, a real nice guy, Italian nice. Pete remembered when Charlie was being processed for a top secret clearance Air Force Intelligence, something like OSI, came to Eastport and talked to all the girls Charlie dated in high school. And to Joe. Charlie with a top secret clearance, Charlie can’t keep a secret, Jesus Charlie coughs up secrets he doesn’t even know. That’s... there’s the whatever sauce, thirty five seconds. With ten second credit for a Charlie distraction. While paying Joe gave Pete a white rose for “Your nice Mom.” Peter beamed. Pete needed people to be nice to his mother. Peter recalled when he was a kid, home from private school Joe caught me shop lifting. Peter raised his left shoulder felling Joe’s strong hand on that shoulder twelve years ago. “Donna ah steal from me no more,” And Joe gave me a choice of some of the candies I was trying to levitate. A Mars Bar....The memory disappeared into its Peter’s feeling of respect.

Memories have emotions, getting sentimental about shop lifting? “I wonder what the Ploughshare Eight are doing. Hell be damned eighteen years for breaking into a -we make good things for life- and pouring their own blood into a hydrogen bomb reentry

vehicle...arrested while they were praying. From where did the images emerge. The many hungers and deceits. A starving baby sucking on his dieing mother's tit. Pete lightens up. Peter releases smoke without taking out the cigarette from his mouth. "Hey, I can see my own reflection." Peter's watching is own reflection in a mud puddle. If I stand here long enough my reflection would gradually disappear. Wandering bravely he wondered amidst the flurry of his imagination. He took a fleeting look at the white rose, happy it remained intact. Be a nice article in the Eastport News society section. Two area artists get together for dinner, no, early dinner. Amy Elizabeth and son, better put aspiring artist. Right area artists spent an evening at her home discussing modern art over wine, linguini and a clam sauce.

Peter and the fantasy arrived at his mother's home intact. Influenced by the news article. Pete wiped his feet on the welcome mat while knocking gently on glass. Pete scratched the tip of his nose. Angled around the curtain and peeked inside. Peer knocked again reminding himself that he was invited. Pete held on to the waiting moment, deciding he was going to say as the door opened. "The flower or me..." Our Amy will say,"Oh what a pretty flower..." And at least one of us will laugh. Impatient is as patient as Peter gets, he slid the flower pot to the side and exposed the key.

Inside Peter avoided doll, he put down the groceries, thinking-wondering how many times the same room unchanged can feel different. "Mom," Peter called out. While placing the flower on the dining room table. There's a note on the stove. "Mom..."Peter called...feeling better about the affection in his voice. He felt tired while gathering the crumbs in the kitchen into this scooped hands. Pete searched around the kitchen. He didn't know what he was looking for. He was going to call for his Mom. Pete exhaled instead. Pete sniffled,"I hope I don't have a cold?" Quietly not wanting to waken his mother Peter stepped out of the kitchen. "Why is the TV turned off?" Peter bumped into the rocking chair on the way to Amy's bedroom. Back and forth once the doll toppled over onto her side looking even more lost by the sudden change. "Mom,"Peter called out as if were asking himself a question. Pete pinched the bedroom door open one more inch. "Mom its Pete..." Pete could see Amy's shoes hanging over the side of the mattress. He felt better. "Mom?"Peter didn't hear what he said next. Moving slowly feeling quickly Peter followed his thought into the room. He stopped behind has outstretched hand.

“Mom,” Peter implored. Not aware the he was moving Peter stepped up next to the bed. His hand hadn’t moved. Until Pete brought it down to his mother’s shoulder. “Mom it’s Pete ...Get up.” The words were lost before they were spoken. Lost Peter’s looking at his hands. Amy didn’t move. He brought the back his hand from his mother’s cheek. Thinking his fingers that were cold. Pete turned around as if to run. He ran back to himself. Nowhere to go. Peter thought of a blanket dialing the phone. The other voice instructed. “Tell me what’s wrong?” Pete answered. “My Mom’s not moving...” An address was given. Other questions. There was one crumb left. He kept looking more afraid. Pete caringly places a blanket over his mother. He liften his Mom’s foot unto the bed. “I’m sorry Mom.” Peter said to himself. He wrapped his arms around himself. He’s watching a photograph. At the Beach. A family. His.... And his father with his arm around Amy. Peter tried. But didn’t look at is mother again. Backing up from bedroom. Against the rocker, Pete held out his hand for balance until he reached the kitchen. One cabinet, two, three. Each closing louder than the previous one. Pete held the Vodka bottle. He didn’t want to let go. Holding each other. Finally Peter poured into a water glass. Before raising the bottle to the trembling lips. Peter felt worse. The bottle down back up again, Pete stopped to check the level. Before realizing the bottle wouldn’t have to be refilled. “Oh,” Peter said as he took another swig. He felt his chest heaving. There’s a voice. “Are you going to be all right?” Pete turned around. Tracking the voice. A cop’s voice. They inspect each other, before Peter answered. “No.” The cop nodded as if he understood the answer Peter barely heard. A woman is leaning , talking into the cop’s ear. A white sleeve is all Pete could see.

Now her face. “I’m sorry....”

Peter answered. “I know?”

More of concern the young paramedic watching Peter holding his bottle asked,”Are you going to be ok sir?”

Afraid Pete raised his eyes... Peter asked. “Where are you taking my mother?”  
Pete didn’t want to lose Amy Elizabeth again.

The young voice asked. “Do you have family here Pete?”

Confused Peter appreciated hearing his name. “Me....”Peter answered. “And my father. He lives here in Eastport.”

The coroner is on his way Pete. And hell answer your questions. I think it's a good idea if we call your Dad?"

And with that offering one life came to an end. And the rest of us would wait our turn.

The conversations acknowledging death were made. The eyes reported fear before the language claimed fear's purpose. Death had come to visit. And taken Amy Elizabeth away. More friends in death than alive. They came. Some as if to count themselves alive. Less one those remaining seemed to be a family again... Death's forgiveness excuses love be love again.

Amy's body was brought to Fitzgerald's Funeral Home, across from the Pizza Parlor. The details of our own death remain intimate and personnel, except by convenient vocabulary left behind. And the assembly begins. The gathering witness. All of varied mourning. And polite regard. The last respects? What tearful tragedy resides within is a solitary undertaking. There is the obituary. Sadder in its brevity than the tombstone. Language more sparse than a grave unsold. Amy's passing away was followed by a lengthy spread in the Eastport News. Several of her paintings included. No mention of the quiet-lonely nights. More the less of so by alcohols redemption. Friends express regrets. Family's tears. Good food. God's words promised heard before. And so ends another day in paradise.

\* \* \*

I heard Peter gasping for air between words... "Come pick me up... I've been beat up." While asking for directions questions Charlie realized he'd been sleeping. "Sure," Charlie said adding. "Yes." Hurriedly Charlie gathered what he needed stepped outside. He stopped himself to hold the blackness o against his eyes. Several weeks after Amy's death these events transpired. As death goes, even for the living, death excuses time its haste. Yet Charlie hurried- feeling Peter's words. Waiting is not a timely thing, but a thing of time restrained. Harnessed well of love's purpose, adequately medicated Charlie Winters dropped to his knees and embraced the alleged Charlie dog. There is no mystery here not by love explained. Charlie man and Charlie dog, there was no eloquence here but love. And may all love be so. The taller bipedal veteran searched for

his shoes. Their next to the couch, old, broken, complicit in their hiding. Charlie picked them up as the victor might the vanquished for one more blow. Not Charlie's to believe but nonetheless imagined. The shirt is buttoned. One more shoe lace the body moves; the soul trails neatly behind. More inventory of mind's neglect than fact, everything is determined in order. What residence claims everything that excludes the inhabitant? Since childhoods thrift Charlie believed that if kept the movement forward he would in the eventually of always arrive. Not in time. Not intact. But in fact. This small story might not be true. But if not then should have been. The devil is exorcised in Iowa with less effort, but finally Charlie exits. He stops himself while still moving; feeling his love expressed for Charlie was not love enough. Slow but motion still he bargains the error against the fact and burdens faith one more time. Another hug...

Dressed, alert enough to assert majority control of his eyes, Charlie takes two steps down from the elevated cottage. He stops hard, bending as if in the mid motion from the step before; now looking like he's trying to see his own face. Charlie has decided to exchange the alleged Charlie dog's water for milk. The self assigned task accomplished, hello's interrupted immediately by goodbye, steps retraced are being traced again. The car is slapped the way some ladies are at square dances. The car ignited...begins to back up relocating pebbles out the way. The half turn out the driveway. Another gear still the car's aim is not less its direction. Motion is intent. And intent suggests awareness. Charlie begins to recall how he met Charlie dog at the Humane Society. The memories flow the way a river turns easily into its bank. Charlie asked for the next "dog" to be killed. Not able to save them all at least the one with the least time would gain the most of time intended as denied. Out came the alleged Charliedog from his cage as marines recruiting posters. An argument managed between cages with another resident was settled. And the two Charlie's stepped into Creation once alive again. Charlie man had tried to kill himself with God's permission, spared by a mosquitoes gathering now there are two. The Old Man with the beard would say Noah's arc is complete. Charlieman smiled his breath, the memory complete-continuing...he rolled the window down inviting the cool darkness into the car. "Put to sleep," Charlie mocked the cruel words to the stars.

Charlie is back, the same driveway, almost the same man. Inspiration defies

logic sometimes even courtesy. He's running back into the beach cottage, nearly missing the last step on an awkward jump. The door opened, two paws are high against the darkness and Charlie's pulsating heart, Charlie's forced against the partially closed door. The leash is taken from the window sill and maneuvered around several licks. One motion thrust and Charlieman is thrust outside behind a taught leash. Charlie had decided the alleged one needed a walk. Three sniffs, this one now the loudest, forward another sniff, the leg is raised perpendicular to the big dipper and a rock feels Charlie's signature. A sound...the leg comes down in increments, the ears are up, translation is the language. The Vietnam Veteran unzips takes out a penis that looks tired and somewhat sad and begins urinating with much less conviction on the same rock. Neither is impressed with Charlieman's marking. If two friends can't piss together....At times the urinary symphony begins with Charlieman. Such was one of the understandings between two creatures whose relationship excused language in the bargain. The three persist in varied directions, the man, the alleged one and the leash. Charlie's thinking about memories wondering if we could recall memory without the gift of forgetting. "I mean memory with a future not past memories." Charliedog looked up, the two brown eyes acknowledged their own assurance then returned quickly to the encyclopedia of scents. I guess remembering came before forgetting or we would have a history, Charlie thought mouthing quietly the last three words. Why does forgetting come back often without permission. Charlie is at the high school prom dancing with Lynn, Marcia and Doris. Charliedog watches his friend staring at the stars before both reclaim the encouraged horizontal. Charlieman wanders his eyes down to his buddy. The one with more hair was deep into the stew of an odor. Charliedog yearns the information be true. Charlieman is back gone away. But that wasn't a memory, it was, but interfered, pleasantly altered without whose permission. I didn't dance with Lynn . Yet dancing in the middle of a memory. Charlieman shook his head feeling even more alone until he felt the moisture of his friends tongue against his wrist. "Thank you Charlie." Charlie stopped to think not waiting for a response. Now remembering the incomparable Karen. Leaning is motion. Let's continue. Not by fiction discontinued. If some was in charge of forgetting what would they'd look like. Short, annoyed, limping- always smiling. Is each person forgetting particulars different? Is dieing forgetting to live? Why can't you prove you



forgot? “Charlie if you don’t mind let’s go inside ok?” Charliedog raised his leg after tugging on the leash and added his own melody to the out of town ladies calling card. Satisfied Charliedog sauntered off in the direction of the front door, leading his friend from behind. “Charlie I’m going to have to talk to Peter about starting a remembering club so nobody forgets. Charlie’s already unhooked the leash and closed the door, always checking to door three times. Opening the door to the Datsun Charlieman tightened his lips around a yawn. Charlie inhaled the moonlight air once, slid into, the ignition again. He raised his eyes to the rear view mirror, backing up, “I shouldn’t talk to myself when I’m alone people will think that I’m with someone...” Charlie stabbed the accelerator. Two turns a couple of whose hundred yards and Charlie’s is slow on Heritage Road. “Nothing is something or it wouldn’t be a word.” I’m goen to go see Mom after I pick up Pete. And see what’s happening. I hope Pete’s o.k. at least one of us should be enough. I hope I’m not already lost even though everything looks familiar. Charlie imagined Charliedog riding shotgun with him. And felt better. “I wish I could talk bark.” The young aging Veteran sped down the two lain Road that was laid down two hundred years ago, past that building somebody said Aaron Burr got married. Those easy going soft ladies who couldn’t show their ankles what a deal that must have been. Ladies couldn’t what was the deal with men showing their ankles. Jesus I’m almost here I must have had some pauses I didn’t calculate. Also less day time traffic in the night. Charlie stepped on his breaks turning into Friendly’s. “I’m sorry I’m probably late Pete,” Charlie practiced explaining to his friend. Charlie’s driving slowly scanning the parking lot. “I hope you expected me later?” Charlie bumped the breaks to a stop. “There’s Pete?” Charlie’s words pointed to a figure bent over his knees, his head down, one arm over the back of his head. “Pete looks smaller that’s not good.” Charlie turned his high beams up scrambling light in the direction. Peter covered his eyes with his forearm. He got up stopping twice before reaching full height. “Pete doesn’t beat up to well.” Getting out and up Charlie could see Peter’s tattered sleeve flapping in the wind. “The skin on his blood is moving.” Afraid what ever Charlie intended to say is unclear. Stepping quickly, tripping once, Charlie hurried towards Peter. I’ve got to slow down to not add my upset to Peter. “Pete...” Charlie called out. Peter waved dismally.

“Why’d you park so faraway?” Pete asked. Each word sounded unrelated to the

other.

“I’m not sure why Pete...Pete did your tongue get hurt? You sound a little unfamiliar.” Pete took two steps towards Charlie, his back hurting, the second step more tentative. “Right Pete you told me once when you’re hurting you don’t like machines to close nearby, right? I don’t either a lot of times there responsible...”

“Don’t worry I’m o.k.?”

“Do you want me to go get the car were going to have to get into it anyway?”

“Don’t worry about it.” Pete held out his arm which Charlie took in both his hands. “It’s good to see you Charlie.” Peter wrapped his arm around Charlie shoulder.

“Pete should I ask you what happened you look like you might need a nurse or somethen close to a doctor?”

“No forget it I’m-”

“Whatever you say your limping I guess you know that....”

“Yeah my back...”

“Well take your time the fight is done. Except for the left over’s....” Pete and Charlie inched their way towards the car. “Unravel at your own pace Pete.” They took half of steps from across the street it wouldn’t of been clear who was helping the other.

“Can I ask you a favor Charlie?”

“Your stayen at my place right that’s why I’m here if that’s what you were going to ask don’t worry about it?”

“What a fucking life-”

“I’m tryen to help Pete one of the things I’m doen you might have noticed is that I’m not saying anything funny?”

“Thanks I appreciate it....”With the next lean forward Peters frown became a grimace.

“Charlie do you have cookies and milk at home?”

“Sure that’s an easy one I sure do those funny Lorna dune deals, the Oreo ones and some bigger interesting ones with not enough pecans. And a gallon of Milk that’s only been opened once. No twice actually.”

“Charlie can I ask you a favor?”

“Sure this isn’t the repetition of the one I anticipated a moment ago is it?”

“No.”

“Go ahead were almost closer to the car?”

“Don’t take this the wrong way Charlie,” Peter stopped to look at his friend. “Charlie could you not talk so much?”

“Sure Pete I can do that.... the car its only ten feet now just almost nine...”

“I might get blood on your upholstery...”

“Don’t worry Pete your blood is welcome anytime.”

Peter laughed then groaned.

Pete when we get home you can take a warm bath. And pick out the pebbles from all the wrong places in your body. I can make some interesting bandages.”

“Great Charlie thanks.” The two friends took one more step, another and two shorter ones. Charlie leaned -reached forward hanging on to Peter’s elbow and opened the car door. Pete hung onto the roof of the car with his left hand, the door with his right and began to descend. Charles hands followed the downward progress first at the shoulder, then the back finally under the buttocks-removing both bands just before Pete collapsed into the bucket seat. “Good Pete that was good.” Charlie ran hurried taking long steps around the front of the car. He heard Pete close his own door as he reached slid into his own seat.

Charlie paused looked at his hands trying to organize himself. Cookies and milk and you already said life sucks right what was the other thing?”

“Don’t worry about it were-”

“Fine were in motion Pete goen the right direction well be home and comfortable soon.”

“I don’t know why asked about cookies and milk?”

Charlie turned the car into a half circle. “I wouldn’t worry about cookies and milk makes perfect sense after an unsolicited beating that obviously went on for too long. The guy got redundant ah Pete?” Charlie driving more carefully looked to either side before accelerating into the absent traffic. “Yeah it’s interesting Pete how people get hungry after a good beating regardless what side you’re on of the beating.”

“Tell me about it.”

“Right and for your added comfort Pete we got recently clean laundered

sheets and I already said about the bandages and also believe it or not we've got some pretty effective ointments. Jesus Pete we should maybe think about opening up a beating up halfway house." Pete and Charlie quietly waited for a light to turn green. "Pete I just remembered your other request my being less talkative if it already isn't too late I'm going to go ahead with that request ...." Charlie adjusted his seat, cleared his throat. "Believe it or not Pete I can already sense myself getting quiet."

"Are you sure?" Peter asked dismally.

"Yeah pretty sure."

Charlie is concentrating his eyes tightening first around the side mirror, less than ten seconds of quiet have elapsed. "Pete I know I'm interrupting myself I mean my silence, but I almost forgot ...I'm sayen you can stay at my house as long as you're interested in recovering from yourself-that's about it. No wait one more....Pete if your carrying drugs specially the ones that annoy the police maybe you might consider letting me carry them I'm sure the last thing you want right now is a convincing frisking. Plus also I can do a better urine test because my urine has already been medicated or just leave them outside of yourself in the car because the police I understand need a particularly better warrant for a car if it's moving." Charlie flashes his eyes out the window and comes right back. "No I'm not in much of a mood for a frisking myself...." Peter has realized the futility of asking Charlie for the peace associated with quiet. "Those guys can lose weight over one of their frisks once...forget I'll be quiet."

Time and space... motion seem different in the night amidst agony. The sound of blood dripping from Pete's nose became the night's tempo. Several moments elapsed each a related variance of the other. Each partner in this nights challenge left the other alone, wishing they could do as much for themselves. Several times Charlie glanced at Peter, each time Pete appeared motionless. Angry, beaten. And tired of both. Not wanting to understand. Not needing to. Ten minutes almost a wrong turn both friends' were near Charlie's.

"Your not good at being beaten are you Pete?"

"Not on week ends thanks for the silence Charlie."

"Strange thing I don't feel responsible for it. Were almost home Pete with the cookies." One minute more Peter's than Charlie's and the car turned into the driveway.

Charlie slows and manages a comfortable stop. He hurries out the car reminding himself to slow down, curling his body around the headlights....

Backing up from the opened door Charlie asks. "Tell me what to do Pete?"

"I'm o.k." Peter rises with more difficulty than he needed going down.

Charlie puffed his cheeks and deflated them. "Pete I don't know how much your body knows it's been beaten..."

Betrayed by motion preferring rest Peter's body protests, the lips tighten against bloody teeth. Both friends are again next to each other moving against their own forward motion. "Don't worry Pete if you fall I'm sure I can catch you in a good way for you and pain."

"Thanks," Peter said sincerely.

Through leverage, the good of friendship the third step onto the porch has been completed. Peter twitched his face away his body recalling a punch he had taken less than an hour ago. They walked the rest of the patio Pete leaning on Charlie. An owl wondered the moon watched." Pete you'll be pleased to know I've left the door unlocked so we could avoid the annoying key fumbling deal."

"Charlie I wouldn't of made a good soldier."

"I think God prefers us that way Pete." Charlie held Pete's arm around his neck with his cheek and left hand while pushing the door open with the other. The two veterans of a uniquely idyllic friendship, invigorated by exhaustion, stepped into the cottage. Charliedog sat by the cocktail table, his tail once to the right, once to the left.

"Thank you..."

"Who are you saying thank you to Charlie? I can go the rest of the way..."

"I'm not sure Pete."

"What are you doing-"

"I don't know Pete, actually maybe I do with my hand on the door I didn't have both hands available to catch you on the way down. You already look kinda of on the way down. So I got into the lifeguard position.... Now your o.k. right?"

"Yeah thanks," Pete leaned back against the door, he reached for a cigarette. Charlie went down on one knee, the alleged one was on him, paws and tongue before he was on the carpet. "Thanks for understanding Charlie you can see Pete's relatively well

and alive after an unfamiliar beating.” Charliedog glanced briefly over to Pete who winked. Charlie rose back to his full height pushing down on one knee, Charlie’s paws slid down from the top of his chest down his stomach. Charlie man squeezed the back of his head, he decided that patting alleged ones on the head and little children was condescending. Peter began sat down on the couch, his face is tightening with anticipation. There was less pain than expected Peter exhaled with relief. The blood on Peter’s face had caked like three day old chlorate frosting. Except for one opened gash that looked like to Charlie like it was pulsating. The two Charlie’s had already left for the kitchen, one of them had forgotten what he wanted to say. Pete said, “Na....” about something. You could hear his foot tapping on the exposed carpet against the lineoleumn floor.

“I’m almost back Pete,” Charlie wrestled with the refrigerator. “With everything promised you anticipated.” Charlie tipped toed out of the narrow kitchen Charlie dog bouncing his nose in the direction of the plate of cookies. “In case you’re wondering Pete the bowl is for Charlie everything else mostly is for us. And there’s more.” Charlie handed Pete a frosted glass of milk. “I froze the glass in the freezer mostly for effect I think.” Pete took the glass and slowly reached for a Fig Neutron and an Oreo. “Pete that’s one of the things I learned from you diversifies your cookies.”

“Thanks for everything buddy.”

“Heavens were not even close to everything yet. Pete it’s that good milk without any of those fat things people get started talking about. Wendolyn told me about them.”

Peter exhaled a plume of smoke, both Charlie’s backed up. “Whose Wendolynn do I know her?”

“No probably not yet Wendolynn is all around incredible. Wendolynn introduced me to God personally like I told you actually she’s very devoted without being...you know.” Charlie looked away

The blood from Pete’s nose seeped through his mustache into his milk.

Charlie turned to watch Charliedog slapping the milk into his mouth, he thought of himself eating off the floor at the VA lock up. He winked at Charlie who winked both eyes back at him. “That’s four winks in under two almost three minutes Pete your mine

and two no three from Charlie.... Pete you might be pleased to know I'm exhausted."

"You'll sleep tonight right?"

"That would make twice in one night that would be uncanny." Charlie searched around the room trying to figure out what to say next. "Pete I'm thinking Pete you might consider dealing with a likely invasion of those bacteria. You know for your available wounds their probably worse in peoples sleep. I don't even know if they take breaks. If they do sleep it be your luck to get a batch of insomnia bacteria. I wonder if your drug habits Pete might leave the bacterial perplexed."

"Don't worry about me I'm o.k. the cookies helped...."

"Sure Pete I know you are but resilient isn't what it used to be if it ever was. Don't you agree Pete taking care of yourself is a nice way to end the day especially after a beating? What are you doing Pete?"

"I'm timing you I bet you could talk about bacteria for three minutes."

Charlie had already left for bathroom, returning with several plastic tubes. "Well Pete these ointments are good and they've been cleaned off from the previous victim. Bacteria are nothen to fool around with they'll eat your nose away. And I don't think your Mom will pay for you to get another nose assuming ...."

"Whatever you say let me have some. What are you doing?"

"Here take them all that way you have a choice." What am I was I doing I was bowing, Charlie sometimes bows without warning I'm concerned that he's condescending himself. I don't want him to think he's unequal or whatever the alleged ones think on that issue."

Peter got up slowly, he looked like he was pulling up from his chest. "Great that wasn't too bad. You guys have it worked out." Peter is examing blood under his finger nail.

Pete sidestepped between the couch and the table toward the bathroom.

"So you won't be startled, I'm going to tap you affectionately on the shoulder Pete. Pete you want more to eat? I'm also going to get clean sheets like I talked about and hunt down a pillow."

"Thanks I'm o.k...."

"Don't mention it Pete good luck with the ointment. I'm glad you're here Pete safer,

what's those pills?" Charlie asked himself and Pete.

"There just pain killers nothing serious..."

"Do they have permission to be here?"

Pete laughs shaking his head with pain. "I don't know Pete maybe I should hide them effectively. The cops-"

"Charlie..." Peter's irritated voice strains reaching out from the bathroom. "If the cops show up I can swallow them all don't worry."

Charlie steps away talking to himself. "You should carry decoys like saccharin Pete the cops can violate peoples rights. And they can do it on short notice..."

Pete stepped stiffly back into the living. "Pete you look like a guy who gets along with ointment. You look better. You want to say why someone got into a fight with you?"

"No not really just..." Charlie handed Pete sheets, blankets and a pillow. "Well Pete maybe we should call it a night. I bet you're tired."

"Specially...yeah I'll see you in the morning buddy." Peter sat down heavily letting the sheets, blankets and pillow collapse on his lap. Charlie backed into his bedroom absent mindedly unbuttoning his shirt. A button popped. Both Charlie's watched the button roll across the bedroom into a near complete circle before rolling over into a diminishing circle. Both Charlie's looked at each other. "Buttons are somethen aren't they Charlie?" The pants dropped to Charlie's ankles, the alleged one curled up next to the pillow. "Where would we be without gravity ah Charlie for one thing depending on the gravity deal Pete might have bled upwards?" Charliedog yawned. Charlie Winters sat on the bed wondering if he was going to sleep. He looked at the pillow as pedestrians look at a busy intersection... Charlie is scratching his wrist, side saddled on the corner of the mattress crossing his legs. Charlie is thinking, what if Pete needs during my sleep? The inquiry continues. What if Pete needs me during his sleep? And I'm asleep. Charlie bounces himself upward and falls back. A change of mind. He lifts the scattered blankets and stuffs both legs under the assembled mass. The unanswered questions have been dismissed. Charliedog sighs; a cockroach after examining the button ambles away. Charlie squirms under the covers. The eyes are closed. You can see veins crossing the eyelids rushing blood to their assignments. A brief crossing, one eye opens," Charlie I hope you and Pete enjoyed the cookies and milk?"



The second eye greets the second. Initial curiosity leaves the room excused by one anxious thought, "Internal organs." The two words as expressed with enough volume would have emptied trenches. Eyes alert further open waiting instruction. Both Charlie's are sitting. Anything reasonable has already been discarded. Any effort that might have satisfied moderation accomplishes the opposite. Charliedog knows when his friend is troubled. Charlie has secured the third button before his fingers feel skin. "The pancreas." Charlie expressed with conviction. An organic presence Charlie Winters knew nothing about except that its residence was internal therefore important. An integration and confession are complete in one sentence. "Maybe I should have taken Pete to the hospital?" Inquiry fuels condemnation, Charlie is standing. "Jesus internal organs plus drugs?" Charlie's is panicked his eyes are scavengers searching for shoes. Whatever facts abide Charlie's mind has decided an autopsy is impending. No second chances. What to do next is unknowable except that it had to be done. Concerns reinforced through ignorance and love....One damaged pancreas, other organs had joined in an anatomical conspiracy. Charlie's face is transfixed with purpose. Barefooted, belt unbuckled, shirt on the floor. The disarray clothed the mind of Charlie's purpose. Charliedog watches, the cockroach hides, the internal organs will submit to kindness and end their acquired contempt of Charlie's dearest friend. Before Charlie could protest further reason to purposes certitude is promised, Peter's life is saved. All delivered by hope alone. Feeling better by Peter's anticipated good fortune moves with a calmer grace of efficiency. But the words returned, "Internal organs." Hope is enemy despair prevails. The words was not screamed but felt accordingly. "Pete." Charliedog stands aside waiting judgments better stand. Peter has risen from his waist upward like a bobber sunk in deep waters. Charlie has not has given no thought to the status of his own internal organs as they might affect the evolving tragedy. Prayer by any motion would have been incomplete. Peter begs. "What?" A loud exasperation. Peter's eyes open looking like they no longer attend any purpose. What the two pools of light see is an unshaven face. Two feet close not far enough Charlie's face. "Jesus," is blamed again. Fortunately Charlie has retreated. Peter is rubbing his eyes.

"Pete...."Charlie begins.

"Gimme a break Charlie what?"

“Pete I got worried about your internal organs. I got close to hear you breathe...”

Peter asks distracted. “What time is it?” He’s looking around. The wrist watch, the unbuttoned shirt, Charlie. Reassured by pointlessness Pete falls back onto the couch. “What did you say?” Before the last word’s escape. Peter regretted the guest ion anticipating an answer.

Charlie words swim in importance, drowning in despair, buoyed by a friend’s compassion. “Pete internal organs are important (Peter and all his internal organs groan) And I’m worried you know for you. And your internal organs. Pete your pancreas alone can kill you and not stop to take any credit. And that appendix deal Pete that’s supposedly only good for digesting large amounts of grass it can also kill you. They can all kill you Pete. (Peter laughs... the sound helped him breathe). And if you can’t afford an autopsy well never know which organs responsible. I think we should go to Westville Hospital to have you checked out.”

“Charlie go back to bed...”

“Pete do you know your skin is an organ?”

Pete’s eyes returned to Charlie looking like they were about to occupy a vacancy they wanted no part of. Peter tasted his mouth before asking. “What are you talking about Charlie?” A sense of suspicion reached Pete... the awareness-there was no stopping Charlie became an inaudible moan.

One Charlie wags his tail, the other one thought he was in the presence of repressed encouragement. “Pete please listen in spite of your maybe thinking you shouldn’t. All I’m probably saying Pete is there’s an outside chance even just one of your internal organs is at this very moment could be developing some kind of crisis. We could be dealing with an inside out death. And it would be the worst kind because you’d end up taking all of the credit. I don’t mean to keep talking Pete. But I’m afraid I’m making sense.” Charlie is counting the points already made, three fingers are extended.” For one thing these organs can be real patient about letting you know anything. Sometimes they keep you waiting without letting you know much until it’s too late. And you know how it goes with internal organs Pete... where one goes the other ones like to follow.”

“Charlie my internal organs are fine.” Pete swings his feet onto the floor. “Do you have some coffee?”

“Sure Pete and you might be right, but it’s like this your not an average person you’re a drug addict who drinks to much. And you don’t keep track of either. I expect in some illogical way you think the drugs are keeping track of you.” (Pete has cupped his chin and waits for the rest). Their full of surprises I hate to say this but I’m sure there scenarios where they even surprise themselves Pete. It’s-”

“Charlie let’s go back to-”

“What I’m leading up to saying....”Charlie is pacing, he slows for a moment of self critique. “That’s right what I’m leading up to saying that I might have already said is that something as innocent as those cookies might end up being the culprit. You hear a lot about blockages in hospitals. I don’t know Pete maybe the internal organs when their assaulted they get...who knows death it’s a mystery Pete especially if you’re dead. “Peter and Charlie are looking at each other with the same face, but for completely different reasons.

“Charlie listen,” Peter casts his eyes out the window. “Why am I listening to this?”

“It’s not like you have a choice... Pete those internal organs will have their way with you it’s not like their impartial. Even doctors get outsmarted by them.” After running out of fingers Charlie is no longer counting. Pete-”

“Omens right your going to start talking about omens?”

“Exactly Pete there always available to help you clarify a situation. But what I’m thinking is that at this very moment you might be an omen yourself.” Peter wishes he weren’t laughing. Charlie raises his voice. “An unregulated omen.... Pete I really hope you’re paying attention because I’m having trouble paying attention myself. I might be tired or worse. “Charlie sat down heavily on the couch dropping his arms between his legs. “Pete I just realized what I probably shouda said from the beginning please brace yourself , but I’m afraid I have to take you to the emergency room even if I have to commit you....”:

“Your nuts Charlie.”

“As you know that doesn’t work to well with me-”

“You can’t commit me-”

Peter got up walked across the room and sat back down. “Charlie have me

committed on what grounds. You try and they'd take you-"

"You just made two points," Charlie held up two fingers that looked like a victory sign. "Number one I'll take that risk. And the second point which I almost forget. (Charlie looks around for assistance, he has to settle for himself)...Right Pete on the unfortunate grounds of yourself. It's simple if they see someone that's unnecessarily self destructive to themselves ...on those grounds alone you can get committed for observation. It's like a citizen's arrest minus the citizen and the arrest. I understand Pete it's a little outrageous. They convene a judge who already seems convened and two psychiatrists. Pete they can also get tricky about what two psychiatrist means. And before you know it someone's helping you. It's like their waiting for you Pete without knowing you were coming.... All they really get you on is on anticipation of yourself. I heard in Omaha Nebraska they've committed more patients than staff members ....It's insane Pete."

"Charlie...." Peter is worried that Charlie might create enough confusion to have him put away, Peter's hand twitched when he thought of... urine sample. "Charlie why-"

"No Pete I'm afraid as unappealing as it might be on this one I'm right, its unfortunate about true. I can even hire a lawyer. You notice my sentences are getting shorter and shorter..."

"What does that mean don't answer. Charlie how'd you get from internal organs to commitment for Christ sakes."

"I don't know Pete?"

"Let me get this straight-"

"How about if you I mean if I just refuse to participate."

"That's the best part Pete refusing just proves you don't know what you're doing. Impaired is one of their favorite words another is inappropriate. They can get to the first one real quick before they even talk to you because they've got your records. The cops get called in and you're a goner."

"I'm not going anywhere..."

"They love that one Pete because I think you're already somewhere. And I know you're thinking I probably don't know much about internal organs? And you'd be right most of the time I don't the difference between the pancreas and the liver. But on a good

day most people don't know how many feet of intestine they have. I don't even know if-

"This is bullshit Charlie it's four o'clock in the morning why-"

"I can't help its four o'clock in the morning." Pete is putting a match to his cigarette.

"Why don't we finish this in the morning after a breakfast?" Pete encircles Charlie's face with smoke.

"I'll make a deal with you Pete well go to the emergency room and take care of your available lacerations and get the word on your internal organs. And if just mention casually it doesn't even have to be a complete sentence that you use unsolicited drugs..."

"And we agree there'll be no more bull about committeemen's and lawyers we forget the rest including the cops."

"Go to the emergency room and forget all the rest?" Charlie nodded and Pete shook his hand. "Fine I'll see you in the morning now-"

"What morning you don't delay an emergency room it's illogical, Pete the internal organs-"

"Fine," Peter almost screamed holding his hands hard in front of his face. "Well go to the fucking emergency room, Jesus Charlie..."

"Great Pete and well stop on the way for breakfast I mean on the way back see we got it done and we didn't even have to mention brains are internal organs."

"Right on the way back. Pete I want to mention be careful if you get a tired suspicious nurse it's a bad combination."

"Fine let me get dressed-"

"Pete do you mind smelling my breathe I'm afraid from all this thinking my breathe has probably turned bad."

"Why do I already feel I've smelled your breathe Charlie?" Charlie gets up stretching slowly. "Charlie when we get to Westville Hospital I get your car key in case they take you. I'm going to go take a shower. Why don't you go finish getting dressed?"

"O.K. Pete that ointment looks good and shiny if they get serious about your commitment that'll look good for you. Could be also the shower will work they like that hygiene stuff. They take notes on it actually. In their own way their nostalgic those people."

“There isn’t going to be a committeemen-”

Right Pete let’s hope so. But if they start asking you practical questions don’t get to eloquent.”

By whatever instruction both Charlie’s headed for the bedroom. Charlie ran his hand carefully over Charlie’s dog’s head. “

Peter echoed from the bathroom as he closed the door. “There isn’t going to be a commitment.”

Several hours passed before Pete and Charlie arrived at the Westville Hospital emergency room. Peter’s shower became a half hour in the bathtub. Plans were changed. Resistance became acquiescence, a stop for coffee and donuts. A speeding cruiser almost collided with Charlie at a stop sign. Except for the usual night wanderers, a garbage truck, lovers back from their motels the streets were empty. The moon set was about to yield the horizon to the sun when the two veterans of different wars arrived. Each playing out different anxieties in the inconsistent quiet of their minds.

Peter flicked his cigarette leaving a cascading trail of smoke, Charlie stepped through the electric doors. Charlie Winters the medicated Good Samaritan, Peter the self medicated drug addict. Both thinking of the different eventualities. Charlie’s talking to himself, “Did I take my medication in case those people make me nervous...”

Peter catches up. “Don’t talk to yourself Charlie you’re with me...”

Charlie’s already frozen against the unique feeling of an emergency room. “Pete if these people...here’s my keys we agreed you’d get the keys.”

“What were you about to say?”

“Just now (Peter nodded) I was about to say that if these people somehow start getting organized around me you’d better get take the keys so you can go back and leave.”

“What if they take both of us?”

“That only unusually happens I mean it’s very rare. Just let me talk first so they know who’s in trouble.”

“Right. This place is starting to get me and we haven’t been here-”

“Pete its better if we stay together that way well know where we are?” (Pete dropped his head once in agreement). The two travelers stepped up to a small half circle

window secured by thick glass and two metal bars.

Charlie clearing his throat leaned into the window. "Hi nurse I'm here with my friend Pete he got beat up last night." Charlie got even closer to the football sized opening and added in a hush. "I'm particularly worried about his internal organs you know the ones inside..."

"What's your name?" The glass voice asked.

"My name?" Charlie quizzed himself for time; the voice suggested he had a choice. "My names Charlie Winters but I'm not-"

"Winters-"

"Yes Winters like the season when it's snowing. But like I said I'm here with my friend he got beat up bad last night, he uses unsolicited drugs and I'm afraid he drinks quite a bit if you know what I mean?"

The voice tried to interrupt. "And I'm afraid he doesn't keep track of either."

The voice asked. "Do you have insurance?"

"Well mam not on us I mean I do, but I didn't get beat up my friend Pete here (Charlie points blindly over his shoulder) got beat up-"

Charlie added listening to Peter's chuckle at the end. "You might say were freelancing..."

As if facts were an incidental annoyance the voice said, "Take this clipboard and answer all the questions..."

Charlie tucked the clipboard under his arm, both friends stepped away. "Pete I shoulda mentioned don't laugh while these people are thinking or talking, they don't like it. I think it's trained out of them..."

Pete and Charlie sat across from each other. Charlie dragged his chair a few feet closer. "Here take it," Charlie extended the clip board.

"Why don't you read me the questions and I'll answer them you write down my answers."

"No you see I can see your getting entertaining about this that's a mistake plus if I write down your answers in my hand writing your signature will confuse them."

"Fine grime the damn thing Charlie."

"If there any guest ions there Pete you might be suspicious of or don't

understand just improvise...”

“You mean lie?” Pete is writing.

“No that’s not what I mean but it might do?”

Charlie continued. “I’ve got a better idea leave those blank. Yeah Pete that’s a good one leave them blank. And Pete remember they take urine around here pretty seriously. I have a feeling your urine is hardly worth urinating.”

“That’s very funny...”

“I hope not....”

“Gimme a break they want to know if I’m a heterosexual. Look at this do I practice safe sex.” (Charlie got up and is leaning over Peter). “Charlie your hovering over me.”

Charlie went back to his seat. “Pete don’t make these people laugh too much Pete they get unpredictable if they start enjoying their jobs.”

“I’ll take a waiver I’m not giving up any urine?”

“A waiver that’s good. Don’t even both looking at any guest ions in Spanish that subjunctive is murder.”

“What’s the subjunctive?”

“I don’t know Pete if you can ever forget something you never knew. I’m surprised you don’t know Pete. You always impressed me as a guy that might know what the subjunctive means?”

Three no four people walked into the emergency room in various injuries. A frightened woman bleeding. She just sat down to catch her breathe. A man walked in quickly holding a child. The baby’s coughing. An old man limping. An argument at the window. He just left looking angrily over his shoulder. Where’d that guy come from? A teenager, his girl friend. A temporary tattoo oozing blood. Peter’s name has just been called. He stood up quickly. Sat back down, reached into his pants pocket and retrieved a blue pill and tossed it into his mouth.

“Jesus Pete....” Charlie began a prayer he didn’t know how to finish.

“Wish me good luck?” Peter turned around.

“Wait Pete I’ve got something for you to listen to... I shoulda probably mentioned before, these people can get pretty deep into being controlling...just go along.



They can't help it."

"Anything else?"

"Yeah maybe Pete if they somehow get you to piddle ask them for a Spanish translation on your urine that might work?"

"That's a good one Charlie. Anything else?"

"No thank you."

Pete followed the nurse into a narrow hallway. Charlie sat down pleased with his good Samaritan status, believing this would be the beginning of Peter's new self. Charlie's scanned a Time Magazine next to his knee. Charlie's thumb and forefinger began their determined rotation, six hundred revolutions later (ten minutes) Pete appeared out of the same hallway.

"Pete how can you be back so-"

"The doctor said I was o.k., let's go our deal is done..."

"Done...? Did you tell him about the drugs, the severe beating? Pete did you say anything about your internal organs? Did you tell him you didn't sleep last night?"

Peter's cough became a laugh hearing the last question. "I told him everything, drugs, organs, booze. Come on let's go." Pete headed for the glass doors waving Charlie in his direction. "Come on..."

"What's he nuts Pete wait could be you got a tired left over doctor. I got one that fell asleep on me once."

"Pete wait o.k. I'll be right back." Charlie pivoted away while talking. He walked quickly, his arms folded into right angels, deeper into the anti chambers of the emergency room. Charlie thought of the narrowing hallway in New York City, Pete and Charlie searching for their room. "Gimme a break above the knees Pete uses drugs defectively in the damn emergency room no less. And the doctor lets him go. Nurse (Charlie has spotted a nurse about to step into a room). Nurse I gotta talk to you." Charlie surprised himself with his intensity.

"Your friend has already-"

"I know nurse I want to talk to the doctor." If Charlie had given an order in the last seven years that was it. The nurse slowly half closed her eyes.

She hesitated before saying. "Fine come with me." Charlie slowed down

encouraging more distance between himself and the nurse. He began thinking about his own exposure. Forget it he heard his mind call back. They stepped into an examination room. "Wait here." The nurse instructed pointing at the linoluemn floor. Charlie is looking up at a skeleton. Charlie reached without thinking to touch the shoulder before stopping. "Hi?" Charlie asked now holding a tongue depressant. Charlie just visualized himself in five point restraints; he shuttered shaking off the image.

"Sir can I help you?" The large-tall doctor spoke first.

Charlie's turning around answering. "Sure thanks I'm Charlie Winters Peter's friend." Charlie coughed into his fist... "And-"

"I examined your friend his injuries are superficial. And he's not interested in any further treatment."

"There's a problem doctor Pete uses drugs I told the nurse-"

"I'm aware of your friend's drug use he's not invested in treatment." The doctor glanced at his watch with indifference.

"The problem is... I also have to tell you Pete sat in your waiting room popping some funny blue pill. If they find Pete dead in some uncomfortable alley his family is going to worse than upset. And I'm afraid their going to get all focused on you (Charlie continued picking up the tempo) especially if... Especially when someone has to testify I'd Pete was using drugs in your waiting room...here?" Charlie pointed at the linoluemn floor.

The doctor considered the space between Charlie and the skeleton. And said. "Please wait here."

The doctor left in what seemed to Charlie a singular motion. "Wait here," Charlie said to himself. I wonder if that's why they call them waiters. Charlie raised one hip onto the examining table then the other. "I told the truth..." Charlie explained to the skeleton. Charlie measured the room visually, wondering how small a room had to be before it lost its room status. "I hope..." Charlie needed to go to the bathroom, his tongue ran a half circle across his lips. The nurse appeared suddenly. Charlie felt exposed. She's taller, older and skinner.

Without hesitation she said. "Your friend Peter is being admitted to CP3 for observation. If you have any other guest ions you can ask the nurse at admitting."

Before Charlie could feel his smile floating on his face the nurse was gone. Charlie tried to figure out how they just appeared. Said something. And disappeared. Charlie returned to feeling good about Pete's hospitalization. She could have said I hope everything works out for your friend. Charlie asked himself pretending he was talking to the nurse. Jumping off the examining table. At the doorway, an eerie moment, Charlie felt a twinge of loneliness leaving the skeleton behind. It was the first time he had any sense of that emotion since Vietnam. Charlie shrugged and retraced his steps to the electric door. Stepping past the water cooler, the anti smoking poster, he was surprised he didn't remember everything he'd already passed by...At the door Charlie turned around and looked for Pete. He was gone.

Outside Charlie raised his voice happily to the heavens,"Yeah..." He shook his head happily. "It's going to be good for you Pete." Charlie promised God, himself and Peter. Charlie got into his car reminding himself he had an extra key under the passenger seat.

Who prays that listens? Peter spent three days in Westville Hospital's psychiatric unit CP3. Short of cash, insurance and anyone who would put up the same, Peter was transferred to Fairfield's Hospital. A place of lovingly attended lawns, tired brick buildings. A place of self where burdened humanity meets with the despairing good intentions of a collectively insane staff. All waiting for the states appropriation that might allow the preferred sadness to continue. (By years passing time would let its guard down and state hospitals would be closed in favor of freeing the desperate to the streets. What bliss suffers the politicians will?) Well any way be the way how many days after Peter's admission into Fairfield Hospital, Pete was discharged "against medical advice" because he refused to take medication. Some of the same chemistry negotiable on the streets. And so hope fell down again. What words to speak that sadness bears. Who prays that listens?

\* \* \* \* \*

Uncertainty does not always allow the weakest insight. What followed in those days by memories burden is not clear. Even if immediacy allowed the truest witness, I am not certain again the details of those days can be recounted back to you accurately. Not

by word delivered. Not by tears remembered. What is illusion when facts are the least preferred? What words enough when death resides and the symphony of life recedes? What dream are we that we sleep to waken? We love and die. And forgotten we are remembered? How in death's language we hear so clearly? Do you agree these things of life called death are the strange of mystery? When death's call is answered truth abides as half truth.

What of death's request allows lives explanation, odd to think and believing knows? Can we be bargained less than God intended? Death is different than life we know? Can we know the flavor without the taste? What more poetry than understanding. We ramble. Chasing words to hide from death while disguising ourselves. What witness is there that claims an unhappy death viable and replete? A life stilled by the saddest spending. Is death unaccompanied? Is Heaven's distance our ideal deceit? Is life the devaluation of our souls? Body and soul separate? Are we arrived lost earned as delivered?

What is companionship once death moves life away? Must death claim us by our living, easy trick easily played. What logic thrives that reason denies. And witness silences. Is God our gift to offer? What of time that does not displace all. Must we ask to know? If the Universe is one location. How can we relocate? Are we lost by learning? Convinced otherwise by our consensual song. Accepting that God created everything. How then can your Mom and Dad seed you as their distinct baby? Otherwise would you not more than the predetermined everything? And so the same of death's invite. What less of everything still everything intact?

And so death enters the room. Not host not guest. But both. The landscape of our dreams. No unwelcome intruder. Speaker of languages. Time is the casual apposition of ourselves. Death is time. Time we are. Preferring our triumphs legitimate by apology. Is this report what you do not unhappily know...? Our Jesus bleeds our faces wet. Children soldiers fight the politician's lyric. And so Armageddon thrives residential. Understand if by what caution you do. I am not explaining, not by forgiveness apologizing nor by promise denying....I wander afraid-mourning seeking the death of our good friend. Must "I" only be hopeful by ignorance? Preferring the fullest wrong by the accompanying right. Must we be sad to know the better garden? "I don't know?" Are

these the Holiest words? What else do I know I know the least by telling?

And still death reaches to collect. Must we resist only by surprise. Of good health proving ourselves worthy of death's earning. Must soldiers kill to die. Must we displace Heaven from ourselves that we be self attendant. Do you understand I am writing you from death? Not a close-distant place that fiction derides. Death is accused of much unkindness. Proving the evidence ourselves. Death applauds. We bow. Are we all artists in the gallery of death? Will machines gather by the river to mourn your passing? When will death rest? Ourselves returned never left.

Without our cherished ending could we still navigate our troubled heavenly stake? Are there divine untested waters transparent by our touch? Easily held by death's prayers denied. Must we die forgotten that we be remembered to God? What love that death be more than life? Death...our practices comprehension-we barely know to justify mourning's harbor. Are these two theaters, death and life, truly cheered by the same audience? What answer that does not beg? We continue waiting the better knowledge. Must death's flower bloom best by our tears. What words do we need that invite the kiss best told? And by silence held forever.

Time passed in the near-distant planet of ourselves death made nest as our labor. Thriving by our progress. And it came to pass that practiced resistance death came to Amy's house. Her red eyed doll would follow to accompany Amy to Fitzgerald's Funeral Home. Not a home you understand, a temporary shelter for the homeless. Family and friends came to count themselves amongst the living. Leaving happy and sad. The Will was read the Will was done. The Eastport News bragged Amy's parting. Pete's Mom was cremated with her lonely well dressed doll. Was there a memorial service? Life moved over death was satisfied. Never satisfied death stayed for more. Life was warned, the caution went unheeded. And there we stood. Calm sad faces. Waving as Amy Elizabeth faded. "Goodbye Amy goodbye." And she was gone. Not yet. A considerable estate remained. Shared by two daughters and one son. Peter's bequeathal was left in trust. Peter was not.

I don't know to say. By witness only wonder. Did Peter mean to mock death. Tempt and tease death. Peter gave himself gradually away. His commerce of thought I don't know to tell. But if death is bragged more by our living then by death's absence

then by that purpose are we wise. I only know what I saw and felt what I could. Is hope calculated? Does hope wander like death? What truth speaks? Hell was once a garbage heap in Jerusalem. Do worms amending complete the complete story? Of course not. I can't know to breathe any truth. Not mine. Not yours. Yet we share and gather the same tender eyes and cautious lips. The truth can not be more magic than us. And today is not tomorrow yet. And God persists by our resistance. So be so. And may love be love. And death is only real by our witness.

Is love denied still love if as love denied? The answer will turn this story to its ending. Pete maintained his incautious life unprovoked by why. Financed by pawning Amy Elizabeth's silver ware. Pete remained well loved by us, some might suggest-as such loved less. Not true. But not love enough. After Amy died if you as a stranger had met Peter you would have thought him merry, stoic possibly and vaguely determined. Not unlike soldiers once they accept any fate. Those who knew Peter by the rational convenient salutation would have surmised, "how nice Peter is getting better." Amy's death as perspective might have been acknowledged as benefit. Some unknowing slaves of love we are? Others would have expressed some self forgiving word of congratulations on Amy's behalf, "Wouldn't Pete's Mom be pleased." All busy of themselves would have been wrong by being partially right. I don't mean to suggest that Pete gave himself to hedonism of opportunity. One more note of love's instruction, labored by us now to you, even in those darkening days Pete would have urged that life is better than the death's inevitable decay however divinely diluted. Hope to us remained steadfast like a loyal loving dog-well leashed. Yes good people remained good, bad people can change wretchedness to kindness. But if love were enough that love be lasting....If the sadness could have been turned away by need alone we would have been happy and hopeful of life.

Death often knocks on life's door politely. The door has to be opened before the lasting companion can enter. And the door was opening for many of us. We continued to live unaware of the encroachment.

Enough inquisition: Several months after Amy's rehearsed departure Peter lived in his Mom's apartment, paid rent indirectly. What the lords of the land call security had to be depleted. Possibly also the elderly owner might have felt some dread of

death's visit. And remained cautiously aloof. Fear became respect. . . . Pete lived in Amy Elizabeth's apartment like a resident burglar. Did Pete eat well and slept the same. I don't know to tell. (Anguish and chaos do not speak through a minority of self). Certainly Pete's drug menu expanded, singing like an exhausted sea Captain, "Tiny bubbles in the cooker." The divine opiate flowed. And the beautiful smile became the slow realistic grin. He was more distant through smack's yielding passport. The bag, the cooker, the needle and Peter would fade like a ship into the fog. Reality became habit. In retrospect death's chores were being done. But greed intervened, the land lord became concerned with property than any right accrued to Peter by death. An eviction notice was served. The silver mine went dry, determined by law, with the brief of a facial twitch Peter was out. It seemed by opportunities contrivance the lord made treasure of Amy's air conditioner. Well one eviction begets another, how many weeks later, Peter was tossed out of the Knoll Inn. A strange breach of logic if not physics, since it seemed only the evicted lived at the Knoll. Peter wandered off away. Lost to the smiling outcaste of himself.

By what assimilation prayer Pete began to live life agreeably. He bought a van worth several times it's weight in memories, fifteen year's earlier the van had been the temple of flower children who had no place to go but dream. Does this journey continue? So it appeared with Pete. Our friend rode this stocky metal with the grace becoming the instrument of his new life. Trailing smoke left over from the sixties, balanced to one side, rust accommodating rust. . . . Pete moved along. The smile behind the wheel. Children waved. Pete became the young man if not happy to know himself then looking forward to the introduction. Dope's allegory was curtailed, sweet Lil joined Peter in the van which became their home. And as if miracles needed no place to hide but life, Pete got a job-working construction with Owen Cage. Hammer and nail prevailed over needle and cooker. Lillian by good and cautious trespass would park the van for a night's rest. A friend's opportunity provided showers. They woke to each others arms. Misery had become a good tutor, Peter learned that it took less effort to be content than to remain alive. Lil had a job at Selective Fashion's, hippie-yippee cloths with an upscale prize tag. All was well wholesale gave way to retail. God was good God was great. Reality had made a friend.

“Sweet heart...” Peter’s words and the yawn of sunrise startled Lil’s eyes open.

“Is that your foot Pete?” One body spoke to another as the sunlight spread out over the crumpled blankets. Peter kissed her cheek. Lili and Pete now kissing so.

“Yeah,” One breathed. Warming both.

Lil kissed the space between Peter and God. Lightly pressing her fingertips on both cheeks. Lili moved not unlike birth when getting started.

“Jesus Lil.” Peter is in pain.

“What?” Lil asks, her tone the defense of a child unjustly challenged. If flowers had learned word not beauty the next sounds... “Why don’t we make love?”

Peter is smiling like a saint accepting grace. They touched and kissed in flight. Wordless eyes insisting. Their bodies moving seeding more of life than thought. Bouncing, laughing love. Lil dives. Peter catches. The day warm emerging watching the beautiful play.

“Did I hurt you?” Lili is afraid.

Peter’s smile’s waiting for advantages better answer. “Yes,” Peter encourages. Lil apologizes. God held both lovers while they gently kissed. What further explanation unfolds this garden naked? Clothes discarded. Sighs congratulate.

Now there is another place. Like turning a page or a bird leaving the fence post, loves frivolity is complete. Practicality speaks. “We’d better get going?” Lili explains.

Pete is carefully peeling the silver strands of morning light from the van’s wall. The hands seeming lighter by their carriage, he places each strand atop Lil’s head.

“What are you making?” Lil asks gathering her smile.

“A crown...”

“A crown?” Lil asks. “Will it fit you?”

“Eventually,” Peter answers.

There are times when truth is revealed unknowingly. And consequently mystery becomes more obvious, yet remains intractable. Lil is watching Peter gather the light like a child the first toy. Lili rallies. Begging reality another chance. “Pete when are we going to get an apartment?”

“Soon.”

Aware of Peter’s ability to dismiss Lil is angry, “I’ll believe it when we get



evicted.”

Inflicting a wound on Peter requires malicious gifts and practice. Pain weakens also protects and strengthens immunity. Finished with the Light, Peter is putting on a boot

Lil organizes. “Breakfast is good how about a shower? Pete how much time could we get for trespassing, public fornication, possession of drugs-”

“Who knows...” The answer resigns from the question. Peter claps his hands. And grimaces feeling the result. “Let’s pedal to the metal.” Peter weighted his hands down against each bucket seat, hoisted-swung himself around over the passenger seat landing evenly behind the steering wheel. “Honey that was good.”

“It was good wasn’t it-”

“ I could be a stuntman.” Pete turns the ignition.

“If we don’t get a shower were going to give body odor a bad name.”

Pete lifts the emergency break, the old van moves to the side before lunging forward. The van moved humbly through the wooded trail, accepting each bump as it was trying to translate every elevation into its own language. A tree branch slapped the van, Peter ducked. A large rock. The van rises and comes back down. Pete asks. “How’d you get hurt?” (Lil is sucking her finger). Steering with one hand Peter is adjusting the static on the radio. Tilting forward, higher, the van comes down hard. Three birds fly by singing their congratulations. Johnny Cash sneaks in through the noise, singing, “On the road again...” The steering wheel trembles, Pete snaps his fingers. He can see the asphalt beyond the next tree. “Da sha vu get out of the way all over again...”

Lil finally answers. “I hurt my finger trying to unzip your fly.”

“Oh my poor (Lil interjects “baby”) your a brave soldier.” Pete returned to watching the approaching traffic. “Don’t worry Lil maybe I can get some bucks from my trustee the apartment’s not a problem.” Peter points to his forehead with a lean. “Did you see the scar from when I got beat up (Lili nods in the affirmative) I told you about Charlie’s and my company designer scars you can be President.”

“ Pete did you know that John Wilkes Booth’s brother saved the life of on of Lincolns sons kept from falling into an oncoming train at a rail road station-”

“Really I’m sure there were more of those kinds of coincidences a hundred

and twenty years ago, fewer people, less technology and-”

“What does technology-?”

Lil interrupts herself. “What was the heaviest coincidence in your life?”

“Charlie had a good one. Before going to Vietnam he stopped at Harvard to visit a friend. Charlie didn’t want to die a virgin, right so he meets this woman from Vassar ozone of the Holy sisters. . Charlie’s problem is he didn’t want to get laid unless it was love. You know how Charlie says.... So this lady and Charlie get it on. Charlie decides he wants to remember her name for the rest of his life. Poor Charlie’s on his way to forgetting his own-”

“Yeah what’s the coin-”

“Well Charlie comes back, tries to get himself together. And doesn’t. This like a year later. Cops pick him up drinking. There’s Charlie in the Eastport police station. Who shows up with his father a psychiatrist? It turns out to be this ladies father.”

“The one from Vassar?”

“Right.”

“Jesus...do you believe Charlie?”

“Sure you know how Charlie is if he’s going to lie he tells you ahead of time. Anyway she told Charlie at Harvard she lived in Eastport.” Peter pulls into the parking lot. “Get your brick I’ll get mine.” Lil reaches under her seat. While the van is still moving Lil jumps off. Pete pulls into a parking space. Lilli is waiting bent over when the van comes to a stop Lil forces the brick under the right front tire. Peter rolls out of the van almost dropping his brick, he hurries to the back and places his brick under the left rear tire. The van rolls back an inch and comes back down against the bricks. Looking outside through their respective windows Lil and Peter cock their fingers and wink.

Up three steps walking together and through the glass door. “Pete what do you think is going to happen to all of us?”

“You mean me, Noah, you, Allen, Owen.... the rest of the gang?” “I don’t know it’s already happened hasn’t it.”

“Not really Allen’s in Alaska?” Lili and Peter slide into a booth. “Were here Charlie’s writing. Owen and Noah.... I’m hungry.”

“Pete do you think there’s something wrong with Dave?” She’s coughing.

“Thank you miss I’ll have a Western omelet, home fries and a cup of coffee. Pete?”

“The same for me thanks?” The waitress spent too much time on Peter. Lili is impressed then resentful. What was your question? Right-”

“Like what Allen isn’t Allen?” Peter smiles at his next thought.”Everyone else wants to know what’s wrong with. .... Allen wants to know if there’s something wrong with Charlie. I forget who-”

“Did anyone ever ask about me?”

“Yeah?”

“Who?”

“Me...” Lil playfully kicks Peter under the table. “Well there is something wrong with Charlie.”

“Not in context.”

“What do you mean not in context?”

“Well you can only go with what you’ve got; I mean you can only show up from where you’ve been. The alternative to Charlie in context I’m not sure we’d want to be having breakfast with.”

Lil looks away at another conversation. “The guys who ran to the intelligence building facilitated a nuclear war. They were normal. Charlie couldn’t he wasn’t...”

Peter adds.”And like Charlie said insanity, alcoholism and suicide are gifts from God if not God who Sear’s Roebuck.”

“You’ve been in a mental hospital...”

“Right there’s hope in the world when Charlie can put some else in a mental hospital.....”

“Allen I think has a tape of the band you formed at CP3 or is it CP2?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised if in ten years that’s all that’s left of us.”

“That’s dismal.”

“Why.” Pete is hurt.

Lili is startled by Peter’s response. A different waitress, frail and skinny, arrived with a plate of food in each hand. Her arms were trembling under the weight.

Pete noticed the effort. “Thank you Miss thanks a lot.”

“Pete this is a pretty dismal conversation-”

Peter’s about the fork more breakfast into his opened lips. “Lili is it true you offered-“

“Charlie came up with a good bumper sticker did he tell you.” Lil spreads out the bumper sticker in front of her eyes with both hands. “Cloning...you can raise your own parents.”

“Hey wow yeah I like it...”

“How’s your omelet?”

“Pete I hate it when people hesitate before biting their toast. Pete did you ever spend time in prison?”

“Are you kidding from toast etiquette to prison no I didn’t spend time in prison.”

“Pete do you think you’d of all of us would good messiah.” Lil finishes the sip of her coffee.

Peter swallows. “Living or dead?”

“Do you think Jesus was the son of God?”

“Why so many questions?”

“I’m serious...”

Pete gingerly sips his coffee. “I don’t know like Charlie said once-any idea is a divine idea it it’s divinely expressed.”

“Interesting...”Lil looks around and comes back more excited. “You know what get’s me about Jesus obviously he opposed violence but at the end he condoned it.”

“How?”

“He encouraged the Romans and Jewish higher archy to take him down.”

“What get’s me is that the Apostles gave up on Judas. Pete adds emphasis to his point by raising his coffee. “They didn’t come through for Judas they let him hang. Did you know that Mohammed never consider himself divine. In all the art of Islam that depicts Mohammed they only distinguish him from other maybe a cloud over his head. And they never showed his face...”

“Interesting I didn’t know, no Pete it’s my turn to pay you leave the tip.” Lili and Pete ate their food quietly for a few minutes. They finished their breakfast. And looked at

each other contentedly. Pete paid the bill. And left a tip. Getting up he waved at the waitress and mouthed the words “thank you.” She smiled and waved her finger tips back from her waist.

Pete picked up his parking bloc. Lil bent over to pick hers.

Robin came up talking “I heard Charlie decided he was going to be an independent intelligence something code name Agent Orange.”

“And he has the ideal cover himself. His life-”

“What better cover than insanity. Who knows what Charlie will come up with?”

“But its gibberish heroin in the chest cavities-”

“I’ve heard the same from different sources-”

“Actually I have to the world’s largest exports and imports are drugs and weapons. We do both coming and going. When you think about it the logic is simple. The only checks and balances on the CIA are the funds that Congress provides if you bypass those funds, don’t interrupt Pete, if you bypass those funds you don’t have to deal with the Senate oversight intelligence committees...”

“And you bypass the mouthy Congressmen leaking information to promote their own agendas-”

“With its own income the CIA or the KGB become their own governments... arrogance unlimited funds unsecured borders and a few marksmen.”?”

“Right...right (Now Lil is leaning closer) Pete carries his voice over Lili’s.... When did Senator Church force the CIA to sale all their Corporate interests-”

Pete turns the ignition.

“Pete it doesn’t stop there. I heard Kennedy wanted to end the Vietnam war he’s murdered the wars goes on for another what ten years.”

“More like twelve years then his brother five years later, he’s going to end the war. He’s down.”

“It’s insane?”

“Pick a code name?”

“How about the Selective Fashion’s forget I can do better?”

“We should buy a Bible-”

Peter tries to stretch out a muscle cramp on his back.

“Are you all right. I don’t know I don’t think you’re made out for Construction?”

“I’m o.k.?”

“Pete when we were in the restaurant did you see a rabbi just walked in with a beautiful woman in a three piece suit.”

“So?” Pete finishes his stretch.

“Nothing....”

“You think of an excuse for me and I’ll think of one for you...” They pull out of the parking lot. “Do you get the feeling one of us talked too much.”

“Good thing nobody was listening.”

\* \* \*

Life can become a futility of lonely of choices that assume their own ambivalent purpose. Lili did get an apartment. Something of a basement with thick-moist walls which had a feeling of dungeon. Peter rose higher and ended up over a hastily assembled pizza parlor. By what agreement the two lovers decided to convene their relationship apart, I do not know. But Lil and Pete seemed no less love’s estimation. Now I will excuse myself alone from further intervention that you might better witness yourself part of the remaining days.

Pete wore his employment proudly; he carried his hammer and measuring tape on his hip with the sway of a good guy with a six shooter. Well enough again, yesterday isn’t today and today sometimes isn’t either. If the fact be known that better dreams be had as Lili observed, Peter did not seem suited for construction work. Hard work against a soft body made more perilous by the toil of drugs. Pete and Owen did turn to the occasional chemical. Particularly liquor. Peter did work hard, but eventually the labor seemed more the effort of a slave than dignity of the task. At times Pete appeared assaulted, the weary face that knew his assailant but could do nothing for the victim. Pete persevered. But what is better when worse is preferred beyond the happenstance of choice. His eyes were distanced by fatigue. So we lived. And we played. Following the vacant shadow of ourselves. But we were alive. And there is God. And not every miracle comes by the asking.

The days began to roll over each other more desperately. More time became too much time and not enough. Lili and Pete made love as our species often does each time for ever, but never enough. The hammer swung at the earthbound nail, the needle made bridge to the body. Day yielded to night. An occasional intervention... A post card from our dear friend Allen, hitch hiking the Canadian woods. Charlie and his therapist Elaine searched for Charlie. Owen, Noah, the others remained better friends to each other than to themselves. The alleged Charlie dog bore witness to all. Yourself how did you prevail during the life harvest of 1981? At the Knoll Inn you know. We loved and lived. And only lied to tell the truth? We did not feel death encircling closer. With each turn taking one breathe away. And something of the promise of the next.

Peter is standing in front the bureau's cracked mirror. As Peter talked to himself, he moved in and out of the splintered glass harmlessly. "Jesus I'm tired even my nose hurts. If tired were taken away from me I'd be just piss and whiskers. Lil you'd think she was on crystal. Lil can do more with eight hours than a corpse with a month of death." Peter raised his forehead. And appeared to be looking down on himself. He wondered how much longer Lili would remain in the John. Pete remembered that Charlie came over and lent him thirty six dollars. "I should clean my window there's only one." Peter exhaled between opened chapped lips.

"Pete," she closes the door behind her, "I was thinking all that time we did pretty well in the van?"

"Yeah three evictions in a free market economy that's pretty good." Peter looked dismally at the bed.

"I only remember two?"

Peter half smiled. "One was mine I slapped the paneling people will believe anything if their bare assed..."

"I'm impressed..."

"I have a suggestion."

"What's that Pete?"

"I've got a nickel bag. You want to handle the syringe?"

"Yeah...your kidding me you want me to-"

"Yes..."

“I don’t want to hurt you. I’ve never put a needle into someone?”

“You like the idea ah?”

“Yeah well kinda...yeah. I don’t know why? What if something goes wrong?”

“You should hear yourself Lil. Don’t worry I’ll walk you through it. You can always pull it out.”

“I won’t get into trouble will I Pete like an accessory or something?”

“An accessory to what? j\Just be careful opening the pack.”

Lili hesitated feeling her decision. “I don’t know o.k. I’ll do it.”

“All we have to worry about if it’s good dope. I don’t know what the odds are. Just be careful opening... Don’t breathe once its opened...understand?” Lil nodded. Pete handed Lil the sugared aluminum foil. And sat down on the bed. Peter rolled spit onto the spoon.

“Pete spits unhygienic.”Lil unwrapped the foil under her chest using her fingertips carefully.

“It’s recycling...” (Pete handed Robin the spoon) “You know where the needle goes the rest is up to God?”

“What if I miss the needle I mean if the needle misses the vein?”

“It’ll be o.k. I’ll walk you through it. “Peter lay down against the bed.

“I don’t know Pete. “Lil is slowly pouring the dope onto the spoon.

“Doesn’t worry I’ll do it just be patient.”

“There’s the syringe on the bed night stand take your time, sit on my chest when your ready.”

“ I’m o.k. Pete.” Lil is holding the cooker below her eyes watching the flame from the Lighter heating the spoon. “Look Pete it’s starting to bubble.”

“Good were doen good you know when to give me (Lil hands Pete the spoon then reaches for the syringe) this is starting to feel a little funny...”

“Between you and me sweetheart a little bit funny isn’t a lot. Now draw it in-”

“You don’t have to tell me.” Lili drew the smack into the needle. Lil and Pete waited for each other. “I’m going to strattle myself on your stomach.” Balancing one knee on the bed, holding the needle next to her shoulder, Lil raised her leg over Peter.”

“You’re in good shape-”



“Everyone’s in good shape compared to you Pete. Now where’s the vein I should....”

Peter wraps his belt around his left arm. And pulls it tight with one thrust.

“Don’t put the spoon on my chest you’ll burn me.”

“Gimme a little credit its already down.... We should of used my spit?”

Peter is slapping a vein between his elbow and the forearm. “Why yours?”

“I don’t know I brush my teeth after every meal.”

Distracted Pete laughed once. “There see that vein bulging that’s our baby.”

For a moment looking cross eyed Lili focuses both eyes on the tip of the needle. “Shit?”

“What?” Peter is upset he squirms against the bed.

“I think I left my stove on?”

“Concentrate on what your doing Lil.”

“I’m sorry I’m sorry don’t worry...”

Damn Pete this is going to be harder than I thought.” The sharp tip of the needle is pressing against the vein. Lili is pushing and holding back....

“Don’t worry about hurting me. Were all vast regions of empty space...” Lil inserts the needle. Pete smiles then grimaces as Lili empties the needle....were random configurations of empty space measurable only by chance....”

“Pete stop with the history lesson. And enjoy the ride. (The needle is empty and being withdrawn). “Pete if were just these vast regions of uncollected space why doesn’t everything just fall through everything else.”

Peter raised his hips. And smiles slowly. “We do.” Peter answered. As Lil got off her lover.

\* \* \* \*

Driving home in Peter’s van Lili could feel the needle penetrating. She felt her sphincter muscle expand then contract. Watching the traffic under the visor Lili saw Peter becoming more distant. Fading.... The eyes losing contact. She stopped at a red light. Like the eyes of an injured bird that didn’t want to hang on any more. She thought to herself. Closing her eyes so she could stop seeing Pete’s eyes. “I should have

stayed.” Lili impatient waiting for the light to turn. She thought it would have been different if she didn’t helped. “Worse...” She said shifting into gear. And stepping on the accelerator. Lili didn’t want to leave. She didn’t want to stay. Somehow managed to do both. Lili tenderly placed a blanket over Peter. Driving faster Lil could hear Peter’s gasps. Now she feels them. The door to Peter’s room becoming a narrowing slit. Lili exhaled. And wondered why she was alive.

Ten minutes of traffic and easing memories Lil is pulling into her driveway. The warm outside felt good. Like the Beach after a storm. She called back the image of herself, her mother and Peter at the beach. Peter kept stroking her cheek, repeating, “I bet I can’t touch you.” Next Lil thought to herself. “I hope I die before Pete does so I can be there when he crosses.” She heard Pete again. “I bet I can’t touch you.” Lillian opened her door. And closed it by falling back against it. “I wonder how many sounds have disappeared.” Lil asked the empty room. Examining her face in the half circle mirror over the bureau. She is scratching the corner of her lip. And looks at the residue gathering in her fingernail. Peter waving happily from the window. But it wasn’t true. She wondered aimlessly where she might be when she was Peter’s age. Her face didn’t tired in the mirror. She was. Feeling the loneliness you can only wait out. “I hope I’m pregnant.” She told herself. Pausing for a response. Last night Pete had agreed to stop using condoms. “I wish the horn on Peter’s van worked.” Lil’s decided to go back tonight. Thinking she should have left Pete a note. Lili pressed the bed hard with her fingertips bed thinking not writing her novel. The reincarnation of Emily Dickenson. A murder mystery? The nineteenth century poet comes back. Lili recognizes herself, in the mirror, Emily. Lil is perplexed, “What will I do with Peter? She collapsed onto the bed. Just like Pete less than one hour ago. Wanting to dream and rest. Hungry...

That night Lili will dream of Peter dressed like a cocktail waitress. Serving her a drink. There they were. Dreamed together. Separate not apart. Then gone. The dream passed like the night. That night Pete had become his own dream. Noah is changing a tire. Owen is watching nothing on TV, a beer in his hand. Both Charlie’s walking the night. A police cruiser drives into the Knoll parking lot. Sniffs and leaves. Time will pass. Lili will not remember her dream. Until the dream remembered her.

\* \* \*

Those autumn days moved unnaturally into weeks. Time seemed less involved with our efforts, more resistant to our lives. There was a greater aimlessness. Yet by aspiration however contrived and drugs ingested we continued. But there a feeling against the skin, old and strange. Sad and even for us unwelcome. If those days had spiraled day into night by sound, not as time bereaved, we would have heard a howling. The face of that sound we would need to have shut our eyes to see. But there was no monster. Just ourselves. Day's of waiting less....

What of dread Peter was becoming I heard from others. Pete became the tired of distracted. Lonely someone said beyond expression. Angry I'm not sure. We hear of others listening to ourselves. If feeling is the more real of knowing, we were afraid. Waiting time drifting waiting for itself. Alone anticipating became a place to avoid. I remember my last place of being with Peter. Lil, her mother and Pete came to the beach. My home to park the car. Pete stood to one side, the edge of the lawn, distant, weary...distant from himself. I looked and never had less to say. Not by any mind did I sense death was nearing. Whatever lingered...I'm not sure. If each life is distinct. Is not each death?

Peter high stepped out of the shower blindly reaching for a towel. Tears dissolved the soap. Pete turned the shower back on. He patted water into his eyes. Outside the shower again, he shook his head up and down and to either side. Unevenly spaced droplets lined the wall, a few the ceiling and the floor. The beaten up cloths piled on the chair were the ones he would be wearing for the rest of his life. Strands of red hair dripping against both shoulders. Two different colored socks. Boots that looked like two drunks leaning on each other. Pete sniffed his arm pit. And visualized the forms he would give that odor on a canvas. Peter is sitting on a small wood chair. He's resting somewhat folded into himself. Looking up wondering why, he slept last night. Is it Tuesday. He tried to smile? Puzzled on who was being asked. Pete tossed out his blue jeans. Hanging on with one hand. One step a few inches. The other foot the same. And the feet were in the pant legs. He pulled up the pants passed his knees. He blew out air once the way divers do before they go down. The pants are pulled up. As Peter rises. He pulls them up

shaking each leg. His eyebrows are down. The wallet is on the floor. Bent open. The corner chewed off. There's money. He scratched his chin hard with the flat of his thumb. The eyes still on the wallet. He kicked the wallet open. The wallet bent open to its other half. Peter sat on the bed his shoulders falling below their own weight. He looked down and saw how white everything was on his body. The smallest portion of a smile snuck onto Peter's lips. Pete felt something not the smile. His socks were on. He didn't remember the effort. Rest had caught up to Pete. He felt the better of worse, stronger. Less so his own assailant. The two boots went on and laced with modest resistance. Peter's standing. The night's pleasure begins. Pete picks up the wallet stuffing it into the back pocket. A t-shirt, a blue flannel shirt, the hair takes care of itself. Done. And Pete holds his hands out to either side, down. He's ready. Deciding against the mirror. He pulls down the rusted door handle. And the door opens to the night. Peter's walking. Hanging out with himself. His exhaustion has been forgiven to memory. Pete's thinking of his cat, he saved, raised as a kitten, "Flaco Manana." Peter feels good. The better from worse is good, once not good. Still walking. The stranger would have said, merrily. He slows suspicious of the improvement.

Noah's weak and friendly voice calls out. "Hey Pete..."

"Hey Noah." Enough song for two good friends.

"I'll catch you later o.k. buddy?" Both friends swung their hands as if to say goodbye. The hands embraced each other in mid-flight. They came down still holding. Tighter and let go. Pete smiled some. Noah thought he did. And they were apart. Separating. Pete wanted to look over his shoulder.

Pete walked past Amy's old apartment, past the Little Book Store to the better expectations of himself. One glanced, Pete debated and decided against Chinese food at East Lake. Pee stepped into the Harth. Stepping from the darkness into the dim light Pete made eye contact with MaryAnn, the cocktail waitress. One smile greeted the other. The place felt empty. Pete dragged out a metal chair. Sitting down he thought, I feel better. Mary Ann followed her good feelings to Peter table. Peter scratched his temple. And ordered a double scotch. "Sure Pete," the waitress said. Vigorous, alive and pleased with her graduation from Westville Community College. She's left. Both said, "Thanks." More to themselves than each other. Pete felt against his fingertips, surprised, he found

several Quaaludes in his front pants pocket. Pete popped one. Swallowing easily. He wished he wasn't alone. Thinking of Allen and Charlie. Waiting for the Quaalude to dissolve its purpose.

"Thanks MaryAnn that was quick."

"Sure Pete can I get you anything else?" The next to last word settled on invitation.

"Yeah a peach orchard farm in Vermont, a pregnant lady who loves me and a new pair of shoes." Pete answered while reading the entire menu.

Maryann listening carefully then responded."Oh," she said. "Comen right up I wish...."

Pete looked up and said. "Me to." Then added. A club sandwich and-

"Some French fries right Pete horseradish and light on the mustard."

"Thanks for remembering?" Why did Peter feel sad.

Mary Ann continues to write. The note pad less than foot from her eyes. Each word meticulous and small. She jumped on the period. And turned herself around and left. Peter thought. "Waitresses are spiritual beings..." The rest of the thought tapered off into the night.

Peter sat aware of himself as people do when they feel alone. He looked around without seeing anything. He listened to his next breathe. Deep and full. His mind and heart moved from one sensation to another. The eyes remained steady. Then as intended the happier sharing when Mary Ann arrived with Pete's meal.

"Let's say grace," Peter invited. Peter surprised himself. The thought initially suggested as humor became something else.

"God no Pete I don't think it's allowed..."

"Sure it is anything's allowed if you whisper." Pete bit a long French fry.

"Do you really want to say, you know...grace." MaryAnn directed her eyes nervously toward the bartender.

"Sure I do give me your hands don't worry I'll keep my voice down." Peter cleared his throat while adjusting his shoulders. "Ready?" Mary Ann bobbed her head up, then down once. Her eyes became the quiet of music's memory. Pete is surprised by his voice. "Dear God protector and deliver of all souls... that's enough." Peter felt...

"No Pete continue...continue please."

Pete sniffled and ran his finger against the side of his nose. "O.K." Peter said looking around. Before he returned. He coughed once. "Dear God touch these words that they may be the good of life. Warm our hands that they may do your bidding. Hold me that we may know your fraternity." Pete stopped as if he'd gone too far. And didn't know how to return. The hesitation ended, Pete ran hurried the next sentence to its conclusion. "And inspite of my life thy will be done..."

"Pete that was pretty good I didn't know?"

"Pete will you put that to music?"

"Sure I will I'll do it for you..." What to others would have been a casual remark, Pete meant and expressed sincerely.

"Good Pete I'd like that," MaryAnn turned half around her body to the bartender. "Well Pete I'd better go, I'll keep my eyes on you if you need anything?"

"Thanks," Pete answered thankfully. He leaned into a larger bite. A man with an unhappily wrinkled face wearing a new suit stepped into the Harth's bar and grill. The couple at the corner table forced their voices down trying to keep their argument to themselves. The man moved past as Pete reached into his pocket for another Quaalude. He took it down with the rest of the scotch. Peter lifted the empty glass to his mouth a second time. Three fingers half the shot glass, his lips on the rim Peter saw Mary Ann standing at his side. The feeling let go of the glass. Peter handed the glass away. Mary Ann went up on her toes once. And disappeared. One of the angry couple has ended their anger. He's eating. Her eyes have taken her away, she's holding a tall drink with a damaged umbrella. Peter bites into the second half. He's trying to remember his conversation with Lili. The conversation has given way to Gwen, a past lover. Marie now...

"Hi Pete?" Peter rolled his eyes in the direction of the voice.

"Do I know you?" A strange question. Pete felt he'd never asked that question before. The question was answered. Familiar words came after each other. Outside an unrelated face. The pink blue neon played the old face. Now a different color. The same skin. The eyes of the older face watched Peter. The lawyer and Pete amiably continued. Time began to float at the Harth. Smiles levitated by alcohol. Everything more relevant in its irrelevance. Faces laughing going nowhere. The frantic bartender. People came in they

never seemed to exit. For how long time held itself the way people held their breath? The words rose up, they seemed to return before they could be heard the first time. “You’re the ugliest guy in Eastport.” The lawyer kidded Peter. There has been more drinking. Pete moves his eyes to hand on his shoulder. And follows the connection to the face. The lawyers stationary face. Now both search each other for an explanation. Three tables away the words arrive...”I don’t know?” As if these words were cue, Pete and the lawyer snap their head back from their trance. The lawyer stands up. And shapes his face into a question. “I’ll catch you later buddy I’ve got to....” A finger points over the bent shoulder.

“I need another drink.” Peter has said a second time. Speaking to know one less him. He stand’s up using the chair for support. Pete runs his fingers pressed down hard against his pants pockets. “No more,” Peter tells himself. He stops his eyes looking at the bar. “Why aren’t bars closer?” Peter has asked himself. Pete steps along a mirror. A middle aged woman, half closed eyes, watches both images. Moving along. Slowly toward the bar. A mouse hurried into the kitchen with a portion of an olive in her mouth. Gradually Peter came over and sat down at the bar. Pete glanced to one side, looked to the other. Making eye contact with bartender Peter is ordering another drink.

Later time stopped bye, tried to stay, but had to leave. Two more drinks, pretzels. The bartender had to left. A replacement. Young, beautiful, a woman Peter thought. Pete feeling invigorated. Cheerful, he signed for a paper and pencil. And wrote down, I’m a deaf mute. She read the letter. And joined her sad expression to Peter’s playfulness. One finger moving back and forth towards himself, the note pad came back. Peter wrote down, a scratch. He stopped to breathe. And wrote again, a scotch. The bartender came back. Offering the polite mixture of sad and pleasant when the disabled are being accompanied. Peter pointed to himself. And wrote down. “I’m Peter my last name is....” The bartender slid the pad back to herself before Pete finished. And wrote. “Hi I’m Sandy.” Peter nodded heavily. Pointed to the scotch with appreciation. The night continued as Peter’s theater. Several customers signed with Peter. One wrote down, I didn’t know deaf mutes could laugh. Peter laughed the other patron laughed as well. Another wrote, don’t you think you’ve had enough. Peter nodded certainly in the affirmative. Peter noticed the exposed skin on his knuckle. He tried to remember. And

didn't. He kissed the knuckles memory. Peter felt better. He stopped slowly seemed quick. Peter's watching himself look back from the mirror. He's angry. Now disappointed. Pete asks for another drink. The bartender shakes her head no. She blows a kiss towards Peter. Then waves goodbye. Peter feels himself shrug. And agrees. He get's up from one side. Sandy brings over his tab. Peter pays. He puts down a five dollar tip. Another five. The beautiful bartender just winked. Peter's stopped to hold his balance. Pete's taken several steps. Laughing now, thinking, I could use a leash.

"How about it Pete?"

Deliberately Peter is looking for the source of the words as if they might leave a trail. "Hey it's you again." Peter is talking to the lawyer. "You know it don't you?"

"Yeah..."

"Where am I going do you know?"

"You need a place to crash?"

Peter heard himself say, "Yeah I shoulden drive cause I don't have a car."

Peter pointed at his friend. Pete's friend get's up gradually. While repeating what he'd just said this time to himself.

"Should you be driving?" Peter is asking while both start for the door. He holds the door open for Peter. "Were outside with the stars." Pete adds feeling relief.

"I hope this is your car..." Peter closes the car door.

The car engine is turning. "Did you see the stars?" Peter wants to know. The cars in gear moving. "The stars." Peter asks again.

"Yeah the stars..."

"Were goen all right so far...?"

"Were almost here." Peter jokes to himself. His voice is quiet and perplexed

The lawyer heard a different question. Yet neither had spoken driving carefully. The cars stopped. Then begins to move again. The engine humming driving. No traffic except Pete, the friend and the stars. The car stops lurching forward before stopping. The car engine is turned off. Pete's forehead his pressed against the side window. Pete stares sadly at a green shrub illuminated by a floodlight

"I'm sad..." No one hears Peter. His friend is walking past the first headlight. The door opens. Peter angels his head down. He holds opposite sides of the door frame



without moving. Then uncertain motion. Pete stops halfway unsure. One pulls who pushes. Peter is up. He's surprised at his own surprise Walking looking at gravel. "You..." the rest of the thought is left to itself. They are walking next to each other. Walking methodically it seems. Each foot step pressed and half against the gravel. Before the next step tries the same. Now a door. Another door. The door opens. On its won Peter thinks. Two steps maybe three. Pete holds the door frame. Eventually inside. Warmer, finally. A light switch clicks. The light. A torn leather chair. A Persian rug. On the floor. Pete shakes his head no, adding, "Thank you." The offer of some cookies and a glass of milk. Peter feels himself going down. Then better comfortably. He can feel his body closing his eyes. And he sighed. And he went to sleep.

The birds sang the morning alive. A robin flew to the window sill. Prayed for Peter... called elsewhere then flew away. A mouse came to sniff good morning. Then disappeared to his appointment. In the kitchen sounds of morning cooking. Words about scrambled eggs. And toast. A loud bite, sipping coffee, walking. Down three steps into the basement. The toast is falling. The word is "Oh." The coffee cup is filling... Pete's friend is hurrying. Pete is blue. Faster until he lifts Pete upward. He's silent Peter is still breathing. He drags Peter off the sofa. One boot then the other. Both of their eyes closed. His lips are breathing into Peter's mouth. Pete's cheeks puff out. His chest rises well. Quietly Peter coughs once. Another cough a gurgling sound. Pete is vomiting. Peter's friend pushes himself up, Pete's face away. He can't. Continue. Breathing for Peter. And himself. He doesn't. He get's up to call for help...

\* \* \* \*

The ambulance drove away slowly and took our friend away.

\* \*

...Several years later...

...Of our friend Peter you know... What song's instruction breaths life better than Pete's attendance. I miss and love you Pete. Thank you for your friendship.

...Amy Elizabeth gently remembered. We are all God's dream. Wakened Pete and Amy now together less life's anchor.

....Noah suffered a head injury. Preferring death knowing life Noah turned down brain surgery. Lili implored. "Owen needs you." The surgery was a success. Afterwards during a drug deal Noah was murdered.

....I last saw Allen walking with his mother on Main Street. Smiling prospering of spirit. Working in a Mormon's recording studio. One of God's heroes continues.

.... Lili crossed the street by The Little Book Shop calling my name. Married possibly pregnant happily so. Returning to her vehicle Lili was almost hit by car. Followed by a wave of her hand. Her smile always understood.

....Owen Cage what life's lyric's he sings I don't know. But know enough the song worth hearing.

....Bob Player Connecticut's best guitarist. Johnny Bayer magician and lyricist. I don't know the prayer's response beyond the prayer's need.

....Marie shed tears on hearing of Peter's death. We held a recollection of Peter's art work at Marie's studio. Generous-beautiful heart the mime artist continues.

....Franklin Carpenter and Leslie Carpenter thriving well God's kindness. Their family prospers life's good purpose. Hope's prevails faith's understanding. Remaining Charlie's friend for many years.

....Charlie the alleged dog. What wonder's God disguises. Both Charlie's claimed life together for another ten years. Memories residence lovingly attended. Hasta luego Charlie.

...The Knoll Inn was condemned. Paul Newman's wife Joan Woodward petitioned a kind reprieve. The City Fathers prevailed. The Knoll came down. A condo went up.

.... Charlie Woram moved to Omaha Nebraska with the therapist from CP2. The beautiful God attending Wendolynn. And continued writing this story.

*An evolving trilogy. Your contribution is appreciated. \$0 - \$9*

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