

IF IT WEREN'T FOR LIFE

By

Charlie Woram

"Sir?"

"Oh, please really there's no need to call me sir. My name is Chuck Winters."

"Yes Mister Winters. Will you please buckle your safety belt. We'll be landing in five minutes."

"My safety belt sure." The stewardess left after smiling nicely. One of those high altitude smiles. A little elongated and cautious. She certainly moved well, efficient and a lot of on purpose direction. I put the newspaper down and locked the belt around myself. Almost too much really, being safety conscious on the way to Vietnam. Though actually, I'm not on my way to Saigon South Vietnam. Not directly now, no. I'm on my way to San Jose, Costa Rica. My father has these outrageous business activities there. You know to make money and stuff. I guess my father thought it would be nice, me having a vacation before going to war. Relax maybe and well get ready in some way and all. I tightened my belt some extra more. "Good that's fine enough." I don't

want to tell you about that. I mean, what's the point if there isn't one. But you never know enough to know for sure. It's just unsettling for me to think about. My father was supposed to come to Costa Rica with me. But his plans changed immediately yesterday, over one phone call during dinner. Exasperated hearing about it, I put my fork down and wondered whether I'd swallow my food already mostly in my mouth. I'd hoped, you know, we'd be together, have some available father and son conversations. About maybe going to war things and stuff. Fit in a sensible goodbye, something anyway. Makes me wonder really, whether if life is up to you or what. The living part of life I mean. Too much really. How can all these things be happening. Almost all of them unscheduled too.

I looked out that port hole window thing. Just nice clouds minding their own business. I'm going to miss Westport a lot, that's my hometown in Connecticut--Westport is. I'm going to miss most especially my youngest brother Rodney Stuart. He's nine years younger than me. I'm eighteen. I have been for quite a while now. My sister Terry she's in college in Allentown, Pennsylvania. Terry is older than me in a lot of ways. Terry is very intelligent and all organized beyond my belief and appreciation. She can really get from point B to point A without going through the whole alphabet. It's unsettling enough to have to calm down if you're not that way. Jesus God, Mom and Pop. I'm starting to have feelings I didn't know were available. But...well, there's probably no question about it. We've got to stop the communist menace, at least slow it down some on purpose. Because they're getting encroaching on us. Westport wouldn't do well with a lot of eager communists running around indoctrinating the women and children with their haphazard ideas. Westport you see, is mostly filled with abnormally beautiful women and redundant money you might say. It's kind of a genetic pool of money and beauty you can't get dislocated from.

Rich men marry beautiful women because they seem to like them that way. And they go off and have these leisurely beautiful daughters. It just never stops, it's unnerving. Even when the women get old they look young and well-preserved. Oh, I almost forgot. I mean, I did forget but now I just remembered to tell you that, I'm going to miss a lot my cousin Bosco. Cousin Bosco is our dog, mostly a mutt. Of course he doesn't know he's a mutt, that's our idea. I don't even think he knows he's a dog. Now that I think of it, I wonder what he thinks we are, going to war and stuff. I wandered over looking at the empty seat in front of me. There's nothing there. I just remembered something, I don't know why, but I'm thinking of my favorite restaurant in Westport, the Arrow. It's run by this large very familiar Italian family. They're all very nice and courteous and the food is so good you almost wish you didn't have to swallow it. If you're ever in Westport I recommend the pork chops and manicotti at the Arrow. I guess that's why I remembered something. I wanted to give you that recommendation before I forgot.

Now after remembering, I feel kind of lonely and kind of desperate to tell you the truth. It was only a couple of hours that I said goodbye to everyone at the railroad station. Hugging then shaking hands then hugging again. Sad enough to make me look away just this right now. But it also made me feel sort of patriotic, calm and uneventful. Altogether mostly sad though. How many times do you have to say goodbye to so many people before you start fading away and just disappearing. Just too much, sitting here. Rodney, we call him RS with his permission, he gave me almost all he valued and collected during his collecting years. Including most of all a Yankee baseball cap signed by Mickey Mantle in person. He insisted for real I take it. He said, "to keep the sun out of your face in the jungle." Rodney also gave me his lucky twenty-five cent piece. RS would never tell anyone why it was lucky. But it was proven

lucky. From the observations of my own experience I saw it was lucky. Years ago I tried bribing him for the information with a fifty-cent piece. He said no, no chance, said if he told how it was lucky it would lose its luck. But now here I am on my way to that Vietnam with my little brother's good luck charm. RS said that he still had to keep the lucky reasons to himself, but the luck would still work absolutely. Maybe could be RS is right, that's the way it's supposed to be. I felt in my pocket. It's still there. I myself haven't followed luck much over the years. So I'm circumstantially ignorant about it. My Mom wasn't at the railroad station. She said it would be too much for her. I got to know what she means. Terry was herself away at college. I'm not going to think back more remembering. All in all I'm here alone, just me catching what's left of my breath. It's strange isn't it? All those so many crazy goodbyes and I'm the only one who left. Well it could be worse, we could all be going. But I do most absolutely have to slow down on all this reminiscing stuff. It's almost like if I do it enough I'm going to end myself up walking backwards into an inconvenient grave.

Jesus, the plane wheels touched ground. I'd forgotten I was in a plane, still wandering around aimless around the railroad station. I looked out the window thing. We bounced harder. "Look at all that!" Tones all those tones of green. All over the place greens, palm trees bowing, hillsides green running into those over there mountains. I couldn't get my eyes off. Maybe sure I'll have a good and relaxing time here somehow. After all I've got RS's good luck piece. There go those greens again. I never saw so many greens and on purpose with each other too. I realized suddenly without too much thinking that the plane had stopped. I yawned and stretched my arms. Trying not to get my arms past the aisle. Jet lag strains me, all those unnecessary time zones. I wonder when a hill gets called a mountain.

I unbuckled myself and got onto my feet. I'm in the first class section. My father's idea. I'm not too much for parades and frills like that. I got right through the hatch and into the fresh air. The warm sun touching my face nicely on its own. I walked down the escalator steps watching my feet to make sure they didn't make any mistakes under the jet lag. I'm uncoordinated myself with the easy stuff like walking and sometimes sleeping. But stuff like the hundred and ten yard hurdles or soccer I'm sometimes better than real good. I think because walking isn't preoccupying enough to keep you free of thinking. It's not important, I just thought I should explain. I stopped suddenly both feet near in front of the terminal place. I can see why my father likes coming here so much. So restful and beautiful. To be truthful and all my father is pretty much of an unregulated success. He's almost a self-made man. No almosts about it, he is. He started when he wasn't too much older than me, it's unsettling the way he does it. I'd like to become a self-made man, but I think it might be too late for me. You have to overcome odds and strife of some kind and then go ahead putting something together permanently with a lot of brute force. I just don't have a lot of brute force. But then again I haven't been inspired intentionally much. Could be I can still be a self-made man. I--

"Chuck...Chuck Winters?" A short stocky man is running up to me. He held out his hand to me. We shook severely. "Chuck I am chur father's driver. My name is Javier. He asked I should pick chu up."

"Sure thanks Javier I'm Chuck. Listen Javier how did you know I was Chuck?"

"Chur Dad he showed us a photograph of you and RS, Terry and chur Mom." We started walking. Javier did, I followed alongside. "Oh," I said. "That's nice being anticipated and all." My hand still ached from the shaking. "Great

way to start a vacation. Thank you for your trouble Javier."

"Chu bet Chuck, no problem."

We processed through customs bags and all, no problem. And got into this nice blue Volvo that looked like one of those old Packards that has severe sentimental importance to me. I'm feeling good now, even better. I'm feeling relevant all over. Look at this scenery, really. The blue sky mountains with all the green right up to the road here. Oh yeah, I was saying about my father before I got disconnected. Pop's got this business-like deal put together right here in Costa Rica. A twenty-four-thousand acre property with sixteen kilometers of beach on it of all things. He picked up the property from Tacho Samosa's widow, that's the dictator of Nicaragua when he was living. His son is at it now. Anyway, then he became partners with this several-times-over millionaire from New York and Philadelphia. It's kind of a little strange when people come from two places at once. But the deal didn't get to become all perfect and inspiring. Pop also became partners, through some regrettable unnecessary coincidence, with a construction engineer from New Canaan. Which is nearby close to Westport. This guy, his available name is Jack Odwyer, turned out to be an appreciated member of the mob. Sure I got nervous. My father didn't know that particular fact of the deal. Jesus I have trouble looking at this scenery and thinking about this stuff. There's a lot of specific tension in this deal because the mob guy wants to turn the property into this altogether gambling resort with an airport for the flying gamblers. But my father wants to get the mineral rights together for profits and to set up a nice forest preserve that is actually already there, just not preserved. The guy from New York and Philadelphia doesn't know what he wants because he already has it and doesn't know it. Pop when he got the property, the property's name is Santa Elena Y Rosa I guess I didn't say, anyway when Pop got the property

he also got the contract to guard the property with his own men. Somehow that's some kind of available edge. So it's pretty much a wait and see stand-off without enough planned for precautions. It's all too confusing enough for me to keep me wondering enough for an agreeable conclusion. I just think what a cocktail party it would be. My pleasant, respectable and self-made father, a too-educated mob guy with hobbies, the widow of a feverish dictator, a happenstance millionaire with out-of-control traditions and a public relations firm cleaning up his drinking antics...the poor servants. Just delivering the hors d'oeuvres must require three hail mary's. Did I tell you? Obviously my father didn't know the guy was a mobster. My father is nowhere near a scoundrel, he's nice.

I got my concentration back onto the mountains where it's quieter. God was nice to make mountains. The sky seems closer here than in Connecticut. I sat back into my seat perfectly. I'm real good at getting comfortable. Even on short notice. I got back to leaning myself with my elbows on the open window. I asked Javier if he didn't mind telling me about Costa Rica and all. He said, sure, actually he said "seguro." But I turned it around for you in English. I listened while trying to concentrate on my thinking. "Look at that!" Three children in school uniforms walking happy and carefree. From the back window I could see the kids wave unsolicited. I waved back eager and smiling. Incredible waving without encouragement. Terry my sister, is probably this very right now in class wrestling down information like a champ. The three kids disappeared from me. Terry is an extreme type student. You don't have to sit very long with Terry to know that she's much smarter than you have to be. My sister was an all-A student in high school. On purpose no less. Oh in my own way I'm smart too, I just don't get the steady on call patterns my sister does. If you want to know the truth I think intelligence

is a personal thing. You should develop and expose it on your own terms as you go along. Looking back on myself. I guess, I started feeling that way about myself when I was going to a private school in Mexico. They called it the American School in Mexico no less. That's right, sure I guess I didn't get to mention, RS, Terry and me--we were born in Mexico. Except in technical terms RS was living in this country, I mean more exactly Mom was pregnant with Rodney in America when we took a vacation to Acapulco and my little brother got premature about himself all at once. And got born in Mexico. Which I thought was nice. But I was commenting about my intelligence opinion, see what I mean. Thinking in its own way isn't always the best way to get something done. Specially on a quick deadline when remembering something forgettable. Things get convoluted and then some. Javier is still talking eagerly about Costa Rica. So there I was in this American school minding my own eight-year-old business. In love quietly with my Mexican teacher. Kids do that you know--fall in love I mean. It wasn't just supernatural or anything like that. Then out of nowhere except herself, with no introduction of any kind, in the middle of flunking my next spelling test no less, comes out this American psychologist. That fact I learned much later--what she was. She appears breathing on me, very tall, with gray hair, a gray dress and gray shoes. Completely gray and her eyes were a little off-color too-really. After she tapped me too many times on my shoulder I'm following her down the hall. Now that I think of it if you're going to get into somebody's mind, specially uninvited, you should at least dress for the part. I got more and more nervous following her and more still, by the time we walked through the office I got alarmed. Of course I should be unnecessarily nervous, this is all unrehearsed and unnatural without warning. I'm now into a small dusty room with one left over desk that was almost up to my chest. She tells me with her long finger to sit down with my

back to the one window. Then she tells me, incredible with no preliminary introduction or explainable reason to me, "I'm going to give you a test." Which first almost briefly got me relieved. Because I had got myself to wondering that they found out I loved Miss Pascual and they brought me here to get me remedied. She's shuffling around a briefcase with her fingers again. I'm looking out my peripheral vision at the one scraggly window. I was no longer relieved, if I was ever enough at all to be. Because it came to me unwanted the thought, a test without preparation from a too-old stranger. I didn't know such a test existed for people. I felt like saying something. But I didn't know enough what it might be. Just about then I noticed she chewed her nails hungrily. It got worse. She started right off giving the test with her mouth--talking, saying to me, "How many days in a week?" First I thought she didn't know. That she was one of those adults that didn't get developed on time. And that I got put with her to help her out because I was generous for some reason nobody had told me about yet. I squirmed so much in my seat, that I thought the chair started squirming with me. But I took no chance either way I said, "seven." Can you believe it she wrote down my answer. But she wasn't through. She wanted more. It was obvious enough to tell. Then finally she looks at me with both eyes and asks, "How many nickels in a dollar?" I got myself dumbfounded. I'd never seen a nickel in my life. Let alone transacted one. I'd be held suspicious if I used one in Mexico. The questions always get harder don't they? Or is it the answers that do. I said outright and brief as possible, "I don't know." And I didn't know. And I knew I didn't. No hesitation unperturbed by my confessed ignorance she writes some more. Now if I had done what she did next I would of been sent to my room. The gray lady takes out a box from her locked briefcase. She opens it, this lady does, and empties it on the table. If I'd been shorter

one piece would have hit my nose. Not enough, I'm looking at her. She just clicked a stopwatch to get it moving. I can see the red hand racing. I just ran out of I can't believe it. Sure I was eight years old, but I can count real well. I know my sizes. I live in this real big house with seven servants that respect me carefully. I'd had enough and more. I looked at her with my smaller eyes. She's looking at the stopwatch that only she could stop. I felt immobilized. Her face was as blank as the table. She tastes her lips like she likes the taste of whatever she got herself to think. She looks at me irrelevant. I shook my head definitely no. And I thought to myself loud, why should I, she screwed it up. The lady is back to writing, pressing hard too. And it was a nice model T Ford. I still wonder if that gray lady had a problem she didn't know enough about. I hope for her sake she did. It'd be awful and sad to think she came that way. And you know I still don't know her name. I'm not surprised those people want to keep their relevant names to themselves and do their work incongruous like.

But boy did things change. A week and a half after that test my parents started staring at me with a premeditation they didn't tell me about. Specially my mother who had more time for all the premeditations. But to be truthful she seemed more concerned than with a plan. Three months later I got set back a grade. Uncontrollably I had nothing to say about it. I had nothing to do about it either for that matter. Held back a grade by a too-gray lady with chewed-upon fingernails who gave me an unrehearsed test without a known reason or an introduction. And you know what, she did it for a living. Yes, misery doesn't love company like some ambiguous person said. It is the company. Company all over misery became. That couple of months later Miss Pascual got completely engaged to Mister Casus the gym teacher. A bad year. Two in a row like that and I would of started practicing my puzzles. I found out years

later from Mom that they wanted to put me in a special class. Get the word, special. But my Mom and Pop put a ruckus together and stopped them. Mom told me she told them I was already too special. I love Mom, her humor in the face of adversity. Problem is that adversity always gets to me before I can get to the humor option. In some ways though I'm very quick. Sure I am.

Javier pulled off the main road. We must already be in San Jose. All the people, not like New York City, but a lot. And these people look like they're going somewhere with a chance at getting there. Relaxed, casual friendly like. The buildings not skyscrapers, modern within reach. And the air is still agreeable here. Two people walking talking amiable, that one smiling alone. This is going to be great. Office equipment, stereo TV's. Two restaurants right next to each other in the same proximity. Like they're not disagreeably threatened by being next door to each other. I wouldn't be surprised if they stopped and borrowed sugar and stuff from each other non-chalant like. Great I love it. We turned another corner, jostling my body a bit to the side. And we stopped, stopped just like that. I looked out and up. The Royal Dutch Hotel. A chubby happy man in a purple uniform opened the door--pretty well too. Too bad they have these uniformed guys. I don't like being treated upon. I swung myself outside. The man in the uniform smiled. I smiled back. I tried, but not as well because of the residue of the jet lag. "Gracias, I'll take care of that." I smiled again and took my duffle bag. I don't like other type people doing menial things for me. Any things actually, unless of course they're life-preserving of my life. I turned around on the sidewalk.

"Oh Javier it's you. Has to be you're the only one in San Jose who knows my name."

"Chu will make other friends ah Chuck." He looked away slightly. "Chuck

chu have been register here. Don Carlos, chur Dad, he said sign for anything." Javier smiled. "I hope chu dun mind my calling you Chuck."

"Oh God no Javier, it's pretty much over all my name. And look Javier I want to thank you very much for everything, picking me up, the information, everything thanks. I feel informed about Costa Rica."

"My pleasure certainly. An' listen Chuck if you need transportation or anything chu call me. Here is my card." He held out his hand. We shook. He swung his other arm and squeezed my forearm. God he has powerful hands. I noticed a little scar on his face kind of like mine, but lower and more punctuated. Javier turned away for the car. The door open he said with a mischievous smile, "An Chuck chu take it easy with the ladies."

"Oh no it won't be easy I'm sure, I mean I'll be fine. Thank you for your concern." I tried to derail a blush as Javier slid into the Volvo laughing happily. I hate it when I blush without enough warning to myself. I should of asked him if I could call him Javier. I'm clumsy with the formal civilized stuff between people. Specially when I don't know them and am trying to get started. It's not serious enough to be serious I guess. That woman remark though what did he mean? I hope it's not something I don't know like a custom I might be exposed to. I have to be much more careful. Here I've been here less than one hour and already potentially rude once.

I'm at the desk here, a pleasant lady and a mostly pleasant guy very nice and familiar. Except the guy tried to get more than a little butlery. I had trouble restraining him from himself. I gave up on language and just took two steps back. He calmed down. They both started off calling me Senor Winters. I expect it's enforced policy here. But I'm more of a what's your name than a senor by a long shot. I don't like people unduly respecting me without permission or some warning caution. Finally they both understood agreeably,

smiling. It looked like one smile that got separated somehow. What I'm waiting for is the key. Here it is, "Gracias." I smiled, backing up. Interesting no smile nothing they just dropped their heads to some ledger or something. Maybe they're on a respecting quota. Be nice if they were. I hoisted and carried duffle bag over to the elevator. I pressed the button once to see if it would work on once. Yep it did. So far, sure good why not. Let's go with good. Nice slow elevator, gives you time to regret where you're going. Compose yourself or whatever. I stepped out of the elevator on the third floor. I snapped my fingers in the air with my left hand. How could I of forgotten my crazy dictionary. I brought my hand down noticing it was still up. Well I can't expect to have all the answers when I keep answering the same questions over and over again. They'll have dictionaries in Vietnam. Sure they will. Lots of people there have to look up words for a reason. The whole war could come to an abrupt halt if they can't figure out one crucial word. What would possibly that word be? I squinted both my eyes to better see down the corridor. I leaned forward, not yet clear enough. I need a new prescription on these wire rims. I should be getting oriental at this distance. I should also start getting to relax and taking it easy. In case I get into a situation in Costa Rica here, where it might be helpful. I swung one arm like the Tin Man carrying a duffle bag. Motion is kind of my hobby. I'm very keen on motion.

I stepped slowly into my room. No problem situation with the door. It's my room because it's empty. Also plus it's my room number. You have to be careful, after high school more unsuspecting things happen. Also more excruciating when they do happen. At least it seems to me. "It's all clear." I walked myself in more completely up to the curtain. Agreeable window. "What." I tossed my head back. Ten eight feet away a complete all-over brick wall. I'm not going to complain. To who anyway? Well to myself I'm not going to

complain. Even though I'm very determined on scenery and stuff that's natural. I pushed my hands down on the bed. I tilted forward my hands sunk down so unexpectedly. "Good easy going comfort--great." Now why would I do that? I started thinking about that University of Maine. Thinking again in that spooky depressed way. What's the point my incriminating myself? My brain is becoming a haunted house of unusual circumstances. You see I did go to college. In a kind of incidental kind of a way. In a courtroom the evidence would be called circumstantial. I don't know why it surprises me, my going to college. I guess it surprises me because it did. That's it and all. Well, I mean I always expected myself to go to college. But I also had this insistent idea that I would become, like I told you, a self-made man. All the self-made men I knew didn't go to college. And self-made I thought was the best way of spending what was left of my life. But no available questions about it, there I was at the University of Maine. I wasn't there past ten no five minutes that I didn't start trying to figure out what I was doing there. And how I was like lost in a closet that was empty with me in it. I must of figured. I'm not sure what I must of figured because when you're desperate it's hard to add things up you're so busy subtracting against yourself. Desperate very simply starts calling all the shots, time shots included. Desperate is not a good way to end the day, specially if you started it that way. And that's most of all true if you're unaccompanied and alone.

From before the very beginning with anticipation and all I felt out of place in the wrong place. From the first day some indoctrination person said we had to wear beanies. Looking around that auditorium I never knew I could not know so many people. And they were all permanent people talking in conversations. Then I thought surprisingly to myself, maybe perhaps I could overcome going to college and still get to be a self-made man. But I also knew I wasn't going to be wearing any beanie. I can use a break from thinking about

the University of Maine. I opened my door. I looked squinting down the halls. Completely empty of nobody. I closed the door. I thought maybe I could meet someone to talk to in a nice way. I went over to my duffle bag, took out some socks and other clothes stuff. I opened the drawer and stuffed them in the way they're supposed to be. I mean, I have a pretty good idea why I left that place, but not enough to testify against myself. There's no question about it that's all. I quit. But it took me almost the whole semester to quit enough to dislocate myself to somewhere else. I mean relocate. Either way I left convoluted in my defeat. And after still all these months I still don't understand enough of the why to know how come I left unheralded and discriminated guilty against myself. The worst part of it all is that I was a nice guy, with no guilt accredited to himself except for breathing. I sat down on the bed for comfort's sake. To tell you some of the truth the most part of it was my being away from home. I missed my family past severely. Enough soon to start missing myself without them. The best part of the week by far was calling home. Not enough minutes you hang up and you're right back where you didn't want to start from in the first place. Even in the morning mirror of myself shaving I looked incriminated. Five minutes awake I'm already suspicious to my reflection. If I'd been called to an all-volunteer police line-up, the other suspects would have shied away from me. And I would of wished I could too. You wouldn't think somebody could get that miserable without some advanced preparation or training. Me like not being able to speak the available language in the middle of a unique emergency that got personal beyond me.

But listen, o.k. I didn't get weak and stupid in my consternations. I kept most of my chin up and a lot of my miserable words to myself. The very worst ones I kept for my own use, actually abuse. I knew right off college

was going to be hard. The facts were threatened to us from the beginning start. I rolled up my sleeves and studied severely. And if it hadn't been for a Bell-shaped curve that happened after the fact by Professor Borns of geology I would of made the dean's list handsomely. I talked to Professor Borns politely on appointment and he said he needed the Nazi curve because not enough people flunked the class. Jesus give me a break above the knees. That's like morticians not having enough stiffs for their needs and being licensed to go out and look for more available ones. You're having troubles alone in your own company and overly educated people start altering reality against you. And you're paying them no less. Paying them with money for Christsakes. I paid for my own first semester. I thought I would help me be self-made. The studying would have been easier somehow fine if friendships had been more spontaneous and available. Maybe could be, I wasn't that friendly myself I don't know. I was too much hiding myself to look for a friend to talk to. Probably with just agreeing with my avoiding of myself. Also though I was out of place with their ideas. Like fraternities, everyone it seemed was gung-ho about those fraternities. My roommate Freddie Wynn from Waterville Maine thought fraternities were the hottest things in civilization since Hershey bars and condoms. Fraternities were not for me, not even in the least. I mean, a lot of behave-alike guys wearing their look-alike jackets. With their secret signals and brotherhood words. Calling themselves brothers and hiring a housemother woman. Usually old with glasses so she couldn't see their on-purpose antics. Getting drunk a lot so they could do them worse, with no extra remorse added. Like it was supposed to be one happy family the brothers and the mother woman. No it wasn't even close for me. I'd rather go to the end of an orphanage line than take up with an antic substitute family that got availably contrived.

I had one other unnecessary problem that was getting me out of control from

being me. I've been losing my hair since high school in disproportionate numbers to myself. And it's true no one in my family is bald. But I heard those genes sometimes get delayed or sidetracked somehow before they get belatedly bald to you. I have no bald spots at all, obvious ones. But my crazy hair keeps falling off and at the University of Maine it got severe enough to get momentum about itself. I suspected in time maybe soon I would have fewer hanger-on's than those eager waiting to let go, then barbers would complete my haircut while I was still bouncing myself comfortably on their chair. During the War of Eighteen Twelve I lost twelve hairs, seven of them with roots. But I aced the test anyway. I'm real good at history. I like things that have already happened. In high school I had this little snuff box Aunt Emily gave my Mom and my Mom gave me. Inside I kept all the hairs that had their roots with them intact. Someday I'm going to have one of those hair transplants like Frank Sinatra did. But I want my own hair transplanted back from my own head, not somewhere else or from some other stranger. Jesus losing somebody else's hair must be awful. In some way they could even sue you I bet. I wouldn't blame them. And at the same time my eyes started looking haunted and hungry like. But I don't want to talk about that. I mean you're standing there in the mirror wondering what they're looking like that at. And then you wonder what they look like when you're not looking.

Towards the end of the semester I went to the guidance department to take a speed-reading course and maybe possibly get some guidance if they had the kind you could refuse after they gave it to you. Guidance I think wasn't the greatest of my desperate options. I mean talking to strangers and not having a very good idea of what to talk about. It's true all my friends were once strangers. And seeking professionals can be helpful sometimes if you're cautious. But the guy I saw at the center was an altogether professional

stranger. Not a good combination, not a good combination at all. The speed-reading machine was too fast for me. I ended up unplugging it just to relax. It didn't help either that the guidance guy was balder than my shoulder. What are you going to do, when life is going against you and you insist on living? Just keep moving I guess and hope you don't bump into somebody who remembers you from when you were alive.

Even falling almost in love didn't seem to help a heck of a lot. I can't be sure it was love. Not as best I know it. But under the circumstances of myself a hint was a miracle. It's also true and a fact that I never talked to the girl. I never even found out her whole last name. Her first name I got from this other available girl. I double-checked it with this other girl just in case of misinformation or worse. But it was o.k. Her name was Phyllis. No you don't want to love a girl already oblivious of yourself by a wrong assumed name. You just don't, it seems desperate to me. I thought I should at least know her exact first name in the event of my writing a poem or something more rational. Phyllis was from a nearby distance beautiful. I'm sure she still is. She just used to move around easy slowly amongst the tree-lined buildings. Her blond hair cuddled around to one side watching like she was about to enter into an amiable conversation with a flower. Of course I was very careful not to stare. I'm strongly opposed to staring. But sometimes I just couldn't stop looking. I don't want to appear like I'm complaining all over the place. That University of Maine place was just like a premature obituary that's all. But what I'm leading up to say is that in a real and pertinent way loving Phyllis the way I did made it all worse not better. Because it got me contrasted. I mean if bad is bad enough long enough you kind of get used to it like not sleeping in an agreeable bed. But toss in a little love and you're reminded repeatedly that you're alive

while feeling extinguished. Well Phyllis wherever you are I wish we could of met. But it was very nice knowing you anyway.

If you must know I'm a convicted virgin. Jesus again, one of those slip things. They make me unnaturally nervous those Freudian slip things. You get suspected of yourself with your mind speaking prematurely without your advice to go along. That's three Freudian slips in two years almost. I meant you see, not convicted but committed, not like I didn't have a choice. Because I did have a choice, even a chance maybe as many as two of them. But I decided on my own pretty easily to tell you the truth that in high school I wouldn't have sex with a girl unless there was some available love that was agreed upon. In high school I did pretty much fall in love with this girl in chemistry class named Stacy. The class was headed by Mister Diamond, who was mostly bald himself but intense and nice nonetheless. He took those particle elements on the atomic chart very seriously. Which I didn't because I had Stacy on my mind. Stacy was pretty smart about herself. And for my taste she was also beautiful. I think anyone would say so under the circumstances of looking at her. Stacy sat two seats over and away in the front row. Which made it easy my appreciating her with my peripheral vision not being strained. My peripheral vision really got developed with Stacy specially after she was moved back a seat. I thought the Air Force might be able to use my peripheral vision somehow. But no, not even likely. The military seems to do everything up in front of themselves. Not too much sideways at all. Anyway I did eventually ask Stacy for a date. And you know what? She said yes, just like that, yes. And she meant it because we went out. Stacy had this Isadora Duncan look about herself. Small tiny freckles, free-spirited and reckless in a generous way. In case you don't know who Isadora Duncan was. She was this roaring twenties woman in Europe who danced everywhere she went. Even without permission.

So anyway, like I said Stacy and I did go out to this lobster place called Lyon's Pier on the seashore in Norwalk Connecticut. Looking at Stacy wrestle her lobster, I think even the lobster would of appreciated it. Listening naturally to the ocean waves lean themselves against the restaurant. The sailboats with the horizon. Nice sure. Then we went to a movie theater. I don't remember at all what we saw because it was irrelevant next to Stacy. We finished by going to the beach by Stacy's suggestion. Such suggestions are beyond me. Sitting talking, those things we said to each other. It was like a painting we were in with each other--happy. Well, by the time I realized I was all in love Stacy went back to dating this guy Hans from some Netherlands place. I guess I came in during some kind of intermission. I didn't kiss Stacy at the beach at all. Something scared me. It think it was me. I'm good at kissing, once I get started with good consent. But getting started I'm well below average myself. But I did kiss Stacy at her door. The kiss wasn't one of those real long ones that take time to separate. But it was remarkable. It still is. I'll remember it that's for sure, even the feeling directly everything. I may not get a lot of long spontaneous long-standing kisses. But I do tangibly remember the ones I do get. There's absolutely no unhappy question about that.

Towards the second semester at the University I started to get tough. Which really isn't even close to my style. I believe tough is not having to be tough. Anyway I got caught up in all my courses and started to hitchhike myself to New Hampshire. In New Hampshire there was this extremely liberal college called Marlboro College. The students there designed their own majors intentionally. Smoking a lot of pot out in the open. Talking communist and other funny ideas feverishly. Which is o.k. with freedom of speech and all, but on pot while pregnant. What conclusion would there be? Everyone there opposed

the war in Vietnam more than the people fighting it. Well enough anyway, I had a friend going there at Marlboro. Her name was Lucie Kearns. Probably still is. People change their names you know. Just enough sometimes. It's not important. At least I don't think. What I probably meant to be saying is that Lucie and I went to high school together. Lucie was also reckless and inspired. But I wasn't always sure exactly inspired to do what. We used to sit in Senor Copeland's Spanish lab talking rampant one thought after the other--about sex. I think it's my talks with Lucie about mischief and sex that kept me from understanding the subjunctive. But in fairness to Lucie and myself that subjunctive was nasty. But the senor was very understanding. I'm not sure he had much choice untapped sex being what it was. And still is. Well Jesus, to make a sad story short. I got corrupt. Lucie wrote me these detailed letters, each I had to put down an average of twice, about how no longer she was a virgin. Then in the eventually of it all she invites me down to come see her. Maybe could be I made a misinterpretation. Thoughts sometimes get tampered with by outside influences of yourself. You see Lucie didn't say even imply that if we got together we'd have intercourse or even you know sex of some kind. But I got myself all implied that way anyway and determined with predatory instincts. I decided without any warning to myself that it would be great if we had sex all the way to intercourse. Just like that, me and sex. No love about it, nothing. But we didn't. It took me ten hours hitch-hiking to get to Marlboro College. Lucie and I hugged each other friendly and nice. But that was it. The whole problem was that Lucie had become a sexual athlete. She was having sex with several different guys in no particular order. It was excruciating to hear Lucie talk about it enthused the way she was. All I could do was listen and try not to nod my head too much. Understand Lucie was in no way a whore or anything close to it. I don't

even allow myself to use that word. Any word that disadvantages one person over another, specially opposite sex people, is well not for me. Finally we said goodbye Lucie and I did. We hugged nice again. Even though it's true I was all revved up to lose my virginity quickly and on short notice. I hitch-hiked back all those miles all over shocked at Lucie's approach to love. Before hitch-hiking back I got inspired sitting down on this old stone wall and wrote Lucie this warning letter trying to calm her down. After mailing the letter I realized I was no better. If Lucie had been slower about herself and more practical I probably would of become the madman breathing between the sheets. Tell me what happened to love anyway, I said to myself time after time walking back to my dungeon, the University of Maine. Probably why we have wars I told myself, to better recover from loving each other. I hope not. I wish I hadn't had that thought. But like I said I was getting tough against myself. Walking along some more I think of hugs, you know hugging people. But hugging in its own way can have its potential repercussions. You see Americans I know don't generally like to hug except during sex and on holidays, specially compared to Mexicans who hug all the time. Even uninvited and without warning Mexicans hug. It's complicated enough to wonder why? Problem with hugging someone is that you have to be pretty close enough to someone to do it. And if you do then it's too late if you shouldn't of. Oh well, I guess trying to figure out hugging on the way to Vietnam doesn't make a lot of sense either. I sure right now would like to say a prayer though. Just mostly for personal reasons that wouldn't be personal if I told you. So many things to learn and so much life to learn them in. I'm not complaining though. Life is fine with me. I just wish I could sleep longer in the mornings. Get a better head start maybe with less daylight ahead.

That crazy window brick wall is still there. Got me thinking more about

that University place, the way it was. And me the way I was--am more or less I guess. It wasn't that I was isolated or something, though now that I think about it that might of been close to most of it. You see the University was mostly a conservative place. The year before I showed up, the campus after a certain hour was divided into halves. Two of them. Male students on one side and female students on the other half. Romance was discouraged anyway, after eight p.m. it was prohibited. And it wasn't just the rules, the students were kind of conservative too. All the students from Maine spoke with this twangy accent that sounded like every other word was getting released from a trap. Not that there's anything extra wrong with that. I'm sure I was the opposite of twangy to them whatever that is. Maybe in the middle of a neutral observer like a bird twangy would win hands down. Maybe just twangy made me realize I was in the wrong place. Fortunately enough from the very first day I met this guy named Carl from Connecticut of all places. He was also looking for someone safe to talk to. Carl lived just twenty miles from Westport in Danbury. Also a nice town like Westport but with more normal people. Carl was studying in some science that took a considerable amount of available intelligence. But Carl wasn't a guy to put his intelligence in your way. He kept it suppressed politely to himself and used it only when he had to. Carl warned me on a regular basis about those increased draft quotas that someone didn't know better than to increase. He knew better than anyone, maybe even than me, that I was thinking about quitting. The war in Vietnam, everyone getting killed on purpose the way they were. Didn't help in the least of everything. It was one thing to quit and go unravel myself in the sun of Miami. But getting killed personally in Vietnam made everything all the more pointless. To tell you the truth I just didn't think I'd be that good at death. I'm not good at anything when it's for the first time unrehearsed particularly. But well, what are you

going to do when it doesn't count that you're doing it in the first place? By the end of the first semester a go-home vacation didn't seem like a near great escape. You see it's very hard to quit when you don't have enough evidence on yourself to quit. I mean, I was passing all my courses real well. I even passed a test I cheated on. A comparative government test right there with my own eyes cheating. Now you know the worst of me pretty much. After that cheating self-inflicted insult I quit. I quit and decided somehow I'd figure out the reason later. But I haven't yet, maybe. Except that maybe I never will. I sure miss Carl though. I used to go to his room just to watch him move. He moved so slowly like tumbleweed in a breeze. It was outright relaxing. For some reason Carl was shorter than me. Yeah that Carl was all right for a human being. I hope he's all right involved in his studies the way he was.

I looked at my wristwatch after adjusting my wire rims. I'm sure I almost need a new prescription because it's getting harder to see through these eyes. Look, there's something I should tell you really before I get more started than I have. I have changed the names of some of the people here that I'm trying to tell you about. The women I kissed I haven't altered their names too much in the least. Mostly because there's nothing wrong with kissing that I've been told about. It's not at all that I want to protect the innocent like they say. No I want to protect the guilty from me. I don't think I know that many guilty ones or maybe even any, but you know how people get to be about themselves. They reassess themselves guilty when they were fine in the first place for reasons they won't talk about. Then they run around asking you to share in the available credit of their guilt but they won't tell you why. Nothing wrong with guilty in the first place, if you did it on your own and don't get unpleasant. I don't know. I do know I'm hungry. All this kissing

talk and quitting talk has made me hungry for food. I sure though would like to talk to someone in person enough to say hello and how are you. I looked at my watch again because I'd forgotten the time thinking about the past. I moved the second hand a bit forward, then back to where time was. People have different opinions about time. Myself I just leave it alone. I happen to think that time isn't a dimension. Just our way of being late or knowing it's not Tuesday. I think the importance of time and gravity have been over-estimated. But I don't know why. An unimportant hunch that's all. I'm stopping myself. Why am I thinking these things? You'd think I had an education I knew about. I turned and headed downstairs quickly for a change of pace. When they say a man ahead of his time, how can a man be ahead of his time and not be dead? Now I know I'm hungry, I'm trying to make sense again instead of eating.

I grabbed a quick lettuce and tomato sandwich and a glass of milk. The cows do it differently in Costa Rica, less swallowing to it and softer. I decided while munching to go out on San Jose. A movie, whatever maybe. I'm glad I stopped thinking lofty, I'm not good at it. Just my way of dislocating myself away from my presence. You know get bored and determined it, the night fresh air is good and fresh. I like breathing it relaxes me. I stuffed my hands in my back pockets and headed the way I was going. Not nearly crowded like New York City. And less muggings about to happen about it. Must be strange to be mugged in a foreign language and not know the word for wallet. I guess you can figure they don't want your pencil sharpener. Can you be free with nowhere to go? God, headlines about Vietnam, walking past a newspaper vendor. I tried to look away but I didn't. Hey, look that's better. Across the street a generous large park with trees and benches. And a pretty gigantic old time church. I stopped and waited for the light to change before I realized there was no light. I'm a good dodger between traffic, sideways

particularly I'm real good. Even without warning or anticipation I can get into a good dodge. I didn't see that before now. The church has a nice easy-does-it cemetery, a leaning cemetery with all the tombstones inclined everywhich way. Like the dead people had too much to drink when they got buried. Now the tombstones like they're whispering to each other. I like tombstones like that. What would laughing tombstones look like?

"I'm sorry I--"

I turned around quickly interrupting my apology ready to catch whoever I bumped into. He's a small kid clutching his shirt like Napoleon no less.

"Chu have money?" He sounded more like an accusation. "Chu have money ah?"

"Yes I do think you." What else was I going to do with that fact? I reached for my wallet. The little kid held out his hand flat high over his nose. I could see his smile getting bigger. "I have a problem," I said mostly to myself. Trying to find him under my wallet.

"Wha Chur problem?" the kid asked in a little bit of a kid's hurry voice.

"I have too much money." I coughed for time to think. "Do you happen to have change for a ten?" I'm not good around money, especially if I don't have it. You know, explaining its absence. I looked around my shoulders. A candy store maybe they've got change. The little guy followed me from closely behind. I wish I'd been that good when I had to almost do some necessary begging in New London.

"Excuse me senor, do you know if you have change for a ten dollars?" The very old man shook his head no with an easy smile. I stepped outside looking at the kid trying to figure out the dilemma of going somewhere else for change. Holding the ten dollar bill I said, "See, that's all I have, let's--"

"Dat's o.k. dat's better," the kid said moving away, the bill already disappeared into his hand. Incredible what speed motion. He got me in the

middle of a sentence incompleated. No in the middle of a word. Now moving between traffic across the street. He turned around his hand in the air clutching the ten. I raised my hand and waved back by my face. He disappeared around himself turning the corner. That was too much. I sighed. Better than a movie, meeting a kid someone like that. I wonder what's his name. He'll sure get a lot more out of the ten than I would of. I bet that kid is going to be a self-made man, no question about it, a self-made man. Maybe could be a self-made kid, be nice for him I'm sure. Industrious the way he was.

I glanced momentarily over my shoulder at the church. I like churches, they're respectful places. People go there and are filled with respect and quiet in spite of themselves like me. I can't think where there's another place that has a steady combination like that of quiet and respect, cemeteries too. I go to cemeteries and church sometimes to take it easy, recover from living. There aren't too many people evicted from cemeteries for rowdy behaviors, during daylight hours anyway. Yep the kid is completely gone. I should of invited him as my guest to dinner. I should of. But I didn't think quickly enough to of thought of it. A car swoshed past me. I felt like an outweighed bullfighter. Be something strange to get smashed prematurely to death by a dented nineteen-something vehicle on your way to Vietnam. Made me right now think two years ago in Miss Spence's history class. We were hearing in class President Johnson trying to make sense so that everyone else could. He said like the war in Vietnam wasn't all that bad, because we had lost more people in car accidents in America in one crazy year than all the unfortunate dead soldiers in Vietnam from the beginning of the war. I thought without waiting for a reason, sure and with my luck I'll end up in Saigon somewhere driving a jeep. I bent over finding a penny. A Canadian penny, good, I like Canadian pennies. And anyway I was right on my clumsy way to Saigon. It's getting dark. I crossed the street again because I didn't know why I crossed it the first

time. Just a bad move, that's all.

I walked for a while easy and lackadaisical trying to relax some. Mostly stores that had gotten closed up for the day. People walking going somewhere other than where I was going I guess. "Look here boy." A medium-size dog came up and sniffed me. Then he looked up with careful eyes. Almost like he wanted to compare the sniff information with the rest of me. "Why don't you stay with me buddy. We'll walk around together." In one reflex his head then the rest of him, he was gone. Jesus could be he had a bad experience with a tourist once. I hope not, dogs deserve better. Possibly that dog wasn't familiar enough with English to understand my being friendly. I just noticed it's started to drizzle. Drizzle is for murder mysteries not for me. Jogging across the street I noticed a bar with a pink neon sign. On and off, on and off it said El Toro Bar. I thought deciding maybe I could get a Coke inside. Talk to somebody who knows maybe. I crossed the street. I mean, I'm already here--I crossed it while thinking about the other side's possibilities.

There's no door except for some bamboo beads. God it's dark, darker than outside. I stopped and reached out with my hand. I needed a moment to compose my eyes. They had here those alabaster walls, you know crinkly and exaggerated. The only light in the place was from a silent stationary juke box and a couple of small floodlights next to the bar. No sawdust on the floor. I don't know why I always look for sawdust at bars. Only six, no seven tables. A small group of people.

"What are you having bud?" An American voice for sure.

"Oh an...." I started talking while I was thinking good thing I didn't say anything more. "Yes thank you, a Coke please, in a bottle if possible. Also cold if you have it?" He turned away expressionless to the refrigerator. Have you ever noticed the limited number of expressions in bars? Nice the floodlights

reflecting different light around the walls. A cavey homey bar.

"Bud I'm over here."

"Yes you are thank you. How much is it?" I smiled without planning to.

"Sixty cents American." I went for my wallet. Guy was muscular, sounded muscular too. I handed the bartender a dollar bill I didn't know I had. God[†] hidden somehow. I walked away without saying anything. Why do unhappy people have to be mean? This guy wasn't mean, but he was surfacing that way. Easily be mean right away. My smile could of gotten to him. What happens to muscle people when they get old and collapsing? I have no idea. I should remind myself about unsolicited smiling in foreign countries. Yes I will remind myself in case I'm right. I need the feeling of some music. The Coke is cold enough to want to put it down. I put it down and blew on my hand. I hope by chance they have a song by the Drifters. The Mama's and the Papa's would also be great. That song "Under the Boardwalk" makes me feel nicely about Stacy at the beach. Mostly American songs so far in this juke box. I inserted two quarters and chose something at random. Random works for me, I guess sometimes often. I'm lucky with random.

"Hallo..." I jumped inside myself to get away.

The voice was, actually is, a woman's. I leaned forward instinctively so as not to see with my peripheral vision. I'm awful at surprises that don't get warned somehow. I could smell nicely her perfume permeating me. The music got started. "Born free as free as the wind blows." I'm not a coward, I just simply need lengthier introductions than most. I finally gathered myself to move and turned around slowly. Just in case to see what's going on.

"Hi." I meant a smile, but I don't know if I made it. From my side, they were all women young probably a sorority. I looked at the lady person in front of me. I realized I'd already seen her from just before.

"My name is Chuck Winters." I held out my hand for a possible handshake. But she was too close to maybe see it. I brought my hand down rubbing my fingers. "Please forgive my startled unexpected reaction. It was unexpected to me too. I'm sorry." I looked to the ceiling fan for a break. "You'll have to...." That's enough I already said that once too many times. "You're someone I didn't expect to see. You know the way you are actually, in person and all."

"My name is Eugenia." She smiled with no muscle effort at all. And held her hand out to shake with mine. She has a much nicer hand than mine. We shook hands together. This Eugenia lady has a real good soft handshake. I let go of her hand still feeling tuning fork nervous. Do we speak the same language or what? Then I remembered I also speak Spanish enough for any eventuality almost.

I felt my smile for the first time. I pointed to the chairs with my whole arm. I felt gallant polite all over. Not much nervous anymore for some good reason I'm sure. "May we sit down, Eugenia right." She smiled a smile more than was already there.

"Why no we sit down Chug."

"Yes sure, I think that's what I just suggested." I realized the light reflecting from the juke box, that she was pretty very and without makeup. Moving toward the table I tried to clear my throat. But my throat got stuck short of clearing results. Listen Eugenia would you like to pick a song of your preference? I should of offered before, but I'm probably unnecessarily nervous."

"No is o.k. I understand you are a nice man."

"You're right Eugenia," I sat down with her. "You're right I probably am a nice man. Not that I had a lot to do with it. I understand somebody announced it's mostly biological. Do you understand biological? I hope that's

not a personal question in Costa Rica?"

"No I understand for sure. No is personal like chu say."

"Sure this nice man Javier, he told me there's free education through college here in Costa Rica. And no military to speak of or count. And that's right, free doctors, so sure of course you understand biological. But now that I think of it I'm not sure I do. The word I mean, those dissecting sessions unsettled me. I went to this University of Maine place, I wasn't though very productive about myself. Right from the start I hated it enough to dislike it. Just one of those things you know?" I realized I'd just leaned forward without meaning to. I retrieved myself slowly smiling. "Eugenia you seem shorter than. Are you? I mean from where you're sitting you seem shorter than me. It doesn't matter. It was just an observation that I made that--"

"Ches I'm shorter. I am five feet an four inches. Wha art chu...chu know?"

"Yes well, in America, you know the United States of America." Eugenia nodded. "People take their weight and height very seriously, very seriously for sure. I wouldn't be surprised that if they found someone that admitted not knowing theirs they'd be hospitalized immediately until their height got figured out. They even ask for your most recent height in job applications. Eugenia you have a lovely laugh, merry like. You don't need a translator for such a laugh, it's nice. Me I don't get into a lot of height ideas. I just round off my height according to the occasion." I got half up off my chair. I sat back down. "Eugenia can I get you some kind of drink that might quench your thirst? I didn't mean to sit here with a cold Coke. But if you've noticed I haven't been drinking it."

"Thank chu Chug a lemonada, a lemonade would be good."

"Sure a lemonade is probably easy." I got up. "Listen Eugenia I'd like to ask you a question. If I may. It might be a question you could have difficulty answering, you know, with an answer."

Eugenia looked around like I'd already asked the question. "O.k. sure if you want." I looked around for momentum, then I leaned closer to Eugenia for privacy's sake. "Listen Eugenia I know accents and foreign languages like yours and mine with participles and stuff are very hard to pronounce correctly specially on short notice. But ever since the beginning of when we met you've been calling me Duck not Chuck. Duck instead of Chuck. I don't mind your calling me exactly Duck. Because I like ducks some of them a lot. Like we had at home once that the raccoons ate. It's just that I prefer Chuck mostly to Duck. But I've got a nickname also that you might prefer under the circumstances of our two languages."

"No listen Chug." Now Eugenia leaned closer to me. "I have no been saying pato. I am sure that I have been saying Chug." Eugenia winked at me. Just like that a one-eyed wink. I got startled because I was unsuspected. I thought for this moment that I'd gotten something foreign in my eye. I moved my eye around, listening to Eugenia laugh before I realized my problem.

"Well sure Eugenia. I'm glad we cleared up the confusion of my understanding. I'm now going to go up and get you your drink. Excuse me I'll be right back." I went back to the juke to press the button I must of forgotten before. I stopped back at the table. "Eugenia I just had a thought almost leaving. Why don't you drink my Coke while I'm gone. Specially since I haven't had any. I mean in case you're thirsty and I'm held up too long." My song just went on, "To dream the impossible dream." Damn I love that song. "I'd better go so I can come right back." I heard Eugenia laughing again pleasantly as I headed for the bar. One day only in San Jose and already I've

met that little boy briefly and now this nice Eugenia. Sure it was a nice laugh, Eugenia's was. No malice of forethought or anything like that. Just an easy like jaunt of laugh no casualties to succumb. Maybe she had a thought that's all that made her merry.

I came back right away with two more Cokes and a lemonade. Even colder than the one I got before. I felt lucky enough to smile. I looked at Eugenia there waiting, like a Chinese beautiful woman fanning herself with a breeze. Sipping the Coke gently like God intended. I sat back down in the chair carefully so I would be comfortable by the time I got located in the chair. Bottle Coke is better it holds that bogue thing better. It tastes better too. I smiled at Eugenia because I was happy. Eugenia reached and touched my arm with her fingertips. Just like that. Strangest thing ever I didn't get startled. Not at all. Not even with not looking I didn't get startled. I might be in love and not know it.

I have to tell you the truth. I really don't know what else to do with it. I mean what I'm saying is, I'm here in the over there near middle of all these eight women and all of us drinking some Fundador liquor for most of two hours. I'm not myself drinking a lot at all. I don't see the point of forgetting that I had a good time by having to recover from it. Eugenia after she touched my hand easy and gentle both the way she did, we just talked about everything available to talk about in an easy and gentle way, polite too. Then Eugenia leaned closer to me. She's an incredible leaner. We started doing that right from the start, right? Leaning toward each other unmotivated like the way we did. We had something to say we followed right along with a lean, sometimes pronounced requiring balancing concentrations. Once I could even hear Eugenia breathe right in front of me. It was beyond believing. I even once in this miracle moment thought of not going to Vietnam,

because it was getting more and more obvious too I was mostly in love. And without preparation or warning to myself. But I stopped that thinking quickly. To be more honest than anything I knew right off I'd make a terrible fugitive. I'm barely good enough at being free. Also I'm a patriot I knew that for sure too. Also Mom, particularly Pop wouldn't be accepting my being an unpatriotic fugitive. I'm sure it wasn't in their birth plan for me. Just this right now Eugenia is leaning towards me with her breath and everything. "My friends Chug, maybe dey can come have a drink with us?" Of course I said great, what else was I going to say, no? I took another sip of my third Coke. I wonder if Coke was invented by a man or a woman or both jointly together. Probably jointly because of the carbonation.

"Chuck..." A nice, even younger than me woman just took my hand for some reason I hope she knows about. She's very pretty already for a stranger.

"Your name is Kati verdad?" I asked with cautious concern for myself. She nodded her half-closed eyes. I hope she's all right and not opportunistic because she still has my hand.

Kati smiled, opened her eyes slowly and said. Nothing yet. I wonder what she wants so slowly. "Chuck chu art a hanesome man. Chu want maybe to go to bet with me?"

"Don't be silly Kati." I got nervous. "I mean we're having fun here Kati. Why get into bed about it? Try to collect yourself for some reason."

"For a hundred colones I go to bet with you. We have a time chu never forget." Kati dropped her jaw downward and raised an eyebrow on the way up.

I got shocked all over. "Are you trying to tell me Kati that you're one of those on purpose prostitutes?" I could feel my eyes almost over my eyebrows retreating away.

"No I no prostitute, somos senoras de negocio. I am a business woman.

Americans dey are prostitutes."

"Passports aside Kati what you're proposing here out in the open is immoral. I'm sorry I mean illegal not immoral. Wait a little while Kati, did you just say somos we are." Kati nodded her head up and down real flagrant like with that emphasis added stuff. "By all you mean Eugenia next to me included?" I whispered.

"So how bout it Chuck?"

"Kati try to take it easy with yourself. I'm still trying to collect myself." I couldn't think clearly enough to speculate on my confusion. Maybe that Fundador stuff is concentrated even with just a little. I'm having maybe one of those allegorical reactions like in literature. I felt my face, my eyebrows blush past color to warmth.

"Chuck chu o.k.?"

"No, yes I'm fine now. I have abnormal recuperative powers. Kati listen thank you for your offer reasonable the way it was. You're pretty and a woman and all. But you see actually I imposed this oath on myself in high school. And in that oath I said to myself not to make love to a woman like you're recommending unless there is some kind of specific love for a reason that got understood in some kind of simultaneous way."

"Chu can break an oath. Chu can change an oath." Incredible now both eyebrows are up about two miles, moving her nose so lightly like it's been excused by gravity's most serious rules. Kati is going to speak. She was waiting for me to. But I was satisfied with breathing. "Chuck chu know love it is everywhere dat chu find it." Kati dropped her chin ^T to more normal gravity.

"Sure o.k. Kati I'm familiar with that love is everywhere approach. But you're making a lot of points before I can recover from hearing the last ones.

Like the initial ones before. Above all number one is that my oath can't be broken without permission."

"Who need to give chu permission Chuck?"

"What? Yes. I heard your question I'm just not sure why." For some reason I looked around for a blackboard. I turned around quickly to Kati. "God can give me permission by a sign and a reason added if he thinks it would help."

"Chug chu art a bit crazy."

"Oh come on Kati that's too easy. Anyway I'm not crazy. I'm a Catholic. Was a Catholic. I faded somehow. But I'm still very serious about God. Specially under stress when he's available and I'm not."

Kati looked at me with this sad cottage cheese defiance. I hate cottage cheese specially when you have to eat it. Kati shrugged her shoulders and her cleavage which I shouldn't of noticed. "God is everywhere like love. Just like dat. Love is da best we can do of God."

I was ready. Talking about God is easy because confusion is welcome. "Sure love and God and all are everywhere, but I'm not. I'm just here a little while in Costa Rica on my way to be a soldier in Vietnam. And then where will I be with all this undemonstrated love? Alone with too many memories unresolved."

"Vienam, Chuck chu going to be kilt." Kati looked authentically concerned. Me too.

"Come on Kati that's not fair. See now you're being unreasonable. Trying to break my oath under duress and because somehow you suspect me of being a virgin or close to it.

"Ches chu art a virgin ah?" Kati raised the corner of her lip and dropped it into a smile. I braced myself for that derailing laughter you

hear at these times.

Nothing except more of that appetite smile. "Listen here Kati we have to reach some understanding. And the understanding is this, not to talk to each other for a while unless one of us has a reason that we both know of. I need time to collect myself to a necessary conclusion from the inundation of yourself."

"Chug chu know what?" I think I said what. "Chu confuse me somehow. Chu are too much somehow anyways." Kati finished her last thought staring into her glass of Fundador.

I slid slowly to a more favorable angle of privacy without turning my back. I caught myself not thinking in any direction. I know confusion is between people sometimes preferable. And even helpful. The way people need to start over and over to get to know each other. They come up and encourage you outright with their conversation and then disappear forever leaving you with an incompleated memory at best. I know all that about relationships and more. I myself more than mostly anything hate to make mistakes with women. And look at me talking like I'm not the problem itself. Just now contemplating love in an aroused fashion. I looked intensely at the Coke bottle. They designed them on purpose to look like luxurious women. I have to give a lot of extra credit to that Kati she knows her looks. I've got to think in spite of the opportunities not to. I need some encouragement contrast away from myself. Without deciding I went up directly to the bar and ordered a half shot glass of that Fundador just for myself. I didn't want to drink from that bottle I bought because too much might seep in. Glasses are much easier to sip specially if you're distracted and potentially unsettled. Which I am. Drink in the slow installment plan I told myself privately. After just my second sip I already decided I wouldn't make love

to anybody in any way for money. Theirs or mine. You've got to be very careful falling in love. Because I overheard unavoidably from this older person on a train that for some women love isn't enough. I couldn't believe it in spite that somehow I did. Not in love and in love. Beyond incredible. I felt suddenly that some women could be like ambiguous vampires, you know like sloppy and unlimited in their antics. You would think they would get reported for some help. So finally I decided completely not to have any contact with Kati or any of her friends. Not even any contact with myself through them, that might encourage somebody with an idea that could be prematurely appreciated. Before I could get to understand myself for reasons that I didn't know about. No, no money for sex--specially for a woman for God's sake, Jesus what next. This opportunity happened to me before in high school. We went to see how the United Nations worked. And we ran into this spiffy pimp. All this really happened, regretably it did. All the other four guys not exaggerated and thrilled making dates with the pimp girls, arranging encounters. I refused on account of who I am on purpose. It was immoral and illegal, with your pants down no less. Even though I went to New Hampshire to have unloved sex with Lucie I recovered and reversed myself in time to regret it. I since have calmed down enough to be recuperated. No there was no chance for me to have sex with any of these however nice girls. Not even if they just had a special on kissing. But all that deciding being done I kept looking at Eugenia and feeling sad enough to be happy. Aren't human beings incredible, specially if you're one of them. I sipped some more of my Fundador liquor. I felt suddenly better all over myself. I felt ordained to a non-existent religion and all over circumscribed. I don't know the meaning of that word circumscribed, but it fit the way words do--always available for the evening. Eugenia leaned over and poured another Fundador yet, even though I didn't need

one. Anticipation makes a friend, doesn't it? Eugenia toasted me with her glass and smiled. I could see her smile through the clear red liquid, the glowing light behind her head and the music at play. Jesus Christ of Nazareth I thought I'm too late to be in love on the way^Y to war.

In another forty minutes we were merry, celebrating without any provocation from good taste at all. I'm afraid I became the merry leader. I wasn't drunk, but I was influenced. And I'm not the only one who didn't know it. I intentionally got up on both of my feet. I got everybody's attention by demanding it politely. The Toro Bar was quiet except for the exhausted purring juke box. I repeated, "Please I must have your attention, tu attencion." They're listening. They're watching. I felt relevant all over. Eugenia was next to me nicely translating. I never spoke Spanish with liquor in me before. "I've made it as clear as I can, that I will not pay any woman for her generous favors." Kati got up on her feet balancing herself with her right hand. No, left. Mirror images confuse me, specially if I'm one of them. "Favors should be cheaper in life than for something." There's pronounced giggling. I felt prestigious anyway oblivious of my circumstances. "Where was I?" I paused for no reason that I knew of. "I'm an American mostly new to Fundador on his way to war." There were several "oh no's" that were too convincing for my interests. "I want to announce a lottery, a raffle if you prefer." Eugenia translated. Everyone cheered and applauded beyond themselves. If it hadn't been for my being distracted I would have cheered myself. Except for Eugenia for some reason, Then everyone's eyes got nicely hungry and very quiet. Eugenia still translating even though I'm not saying anything. I hesitated myself wondering about that. It got quieter, a quiet that even the deaf could hear. "The raffle lottery is that the winner who thinks and says the right number in my head from one to seven will win and

get a hundred and fifty colones. And me consenting for the night!" Whistles and cheers and applause got elevated. The happiness sounds subsided, already they were seeking the right number out-whispering each other's calculations. "Listo," I asked. I stopped to remember from Mexico, "Listo, apunten, fuego." The Mexican firing squad, ready, aim, fire. And they always did. "Estamos listo Chuck," Kati called out looking focused even more pretty. I pushed my wire rims up my nose. "Bueno," I said, "Ahora los numeros." They started to call out numbers, some several numbers. Out of nowhere except my head I wondered if Jesus himself had ever gotten misbegotten about himself. And had the good taste discretion to keep it privately to himself. No, Christ he was divine I'm just an airman on borrowed money. I don't think Jesus would find the Toro Bar unpleasant, maybe sinful but not unpleasant. He was favorable to that Mary Magdalene lady. Here just the threat of one miracle would probably save everybody. "What oh?" Unbeknownst to me it got quiet and they wanted the winner. I felt moderately dizzy and dislocated. "Yes, that's right believe it or not Eugenia wins." My hands went up unexpectedly to myself. I'm not surprised enough to be embarrassed. I brought my hands down as quietly as possible. I have to tell you in the briefest way possible. I knew Eugenia was going to win. I fixed the lottery. Everyone started to get up after a few uncomplimentary groans. This probably most certainly a double sin. I'll pay the prize later. I got mitigated because I'm almost absolutely sure that I love Eugenia a lot. Kati came up to me, lifted my hand up and shook it. I felt incriminated enough to feel like I'd just put on sudden weight. My arm, Eugenia came up and locked her arms around mine gently. She's smiling. I smiled o.k. "Eugenia what a pleasant surprise. I was about to feel more miserable and now I don't."

Chug I din no pick no number?"

"Well then God, it must be divine providence or close to it." Then I felt that about-to-be rejected severely feeling. I looked into Eugenia's eyes and said, "Do you believe destiny matters if it doesn't work?" Eugenia didn't answer me. She took both of my hands in hers. My hands were sweating enough for there to be moisture between us. Maybe it's condensation I don't know.

"Chug should we go?"

"Sure go. Look before we go ah, one thing maybe more. If you could decide to call me your near favorite name. This duck thing is getting to me unnecessarily. Also let's have a drink. Why not?" I anticipated. I was embarking on a near monumental experience and I didn't feel at all monumental. I felt consternation and remorse for just the conception of all this.

"I like Chug o.k. An we got to go because the bar is closing very soon."

"Sure if you have to go well go, But--"

"Chug you forgot we have things to do. An I won verdad?"

"I thought I won?" We walked out together more or less.

It's dark outside. I don't know why I should be surprised. But I am. Some kind of daylight would of suited me better. Just like that a taxi appeared, almost magical it was. A short plump higher than long taxi. We got in. First one of us. I felt like writing suddenly a poem. I thought not probably one that could be finished in time for making sense. The taxi is moving after Eugenia said something. As an unplanned inspiration, I almost leaned over and kissed Eugenia on her cheek. I stopped myself quickly before I got in motion with the idea. All those great poets end up killing themselves from too much poetry. A lot of them drank liquor too. I looked over to Eugenia. She was looking at me nicely and kind. I smiled, but my smile got caught in the middle. I looked out the taxi window. It started raining on

its own, not hard. I wish a lot my father would be waiting for me at the Royal Dutch like in high school, see maybe if I had a good night. Maybe say something brief about being late. A hand on mine. Eugenia's, I turned some more and smiled as much as I could.

"No worry Chug no faraway close o.k."

"I'm just mostly happy sitting here driving around Eugenia. I don't feel impending or pressed in anyway I'm just happy driving around." Eugenia raised her eyes to the ceiling. Her eyes danced around easily like Christmas tinsel when the door opens. I think she's looking for a word. Why do people always inside look to the ceiling when they're trying to think of a word? But outside they don't. "Yes." I encouraged Eugenia with a minimum interruption.

"Wha Chug chu do for a living?" Eugenia was pleased with her success.

"Oh yeah, I almost, I did forget what I did for a living tonight. Thanks for reminding me Eugenia. I guess you might say I'm a soldier. Soy un soldado. But I wouldn't exactly call it a living. Since what we do doesn't seem to have much to do with anything living about it."

"Un soldado." Eugenia's lower lip went up and chased her eyebrows up as well.

"Well sure." I felt this need not to retreat. "Sure I'm a soldier on his way to Vietnam."

"Chug," Eugenia said very slowly moving her head to either side. "Chu no make a good soldier."

"Ah." I meant it like a hearty laugh. But hearty got left out of it, and it came out backwards. "Eugenia I'll make a great soldier. They don't give you a choice for one thing. We also plus have a cause. We're freeing

the Vietnamese people from other Vietnamese people somehow. Really that's what we're doing." Eugenia again shook her head even more slowly like a fan when it's not even warm. I thought Eugenia knew something I should prefer not knowing, but should. I hate that when people keep information from you on your own impending doom. We kept moving. The taxi got quieter between us. So quiet my unwelcome thoughts started to sound like aluminum foil unwrapping. Out of some kind of desperation new to me I reached across with my very own hand took Eugenia's. Touching the moment of touching, I felt right off like saying a prayer. Strange actually I never said a prayer touching another human being. You'd think that's what we would do preferably. "Eugenia did you say something?" She looked at me.

The taxi driver repeated, "Viente colones por favor." We'd stopped and I thought it was me. Right, I said to myself rallying to make sense, pay the taxi driver. Eugenia opened the door. I paid the taxi driver with my thanks and the money he asked for. The driver thanked me funny, mischievous like. Maybe he's just that way. I decided to get out of the taxi, surprised not too much that I needed a decision. Standing in the rain I watched the taxi disappear and then some until it did completely. Eugenia in front of me waved me towards her. I stuffed my hands in my back pockets and followed up towards Eugenia. I looked around at everywhere that I could. This whole place is kind of secluded around itself. Trees, shrubbery all over the place, growing on somebody else's idea. Large trees shading the moonlight from the motel type things, too close up ahead. There were floodlights high, but not enough to stop the glow from the red light over each entrance. I guess that red light stuff is for real. I turned around to see if anything had changed since I passed it. No the same. What's the incriminating point of the red lights? Maybe a world-wide law of some kind to give people caution about

themselves and their behaviors. I felt suddenly all over that the raffle was a very bad idea.

"Are chu ready Chug?"

"What do you mean?" I looked up at Eugenia standing in the doorway.

"We here. Dat's all." Eugenia smiled.

I moved up ahead taking my hands out of my pockets. I think the best thing is for me to go inside, forgive myself, apologize to Eugenia. The red light went off suddenly. I lost half a step in the air walking. I don't want to have to think what it meant. Still my eyes on the light I almost walked through the door past Eugenia. Eugenia moved in ahead, leaving me half in between. The lottery feeling is lost. Could be maybe the Catholic church is right I'll be damned for this in my eternal salvation. I might even regret it. I took two steps inside for no reason I knew. The door seemed to close easier than it opened. I remembered swiveling myself around that I didn't open it. Maybe it came opened and it only closes. I'm not making sense. I'm not even seeing what I'm looking at.

"Eugenia listen, ah being that I'm already inside of here. There is something you should know for your interest. And my sake, even could be my preservation. And that is we don't have to do this. You and I we don't have to do this. For any reason we might think we know--"

"Wha chu say Chug?" Eugenia looked moderately angry and tired. Even almost disappointed. But that was probably me.

"Possibly you misunderstand me Eugenia in your reaction. I'm saying but probably didn't say well enough to imply clearly, I'll pay you whatever you prefer and wish. In spite and above your winning the raffle or lottery whatever it was. With my thanks of course and intact appreciation.

"Chu pay me jus to come here like this...really!"

"Sure yes absolutely I'll pay you completely what you ask. You don't even have to insist Eugenia and I'll pay you. You can just walk out happily and leave. You don't even have to remember me unless you can't help it. That happens to me a lot--"

"Art chu crazy to give me money like this?"

"Crazy oh no, not even in the least. I mean maybe. But not in a popular way." I looked down at the green carpet. "I'm just myself that's all."

"No I no mean crazy crazy like dat. I mean--"

I looked up, Eugenia was looking at the same spot on the carpet. "Eugenia are you trying to muster up the difficult word eccentric? Because if you are, I'm--"

"No no ex ex like you say. I say differnt an difficul."

"No I'm too easily avoided to be difficult. I'm sometimes difficult alone and also sort of eccentric. But on the good and safe side of things. I have it under control. Specially in public when I'm amidst people that might suspect me for better reasons than I do."

"Ches Chuck maybe chu art crazy a little."

"Jesus Eugenia make up your mind. Crazy, eccentric, obtuse--"

"Obt...obtu like chu say, dat is an animal."

"No you're thinking of mongoose not obtuse. Obtuse means like I get to other people's confusions before they do. And they give me the credit for theirs. I think, now I'm not sure."

Eugenia walked to me and passed me while I was still trying to talk. Then around behind me and up to me. Really incredibly efficient motion.

"Chug chu wan a Coke maybe?"

"Sure yes I guess why not. And obviously for you Eugenia."

Eugenia walked the seven feet over to the wall and slapped it. "Una

Coca Cola," she said in enough sturdy voice to negotiate the wall. I had no idea what is going to happen. Except something potentially interesting. A partition slid open from nowhere on the wall except where it was. A human hand stuck out from the opening next to Eugenia. Eugenia took the Coke, paid the hand. The hand disappeared with itself. Hard to believe. If I wasn't civilized on purpose I'd probably say it was a miracle what I just saw. Or one trying to be.

"Thanks a lot Eugenia. It's nice of you to think of me under these conditions. I gave myself a generous sip. "Eugenia forgive me. I should of offered you a sip first. I must of left my mind in the office."

Eugenia smiled trying to corral some extra laughter. "Chug is dis chur first time?"

"The Coke. Oh no! I mean sort of yes. Actually yes with another person. I mean, you know a woman of your magnitude. But it's not really technically my very first time. Because I'm very well read on the issue. And I've seen up close these movies, one of them twice. Either way and anyway there's very little chance that one of us will get hurt and walk away regretful in that way." I stopped completely to think. "Eugenia?"

"Wha Chug?"

"I'm scared."

"Why chu scared. Chu know."

"Truthfully Eugenia I had considerable trouble kissing Wendy and Stacy, even Lucie and Jane. And I didn't even kiss Phyllis for some reason I don't know."

"I not dem Chug. I me. And chu art Chug a soldier." Eugenia took one step and put her hand on my chest. My whole body on its own went up to over six feet. "Are chu not these things?"

"Yes I am. Sure I'm me. I've been not me lots of times. But that's more me maybe. But see it's like this Eugenia probably, what if you fall in love with me? And I fall in love with us. I mean you, us too actually." Eugenia moved her hand to my other chest. The first side was getting heated. "It's actually too late already because I'm already in love with you from before now to my surprise. You know when we met for the first time from before. And now I'm here circumvented somehow."

"Luv is goot Chug."

"Sure yes love is goot. I mean good. If you agree what's good about it. Eugenia you just did say that love is good didn't you? I got distracted answering at the same time wondering that you almost pronounced my name right. If you did thank you. If you didn't thank you anyway for trying."

Eugenia smiled with her eyes I think. Because I'm sure her lips weren't that involved. "Sure ches I did say dat. I believe luv is goot." Eugenia took two steps toward me. I thought too suddenly that she might be going out the door. Eugenia put her hands on my hips, then around me. And hugged me with her head against my breathing chest. I felt her hair carefully nicely with my hand. Eugenia turned her face to mine. And went up gently on her toes. I went down and kissed Eugenia with my lips. We kissed each other knowingly. I inhaled and exhaled deeply. The kiss was wonderful. Suffocating in a cloud must be like this. All the love like this and the company. We kissed again more. Everything from there went privately well for the both of us. For me. No probably for the both of us. Some things are personally private specially when they're not somehow.

"Chug?" I looked up. Eugenia's eyes were almost gently asleep. "Chug?"

"Yes Eugenia?" I went up slowly on one elbow, so's not to unstable the bed.

"Wha art chu doing?"

"I'm or I was smelling this rose here."

"But dat no real rose. Is fake."

"Sure I understand that Eugenia. But I'm not you see. I was practicing smelling a rose you understand. And wondering why people make fake roses. While you were sleeping I almost went into the woods to pick you some flowers. But I decided better not to because of the risk of getting lost in unfamiliar woods. Specially if I went in with a reason of coming back. Like you here. I talked to the hand, I mean the person with the hand. But he said he had no flowers. And he said there was no all night florist in San Jose that was open this late. So I guess I came back here and started fooling with this rose. Maybe as a compromise of some kind."

"Chug I no understan why art chu still smelling dis no real rose."

"I'm sorry Eugenia I got absorbed with not knowing what I was doing talking to you."

"Chug chu are a little bit crazy."

"Don't be silly Eugenia I'm not a little bit crazy. I'm too young. Eugenia do you mind if I just look at you for a while, not enough to stare. You know just long enough to appreciate." I needed to change the subject. Crazy makes me nervous.

"Sure Chug. Why chu no lie next to me."

"Thanks Eugenia that's a nice invitation." I rolled over on my hip and balanced my head on my hand. "What was I saying before then Eugenia?"

"I dun know Chug. Don chu remember?"

I sat up, crossed my legs and put my hands on my knees. "No I don't, not even remotely. That bothers me too a lot, you know Eugenia not knowing. It upsets me not knowing does. Forgotten things are just part of it. I'll

be in that Saigon in a few days walking around for some Air Force reason and I'll remember what now I've forgotten. It wouldn't be too bad really if things stayed forgotten. Sure I'll remember but I'll have nobody to remember them to." I got up from the bed. "Moving helps when I'm on to something I don't want to be. Sometimes Eugenia I wonder if the only hope to knowledge is that it isn't." I got to kneeling in front of Eugenia. "It's not that I want to try to make enough sense, not now. You know what I mean?"

"Sense is goot Chug."

"Well it's more or less like this." Eugenia looked away momentarily. I hate talking when I'm the only one who can hear me. "All those catalogues of going to college when I was in high school." Eugenia agreed yes with her head. "Every course, even graduate people ones, all went on the same. Everything all the planned on purpose courses were about us inflicting wounds on each other, or just getting over all the wounding we do. Like sociology and psychology. Plus how to inflict the wounds like lawyer or outsmarting people in business. And the quieter stuff like history, anthropology and archaeology, that's about the available recording of our inflicting wounds. And what's science, you might say. I don't know much about science. Primarily maybe how to get there faster and shoot them straighter. And to improve on God, that's what science is. Nothing of enough learning that says life is wonderful, complete and generous." I startled myself reflecting, "Eugenia?"

"Ches Chug?"

"You know I don't think I've ever talked like this. You know, person to person determined like. I don't sound like a priest or even a minister do I?"

"No Chug, no even close. No for a priest especially."

"The only thing that I can think is missing from all those courses completely is love." I ran my fingers down my lips thinking.

"Chug chu no make a good soldier." Eugenia looked serious at me.

I crawled over and sat next to Eugenia. "Isn't it something Eugenia you meet someone like me that meets someone like you, in one country. After leaving your own country where you weren't born. And you go off to another country for some reasons of war. A war with people you never met. Not even enough to wonder why. If it were right you wouldn't think there'd be so much traveling about it. And why kill them so much anyway? Why not just educate them and let them take their chances with the rest of us? It's the wounding of it all. It's all way beyond my capacity for ignorance. And yes Eugenia I think I'll make at least a fair enough soldier if I try hard enough. I don't know?"

"Chug I think chur a Catholic and chu don know it."

"Eugenia I think that's called a Protestant." I almost sneezed mysteriously. I'm not going to wonder why I didn't.

"So listen Chug." Eugenia sat up. I got a glance of Eugenia's breasts by mistake and quickly averted myself to recover. I turned back feeling Eugenia's hand on my cheek. "Is o.k. looking Chug. Chug if chu believe dis idea is goot. I believe dis idea is goot. Why chu going to dat war in Asia?"

"I think mostly Eugenia because I'm an inherited patriot from my father. That's probably mostly the truth. Because you know I've never been in a fist fight except to take the first mandatory punch. I'll die if they ask me to kill somebody. Maybe I just don't have enough original ideas of my own. I don't know. I tried when I was with the circus and--"

"Chu were in a real circus Chug?" Eugenia sounded like in front of three candles on a birthday cake.

"Mostly yes I was I guess. Clyde Beatty and Cole Brothers world's biggest

combined circus. If it takes that long to say it it must be." Eugenia laughed, merry like, nice. Taking her fingertips from her lips she said,

"Da world's bigges--"

"They said that Eugenia. But I don't know how exactly true it is.

It's--"

"Dey lie like dat?"

"It's not lying really. More like American advertising." Eugenia went up on her knees. I got startled all over. "Eugenia you're not?"

"Chug da time is late."

"Eugenia wait this is serious. I have some ultimately serious things to say to you." Eugenia moved around picking up her clothes. I didn't plan on her leaving somehow. I felt nervous enough for desperate. I can't believe what just now happened in my mind. Like the right candle illuminating. Everything fell into place. With me happy about it. It made so much sense there was no question about it. I got off the bed from my knees. I couldn't wait to start talking. I have to calm myself to prevent stuttering. Eugenia looked up to be concerned. "Eugenia," I said softly. Eugenia started to put on her blouse. "Eugenia," I repeated looking for her eyes. She finally looked at me waiting.

"I'm sorry Chug did chu say something?" My God she's beautiful even more than the first time. I know for sure I'm in love, in love with no accountable reservations. "Chug wha chu wan to say to me?" Eugenia snapped her fingers in front of me.

"Yes right I'm sorry. I got a little enthralled. It's not me Eugenia. It's about us you see. Listen Eugenia do you mind if I stay sitting while I tell you what's happening in my mind?" Eugenia shook her head no. "These things I know should be better said eye to eye. But I'm better balanced from

here." Eugenia came over and sat down next to me. "Just listen to me as much as possible Eugenia. Interrupt me if you get a breach of concentration." Eugenia smiled a tiny smile. Her eyes glistened like I don't know. I inhaled enough to know it. "This is what I'm thinking this very right now Eugenia. I'm going to Vietnam in a few days---right?" Eugenia tilted her head slightly to one side. Her eyes opened to embrace me kindly. I went up on my knees. "In a year Eugenia, less by one week if I don't take my R and R. I might be coming back from Vietnam alive." I just barely slowly reached out and touched Eugenia's shoulder with my fingertips. "Well you see the very simple miracle that I'm trying to get to is like this. When I get back to America alive, come live with me." Eugenia looked surprised enough to be too surprised for my sake. I have to rally. "In Vietnam I'll better practice my Spanish, even the subjunctive if I have it in me. And if you're inclined you can practice your English. That way we'll for sure have a common vocabulary between us." Eugenia got up from the bed and went back to getting dressed.

She said perplexed, "A donde estan mis zapatos?"

"Your shoes I'll be right with you Eugenia." I stayed trying to retrieve my fading hope and concentration. "Eugenia you'll love America. America is a great place to live Eugenia. Really it is. There's a cheap movie theater on every corner. Christmas is great and comes by regularly every year. There's jobs a lot of jobs. Free elections you don't have to vote in. Great dentists too." Eugenia stood up from her knees with a shoe in one hand. "Eugenia we have already waiting our family doctors, Doctor Sullivan and that Doctor Hennessey with his easy-does-it drill. Eugenia looked at me more lost than hurrah happy. "And that Doctor Sullivan specially has an on-the-job sense of humor and--"

"Chug I have two children."

"That's easy Eugenia bring them with you. All that means we don't have to have any children because you already had them." Eugenia looked at me with her feet part still undressed. She raised one hand to her hip and shook her head. "I love children naturally without trying. And children love me, that's my impression. Pretty much it is. Eugenia listen something else I can help raise them. One at a time at first. Because, well because I've never raised any children before in a consistent on purpose way. And you know what Eugenia, what's more we can go to college. Become something maybe." I paused, watching for some understanding comprehension. A little of something maybe.

"Chug..." Eugenia paused much better than me. "Chug chu art crazy for sure."

"No I'm not Eugenia. You shouldn't say that without a lot of extreme repeated evidence. Sure I'm eccentric like I said, maybe sometimes often. But I'm mild about it and I keep it mostly entirely to myself."

"Eccen..eccentric verdad." Eugenia smiled almost about to giggle.

"Very good Eugenia that's a very difficult word to come by." I looked at Eugenia moving around to comprehend my next move. I felt myself running out of time. I wish I were more appealing somehow.

"Chug?" I sat up from the bed. It was a soft sound, even kind of familiar.

"Yes of course what Eugenia?"

"Chu have my money." Eugenia moved her hand towards me, but dropped it back.

"Oh God sure Eugenia, my apologies please accept them." I started around moving like a madman looking for some sign of my wallet. Saying to myself like a chant. "The raffle the raffle. There it is." I pointed under the desk like I was accusing the wallet. I turned to look slowly to Eugenia.

"It was a raffle, wasn't it Eugenia?" She looked at me like one of us wasn't there. And I think it was me. I walked towards Eugenia pulling out money and tripped downwards bouncing off the bed to one knee. I heard laughter before the pain. I looked up to the much taller Eugenia. Eugenia came over and started me up by my armpits.

"Chug I sorry I laugh," Eugenia said with some grunting. Standing up I looked again at Eugenia thinking about last times.

"No it's o.k. your laughing Eugenia. If I had time I probably would of laughed too." I noticed the idle wallet in my hand.

"Lo siento Chug. I should no--"

"Don't let it bother you Eugenia. I'm the one who fell down. And here I am already standing in the past tense. I mean the fall." I talked adding up in my wallet. I pulled out the hundred and fifty colones and handed it carefully to Eugenia. "Listen if you don't mind I'm starting to feel a little inconclusive. What I'm saying by not saying Eugenia is what do you think about my offer? You know the one I just...." My voice faded and faded until the end I barely knew it was me. Eugenia stopped being in front of me getting her purse. I looked in the mirror. I couldn't believe it was so obvious. I'm nude. I'd forgotten in my perplexity. I looked fast for my pants. "Eugenia you're still here. Be patient, I'm not ready for my goodbye. Not completely so." I slipped on my pants. "I'm saying you wouldn't leave without my saying my goodbye."

Searching feverishly with both eyes for my shirt and belt Eugenia put her arm into mine. "Chug chu no going to give me a tip?"

"Yes absolutely of course a tip. Excuse me Eugenia. I must of known unconsciously I was undressed nude and wasn't thinking clearly. Please excuse me enough to forgive my absence." I reached fast everywhere into my wallet

and pulled out some extra more money.

"Tanks Chug. Chu art nice really chu are." Eugenia pulled my head down and kissed me on the forehead.

"Thank you Eugenia that was...." Eugenia began to walk away with my hand in hers. I followed behind catching up. She let go at the door. My eyes were on Eugenia's eyes holding the door. "Eugenia listen to me please. This is no more than very important." I hesitated to breathe and get enough going to make more sense enough. "On the possibility you haven't figured it out, possibly maybe because it's so obvious, I don't think that's a complete sentence Eugenia. What I'm saying anyway overall is that I love you. I really do. With no measurable reservations about it." Eugenia of all the things she could of done my left hand, raised it to herself and kissed my fingers. It's another backwards. "Maybe I should try to talk to you calmly in Spanish. I can if you let me relax first for a minute or two." Eugenia looked at me tiredly. "All I'm saying Eugenia is that I'd like very much for you to be, even just partially, what you're already to me love." Eugenia turned somehow and walked into the darkness. "Don't go." I barely heard my own whisper I didn't plan saying.

I stood between the door and the wall filling the empty space for I don't know how long. A long time. Longer than I've ever waited in a short period of time. Finally I straightened myself thinking I wouldn't at all be surprised that Eugenia is a self-made woman. No I wouldn't be surprised at all. I moved my head quick towards the wall thinking. What I need right now is another chance. Sure exactly another chance. I'm good at second chances when I get them. I decided for tomorrow to go look for Eugenia. And compel her more by my ideas of going to America with me. Maybe she's still outside waiting for a taxi. I ran outside thinking good thing I didn't close the door.

I stepped hard on a pointy little rock. Holding my foot up I looked around. How can it be darker now than before? Maybe I don't know why. "Eugenia!" I called out in a very loud whisper. "Eugenia estoy aqui." I've got to whisper. I don't want the wrong person to answer for a reason I'm not ready to tolerate. "Eugenia!" I tried to spread the sound more around from there to there. "Eugenia listen o.k. if you can hear me." I stopped and got stationary waiting. I don't like accepting the obvious when it's at my expense. "I'm going back in and plan for tomorrow. Be ready for sure." I'm facing the buildings I didn't know. I counted the red lights to mine. You know for certain this place has the potential of being a deja vu thing. I started up moving carefully on as much as my toes. Giving those disproportionate pebbles less of a target. I have a great sense of direction when I'm going forward. Ever since from being a little kid I had this sense of direction that believed if I was going forward how could be I going in the wrong direction? It worked somehow, I always got somewhere intended. Why am I thinking these things? Maybe I guess I'm getting ready to be with Eugenia. I'm here now finally at the door. Seems more of a hurry you are in these barefoot situations the more sharp nasty pebbles you pick up. Could be not more, just more closer recovery times that are really pain continuing. I raised my foot to examine it. I felt for a moment like a crane without a mate. Maybe a flamingo, I don't know. Either way just temporary if I'm lucky and can get Eugenia to comprehend. I shooed away a hitch-hiking stone still clinging.

I hesitated to anticipate the emptiness and walked inside. I almost died. It's a near vacuum. Better outside in the dark Jesus. A vacuum with me included no less, it's not natural. Nostalgia ruins me sometimes, just ruins me beyond recovery. I felt like kneeling down and slapping the floor a couple of times just for some acknowledgement of myself. I absent-mindedly,

like a slow reflex ghost, went around picking up my clothes. I've got to pick up my pace before I develop more melancholy nostalgia. Like attending my own funeral with me watching perplexed feeling left out. God Eugenia what an entirely complete lovely woman. I feel unbearable. I closed my eyes. The word prostitute jumped at me bold and apparent. I reopened my eyes to think more clearly. Who's to say who's a prostitute. Plus sure the anyway of it all if Eugenia hadn't been that way I would of never met her. And I'm lucky very that I did. Now in love and all. And with a good night's sleep more so. I'm tired. This has happened all too quickly. But then again right on time. Jesus here I go remembering unwarranted when I don't want to. I still say it takes a pretty good memory to be able to forget. If forgetfulness were more reliable enough to be depended on. It was two years ago, no, two and a half almost. My father came up to me with the car keys after I passed successfully that driving test. Pop hands me the car keys solemn like. Out of nowhere except right in front of me my father says, "If you get some whore pregnant you're going to have to marry her." I couldn't believe it in one sentence complete onto itself my father said that. Nothing like he ever said before. Almost on time I said what if she doesn't want to marry me? But I didn't for no reason known to me except maybe shock. I just instead looked at my hands right there in front of me motionless. And wondered quietly about why. But to tell you some more of the truth after all these two-and-a-half years I wish I had said something. Because that was a prejudiced remark that's unfounded. Like I almost got prejudiced myself just a moment ago. I'm glad I didn't. "It won't happen again I promise Eugenia," It was just my potential shortcoming that's all. Understand I'm not blaming my parents by some judgements. Not at all, I wouldn't of wanted to raise myself. I would of preferred a girl baby for starters. I quinted my eyes looking for my socks.

I just now decided there's no questions about it Eugenia and I are going to be happy and stuff together. And everything else that it takes too, sure that's right.

I picked up my pace. I hate losing things when I can't find them. What would my father say my showing up with Eugenia for a turkey dinner on some Thanksgiving? Nothing we're not going. Not at first till our secret gets softened. "Here my socks good!" I pulled on my socks. No holes, I wonder how that happened. Mom probably snuck some new pairs on me. I got up and stuffed myself into my shirt my arms high. I enjoy that, popping up out of the collar hole there. Just pop up, not there now everywhere. Sometimes I slow the pop in anticipation. In that Ponus Ridge Junior High I sometimes used to pop three four times every morning till I got satisfied. I pulled out my wallet after some resistance and walked over to the partition to see if I owed the hand anything. And like a quirk I thought of the University of Maine. These bad memories seem to hang around each other taking turns irking you unmercifully. Sometimes admiring failure is as successful as you can be. I wonder what happens to aspiring to be self made men who don't make it. I don't know. Could be I'm lucky not knowing. I should know. I opened my wallet wide wider. Alone and now with no money not even enough to count. Now I'm in a criminal situation. From love unregulated to molesting memories to criminal. And with not one change in clothes. I gave it all to Eugenia quick and spontaneous without time to hesitate and figure, "God lord have mercy or whatever is available." No wonder men get circumcised when they're just babies. It's a warning of more to come. I'm stalling myself with nonsense to stall the immediate predicament. I've got to confront myself. I checked my wallet before. Just as empty more actually. I checked my pockets. Nothing

even enough for an imitation smile. I could try to escape. Escaping tourists are easy to find. Anyway it's dishonest and probably unlucky. I braced myself and knocked on the wall lightly to get a head start on the truth. The partition door opened slowly. The hand came out less far.

"Si como te puedo ayudar?"

"Yes how can you help me. Gracias, cuanto te debo?" I wanted to know the extent of the damages to gauge better my response.

"Todo estas pagado gracias." The partition closed.

"No kidding." I already said. I guess to myself. The guy with the hand said everything's been paid. Isn't that too much. And I was miserable for nothing. I'll be damned. I'll just write it off for practice. I looked at myself to be sure I was fully clothed. Yes, no Eugenia's last name, I don't know it. The Toro Bar will have it. Great, quick problems, just as quick solutions. I stepped up the five foot to the partially opened door. I looked out more of a peek, just for fun, that's all. Still dark, still floodlings, still me. Now all that's left is some extra added hitchhiking back to the Royal Dutch. I yawned. I wish I could sing. I could enjoy some music right now.

Sure I hitch-hiked for two hours now so far. It was either keep hitchhiking or take out Costa Rican citizenship and look for a job. It wasn't easy starting. It got less easy going along. Rain, sure just like that, rain from up above and everywhere else. Even before the rain cars passed me. Not many at this hour of the night. But one was too many followed by another. Then the slow rain got more eager wet. I tried hitchhiking in different ways. I wish I hadn't of limped, that was stupid. To make matters worse, if possible, I didn't know if I was limping in the right direction of the hotel. I know where the sun comes up and all that. But that's no help when the sun's not available for that east perspective thing. Also I didn't know if east was the way to go.

Two strikes on the same pitch. The moon I didn't have any personal knowledge of. Except that it was the moon. One good thing, though, I'm already drenched and I can't get wetter unless I'm drowned dead. I shrugged my shoulders and got started feeling humorous and carefree. I think it's a symptom of being too wet and still raining. For a moment once I got as virtually extreme as I could. Thinking that Costa Rica is a Catholic country I got myself into a crucifix position when I heard a car coming. Whenever it was honked. I don't know if it was an encouraging honk or exactly what though. I stopping the crucifixion position when I got water in my ear. And just then five minutes later about, a pick-up stopped. A nice red pick-up with a real nice guy name, Jogincito. It turned out by chance that I was going in the right direction of San Jose. I smiled, watching the windshield wipers. Just now one of my favorite songs went on Jogincito's radio. That "Monday Monday" by the Mama's and the Papa's.

"Me gusta esa cancion, Chuck."

"Me too, yo tambien Jogincito."

I hummed along under my breath with the words. Jogincito said he liked that song. I felt the smile on my face thinking of that hand jumping out with good news. I still don't know how everything got paid. I decided also in the rain to leave Eugenia a lot of my ten thousand dollar life insurance in case I get killed somehow in an untimely way. It's nice of the Air Force insuring us before we die. Also leave something for RS and Terry. Actually I did already. With that bequeathal deal I had to attend. I left a thought to my parents that I wasn't leaving them anything momentary like because they already had everything they needed and then some. Now that I think of it, If you want to tolerate my opinion. I don't think the American dream is to have money. N, not even close. The American dream is to have more money and yet more is not enough,

Everyone, even people with money are always dissatisfied wanting more when they already have enough already. It's strange I think. Normally, maybe you already figured out I don't give up my opinion unless I'm desperate somehow. Like now wet.

"Chuck?"

"Si Jogincito?"

"Cuando acabas tu vacation in Costa Rica te regresas a America?"

"No Jogincito, me voy a Vietnam, pinso que soy un soldado."

Jogincito drew his forehead back an inch looking apprehensive. I got scared that he knew something more than I did. "No me digas?" He said, glancing back at the road. Then he said like he was about to whistle with exasperation, "Buena suerte Chuck." I decided not to ask him what he knew I didn't know. I didn't know enough conversation meaning enough Spanish for that kind of detailed subtleties. I speak Spanish real well, enough anyway to slow down a mugging. But not enough to apologize for one. So I settled for shrugging my shoulders high. I wish I hadn't of said anything about Vietnam. It dampend me more than I was already wet. But you don't know what happened next just less than a minute agol It got obvious from the buildings that Jogincito was taking me right to the Royal Dutch. And look with your eyes, here we are.

"Muchisimas gracias Jogincito usted es un buen amigo." I turned around and took Jogincito's hand while it was still on the steering wheel for the longest most thorough handshake I've been part of in years. I said "gracias" again and turned to look for the door handle, adding that I hoped his farm would grow everything right and his wife and two little kids would be fine and o.k. and in good health. The door thing wouldn't give up. Jogincito tapped me on my shoulder. I looked back at a piece of paper in Jogincito's hand.

"Escriba cuando te llegas a Vietnam y cuando te regresas at Costa Rica tu vienes a nuestra casa."

"Jesus Jogincito, you're a regular natural friend. I will write you from Vietnam and sure I'll visit you when I get back to here." I held the paper up and said, "Seguro." Jogincito smiled, his lips opening up the smile so generous and severe. He leaned and reached over me opening the door with a tug and a pull. "Gracias again," I said, stepping out of the pick-up. Jogincito waved from inside. I waved back as the pick-up headed down the street. I put the piece of paper carefully in my wallet, looking up twice to make sure I wouldn't miss my last glimpse of Jogincito. He turned by the church and was gone.

"What a nice guy." My luck is getting more and more o.k. I made an unscheduled friend with a family to meet. And I'm in love. I raised my hands over my head I was so happy. Worse will never be the same. I turned around feeling happy enough to make plans on it. When the biggest raindrop of unfallen rain from somewhere landed on my forehead, I looked up, smiled, and said, "I understand. But it's going to take more than that to overwhelm me with a warning." I stopped after two steps and added, "But not much more, thank you."

I walked past the extra skinny desk clerk smiling to whomever she thought I was. She nodded with an early morning smile, you know less evident but more apparent because of the effort needed. People don't like to take chances the earlier it gets with being misintended. I learned that long ago somehow. I would have liked chatting and saying hello. But I already felt happy enough. Plus why take a chance that you can reserve till later. I pressed the elevator button three times. The elevator door started to inch open. I changed my mind. I felt like motion. When I'm happy for a knowable reason waiting can be a problem, motion helps. Specially if you're going somewhere inevitable and potentially good. Running up the stairs I got to fantasizing Eugenia waiting

for me in my room. Waiting agreeably because she couldn't resist waiting without me at the Toro Bar. Winded of breath by the third flight I decided to curtail the fantasy because I wasn't up for the disappointment. Enough's enough that I would see Eugenia at the Toro Bar tonight. Then I thought walking down the corridor dripping--there's always a miracle. Sure, Eugenia will be waiting for me comfortably in her evening bathrobe, a breakfast of tropical fruit waiting fresh. And she's smiling with unbearable revelations. She reconsidered my offerings and her reciprocations got the best of her. God, I'm exhausted. I opened the door. The room was empty. Worse...the cleaning lady had put everything into her regulated order, when it was already in mine.

I walked right up to where I stopped and started undressing vigorously in as many ways as I could at once. Stripped completely I turned around and looked in the mirror. Jesus, I'm shivering enough to see my own vibrations in the mirror. No, I'm not going to take a warm hot shower. Leave wet enough alone. I wonder if the Air Force will pay off that ten thousand dollars if you die casually, I mean naturally. Maybe it could be it has to be one of those casualty things. I should have asked that Provost Marshall guy. But I wasn't acclimated to the possibility of death then. Shall I write a brief will now in my own handwriting to cover my possible discrepancy? No, I'm getting obsessed almost about dying. One thing about death is that it doesn't need any help from you. But I should be ready. I don't want to be dying and not know it. Shame to be surprised not till it's all over. Sure, I'll get dressed and get witnessed an accommodation on my will. Leave Eugenia and the kid lots, RS and Terry some and nothing for my parents except something sentimental. I put my socks on. "I need a lucid rational witness that's known to be alive for a good reason." I stopped abruptly into myself. No, I'm not goint to die. And I'm not making sense. Must be maybe the spontaneous love and getting very wet after losing my virginity. I'm flustered that's all. In love and flustered. Plus

going to Vietnam is unnecessarily not helpful. I'm going to sleep. I hope they don't have any of those crowing roosters nearby. Those birds don't stop at anything. I respect that. I closed my eyes convincingly under their own will. I felt good and tired, no longer panicked in the least.

I heard something, then I opened my eyes. I'm awake alert again for some reason. I already was up on my elbows. I felt dry all over, my mouth, all over. I unfolded my bed away from me. What a night beyond my reasonable expectations. I'll probably need permission to remember that night in heaven. Those heaven people aren't eager to let you remember earth things, I'm sure, be disruptive. I yawned, then I sneezed. Wow, a combination first. Lose my virginity and a sneeze-yawn combination in less than twenty-four hours. What next? I stretched my arms, then my everything. Vietnam, why am I thinking about that place, on vacation and in love no less. I've got four days I know to get there. Yesterday I know, why did I tell that Kati girl I had two days? Maybe I guess it felt like two days. I put on my wire rims to see the time. But sure I don't know day or night or what. Doesn't matter because if it did it wouldn't change the day or night of it all. To tell you the truth I feel about time the same way almost that I do about gravity. I think they should be more of an opinion than anything else. Accommodating to the occasion gravity, that would be nice. Being out of time instead of time desperate be very nice too. But nobody asked me. I'm taking a shower.

I've got to get more concentrated with myself. Good shower nice soap. Exactly, I've got to get more concentrated. Leave death alone, I'm in love with purpose and everything. Because I've lost some of my necessary concentration in the last two years. Which happens I think mostly when thinking gets to be

of no avail. You know, when life gets in your way inspite of what you're doing to get by. I did well enough in class. I did. But those green cheering soccer fields. Jimmy Fabrizo running arching the ball like a rainbow. Donny Cloud passing to Andy Kydes. He dribbles like a tap dancer on a high wire. Score of course. Tony Signor and I guarding our own goalie running up to congratulate everyone then ourselves. Tyler Lamar he made all state. Too much yeah. We were one of the best in the state for three years. Oh well...I sighed. I've got to stop with my memories or I might become one. Well, at least the room now looks more like it's been habitated by me. I don't mind disheveled confusion as long as it's mine. Clothes everything. I don't trust people that don't wear their own clothes. You know, people that like to fashion beyond themselves at other's own expense.

I walked outside the room after taking one more careful glance. The cleaning lady will show right up and try to make everything right. I shook my head. That's one more thing that I don't have in common with my family at all. Servants, I mean. Even the idea of servants makes me climb the wall. I feel strongly about it. I really do. And I'm taking from imposed experience that I've had. I'm not just speculating for some wayward reason. When I was born in Mexico, it's not easy to recall outright. I was born into a house with seven servants--even a gardener. Even the flowers had a servant for Christsakes. I guess at first I figured the servants came with the house, with the toys. I actually don't know what I figured. I don't think I even counted them till I was four years old. But now if you bring a servant near me, Jesus, give me half an hour and I'll convert them on purpose. And I don't think giving them a Christmas bonus makes them any less of an available servant. If you want to tolerate the truth, it gets worse. Worse because people think they're being so over all equal and gracious and humanely generous. But there's nothing

generous about it, not absolutely at all. The next day it's pick up the sneakers. Fold my shirts. Serve me a meal. There's no end to it. It just doesn't even stop by accident. When you think about it the whole thing makes me nauseous, nervous and perplexed too. Seven servants for five people, four, RS didn't get born yet. Seven servants for four people that's mathematically insulting. I know. I know. People have the right to be servants if they want to. I know that. And also a lot of people in Mexico wouldn't have jobs at all, no food, no clothes and stuff--if they weren't servants. But it doesn't mean you have to have them around like servants. No, not at all. If I ever became wealthy for some particular reason that got beyond my out of control. And maybe I lost some of my walking foot--sure, I'd have servants. But I'd split the work right in half. Right in half. I'd do exactly half of each servant's work. But it would have to be done on my schedule. My half, I mean. And something right from the very start. I'd eagerly advise the guy or girl servant, whatever they choose to be, not to call me sir. Please don't call me sir except by an unfortunate accident. And I'd prefer older servants. Somebody with just a couple of servant years left. Let them go out quietly in a friendly way. Plus also people that move slowly relax me. You know, people that took a real leisurely way of getting from one end of the living room to the other. Even if they didn't make it it would be o.k. No problem, it's o.k. If they were receptive servants when it became obvious they weren't going to make it to the other side--I'd help them. I'd be like a servant lifeguard. Available for all the circumstances. And we'd obviously eat together, take turns cooking and serving and selecting the menu. And no one would have to dress for dinner if they didn't want to. I mean except for clothes of your own preference, that's what I meant. Not nude dinners, that's not what I meant.

I can't believe I'm already outside standing here. I'm glad I settled that

servant thing again. That felt good. How can you be in front of something if your back's to it? Speaking or thinking about being a virgin. Somehow I don't feel I lost anything. Why do people go around saying somebody lost their virginity? Why not gain something added, uplifting and nice? The whole thing is a little defunct. But there's nothing I can do about it today. Well, I should make a move in some direction. Not just stand here looking incriminated. Suddenly I stopped walking completely in my tracks. I couldn't remember if I took a left or went straight ahead or a left or what. I guess I'm lost even though I know where I am. I turned around in a complete circle. And didn't get oriented. It couldn't be straight because I feel some turns in my memory. I didn't get lost. I couldn't of because there was no plan to get there. None of these stores look familiar. Could be maybe because they were wet before. I went left. It's as good a wrong direction as any.

You're not going to believe this. You have to. Two turns and I'm lost. Two turns plus one distraction to be exact. And I've been lost walking fifteen minutes straight. I tried a telephone book, no. A candy store, nothing. A nice lady in a shoestore that I got embarrassed asking cause I thought she might know. She didn't. I walked and walked and it got darker and darker. My wristwatch says it's one o'clock in the morning. The darkness agrees with that. Then I walked more eagerly another half-hour. I followed this drunk gentleman thinking he might lead me to the Toro Bar. But nope. I had to stop twice to pick him up and help him along the way. The second time I offered to get him a taxi. But well, I guess very intoxicated people talk the same in any language without too much regard for words. I felt desperate enough to confess to a crime I didn't even influence by witnessing. I got to thinking that this very now a day ago only I was with Eugenia. Then it hit me again like a surprising wall, I couldn't remember Eugenia's last name. If I ever even knew it. How

could I fall in love without somebody's last name? Rather than take a chance on giving up I flagged down a taxi. While there was still something left of me to hope and plan with. I felt perpendicular to myself, that's exactly how I felt. Bent out of shape and desperate. In love without the evidence to show for it. I flagged down a taxi. And asked to be taken back to the Royal Dutch in a hurry.

I got out of the taxi forgetting to pay. Which got remedied with a scream. Maybe it was a yell I don't know. I walked through the lobby with my hands in my pockets. I felt intimidated all over. I didn't want to talk or be talked to except for a warning. A life-threatening warning, nothing else. This is easily the most-most out of my family loving experience I've had and I'm lost. No, I'm not going to let this happen. I pressed the elevator button. If my crying days weren't over I'd be crying. I stepped over the elevator gap. Some people are wise, others are born otherwise, I guess. You shouldn't need a compass to find the woman you already love and have met in person. Jesus...I got through to my door o.k. I opened the door without fanfare. "Good." It hasn't been altered clean neat and orderly. I plumped on the bed, and took my loafers off. I'm not going to sleep. I sighed, a bad one. It's awful when you're immediately lonely and you sigh. No, I'm not going to sleep. In my situation God knows what I might dream. I sat down on this purple victorian chair. The kind with more back than anything and can punish you if you're bony. I stuffed my elbows into my knees and wrapped my hands over the back of my head. I felt like the statue the thinker except without a thought for all the posing. I sat up and hooked my hands around my knees. I felt not relaxed and dumbfounded. Maybe I should meditate for the first time. Another first time something might help. I heard you can get a lot out of that. I closed my eyes slowly like a sheet coming down forever down on a bed.

That was nice, really. It still is. Somebody nice told me directly once that praying is talking to God, and meditating is listening to God. And out of nowhere I'm familiar with I started thinking about Jane and the red upholstery. God, I haven't thought severely of Jane in years and years. Since maybe we were dating. We weren't exactly dating. I'd just been in this country America a couple of months. I was watching kids play kickball the way they were in that Rowayton Elementary School when this taller girl comes up to me out of nowhere without an introduction or even a warning hello and says outright that Jane wanted to go steady with me. I was just standing there alone and completely unprovoked and she says that. I got nervous with nowhere to turn except at myself. Kids in Mexico weren't nearly that advanced. I said to the tall girl, "What do I do?" I mean, if I ever saw Jane I didn't know her to recognize her name. The girl says, "Buy her a ring that's what you do." So of course I bought her a ring. The kind that fits all with a little tape the jeweler said. The very next day I gave the girl the ring to give to Jane. I thought that was going to be it. But one day soon during recess Jane came up unmolested by me. She was actually quite pretty, now that I remember, blonde with a lot of freckles that got placed nicely by the opportunity of birth. Anyway, Jane wanted to know casual-like if I wanted to go "to the car" after school for a little while. Sure, I said. I thought it was part of the demands of going steady. But I had no reality idea what "the car" meant. Well, Jane was really way ahead of me--way ahead. We ended up in this old broken-down no fenders nineteen-something Packard Studebaker I think. Without anybody's hesitation except my own we started kissing. Not how did I do on the math test, no, kissing right away. On the lips no less. I had no complaints. It was really very nice and exciting. As you probably might have already guessed, when you bring two cultures together something was bound to go wrong. Specially in the midst of kissing each other.

Sure enough it did. Jane and I were hugging and kissing and kissing and hugging. And I was getting good at it too. Then Jane stops real abruptly and says, "You want to go in the back seat?" Then she exhaled convincingly around herself. I don't know somehow I got startled, unexpectedly too and I said, "No, I want to stay up here with you." Jane looked at me with both of her blue eyes that got bigger the more she looked. Then she went away and started looking at the far away trees. It was a tragedy, no question about it. Well, as anyway goes, we didn't go in the back seat. Someday I'll probably look back and think it was funny. No wonder I haven't thought back about it a lot in all these years. Jane maybe I guess realized I was somehow backwards or something dim like that. I trailed behind her out of the woods and never saw her again. Two weeks later the same girl from before appears to me and says Jane no longer wanted to go steady with me. I said, "Well, what do I do?" She said I should take the ring and put it in my hand convincingly and throw it into the duck pond where it's deep. But then I felt bad that I'd thrown it too far. I suddenly felt irretrievable and lonely in a different way from ever before. A year ago I went back to Rowayton Elementary School to those woods. I don't know, I guess to pay my respects in a way. And I couldn't believe it that crazy old Packard Studebaker was still there. Red upholstery seats and all. I decided right then and there to paint it, get some rust off, maybe even put some elementary school birth control warning in the back seat. Something agreeable like "save your best kisses till later." But I didn't. The idea went away just as fast as it appeared. I decided it was their car now. And that--that's the way it's supposed to be. I'm still here wondering what would of happened if Jane and I had gone in the back seat. That's waht probably bothers me most about things, not knowing. Not knowing and caring not being enough to know. I hope it doesn't get worse. But it probably will. I miss Jane. She probably would have been

a great girlfriend if I'd known more about available chances. You never know about life. Could be probably you're not supposed to. I wish they had TV's in these rooms. TV keeps me from thinking.

Isn't that something. I fell asleep right in this victorian chair. Thinking of Jane I fell asleep sitting up. I got up stretching myself almost beyond limits. I could use a good yawn. Nope, nothing happened, no yawn. "I'm going to take a tub and a shave. Get organized. Find Eugnia and be happy again." I'm in the shower. I decided to shower again in the interest of time. And you know what? You can't, I haven't told you. It came as a complete surprise to me. Because it's not my type of thought. Hire a private detective. I felt elevated I was so happy. I started to whistle. I haven't whistled on purpose in two years. Jesus, things are turning around. "God bless me for being alive."

"Yes, sure, thank you. And if I can ever do anything for you, my name is Chuck Winters!"

The hotel clerk gave me the name of a reliable private detective. That probably means he's not cheap. But what am I talking about? Money is no, what do you call it, concern. I looked over my shoulder walking away. The clerk was looking at me down and a little sideways. I'm too much that's inexcusable. This guy hotel clerk is helping me nicely with information and I'm thinking him--that he's strange. Me being eccentric thinking that he's strange. Just because he didn't move his legs when he reached for the phone book. No motion people bother me. But that's just my prejudice. I'm too much. I'm strange for thinking him strange that's what it is. I tell you I have a steadfast rule about sins and sinning in all their redundant ways. It goes, a sin is not a sin unless it's repeated, then it's unforgiven. But Jesus when I first got to applying that rule did I get isolated and alone. And not meaning to by any decision that I know. Sinning is hard, stopping it I mean, when there are so many people

willing to help you out with your next one. Maybe I'm asking too much out of someone that can't vote yet. I don't know. Maybe I'm not supposed to be a self-made man at all. But maybe it could be I'm supposed to be an ahead-of-myself man--with nowhere to go. "Here comes a taxi," I whispered to myself to help me in my concentration. I raised my arm. I'm never going to call another strange person strange again in my life. You can't have an enemy without being one. It doesn't get simpler than that. I've got to remind myself now that I think of it, to get a toothbrush. I couldn't find mine in my duffle bag. I don't want to show up at Tan Son Nhut Air Force base Vietnam with bad breath and a lot of unnecessary tartar. The taxi went right by me. Maybe my hand was too tall in the air. Could be he was on assignment. I don't know. And you know that clerk person he had a nice smile. And I didn't remedy that strange conclusion while I was still talking to him. Rodney once slept in my room, when his room got painted. My mother is very concerned about unseeable things that might harm people. Like fumes and stuff. Anyway, about smiling, Rodney said that once I got to be convincingly asleep I started smioing away like a madman. I wouldn't stop. RS said it got so bad he went to Mom and Pop for help. He thought I was dying. Can you believe it, a kid like that eight years old coming up with a conclusion like that? But then I got to thinking that Rodney might be right. I'll bet a year's hostile fire pay that most people die with a smile on their face or somewhere near their face. And those that don't get to their dying smile it's a lot because the dearly beloveds around their death beds are distracting them. Distracting them with a lot of earthly questions I bet. No, I'm pretty sure people die with a smile on their faces. A generous one too probably. I mean, to my way of wondering, when a guy gets hit with a mortal bullet and all--the first thing you experience isn't convulsed pain. It's surprise. And the smile happens generously on the way down. Of course, I can't

say it to be a fact because I've never been mortally wounded. But I can guarantee you without disdain or anything like, that if I get shot mortally I'll get to my smile real quick. Specially if I've got some parting words to offer. I would want to do both very much. I think I would be very good at parting words. Specially if somebody else that I like is listening and she's a woman. But you see, there I go again. Getting into death again. Unnecessarily too. I give up. No, I don't. Actually it was more into smiles than death. Sure, that's right. Good, I feel better.

The time I saved showering is almost used up. And not yet another taxi. My neck and shoulder are a little painful. From sleeping in that chair in a pretzel position, I guess. You know, this football player told me in high school that there are a hundred and sixty positions to have sex with a woman. I couldn't believe it at first, I got flabbergasted. First I thought he meant like eighty positions with each one being counted twice. But no, he convinced me a hundred and sixty positions. Aren't human being incredible? Never convinced with nice and easy. God, I hope that private detective finds Eugenia for me. I'd die without a smile if he didn't. I felt like pacing. Jesus, if these possibilities keep up I won't be in enough shape to surrender when I arrive in Vietnam. But sure, a professionally trained private detective with their ways, he'll find Eugenia. It's not like a mystery plus all he's really got to find is a building. And that's much easier because they're stationary and larger and they don't have impressionable reputations. "Look at that...." Just when I got despairing a taxi that got unsolicited. Too much. Lucky, probably, I feel lucky.

I stepped inside quickly to save more time. Still sitting on my way down I said, "Gracias, senor, avenida nueve y calle cinco." I'm sure that's the correct address because I am. Already the taxi driver shifted and accelerated fast. Good. We accelerated more again. I mean, he accelerated. I slid over

to the window to hang on. Just in case I needed to. I wonder if a person born in a foreign country, raised in another can put two foreign accents down at once. Like French raised in America chatting in Argentina. Mysteries and private detectives is probably why I'm thinking about it. We stopped. I got surprised unexpectedly. Just a couple of blocks. "Agui estamos." The driver turned around smiling slowly after all that acceleration. "Cinco colones." He added more smile around himself. I said "seguro" after smiling myself. You ever notice smiling in the back seat is harder than from the front for some reason? I got out bent over after paying with a tip--thinking this isn't one of those a hundred and sixty positions. No not hardly, not hardly a position for one person. Why aren't cars taller or people shorter? People seem to have a lot of unnecessary prolonged height. It's not important right now. I'll think about it later.

"Look at that." A modern building. Lots of glass and tiny amounts of metal. Suddenly I felt hesitating about myself. I don't know enough why. I mean, I'm going to pay. And it's a missing person's thing, why should I feel nervous? "I'm not going to hesitate." I might figure out why I'm scared, then I'll be in real trouble. I stepped quickly inside. I checked the glass black felt thing that says who's everybody. "Why shouldn't it work, plus it has to. I'm on limited time with a lot of need." I ran my finger down the glass one more time. "There it is right there. Senor Fabe..."

I went and decided to walk the three floors. Just a bit more tiredness gets me more focused and prepared. Good, right there, no more looking. It would be strange not to be able to find the private detective you want to find somebody else. Four, now three more steps. I made my way right to the door. Maybe I should of called first. I don't know the etiquette of private detectives in Costa Rica. I knocked loud enough for me to hear with all my knuckles. I

couldn't hear exactly.

Again. "Entrate entrate." Sounded like an order. I don't think I hesitated. I opened the door. I looked up from the floor. He was a man with black hair and an expensive suit. Handsome I guess you call it, and maybe young.

"Te hablas espanol?" He asked, putting down a paper, holding a pencil by his face.

"No si?" I was all prepared to what to say. But it all got eclipsed. I sat down in a comfortable chair without meaning to.

"Yes, senor, I'm better in English when I'm potentially under pressure and confused."

"Well, please tell me how can I be of help to you?" He leaned back into his reclining chair and tapped his nose three times with the pencil.

I coughed to organize my thoughts. He formed his hands together into like a cage while looking at me, but one a small bird could get out of. "Well, senor, I'm looking for a person who happens to be a woman. She's beautiful to me and I need very much to find her quickly."

He let go of the cage. "Si, missing persons happens."

"Sure, this one happened pretty quickly. I met her in this pretty innocent bar." I think I just lied. "And...anyway, do you happen to know the location of the Toro Bar?"

"Did this girl perhaps steal from you?" Senor Fabe leaned into his desk.

"No, God, no, she didn't even come close to stealing from me. We became close, you know attracted personal friends. You see, Senor Fabe, it mostly has to do with my not being organized. I guess my not always concentrating exactly where I am. I forget people's names and faces and places.

Sometimes all of them at once." I made a circle around the side of my head for emphasis. "It's not maybe more lapses than a poor sense of lost direction, that's it."

"Well, then, my friend, you took a chance coming her, ah?" He laughed. I laughed also to be polite. "Why don't you try this, young man." He formed his lips into an easy circle. "Why don't you get into a taxi and ask him to drive you to this bar."

My mouth fell open. Almost it felt like to my lap. Anymore and I would of disappeared behind my mouth. "Get into a taxi and ask...senor, you're brilliant." I got up on my feet feeling more my normal height and said, "Great again, senor Fabe, please tell me how much I owe you for your consul?" I went after my wallet.

Senor Fabe held out his hand like a traffic cop. "You owe me nothing, young man. I am happy to of been of help to you."

"Senor, I'll be happy to pay you. It seems that I should. You solved the mystery outright, without any preliminaries too."

"No need, I assure you." We shook hands. "But tell me if you would what is your name? I let go shaking hands. I'd forgotten we still were.

"Yes, right, that was rude of me, senor Fabe, that I didn't tell my name while introducing my missing person. My name is Chuck Winters actually." I looked at the senor trying to decide. "Senor, do you mind telling me out of my curiosity, how you learned English so well? Accent and all."

"I learned English in one of your American prisons...."

"Incredible, no kidding. A prison, no less. Were you a guard? You seem too nice to be a warden."

"No, in fact, Chuck, I was a prison inmate."

"My God, I hope you weren't innocent....?"

Senor Fabe dropped his head laughing through his nose. "That's well put, Chuck Winters. You are saying it is better to guilty in prison than innocent. I do not know of any innocent peoples anywhere. No, I went to prison for a crime of passion."

"No kidding, passion no less." I coughed, thinking about myself and my not knowing the passion rules of Costa Rica. "Crime of passion, senor, I didn't know we had any left." He smiled extensively. There was a slight gentle knocking on the door. My head turned. Senor Fabe put his hand on my shoulder. We walked together toward the door.

"Let me know if I can be of any further help to you, Chuck...o.k.?"

"Sure, thanks again." We shook hands again. The door opened. Senor Fabe shook with both hands. He smiled and winked. "Good luck, Chuck." Quickly, after waiting I guess, this middle-aged woman about twenty-eight walked into the office. She was crying into a silk handkerchief on her nose but not touching. She swung her fur heavily on the chair like it was still full of the animal she got it from. I wish I could watch. Maybe I could help. I turned myself around saying, "Goodbye Senor," one more time. I got myself outside the senor's office. Incredible generous the way he was. Helping out when I offered to pay money no less. I started down the stairs feeling lucky and almost carefree. God, I'm going to be with Eugenia in minutes, perhaps sooner. It's great when you know you're alive and you know the reason.

I jumped the last step outside throwing my arms up in the air before I landed. And that had to be a personal record for handshakes. And one of them a double. Eugenia maybe and I will go for a walk and figure out the future in a futuristic kind of way. I like that. I love the future when you're in it. I went up on my toes just to get closer to the sun. Things are going to be

better, maybe even all right and happy. I like my feelings. Problem is sharing them with other idea people. A scraggly little dog hungry and sniffing came right up to me and scratched at my leg with one paw. You could count his ribs he looked so hungry. Probably the same on the other side. Yes, it is. I kneeled down on one leg to introduce myself. "Hi, fella, I'm Chuck Winters, your newfound friend. You don't have a collar or anything." I got up. "Listen, why don't I jog across the street and get you something to eat. Me too." I held out my hand flat to him. "Wait here so's to minimize your chances of getting hurt crossing with me." He stayed. I turned around, looked to either side, and started across. Halfway across, less, the little guy passed me running. He got to the other side way ahead of me. His tail moving, shifting his weight to the other side. He looked amused that he be to the other side.

"Listen, o.k., world-wide people have this prejudice about dogs going to eating places. So stay here. Because I don't know if I can explain you enough in Spanish. He jumped up and got one lick out of my nose. I was bent over talking. But still it was a pretty good jump, accurate and without warm-ups too. "Stay, you understand. I mean, move around if you want. But nearby. So you'll be here when I get back." I turned back around for the little restaurant. I kept my hand in the stay position behind me.

In less than seven minutes the food was ready. All the time I was wondering if he would wait for me or give up. I took one last look at the easy, barely rotating fan. The kind that go so slow that flies like to hop on to take a relaxed break from flying. I'm on my way out. I got a single cheeseburger for me. And a double cheeseburger for my friend, because of his ribs. Just too much. What a day. He's still here. But across the street staring right at me. It's like we made a compromise on the original stay. I

checked twice both ways for traffic. And crossed quickly balancing myself and the food. "Here we are, companero. My God, the fastest wiggling food I ever experience." I put down little dog's food neatly on the paper bag so's it wouldn't get dirty. "What am I going to name you? Everyone should have a name, I guess." Little dog was like diving into his meal. It made me feel good. "Sure, I'm going to name you Andy J. After our president Andrew Jackson." I don't know a lot about President Jackson at all. Except that his wife taught him how to read and write. Which was nice. But I do know one thing he said that pleased me a lot. I'm a prolific misspeller. I have been all my spelling life. And I've paid dearly for my misspelling indiscretions. I have. One day I understand, President Jackson was in one of the fancy ballrooms of the White House. Surrounded by a lot of puffed-up over-dressed dignitaries. And apparently they started talking about spelling. Of course, they tried to out-impress each other and their spelling knowledge. Not to be outdone, President Jackson spoke up loud and clear and announced, "In my opinion, it's a pretty limited man that can only spell one word one way." I laughed just to myself right now thinking about it. "Anyway, buddy, if it meets with your satisfaction, I'm going to call you Andy J." But then overwrought with my happiness I didn't think I'm just going to be here for a short few days. A couple of days and then what separates completely. Jesus, I haven't gotten to Vietnam and already a casualty. Doesn't seem right, a non-combatant for Christsakes. Andy J. is finishing up his cheeseburger frantically. He might not survive without me. I can't take him to Vietnam. They don't allow pets in a war zone just people. I feel awful and cruel. This war idea stinks more and more. I looked for a taxi. Maybe Eugenia can take him. I can send money support. Sure, that's possible. I don't see right now at all why not. "Here, boy." Andy J. Looked up.

"Take my hamburger, I didn't touch it. You need it more than I did." I didn't finish my sentence and it was gone with a jump. Dogs probably think that talking is just barking that went astray. It's not like he interrupted my sentence is what I was thinking. What incredible jumping, that's for sure. I looked again for a taxi. "Chew your food, Andy, that's the fun part." No taxi will they take a dog anyway or what? We'll walk if they don't. Hire a taxi and we'll follow the taxi Andy J. and me to the Toro Bar. It's a little eccentric, but I have the money. Plus I can get a little incognito about myself.

I, excuse me--we had to wait a considerable while for a taxi. But I didn't now mind at all in the least because I had company. Andy J. and I had a good relaxing time waiting, reminiscing the way we were. With most of the reminiscing being done by me, as far as I could tell anyway. I felt gifted having a dog like Andy, more and more he was turning out to be an extraordinary dog. If in fact he was a dog at all. What I'm meaning is that if he doesn't know I'm some kind of a man, how can I know that he's a dog? How can I know what a grasshopper is all about if I'm not conversant with the ways of grasshoppers and I don't know what they know about me? Sure, that's right, just this right now I've decided I'm very opposed to name-calling. Even a river or a cloud. Some white-haired guy, of course, with a trailing white beard went around naming things without any permission from anyone he didn't know. And people without the time for beards or white hair were impressed as hell. What if he got some things pronouncedly wrong? And a dog is not a dog or a fly a fly? But they got treated that way so much for all those years--they got used to the negligence. I've got to think some more about this because I definitely think I'm on to something. Yes, I'm making a mental note to pursue this vigorously after Vietnam if I'm still alive. But you see what

I'm saying about being relaxed with Andy here, we're almost to the Toro Bar and I'm not yet apprehensive in any way at all. He's a nice taxi driver too. He accepted Andy and me together. At no extra fare too and didn't protest my barking, I mean Andy's. I only barked once to see Andy's reaction. He got instantly bored and not close to perplexed. Good, I like an alleged dog with high standards. "Yes I do!"

"Aqui estamos." Oh God, I got to the apprehension part of me. I should of known. I felt like crossing myself like when I was a functioning Catholic kid in Mexico. But I didn't, to avoid hypocrisy's sake. I also had to pay the taxi driver with a nice tip and all. Which I did. I almost asked him if he'd mind going around the block slowly once. But I didn't for a reason I didn't know. Andy got out of the taxi right alongside of me. Walking toward the too-close Toro Bar I went from feeling apprehensive to a little decomposed. I locked my shoulders into the forward position--composing myself as much as was possible in me. And I walked in and inside.

I stopped at the darkness of the room. Andy J was wiggling his tail under my arm. It helped feeling like a misplaced pendulum. Then too suddenly, still trying to focus on the dark, I had the thought that Eugenia had a husband. Why didn't I think of that before when I was more available to the question? Eugenia said for sure she had two children. Jesus, I hope, "Compermiso." I added myself "compermiso," with conviction. Someone bumped into me. All available bump-ins I apologize. Just in case I'm at fault and culpable with myself. Also, I think it helps with my balance in the case of a severe bump.

"Wha you haven to drink?" I turned around away from looking at the juke box. She was a stocky woman, oriental sort of, looking at me through a shot glass she was polishing.

"Yes, mam, thank you?" I ran my fingers down my cheek till I ran out of cheek. "I hope you don't mind my dog with me. We're new to each other. And

I'm afraid of a too early separation. For his sake and probably maybe for mine. Yes, anyway, a drink?" She wasn't reacting at all in any available way that I could see. "How about please a nice cold Coke in a bottle if possible. If not, any kind of Coke. Or Pepsi actually, when I'm traveling I can't very much tell the difference." The lady half-turned around just giving enough of one of those negligible looks. You know, a negligible look people like to manufacture from themselves when they want to prove they're the only ones in the room. It almost worked. I looked around me to either side. Andy was doing fine well-perched under my arm. The lady turned around, it seemed just moving the top of her body like a tank. Should I ask her, her name as a courtesy to one of us at least? No, you shouldn't get too familiar with someone who doesn't want to know you. "Mam, if I may get to the point of why I'm standing here." I took the wet dripping Coke. "I came here for Eugenia to..." I didn't finish my thought. She dropped down the shot glass to her mouth. Her eyes. The look if it had been buckshot I would of disappeared. "We're friends," I added from far below my throat.

"She was your lady for the night?" She said in her funny half of everything accent like it was an incrimination. I felt like was blackmail evidence just standing there trying to get the thirsty Coke to my lips.

"No, she wasn't my lady for the night. We're friends day and night of the close-up variety. And I'm on my way to Vietnam and I wanted to come by and see her. Say hello again and a final maybe goodbye. That's all, friends." I started feeling a little potentially irked. It was after all just a raffle that got out of control and influenced.

"Eugenia is in Guanacaste for the week visiting her family." The shot glass went back up. Then down. "They don't have phones. And I don't know her exact address."

"Yes, well, I see. I don't have much choice, do I?" I raised up the Coke and took a swig wishing it had been concentrated scotch. "Mam, perhaps maybe you can tell me. Tell me if Eugenia is married somehow to another person, you know?"

"Na, divorced."

"That's good. I mean I'm sorry she had to get divorced to be free, but anyway==do you think I can write Eugenia in care of this bar? Stay in touch and stuff. Also, I want to leave a two hundred dollar gift for Eugenia. Eugenia and the kids from me. Maybe--"

"You trust me, do ya?"

"Sure, why not? Why shouldn't I? I don't know you. I don't have a reason not to trust you." Pressure, a hair fell off my head and bounced from off my nose and disappeared between my legs. That's all I need, bad news, now baldness.

"I'll give Eugenia your friend the two hundred, b.k.?"

"Yes, sure, great, that's nice of you, thank you. And here Mam, here's another fifty to treat you and Eugenia to dinner when she comes back. In appreciation of your kindness."

She took the money, finally putting down that shot glass. And winked on me with her full eye and most of her cheek. God, what a wink. She wrung up the cash register and pulled out a card. "Mam, also, Mam I want very much to make Eugenia my primary beneficiary of my life insurance policy in the event of my inconvenient death in Vietnam. And her last name has slipped from me?"

"Her last name is Sanchez. This here is the address of the Toro Bar." She handed me a little like business card. "You're a funny guy buddy?"

"No, not really. Eccentric, maybe, but not funny, no. But thanks." I put the card in my wallet. "I guess Eugenia Sanchez of the Toro Bar and Guanacaste like you say should satisfy that Chief Provost insurance man in

the military."

"Sure." She smiled finally. Nice smile surprisingly. I got myself started out. Not feeling as bad as I thought I should be. Because now maybe I have something to look forward to. "Oh, Mam, how much do I owe you for the Coke?"

"It's on the house. Yeah, what's your name? You didn't say."

"No, I didn't, I guess, did I? My name is chuck Winters, Winters as in Winter storm. And thanks for the Coke. It was a good one." I turned to exit and turned back around. "Mam, do you want me to write down my name in case you forget somehow?"

"No, I'll write it down, no problem. And, buddy, watch out for that inconvenient death." She nodded and smiled and winked again. God, a triple. This woman's in control.

I stepped outside, turned back around and went inside again. "One last thing, Mam, if I may. Do you happen to know where there's a nearby park. I feel the need I'd like to go enjoy a park."

"Six blocks down to the right. A nice park. Anything else?" I guess I interrupted her shot glass.

"No, thank you, that's it. Except maybe when I return after one year. Maybe you and Eugenia would like to join me for dinner?"

"We'll have something here, ah? Why not?"

"Sure, great, thank you. I'll look forward to that. I will...."

I put Andy J. down. Six blocks down. That's easy, five, then six. Plus also we'll be able to see it then. "Andy, you were great through that whole thing. You should get some kind of recognizable award for that." I looked at the sunlight walking at a good pace next to Andy. They should have awards for dogs. Not breeding show dog things--those are for people. I mean

like character awards, like dog of the year, for outstanding sincere character in the face of life possibilities. Too bad, maybe I didn't get to see Eugenia. But maybe it's good fate because too much love suddenly can be encumbering, I'm sure. Sure, awards for dogs, I like that. And look at that, just eighty yards from the Toro Bar. Yesterday I was just near this store and I missed the Toro Bar completely. I closed my eyes briefly. I'm slightly tired. The humidity maybe. Thinking also exhausts me when there's not enough conclusions. And the love too, that's part of being tired. Because it's new and unrehearsed for. All new things are a little tiring sometimes. I don't want to forget to make those beneficiaries in Vietnam. Right off too. I mean I've made promises. I don't want to disappoint anyone in the event of my demise. I remember at Lowery Air Force Base when the guys going to Vietnam made out their wills I told the Chief Provost guy I wanted to leave RS two thousand dollars. And that he was to collect it on his twentieth or twenty-first birthday, whichever one came first. He wasn't amused enough to think it was funny. But I insisted. I told him my family was that way with a asense of humor and all. Also I thought a little humor might help them deal with my surprising departure. I expect actually I'm the only developing eccentric in the family. It's in the genes I'm sure, so I'm not going to spare myself the time to worry about it. I just got inherited funny, that's all. I have no complaints to brag about. I'm inalterably in love. I've got a dog, alleged dog friend. I'm healthy. I've got a premature and free life insurance policy. So I'll be able to look down from heaven in my spare divine time and be amused with everybody having a good time spending my money.

I picked up my friend to cross the street. We're here. Looks like ample walking around room too. Nice trees, park, and a sprinkling water fountain. Very little traffic. A successful walk across. I can smell the

grass already. And look, Andy, no no trespassing signs or walking on the grass signs--a civilized park no less. I hurried, still carrying Andy over to the fountain. I put him on the ledge. By the way, Andy is a him dog, I checked at my first opportunity convenient to him. So the name worked out. Andy's drinking water. He's thirsty, real thirsty. I sat down myself comfortably on the ledge. And no sooner compact myself with the fountain and I couldn't believe it. I'm thinking about death again. This is ridiculous, why don't I just go to the first mortuary and submit myself for bidding. I mean, I don't want to die. But why give up myself so much to the possibility? It's almost like I'm on Death Row. I shouldn't complain in the least. No, because I'm not on Death Row. I have to tell you, though, now that I'm thinking about it, I'm not only vehemently opposed to my death, I'm vehemently opposed to other people's deaths too. Specially particularly like formal deaths, executions and stuff like that. You know, like kidnapers, and rapists, murderers. Anyone we like actually to execute, since we're always changing our laws to accommodate our preferences. You know how it goes. Whenever the state people are going to execute someone, the TV and newspaper people start to get convoluted hungry. And getting countdown about themselves. They get into last meal stuff. Two days left. They review the thug's terrible self and his crime. Last minute reprieves are unlikely because the governor everyone knows enjoys executions most of all. It's well beyond excruciating. And sure enough, the next day on timely schedule the poor guy is executed to hell and back. Then stories about how splendid and chilling the execution was. I figure myself if you can't put it in the Bible don't do it. It's beyond tears is what it is.

"No." I stood up like a Jack-in-a-box. I sat down. I'm not going to be thinking about this stuff. I'll get decorated before I get to Vietnam.

"No, yes, I am." Why shouldn't I get involved in evil things to make them right? Even if only right inside myself. Sure, I'm right, yes, I am. Let me tell you, how can people say it's not cruel and unusual punishment? They say it's not torture is it? Sure, if some bent over himself hairy guy came up to me and said in a perverted voice, "Do you want to be completely executed today or do you want to be tortured generously by me?" I'd say after hesitating, "Well, what exactly do you mean by torture, if you don't mind?" "If you don't mind," I'd say because maybe it's supposed to be a surprise. You understand, I'm trading in time now, a little pronounced torture for some time. And if he told me the details of the torture, which would probably take him an hour and a half, you know how white collar professionals are about their work, I'd say that's fine and well, sir, but could we skip the stuff with my nose. You know, maybe trade it in for something more, well, less unamerican. You understand, of course, I'd pick torture to death for some extra time to wonder and speculate about things. Isn't enough unkindness enough? Didn't Jesus say stop it, enough already? Also, it's true you get to know your torturer while he's at work. It's not easy on him either. Maybe I could impart a few thoughts. Never know. And being that this guy is a federal or state employee no doubt we'd get some coffee breaks. No, if the possibilities are not endless they are certainly there. There's absolutely no question about it, death while living is cruel and unusual punishment. I know that's an unusual theory. But that's because people like death so much. It's more dependable, there's a lot of profiting about it. Nicer all around--if it's somebody else's death. Which is the problem, somebody else might be somebody else's death also. And then what, before you know you're short too many people to find a friend.

Once in high school this pony tail girl came up to me and said, "Chuck, do you believe in capital punishment?" I said, "For you or me?" She just

like scurried away, no nothing gone. What got me thinking about her, whose name I didn't know, is an article I read then. This article, believe it or not, that some states are working out on ways of executing people that they choose up and want to put to death. They always say "execute," don't they? But they mean "kill." Like it means a lot of difference to the guy being executed and his nervous family that he's not going to be killed. He's going to be executed. First I thought, well, what are they talking about in this article? I thought maybe they'd come up with my torture option. Cushion the electric chair or what. I read the article and it got worse. Give me a break, why don't you? They were actually talking about in Texas of putting some guy to sleep with lethal rejection. I mean injection. I put the article down. Jesus, should I laugh now, I thought, or wait till I'm dead so I can recover myself in heaven. You call that progress? Postpone the second coming, we're too much. I right now felt like praying. But I don't know if it's polite praying in English in a foreign country. Maybe, I don't know, the translation might get screwed up.

Then I got this idea in defense of their's. I mean, if you want to be humane and all, why not execute the guy with laughing gas? Yeah, that's right, laughing gas. Going along with my idea to see where it would get me. The condemned guy walks into the death chamber in a wrinkled suit that the state of Texas lent him temporarily for his execution. He looks angry but he isn't. He's tense. The guards are tight on either side of him. Stocky guards with undoubtable somewhere tattoos. Twenty-five feet from the entrance in a glass bubble like, the witnesses. Including a couple of guys from the media eating peanuts. The warden in his balding crewcut is in the corner. In charge, all over himself. The tight warden looks like a bulldog in a three-piece suit, no kidding, he does. If he barked, nobody would be surprised. And there's the doctor, looking erect from the shoulders up. Standing next to the laughing

gas dispenser. The condemned man, getting more and more condemned by the minute, is walking slowly with the two stiff guards. A witness smiles an undernourished crazy like smile. The condemned man stops suddenly. A reporter stops chewing and swallows his peanuts. Everyone's looking and then some. Both guards each put a hand on his back. He's back moving. His lips saying something nobody can hear. He's standing in front of the restraining seat. The poor guy sits down without encouragement. His hands are on his lap. The guards work quickly like pigeons in front of popcorn. They're on their knees strapping the almost dead man's legs tight and tighter. Two witnesses are on the edge of their seats stretching their necks to better see more. The man is tight in the death chair. The guards move to either side, four feet away. The doctor turns his educated head and looks at the warden. The warden drops his head down sharp like a guillotine. The motor of the laughing gas dispenser starts humming. The doctor approaches the man with the laughing gas nozzle in his hand. The man inhales and exhales. The doctor is closer. The witnesses are hungry. The reporters have stopped eating. The nozzle and the doctor are on the man's face. The machine hums louder. The doctor scratches an itch in the back of his neck. The nozzle stays on. The warden raises his arm to look at his watch. He nods slowly at the doctor. Who knows, the gas has to be dispensed just right or the execution isn't humane and successful. And everyone in Texas knows that there's nothing worse than a sloppy well-attended execution. The doctor's arm is about to go up. It is up. The condemned man looks at the warden and starts laughing uproariously. The doctor sniffs at the nozzle. Four witnesses are now laughing. A guard smiles and looks away. Another witness laughing, slapping his knee. The condemned man laughing even more. The warden nods. The doctor leans into the man. The nozzle is back on his face. And slips off his face. The condemned man

catches his breath and tries to speak. He tries again. The witnesses are on their feet. The condemned man laughs once more and says, "Did you hear the one about?" He catches what's left of his breath. "Hear the one about the husband who goes up to his wife. And says. How come you never tell me when you reach orgasm?" The doctor, the warden, and the guards are unintentionally frozen to hear the punch line. "And the wife says, cause you're never around." The doctor looks at the guards looking at him. The warden has left the room. Everyone starts laughing. While the witnesses look dismally on. They all calm down. Don't they always. The doctor recomposes himself. The guards stiffen up. The warden is back from the bathroom. Everyone hesitates and moves. The condemned man who laughed the most has tears down his cheeks. The doctor proceeds. The guards hold the man's shoulders. The nozzle again. This time for three times as long. The nodding warden nods again. The nozzle is up. The doctor exhales and sighs. The man's head is on his shoulder and down. The doctor gets his stethoscope from his back pocket. Puts it in his ears, then the man's chest. The doctor waits. Alarmed, he looks up at the nervous warden and says, "Warden, this man is still laughing."

Do you see what I'm trying to tell you? I know the whole laughing gas execution idea is probably in extremely bad taste. I don't blame you for thinking me offensive or worse. But sometimes you have to go out on the limb to prove a point. Even if you're the limb. The point is that it's not nice to kill someone. It's unkind. Death is not life. If criminals can't help but commit their awful crimes, they should be put somewhere until they return to their health. They're less criminal if you don't treat them like criminals. And they won't come out of wherever they should go angry and nimble with new crimes if they get treated right. They should maybe go in the Air Force, bad guys' brach or something. I know it's simple. But it's supposed to be,

life is. That's my thinking, anyway, for what it's worth. I feel exhausted. Sometimes I get exhausted just trying to recover myself. Now I wish I'd gotten to see Eugenia. That execution has exhausted me and left me feeling lonely. "Hi, buddy, companero Andy. I can't be empty and lost if you're here, can I?" Andy climbed up on my knees. It always amazes me how a dog can jump up high like that without any preparation or anything. Just jump. I petted Andy's head. He went up, his paws on my chest, and licked my face. At the very risk of being cynical and tired, I don't think sometimes people deserve being so close to the clouds and heaven. If up is where it is, loyal is what pets are. Makes me think of our Cousin Bosco. Our good friend. Andy jumped off. You notice how dogs get less often embarrassed than people. And with good reason, I'm sure. Actually, though, once Cousin Bosco was severely embarrassed while he was running around under his own recognizance with me. I was riding along the pond in Rowayton. Where I threw Jane's ring under customary instructions--remember? Cousin Bosco stops. Really stops, I mean, motionless. Then he crouched down. He's the hunter nobody dares hunt. He looked tense like a slingshot about to sling. He moved forward like on his toes he was so smooth. I couldn't see, wondering what was going on. He moves, more deft like hurried--eager. I moved up closer in my clumsy human way. Walking on my two feet. Cousin Bosco went on a run. He trounces. Right on top of a cement duck. A skinny duck to boot. Cousin Bosco looked around, his paw up in the air, licking his embarrassed chops free of cement. I turned around fast, looking away, so he'd know I didn't see his severe dilemma. For the years that followed what happened never came up between us. He didn't seem changed that I could tell. And I never told anybody. I wouldn't be telling you now, except like I said, Cousin Bosco is a broadminded dog. It was coming to know intimately Cousin Bosco the way I did that I came to realize

that dogs do go to heaven when they transpire. It seemed so obvious to me. I mean, can you imagine heaven without dogs? It wouldn't be heaven discriminating like that. I miss Cousin Bosco indiscriminately. I guess I mean without reservations. If I ever become as good a man as he was a dog, I won't have any complaints at all.

Two kids right beyond over there are pushing each other, like to start a fight. But they're just playing around, using each other to shadowbox. Not what you might call a two-party fight like that David Burns guy when I moved to Rowayton from Mexico with my family. This guy David Burns was pretty big and menacing, with an ugly disposition around himself. He carried a bullwhip with him. Unbelievably he did. In America, a bullwhip. In a civilized town like Rowayton, no less, it's still unbelievable to me. He hung around these other less tough guys, but still tough guys. They do it that way, you know, a pecking order of toughness. And only they know the right order. It's confusing, it really is. This one sunny day I was walking unperturbed through Mr. Jenkins's boat yard to get more directly to the pharmacy. They served this incredible cherry coke with real cherry syrup. And right out of nowhere except right where I was jumps out David Burns at me. He says inviting angry like, "I heard you said something about me?" I claimed my ignorance completely saying I didn't know him except by reputation. He called me "a wise guy punk." I didn't say anything. Under the impending circumstances I thought nothing supported my silence was the way to go. I didn't know, though, that silence really gets to these people. Next, like on pecking order cue, five guys show up and half surround me. They had on purpose dirty clothes with unruly expressions on their faces. It was like a police line-up minus the line. If they had been old enough to shave they would have been unshaven. It was awful. Then awful got worse. David Burns says harsh-like, "How would you like to

kiss my prick?" I answered instantaneously and convincingly, "That's unnatural and unlikely." He got what he wanted. I think the word "unlikely." He pointed my finger, no, his finger at me and called me "a foreigner punk." He moved onwards towards me. You see, I know how these fights go. One guy says something. The other guy says worse and declines the first thing said. Then one guy says something about the other guy's mother. It can go on for hours with a couple of "Oh, yeah's" thrown in for clarity and perspective. At a given moment surprising to the both of them they run out of word excitement and one guy gets ferocious. Before the ferocious guy arrives, the second guy is waiting himself already ferocious. Well, with that David Burns moving on me, regrettably I didn't do anything. I just kept my feet apart awaiting the soon to be arriving David Burns. He got here. I ducked very fast. I'm extremely fast when motivated to protect my personal body. Too fast, though, that time. I almost came up on his first punch. It's one of the most important rules of boxing that I don't mind passing on to you. You don't have to duck the same punch twice. He was surprised. So was I, since it was my first recorded duck ever that I remember for any unsolicited reason. Then that David Burns had to stop momentarily to calculate himself. He's thinking that maybe just maybe I'm more than he shouldn't handle. He pushed my shoulder. He insulted me. He pushed my shoulder again and increased the priority of insults. I didn't say a thing except my silence. It got to the point that he started saying the lines that should have been mine. A wall of his fleshy friends formed around us to enjoy the unfolding details. David Burns pushed me again and again. I kept my feet less part and kept my face non-compliant and platonic. Half an hour plus went by and David Burns started to look like he'd been beaten up without my compliance. Well, to make a short story less preposterous his diabolical buddies started changing feverish like "get him get him." David jumped on me. I swerved around and caught him in a full

bear hug. It was easy, David had the misfortune of being overweight. Then from there I just held David in my arms for what must of been three hours. His threats became angry demands that became angry requests with assurances. I don't think that David Burns had been held that long by another human being foreign or domestic. I have to give credit to David's pecking order friends for not interfering with my holding David at my expense. Maybe it would of disrupted the pecking order, I don't know. Finally I let David go with the assurance that he would depart calm. And he did with his buddies trailing behind. And I myself got home late for dinner. And got punished moderately. Just some logic instructions. I was too ashamed to tell my family I had been in an uninvited fight. Even though there was only one guy fighting. Really, what are you going to do? If it weren't for life, I'd have nothing to complain about.

That's what got me thinking about birth control right now. When I got a good handle embrace on David Burns and he went down, a rubber johnny fell out of his shirt pocket. Do you have to believe it, on an eleven-year-old kid his age. They're illegal for a kid eleven years old. In Rowayton we were told you could only sell them to adults with problems. When David got into a fight with me I was also on my way to see my friends Chet, Stan, Win and Linda. Linda's father owned some kind of boat yard maybe. Anyway, the five of us when we got inspired and felt inclined enough went around trying to track down the rubber johnny salesman. One of us got the information, it wasn't me, that the bar across the street from the library sold those rubber johnny things. You know, in case you don't, rubber johnnies are used in the event of intercourse developing between people of the opposite sex. You put them on to protect the ejaculation. But like I might of almost said, we didn't find him or even spotted him. But we arrived at a good idea of what he looked like. We figured he was shorter than taller. But pretty tall still.

He was rotund, not fat with a hefty chest. And he always wore a tailored three-piece suit. And a hat that came down close to his eyebrows. We knew for sure that he was mob connected. The bartender told us, his name was Mister Paterson, told us all the rubber Johnny traffic was controlled by the mob from an offshore bank. Later on when we separated our own ways and we approximated growing up, we found out it wasn't at all that way. At least I don't think it is. But anyway, like I said, we never found him. But he does exist, of that I'm sure.

Why am I sitting here non-compliant with myself remembering all this stuff? Because it's not pleasant and agreeable. It accentuates my being unnecessarily alone with nowhere to go. A teen-age girl walked by oblivious and bouncy with a radio. God, that song went on, "Down-town, when you're alone and you're feeling so lonely, You can always go down-town...." I got up to distract myself from listening. "Andy, buddy, let's walk somewhere, ok?" I used to hear that down-town song all the time at the University of Maine. It was excruciating to my confusion. I guess it would be worse if I was married happy in Connecticut with someone. And I was here alone. Maybe I should make an effort to go to this Guanacaste place and track down Rugenia. Try to make real sure that maybe she didn't completely understand my sincere intentions. "When you're alone and, stay right here, Andy. No, I'll pick you up to cross the traffic. When you're alone and"...you know I love singing. But I've been told convincingly I can't sing. Miss Purdy our singing teacher at Ponus Ridge Junior High School said outright in one sentence that I was tone deaf. And she said it to me without telling me what a tone was. But in my personal opinion, which I'm entitled to under the conditions that they are my ears, that wasn't at all the problem. The problem was more that sometimes Miss Purdy didn't sometimes wear underpants into class. Yes, sure, she

wore a dress, but sometimes outright no underpants. And whenever Miss Purdy bent over to pick something up like an eraser, I blew my octaves immediately. It was a terrible time in a very fascinating way, because my hormones were new and current to me. That's something else I wasn't directly warned about with some caution--my immense hormones. That seems to happen a lot to human beings I know, not enough warnings. Strange with all the pronounced things that goes around on purpose and not enough warnings. Too much thinking, I think, and not enough conclusions that don't lead to more thinking. This thinking business is disturbing. Tricky what God did on purpose that way. Thinking is like building a meticulous cage around yourself. And you're told to think your way out. And what you get is another cage. Listen, if you think of a way out of this thinking business, a practical way not a convincing way, let me know. Write me in care of Vietnam. I'll be most appreciative. And if it works, I'll pass it on to the other guys.

I feel better now, more unregulated. Andy looks also more chipper. Motion helps a lot. I don't know why, but it does. I always feel I'm going somewhere. And even if I don't start that way, I always get somewhere. Which means that must be where I was going. Just unplanned, unscheduled, but arriving nonetheless. I looked down at Andy J. He's doing very fine by my estimation. Just mapping the place out with his pronounced sniffs. "Anyd, with two of us moving, we're bound to get someplace." I stuffed my hands in my back pocket for security of balance. I like walking like this, nonchalant kind of. Not a care free in the world. "Andy, do you mind if I change your name prematurely to Charlie?" He looked up, startled like, one ear up like he was saluting. I laughed, pleasing myself that I did. Actually, my real name is Charlie. Chuck is my nickname. Also nick is also my nickname. Which was my father's nickname because he also got named Charles. Chuck, I guess,

got added on by friends for convenience opportunities sake. "Sure, Andy, I'd like to rename you Charlie. Sure, that way if I suffer my demise my name in all its intentions will get carried on." A well-dressed woman walked by, looking at me funny. Maybe, I guess, because I was talking in English to a local dog. Who knows? Funny, looks no longer bother me. But I still don't know what to do with Andy in a few days soon I'm gone. Well, I'm not going to get perplexed about it, I'm supposed to be nonchalant. I also have plenty of time. But I should at least write RS and tell him to take care of Charlie if I get all absent and stuff. "Look at that, Andycharlie, that church. That church I saw before with the leaning lazy tombstones." I like that, Andycharlie, a good name. I like it. I picked up Andycharlie to cross the street. I decided to pay a visit to that tiny cemetery. See what's up. Cemeteries relax me always for some reason I'm not informed about.

We crossed the street well again, no repercussions, nothing. I put my buddy down low to the cement in case his blood got circulated down while I carried him. I should have thought of that before. I'm standing right in front of a four-foot wall. Four-foot and some, trying to figure out how to negotiate the height. Because the wall seems to go around completely. I'd go around the building church thing here, but buildings change if you get around them enough. I might lose my perspective. I wish Andycharlie would make some kind of leading move. How come buildings outside and inside have more squares than rounds? Everything's square this square that square. I tossed one leg over the wall, heaving up with my hands. I laughed, it was clumsy like a slow-motion high-jumper that forgot to dismiss his gravity. I'm up, almost mostly. Yes. Sniffing---how did you get up here, Andy? I got up on my feet looking at the slanted tombstones as I went up. I hesitated to look around, make sure I wasn't trespassing without permission. Looks all right. We walked up together between the graves. I stopped quietly. Andycharlie

said something?

All I heard was myself hearing nothing. I decided out almost starting to get scared to preoccupy myself with something in my head. Maybe because the first thing that I thought of was that I was hungry. I'm glad it wasn't that I'm thirsty. Anyway what I thought of was Jimmy Kurtzen. Actually it was more like Jim than Jimmy. You might say Jim was a friend of mine. A warmly developed acquaintance. No actually better—a friend. That's right for sure a friend. Jim was, probably still is somewhere, this uncontrollably smart, very smart guy I knew from delivering groceries. He went to Europe Italy somewhere to write some kind of graduate thesis. He was supposed to write how underprivileged the poor Italians were. I don't know for who. I'm sure the poor already knew. But at the time that he was halfway through his writing he got involved with overly struggling workers. You know helping them with their causes and providing them with some incentive ideas. I guess you might say fermenting trouble. He eventually with encouragement got moved to England where it was easier helping the workers who spoke the same language. Even if not for the same different reasons. Eventually again with time passing the way it does, Jim got more eager and quickly became a specific available nuisance to the authorities. Jim says England's got a Constitution of freedoms and stuff, but it more subject to interpretation by convenience. Jim got deported back to America in time to be got rid of. He got exiled. Anyway I used to help stack his groceries and stuff. Because Jim had gotten sad about things that got in his way, like life. Jim was much older than me like fifty years old. He used to read a lot and watch TV with considerable determination. Jim said it was his existentialist mantra. I didn't know those words. And I wasn't in the mood to add to my vocabulary. But that existentialist has come to haunt me in some disguised way. But I haven't gotten to the specifics of it yet. Jim is Jewish—that's what he said. Which is probably true because he didn't brag much. But he never went to a synagogue or any place like that. Nor got invited. But you know you don't have to be very religious to be devout in the Jewish religion. Which to me is inspiring—being

effortless with God. One day I invited Jim to go to Lutheran Church for some variety which I myself appreciate and sometimes enjoy. I thought Jim might like to get out and respond to some thing on the lively side of breathing. Those Lutherans can get pretty articulate and sometimes they even make sense. One thing though and I feel very strongly be done outside. Try to tell that to an air-conditioned minister. Jim said no. This time shaking his head to either side with a strenuous smile going along for the ride. Then he said to me, somehow at no surprise to my anticipation, "Chuck you know that holy water has germs in it." I didn't hesitate and without further encouragement said in defense. "Sure Jim but they're in a state of grace." Jim then hesitated himself and then not resisting his reaction any further started to laugh. Jim finally recovered himself he put his arm around my should and we walked out the door. Not in a hasty way, it just his way of telling me it was time for me to leave. At the door he said I'll see you next week. I said o.k. and left. I guess I'm sitting remembering these memories because I miss Jim Kurtsen. I miss everybody. How many people do you have to miss before you start missing yourself. It's excruciating beyond repair. It really is. I got up, motionless was starting to get to me.

I wonder how dark it can get. Now what, not him again. Walking around here like a seeing man in a blind world thinking about Adolph Hitler again is unnaturally irregular. Maybe even existentialist. I should try to find out what existentialist means before I become one to late. Another bump on my knee. "Andycharlie. come help me buddy. I don't have your advantages in the dark." Oh yeah that's what I immoral something. I said, "That's quite a lot for just one guy isn't it?" Jim looked at me for evidence of my decadence hidden from before. Jim kept looking at me severe and thorny. I tried to rally on my behalf and tried to explain. "Sure Jim this Hitler guy wasn't one to say excuse me with any regularity. And if he did you'd probably want to duck for a week. But he was human being." I further added that all those guys like Buddha and Jesus all of them, said be nice and forgive your enemy. I mean everybody thinks all the evil is been taken care of because Hitler got taken out of the action. But I bet

there are five hundred, no twenty five guys in just America alone who would be happy to take over for Hitler. And start goose-stepping like madmen. Plus then I said, in surprise to myself because I didn't know I knew that thought that you are equal in love for yourself, and others, to the love you have for the person you hate the very most. Jim called me a neo-fascist. I didn't rise to the occasion because I didn't know what neo meant. And I've learned not to ask for definitions during an argument. Because you'll get them. Nothing more happened, except Jim went back to drinking his Indian-jasmine tea from Brooklyn. And I got to relax around the available silence. I myself don't like arguing. Most especially when I'm alone in this severe silence and dark. But you know what Jim said next. I'll tell you. He said not yet satisfied with himself that I was illiterate. Just like that "your illiterate." I said, "How can I be illiterate when I'm not that well read?" Now that I think of it here, that wasn't a lot of sense remark. Under argument stress, I guess, I sometimes collapse with my logic. Jim then came back from the kitchen with some of his tea for me. Which surprises me pleasantly when people can be generous after too much manufactured strife. Then afterwards after the tea I excused myself saying no more about Hitler good or bad and I left with myself. People sure get excited about somebody they never met. See my theory is that people try to turn a guy like Hitler into the worst of evil so they can continue their own mischief in good comparison with a nasty guy like Hitler. Well anyway please excuse the wisdom it was unintentional, if it happened at all. Sometimes I just give up on myself and try to proliferate. But specially in the last few months I've tried to cut down on knowing too much. With going to Vietnam and everything, knowing unnecessarily too much can be unsettling to say the least. But I started to say how Hitler and his cronies, how they intrigue us being eager detractors. I even read in this book, a whole chapter of it, how Hitler and his girlfriend that Eva Braun might of escaped from the bunker to a better neighborhood. I hate it unnaturally when something is said that might be important without evidence to make it so or what. I even went to the library to find out more about Hitler maybe escaping with Eva. There was nothing to it very little. Even the

librarian didn't know about Hitler getting away. Strange I got frustrated and gave up for the moment. I decided to myself that if Hitler did escape, he probably had a hell of a time finding a job. I heard something moving in the dark. I braced myself for a predicament. And I'm a potential uninvited intruder. I whispered, "Andycharlie come-"

"Si." A voice.

"No." I added denying any evidence of my dilemma. No I added again without a voice, just for extra credit. I finally turned in the direction of the voice. A candle came towards me flickering. I tried to sit up more up on the pew. But I got elevated from myself, already past sitting up. I sat back down. I can see a face now, wrinkles. I'll give him the first chance at me. He's got the light. He belongs here. And I'm the predicament. I decided again not to introduce myself, that's nice. He's closer. He's closer to me. But I don't feel closer to him.

"Si...." He said again. He sure moves slow for a guy with burning candle.

I said, "Si gracias." He is a he. A priest maybe I think. He moved even closer and sat next to me precisely. I then remembered the priests in Mexico who were limiting to me. They always forgave me my words. But I never felt forgiven enough.

"How please can I help chu my son?"

"Oh yes well. Thank you father for offering to help me under these circumstances like me here." Good I got myself a whole sentence expressed grammatically and everything. I'm starting to feel potentially better. But he hasn't responded. Maybe could be he's savoring his words. Should I tell him I'm a potential Tourist American from another country? I can hear the candle wax dripping. Could be maybe he thinks I didn't answer his question. I almost moving my lips told him I came looking for my dog. I decided to omit the truth for something better. Why incriminate Andycharlie when incriminations aren't part of his routine.

"You asked me Father why you can help me here right?"

"Ches." God he's old. He might not outlive the candle. That's not a nice

thought.

"Father I actually was going by here with my ...friend Andycharlie. And I saw your tombstones out there. And I came inside to express my concern about they're being fading and leaning away the way they are. I thought maybe since I'm going to be dying, no actually might be dying in Vietnam-I could offer to help rehabilitate the tombstones. You know like help from one willing corpse to another?"

"Chu are confusing me my son."

"No problem Father, it happens to me all the time. I'll try to be more organized around what I'm saying o.k.? Well, I'm a soldier. I'm actually an insured soldier on his way to an uninsured war. If you know what I mean. And I might die in this war. It is after all the upper most purpose of a war. Dying as much as possible. Excuse me father I'm not good at recalling my own inopportune death. I was saying anyway walking by I thought the nice people buried outside were probably heroic being that they were buried next to a church."

"Ches I tink I undertan."

"Thank you father it's nice of you to talk it encourages me." I cleared my throat slowly. I think the candle smoke was suffocating me slowly. The combination of smoke and strangers always gets to me. "And so what I'm wanting to say Father is my death?" For some reason the priest brought the candle closer to his face. He got even older. Older beyond figuring out the age, like when wrinkles interrupt each other trying to get out of the way.

"Wha chu offer an say is generous my son." He stopped to catch his breath. I got a little nervous the way he was breathing, like he meant it. "Chu no havt to worry. We will repec chur wishes. And we will pray every day for chur safe return. Art chu a catholic my son?"

"Oh sure, I mean I was baptized a baby in an obligatory way as a catholic. For sure I was. But now I mediate I mean migrate between different church and synagogues even. To see what is available and happening."

"Ches I understand." He started to get up slowly. Very slowly. I didn't

want to get up and beat him to the top with all his effort. I'm still waiting. All this time suddenly I realized I'd forgotten about Andycharlie. He can't be trapped in here, without any proper facilities. I rose fast to my feet.

"Father I have to get going . But before I do. I'd like to catch up on my understanding. I don't like to ask questions before I ask them. I mean I asked a question you might not of answered. This is the Basilica of San Jose the sign said? And also about the people outside, you know with tombstones, were they heroes in someway?" "Ches ches." He sat back down slowly. Jesus I've strained him. "I'st the Basilica de San Jose. As ches da people outise dey more dan a hundred chears ago died helping da poor wit a plague. So dey art God's heros."

"Wow God's heros. I suspected something like that. But not that good. I'll be honored to send them some money upon my death. Sure that'll be good. Well father thank you. It was very nice meeting you, you've been very generous and polite." I held out my hand for a handshake. But nothing happened. I couldn't myself see my hand. I retrieved it. Coughing unintentionally. "Well again bye father." I turned away. "Oh yes father just so you and I know. My name is Chuck Winters from the United States. What is your name if I may ask?"

"My name is Father Eduardo. An my son we wilt pray for chu. An for chur safe return." "Thank you...thank you very much father. And don't worry we'll work it out for those tombstones one way or another. Even if I survive. I think he said "Ches" as I back-tracked in the dark. It's funny walking backwards in the dark seems to work better. I guess it's the retreating idea. God I hope I haven't lost Andy. He wouldn't understand. Andy might think he lost me. Bad problem when the solution is a problem. It's not a problem till it is. I think this is the door. "Bye father," I whispered loud enough. But there was no response. Father Eduardo he said. And they were heroes too much. I pulled easily on what I hope is a door handle. Daylight, I squinted, my eyes closed. On my leg. I looked down. "Andy was wagging his tail like a madman. "Let's go Andy. We've done all we can here." I felt like clapping my hands. Like I was accomplishing things, one thing after another, getting organized. That's what I felt like, generous and accomplished. Would have been nice seeing Eugenia

again though. But that's fate. And fate is part of love. Sure it is. Andy and I walked around the graves so's not to step on anybody unnecessarily. I liked that Father Edward a lot. Old age suits me, specially on other people. I sat down on the stone wall to plan maybe what to do next. Andy sat next to me. Sat better than I did. That's why we have furniture. "Andy you and I seem to have worked out a real nice rhythm between us. Hanging out and everything. I know when to pick you up. You waiting for me. That's great." I nodded at Andy. He licked the air in my direction. I turned around and looked at the graves behind me. "Isn't it great to accomplish something in your life before you die Andy?" I sneezed hard. I hope I'm not coming down with something. I'm hungry again. I looked back over my shoulder again. You know I bet, they even got nuns in those graves. Most of them are young too I bet. Nuns usually are. They like them that way. I wonder why they don't take saints in groups, just individually at once. I don't know, maybe the rush would scare them. I wish I had asked Father Eduardo and risked the answer.

Andycharlie and I got uneventfully to the restaurant. It was just across the street. An agreeable open air restaurant. So there was no problem with one of us being a dog. We're just waiting for the waiter to acknowledge us with a menu. I don't like waiting. I guess I've got impatient genes. Hungry has a way with me. Did I shave this morning? Yes I did. Both sides good. I almost looked over my shoulder. But I stopped in time. Making somebody hurry is worse than waiting. Impatience is like waiting in a hurry. Relaxing in spite of yourself is the way to go. You know I'd like to accomplish more in my life than die conveniently and leave things behind like useful money. But I don't know if I even have enough time to think about it. But in another past time with what I know I could be incredible. Even with a following kind of incredible. No I wouldn't be a hot-shot scholarly guy like Thomas Jefferson. And he was contemporary to himself too. You see I don't know if the sun rotates around the earth or the other way around. And I don't much care since there isn't much that I can do about it. So if I got transplanted to another time I wouldn't have a lot of hefty information that would be of any value to anybody. I'd probably be

followed around by a lot of people saying "So what" and "big deal." I might have settle for being a very minor league forecaster like Nostradamus. Sitting not fully dressed in the customs of the time sitting with a bowl of fruit in front of me-offering people some kind of future thought that might please them. Of course if I got removed back early enough with the real pre-Egyptians, maybe they're called Mesopotamians, I could introduce elementary mathematics. Sure that has potential. I might be later acclaimed by some Egyptians with a pyramid named after me or a water fountain. At the very least I would get some nice pre-Egyptian house with a nice pre-Egyptian wife and a lot of savory fruit. But if you actually want to be accurate about the whole thing it might not work at all. I mean you have all these amiable pre-Egyptian songs. And I show up from nowhere dressed in a nice silk leather gown with a too heavy necklace around my neck. Which I can't get off for some reason, but I'll deal with that later. I hope it's not a problem. But if you're going to teach somebody a lot of elementary mathematics you have to dress the part. Irregular and fancy like. Mystique I think they call it. Maybe not. The details can wait for later. Of course I'm no fool ripe I am with all this addition stuff. I start cautious and slow. I come up during their herb break and introduce myself cautious and slow, real slow. And after we're all amiable and calculated I say, "Have you all heard about this new two plus two stuff that's going around?" And of course they'd say "No Amos we haven't why don't you tell us about it." Of course they wouldn't want to let up they hadn't heard anything, That's outright human nature. If you're ignorant you don't want to take all the credit, specially if you know something curious yourself. They'd say then, "Oh yeah." Eager-like. And I'd sink my sandals into the soft red clay of the Nile. And I'd say "Yeah," it be murder not to.

Then slow after walking around into an almost full circle I'd sit down on my haunches. I don't know what haunches are. But I'm sitting down anyway erect like. Then I'd start elucidating like a madman on addition. Feeling pertinent as hell-too late to be humble because I'm already on the multiplication tables-just to show the incredible potential evolving here unsupervised. I'd finish up

a little tired saying, "Sure with this addition stuff you can even figure out how much stuff you have. And how much stuff you want in the future time from now." And they'd say "no." And I'd say "Yeah." And I'd be known as Two plus Two no longer Amos, out of unregulated affection of the people. I'm sure Two plus Two sounds a lot better in Pre-Egyptian-much better. The first name was just the error of my mistake that's all. But of course its not my bad luck it's human nature again. No my bad luck also. I'm not satisfied. Out of an incredible blunder during a conversation I do a little subtraction. Maybe after a love affair that didn't get matriculated, I start doing a little melancholy subtraction. And the subtraction spreads like wild fire set by instantaneous combustion. People instead of saying I've got twelve bushels of wheat they'd be saying I'm short Two from subtraction. They'd be saying look at the Pharaoh's lazy son he's got a hundred slaves and my wife won't work on Sundays. It would go on on and instead of people adding their heads off-they'd go around subtracting till their ribs were showing. And sure with everything disappearing around them through their calculations they'd come looking for me with the usual human inclinations. No ceremony no introductions they'd execute me formally with a lot of rusty spears-that don't miss. My crazy grave would read here lies Two plus Two we gave forty two-on purpose. Then in lettering underneath it would say. "May he subtract in heaven." I looked at Andy. "You see buddy," these heroic fantasies never work. Maybe I'm too honest for my own forgiveness. I'm not in the actual accounting reality of it all a very honest guy. Just enough to regret a missed opportunity to be honest. What are you going to do?

"Hey buddy, I mean companero?" He turned around. I brought my hand down from waving. It was that young beggar kid from the other day. The runner. He's stopped leaning away. "Quieres comer conmigo?" I asked if he wanted to have some lunch with me. He's shaking his head a definite no. I shrugged my shoulders. He said "No" with a devil's kind of a smile and started away. I called out "postre," in case you want to know that means desert. He stopped, the top half of his body toppling on ahead of him by a foot. He turned around, the smile now, was near divine. "Postre seguro," he said pulling up a chair. The

metal table came up barely to his chest.

"Como te llamas?" I asked him his name. He was still in an easy intense smile. "Quiero mucho helado...much." He made a mountain-like pile with his hand over the table. He's saying he wants an unbearable amount of ice cream.

"Sure you can have all the ice cream you want, that's no problem and it's reasonable." I slipped into English by some brain mistake. Probably giving permission mistake. "Pero como te llamas, tu primer nombre?" I'm still trying to get his name so I could give him mine. He looked at me a little suspiciously.

"Why chu wan to know my name eh?"

"Just as a courtesy, so you can know my name. All you have, actually don't have to give me is your first name. It can even be a fake first name. You know so we can talk to each other in a naming kind of a way."

"My name is Philippe. Wha chu name" He tossed his head up a little with the last sentence.

"My name is Chuck...Chuck Winters, mostly from America. But born in Mexico when I was a kid. Obviously I guess right?"

"Wha chu art doing here in San Jose?" Philippe asked looking over my shoulders probably for the waiter.

"I'm here in San Jose with myself on vacation before I go to Vietnam to be a soldier." I got out of control by the end of the sentence bragging a little. Philippe is still looking at me, kind of intense like he was witnessing something he was thinking.

"If chu art a soldier? Chu art going to die. He paused for more calculation, Dat Vietnam is a war right?"

"No I'm not going to die. Why should I die? O.K. sure I might die, it's possible, but not likely since I'm going to be working in a laboratory, not with a rifle or anything like that. Anyway you're just a kid. What do you know about soldiers and stuff and war? That was just a question you understand. By my way of wanting to know." Jesus it's enough I've become preoccupied interested in death without other people promoting it around me.

"I'm no jus a kid. Chu are a kid goin to war."

"I'm not just a kid I'm nineteen years old. Eighteen actually to be exact. But I'm planning to be nineteen soon." I felt confirmed. I love a good argument when I win. I noticed in my peripheral vision the waiter. I started give the order when my very young friend said, "fine o.k. chu say I'm a kid. I say chu art a kid. We are both kids o.k.?"

I looked down from the waiter and over to Philipie. He dumfounded me. I can't argue with my peripheral vision preoccupied. I never have. That's one of the reason's why I can't dance too well on dance floors and other crowded places. It's not important. I shook my head to organize myself. I looked up to the waiter.

"Por favor para mi tres cosas de helado. Y para mi amigo mucho mas helado."

"Mucho exactamente." Philipe added with smiling emphasis.

"Si senior." The waiter said a little to solemnly for ice cream and left. I've got to look up the word "scoops" I told myself.

I leaned forward some. "Listen Philipe." I started in a strained devoted whisper. "Let's do a compromise...I'm a soldier and you're a lawyer. How's that for an o.k.?"

"Sure dat's o.k. alright. But chur goin to pay for the ice cream right?"

"Of course that's right. You're my guest what else . How'd you learn to speak English so well for a lawyer your age?"

Philipe laughed a little bit of a sprinkle water fountain laugh. "I learn from watching dat TV in da store. Little Joe Cartwright, and some Paladin wit Have Gun wilt Travel. Oder stuff too I learn a lot." Philipe dropped his head to make and exclamation mark.

"That's great. Well aren't you in school or what? How old are you anyway?" The ice cream came appropriately as ordered. Philipe got his mountain of ice cream and I got my three scoops. I realized just no didn't order the flavors. No matter, Philipe looked up at me, his nose just above the peak of his ice cream and said. "I'm wha chu say eight chears olt maybe nine. And I no go to school. I come from El Salvador to become a success."

I put my spoon down. "You've got to be kidding me Philippe. I myself am in the process of becoming a self made man. This is incredible."

"Chu can no be a self made man." Philippe stopped in the middle of a scoop to look at me. He was half amused and half angry.

I put my spoon down again. I looked away and then back. "Now what. I mean what makes you possibly think I can't be a self made man, when I'm already started."

"Chu can no be a self made man because chu art already rich, dat's how."

"That's ridiculous. I'm not rich anyway , my father is. And I'm not sure he is rich. He might just be affluent and once one time rich"

"What chu say aflu afluen-"

"Affluent Philippe means you're redundant about things. You have everything you need and have started repeating yourself. Maybe excess is the word, luxury too, a little bit. I don't really know Philippe. I'm on an allowance that's generous that's all. I'll probably be the only kid I mean guy in Vietnam with an allowance. I'm kidding of course Philippe my father just sends me money whenever I ask for it. So it's not a routine allowance." While talking away Philippe was eating away his ice cream. He dropped his right hand to his side and scooped away with his left. Just the way I do it too, for balance and perspective. Except I'm almost always right-handed.

"Dat's why chu can not be a self made man. Because chu got extra ready help. To be self made man chu got to have nothing. An dat's da truth."

"Philippe you've got some ice cream on your nose."

"Dat is no important."

"Good I respect that. Well in regards about what you just said Philippe about nothing. There are different types of nothing. Not just money nothing right?"

Philippe swallowed some ice cream and licked his upper lip. "Ches o.k. wha chu say. But money, lota money help de other nothings mucho."

"Sure I see what you're saying. I think I do. It's all about that struggling stuff. You can't get to be self-made even close without some

substantial struggling. And money interferes with that. God Philippe what are you doing?" I felt unnecessarily startled. Philippe had risen to his feet and wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

"I finish my ice cream. Not I gotta go. Go on, chu know."

"Yes well...I understand. Listen Philippe this is what I'd like to do I'd like to write you a letter from Vietnam. And-"

"I no have a place to write to. "Philippe was getting impatient.

Me too and nervous. "O.K....o.k. well then this is my idea. I'll write you in care of the Royal Dutch Hotel. Send you some money for some ice cream or what ever. For you and your friends. That's a good idea isn't it. And I'll let you know how Vietnam is going and stuff. All I need is your last name and that's it." Philippe stared at me for the longest time. And I watched him stare at me while thinking. "I understand Philippe you're traveling a little incognito. So I don't need your last name I'll just say Philippe in care of the Royal Dutch and I'll warn them you're coming. Is that close to o.k.? Not warn them really just let them know." He nodded his head up and down once and smiled nicely and warm. I got up on my feet and held out my hand. Philippe walked around the table and took my hand with his. We shook. "Thanks Philippe I've enjoyed our company. The best of luck in your adventures. Oh yeah great I'm glad I didn't forget. I also want to make a beneficiary in my will. Upon the event of my death in case you don't know you'll get some money." I smiled. Philippe joined his smile with mine. "I no hope chu die. But chu shoul take it easy." "I will thank you for the thought. And the thinking behind it." Philippe turned away and headed down the street. He turned around and waved from his shoulder. And moved down the street with his hands in his pockets. Isn't that something I hardly just met him and he wished me that I stay alive. And after making him a beneficiary too, I sat back down after realizing that I was standing up. I don't feel a lot like ice cream. Philippe sure swallowed his up, even most of the liquid part that got melted down. I'm going to see him again sure, like I said also write him. Maybe he'll write me. I should have asked. I don't know if you can learn writing from TV. Wait and see. I shrugged my shoulders for some reason. But they didn't

shrug much.

I went back to finish my ice cream. What flavor is it, some nutty thing. Philippe did say some potentially very interesting things about getting to be a self-made man. My problem all together is I think that in America they don't pay much enough attention to personal freedoms. The unregulated variety that get much more trampled on more easily and with there being no recourse to do something about on your own. See it's much easier to break a law if it's not a law, if it's just a habit or custom that got popular. I understand, I know I do, all about freedom of speech and about freedom of speech gathering and private religion-I know all that. And I think that they're pretty good ideas, considerate and all. But those forefather guy's didn't say anything about the real personal rights to be yourself free and relieved. Sure it's great that a woman can speak up her mond and get help with the recourse of it all. But try saying it at the dinner table. Specially if you're planning some non-profit result for yourself. What if you just want to go to a shopping mall and not shop, just watch for the eventualities forever. Right away someone will come up to you eventually and try to help you. Freedom is fine if you don't need somebody else's consensus getting worked up. Husbands opinionating themselves against their dormant wives. How about that? Shouldn't there be some freedom not to shut up without raising you voice? How about parents raising their uncomprehending children until it's too late adding something yourself. There should at least be some kind of warning label on parents. Something brief like on cigarettes. That Benjamin Franklin should of done more foreseeing than he did. Freedom of speech great I love it. But does that mean you have to be stuck with freedom to listen? Like in the military. All the freedoms seem to be in half. How about opinions? What exactly are they about? If some bad breath guy comes into your house with hair on his knuckles, even if he's a friend, and starts to rearrange the furniture and stuff. You call the police when he won't stop. But what if he's there and starts to rearrange you with his opinions. Then what? Nothing that's what because there are no Constitutional freedoms about it. How about a Constitutional freedom of sustained silence. No the

founding father's got to incomplete about it all. Bottom to the ground bottom line if somebody gives you your freedoms you're not free. No you're not free cause you were already born that way. Free and unencumbered waiting to be perturbed. And I'm just an old kid and I know these things. Give me a break. That Mister Depace would understand if I could right now talk to him. Mister Depace was our English and history teacher at Ponus Ridge Junior High School. He was an almost major league baseball player. Pitcher I think. I miss him. I liked him. He cared a lot for a busy teacher. Easy does it caring too. I hope he's alright in heaven. He died unnecessarily of something. Jesus how can this table be so empty if I'm still here? There should be a better way to end your life than dying. Specially if you're wanted for some good reason. I got scared quick beyond myself calling out "Andycharlie." Oh good I'm relieved he's right here. Great that's all I need a tragedy more than my impending self happening. I looked around for a reason to relax. Well it could be worse. I wish I hadn't of said that.

I got up to leave, pay the bill and leave whatever. Andy jumped up efficiently on my pants leg. "I have no complaints with you along buddy." I petted his head. Good the waiter came with the bill. I didn't feel like conversation in any language so I just paid and smiled. I left a tip and moved myself on. Moving helps you get the impression, maybe it's not an impression more a suspicion-that you're going somewhere. You know this happens to me quite often, I'll be literally talking to some friend or acquaintance and they'll get right up and leave. Maybe saying goodbye but no substantial pre-warning. Not a hand single nothing. Just leave gone away and left. And of course you never know if you're going to see them again-the circumstances of life being what they are. Even if they say see you later. You never know. Then I get this severe alone feeling that says you're about to be alone with yourself. If you don't understand maybe you're one of those or I never met anyone with your particular approach. But the overall strange thing about it is that I don't feel that way with two or more people. No it's always those strange one-on-one situations involving usually one other person. Sometimes I meet them in my memory. The

remembering part, not the forgetting opportunity part. You spend some usually generous time together. I like it when people co-operate in your fantasies. Sometimes for me they don't. I guess I'm sometimes too honest. Why am I getting myself into fantasies? I'm evading myself. But about that pronounced leaving predicament, I did say to myself once why am I getting all the left behind and they're doing all the leaving. So I tried leaving politely with substantial warning. And I did get up and leave. But after ten-twelve feet of getting away, I got overcome and convoluted by the feeling that I was alone-just in a different location. And you know what I'm standing there figuring this out and someday comes up to me and then leaves. Sometimes I just feel like a strange weather vane in strange unfamiliar winds. But you know what I've been left behind by some very nice people. So I'm not having any complaints.

I switched my pockets to my other hands. No my hands to my other pockets. I'm waiting trying to look nonchalant while Andy pee's on some immobile object with considerable determination. I think peeing to them is much more important than it is to us. They leave communication directions to each other that way-I think. Maybe that could be it actually they pee-we think. Sure that might be a breakthrough without my knowing it yet. I straightened up a little. I'm leaning on this lamppost. Good Andy is through with his observation. We got back to walking aimlessly. I shouldn't say we. Andy probably knows exactly what he's doing. I tell you if death is anything like this no wonder people get dissuaded from it. And that's without counting the other drawbacks and inconveniences. I decided to follow Andy to where we end up. Where he's going. See what kind of luck he has more than me. "Andy be careful!" He crossed the street like a butterfly deft-graceful like over a pond. I looked twice to both sides and ran across. Andy was waiting for me on the other side. Which is a relief. "Hi boy thanks for waiting." I patted his head. I got afraid I thought the way crossed he was trying to escape my friendship. "Andy let's go into the park woods." We moved simultaneously together right towards the trees. I can use a little time away from determined civilization. Be with some agreeable trees and privacy. I ducked under one tree branch which was hanging considerably

too low. Andy is a good wanderer. Of course he's much better at scenting himself around than I am at wondering what I'm doing. This is good. I like aimless when it's in motion. Maybe it's not aimless enough if I'm following Andy. I wish I knew more about detailed evolution so I knew more from where I stood. And for what reason of course. I moved some weeping willow trees from my face. "Take it easier Andy, I'm only human you know." Andy turned around nonchalant, looked at me and continued with his wandering. Out of nowhere except that it was nearby, a radio, transistor-like played that song "The Happening." I love that song, it took me over feeling happy and inconsequential. God I wonder what Eugenia is doing in that Guanacaste place. Could be possibly maybe that at this very moment she's thinking of me. The song stopped fading, it's gone stopped. Could be Eugenia is even thinking of me with a good reason. "The happening...." I sung under my breath. I sighed, too loud even for the park woods. I like sighing very much. Sighing to myself relaxes me and I think gives me a warning perspective about impending things yet to come. You can also perspective the people around you when you sigh. A lot of people sigh when-no I'm not going to start that stuff again.

Andy and I have been walking another fifty minutes more or less. More less than more to be accurate. Sure close to fifty minutes from what I could tell of the position of the sun, the deep depth of Andy's foot prints and the regulation shape of my heavy breathing. Andy is indefatigable. Of course it's easy for him. He doesn't know what indefatigable means. I dodged a second branch the second time from once before I think. I'm not altogether sure I know very exactly what indefatigable means myself. It might mean, if I'm sure, that you're into somebody else's fatigue in an insincere way. I stopped to collect myself and my breathing. It's not that I'm out of shape. Ducking and dodging, bending over generally, affects the inhalation rhythm of my preferred breathing. I sat myself down against a tree. Sometimes moving around aimless can be very helpful. Sometimes not. It gets comical and pathetic. And at most of my expenses. I'm not good at being lost. I get depreciated quickly. And I get myself to walking quicker and more desperate like. Then you just get nowhere faster sooner. You

get more anxious and worser about everything. I know worser is not a word, not yet anyway. Though if someone wanted my vote I'd go hands down to make worser a negotiable word. But you see that's one of the first signs of wandering desperation-your grammar begins to go. Enough lost time and you find yourself grammatically impure, even after you've relocated yourself.

I sat back down on my butt for the lack of anything available. I'd gotten up to wander while talking out loud. More pacing than wandering. I started mourning my own thoughts I guess. Bad thing to be pacing in the woods. I can now hear Andy's paws drumming against the leaves. It's hard to believe. Yes my available recollection is coming back. It was in woods like this that it started. Started a year ago my being incognito traveling in what I could only hope was in the service of my country the United States government of America. I was, has to be still am, being followed by two no three rogue FBI agents actually being over-employed by the CIA. But they're not actually KGB and then only maybe. Tracking me trying to get my whereabouts known and located. Only one of them knows, what's going on in spite of my need for rest. His name is Agent Grotto Ludicrous. Fat with a designer scar on his chin, he knows what I know, that the human society and all its subsidiaries is behind my apprehension and sleepless insomnia. He knows that I've got what I've got. The unabridged complete translation of barking into English. My God including slang and some of those colloquial things. The world's dogs are not pleased with us. They're concerned for Godsakes. And we've been gassing them. Gassing them to satiate our convenience. But powerful interest groups of fools have made a concerted effort to suppress the code barking book. They feel vulnerable exposed to the dogs opinions. They don't want to share the planet with a lot of articulate dogs that have never really been just barking. That's enough for me. Thank you available fantasy. "Andycharlie," I yelled out not too loud to contaminate the woods with noise. "Here he is." Faster that fast he's here. I dropped my forehead between his eyes. His tongue slurped happily between my nostrils. I laughed feeling happy and relaxed all at once. "Andy you're one of God's best cues." Andy I've got an idea." I got up fast. "Jesus ouch." A low flying

branch on my head. I rubbed my head. "That was unnecessary." I rubbed the branch. I don't know for some reason I didn't know. "Andy let's go back to civilization."

Andy and I took half an hour to come out of the woods. so maybe we weren't wandering for fifty minutes or so. Unless we were walking maybe in a circle that wasn't a straight line. But opening the bushes in front of me to the traffic make me feel accelerated, no more exhilarated. Very nice these woods for people who like to retreat without taking impressive chances. I've already made the same it's good, this decision. Maybe...sort of. I'm just going to try it out with some development. I'm careful about decisions, specially if they involve some too much action, a decision specially that makes entirely too much sense from the beginning. Those kinds of decisions don't have too much of a good reputation with me. I put two fingers to my lips to whistle down a taxi. I sounded like a tea kettle. I can't whistle. I just thought maybe this time I could. Everything requires practice, even failure requires practice till you get it right. I just have to be patient here, holding on to Andy under my arm. So the driver will know there are two of us involved. I got this idea realizing maybe what I knew. That only rich people hold dogs during traffic from what I've seen during my experience. Poor people don't. They let their dogs take their chances with them. I don't know who's right altogether. I'd say the poor. Almost all the rich people I've known circumstantially most of them-are very clumsy. Probably in part because they rely on their minds instead of their brains to make an exaggerated living. Also because I tend to see them at parties partially intoxicated. Partially usually does it for them though as far as clumsy happening. Except for the experienced drinkers, they go right past clumsy to talking about the Republican party like it was something real instead of just people bargaining themselves away.

"A taxi stopping." If I'm not lucky I won't ask why. Any sooner and it would have been right away. Now I'm feeling good. I feel momentum all over. Andy looks good too, we should be there soon. I don't know why I think that. It's enough that I prefer to, sure why not. I prefer to. I did give the driver

the address. Sure, why else would he be moving in a direction. Jesus I've got to brace and organize myself. Seeing a private detective again, even a nice one, unsuspected and with a reason-I've got to be at my best organized. I'm getting nervous. Enough to squirm unmercifully. I'd be awful in a police line-up. I'd identify myself just to get it over with. I wonder if a woman ever met her husband through a police line up. Sizing somebody up and getting allured all over the place. Good we're here. I'm glad I stopped worrying. I paid the driver generously. And Andy and I exited ourselves. If this doesn't work. I don't know. I started to think. Not really think, more images of Eugenia. Gentle breezy images like flowers in a generous uncrowded garden. I tried to recover from the images after I put Andy down. I feel lonely when I'm scared. I much prefer being lonely when I'm with someone else. I feel less condemned. I looked apprehensively at the front entrance of Señor Fabes' building. I'm still looking now more than before, which was more than glancing phase. I'll look till I get calmed down or bored with being nervous. I wonder whether it's better to die being a premature virgin or die being a virgin plus one encounter. I'm just thinking like this defensively to keep myself from a decided action. You wouldn't think would you that being a virgin would get remedied by just one night. A partial night to boot. You wouldn't think that, on just the momentum alone you wouldn't think that. One of my feet moved forward. Just my nerves claiming me for their better use. "God," she was the love of...that Jim Kursten, with an unregulated Freudian slip. He was talking about an affair he'd had with his next door neighbor. While married no less to his own wife. And he says reminiscing out of control," she was the love of my wife." I shouldn't of laughed audibly when Jim said that. But I get out of control when I'm around spontaneous knowledge that happens unintended. Enough now I've got to act. The hibernation congestion phase is over. I wonder if they have good taxi service in Saigon. What I know about Vietnam can be fit into a midget's thimble, with enough space left over for rental. You'd think we'd get to know people before we went to war with them. As a courtesy if nothing else. I'm stalling more. Stay here stationary any more and rigor mortis will take its stance on me.

What's Señor Fabe going to say? I don't want to think about what I don't know, specially with results intended. Specially with someone whose already started on opinion on you. "To hell with it. Here Andy." I clapped my hands. Andy ran and jumped into my arms. I said to myself do it now pay later. I cringed myself and moved. I trotted up the stairs.

I'm standing here with Andy under my arm waiting for my knuckles to knock. I knocked missing the door the first time. A sturdier voice than from before said "entrate."

"Hi Señor Fabe. It's me all over again."

"Yes my friend. Tell me please what can I do for you?" He sounded all over sincere. But that can be the problem I thought quickly. People don't always sound the words they mean. Or feel what they say. Or say what they think. It's called confusion.

"What did you say Señor Fabe?"

"Please sit down Chuck you appear unsteady."

"Thanks." I sat down still holding Andy. For his sake and mine. "You remember my name Señor, that's nice." I got up on my feet. "If you don't mind Señor Fabe, what I've got to say is best said on my feet while standing." I straightened my shoulders. "I don't know why that's true. But it is. Probably, has to do with circulation of some kind I don't know." I cleared my throat to organize my first sentence. "Señor let me say it simply, very simply actually. That it's like this, I don't have time to be gracious and overly polite. And as apologetic as I'd like to be under the circumstances. Under the circumstances that I'm referring to is that I'm going to Vietnam. And I would like you to appreciate considering this. Preferably by saying yes, but if by saying no...to say no as briefly as can be managed conveniently by conversation. Since I will need the left over time to think of some available alternative action for getting me and Andy here situated happily." I sighed demonstrably. "The request you might have already guessed, maybe you haven't. But either way it is that you take care of Andy my friend while I'm gone." I sat down exhausted. I almost got up realizing I'd sat down. "Thank you Señor for hearing politely my request on

behalf of Andy here."

"Yes," Señor Fabe was looking at the ceiling when he said that. But it wasn't that kind of a yes like o.k. yes. His eyes look merry and agreeable. I took a chance and got hopeful. He put his pencil down and shaped his lips into an easy relaxed circle. "Yes." He looked straight at me smiling. Sure o.k. that's the yes.

"I want to make sure I understand completely Señor. Yes, as in o.k. I'll take care of Andy?"

"I will be happy to take care of Andy yes." He stood up. "Here I will give you my card. You write me. I will write you. I have been thinking of getting a pet. So this will be good for all three of us."

I'm standing more than I have in a long time. "Señor I'm too speechless for words. I...I'm happy and way relieved thank you." I took Señor's hand in both of mine. We shook real well.

"Chuck what do you plan to do when you return from Vietnam? If you do not mind me asking."

"When I return from Vietnam. That sounds good. I wish I were already here. You mean a job and all that." Señor Fabe nodded. "I don't know exactly, maybe sort of work with my father somehow. But I'm not sure because I don't like business ideas the way they are. Particularly I don't like the business ways of people. Once this counseling person at the University of Maine asked me that question. I said I'd like to be a gardener. I a nunnery I thought. A nunnery like not a monk's place. I much prefer women in all regards to me."

"Why is that? Is there a reason?"

"That's it, there are almost as many reasons as there are woman. And the over-all nature's reasons. Women have more to do with birth and life than men. I'm sure that if women had more to do with war and the other destructions, we'd have a lot less over all unpleasantness. Women maybe lie almost as much as men but they get less pleased and excited over successful lies. I'm sure of that. And Señor Fabe ever since I was a little kid I always preferred breasts to belt buckles." Señor Fabe started laughing instantaneously. A pronounced hearty

laugh. Before I could tell him that was a joke. I waited while he wound himself down.

"Chuck you have some interesting ideas, you would call unconventional-verdad?"

"Yes unconventional is one of the more conventional words for off-the-beaten-path."

"I am surprised they let you in the military. You are a free thinker."

"Well yes I guess I am a free thinker Señor. Now that you put it that way. And actually they started to get formal ideas to try to kick me out of the Air Force. But I wouldn't let them. I coerced them you might say to keep me in. Now that I think of it, they probably appreciated that in me. I was terrified of one of their dishonorable discharges. That word made me cringe, dishonorable not discharges. But Señor talking about the Air Force makes me remind myself that I've decided to go back a couple of days early. Kind of to head start myself and be ready. It's easier being impatient back in the States, familiar the way I am about it, than here in Costa Rica. A country I'm progressively feeling more and more nice about. Here's some money to get started with AndyCharlie."

"No no. That will not be necessary. Andy will be my guest. It is that simple." But it is good that you are so well organized."

"Yes Señor I am well organized, very well organized, when it comes to people. But not at all when it comes to people with their yes is no and maybe isn't. It's not at all that I don't like people, after all you're one of them. It's just that they disorganize me with their available patterns. Could be I'm just short some of their adept skills like being organized amidst their meandering company. Señor...on the important side of this conversation. Please don't be afraid to spend money on Andycharlie here for an emergency or any reason really. I will repay you. If I can't father will, he's well to do about money. And he's very generous with me at his expense-" "Do not concern yourself Chuck. I am sure friend will be fine."

I stood up and extended my hand to Señor Fabe across his desk. We shook,

another good all around well done handshake. His, I have to keep practicing mine. I turned around to Andy who was sitting quietly next to my empty seat. I went down on my knees and cupped Andy's head gently in my hands. "You're an all good loyal dog. You and Eugenia and now Señor Fabe here are the best by far things that have happened to me since a long time ago." Andy climbed just below my chest. He stretched himself. "It will be great thinking of you Andy. Which I am thankful to you for." I went back up. Andy's paw's sliding off me. Feeling heavier much heavier going up. The gravity of sadness I guess. I smiled at Señor Fabe trying not to cry. "Bye señor." I turned for the door. "Bye Andy." I waved. "Better bye next time." I exited just in time to stay ahead of my feeling and hear the señor say "Good luck Chuck."

I hurried down the stairs a little sideways. Just I don't know why that's all. Trying to keep my mind free of consternation and any of its ideas. I made it to the last step realizing I hadn't watched at all where I was going. Not even enough to be surprised by the time I got to the last bottom step. I looked back up the steps. I shouldn't of. I got to thinking what Señor Fabe and Andy might be doing. While this, me on the way to Vietnam. What's the point of that Vietnam anyway? Why don't they give their wars closer to home? In better reasonable weather if nothing else. I moved out into the sun outside. The sun greeted me with like no surprise to either of us. Felt good warm touching on my face, my arms. Imagine saying goodbye to ten people all at once. They'd have to carry you away in homemade stretcher. I just have to keep my head and my mind free of any extraneous wondering around. I've got to be focused soon on being a soldier. Not obvious like in basic training. They were obvious at being obvious. I went through basic training twice at their preferred insistence. Eight weeks time because they said I was having trouble being transitioned. And they are right, I don't do good dependable transitions from being someone of my choice to being somebody else. Like even at summer camp. Somebody shows up without an introduction or an apology and they right off try to transition you to be one of them. At least at the University of Maine they let you fall apart on your own, unassisted-even unwitnessed.

There's a taxi. I raised my arm. Maybe he would prefer the other arm. He drove away empty. What I didn't get started telling you before when I interrupted myself with transitions--was about handshakes. At that Lackland place where we did basic training, maybe there were thousands of people, and not once a handshake of any kind. Not one. Hell must be like that on a bad day--no handshakes. No touching situations of any kind. Now you see that Señor Fabe had an altogether impressive handshake. Not a madman's grip--sturdy and well-landed. A sincere and dependable grip. He had a handshake that represented him the way he is. No, it's true I enjoy handshaking very much. I take it seriously in the way of carefully knowing somebody. It's the best way of getting a hint on somebody. But to tell you some more of the truth I'm not a very good hand shaker. Problem is of course that you have to shake somebody else's hand to reach being good at it. It's too bad now that I think of it that you can't shake your own hand. Get an idea a better one on how you're doing. You step into an alley and shake your own hand, get abreast of yourself if you're undecided or it's a close call. "See what's happen" as those hippies like to say. But from what I've been able to see a good handshake starts at the elbow. If you're off to a negligible start on what could of been a potentially good handshake. And of course it goes without saying, but I better say it anyway, you've got to be ready for the other guys handshake. I mean if it appears early that he doesn't know what he's going to do you could end up in real trouble and end up with the credit for a bad handshake. You might have to make some real quick mid-flight accommodations. They're almost unconscious they have to be done so quick. And if you do have to make movement changes you're left with a lot less time for the second part, to what should preferably be a good handshake. Of course you don't have to care at all--some people don't. You can just let the guy flounder and collapse into his own clumsy handshake while you witness it all dismally. Anyway the second part is the meeting and the joining. That's where the hands arrive and clasp each other agreeably. At least you hope agreeably. A lot of guys show up good but blow it on the grip. They get everything right the delivery--the adjustment and with the grip they get neanderthal. They try to prove they can

take care of themselves against everybodies odds. These guys grip so hard that the third part of a handshake is almost impossible. The third part I'm sure you already figured out is the shaking. I myself don't know too much about the shaking part because by then I'm too self-conscious concentrating on the alternative person to focus keenly on the movement of details. But I think pretty much all you have to do is hang on and hope for the lucky harmony of it all. And of course realize and accept that if it does go bad it won't go on forever longer that it has to. Finally the release. What you do is release slowly and evict or evacuate gracefully. You most certainly don't want to slide off slowly or you might end up with one of those curious sexual feelings that reputations are built on. The recovery of which is perplexing though usually brief. And eventually becomes circumstantial and a little negligent.

Now on handshaking women. I have absolutely no knowledge about how woman are in their handshaking. Because I'm not a woman. But overall from my side of me, woman and I are pretty good with handshakes. Under the right inspirations usually warm, firm but not grippy. An altogether friendly familiar handshake with nobody with wiser about the intentions. But one more thing maybe when it comes to handshakes you should never take them for granite. Even a much repeated handshake. You can just never know. People change, sometimes tragically unbeknownst to themselves with nobody telling them. And of course their handshakes change with them. Sometimes believe it or not the handshake is the first thing to go. Stay alert be ready to respond. And everything should be alright. Nothing's ever alright, usually barely o.k., if that. I mean there are always the unheralded flukes. You do everything right. You approach, deliver and grip. And you get wet. A wet moist hand. You can't help but wonder wet with what. You don't want to change your expression. But it does. Faces being what they are they always do. Always on their own to. Then there is one of the worst under regrettable flukes. The two-thirds handshakes. When for an unannounced reason one of the would-be handshakes is stopped before delivery. The other recipient guy slows approaching stopping. It becomes like two mannequins in a standing empty warehouse. A couple of a few weeks ago Mom and

Pop gave me a going-away party. I have to pause myself to think. Because I'm not entirely sure about myself why I mentioned that at all. Sure that's why I forgot and that's why I now remember it was unpleasant. You see sometimes you can defer a handshake to a smile. If you anticipate an unsuccessful approaching handshake you can give up a smile. It's that simple. So I thought. At the party two girls came up committing to a handshake. I already got completely deferred to a smile. They ended up two-thirds unfinished. My smile got avalanche to nothing. And I would of given up anything in the first place for a warm and inspiring handshake. I must of been distracted. What a shame, still now a real shame. I wish people in our country embraced more.

Well everything that was left over worked out perfect, as perfect as good luck gets. I told the nice desk clerk lady about Philip might be coming over to collect some random mail for me. Unsolicited she checked the flight schedule for while I was packing. I decided first to wear my uniform to get myself in the right mind reference. But I didn't. I didn't want to be myself in Costa Rica in a uniform. I didn't think of Eugenia while I was packing. Which was good. Then I realized that realizing I wasn't thinking about her was as good as thinking. And I got melancholy and slowed down. Then it was that I decided to wear my blue jeans and a nice light blue shirt. The blue was nice the shirt was just average. Why was I getting appealing with clothes I wondered out loud. I must be getting partially unconcentrated from my usual ways. I want to get started and get over Vietnam. But get something started over with that's one year. Specially it's being unnecessarily noisy and with bullets. Anyway I pack and unpacked everything twice. See what I forgot. I always do. I forgot my Webster's Dictionary and my can of Chunky Peter Pan Peanut Butter, that I'm very fond of at my age for the lack of better taste. Walking down the corridor, carrying the duffle in my hand, a waiter came up to me completely unsuspecting of good news. Pop had ordered a cake for me. Of course I was exalted beyond myself with sincerity of it all. First I said because I was pressed with lessening time, to split it up with all the waiters and busboys-everybody like that. Walking five feet away after a handshake I changed my mind. I thought I

should have some quick cake since it was thought of nicely for me. So I did hurriedly get more frosting than cake with two bites. But you know what? The cake said on it in red white and blue "To A Patriot." I wonder why they picked those colors. From there it was goodbye to no one in particular and a fast taxi to the airport. I even remembered, out of nowhere except my brain, the word "apresurate." The airport was an airport. Which I didn't get much to see because of being in a hurry and shutting down my peripheral vision.

The flight to LA was as completely uneventful as possible under the conditions of there being people around you. I slept through it, part of it. I must of been tired for some reason I didn't pay attention to earlier. A sudden deep-throated burst of coughing, never fails, my eyes are open like they're going to depart and run off from me. I just get this feeling that people are trying to say something and it comes out coughing. Strange I know and illogical, but when I get sleep interrupted I don't come up myself for a common sense award. Specially at thirty thousand feet, there's something primitive and desperate at all those thirty thousand feet. Even if I knew the why about it, wouldn't help me I'm sure. Maybe perhaps there just isn't enough why-quite yet in the why of me.

After I decided to take a chance on closing my eyes completely again, something regrettable happened. Regrettable enough to be unfortunate. We were served dinner. Chicken dinner. Instantaneously without the translation of a memory or anything I thought of Madeline and got remorse. "God no not chicken." I said out loud, enough for an echo if one had been available. But see I don't know if I should get into this. The death the intrigue of it, just to much to bare. But I guess if you can't tell someone the truth you don't want to be around what you're telling him. I was a kid with my family on vacation in Acapulco. Pop owned some hotel there name Los Flamingoes with some other guys. He always said he didn't own it, we owned it. But owning these things never affected my allowance appreciably much. Could be he was helping me be self-made. The dismembering scene, I made a face. And I saw it reflected on the porthole window things. Like I said I was just a kid not even aware that I was

doing kid things. Taking it easy in the hammock, eating all my animals like any hungry naturalizing kid. Maria walks by, the very nice cook lady with a moving jumping satchel. I said, "Maria what you got quivering in that satchel?" Maria open the satchel and showed me this all around breathing living elderly hen. She asked me outright if I wanted to play with her for a little while. I said, "Sure of course I'm fond of hens." So I did play with Madeline which is what I called her for a name to give her. I loved Madeline right from the start. She walked charming and proud like we rented from her or something. Reminded me mostly of that General De Gaulle after all the medals took over. Madeline went wherever she wanted to go completely. I followed her because she wasn't interested in following me. But after a while she acknowledged me. Possibly because I gave her some corn that I got generously from Maria. But to be truthful again in a regretful way even after Madeline acknowledged me directly--there was no question but that she was a slow learner. Understand I'm not saying that's bad at all. And I knew that before I flunked my first foreign IQ test. Which I got unprepared for by warning. No most slow learners get more places sooner because they spend more time at each place to learn. My problem, the problem was that I was at that time short of impatience. I got more and more frustrated because Madeline just didn't seem to want to learn anything she didn't already know. But she did hang around me. We developed a relationship that got abiding you might say. I would of given anything to know what her detailed opinion of me was. You know in their animal folklore ways.

I have to stop to collect myself around my memories. O.K., I can't remember exactly enough to tell you. But for some reason unavailable to me right now I decided to excuse myself from Madeline for a while. Maybe go swimming selfishly. I don't know. The truth is I abandoned her. Walking away looking over my shoulder she looked at me with sad perplexity. Time went by the way it does on its own for no good reason. And it was time for dinner. The usual dinner don't whistle at the table and eat what you must. After eating my self-determined share and taking my last gulp of milk I asked my parents simultaneously if I could be excused. Mom asked if I was going to play. I said sure I was going to

play with Madeline. Then Mom and Pop asked me, "Who's Madeline?" I said it was some kind of pet hen Maria brought to the house for companionship. They both looked at me with eyes they'd never shown me before. They leaned closer to me for their sake. I backed up as much as not running would allow. My father explained to me in these stationary words that "We" had pretty much eaten Madeline completely. I looked at Madeline's leg on my plate. If I was breathing I didn't know it. I was speechless without around me any word available. I waited at the table till everyone left. Holding my breath away from the food. And me. I tried to think generously that it was good I didn't eat Madeline's whole leg. But it was a very poor excuse for "I'm sorry Madeline." I got myself beyond crying for a chicken I'd abandoned and respected. The sadness got consuming me. I can still feel the sad about it after how old I am now. When I was sure I was all alone, I went around the table and gathered up all of Madeline's remains with careful respect. I took her outside and buried Madeline next to those flowers that make only a scent at night. I knelt down and said a prayer of forgiveness. You really don't know how much apology forgiveness you have until you've done something that wrong. Getting up on my knees a tear rolled down my cheek. I didn't really cry with all the tears you've got-except for the one that got away.

I don't know how much influenced I got out of my respect for Madeline's memory. But now and sometimes then I still say a prayer for Madeline as much a prayer as I think a hen can appreciate. And since then, which is a prayer in itself, I haven't eaten chicken or thought of it. But once. My family and I were at a roadside diner, you know quick and inefficient. I ordered my non-chicken preference. What did I get? Right, chicken, almost the whole guy. I worked at an overly private country club in Darien Connecticut, I know what they do with returned food to the kitchen. In the garbage can. So here I am with a recent relative of Madeline's fried and apart. So I ate the chicken against my resistance-I ate it all. I decided outright that I'd make a better cemetery than the garbage can. And I did. But since then I've been free of eating chickens of any kind. When I eat in a restaurant and they offer chicken I practice my

order out loud in my mind. And when it's my turn to order I wait for silence around me. Be patient and enunciate. Specially if you're in a restaurant that serves food faster than you can order it.

I don't know how exactly influenced I was by what happened between me and Madeline. She was no question one of the key turning points out of my life. Funny isn't it you'd think it would be a priest or a coach not a brief chicken eaten publicly. I think it's mostly about respecting life at no one's expenses. Any you know I'm in the process of becoming a complete devoted vegetarian. Now I'm just a partial one. I tried at Brian McMahon but not successfully to continue uninterrupted on purpose. I got immediately disorganized eating lettuce sandwiches and peanut butter and sometimes jelly. On this one day between classes that same girl that appeared and started talking to me about capital punishment, she's right there again. No preparatory introduction except breathing. She says to me after a shifting pause. Seeming taller about herself for some reason. She says, "I understand you're becoming a vegetarian?" I said, "yes." As briefly as I could. "Why?" She asks. I said, "Well because I like animals." She walked away without any noticeable about-face that I saw. Could be she moved off sideways. Strange...and you know I still don't know her name. Not even enough to guess at it. She still perplexed me. Still does when I'm available to myself that way. Oh on the risk that you might of misunderstood, I meant strange good not strange bad. And strange bad can be very good under the right inspirations. That's just what I wanted to say in addition of.

But listen I started to tell you about my turning points with Madeline. Two years ago I got started on an idea. A business idea of all things. From me no less. My very first one past lemonade stand and stuff like that. Out of nowhere, while leaning on the girl's gym door, my idea intended for me. I haven't told anyone this idea publicly in person. Regrettably because of possible encroachments and greed. I have all the variables worked out and all the follow-through almost. Except for my reservations about becoming rich. But in this country it seems unavoidable. Anyway this is what I figured. Most people are repressed unconscious-of-themselves vegetarians. I mean if they

understood the facts passionately they'd think twice before devouring themselves over a steak or some baby calf breast feeding from his easy-going intended mother. I ask you what would the carnivorous parents answer to the questions of their children. And there's the living sad story of Madeline culminated around her nice grave. But grave none the less. It's unparalleled disgusting. Anyway that's the legwork of the idea. The company itself is called "Death by Natural Cause Dishes." We'd have these refrigerated vans travelling carefully all over America picking up edible animals that got killed somehow like by car accidents. We'd go to farms by agreements and get all the cows that died of old age or died in falls and we'd gather them up with respect. After a reasonable time to give the other cows time to come to terms with the fatality. And of course we'd have all the Death by Natural Cause franchises centrally located. You could eat a hamburger without worrying about the premature cause of death. And you could feel quieter about yourself that your respecting chickens and the like, also for sure that will hesitate you more from going after one of us with your human inclinations. Of course you figured out the problem. You don't have to add two and two together, wait first I want to interrupt myself directly to tell you our logo. We have these eight fifteen second commercials. Long enough so that American's know they're watching but not exactly why. A cow munching grass happily in its melancholy way, a sheep in awe of what she sees, a donkey kneeling before the Christ child in the manger next to a rooster and some other buddies. That's right, an outright nativity scene. Just the way it happened. And then with each commercial disappears one of Jesus's companions. Then another. Being taken away by McDonald people and Burger King people, until the Jesus child is left vacant and alone-crying. I really think it would work. This company. I'm almost sure of it. At the very worst it has potential. I just decided I won't go into the available problem about numbers. Because the solution needs refinement and calculation. Maybe when I make it compatible I'll tell you. Of course when it comes to life you never really know. Just when you think you've got something to share with yourself on a regular basis-you realize you're lucky because you don't.

A little air turbulence. Just as the lady next to me got started lighting a cigarette. I'd go and try to go to sleep, but with the air currents which really aren't air currents, I'd get this smoke crawling up my nose to fester. I'm anyway a light sleeper with an unbearable disdain for alarm clocks. When I set an alarm clock for a predetermined reason that I agreed to, I always during the night get up four five times to see how much time I left for sleeping. It's ridiculous enough to be illogical I agree. I mostly don't like the machine alarming sound it makes in the morning. I try to stay ahead of that. There should be a merry pleasant agreeable sound. A welcome breeze sound. Maybe even the sounds of twenty handshakes. That's good I like that. When we were living on Richard's Avenue Pop used to wake RS and me by shouting "charge" from the bottom of the steps. That was fine a nice familiar sound like charge was just fine. It was the over-the-hill kind of charge, not the credit card variety. I'm sure it was. Yes I am I'm sure. I wonder how the Vietnamese get up in the morning. I don't know that's how. But I guess I'm going to find out sooner than...whatever. Somebody's coughing. They're o.k. now, only a slight altercation.

Soon has come and gone, but it should be soon now anyway. I mean arriving. The smoking lady left from my side almost an hour ago. I don't know why she left. Could be she read from some psychiatric hints I was making from my expression, that I didn't knowingly intend about myself. I just don't like smoke on me. Which I guess it's good I'm not artillery. But just now another lady is squeezing through to take the empty seat. Just when I was deciding about some sleep for myself. And I know this lady is going to want to be talking about life. Old women on planes always want to talk about life in the person of their grandchildren, always for some reason that beguiles me. You would think an innocent teenager on his way to be a patriot could be left alone for some sleep. I decided to impersonate a sleeping person that way I can at least rest up my body if not my mind. What gets me about these ladies and I don't want to appear small-minded, but all those photographs they show--all look the same. I try to appear disinterested, distracted even blind, but the photographs keep

coming. I'm not an unfriendly guy. I'm just not good at thirty thousand feet, specially if I don't like where I'm going. Once I got so contrived, between guilty and frustrated the way I was, that I yawned incredibly. Yawned incredibly less than two feet from the old ladies eyes. This was the kind of yawn that get's people thinking of caves and bats. I held my mouth open so long a guilty bystander could of auctioned off my fillings during my absence. This lady was not moved went right on with the crazy photographs. How could someone have five times more photographs than family members in one wallet? But I have no complaints the old lady next to me right now is asleep. And I'm awake anticipating her. "We'll be landing in LA International in just a few minutes." That was the pilot I guess, he didn't say for some reason.

We disembarked in Los Angeles through that funnel that looks like an engorging caterpillar. I remember the days of before when you got a plane walked down these reasonable steps and kind of carefully touched ground respectfully. You got the distinct feeling you reached a destination. You felt accomplished and located. But this way with this funnel thing you really don't get a sense you arrived somewhere other than where you got started from. Not tangible evidence really. I bet you, and I'm serious, quite serious anyway, that some all around vacationers and businessmen got on board through the funnel on a foggy day. And then two more hours later they landed in the same place for technical problems, everyone of course disembarking through the disengorging thing, I'll bet they wouldn't know for a week where they're supposed to be. Businessmen maybe would catch on quick. With their Wall Street Journals and calls to stock brokers. I have now possibly the more I'm thinking of it another business idea for my further consideration. Surprise Holiday Vacations. Why not, figure out where you are. Unlimited hints for your consternation. Get lost with friends and loved ones. At the end of the vacation everyone would be comparing eager notes on where they think they'd been. Who they met trying to figure it all out. How happily lost they were. Some would maybe think they were in other countries forget just what state? The captain as a company joke could say I hope you enjoyed the hell out of Hamburg Germany. What with all our immigrant population

being neighbors of each other-it's possible. I should tell you before it's too late for me to forget. I don't know if Hamburg is in Germany. My geography is awful specially when locating countries on flat maps. But I don't want to take credit for your ignorance that Hamburg is in Germany. And get you dislocated with that fact. I've been very responsible for passing on potentially intriguing information that turned out to be circumspect. Like about Katherine the Great, the auspicious and horny Czarina of Russia. I told people-way too many, influenced by unreliable information that got misleading by me, that Katherine the Great died of unnatural causes while having intercourse with a horse in her bathroom. I felt awful, awful enough to qualify for excruciating, that I passed around that compelling ignorance about Katherine. I don't know how she died. I'm absolutely sure it wasn't in the bathroom. About the horse part that's mostly probably not true. I've heard different stories from almost reliable people. But you know now that I remembered most people I talked to privately about Katherine and her horse got sickened or partially sickened at the idea of a woman like that with a horse. But I think really it works both ways. I'm sure the horse would of much preferred being somewhere else with someone more compatible. And if the story is true I wouldn't be surprised that Katherine didn't have to use the whip to get the horse in a convincing mood. Hard to say the details. Can't be certain enough to be unsure enough not to wonder about it. But either way I'm certain enough to be unsure enough not to wonder about it. But either way in the bathroom, if anywhere at all. It's just too entirely undocumented. But it's also the type of documents that get very hidden or destroyed. Probably by the cavalry.

We're landing again, this time finally San Diego. I got so occupied with my get-lost business deal and with Katherine's antics-I didn't pay immediate attention enough to tell you about Los Angeles Airport. There's nothing to say. An airport is an airport. If outer space aliens came to the planet earth to try to figure out what we're capable of, LA International is a good place to start. There you've got encounters of every kind. Everyone gets into the airport attitude. Everyone walks around, if you want to call it that, like the

bathroom's a hundred yards away and they've got fifty yard bladders. Even religious people with their shaved heads and orange robes get frantic around themselves. Even little kids get animated by no choice. Being dragged by the hand, heads bobbing up and down in one of those pouch things. And the eyes. If you could block out everything except the eyes you would report to the first surrender location. Sure well anyway hectic is the word. It got me thinking though about maybe it's a good idea for me to start psyching preparing myself for Vietnam. You know arrive with the appropriate mindset. Here it is the first San Diego bump. Forget my get lost vacations. I'm not sure enough they'll work. Another bump now straight away. But if you happen to think the vacation idea has some kind of potential you're welcome to it. Good luck I hope it works out for you.

I gathered up my duffle bag and got started out of the terminal. I expanded my peripheral vision as much as I could-just for practice's sake. And to refine my concentration about going to that Vietnam place. I shouldn't of said that I walked out, because I'm here standing in front of those hotel telephones with the glowing plastic signs. I guess I anticipated that I walked out but stopped realizing the need for a likely place to sleep. "Yes," I like this El Dorado after Costa Rica. I picked up the telephone. I put it down. Just like that in my mind I heard Eugenia say, "Duck chu no make a good soldier." That's exactly what Eugenia said directly to me and in my company. How can I be thinking about swimming pools and comforts, when I want momentum going the other way? And I already decided that. Jesus I'm slow, I looked at the screens to look for the seediest motel hotel around, with about-to-collapse accommodations. No none that much, this one some. Maybe it's just the sign though.

I picked up the phone. "Yes hello. Yes sure thank you. Listen my name is Chuck Winters and I'm calling with a question that I would appreciate the answer to. Could you tell me in San Diego please, a hotel that is even more raunchy than yours?" I put the phone down. I got a little dismayed. He said he couldn't give out that information. Harmless information like that and they can't give it out. What do they have some treaty between each other? Why do all

those hotel desk clerks always sound skinny on the phone? They should have three phones right here. One for nice reliable information. A second phone that says "don't bother." And a third phone that says, "I said don't bother." Sure and a fourth phone that plays "The Happening" around the clock forever guaranteed. I tell you at the Y-that's it my God...the YMCA. The good old YMCA. The other way momentum that I need can best be found at the Young Man's Christian Association. Understand or maybe don't understand, that's better. About the Y, it's not that people are derelicts and renegades. No not at all. It has more to do why people at the Y go there. Guys that need a shower and a bed after losing a job. Guys that got into a specific detailed argument with their wives and had to move out vigorously. A salesman looking to relax after not making his commission last month. And you have the guys that always know better than to tell you why they are there. They're the ones that are the most interesting. Because they're cautious and convoluted in their mysterious ways. I want you to understand something if it already isn't too late. I'm an observer with overflowing survival instincts about himself. I learned it's impossible not to notice the way people are. And I like to give people the benefit of my suspicions. Which when they materialize I'm very fair about. But I am under no circumstances interested in figuring out who's guilty and what punishment they should be treated to. Everyone's innocent as far as I'm concerned. Some more than others that's all. Some of course like to apply their innocence more on others, that's called making a profit. I guess that's human nature whatever that means. But you know what got me, more than somewhat when I was at the Y. Nobody asked me my particulars. First I decided they thought I was a pretty nice guy. Then I thought could be they think I'm one of those mystery people. Maybe they thought. I don't know what they thought. Sometimes not knowing is as much as you're going to know. And maybe lucky for your ignorance.

We headed for the taxi. We meaning duffle and me. Enough speculated thinking.

Specially with the delayed conclusion of it all. Listen if you think the boarders at the Y are a little on the severe side. Understand I have nothing

against severe-side people. It's just after a while it gets unsettling at the Y for memory reasons. Enough time and you become severe sided yourself. It's like by osmosis the kind you don't participate in, but gets you anyway. What I'm saying indirectly is that the people at the Y are o.k. and agreeable. But and this is a big but, the people working there are something to be cautious about. They talk to you in the matter of speaking that proves you're not there. Their manner is like cops lifting finger-prints at some personnel crime scene without your permission. Could be possibly I'm wrong. But when it comes to the Y I'm as expert as you dare get. I stopped resting putting the duffle down. I inhaled consciously for starters. And tried to clear my mind which for me is necessary for rest. Enough not enough rest. I tossed the duffle over my shoulder. I changed my mind. I'll drag the damn thing. Why take the remote chance of dying under the weight of my own clothes? Fall over, a heart attack whatever. End up with a mortician. Those people give me the unnecessary creeps. I've heard things about them. I simply just don't understand why they choose to harvest the dead if that's the word-instead of being a dentist or a ship's captain. Always with their acute mourning voice. And their dearly beloved faces. A dependable friend of mine told me that they're that way even when they've gotten to explaining the inflated dollars and cents prices for preparing some crazy body that once belonged to the person that left it there. They think just because they're working with cooperative bodies they can get away with anything. And they never have sales or specials like other businesses. Sure some appearances are important, but not after you're dead and beyond yourself left behind. This is going to get you, the same friend said, that they smell funny. Funny like that embalming stuff. I also heard some stuff they do on their breaks. But I don't know enough of the truth about it. So I won't get into that without more disgusting proof. I'm sure military morticians aren't that way. They just don't have the time. Me, I'm just going to walk into the Canadian woods with a passport and offer myself to the first available-deserving bear. For consumption after I've gotten a third opinion about me being terminal. That's the least I owe myself. My own dieng opinion. I stomped my foot hard. Look at me. Here

I am thinking all over again. And about my own terminal death no less. No, actually that's good bad momentum—sure morticians. What else could be more preparatory for the right mind set?

I tried to whistle again seeing a taxi. Unsuccessfully again. Good he's turning towards me. You don't have to hear a whistle you can see one. Where did all these other people go to learn whistling? The driver said it would take long. "Just downtown." He said when I mentioned the Y. I almost asked the driver about San Diego's YMCA, reputation and all. But I stopped myself with my mouth open. I decided surprise is an integral part of shock and devastation. Better leave things for the worse.

"Driver could you tell me something about San Diego?"

"Nothen to tell." He answered me in a near harsh almost unfriendly way. Well I thought to myself quietly, nothen is somethen or it wouldn't be a word. Very sad when people are unhappy in their anger and get forlorn about it all. It's almost like they've outlived their contempt for themselves. We pulled over in a sharp turn curve, half curve, no quarter curve. Anyway that was fast. I didn't even have time to think of something potentially helpful to leave by. I didn't even have time to think of something potentially helpful to leave by. I paid the driver in silence trying to be helpful of his unhappiness. He drove away reasonably. I hugged my duffle bag and tried to squeeze it up to one of my awaiting shoulders. I took two steps forward as I started leaning forward. Mistake I dropped the bag. Whenever I carry too much weight, specially somebody else's idea of weight—I always feel I'm taking the same step over and over again. You know instead of taking turn steps. Doesn't mean anything just my weight apprehension. Dam now what? I lost too much of my balance stepping over a crack. Duffle again is on the sidewalk. A hundred-and-forty-eight pounds of things, three more pounds than me counting the scale. Could be I'm more tired than I should be. I bent over and sat up the duffle bag perpendicular to me I think that's perpendicular, either way it's still the way it is-up. I balanced it on my shoulder to heave up. And up with a grunt and over my shoulder down my back. This is potentially embarrassing. I looked around to see if anyone was

watching with intentions of wanting more. All clear good o.k. I am tired. I'm in love, no longer a virgin. I made a lot of friends too quickly on short notice. I've underfed myself the last three four days. What else, sure that smoking woman got smoke up my nostrils which I'm not used to. I decided to drag my duffle. Pretty primitive and becoming dragging for a civilized anybody. Eleven steps to climb. Unusual elevation for a Y. Most Y's I'm familiar with like to get you at ground level.

I'm not winded after the eleven. But I feel trepidation all over. Not hesitating long enough I pushed pulled wood frame door. We walked in duffle and me. I decided a couple of recent years ago about these push pull doors-- just to take them on both ways. Because I have trouble on the spur of any moment deciphering the push or from the pull or what. They don't give enough warning-- just there it is the door. Should be like in twenty yards a sign that says, "you are now approaching a push pull situation." Then maybe in five yards, "Remember you are nearing a push pull predicament--ready yourself." So I go both ways. And usually it works. Problem is sometimes the door is locked. Then inadvertently to myself I get vigorous thinking to my unconscious that I'm getting them both wrong. Confusion gives up to confounded. In time I give myself up to recompose myself to my situation which I eventually realize is self-inflicted. But fortunately perhaps my recovery time is pretty good. And I go off to look for a more compatible door. Who invented the door anyway? They seem a little obvious to be that necessary.

I myself wouldn't mind being a ground level astronaut. Without elevating too much above myself. I have a serious fear of heights, specially if I'm potentially going down them. No I'm delaying myself. I feel undesirable motionless. "Enough that's better." I cleared my throat. "Get tough. Get ready Chuck." I sniffled hard with my nose the way boxers do and almost triggered my spitting response. "Move Chuck," I whispered terse, "you're here to protect your country." Sure enough I did. Right toward the desk with the slow hesitant moving lady. Has to be the only desk. "Excuse me?" I said not waiting for myself to wait. The old lady with not enough hair on her head so far

hasn't done anything with my excuse me. I dropped down and leaned my left arm on the black desktop. I'm a great leaner. I even lean real well in my dreams. I'm still waiting but slightly more impatient than before. Leaning works in better shoes. I cleared my throat with borderline aggression. It hurts...my throat. Everything needs practice even sometimes practice itself. I like that thought. Maybe I'll use it sometime. Maybe could be I heard it before. I hate it when people imitate me before I do. That was intended humor. Just in case you needed the perspective of my knowing. I've got to do something with my mind while waiting for this vehement woman. She's got waiting down to-

"I'm sorry young man. I didn't see you waiting..." She got moving slowly toward me with her old age compunctions. "Have you been waiting long?"

"No mam not long. At my age long takes some time to get to." I smiled on credit. You have to be careful at the Y sometimes they can be-you lose track which is which.

"You want a room? Is that right?"

"Thank you Mam yes. And if I may I'd like to pay one daily rate at a time. Just in case I'm not here the day I decide to go."

"That doesn't make sense son?" She was like leaning from her forehead forward, with the rest of her trailing behind. I felt like making myself available to catch her. But it could take five years.

"Yes man excuse me you said that doesn't make sense. No well perhaps, I tend to become unsettled around strangers I never met before." She got looking suspicious. "You know, I mean that they don't remind me of someone I know firmly well or that they remind me of someone I wish I'd been better off not knowing before I met them. But it's nothing personal it's just me getting along as best I can. But anyway again mam what I might of said better, but didn't, is that I want to pay one day at a time. If that's possible. And if it is thank you."

"I understand son." She turned her shoulder then her back talking. "Where are you going son?"

No I'm not going to answer that. It's still personal sort of. "I'm going to whatever room you assign me..."

"No I mean your duffle bag?" See what I mean not completely here yet and an interrogation. "Your duffle bag is why I'm asking?"

"Oh yes of course, I'm going to Vietnam on somebody else's orders. You know to be a patriot and stuff."

"That's nice. A lot of boys go to Vietnam from here." She's almost at her side of the desk now. "Here's your key son. Top floor looking away from the traffic." She smiled nice actually. What a break a nice smile. "The room is fifteen dollars and the key is an eighteen dollar deposit."

I handed her the money thinking the key is worth more than the room. "Mam you don't by chance have a room that faces the sun when it rises or when it you know settles down."

"No I'm sorry I don't. But this room faces away from the traffic."

I took the key until she let go of it.

"Thank you mam for the room without traffic. I'm awful in traffic. Specially if I'm asleep. I went into my back pocket smiling pleased to get this done with. It's not where it's supposed to be my wallet. I got that beyond my control trouble feeling that victimizes me at times like this. There it is right on the desk I'd taken it out listening and talking. I gave the lady two twenties. She started to check them, up to the light-everything but sniffing. It's her job I guess. But who would risk a fraud charge to get into the YMCA? That's a legal defense in itself. I mean, they'd probably suspect you of trying to improve your living conditions by trying to go to prison. But she, this nice old lady, is a nice lady. Still checking the two twenties. I wonder if they did find you guilty of passing a bad twenty at the Y. Jesus I seem to be getting more and more sarcastic with my developing self-indoctrination. It's good if I can retrieve myself when it's time.

"Thank you mam." Finally she handed me my change. She said something that didn't quite reach my listening. "I'm sorry mam what did you say?"

"I said good luck son." She leaned back smiling after leaning forward to speak. "Thank you. Have a nice day and bye." I picked up my duffle bag and headed away toward the stair case. She must of called me son a hundred times.

I don't appreciate and hate somebody calling me son. Without any encouragement or provocation or heredity from me. I've had enough unintentional trouble fully accepting myself the son of my parents-to encourage people sonning me all over the place. One set of parents as intended is quite enough-specially I'm sure with them as well. Being a parent I'm sure isn't easy. Specially if you have children of your own. I smiled to myself trying to distract away my mood. I smiled harder trying not to think what I kept thinking anyway. Maybe I should of stayed in Costa Rica with Eugenia under a disguised alias. Well this is fate and maybe I'll come out of it is a self-made man. I hesitated looking at the walls that needed cleaning and painting and walls for that matter. Chipped away the way they were. I'm not going to take the elevator particularly since there isn't one. But if there were I wouldn't take it for further conditioning of myself purposes. Get me more pronounced about myself. Now that I think of it there aren't any of those "no interlude" signs. Could be they took them down for repairs or something-maybe paint them. I started up the stairs. I decided to drag duffle. Some people do come to the Y for interludes and stuff like that. Really they do. The Y tries to discourage that. But you know how people are. If they want to get together and mingle for their own particular sexual reason there's no stopping them. The Y in New London, Connecticut actually did have a sign saying no mingling for any special interest reasons. They don't say sexual anywhere most specially at the Y, people will take it as directions or instructions. Because they'll get frozen and animated on the word sexual. One guy at the Norwalk, Connecticut Y, a sprinter from Norwalk High I told you about maybe I didn't, told me some of the sexual interludes get pretty extravagant. One he told me even got catered. He beat me in the hundred by a full two-tenths of a second. Coach Worthy told me I was the only sprinter who paced himself in the hundred. But I didn't knowingly pace myself anywhere I just peaked different than other sprinters. Maybe I peaked before the race. Could be I peaked two weeks after the race. Who knows about maybe anyway. Yes is no and maybe isn't. That's how people live. Good I'm getting bitter now and I've still got five floors to go. What did I just say yes is no and what isn't? Another two floors

and I'll be up for a recovery. It doesn't matter what I just said. Jesus by the eighth floor they'll find me dead of internal combustion. It's getting more bad approaching worse. No wonder teenagers fight wars, older people couldn't carry these duffle bags. I'll be lying there dead and people will conclude I died from a self-inflicted interlude. The smell like oil and sawdust doesn't help. "I'm not checking the numbers of the floors anymore." I don't like patterns when I'm straining.

"Here we are." More the duffle bag than me. I dropped both my hands to the side. I turned my head to my other side to catch up on my breathing. I have one of those deviated septums or whatever that gets in the way of my straight-forward breathing. Must be awful to suffocate like this, in a situation like this, no not right now important. Get relevant, breath and get relevant. I looked at the key number. Good this door in front here. No more additional extra motion. I truly hate it when I become my own worst victim. I'm standing long enough I inserted the key successfully. I turned, the door opened. Well good finally no more ala carte nonsense. A nice room that suits my purpose. No colors except brown and grays. I didn't want to assess it more till I was inside locked in. An open window with a ragged cloth curtain. Moving nicely though in the breeze. Contrast is essential for disappointment. Yeah nice breeze. I walked quickly to the nightstand. Great a Bible. A nice friendly divine book, more contrast I should possibly read it over my next three days. No read it when I come back. Could otherwise affect my proportions, even my ability to reason around myself when needed. I don't know I'll think about it. Just maybe read the ten commandments. I wonder just how exactly the ten commandments fit and compare with the uniform of military justice. Actually I would think that ten commandments are way too many. I mean if you give a kid ten of anything he thinks he's got a choice. Why not one commandment to be polite always. Polite people don't kill their neighbors without permission or steal at the expense of not getting caught. I'm not going to think about it. I'm just going to take my time and get unsettled here.

I took an unsuccessful nap. I knew right off in a minute I wasn't going to

fade enough for sleep of any kind. "There's lipstick on this." A cigarette butt I picked up from the ash can with curiosity. A woman here is illegal. So that's a possibility. A guy that likes to smoke with lipstick on. Maybe both. Hard to say for sure. I tossed the butt in the can and dropped back into the bed with a bounce. I love being comfortable. I'm good at it to, give me half an hour's warning, wherever I am, and I can get comfortable. I'm hungry I suddenly realized. Very hungry. I patted my stomach to reassure it. Hard to believe the last time I ate was ice cream with my buddy Philip. And before that I don't, no there was an after that after the before I forgot. The two mouthfuls of patriot cake. But before, what do I want, evidence? I'm hungry that's enough. But I don't want to be around a lot of unknown busy people. I'm too disorderly myself. Compared to me Rodney is outrageous. He folds his socks believe it or not. And then unfolds them to put them on. Me I just wear my clothes. Whose else am I going to wear? I knew a guy who color-coordinated his socks with his eyebrows. And had different colored socks. People are funny with their clothes parades. But I'm hungry. Should I starve myself for further con-Jesus a knock on my door. A temporary door ten minutes here and a knock. Already on my feet. Who could it possibly be that I don't know? Foot steps walking away. I tipped-toe over round the bed post. "I locked the door didn't I? Yes I did-didn't I?" God what potentially disgusting thing is going to happen? I knew it. A note just under the door I know this is an invitation to do something leud and excessive. I just know it. I stepped up to the note-not too close. I bent over and stopped going any further. I picked it up, no I dropped it. I straightened myself up to full height and then some. No I'm not going to acknowledge this invasion.

I'm walking around theses five minutes trying not to pace. But I am. I've got to pace off my thinking. I know it's a homosexual person, sure I do. Trying to sequester me some how for some leud available evening. Some homosexual guy interluding his life away and trying to compromise me at my costly expenses. "And me a patriot on his way to war." I increased my pacing. Already I've had to move furniture to give me my pacing range. He had homosexual type penmanship. I saw that much. A lot of twirl stuff and no very little straight up letters.

These homosexuals can be very organized about themselves. Some are even educated. They get together and drink tea and beer and start remembering about their antics. Antics they got at somebody else's expense. And yes I saw one of their magazines by mistake in Times Square last year, they can be very overbuilt. Sometimes they travel and do their menacing in hordes. I sat down on the bed for composure.

"Is the door locked?" Yes I already decided by checking, it's locked. I kicked off my shoes because I could feel myself perspiring into my socks. Which I don't like. And raging a male-type guy isn't most probably like raping a woman without her believable lack of co-operation. I got back on my feet to get back to some pacing. I sat back down. This is more that pacing can handle. I leaned out to look in the mirror. "Listen I'm about as sexual a guy as they come with the members of the opposite sex." Sure yes in Mexico men kissed and hugged each other with an abrazo. In this country American it was altogether different. In that Ponus Ridge Junior High if you touched some other guys knee by mistake under the cafeteria table, he'd jump eighteen hundred feet and shelter himself with the school when the guys got bulkier. During free time they'd have these goosing free-for-alls. Chasing each other around like madmen, with some pretty pronounced gooses getting manifested. And no less the girls watching, not feeling left out. Some even laughing. Insanity during recess is what it was. I went to the sink for a glass of water. All this desperation is making me thirsty. "Sure you might say how about all that stuff when you were an adolescent." Well I was just a kid then. That doesn't count entirely by itself. Sure enough as a kid I pretty much knew what was going on. But it came primarily from a foundation of consuming ignorance. Fine and o.k. ignorance can very quickly be replaced by what's going on in an instant. I mean you only have to see a woman's vagina once before, before you know you've walked into something earth-shaking beyond belief that's potentially prime something. I'm still thirsty. I wasn't able to get down enough water into myself.

I paced five feet and got back down quick. I need to maintain an occupied silence that is to my advantage. Really this is terrible. It's over-

conditioning is what it is. Only in what's left of America. I tell you if you wanted to make an unbearable horror movie in America—make Frankenstein queer and busy. Not funny not now. As a kid I got organized about my sex drive before I didn't know I had one. No not one of those behind-the-barn routines or that mailman thing that spread like wildfire. I just pretty much traveled by myself within myself. I did once play spin-the-bottle. I didn't get one fair spin not once. The bottle was full and it was my first time. My hand kept slipping off. It was terrible. Plus I didn't know anything about the law of average. So I had this hope problem. This one other younger kid, he got to kiss one girl twice and the other one three times. Each time more pleasantly consuming. It was beyond toleration. I think it was the first time in my life that I realized my life wasn't going to be contemporary.

But you see back then I didn't not only not know about my sex drive. I also didn't know like I said about that law of averages. So eventually in time I walked out. I should of stayed. I regret I didn't. I still ruminate about it. With how popular spin the bottle was, and I'm sure still is. I'm surprised there hasn't been a thorough study done. You would think, I would that Sigmund Freud would of gotten to it. And come up with some warning implications. But he didn't a teacher told me. I heard that he knew more about the human mind in its absence than any man alive. Of course he invented it. I feel a bit tired. A bit's enough for me. I don't have that many bits in me. Reminiscing for logic gets to me always, it gets me melancholy and wistful out of control. I go way past sentimental into woeful and end up feeling forgettable. I could reach out and vomit strenuously it's so real. I tell you if it weren't for life, I could maybe right now be somewhere...I don't know, just somewhere.

I'm so hungry. I'm tired. I need a thorough shower. It's incontrovertible and for sure too, I mean you can't be anything before you know it. You can't be a criminal unless you are well-versed in all the particulars. If you don't know what a crime is you're not going to be impressed with prison. I mean I read in real statistical print. Somehow I'm up again pacing. You'd think people who paced would have some idea of where they're going. At the very least of things

get there somewhere eventually. What I read if you have to believe it is that a lot maybe ninety percent of children while they're still kids have had a homosexual contact of some kind. That's calculated I'm sure not counted by the numbers. I went back to lie down. I felt a little convalescing might be in order. I about faced myself and went back to pacing. "I don't allow myself to get involved in other people's percentiles. Specially if I didn't get included, but got shared anyway. I still believe you can't be anything before you know it, even if the percentiles propagate it that you can. I looked down at my hands for some reason. Hands are curious aren't they? You see what I've been trying to avoid by telling you, is that I was this unsolicited and ill-defined homosexual type person when I was maybe seven years old. In my untimely immaturity I didn't know what a homosexual was. And sexual to me then was nothing of what it is to me today agreeably. Maybe possibly homosexual was a sound to me and no more. But it still festers against me like a condemned verdict. There's a lot of value in severe punishment specially if you agree to it and are available. What happened is beyond remembering it's so unforgettable. Of course those are the things you remember to the meagerest detail. Mom and Pop, we didn't have a TV because they thought it was a bad influence. I myself was much interested and devoted to the antics of Flash Gordon. The space guy on TV. But I didn't have a TV to watch. So out of somewhere this one neighborhood kid who was unnecessarily taller than me, I could watch Flash Gordon on his TV if I did something to his penis. Incredible that I couldn't figure it out, the impropriety of it all, by some available primitive instinct. But I didn't. It's the first time in my life that I got unregulated to myself. I think what I thought was that it was a bargain, some a little of this nonsense and I get to spend time with Flash. Incredible in spite of myself it was. I thought back years later about the whole thing, shaking my head beyond myself in dismay, thank God-I got tired of Flash Gordon. I mean, but where does a guy go to forgive himself if he's the only one around who can do it? Sure I can, "Chuck I forgive you. Take it easy. Take it easy. Have some pistachio ice cream and take a break from your life." Great so you say it and the very next thing you know

you're still there...yourself. Guilt's a bastard specially if you come from a family.

I learned over dropping my elbows on my knees and locked my fingers on my forehead. My wire rims got squashed some. I eased up on my head, sat up and inhaled. Now this time of me here remembering, with me on my way to Vietnam. I exhaled. And maybe it's going to be the same way in Vietnam like with that former past homosexual escapade. I don't know anything about war, not really. I'm not stupid, it's not TV while munching free popcorn. Could be maybe I'm not qualified not knowing what I'm doing. Maybe possibly I'm overqualified in an underqualified kind of a way. And maybe perhaps I'm just too premature to be going to war with. I got up undecided to be so. I don't know enough about extraordinary violence. Not even enough to know what I know. The violence in Vietnam, sure it's hysterical. I mean historical. Organized and planned. Civilization wouldn't be civilization without it's scheduled wars. Without wars peace would only be an opportunity. Wars bring advances. Without wars we'd all be drinking polluted water out of dixie cups. And Vietnam isn't really extraordinary violence. By extra unnecessary violence I mean, you know two guys beating on one. Unsportsmanlike violence you might say. Like a girl beating a girl for non-medical reasons. I got up suddenly, then I realized looking down I was up. "I need luxury. I need the Ramada Inn or some other place with all their redundancies." I'll go eat somewhere extra nice. Leave this place, because I'm starting to feel myself over-rehearsed. I'm acquiring too much tensions and doubt. There's enough time for that in Vietnam. War is instinct not calculation and probably some running and hiding. Good I'm probably all resolved and got what I came here for.

I noticed from one of my peripheral visions through an unplanned glance-that described scribbled note on the floor. Without hesitating enough not to move I walked over to the note. And picked up knowing that I would read it feeling less unmolested. "Steve if you can make it over to my house. Dinner with me and the wife. Great...didn't want to wake you." And it's signed an innocent note to the wrong man because it's me. Jesus help me, I exposed myself unnecessarily. What

next? I'm going to add suspicion to my list of three basic feelings. To the bottom of the list suspicion goes. No not to the bottom a little to the side. Next to love fear and anger. All the rest feelings are intermingle as that's what I believe. Feeling hesitant on the way to be the three. But I don't have time to believe that right now. I mean think about it. Either way I need a shave, at least around my chin. I think jet lag makes whiskers come out faster and with more tenacity. I wish I had a pet around. Cousin Bosco or AndyCharlie, our cat Muffin would be nice. They should allow pets in the military for personality reasons if nothing else. They do have, the military does, these K-nines. I found out the hard way at Lackland where I did my basic that you're not supposed to pet them. It affects their training adversely. Who knows perhaps that's why they don't allow girl friends that much either for the same reason. Substantial kissing would slow down a platoon I'm sure. Because there's a kind of jet lag to that too. I hope Andy's all right or enough o.k. It's a positive jet lag, uplifting kissing is-that's what I meant. I put the note on the table in case the guy came back for it to better deliver it. It's a nice window I noticed. I think I'll go over and look out of it for some relaxation.

I woke up suddenly. How else, gradually I guess. I stretched my arms down past my hips. I could use a yawn to start the day. None available. I slept in my clothes. So what, I guess. I must have been more tired that I realized. Consternation, chaos and remembering can fatigue you. Don't forget anticipation. No forget anticipation I've had enough of that. If I could tell the future, I wouldn't talk so much. I checked my wristwatch. That was stupid. I can already tell it's the morning from the outside. So it must be inside too, I yawned...good. I think that's a sign that my whole mind slept and my dreams weren't convoluted, or appropriate somehow. I need a shave and a shower, breakfast too. I don't want to arrive in that Vietnam undernourished, foul and befuddled. I should do some push-ups and some sit-ups. Lots of them. At Brien McMahon I did a hundred push-ups. I'm pretty altogether strong. Just don't have much use for it that I'm aware of. I haven't done some push-ups since basic. But those weren't really push-ups. They weren't self-imposed push-ups, they were

mandatory on somebody else's witnessed schedule. Shower and shave, push-ups and breakfast. Build up my upper body strength just in case I need it. I chuckled at my own joke. Sometimes I just have to lay back and enjoy myself. Actually I don't know why it was funny. A sneak delay maybe. I got down on my knees. Could be I should say a prayer while I'm down here. "No I don't have anything written out. And I've exhausted my prayer quota for the month." And like I told you I am of the opinion that prayer are a party line. Either way for all those reasons it's push-ups. Should I pray while I'm push-uping? Be good and all that. I hope they have TV in Vietnam. Sure they must, how else would we know that's going on. I got up. I did five and got feeling impractical and hungry. I have to start paying more attention to my basic cravings. That's a good thought I like it. Also good I stopped the push-ups after five. Too many and I get up feeling deprived in my presence. And I felt a little of that on my way down. Good, it's going to be a good day. Two good things already and I'm not fully started yet. Sure a good day coming. Why not I'm due for one. And entitled. I'll have breakfast, a conversation. Not just a conversation. But a sustained one about life or something pertinent like. An encouraging conversation, not gloomy, a making sense conversation with a minimum of thinking. That's not too much to ask somebody in a park or a restaurant. That's it too, I'll go to a park. A city this size is got to have a park, for the muggers to relax if nothing else. I'm on a roll.

I showered and shave fully. It was no obstacle to overcome, though I had my cautious doubts. Being the Y and all. I went back for twenty more push-ups. Not for my body but to regulate my determination better. And also I had a nutritious and successful breakfast though solitary. Except I left with the tip. I mean I forgot to leave one. I went back three blocks. I'm an extremely careful tipper, meaning I'm very generous. I don't know what else to do. Give less? And then what, saying thanks makes up the difference? When she has two children not counting her husband, one with the fever at home, a horny husband that beats her and spends the grocery money on morbid tattoos. I have a motto now for four years that's worked. Except the best. But don't depend on it if

it happens. But of course the best or near best is more apt to happen if you get stationary about yourself, with friends and stuff. Well what are you going to do, if it weren't for solutions we wouldn't have any problems. I'm glad I remembered the tip though. Would of been awful remembering a hundred thousand miles over the ocean on the way to Vietnam. Another good thing-good. One more and I'll disguise myself and be happy.

Rather than saying out loud to myself-what's going on around here. I'm watching. A nice park of all places. Been here with my legs crossed for maybe most of half an hour. Isn't time great when you're not involved with it. I wish I knew more about gravity than I do. Must be awful dying and going to heaven gravity ignorant. They probably don't need knowledge in heaven, just wings they have probably instead. Birds don't need knowledge they've got gravity on their side. Could you see two birds discussing the pro's and cons of something, extraneous and puffed up like that William F. Buckley? He's something else I like that Buckley guy. I like to watch him unwind himself. I tell if you if words had calories he'd be extremely fat-extremely. So fat, you'd have to climb a ladder to denounce him to his face. But he'd be waiting for you, coloring himself all over again. God he knows his words. People who know each other enough to love or hate one another on some scheduled basis should have one word that is completely unique to them. A made-up word. A word only they know and can pivot themselves around. I sat up. A hobo person just came over and sat down next to me. Maybe he's a bum, is that it now, what is said bum not hobo. They're not my words either way. I've got to be silent and polite. Not ask for a story to tell. Because bums are tired and lonely and too lost to care. The last thing he wants is a spontaneous conversation with an almost kid. I glanced at him with my casual peripheral vision. He is tired and sad I think. No I'm not, I might say something opportune or misopportune, either way it might get unhappy. And it's a lovely day gorgeous. But you know to tell you the truth I don't know exactly what season it is. I haven't memorized the change of seasons, one into the other in the right order. Then a year ago I thought why should I? There's nothing I do about it. They're in the order they want to

be. Plus I like the surprise of it all. Winter again, how nice. Spring I get a warning about because of those yearning hormone things that are primitive and can't get reconciled by thinking of good taste. In Mexico we didn't have that many seasons. I found that sometimes helpful. I wish this very right now Eugenia was here with me. Her head on my shoulder. I wonder what she's doing right now? No I'm not going to think about that. It's beyond my range to fathom. I'd-

"Hello sir my name is Chuck Winters." I held out my hand a little to sideways. He's not going to say anything. He like didn't even move enough to be upset. Not even charging nothing. Jesus....Why are most derelicts men? Could be perhaps because women get the houses on divorces. Be awful to have a lot of lady bums.

"Sir, it's not my desire to perturb you. But it's probably too late not to. If that is the case I thought you might like to join me for a lunch of your choice?" He looked straight ahead. But his looking you couldn't even say it was straight ahead or anywhere. God what if I end up like him before I'm dead. I turned away quickly I didn't realize I was staring. This is awful. It's like somebody drowning without the water. But in time.

"Sir I'm concerned. And you're probably going to risk thinking that I'm obnoxious. And I wouldn't be surprised if I am. Being that I know better that what I'm doing. But I'd like you to accept on my behalf this ten dollar bill. Ten...to use for whatever are your purposes." My voice trailed off. I barely finished the sentence. He didn't take it I don't think, I'm blinking too much myself to know if he's blinking. I feel invaded in reverse against myself. I slunked down on the bench and folded my legs hard against each other. I'm just going to sit here. I can't leave. Hell think I abandoned him. Elephants take better care of each other than we do. I should of kept quiet. I'm thirsty with my stupidity for talking. Just sit here and revere the silence quietly. I'm... enough I'm, just sit. Why are people happy, others unhappy? Some rich more poor? Why don't people make up their mind and not give some help. What the hell do I know I'm just a Christian. If I knew what I was doing I'd be lost. Blue

from the side of my face. I looked up, a blue uniform—air force. He's my age. "Hi, how are you doing?" I smiled and sat up. And he went right by. Nothing but with a worse face than the old man. Jesus please tell me what's going on here. What is this Destiny Park or what? I looked away with nowhere to look. I felt scared. I got up on my feet to walk...away. He even had that Vietnamese defense ribbon. They showed it to us at basic for some reason I didn't know that startled me. Did Jesus or that Buddha guy forget to say something? Something got missed I don't know. Look, hey a wild doberman without a leash or a collar. Running, hopping around free. He jumped up at a butterfly to sniff and came down turning and running. I'd love to be a dog just for a few years. I'm hurriedly on my way toward the doberman. Introduce myself say hello, good petting handshake. He stopped. I stopped. Thirty forty yards he's looking straight intense at me. His ears are up, his eyelids. He's gone. What is it? I looked around the park for a reason of an answer. The bum gentlemen was gone, everything-barely just me. The doberman is more gone. I shook my head feeling only my forehead moving. "I'm not gone no. But I'm going."

I decided right there. Right now I'm in a taxi. I decided to get started to go to Vietnam. I can't take waiting. Waiting is awful if you're not a waiter. I feel better. Get Vietnam over with. Get started come back. That park I hope I never know its real name, got me convinced. The taxi driver promised me we weren't far from the depot place. Where soldiers embark to war. If this isn't good it's best. Good I feel better. Better enough to almost smile. I did. I laughed a little from my chest easily out of my nose. I fortunately somehow got thinking about dolphins. Fortunately because I like dolphins a lot. If God gave me a choice of being a dog or a dolphin. It be tough. I think I'd ask to be a dog guarding dolphins from unpleasant people. You know though there is serious misinformation about dolphins. And it's those words by the numbers statistician people that are responsible. You probably heard about how dolphins out of their own generosity in a very pleasant way—push back troubled swimmers to the safety of the beach. Help them out right? Then these research statistic people come back with a study. Claiming that as many

swimmers are ushered away from the beach as toward the beach. Who asked them to do a study anyway? How about a more thorough and complete study, if one at all? Like who did they usher back to the shore? Who did they try to spare us from? Did the dolphins make some good intelligent decision about who to push and direct away? Give us some probability on this why not. How many child beaters and wife molesters got pushed away from the shore? How many nurses and rabbi's got helped back to be with us? Sure o.k. I agree maybe dolphins shouldn't be making these choices. But we do. And less efficiently. Could be also dolphins know something about justice we by-passed. Of course I'm assuming here the bad ones in the water don't drown. So it's really more of a wet critique. Absolutely I have no doubts about it. I'd like to be a hardy doberman helping out with my assistance the dolphins. I'm glad I got that settled. "God look at that!" The driver said. "Tell me about it buddy." I opened the taxi window.

"Hell no we won't go!" Fifty of them in a circle. "HO Chi Minh will win." With megaphones. "Hell no we won't go." The taxi stopped twenty yards from the protestors, one of them had more hair than twenty of me. Interesting. I paid the taxi driver the eight bucks he asked for and said loud, "Thanks." He kid of saluted me from the side of his forehead. I smiled and sighed. I turned around. "Hell no we won't go." I hurried into the depot through the glass doors. "That's better." Near less shouting. There, in the military places, windows with iron bars are always the places to go. There are a lot of soldiers here sitting, lying sleeping against their duffle bags. Yes I'm here back in the military.

"Can I help you?" I pointed at my chest. "Yes you. Are you a protestor? If so out." The sergeant swung his thumb away from my view.

"No I'm not a protestor. I'm in the Air Force. Here to go to Vietnam."

"Let's see your orders." Sergeants always sound angry. And you never know at what. Except it's best to assume you're it. He's reading, comparing with something.

"Your orders and my records. You're supposed to disembark today at seventeen-hundred hours. Not day after tomorrow. I felt marginally frozen enough not to say anything or think enough to come up with something for myself.

I wanted to start Vietnam. But not today. I came here to check and get a sense of everything.

"So...what do we do sergeant? I mean what do you do?"

He looked at me steady, his lips restraining a smile like a brahma bull in a pen he didn't quite want to send on its way.

"O.K. so it's today. Thank you sergeant." I turned away folding my orders under my eyes.

"Airman Winters good luck."

"Oh, thank you sergeant. You too Bye..."

There's nothing to do but leave and come back. What a strange, thing to happen. But wait a minute. Do I come back on my orders or there? I'm not going to worry about it because I might not come back. I paused to hesitate, brace myself going outside. I swung the glass door open.

"Hi." God a robust pretty woman from nowhere that I foresaw. "Are you going to Vietnam?" She smiled, after such a question she smiled.

"Yes I am going to Vietnam." She was just a little older than me. And prettier, you know I'm distracted and surprised. I don't feel like being indoctrinated. She's still looking at me in her long tan skirt.

"Why are you going? Aren't you aware that we are losing so many of our boys? That the war is unjust?"

"Miss you've asked too many questions. And I wouldn't know the answer, if it were just one question." I smiled walking away. I didn't want to be rude to anyone specially just before leaving for Vietnam. I turned around and came back the five feet. "Miss to tell you as much as the truth I can on short notice. I'm mostly going because the other guys are going." She looked sad and about to be consoling at my being circumstantial. "What I'm saying, excuse me if I interrupted you before you got to say something in response. What I'm saying is I just want to be fair. And not get any more breaks that I'm entitled to. That's all." I smiled again more patiently about myself. I nodded and left again still smiling. That's been maybe my longest smile in weeks. I opened the glass door. "Ho Chi Minh will..." I closed the door and walked back. She's

still standing there like a daisy happy with nowhere to go. Maybe she's younger I don't know. "Hi listen I'm back. I wanted to tell you I think you're nice. Caring about us going to war with your protests and stuff. I really do a lot respect your right to protest. Though to be quite frank, you folks do get a little loud and repetitive. Have you ever considered a singing protest?" She smiled and got up on her toes toward my direction surprising me unexpectedly. She went right up to my ear, her nose touching my ear. I looked at her and said, "o.k. well bye." I turned away finally I was sure to leave. Outside, I wanted to look back. I didn't good. I hate those looking back scenes. I'm always almost sure I'm going to see more than I can handle when enough already got transpired. The protestors are quiet. Some whiff of marijuana smoke in the air. I expect loud protestors are the way it's supposed to be. Muffled protests, specially in America, wouldn't make it. You've got to nuisance yourself some. You know you won't believe this because I should but I don't. I didn't hear a whole lot of what she said. It was a nice long sentence, her nose was against my ear firmly almost. She said she was Maria from Omaha, Nebraska. How nice. A pleasant polite, extra pretty woman from Omaha. I rubbed my ear lightly. A nice warm nose too. "Ho Chi Minh will win. Hell no we won't go." A taxi and I'll go. There's one waiting motionless. If that Ho Chi Minh guy does win. Well, I opened the taxi door, I don't think he's too very fond of protestors. Specially part-timers. I don't understand these people pay there taxes that pays for the war in all its ways. Aren't they recriminating themselves?

"How about it buddy. Where to?"

"Right sorry. Where to? Please to Destiny Park, if you would?"

"What?"

"Oh o.k. right, its that nice park a couple blocks from the YMCA here in San Diego."

"Gotcha." He geared up with a grind. We're going. I didn't get in the taxi with plans of going to Destiny Park. I forgot that's just what I called it in my exasperation. I decided suddenly to myself with everything happening ahead of schedule prematurely to maybe spend some kind of half hour there or so.

Maybe things will get improved there. And I can get started off there on the right foot of some kind. But actually with that Maria girl everything might already be off to a good start. Probably not though. Not enough to just gather everything up and report. No not probably near enough.

You won't believe this. Just riding along for the last ten minutes or so. Something very nice happened. Nothing...just silence. Barely no thinking, barely no observations, just a happy agreeable nothing of silence. If it had gotten too much better I would have leaned forward for privacy and taken my pulse. "Here you are bud. Destiny Park like you said." I looked out the closed window to see how long I should hesitate. "Looks o.k. Thanks mister how much do I owe you?" I reached for my wallet, it's there. Must be extra awful to lose something in Vietnam. "What did, yes right seven dollars. Here's ten bucks in case you need more money?" He the taxi driver turned around with a smile. "Thanks buddy. Listen you gone to Nam?" I tried to smile like Kirk Douglas, but I lost in the translation. "Yes, yes I am. They asked me to and I am." He nodded hard. "Well good luck you hear?" I opened the taxi door. "Yes thank you very much I appreciate your good luck."

The turned out to be nice taxi driver waived his hand backwards at me as he drove off. There's that park bench right over there from before, but now just from here. Next behind to that weeping willow tree. I'd already started up the easy little ridge. I've got to be more conscious of time now and for a year. The military takes time very seriously. Gravity too for that matter. If it weren't for agreeable gravity the military would have to settle themselves for butterfly nets with uncooperative butterflies to catch. I sat down without too much caution and a big exhalation of breath. Is that a word, exhalation? I'm not sure. I wish I hadn't of forgotten my Webster's. I can see getting a very loud order and not knowing one of the words. What are you going to do? You know I bet there's a tree-like form for every human expression that we've already gotten to. I wouldn't be surprised. That tree right there, just taller than me, leaning the way it is, I'll be damned and never be forgiven-it reminds me of Wendy. She was. She was...Wendy. Whoever that silly person is who said, "Tis

better to of loved and lost than to of never loved at all." Never met Wendy. If he had that guy would of spent his life looking for her. How can these things happen to me. When I wouldn't be ready for them in five years on a good month. Maybe I'm ahead of myself and got turned in the wrong direction. Wendy was well lots of things. Wendy was secretively unhappy while being smiling and o.k. I have this unbearable thing about helping out women when love's available and at stake. Wendy and I went one day to Radio City Music Hall to see "Taste of Honey." We were in Miss Nolan's algebra class. Wendy was more than me. After the movie Wendy and I went to this seriously cushiony couch in the lobby. Real over-done comfort, like when I sat down my knees came up to my ears. But we worked around the excess comfort and we talked. Nicely we talked. Wonderfully we talked and a little recklessly. Wendy was too proud and bold to admit being unhappy for any audible reasons except her own. She wa beautiful, but not bragging in anyway. I loved her more than I can tolerate by denying it. And forgetting. I don't want to get into any reasons why Wendy was unhappy, it just might not be any longer any of my business. Hopefully not hers either. I swear if this very right now I got a letter saying Wendy needed me desperately immediately, I wouldn't hesitate what's right or what's wrong. I'd go available to help. But Wendy and I lost touch with me. I mean to say we lost touch with each other. But it was more likely Wendy who lost more touch with me than I did with her. I guess now, when it comes to love it's good to know your limits- specially if you're one of them. We just lost touch with no commitment except to wonder the why about it. Those prolonged permanent goodbyes where not enough of anything gets said. "Wendy right not remembering you, if I were on death row I'd feel appropriate."

Well anyway I've got to finish about Wendy and me, maybe get resolved enough a little. So we were sitting on that cushiony couch at Radio City and Wendy without the circumstance of a warning puts her finger tips barely on my knee. Then Wendy says in this voice like harp's play, "Let's go to Acapulco!" What I heard was so wonderful and outrageous that I had enough trouble hearing it to wonder if I did. But I did. Because she expanded. But could be maybe I was too

young and terrified of love to take advantage of the miracle. I only had my license six months and was still in a committed virging life style. You know when I become speechless enough not to say anything I think, no I don't, I don't know. I got to love's crossroads and I went the wrong way. Now look at me now, at Destiny Park without a destiny but my memories. No wonder waitresses always ask you convincingly if you want another drink. The time came that I drove Wendy home in a taxi. At her over-the-hill door step I took an incredible chance and asked Wendy for some kind of kiss. Well it was remarkably the nicest thing that happened to me in high school. Nicer than being named soccer co-captain with Tony Signor and Tyler Lamar. I would of given my rib cage to of kissed Wendy gently for a little longer one more time. But I was too overcome with myself to ask for a second kiss politely. And I never did ask Wendy directly for a second date. I have no idea why I didn't. None whatsoever. Except I guess maybe that survival thing. Could be I thought somebody like me has a limit to the capacity of how much happiness they can tolerate and get used to-while risking losing it. It's excruciating and deplorable, if you're enough in shape to go that far, when you don't do something crucial without knowing why. Worse consequences you're lost. You're left feeling like your memories are incompatible with your sustaining living self. Your feel like rushing to the nearest mental hospital tossing your arms up in the air and saying, "o.k. explain me." But why am I thinking and thinking these things? I got up quick on my feet. "That's it I'm leaving this park it's haunted with me."

I ran back to the Y. Until I wondered why I was running long enough to slow down to a jog then finally a regular going-somewhere walk. I guess I've got pent-up feelings I made the mistake of memorizing. I went through everything in duffle to make sure I remembered everything I forgot. Just to keep everything in my order. I had enough time to go through twice. But I didn't. I just sort of frisked it. I looked at myself in the mirror chest high. Kind of strange me in a uniform, my fifteen o fives. Philipe, Señor Fabe, my beautiful Eugenia, that current Maria even, Mom and Pop, RS and Terry, they all got reflected in the mirror with me. Sure that's it I'm a pretty all over lucky guy. All these

people kind and most of them new. I have no complaints none whatsoever. If I did I'd be talking about no one except myself. And I don't and won't. Where is Andycharlie? I guess he was too low to the ground to join up. Not forgotten that's for absolutely sure. I inhaled and sighed at the same time. "Lucky Chuck." I rounded my shoulders and turned to the side looking at my reflecting self all the way. I just got an inspiration idea I did. A good one. I'm going to come back to this very room in a year. A comparison reunion you might say. Then and now. Actually now and then whatever. I got even more inspired yet again. This here and this here. I'm writing out a note in my best available penmanship. That's it come back in a year. Kind of a punctual comparison you might say. See how I did. I slipped the note behind the mirror in the crack between the glass and the frame. I clapped my hands hard feeling pleased that I'm excited. The note said. My name is Chuck Bromely Winters the Third. I am mostly an American patriot. Except, I scratched mostly. Then the date today's. Then I wrote, if this note is still here in more than one year then consider me dead somehow for my country. In the line of some kind of duty probably. I have no regrets except that I'm dead. Then I signed it real well. I added a fingerprint for special effects and make the note look officially eerie. Great, I didn't mean to give you middle name intact and officious. But now you have it. I clapped my pleased and happy hands again and looked around not to forget something I might leave behind. "Maybe I could do some push-ups, like twenty of them or fifteen." No there's no point I'm in good enough all-round shape. Plus my upper body strength won't have much to do with what I'm going to be doing. I hope. Because if it does I'm irrelevant anyway. I've never been in a fist flight in my life. My side of punching anyway. It was good of me to take that couple hour nap. I'm now refreshed and ready. I hoisted duffle and down I went.

I've been taxi lucky in San Diego, no waiting, nice drivers. How come more women don't drive? Be a chance to marry one of them, with some encouragement. It's taking longer getting to the depot than before seems to me. Should be the other way around. At the Y there was a sign that said if you left after the noon hour you had to pay an extra day. I waited at the desk, but nothing happened.

Except for my waiting which I didn't do for too long. I left a note that what I owed them they could deduct from the key deposit. Not that I think of it I don't know if you're supposed to get back the key deposit or what? Well..."here we are, more like me. Good almost no protestors. Could be they got tired refundant of themselves. Maria though would be nice to see again. Because I didn't hear her whole whispered sentence. "Six bucks Jack." I refocused myself. "What?" Oh, he said six bucks Jack. "Thanks." I handed the driver nine. He needed a shave. Not important just an observation. I wonder if they're tipping in Vietnam. Why postpone? "Ready or not here I come." I think I got that backwards. I lifted duffle and headed myself towards the swinging door. A lot more soldiers everywhere. Sitting, lying in all kinds of unmilitary positions. Even snoring in various audible volumes. Are they all going to Vietnam or what? Maybe coming home resting I hope. No...no Maria not even close. Could be that's good. No it isn't. I'm looking for a phone. Where's that phone? The pay phone like. I kept walking around slowly looking to relax and build up a relaxing reservoir, plus I had nowhere to go. A relaxing reservoir I just thought of that. A bit a little too late. Not important now though. I'm peering looking-there. A line, a long line behind a phone. I promised Mom and Pop and Rodney I'd call. A long line though. I got in line after putting duffle down. I got a little eager at being desperate. There's possible not enough time. In the military somebody always gets left out. It's a tradition.

The line is dwindling down. Problem is the time isn't. It goes and goes more against less time. Good thing I came in early today to check out the place. I would have been absent without leave. I don't know exactly what that means. Except you get arrested, then probably court-marshalled. Then they get all dishonorable about you. Eight minutes. Three guys to go. One just hung up. Also too the time on my wrist watch is conflicting with the large wall clock. Three minutes conflicting. Guys just got started filing out of the terminal. Another hang up. One guy. Time decisions kill me. I'm still waiting. I can't miss my flight twice, once almost and this one impending. He's dialing again.

One guy, just one guy, just one guy then me. He's talking. "Sure sis love you. Tell Mom what I told you." He laughed nicely and hung up. "It's all yours Air Force." I nodded, "Thanks." Good and great. I dialed missing the first number once. I kept dialing thinking what to say. Hi Mom and Pop how's RS and Terry. Good it's ringing not busy. By both watches I'm late. The line out of the depot is disappearing to three guys. Still ringing. I'm waiting still ringing. I looked at the clock for no reason. Still ringing. I hung up exasperated. I swiveled my shoulder around the phone booth and ran.

I got into a slower running. My duffle bag had been loaded. I saw it but it didn't register first. We're taking a commercial air liner. Five guys still going up the plank. I slowed down easing my breathing. Why pull a muscle on the way to war? Too much, TWA to Saigon. One last guy already passed into the plane. "Hey wait for me!" I shouted starting to run again increasing my strides. Starting up the escalator thing-panting. "There's one more. And it's me." I wanted to turn around at the hatchway. See America one last time. But I didn't. I went with myself inside.

I'm looking to the way back breathing heavily. I like sitting in the back, it's a habit on long flights. I figure if the plane crashes I'll have that much extra time to collect myself and my thoughts. I looked down walking and to either side. It always surprises me when I have my uniform on. Just does. I guess because it's actually not my uniform when you get right down to it. There is an empty seat in the back. Good I sighed, my breath is almost caught up to me. I'm a little sweating thought. There maybe a hundred, a hundred and fifty or so military guys. Marines, Air Force mostly, and Army. I know I'm back in the military when I start to lose all the primary colors. It's all varying tones of grays, except for a few guys in their dress blues. I sat down finally with more weight than I started running, muscles tighten around themselves you know. Kind of hide from what you're doing maybe. I know my sitting in the back seat is more of a superstition than a technological belief. But superstitions and ignorances have a place in our society and can be very eventful. Anyway even if I am wrong why take a chance on being right, when all that's involved is one

convenient change of seat? The engines roared. "What?" Because we're military guys we're not entitled to a slow acceleration? Give me a break or give me some morphine. Instead the engines got louder and more determined about themselves. I guess this is it we're moving. And not backwards.

I'm right next to the port hole window thing. Two empty seats next to me. Which is good gives me more space for my thinking and stuff. I just like privacy when I'm alone that's all. Specially with much less private times coming along up ahead. I glanced down at my uniform with tiny sweat drops on it. Surprised again, another uniform. If I wore a uniform a hundred years I'd still be surprised with myself wearing it. Not that I have anything in any particular about wearing uniforms, that I'm aware of anyway. I just don't like wearing other people's clothes like I told you. The safety belt sign went on. A little late I think, we're accelerating down the runway. Outside I squinted, an old black man bent over a whisk broom sweeping around the flag pole. Makes me think remembering, about just when I was a little kid in Mexico. At assemblies and stuff we'd pledge the allegiance to the Mexican flag. We're going faster. All of us kids, we'd put our right fist over our hearts and saying, "Verde blanco yo colorado la bandera de el soldado." Translated into our English it means. Green, white and red flag of the soldier. But with a catchier bounce in Spanish. Of course that's virtually easier for them to say, they hardly don't have an efficient army. We're airborne. And climbing. I was saying, they even have a cavalry with horses-incredible. What better way to dissuade a menacing opposing army than to have a backward Army with nice agreeable living horses and stuff. The jet escalated more forward with itself. Why do all transportation machines get thrust forward instead of backwards? I don't know and I won't ask. I reclined my seat backwards just as we started to levitate more upwards. I forgot again back seats don't recline. You're stuck at a right angle. I looked out. America smaller and smaller. That hippie girl Maria was something whispering into my ear. I wish I had paid direct attention. But all I could feel was her nose breathing. She might of had something good to say that was instrumental, maybe even funny. I wonder where I'll be exactly a year plus from now. I closed

my eyes slowly, to check maybe how relaxed I was. I can't do it if someone is looking at me with their eyes opened. But I'm alright enough for the impending circumstances of myself. "Good luck Chuck." The jet leveled itself off. So now it was like more of a bed. Maybe I'll get some sleep. Yawning tired is probably risky in Vietnam.

I don't know if I slept. I think I did, but not for how long. It was like that half sleep of caution that I'm capable of. Where I'm in both places at once straddled. I was thinking that I'd be awful at being pronounced dead. Just probably not very co-operative. Probably restless to get going. Big responsibility pronouncing somebody dead accurately as opposed to maybe lazy and dormant. Rodney Stuart asked me this once about two years ago, what I'd do if I got pronounced dead. Out of nowhere he asks me. I said, I'm not stupid RS I'd ask for a second opinion. RS hesitated considerably and then threw caution to the wind and laughed. He's more of a cautious and formal wit than a slow one, but like I told you with a very keen mind. I'm the opposite with my available sense of humor I'm reckless. I spare nothing, sometimes no one sometimes not even laughter-my little attempts are so baffling and poignant that they're beyond the redemption of humor. I wonder why I'm bragging. It's not my way. Maybe I'm bolstering myself unconsciously. I hope it's not unconscious. I have my severe reservations about my unconscious. Not just mine like everybody's. Like possibly we don't have one. It's just something that caught on miserably by popular mistake. And all this time we've been plodding along eagerly where there's nothing at all fertile to be had. I'd very much like to win a medal of honor or two. I understand though that in order to win a medal of honor you have to be dead effectively somehow or at least almost completely dispatched in someway. I wonder if someone ever got one for saving some orphans from being occupied and menaced by the enemy. That's enough I'm thinking too much to evade myself being here. The unconscious, being pronounced dead, there all things that take care of themselves. I've got to get practical, sincere and concentrated. I'm on my way to war for Godsakes. I leaned my head with just contact pressure against the porthole and I closed my eyes. I could feel my teeth shattering or

chattering is it. I wonder if I were quick enough I could get morse code out of this. Probably lose my fillings on the verbs on some crucial sentence.

"Do you mind if I sit here?" It's a voice. A woman's voice. I opened my eyes first then I looked left slowly to be ready by the time I saw what I heard.

"No you're welcome to sit here of course. I can use the company. I was just about to start gauging my boredom."

She sat down with one seat between us. The way high altitude airline stewardesses do-gracefully and quietly. I can't get over it, a commercial airliner to war and now in-the-flesh woman stewardess. Hard to figure enough to believe.

"My name is Chuck Winters, I guess Airman Winters now," I held my hand out for hers. She looked at it quizzically. I started to retrieve my hand when she reached for it. Even with initial retreat a good handshake. Very good, considering the initial complications. She's very pretty I could tell from listening to her and looking for too long. All stewardesses are potentially beautiful. This one though had some mellow softness about her, like one of those cameo broaches. Then without any premeditation that I knew about she turned and looked at me. I didn't know what to smile.

"My name is Elaine." She smiled with hardly a motion to her lips. Real grace moves at its own pace and usually without warning. I didn't know what to say. I'm still speechless of a thought.

"Elaine I know sometimes stewardesses are too tired, even ordered not to fraternize with the cargo, you don't mind do you if I call you by your name?" There's that out-of-nowhere smile. Mystical I'm sure. You can tell when people, specially soft women, smile considerably about themselves because it takes a lot less time for their faces to settle down after the initial impact. And there's virtually no lifting in the effort-beautiful.

"I'm sorry what did you say a moment ago?" I'm afraid I was concentrating."

"I said Chuck. We may speak there's no problem."

"Great." I unconsciously unbuckled my safety belt, so I could get a better angle on the conversation. "Elaine I hope you don't mind my telling you my name

first from before. I tend to become a little over-enthused when under directly the influence of circumstances like this."

"No of course not. That was fine. "Look at her, she's always on the verge of a smile.

"Thank you I appreciate the encouragement. I'm not usually this intense hyped up or whatever else you might have already perceived."

"I understand." Elaine said on the border of a whisper. This time unbearable with a falling leaf smile. Just kept moving from side to side. Jesus Elaine might be one of those rare individuals with a complete array of smiles.

"Well Elaine...." I had to pause in spite of myself. Around all over beautiful women I become too appreciative to remain conscious and focused. "Well Elaine, you did say I could call you by your first name? You did didn't you?"

"Yes, if you wish that's fine."

"Well that's a nice relief. I'm glad that's settled already. Listen Elaine you seem to have barely an accent that just faints when it gets to my ear."

"Chuck I'm from Norway." I waited eagerly for more. Here she comes. "I came from Oslo five years ago, to study." She nodded with a minimum drop of her chin. "I became an airline stewardess about...two years ago."

"That's great Elaine, at your age you've already got a steady pattern like that. One thing after another in place like." I looked away unexpectedly briefly reviewing my life. I gave up after the first unscheduled debacle. "I myself am the only one in my family not organized. Probably some held back genes that got involved with me before I knew enough to react in my favor. When they wanted me in the Air Force I warned them against them. But they didn't seem too impressed."

"Would you like a piece of chewing gum Chuck?" I looked at the juicy fruit in her hand. "It will clear up your ears." I accepted the gum carefully. The way she moved. I hardly didn't see her get the gum from anywhere. Move almost past graceful to serene. What a break to be around motion like this. I unwrapped the gum.

"Thanks Elaine, you sure you can spare this?"

"Of course Chuck." And another smile. Give me a break. Nothing you can learn. Just some lucky genetic deliverance.

"Listen Elaine." I talked around the gum. I started talking prematurely before the gum was in my control. I calmed down. "Listen Elaine I was saying, you say you're from Norway. What do your folks do there? I mean your folks family?"

"We run an ice-cream parlor in Oslo."

Elaine held up one finger to her lips. I realized I'd gotten way too loud in volume for my exhalation. But I felt remarkable about what I just heard. Elaine's whole nice family scooping up ice cream in a leisurely happy way. I raised my finger to my lips and added my own, "Sh sh." Loud enough for Elaine to hear. Several other soldier's had turned around to look for the origin of the sound. Elaine had already put down her finger, but kept it extended I guess in case she needed for back up again.

I waited till being calm reached my voice. "I think Elaine that's close to the near most phenomenal thing I've ever heard. A whole family getting together and selling ice cream in a little ice cream sloop in Norway on a regular basis. I mean next to being a generous marriage counselor I can't think of a nicer thing to do. I bet you took turns scooping. And you had a little stand to reach the ice cream when you were all little, so you wouldn't feel left out by your height."

"Yes I enjoyed working there with my brother Emmet, when I was a young girl."

"Could be it's already too late for my being intrusive--"

"What is in intru--"

"Oh that means not minding your own business without encouragement." I coughed I swallowed my gum by mistake. It's o.k. it went down appropriately. "What I was lending up to Elaine." I swallowed some again. "Is what, what I wanted to ask you is what is your favorite flavor?"

"Chuck are you alright?" I nodded my smile yes. "Yes well, that's an easy one. My favorite flavor is pistachio."

"Gee I wonder why I'm not at all surprised. Sure pistachio. And you know I was just thinking about that very flavor the other day. But now that I think about it, I haven't heard about pistachio much in recent years."

"You want to tell me what your favorite flavor is?" I looked back to Elaine I was still on pistachio and what happened with the gum.

"Sure I can tell you my favorite flavor. It's rocky road." I could tell Elaine was going to ask why. She telegraphed herself beautifully. "Why you're probably wondering? WELL...there's probably no why's about it. What I'm saying is if you have to get why about an ice cream flavor you're already lost. It just is that's all. And rightly so or it wouldn't be. But you know what Elaine?" She raised her eyebrows and the corners of her lips. "I got my rocky road at this franchise place in America. But they stop their flavors just like that for no reason that I know. So rocky road got stopped without a warning to the general public. I got upset with their automated ways. Any day you go in the flavor of your preference might be gone. It's nerve racking and depressing potentially. There should be a museum of ice cream flavors."

"That is interesting Chuck."

"It's painfully interesting that's what it is. Everything in life is getting fleeting and now not even the right ice cream flavors stick around."

"Yes I understand." Elaine looked away. I could see that not only Elaine understood, but took it seriously like me."

I swiveled around more toward Elaine and braced my arm on the support. "Elaine do you have any extra ordinary memories of you and your brother Emmet scooping up ice cream, talking to each other, maybe whistling and exchanging sentiments and stuff? People in Norway do whistle a lot don't they?"

"I have many memories yes Chuck. But I don't remember a lot of whistling? And you Chuck do you have pleasant memories of your family?"

"Oh sure lots I'm sure. But I haven't had the time to detail and file them in any orderly way. I guess because the memories are happening still. This here is the first time I've really gotten memory serious in my life. You know needing to remember. I should have some available though, because over all I'm a pretty

sentimental guy. I do keep an old age box Elaine, that must count as a memory. Right?"

"A what?" Elaine reacted like she just swallowed an unfamiliar amount of air. She wasn't clumsy or obtuse. Elaine I bet could slap somebody without being impolite. A true lady with grace can get away literally with murder, specially if she comes from a wealthy family. They get better peers.

I waited for Elaine to unwind her reaction. "Yes sure, my old age box. It's like this Elaine, ever since I was in Junior High School I started collecting personal things. Personal appropriate things to my life. Like my first baseball mit got collected. My first beard got collected."

"Your first beard?" Elaine sat up a little. I hope I'm not going to lose her.

"Sure yes my first beard with the mascara intact. From when I was in Huckleberry Finn as Injun Joe in Junior High. Just about everything that gets me to reminisce gets potentially collected. Like on a date once, some lipstick on my sleeve somehow, it got collected. I cut off the sleeve with the lipstick part, put it sealed in a baggy with detailed review of the incident. Then finally collected."

"Why? I don't understand why Chuck?" I could see it wasn't a crisis for Elaine, but she was interested in more some kind of an explanation.

"Why you mean why Elaine? Well very simply because I figured eventually maybe I would get very old. And I had this idea. I guess more of a fantasy triggered by reality, that I would end up in an old soldiers home in Vermont on a borrowed rocking chair with nothing to do and everybody to do it with. But then I'd have my old age box to go through repeatedly with all its happy perplexing details. And that's it. Why I have an accumulating old age box."

"I think that's beautiful Chuck." Elaine actually tapped her fingertips on my exposed arm. I shivered warm.

"You really do? Of course you do. What a relief. Some people think I'm peculiar unto myself. By that I mean Elaine you wouldn't lie."

"I don't think you're peculiar at all Chuck."

"Well thanks a lot. That's great to hear. Because I know I've given you a chance or two to form that conclusion. And you haven't great." I waited for myself I wanted to complete a question still forming in my head...o.k. "Elaine do you happen to know where we are going?"

"What Chuck?" It became a very slow what. She now got concerned looking. "No, I see, no I mean I know we're going to Vietnam and all. I was just wondering if were going to stop or what? And also why they let young ladies like yourself go to Vietnam with the risk of it all?"

"I'm sorry my mind, yes first Chuck we're going to stop at Guam and then the Philippines at Clark Air Base."

"Oh I see, thank you Elaine. Now I know what to expect in what order." Elaine held up her wrist effortlessly and said. "It's time. Hopefully Chuck I'll be able to come back and visit some more. It's been very nice really." Elaine stood up, leaned over and squeezed my arm.

"I don't know what words Elaine. Except thanks for being here. It was very nice meeting somebody persistently nice like yourself here of all places."

I'll try to come back." Elaine started away.

"Elaine!" I held up the juicy fruit wrapper. "It's going prominently in my old age box."

Elaine smiled. And she was gone. Me too for a moment. God that was, that grace in movement even just sitting still, her voice like an easy harp you don't hear but feel. And me swallowing the chewing gum, right off she knew without getting in the way that I could handle the possible emergency. I knew that about her I did. I'm insightful that way. I know motion. It's a preoccupation you might say. Other people's motion mostly. Yes I'm very insightful myself in some very particular ways. Specially if I'm not the one being sighted. God I hope I see Elaine again for a more, at least a more through goodbye. She's been gone just less than two minutes and I'm already alone with myself. Why anyway do they call them goodbyes? Where's the good been hiding all these years? The whole thing is just too unfortunistic. I like that word...unfortunistic. If I have unlimited right and opportunity to misspell other people's words I should be able

to add just one for public consumption. That's right I'm going to go ahead and believe that. And now I do.

Clouds I'm not surprised, I'm not disappointed. I like clouds. Something for me strange saying goodbye to someone at an altitude of some thirty thousand feet. More strange than some clean bed death scene. I don't know why I believe that but I do. I've done quite a few death bed scenes in my life. Playing both parts too. The departure part or the dearly beloved getting left behind part. I've gotten immeasurably good at either opportunity. I really have. At times I even get tearful whatever part I'm in for. Whatever side I'm waving away from I don't hold back. I don't know why I perplex myself in that way. But with heaven looming in the horizon uninvited, it's good to be ready. I mean it be awful to be really dying and forget to say something that you think is maybe important. Be worse that awful. I'm right now going to make myself an oath. A silent consuming oath, the breaching of which will have consuming ramifications. And my unalterable oath is that I'm going to stop dwelling myself unto death. If I'm not ready by now I'll never be. And if it's stupid regrettable to forget saying something upon your parting death, it's worse to die dead while thinking about it. It's redundant and maybe God would say greedy. What it is though, is that I don't entirely mean death dying and goodbye. Death seems to get around us in so many ways. Like I'm a little worried that I might come back tainted somehow from Vietnam. I've read a lot about that. And you see it in the movies, specially in the movies like with Gary Cooper. Some guys go to war all cheery and happy-faced. One comes back. A friend, a girl friend type friend, runs up to him with her bouncy hands and her happy self about to hug him and the guy starts talking out of the unshaven corner of his mouth in a sandpapery voice. It's the eyes, always the eyes. They look, they see actually but they don't look. They move in tiny centimeters everywhere and at the same time nowhere. A gallows voice and gallow eyes. Awful terrifying. So you want to say enough of a convincing goodbye so people will recognize you when you come back altered and alone. You don't want people to say "that can't be John, no that's not possible." Specially if your name is Chuck. At the very same time

you don't want to say such a convincing compelling goodbye to people that you get broken and fatigued with your waving hand still up in the air.

But you know if you have to think of it you should. Death I mean. It requires some preparatory work like everything in life, maybe more because of the divine uncertainties. Not everyone has it in them, the preparatory part I mean, the death part is understood, part of the bargain and offered readily available. There's a survival instinct about it, not wanting to thinking generously about death. No one is eager to fit it in their schedule. That's why in my opinion that most guys who get killed enough to die are first over all surprised, rather than pained or feeling circumvented. I bet the most repeated words when somebody like soldier gets shot are, "well I'll be damned." Or some version like that. For example if you take five marines into some uncomfortable room, marines get uncomfortable everything, and this short sentence sergeant says, "men four of the five of you are going to die in a mission tomorrow, sad but true." I bet everyone of those marine guys will think too bad about the other four. But if the over-exerted sergeant gives them each five cards and the ones with the ace of spades are the dying ones, the surprise is gone. What do you think the marines are going to do? I don't know probably play cards. Understand I'm not saying there's anything wrong with our current available system of death. If you have to die it's nice to be surprised, as opposed to be scheduled promptly. All I'm exactly saying is be prepared in case you're surprised at an inconvenient time of yourself. One last thing on the available opportunities of death. I don't like heaven being called the hereafter. I prefer it to myself it be called the thereafter. I can't tell you exactly why, just that it suits my preferences to go to the thereafter and leave everything hereafter behind. Nothing personal about it, its just how I feel about moving on. I don't feel relocated enough with any ties about me.

I crossed one leg over the other. And slunked down in my seat to treat myself to that reclining feeling. That Elaine was something, now spending time with her I feel relevant and happy enough. I'd love to be married to her in my fantasies. Not in real life. I know my limits...people. In all their

surreptitious ways. I even feel good about death with the thereafter preference more cleared up. I almost decided to sleep some. But I feel a lot more like a fantasy. I take my fantasies very seriously. I'm extremely fair and I don't use anyone out of character. Specially for any special sexual privileges. And over all my fantasies are quite meaningful and well attended. I'm very lucky indeed. They're mostly preparatory my fantasies are. Sometimes I show up in the real reality knowing exactly what to say. All reasoned out and available. I smiled and closed my eyes slowly. Like I was saying from before, maybe come home with two medals of honor. No one, a nice shiny one. I uncrossed my legs. In fantasies you should keep the circulation going as much as possible for the best of better results. I'm back in America. Too much, I'm running for Congress. Me of all people. Who would of thought. I'm back with my leg missing. The right leg. No the left. I gave my leg for my country saving a bunch of K-nines from Vietcong snappers. I saved them believe it or not with a lot of surprising to me heroic and a lot of off key noise. I had to rely on shouting because an m-sixteen wasn't issued to me. And I'm a hero. No question so far about it. There's a photograph of me in the Westport News with my leg missing obviously and a fluffy-haired dog licking my cheek. Another buddy k-nine is bringing me his bone share unrequested. Not many hero photographs in the Westport News because not many rich people go to war. They serve other vital functions like making profits from war which we've got to prefer to win from. But I'm back thoroughly with the extra medals, so many I don't know what they are. Because I'm not much like my dogs impressed with medals. You know what? All the dogs I saved from the snappers, they're all with me. They got given to me by a confused colonel who was being kept awake by their unceremonious barkings. But nonetheless gave them to me without regard for anything but his confusion. Clear-cut details aren't essential in fantasies, actually they're best avoided in the interest of progress. At the Westport Train station my nine dogs and I get off the train. I've got the bone given to me by my photograph dog, in my also moderately but bloody wounded hand. Which will be o.k. The had not the wound. Yes I almost forgot. One of my dogs is female type. Mary Elizabeth is her name, K-nine Mary

Elizabeth. By some reasons that pleases me, Mary and I are very close. To be truthful she loves me dearly. It's almost unexplainable. I'm getting off the train holding the bone in my partially intact hand and somebody shouts, "Chuck you should run for Congress." I said, "well o.k." And why not I had nothing else to do that summer to recuperate from my wounds at their pace. Plus I'd already given my leg for my country why not more. So I run. And I run deftly to my surprise but nobody else's.

And here I am running. Now what? Sure fine that's good. I just don't run. My dogs run with me. The word gets out to the people, if my dogs trust me why shouldn't you? Most of that is probably that subliminal stuff, which is good for people who can't stop voting. You'd think if we had it right, one election would do it. Maybe not. God I'm not surprised, always problems. Go out amongst the people and problems of the acute variety. I'm attempted to be killed. One nimble dog buddy saves my life. His name is Homer. A mutt who got joined with us during the campaign. As a matter of fact there are twenty of us now counting me. So my life got saved in a timely manner from an unhappy practitioner from the other party with bad breath. Headlines all over the place. Mutt saves veteran, both live. I hold no gripes I explain publicly. I forgive the culprit, but advise him to do something about his bad breath. The police have other plans for him because they know he's otherwise a good shot. The polls get turned around already in my favor. You know how people are they love a good dog story. There's not really a point to have an election. But we do. Out of force of habit and pretense. We win. The dogs and I do. But see this is where the problems begin in an already successful fantasy. The winning happy-go-lucky part. I'm not pleased with that. It all becomes too unreal and not believable. I like the more getting there than the benign successful part. Wait a minute. I don't believe it. The victory party over and what. I'm informed myself directly from Congress that they don't allow dogs in Congress, just Republicans and Democrats. What do I do a kennel what? Of course not. I go to Congress and say the most briefest speech given their annals. I go up to the podium and steady say. "You don't want my dogs. You don't want me. So screw you all."

Jesus that was unexpected. It's not like me to swear in my fantasies. Or anywhere else. I don't know. Seems like the better the fantasy the worse they end. I sat up. The circulation is going against me maybe. I hope this isn't a symptom of my getting more coarse and harder. I yawned. I've got to be more attentive to myself. I yawned again. No problem yawns suit me under the right conditions of my privacy. I'm tired. I shouldn't maybe be. But I am. Maybe, I can have some nice dreams. Would be nice. I can use the company.

I woke up my eyes. I woke up that's what I meant. I don't remember deciding on a chance to sleep. But I must of slept because I woke up. It's unnatural off a bed. I hope Elaine didn't come by and decide about not waking me up. That marine guy, he wasn't there before. People are moving around. Black military guys get more infantry risk jobs than white guys. That's really too bad because it's not right. Their having more of a chance at death than somebody less colored. He sure sleeps well. Could be I do too. It's hard to tell from my wakened assessing of my sleep. I smiled at what just came up from my mind. Remember I told you about delivering groceries. Well there was this very African guy from Africa. Maybe from Nairobi Kenya I'm not sure. Somewhere anyway. Anyway he imparted to me some incredible information. He told me that in the distant past he came from proclaimed royalty. King warriors no less. Now his family are lofty businessmen and lawyers. His name is Arthur, the guy I'm talking about. Arthur got somehow side tracked from being royalty or a businessman. He'd kind of sit up on the bed, the way you'd expect royalty to sit, with a can of beer, but never seemed terribly influenced by it. One day he asked me pleasantly to put the groceries down. In the past we talked about world affairs. Which didn't take us long to do. Me less long than Arthur. This time out of nowhere he says, "You want to know how the white man came to be?" I said, "thanks I'd like that." Arthur explained after turning down the TV's, in a whisper that thousands of years ago after the African tribes got formed that bad things started to happen. People started stealing, and gossiping and sodomizing each other with and without co-operation. After a lot of patient warnings these thieves and all around sodomizers were kicked out of the tribes. But they

continued with their sodomizing ways and they got kicked out again and yet again, further and further away from the African sunbelt. Soon eventually these unhappy derelicts more further away from the hot sun belt, got whiter and whiter until pale white. Then Arthur opened up his arms like magic trick minus the smoke and said, "And that's how the white man came to be." I looked at him and said. "Well I'll be damned." It made perfect sense to me. I told Arthur we should talk about it some more for details. And he should inform some respected University. I love feeling intrigued and relevant. Because I read from some reliable anthropologist that man did get his walking start from around Africa. So I please with the information that Arthur had imparted to me. I stretched out my legs some under the seat in front of me. Maybe I should sit in the back seats only during a possible emergency, so I can get some reclining done. The pilot just said were approaching Guam put on your safety belts.

I can't get over it, safety conscious on the way to war. Why don't they call off a war due to safety considerations. At least maybe a war with more breaks, a part-time war maybe. Sure why not a war with very slow bullets. You know bullets that would take a month to get to their designated targets, give a guy a chance to reflect on his inconvenient immortality. I'm lagging from the jet lag, I'm not making sense. Not enough as I should by now for going to war. "Oh yeah, thanks a lot." She was a stewardess lady not Elaine bringing a bag lunch of some kind. We're coming down. A milk, an apple and a sandwich. Mostly sand outside no buildings yet. Do I get now to say that I was in Guam? No not unless I talked to some Guam people and said hi or whatever. Just landing is not anything but just landing. A ham and cheese sandwich. Poor pig what a way to end up. You know I think dogs and wolves would be vegetarians if there was more sport in catching vegetables. The plane is slowing on the runway. Feels like it anyway. Remember that elementary school joke, what's worse than finding a worm in an apple. Right, half a worm. I heard one at the University of Maine, the only one. That place was humor starved. It's probably been a hundred years since somebody there died laughing. Anyway it goes like this. A drunk walks limping into the doctor's office and says, "Doc I broke my leg in several places.

What should I do?" I yawned again, excuse me. And the doctor says, "Well stoppe going to those places!" Not a bad joke if you're having a desolate year. Sometimes you just have to be in shape to laugh. How can we be moving again? It's only been hardly not so long. We must not be disembarking. Just refueling for some reason. I fastened my belt. And took a bite from the sandwich. I put it down. I'll eat the apple later. The jet bounced itself down the runaway, gaining speed. Makes more sense to say going faster. How can you gain speed? What else, I thought as the jet got airborne some. Out of boredom I'm going to get some more sleep with luck. I dislike boredom bitterly. I always feel if I'm bored long enough that I'm probably doing something right. Strange sure I know. But by the time you're eighteen you should know where you stand. Me right now I'm going to sleep, with luck or otherwise I'm going to sleep. I wonder what really happens to people when they go to sleep.

"We will be landing on Clark Air Force Base Philippines. Upon arrival you will have thirty-five minutes during which time you can disembark, if you wish." I heard that. The Philippines. Do they speak Spanish or what? I don't know. How about Elaine though? I fastened my safety belt. I inhaled and exhaled just in case I needed to. I felt like I used up to much time sleeping. Could be maybe I lost some accrued preparedness with the rest of it all. I folded my arms under my chest. Balance if nothing else, also something for the to do. He did say we could get off the jet. The jet bounced already. I wasn't looking. Bouncing hard again, take it easy buddy. Bouncing lots of times, too many to count. Terrible landing, would almost have to be on purpose. I'm waiting for the jet to slow down under the pilot's efforts. I got a great idea...wow. A great idea for company. Johnny Jones in my reconnaissance class, from Alabama, he's stationed here at this Clark Air Force Base. I can have company. He was my all-purpose weather friend Johnny was. I just looked up where we'd be landing. I would of loved looking forward to seeing Johnny. What a friend he was, is still, is I'm sure. He'd go out precariously on a limb for you in short notice too. I'll give you an example. With a good friend you only need one. With Johnny there were quite a few. There was this Sergeant Luster at Lowery who

taught one of our classes. Just maybe three year older than me, if that. He worked as a bartender at night, during the day he was Air Force gung ho at the right times. A regular person to. We didn't get along great, me and Luster. I should better say he didn't get along with me. He had the extra stripe not me. Me I only had the stripes to be a subjugated victim on short notice. Maybe he disliked because I was chronically more relaxed than him. Can't tell when it comes to contempt. If you try to find out contemptible gets all stirred up. Could maybe possibly be that I was better at being humiliated than Luster was at humiliating. I just never took him seriously. One day I said something misdirected that questioned most of his personality when I only intended to inquire as to his authority. I made a mistake is what I'm saying. I don't right now remember exactly what it was. But it was spontaneous and unredeemable by me with an apology that I didn't have available to give. He just got to me in an accumulated way. It was as inopportune as I'd gotten in the military. If I had to do all over again I would have tried muffled whispering my sentiments. But good old Sergeant Luster walked over to me directly. And with unmilitary like precision took me by the arm. I followed him by his orders to the bathroom. "You're out," he said between his tobacco-calory stained teeth. "You're going to go see the base psychologists and you're out." He sounded and looked like a misplaced baseball umpire. Me, I was terrified of one of those dishonorable discharges like I told you. I'd already survived one. I said out loud instinctively it was so quick, "If you make me see the base psychologist I'll tell him you brought me in the bathroom unwillingly and tried to french kiss me." Sarge made a move with his own choice. And it wasn't because he wanted to show it to me. At that very just then Johnny walked in talking in his Alabama way. You see, the military takes uniformed lucid witnesses very seriously. It's very hard to break the military code of conduct in front of a bleeding victim and a soldier witness. Not good mathematics. Johnny knew it, that's why he was there. Isn't that something. Sergeant Luster after eyeballing Johnny put his nasty fist down and retreaded himself to the classroom. I got saved through a prevailing friend. Johnny Jones was just a good friend, that's all there is to it. And

that's enough.

The disembarking line is dwindling down slowly with me at the tail end. Down the aisle more slowly. Shuffling gets to me, it gives me the feeling I am where I've been. Worse than walking backwards, at least then you're going somewhere familiar. I looked again too many times over the shoulder I'm running out of plane. I startled myself with a sound. Somebody I'm sure called my name. Unless somebody else's. Just eight feet from the exit hatch thing, it is me. "Chuck Winters." I called out not too loud. "Yes I am, it's me." Another stewardess came over and handed me a note folded up. I got ready for bad news. I kept walking reading. I don't want to react completely till I know all the bad about it. "Chuck I came back. You were fast asleep. I did not want to disturb you. I had to get off at Guam. I hope and pray all will go well with you in South Vietnam." Signed Elaine. Now a ps. "Good luck with your old age box. I'll try some rocky road in America, when it comes back." And there's a stick of gum. I inhaled and it turned into a sigh. I felt vanished by my unprepared for consternation. There's nothing to do. But just do what I'm doing, more of less. But it's going to be more less than more. This is bad luck in the flesh.

I looked, got surprised I'm in the sun. I squinted away, folding the note carefully the note carefully for my old age box. At best it was rotten bad luck missing Elaine asleep. "I don't know maybe it's for the best." I headed toward the terminal looking for something to distract me. "Maybe it's not for the best." I tucked the note and gum carefully in my wallet. That for sure is going into my old age box. A most prominent part too. When I'm old and decrepit I'll chew up this gum and remember. Then I'll just sit and reminisce to hell all over the place. But I'll never see Elaine again. The goodbyes are getting fainter and fainter, right within my own unavoidable proximity too. I picked up my pace considerably and walked right through the swinging doors into the terminal. I hope I don't make another brief time friend. I got startled unexpectedly. Good a diversion. Right in front of me, over my head a mural, a stark mural of the General McArthur-walking from the ocean onto the beach with several of his all-wet assistants. He looked like King Neptune about to take a hearty walk amongst

the disbelieving natives. Except for the aviator glasses he did look godly. The kind of sunglasses that look like the guy puts them on with both fists. He was something else that McArthur. I looked for a phone. I hope they don't have a different convoluted dialing way. I looked back at the mural, still coming out of the water. You would of thought he'd of made progress. Why do murals I'm familiar with look like somebody's going somewhere, and that somewhere is the same as the guy depicted? There's a phone. Watch Johnny's on leave, not in, never heard of him anyway. There's always somewhere waiting an impending change of pattern. Well dial and find out, if dialing is what's done around here.

What did I tell you? I've got some good luck turning my way. I hope it's not just a fly-by type thing. After a short conversation the sergeant guy told me sure he'd tell Johnny I was in the terminal. I climbed up to the next level where it looked like the restaurant thing was situated. Good it is. I sat down feeling tired and a little displace. I told the sergeant twice my time dilemma and he said o.k. he'd tell Johnny. I looked up almost startled, but just my eyes. I got surprised to see a foreign person. I snapped my fingers in angry frustration and stupidity. Jesus, see there I go, I'm the damn foreigner here. Now I succeeded in unsettling her. "It's alright Miss, there's no need for both of us to be startled. It was my fault." I smiled. "My consternation not yours." I smiled again, and tossed my arms up in the air in mild surrender. She smiled warmly. I needed to ask her name. She was quite young. I decided not to, enough impropriety for now. The young lady took my order of two bottled cokes if possible and exited a little sideways for some reason. Maybe she didn't want to expose than one flank to me at a time. Customs of here maybe, I don't know. Whatever, I've got to focus myself on paying attention. My first overseas person and I blow it. The last thing I want to do is arrive in Saigon and be rude. I pinched my fingers together as a reminder to myself, a physical one that might register. I wish I knew more prayers than my own.

I looked at my watch again stupidly. It's on Pacific Time and we're here on whatever time. I don't even know how many time zones I've crossed. You'd think you'd know, some sensation anyway, when you're crossing one. I've been

here at least three, four minutes, many more than two minutes probably. But I didn't start counting them from any beginning so I don't know. I tightened my hands around the metal bannister. I'm standing because I wait better standing impatiently standing. Why now of all places am I thinking about orgasms? Jesus I've got to organize myself to some conclusion. Sure that's probably it, me in my high school gown holding on to a metal bannister. RS photographed me. Remember that crazy pony tail girl even to my graduation she got to me. Unannounced she appears. And with new proportions suddenly. I find it interesting how girl's pleasant anatomy changes with the less and less parental supervision they encourage and gets afforded to them. Probably just a miracle of nature that went its own way, nothing to do with supervision except for God's. Anyway, "Chuck," she comes up to me, completely unperturbed by what she knows is in her mind, and says, "Chuck do you happen to have a premature orgasm?" I looked at her in my dignified robes. Understand at the time being a virgin I didn't know if my orgasm was premature or conventional because I'd never had an assisted orgasm. I was still a committed virgin. And she's still standing there below the bannister like she's about to give her an answer and said, "I don't exactly know, most probably what I've got is and immature one." She did a right face and disappeared forever. I knew her name once. But I forgot it somehow in my memory. I miss her I do, more and more. She wasn't pretty too much. But intriguing and rumbunctious. goes to show you really don't know how pretty a woman is until you know her and miss her. She did a person real well. Where's Johnny? The pilot guy said thirty five minutes. And the cokes?

I turned around on a chance. The teenage girl was just standing there waiting, forlorn like and maybe obedient. It was awful. I hurried back over. I don't want somebody to be obedient to me. Not without the warning of a conversation. "Please Miss relax and tell me how much I owe you in America currency if possible. And I wish you had tapped my shoulder. I had no idea you were waiting." I looked more at her for an answer. "Ist one dollar o.k. g.i." I wrestled through my wallet. "May I give you two dollars as a kind of an American custom called tipping." She smiled and shrugged one shoulder. I handed

her carefully the two dollars. Too often money is stuffed and not handed well. She took it. The young lady took the money and left after curtsying mildly. Something else I don't think I've ever been curtsied before. I'll be damned. A first, and I thought I'd have to get to Vietnam to get to those. A curtsy on the way to Vietnam. I picked up the coke and started drinking. Mom says I guzzle. I think of it more as efficient disposal. I should of asked her if she knew how much time had elapsed since I startled her and myself. I put the empty bottle down. I don't guzzle around immediate public, that would be obtuse and potentially vulgar. Impolite too, but I handle carbonation well. Even as a baby child my mother said during breast feeding I wasn't much hardly at all for belching. Johnny, I looked at my watch, before making eye contact I knew I shouldn't of again. That's it I'm gone. If I miss the plane I'm court marshalled on arrival guilty and condemned. Not even hello enough to say goodbye. This is getting partially peculiar.

I ran outside and into the jet. I ambled my way toward the back looking by chance for Elaine. Even though Elaine said she got off at Guam. I like looking for miracles I guess. I sat down, hungry, tired and thirsty. I should of drunk that other coke. I tightened my safety belt just to remind myself where I was going. So many goodbyes. I guess I could think better bye next time. I hope Andycharlie is getting along well in a dog's world. Father Eduardo moving around with a burning candle just as slow as he was. Terry calling me in the morning before I left Costa Rica to wish me extra love and good luck. Crazy Rodney Stuart handing me his baseball cards, including the one signed by Mickey Manble and Roger Maris. Jesus I hope I don't disappoint them all and die. They wouldn't be good at my inexplicable death. And Elaine. And now Johnny. Eugenia, no I'm not going to get into Eugenia. Just take it easy. The jet jostled itself forward. We might not make it to Saigon, belly flop skid on and across the Red China Sea, come to a stop in Australia. Be the landing scandal of the century. I'll sleep. Will I? With my absence of luck I'll wake up in somebody else's dream with no complaining rights. It's just a little short hop to Saigon. I'll sleep yes or imitate myself sleeping. I need the rest.

"We're here!" I said, loud enough for me to hear while still waking up. "I'm here too" I said more under my breath. I didn't stay awake. I didn't I guess. The wheels touched and touched again. I looked out the window. It's not too bad. Palm trees and sunshine. One year from right now and I'm going home the other way. We coasted passed three gi's sitting on sandbags, encircling some jet fighter planes. They're waving. I waved back. I don't think they saw me. Palm trees, sunshine and friendly people. Too much maybe could be I exaggerated myself to worry unnecessarily. I hope so. I won't hope so. I'll say that's it and true. I put my hand down from waving. Over there some fat belly transport takes off. A B-52 landing tenaciously like hungry for the runaway. We're certainly coasting a lot. The captain just informed us that we just landed in Saigon, South Vietnam. Anybody who's surprised gets promoted. I chuckled at my own joke. My laughter got short winded. The captain just said. "Good luck." He sounded like he meant it. The jet engines growled and we slowed down. Slower, the engines let out one of their almost finished outbursts. We turned into a half circle. A couple of seconds, now yes, the jet stopped. "Where's my mother fucking recruiter." Several guys laughed. Jesus, not yet out and already the most severe swearing possible. I got up an inch and fell down against myself. My safety belt was still on. I unbuckled myself. I inhaled deeply and exhaled less deeply. What happened to the rest of my breath? I stretched my arms again and my legs. I felt stiff. Someone said something about unloading. That must be us.

I followed the tail end of the line. Concentrating slowly on being careful going out through the hatch thing. I stopped-the heat, "incredible." It's like reaching into the oven for a baked potato. I started down the escalator steps. I hope everyone's going to be o.k. while I'm gone. My hands on the rails, one step at a time. I looked up almost near the last step. Hundreds of g.i.'s moving in every which way. An air control tower, radar turning and turning. I'm myself down in Vietnam. Except for the heat, not too bad. So far anyway. Far right in front of me, two metal roof buildings without walls. Desks g.i.'s sitting busy. Jesus the heat what's the point. I'm walking toward a five foot

stack of duffle bags looking around for, whatever. A g.i. with no shirt climbed up to the pile of duffle bags. No shirt isn't that out of uniform. He's yelling out names. Another one, his dog tags swinging across his chest. His tanned chest wet with sweat. I got closer yet to better hear my possible name. A bead of sweat rolled down the side of my face. I ran my shirt sleeve across my temple. Head off anymore beads. Must be awful this heat getting hotter. I grabbed a glance at the sun. This is too hot for sun bathing. "Winters." Somebody's authority voice yelled out my name. I followed myself into the sun. I mean, the sound of my name with the sun in my face.

He's a sergeant, with an impressive military head. They always have a crewcut head, and bone jaw when they talk like that. I exhaled with my mouth open, hoping to let some heat out. I stood a safe distance, but right in front of the sergeant with my name. "Airman Winters sergeant?" I can see my reflection in his funny silver sunglasses. He's looking around over my head. I couldn't remember if you're supposed to salute sergeants or just what? He turned away from me. No eye contact nothing. Not even my body. "Let's go Winters the war effort is depending on you?" The vacation is over completely. You're just supposed to salute officers who are in the way. That's it. I followed behind him running my fingers against my brow. A trail of sweat drops rolled off my finger onto the sand. And disappeared on contact. I'm right behind him. He swung himself into the jeep. "Well get in Winters!" He squeezed hard the steering wheel. "Yes, sure sergeant?" I wanted to ask where we're going. One of those two duffle bags must be mine. No questions are best? No questions are best? I'm back unheralded to do my duty. We're accelerating. I mean the jeep is-actually. I should of noticed his name. Just in case there's a reason to. I want to look back over my shoulder to see that airport as we were leaving. I'd better just get practical.

"Sergeant I have a question if I may?" I waited for some response. None yet. I coughed myself out of reflex. And nerves probably. "Yes sergeant do you happen to know what time it is?" I turned to look more directly at him for encouragement? And not to miss any answer.

He turned. I'm looking at myself looking at him. "You're kidding me Winters?"

"No sergeant, no I'm not. Because I'm probably still on Pacific time or worse." I should of quit during an incomplete sentence. You never go past a you're kidding remark. Even if you have to, you don't. I've got to get onto my transition. Not yet anywhere and I'm off to a near bad start. I should of marched everywhere in San Diego. I moved myself more deeply into the jeep. And be silent I said to myself without moving my lips. He accelerated for some reason he had a right to. I looked around mostly peripheral. Maybe I can and should begin to memorize the base some? Get ahead of myself? The wind felt good! Those all of them must be drainage ditches. For that monsoon stuff. I wonder when it happens! It's getting wet I mean. Not those fox hole things I don't think. Not right in front of each other across the street. We turned the sun again. A lot of guys walking. Something different about them. A nice palm tree nonchalant like. That's nice. Another one good. I have an affection from way back for palm tree. I can always come by and hang around with palm trees. I looked over to the sergeant momentarily. I don't know why. Just did that's all. He seems unperturbed and unmolested. "I'll be damned." I said too out loud with my excitement. We just now passed by two soccer fields. Great not bad. Play some soccer maybe. Read a lot, save a lot of money, get in extra shape and write a lot of letters. That's what I'm going to do? Spend my year and go home-enhanced. Play some soccer with some oriental guys that would be nice. They can teach me things I'm sure. The sergeant applied his breaks metal loud. He stopped in front of an air police guard shack. They nodded to each other with a lot of emphasis. The Ap waved us in with his arm across his own chest. He sure has a lot of weapons. The choice must be excruciating. That's what it is here from before that was different. The weapons, on all the talking soldiers. M-16's, hand guns, hand grenades, I think and some that were new to me. Now a cafeteria on my right. We're moving very slowly snail's pace. The cafeteria covered by sandbags. Six feet maybe no maybe seven feet high. The sand bags are. All those guys a long line I guess waiting to eat. A tall very

funny frog like radar tower on the left. We stopped hard. I went forward looking. A black gi swiveled himself around the fender and moved on. He's smiling, a close call like that and smiling. A congested bullfrog is what that looks like. I turned back around forward. More drainage ditches. These thirty forty of them must be barracks. Moving faster just a little. Behind us I didn't see it before. Sure yeah, probably a maintenance thing. Jeeps, trucks look even and ambulance all torn up. Metal twisted everywhere. We stopped! I went sideways forward only slightly though. He's into his stops isn't he. I hope it is my duffle bag. Maybe I'm already supposed to know something I don't! About my duffle bag. I got slightly nervous.

"This is it Winters. Your home away from home." He's already out of the jeep about to talk again. "Let's go!" I swung out. I almost before said thanks. I'm glad I didn't. I've already taken enough chances. He walked in ahead of me. I quickly checked the duffle bags. "Good it's mine." On my that's it. I hurried bent sideways some towards the screen door. I'm hurling fast to catch up, opening the door with my free hand. I can feel my cheek crushed by the duffle bag. The sleeping quarters, all of them, are separated by lockers. Good some marginal privacy at least. I'm looking out with only one eye. The bag got tilted forward. "Where's the sergeant?" The bunks have mosquito netting. They've got unwelcome mosquitos here I guess. Privacy, mosquito netting and lockers. Walked just right by a guy watching TV tucked between the two bunks. Couldn't of been beer in his hand. No not open like beer, no that's way off the military code thing. Way off.

"You're right here Winters." I looked up still walking. I stopped just in time. I put duffle down, the sergeant still slapping the top bunk. Wire screen windows good for some breeze. I'm on top. I straightened and rotated my shoulders. Trying to be casual and not tough about it. "That there is your locker?" The more severe the sun glasses the more they leave them on inside. I don't mean to be looking at him. "This is your key. Do you have any questions Winter?" He said it like time up for questions.

I took the key still in his hand. "Thank you no sergeant. No questions

thanks.

"Winters one more thing." He uncrossed his legs and stopped leaning on the locker. "Tomorrow at 0 nine hundred you have a debriefing at the intelligence building."

"Sure sergeant, that's at nine o'clock in the morning right?" I inhaled feeling better now just tired.

"Right Winters." The sergeant said, already walking away. His voice fading he added, "Something like that!" I needed to ask him directions. But I'm better off postponing that for sure. He would of answered me in some brief way anyway. I looked around at nothing I'd already hadn't seen. I've been here maybe half an hour or less and I've made no real extreme mistakes. Good that counts for momentum. Sure it does. I should of though asked maybe one or two etique questions anyway. Like are you supposed to change into your pajamas to go to the latrine for a whoever or what. I'm not-

"I Sung Ho."

I turned around too quick thinking somehow enemy of some kind. I got to surprised-distracted to know which one enemy it might be. Woman or oriental. She took a step closer to me smiling. "Hi," I said almost moving back unconsciously.

"Ho, me Sung Ho mamason." I smiled. She's very nice looking. Five feet three in sandles with buck teeth that stick out nicely. I stopped myself staring with another smile. Now she smiled back as I looked away. I could see she picked up a combat boot. What's about to go on? I leaned on the bunk bed. But not enough to appear lazy impolite or comfortable. Just tired now more perplexed. She looked up to see if I'm paying attention. She's mimicking like polishing the combat boot. Real feverishly. Maybe I shouldn't guess what she's doing. I shrugged when she looked up. Should I ask for her name again more slowly or what? She's looking more at me. I shrugged again. I think a shrug is international all over. Could be maybe she's here to greet new troops in some Vietnamese ceremonial way. I shrugged again. The highest possible shrug. Almost over my ears. Now she shrugged.

"I Sung Ho mamason!" She raised her knee up and brought it down hard on the cement floor. Fortunately to my relief it arrived to the floor softly. An injury now would be too soon. Way too soon. I don't know enough first aid to apologize. I raised my hands palm up to the ceiling like some surrender shrug. That might be a whole new gesture I thought.

Exasperated for thought I said. "I Chuck Winters of mostly from America. I don't understand. Really I don't. I'm afraid you've got me at a deficit." She made a groaning sound and walked right over to me. And tossed open the bunk's mosquito netting. After unmaking the bed she started making it. I felt awful not knowing what. I shouldn't be doing this on jet lag. Suddenly she moved quickly away and grabbed a walking by g.i.

I looked at him and said perplexed softly. "This lady I think wants to sell me some combat boots. And is threatening to make my bed?"

He laughed brief and easy. I could barely hear the laughter. He looked differently tired. I never saw that expression before. And right after a near laugh.

"No buddy. Sung Ho here is a mamason. She'll make your bed, shine your boots, do the laundry for five hundred piasters a month. It's a good deal." Sung Ho with almost each word moved her head up and down.

I looked at the black gi and said beyond myself exasperated. "You mean like a servant." Not waiting for an answer I added almost stern. "Could you please somehow tell Sung Ho." I looked around myself for available words. "That I'm very opposed to servants of any kind. That I myself am here to help. I mean that I'm here myself to help. You know by being a soldier. Your name is Sung Ho right? Did I pronounce you correctly?" She nodded graciously. Nice too. "Like I'm saying Sungo Ho. I'm here to help out and free everybody somehow. Having servants, is just all the more bad. Even since I'm opposed to servants in the best of conditions anyway. So the short of it for all those reasons is that I can't allow myself to have a servant of any kind. But thank you very much for the offer." Sungo Ho stomped her foot hard again. And the expression on her face was exasperated and getting worse. I opened my hands up in front of me to

show my own available exasperation. Sung Ho planted her feet up and raised her hands to her lips. I put my hands into my back pockets trying to remember if these pants had any. Suddenly for no reason perceivable to me Sung Ho looked at me in potential relief. And considerable wondering. I raised my shoulder for my own sake. I want to stick to my own ideas the few I've got. Sungo Ho smiled like she meant it knowing something. Jesus this is as incredulous as it can get unannounced and on short notice. I mean, I'm here for democracy's sake and they avail themselves a servant to me. One day, not yet one day and already a potential compromise unexpected. Sungo Ho is still smiling. I'm just looking. A real sustained sincere smile. I haven't witnessed one of those in years maybe many years. "Look Sungo Ho ah?" She's looking more than I was. "Let's make a compromise because it just now somehow came to mine that you might need the money for personal and extra ordinary reasons like maybe even children of your own. So this is what we'll do for a compromise. You understand compromise." Sung Ho shook her head believably. "Well o.k., it's like this. You shine and I shine the shoes. The laundry we take turns together with. And everything else we share right in half. And I still will pay you the five hundred piasters o.k." I held up five fingers before I felt my stupidity for doing so. Sung Ho was already taller with her happiness and applauding without making one sound. "Sungo Ho that's great that's great." I held out my hand after taking a step. And we shook. I was so relieved I didn't pay any attention much to the handshake if it was good or what.

"You o.k. number one gi." Sung Ho leaned over nice to one hip smiling all the way.

"Number one gi thanks that's probably good right?" Sung Ho nodded. "Well fine and o.k. Sung Ho listen Sung Ho." For a moment now past I almost forget her name." I almost said Sung Ho with the current rate of exchange as I understand it why don't I pay you the five dollars in advance. Just in case for whatever reason." I already had the wallet in my hand with five dollars on its way out. I handed it to Sung Ho folded. I don't like to hand out full stretched out money. I think it's in poor taste. Specially in a war zone for Godsakes. Sung

Ho took it while I was still thinking to myself. And already I noticed with more of a smile than before. I dropped my hands to my side with my own smile. "Now Sung Ho with your permission I'm going to go rest myself on account of that I'm tired. I raised my hands up to my ear like a pillow. Sung Ho nodded hard but still very graceful and exited with her self. But after already one more smile. God these people so far have incredible motion. Different from ours, more of it, and with more dimension. Good I feel good. Here not a day yet and good news all around. I'm glad and relieved though Sung Ho didn't bow at me like in the movies. I'm not comfortable with bows. And I'm not that experienced with them myself from my end. I could feel myself smile a little looking at the bed. I took one shoe off then the other and took the bed post with one hand to help with the hoist. I wonder why they had that wrecked up ambulance in the mechanics depot. I thought those Red Cross people weren't supposed to get assaulted. Because it didn't look like normal wreck damage. Maybe an accident by hit. I mean hit by accident. I put up a foot on the lower bank cleared a passage through the mosquito netting and lifted myself slowly. And into the bed with myself finally flat. I brushed the mosquito netting away from my face. We should have been taught some of the language here you know. Coming here to die and kill everything. We should have been taught some of the language as a courtesy to all of us around concerned. Nothing articulate like hello maybe, please would of been good, God bless you as an option, and also watch out might be helpful. I felt my eyes closing a little without too much of my co operation. Also some customs. Sure some culture and custom. Do ladies get seated first. And what about those sneeze grizunheight situations. And something preliminary about love for starters probably. But I didn't get any of that, nothing at all actually. I finally decided to close my eyes already feeling partially fading.

I went up on elbows recognizing myself on the way up, I heard something. I looked at my wrist watch that wasn't there. I heard more human sounds. I opened the mosquito netting preparing my eyes.

"Sorry Chuck we tried to keep it down. How about a drink?" I opened my mosquito netting more. There five guys four maybe six. Liquor bottles a

rotating fan. Flagrantly liquor bottles out in the open space.

"Hi is liquor allowed here in this place." I sat up more shifting to one elbow.

"Allowed, it's required!" No four guys counting me. One left? "I'm your roommate Chuck. Bunk mate actually, my name is Chris, Chris Bradley." I had to shake his hand with my left hand because my weight was all over my other hand. He was short and stocky with curly hair. Even from up here he was short. I draped my foot over the bunk and slid down belly against the bunk bed.

"Hi." I said turning around still a little too tired. I offered my hand for a proper shake.

We shook extra enough to make the drink in Chris's hand jostle around. "Chuck I'd like you to meet some of the guys. "This guy here is Tony Jensen, call him Tennessee for obvious reasons." We shook and nodded. He was not only drinking but maybe almost drunk groggy. "Over here." Chris had me by my elbow. "Is my buddy from Ohio State University where we avoided the draft together Bobby Adair." I smiled and nodded because his hand didn't go out. He smiled, with the drink at his lips tilting. "Except I didn't know Bob was at Ohio when I was there." These are long introductions for a war zone. I looked again walking, that Bobby guy was quite over all tall with very red hair. People with red hair seem taller to me for some reason I don't know. "Here we have Chuck." I turned more to look, the fumes of the liquor in this night heat were getting to me. Even the moon gets hot around here. "Chuck are you paying attention?" I smiled and before answering Chris went on, "This is Airman Lawrence the keenest mind in intelligence." We shook gently for both of us. He was even taller than the other guy. And near fat, but well distributed with his over-weight. "So Chuck where are you from? What is it going to be Scotch, Vodka maybe-

"No thank you. I'm better sober Chris, but I appreciate the offer." I still wasn't recovered, drinking in the open. "But do you happen to have a coke or something close like it?"

"Sure Coke coming up." Chris opened his locker. He had a refrigerator there and more waiting liquor bottles full and unused.

"Chris how did you happen to know my name? They didn't tell yo I was coming, did they?" On the second try Chris popped the Coke can.

"No, your duffle bag." Chris handed me the Coke, missing my hand by a couple of inches. We both laughed. Me out of courtesy.

"That reminds me," I said out loud to myself. I went into my pocket for the locker key, then the other pocket. I needed to try the locker and the key. Walking my feet still hurt from the landing on them. The blood got slow recirculating and got coagulated to the bottom of my feet while I was sleeping.

"What are you doing Chuck?"

"I'm trying to open my locker pretty much?"

"No Chucky it's right key, wrong locker. How was your flight?"

"Oh." I looked over to the other locker. The other guys were talking stationary like mostly drinking slowly. "My trip, Oh my trip was fine, we landed." I went over to my locker, not to pen it though. That Red Adair guy was wobbling, leaning on the hinge thing. Half his body looked like it was trying to get away from the other half. A real pronounced devoted lean. I stuck the key in." "Chris I'm in photo reconnaissance. Does that happen to be in the intelligence building for some reason?"

"Yep sure enough. I don't know if there's a reason, but photo recon and intelligence... same gi. All the guys in these several barracks here work at the White Elephant."

I don't want to believe it. I tried it upside down and again the other way. Even angles and nothing. The key wouldn't get in enough to turn which ever which way.

"That Sergeant with the mirror glasses gave me the wrong key. Did you say White Elephant? Some kind of nick name maybe?" I looked out the wire mesh window. For some reason not much of our light seemed to get out.

"Mirror glasses." Chris laughed to himself upping his cheeks against his chest while stirring his drink with a pencil. "Yeah that's it White Elephant is a nickname. An elephant never forgets, something like that." He smiled a big smile into his drink. I turned around, two of the guys had left. Red Adair was

past leaning almost asleep except for one eye, his elbow up to his cheek against the locker.

"Listen Chris, I said I'd like to ask you a question. First you know I don't want to appear intrusive somehow on my first day in Vietnam." Chris raised his eyebrows more slowly than I'd ever seen. I stopped to wait for their peak. "Anyway what I'm leading up to saying is that, well are you sure drinking isn't against the military rules here. This isn't some kind of protest is it?"

"Yeah," He said like a laugh, pushing off his locker with his shoulder. He had gotten to leaning while I was talking. Chuck about the first thing you learn here is that this isn't like I was talking. "Chuck about the first thing you learn here is that this isn't like America. Drinking is fine, everything more or less is fine. Smirnoff a half gallon is a buck and change. A fifth of Jack Daniels is what, less than two bucks. Drinking you might say is encouraged. Not that we need much encouragement." Chris had to make two tries to get his drink to the drinking part of his mouth. I yawned demonstrably. All this extra added leaning and slow drinking is reminding me I'm tired.

"Well actually Chris it doesn't seem all that bad here. I met Sung Ho and we agreed and got along fine. And sleeping I could hear the thunder, a gently breeze and--"

"No thunder, Chuck my friend those were our B-52's trying to keep the VC off their toes. They were hitting our perimeters. Maybe not B-52's, anyway bombing."

"Bombing Jesus I hope they're accurate and not hurt anyone." I asked too outloud.

"Like us?" Chris laughed.

"I guess yeah us? But bombing too much. Too much all around for sure. I never heard a bomb go off before with a reason." Chris looked at me like he missed me where I was standing. I smiled. He smiled back half a smile. "Well if you'll excuse me Chris, I think I'm going to go back to sleep so I can get up tomorrow... Goodnight o.k."

"Sure Chuck good night." Chris said almost not finishing the easy sentence.

I turned around. Chris slapped me easily on the back, just as I started to heave myself up. Up to my belly on my bunk I thought I should of undressed at ground level. I lifted my left knee up onto the bunk and rolled in sitting up. More successful climb than the first time. Less over-coming of everything like myself. Chris is going to be a good roommate. Nice of him to slap me on my back friendly like. And he was partially inebriated. Just imagine what he'll be like sober. I pulled off my other shoe and placed it on the corner of the bed. The other guys were interesting from the near distance of themselves and me. I finished off my shirt and unbuckled my pants after the belt. I most particularly like Sung Ho. She's all around nice and familiar without effort. I pulled down the mosquito netting for some available privacy. I decided to keep my pants on. I don't know why. I just did. Unbuckled and on. I cushioned my head against the pillow. Nice pillows I'll give them extra credit for that. Real nice. I put the sheet over my chest, then pulled it off. Remembering I was too warm. I closed my eyes. "If I die in my sleep please don't wake me?" I whispered laughing lightly around myself. I closed my eyes more relaxed easing up on my eyelids. A nice dream would be welcome and nice for sure. Be well received a nice dream would. A nice Sung Ho lady, a getting better roommate and a key that...I gave myself up flowing into the jet lag.

You won't believe this. I found it interesting, actually almost very interesting. No for sure actually intriguing. Just now a few minutes ago, after I woke up. I went to the latrine place. Shave and shower, then I'm standing pretty much urinating to myself. I tell you that possible indiscretion, because well that's what I was doing. Anyway right out there forty yards maybe from out American urinal, what do I see and hear from another gi? Right past the thick barbed wire, already past a narrow dirt road, and past again this observation tower with a machine gun. I've got to stop because of my interested excitement. What I was trying to say. Right over there to the very right is this large sad French cemetery. For the French soldiers who got killed here before for their own reasons that they were doing here. Probably they brought Democracy here prematurely. I don't know. It's too bad though. That's something else, the

Pentagon could of done taught us some history on why were here. Reasons and stuff I mean? I have to find out better on my own. But listen two or three hundred yards from the French Cemetery a children's orphanage. Maintained by somebody? I mean isn't that something else vivid like, that's the history of Vietnam unwritten of the last past how many years. Now us here right in the middle. It's all so clear and very tearful, it makes too much sense. But now after thinking about it some more just now I stopped myself. And am going to continue stopped till I know more! I'd forgotten when I woke up to take it easy. Spread myself out in the right places. I'm here for my duration and I can't be knowing too much without the facts.

The next thing is unusual maybe possibly even peculiar. I'm still thinking about it drying my hair here in my cubicle. Understand as you know I'm not saying peculiar is bad. Peculiar is just sometimes what it is. And you're stuck with that word in a punctual inescapable way. You get stuck at shocked and invested in peculiar. I don't mean to sound like I know what I'm talking about? But anyway like I said I don't get ingratiating about my clothes. But my body I try to stay aware and appropriate about. I got deviated again from what I was trying to get to? I wanted to tell you what happened unintentionally in the shower just now. So, yeah I standing there showering myself oblivious as I can be without help. And out of control, my control, not even aware of it at first. My peripheral vision wanders on me. Understand right off, I don't go around checking out undressed people in showers. Or anywhere else except maybe Eugenia. And we got there by agreement and consensus. But in a shower you can't go around with your eyes closed tight without soliciting some kind of possible injury. What do I see out of the corners of my eyes. Because I'm facing the incident now. A muscle husky guy with neat black hair, a completely tanned body that had a tatoo of a cockroach on its penis. I think it was a cockroach! I don't know my insects that well. Specially on penis's. Needless to say I got shocked and amazed beyond myself. And immediately without forewarning got to the word peculiar. I swift turned away post haste already having seen too much for my memories sake. I first thought quickly my eyes closed for the indiscretion of

my embarrassment. I hope he knew the tatoo applier! I mean talking about entrusting your penis to another person. It had to be close to the most unscheduled thing I expected to see today. I finally went from shocked to confused which is the peculiarity of my pattern. I recovered quickly though and almost decided to engage him in conversation about his cockroach. Fortunately I didn't. It would of been highly irregularly. I reminded myself what I knew. Don't ask the obvious when it's already potentially beyond reproach. I've learned that specially from strangers. Have had to remind myself repeatedly. Because the very real extreme odds are that he had a good reason for his cockroach penis that was private. If not more so? Plus if I'd made a comment about it he would of known that I was paying undue attention to his penis. And that wouldn't do in a war zone. And also if my some immeasurable odds he didn't know he had a tatoo like that on his penis, the last person he'd want to hear about is from some curious stranger in a shower in Saigon Vietnam. So I lucked out all around. Maybe a long-standing patient family doctor or a tolerant priest with a sense of humor, but not an unannounced curious stranger for sure. I don't mean to get entirely analytical about it. But I must admit it's not something I'm going to be able to forget without the benefit of some very accurate surgery. I also just didn't expect to get unsettled so soon in Vietnam. Well what are you going to do?

I put on my green fatigues with my combat boots. I expect they want you to get dressed up looking like you're ready and available for whatever. I hope that debriefing is brief. I'm not easily briefed. Specially when I don't know about what. My glasses, I have them on. I'm legally blind in one eye in Connecticut. It varies that legally blind stuff from state to state you know. I don't know if I'm blind in Vietnam though. Probably they don't get to standards too much here. What's the difference. If there were a negotiable difference. You'd think if I were less legally blind in Virginia, I could get to see more. I don't know I'll have to think about it? Anyway I'm ready groomed, startled and ready. Am I ready? Sure why not! I got up from sitting on Chris's bunk. I hope that's o.k. I bent over and ironed out the wrinkles with my hand. I have to check out

that key dilemma thing. They gave us lockers for some reason. I hope RS and everyone is alright. Andycharlie everybody. I'm fortunate all around. If things were any better, they probably wouldn't be. I put on my cunt cap. No that's the wrong cap for this color. They like that green thing. There it is under my Peter Pan peanut butter. They do call it that. Cunt cap, the Air Force does. Strange unnecessary ideas. Nothing I can do about it without saying something. Basic training they started all that funny talk. My bed isn't real well made? But if they encourage budget drinking, beds shouldn't get to them whatever their status. Plus I'm hungry enough to eat breakfast? No Jesus no. I just remembered my deal with Sung Ho. I've got to make my bed. I took my cap off and tossed it on the side table there. I climbed back into my bed through the mosquito netting hole. If I can get in so easily a mosquito won't have any problem. I turned more, reaching for my face. The crazy netting, even in my nostrils it was in. Now in my face. I'm trying to wave it away. Jesus without the little holes I'd suffocate without a trace. I dropped back into the bed crashed down deep into the pillow. The netting gave up and fell down on me slowly like one big gray green butterfly. Now it's all over me. I felt drowning in my own stupidity. I sighed the mosquito netting rising a bubble above my nose. I drew in as much breath as there was in me. I exhaled. I laughed, if a mosquito is watching he's probably laughing himself more than me. This altogether reminds me of my wrestling career at Brien McMahon. It's not good to call it a career when you weigh the results against the facts of my success. But God were those twins Barry and Marty good. No I've got to get to that Elephant place. I can't be reminiscing with mosquito net in my nose. I've got to survey the situation and get to a conclusion. Forget breakfast I'll have to eat some other time that's more available. I need to get to the debriefing as early as I can. Earlier if I can.

It only took me five minutes to escape. Maybe ten at the most. I put on my cap from the night table thing. Checked my pockets for whatever I was checking them for. Nothing missing. I checked my wrist watch. I forgot I'm still in the wrong time. Not here in Vietnam yet. I started for the screen

door. Looking back over my shoulder at the defeated mosquito net. I laughed again muffled thinking I almost got pinned by an insect net. Should put a sign on it mosquito only. I got approaching the swinging door. You know I had twelve wrestling fights in high school. It felt like much more than twelve in two years. I don't remember exactly two years, a year and a half. But I remember regretfully. Twelve matches, twelve losses. Convincing loses too. None of that to the wire stuff. I wrestled at a hundred and forty-five pounds. Because that's what I weighed. My weight class was with all those deft moving around guys. Quick and always strong leaving me by the second round late, winded in my despair. First round I was equally good, once or twice even better. By the second round though I ran out of that stamina stuff. One thing though I have to say because it didn't help. Half the guys, I hate to say, had unnaturally bad breath. A few had enough to qualify for torturing certificates. I found that very discouraging. That kind of bad breath I mean. I kept having to turn my head. And under those conditions peripheral vision is pointless almost. Except to know when you've been blind-sided. I mean, me myself as a courtesy I used to brush my teeth before every match. The guys in the lower classes looked well smaller. The bigger guys looked soft and slow like convenient turtles. No I was in the tough weight class. But those guys Barry and Marty. The twins you know who moved up from Danbury. They were incredible in tenacious motion. They were gifted that's what they were. I mean gifted straight from God no less. They were that good enough. We became friends. Barry and Marty did with me. They were identical twins you call them, not familiar twins. But Jesus could they wrestle, like jeeps with sideways gears. If they got autopsied after their deaths, you know, to determine what influence their deaths had on them, it would take seven autopsy people to keep them down on the table. That's an exaggeration, of course. But at least six anyway. Talented like I said no question about it. I really miss them a lot. We used to go to movies and stuff. Then discuss the movies strenuously over pizza afterwards. But after they went away to college and stuff they pretty much disappeared into themselves. Situations change just like that. And before you want to know it you're alone

except for some strangers that aren't from your past. It's in a way strange because Barry and Marty were real nice guys. And none the less, they could wrestle like that with no repercussions from anybody.

I picked up my pace going towards the guard shack. I like to move quickly in heat. I like to get ahead of the sweat. It's hotter right now today if that's possible. The barracks was pretty vacated. Except for guys sleeping, getting dressed undressed, watching TV. Not that vacated, I don't know. Getting the rhythm here is going to take time. I wished I had time to stop for breakfast. I'm probably hungry. Another bead of sweat running off on its own down my cheek already. Be nice a wintery war, make a snowman. Take time out to shovel the battle field before the battle or whatever. A jeep is going by real slowly, very slowly with a machine gun waiting mounted on the top. I never saw such a big machine gun! I hope it's not for people. They just passed me by with a little extra acceleration. A black gi legs crossed with one hand on the long barrel gun. He looked like a happy jazz singer somehow minus the uniform and the gun. I don't know. Should I of shaken hands with Sung Ho yesterday. Because maybe hand shaking means something else here in Vietnam. I've got to keep my eyes open for details as they happen. I got up to the air police shack thing. I stopped and smiled. He didn't notice looking away then to me. You ever notice how enforcement type people tend to look at you more with their foreheads.

"Thank you sergeant excuse me." He opened his eyes more. He dropped his thumb from his M-16 strap.

"Yes," He finally said after I didn't know what else to say.

"Yes thank you sergeant. I need directions to the intelligence building. Because I don't know where it is? You know from right here where we are."

After looking at me for some mysterious reason, he pulled his blue helmet back from his sweaty forehead. "Cross the street here." He pointed with his nose, thumbing back his m-16 like a suspender. "Straight down forty yards. Take your first left and a hundred yards give or take a right. About a quarter of a mile you'll see it on your left. No windows, a moat with a bridge over it."

"Thanks cross here, left some hundred yards a right and a quarter of a mile

on my left with a bridge?"

"Right." He smiled a near straight line across his lips.

"Thanks again." I said trying not to smile so I wouldn't get a distracted start on the directions. I looked both ways at the intersection. Looks o.k. so far. I crossed at my quick pace. Straight ahead thirty yards a left. I shouldn't probably smile too much. Get into more of a war zone grove. Here familiarity probably breeds contempt. "Jesus help me!" I shoved my stomach forward and jumped onto the sidewalk. I didn't hear that ambulance coming. He turned sharp left his wheels screeching going up. A van, it said morgue on it. Jesus what's his hurry. Run over on the way to the morgue or what. Scary and overly over-productive. I can see the telegram now to my parents. "Sorry Mr. and Mrs. Winters son of Chuck. Your son was run over crossing the street for his country." I've got to be more careful when I'm not that much over out weighed. At least be alert enough to know when I'm being alert. And right after remembering about wrestling too. I turned left by a nice cement basketball court with bleachers. I like bleachers a lot for some reason. A little recreationing after a day in the jungle. That's nice. I picked up my pace. There's less traffic in this compound here. I'll have to remember that to relax. This is better walking more on your own. Free spirited like and some shade too, in basic training not even in tech school at Lowery in Denver was there much walking. Mostly all of it marching, except to the bathroom at night and some other stuff. Which I rarely to the bathroom at night. I prefer sleeping. Once though I have to tell you. First I have to keep my eyes straight ahead for that left turn. He said a hundred yards give or take. Give or take. What though? Anyway though, once in basic training I did get into a free flowing walk, completely unexpected of the opportunity by me. It was all around something else. I was in the barracks minding my own assigned business polishing my combat boots. And I get this message from one of the guards that the sergeant wants to see me in a post haste kind of a way. We had guards all the time. It was two of us taking turns guarding the rest of us. And I guess themselves. You know I never figured out from what. There was nothing to guard. But we guarded it anyhow. I got to

the sergeants no door entrance way. I knocked standing straight. They liked it that way. I walked in after admitted. Not really a walk by any human ways of the word. You're supposed to walk in a vertical straight line on the horizontal floor, turn sharp and end up parallel right in front of the sitting sergeant. By about a foot if you can believe it. Then you stop like stripping a gear, toss one of your arms behind you, pop open your feet and salute with a "yes sir" and one of your hands as well. After that they call it parade rest. Not much rest to it though. Anyway I made my turn, horizontal made my stop, opened my legs and missed the sergeant by at least three on the vertical feet. To the right I think by his mirror image. And understand all this is being navigated by peripheral vision in starchy clothes. Now I have, I've told you, excellent way-above-average peripheral vision. But that's only when I'm on my own unencumbered free with my peripheral vision roaming at my free will expense. Anyway again, incredibly the sergeant didn't say anything when he recognized my not too near miss. Of course he started by saying I was a poor excuse for a soldier. But that's a given. Not just me either, it's part of the available development. Poor excusing everyone. I agreed I was that because I knew that was my line. And I knew when it was expected of me. It takes you less than only one week to learn all the self-demeaning lines in basic. The sergeant went on with hungry like determination about not being an acceptable soldier. But that was it, this time for introductions. Finally he stopped like a guillotine after the covenant head. He ropped his feet from the desk. And sat straight up on himself. Of course I was already curious. But not ready for what he said next, looking at me like a sparrow hawk at an easy lazy field mouse. "I'm going to let you call her. You have forty five minutes." I said, trying to respond carefully to the absent logic of his remark I said, "Yes sir. But call who sir?" He looked at me, for a tidy moment mysterious and said straighter up. "Your mother called. She tells me you have to vote on a proxy on one of your father's companies." If I swallowed more I would of disappeared under the suction of my throat. Then the sergeant said hard, "Didn't you know about it. Your mother said it was crucial." Less at parade rest than before I said, "No sergeant I didn't exactly I've been

here all this time." He said a heavy "Oh," with a hefty elevation of his nose. "Well go Winters go." He finally said sending his fingers up in the air. I tried not to smile and probably didn't. I said, "Yes sir," which was my exit line. And so I did happy beyond available belief. It took all the hesitation calories I had to keep from walking out of there fast alert alone run. But I went out normal. My mother's way beyond too much, with such an easy generous fabrication. She just wanted to chat with me? Have a good son-to-mother conversation that's all. Oh yeah something I forgot to tell you that I didn't do. Or did... do wrong. I missed my exiting salute of the sergeant by about a hundred and ten degrees. I think I got the mirror in the opposite wall. It's not important except I like to be thorough in the recounting of my details. But finally I have to tell you that was the easiest happiest forty-five minutes of my basic experience. I walked happy-go-lucky to the phone taking the near fullest advantage of my recreational reprieve. I even tried marching for the contrast sake of it all. I never had marched alone on my own without anybody else stomping around. It was easier but still pointless. I much prefer walking the way I do and God intended for us two footed people. Of course it got better from there. Mom and I talked. We laughed, it was good enough to be great. I hope I don't have to tell you there was no proxy vote at all. My Mom just missed me and she had no problem being mischievous. I tell you with a mother like Mom who needs two parents in an emergency. The emergency comes in second every time easy.

Vietnam isn't that bad, only here one day less than one day and already I'm walking free with plenty of room to spare. Isn't love I mean life funny with all its jurisdictions. I mean fathers, mothers, brothers and all those that get invited in. Too much. And now me in love with Eugenia on the way to some intelligence building. If life were any funnier there'd be no room to laugh. This must be the left the ap talked about. It's the only one here and I've run out of space. Then he said a quarter of a mile didn't he. I'm terrible at listening at distractions. I mean directions. Distractions too for that matter. If I pick up my pace I'll be almost there. The sun is getting more can tankerous

and unnecessary. Maybe could be that's how the oriental people got their nice slanted eyes. From prolonged squinting in the sun looking for unwelcome enemies to discourage. I felt sweat run down my middle of my back. Right down the middle. In a hurry that sweat drop was too. You get dehydrated lost here. You'd think that bead had some detailed appointment it took off so fast. There it is. It has to be. The moat, the bridge all painted with some Chinese designs. Jesus look at the building unfriendly. Looks like a bomb shelter that got regurgitated up. No window, cement and one green door. And that's just from here. I didn't realize I had stopped. Another fifty yards past the empty guard shack up and down the moat. I don't know maybe the bridge is not for walking. Kind of a mystical bridge. It took only about ten minutes or less to get here. I don't want to be too early specially if I'm on time. In the military if you're early they think you want something. And they'll look to try to give it to you. I brushed off my uniform in front of the green door in case there was something on it that bothered them. I got my handle on the door. Why so heavy a vault door. I pushed pulled opened the door. I hope it's not that hearty going out to exit.

I'm inside irreparably. God almighty air conditioning. It's fudgesickle cool. I thought of that line at the door of Dant'es Inferno. Which I don't remember exactly. Something to the line of good luck and too bad. I closed the door with my back looking around. Over to the right past a four foot heavy varnished divider thing, a large long plastic blackboard. An Airman guy standing on a ladder making notations with a crayon of some kind. Mostly flights of departure and arrival. More departing looks like. What are we doing flying over Thailand and Laos. I thought we're just here. And what's that country in numbers, no name. I hope I don't learn more than Walter Cronkite with me just being a kid. I hope I already have and don't know it yet. The half circle Airman looked at me climbing down the ladder. Just a look, but look enough. I turned to move ahead twenty feet to a desk with another sitting Airman. He's an Airman first like me so there's no need for me to get sophisticated beyond my control. He's still looking down at something, a paper two feet under his nose.

He must know I'm here still waiting. I do. I cleared my throat out of necessity not trying to encourage an opportunity. He still hasn't looked up. Now he is real slowly. I'm waiting less.

I started it. "Hi my name is Airman Winters. I'm supposed to be here now for some kind of debriefing of me?"

His brown eyes looked at me like a predator short on groceries. I didn't comply in anyway to the way he was looking at me, except to look away at the most available distance possible.

"Where's your badge?" He had a brown eyes voice.

I'm looking back in his vicinity. "I don't have an issued badge of anykind. I wasn't informed." I got pleased with myself. Factual, precise no extra credit information.

"Your orders?" He held out his hand like it was heavier at that moment than he had expected. I already knew where my orders were in my hand after my pocket. I handed him the orders. I had eight copies of my orders made back home in Westport. Just in case I needed proof somehow of my being here for some reason. He's reading my orders like looking straight down from a bombing hatch. His chin tucked against his chest. Still reading. I rubbed my fingers together. I don't like waiting without a conclusion around to be had. And I'm still waiting more. There's not that much to read.

Still reading, he's talking now. "The debriefing has been cancelled till a further date. Which will be posted. You can get your security badge at the small ap administration building by the Airman's club and the basketball court."

"I see o.k.?" What am I going to do with my idle time. I'm not good at idle time, specially if I'm the idle part of it. He went into a drawer under his belly. And selected one of three pens in his hand. He bent down and made a change in my orders with surgical consternation. He handed them back to me looking at his handy work as the paper passed from him to me.

"Thank you?" I looked at my orders. Jesus, he added a comma and initialed it. All that for one lonely comma. This is going to be sig here and wait a while all over again. I turned to leave which is what I thought was left for me

to do. I reached for the door handle, getting braced ready for the hot.

"Winters!" I turned around quickly surprised.

"Yes sir?" I answered in my take it easy it's my name tone of voice. He's a skinny sergeant. Very skinny with a skinny head crew cut. "Yes sergeant." I added for him to add more. He's walking towards me.

"Your shift has been changed, eleven hundred in the clearing room."

"Thank you sergeant. I'll be there." He smiled and started away. I wanted to ask him how he knew my name. Oh these fatigues have it sewn on. But my back was to him when he got to me. I shrugged my shoulders, that's two hours from now eleven hundred is, isn't it. I opened the door without thinking, still thinking about what to do next. Two hours, I'll be here either way. The heat from here to there and just like that this heat. So I'll get my badge like the Airman said. Sure that's right I picked up my pace towards the mystical magical bridge. And I'll go to the Chief Provost to get my will changed will all the new names appropriately. Maybe also get some food at the Airman's Club. They usually have food there. Two hours is plenty. The two spots are neatly near each other's. Two hours is more than enough. I picked more of my pace. For better or worse I'm started again in the military. A war zone no less too. This too much, this heat. Why don't they give us this heat kind of clothes. Like the British wearing shorts against the Boars and all the others. That's true the British in England have calmed down in theses recent years. With their available eager wars, that's nice and encouraging. They probably got tired and got feeling repetitive. Walking I reached up to my forehead and wiped off the unsolicited sweat drops. I swung my hand out easily in front of me. And right off almost before reaching the ground the droplets disappeared into the sand. Much hotter they'll evaporate on my face on showing themselves. I've just got to relax and take it easy. The heat will subside or I'll get used to it. And I'll get adapted to the military idea of myself. But to tell the truth that I expect. I feel surprises coming up. Just a feeling. But who know's some of them might be good and agreeable. I'm moving well along. Because I walked this part before. The same ground even in the same space always takes less time or seems

to. Either way it's less I'm sure. Walking I didn't already mention I saw two things that were interesting. One very interesting, even engrossing almost. One was unorthodox and potentially unpleasant. So that one I'm going to leave alone. But the one that was very interesting. Just a moment ago now. An American girl walking along actually strolling, with this beautiful young Vietnamese lady in a flowing flowering yellow silk dress. Just walking, walking easily. It's beautiful. I slowed to watch nicely from behind. But I stopped and accelerated for privacy considerations. Look there's the Airman's Club, that Administration building must be thereabouts nearby. I'm doing better and good. Now a little breeze, I'm on a roll.

The photo got done easily, after some modest confusion of who I was which I didn't question or add to. Except on the photo I did look a little overheated. And my eyes, even though motionless, still looked wandering around. Which is probably good when you think about it. Other than those things it was incidental. Well not quite exactly. I'm almost too surprised that I almost forgot. Because the whole thing surprised me. I'm talking about that they gave me a prisoner Geneva I.D. card. Unbelievable, believe it or not, a prisoner I.D. card. Isn't that an unnecessary something. A prisoner card before you're a prisoner. Then I tried to read it while signing it with my name. It said and the AP sergeant confirmed it, that if I'm captured intentionally by the enemy I'm supposed to hand them this card that explains my individual prisoner rights. Listen I might be naive but I'm not stupid to follow. I can see myself being dragged into this colonel's hatch hut by two Vietcong guys for some intended questioning of me. I shake my arms loose from my captor because they let go. There's the standing colonel with his nasty interrogating equipment. I pull out swiftly, without hesitating in the least, my prisoner Geneva card. Flat right in front of the colonel. And the Vietcong Colonel shouts, "Shit! He's got his card with him." Give me a break if you've got one left over. I wasn't born yesterday? But no matter, you get my point. It's almost completely entirely preposterous, a Geneva Prisoner card. But I kept my card anyway. In case someone from my side wanted to see it. Specially these intelligence people,

they're smarter sometimes than they think. Speaking of breakfast or lunch I'm almost crossing the street into the Airman's Club. With all the jet lags and time zones, I probably already digested my last meal several times over.

I crossed the narrow street quickly for security sakes. Looking at the bleachers again and walking under the blue canopy of the club. I like canopies a lot. If I had more time I'd renter again. I probably like them because of my Sir Lancelot days as a young kid. They had nice canopies during those jousting things when nobody got hurt, just upset. Jesus, like a western saloon. No sawdust though. No extra added light, a little somewhat dark. Girls, no less, in tight skimpy dresses tighter than they were almost. I stepped inside deeper looking further around. One bar, now two. Music just started. I guess one's for an emergency. Music without words, loud. Pool tables. A black marine, that's o.k. and nice everyone can come in here. I mean marines, not the color idea. Do you know this is a fact? In the World War two times, they separated the blood for transfusions between black blood and white blood. A short high stage up ahead empty with a standing microphone. Can you believe it, black and white blood. Too much of a sad silly fact that is. I like sawdust floors. I feel luckier and safer once falling. My eyes are adjusted now I can better see the subtleties around. Busy quite a few people all in uniforms so far. Me too. I sat down at the near closest table. Those can't be. Too much of all things, slot machines in a neat row. Drinking in the barracks and available slot machines, what's next?

"GI you may wan a dring? I turned around to hear the voice that interrupted me. Two breasts, I sat up. Right in front of me at my eye level. I sat up higher. I don't want to respond to two prominent breasts arriving like that suddenly by themselves.

"Thank you yes, please. I mean, no I don't want a drink. I'm almost on duty. Do you by chance have food here to eat?" I watched her collecting her thoughts. She certainly has large breasts for a stranger. Both of them. I wasn't looking, I memorized them. I didn't know orientals came in breasts like that.

"We havt hamburger an french fries. Wit lettuce and tomato to." She's looking at me for an answer.

"Yes thank you I'll have that. A hamburger, cheeseburger if possible with french fries and lettuce and tomato too. O.K.? And to drink anything without alcohol or liquor of any kind." I smiled, feeling hungry with my order. "And please do it at your reasonable leisure, there's no need to hurry."

"An ah dring wit no liquor?" She almost smiled. But she retrieved herself in time. I checked my wallet just in case for reassurance.

"Sure yes, you know a soda pop like a Coke or Pepsi if you have to would be fine?"

"O.K. sure I understan." I'll be damned, a cursty in a half circle. She's pleasant that's...I decided I wanted to look some more at my Geneva prisoner card. Why did they want me to sign it? Isn't it enough that I have to carry it. And risk like I'm maybe knowing too much. This identifies me as a potential prisoner. I guess that's fair. I'm squinting. Maybe they say something about being refundable. I can hardly read this print. It's no "can hardly." I can't. What's the circumvention here. What's going on with this unnoticeable small print. Does everyone get small print or what. An enemy like me comes in carrying small print, it's forget it? I'm not going to end up in the jungle in small print. I'm leaving this thing behind when I have to. That's what I'm doing, leave it behind. I bet the enemy they don't carry small print cards. They know who they are.

"Here you are wit your foot."

"My foot oh my food. Thank you that was quick. Did I ask for french fries?"

"You havt to pay anyway o.k.?"

"Sure of course, I'm familiar with the custom. Do I pay now! Do I you know pay later?"

"Pay now o.k. You pay eighty ninety fivt cents."

"Eighty ninety five cents. Is that like a dollar seventy five cents or maybe what?"

"No you pay ninety five cents. Dat all." She smiled lovely like.

"Fine here's a dollar fifty it I may. You know, give you a tip, o.k.?"

"Sure" She said that with up beat syrup sort of. And she turned around and left just like that.

Gee I almost like started talking in Vietnamese it felt left like to me. I paid her with crisp money. I always do waitresses when I can. I like the crisp sounds about it. I tipped her generously. She's graceful and nice. Plus I think you should tip extra generous here. After all these people are letting us fight their war for us. Suddenly it got to my nostrils. The unhappy smell of liquor. Enough liquor and we might not know we won the war for years. It's enough to get defused beyond recognition. I took a careful and generous bit of the hamburger. God I'm hungry and I didn't even know it. I've got to start paying more attention to my elementary needs. I lifted up my glass of soda, still chewing. I could almost see my reflection almost. Interesting maybe different glass. Made me think of an experience. Just watching him, he said, "Know thy self sinner and be true." I don't know about the sinner part because I was just sitting there. But the part of knowing yourself really got to appeal to me directly. Then I thought, know what? He probably meant the soul, I know that! But I don't know much about my soul at all. Because I haven't spent much time with it. My character is o.k., that week anyway. Then again I thought out loud know what. I looked at my fingers. Then I took a look at my knuckles. And realized I hadn't paid much attention to myself over the years. No not much at all. After checking my arms and my hands I went into the bathroom. I looked at my head backwards and forwards in the mirror. My shoulders, my back most of it. I thought of wondering about my personality. But I decided against that. It's much better to start with the available particulars that are more available. Sure plus personalities seem to get intermixed unwittingly a lot. I even got a chair and looked at the bottoms of my feet. I was surprised they were interesting. I had a good day doing that. Know thyself, he said. And I did, to a start anyway.

I heard something after a lull and turned around slowly to my surprise in

case it was meant for me. Nothing, just a sound of some kind I'm not that familiar with. I took the last bite after another swallow of soda pop. And one more thing about knowing yourself as much as possible. After getting my IA draft thing, I realized how handy the time I had spend being aware of myself could be with the Vietnam war going on and all. Look at me now, for example. Unsuspected by myself in a war zone. Unplanned, but here I am. Listen, for example, I thought. What if I'm walking through my barracks happy-go-lucky as can be. And what if a humugous mortar explosion takes off and happiness. Unlucky for me I'm on the ground everywhere speculating about my mortality, looking for one of my fingers. I know my finger's missing when I go to scratch myself and I miss. But I'm lucky you see because I know myself. And I rush eagerly my finger to the dispensary. There they generously put it back on. And altogether I'm happy and back intact again. Probably with a couple of days off. What if I hadn't spent that time paying attention to myself. Would you like to spend the rest of your life walking around the somebody else's finger you picked up in the mortar confusion. Worse what might happen later. You're walking through the barracks on your time off and some gi guy shouts at you, "What the hell are you doing, that's my finger!" Right, and then what? You've got to go back to the dispensary and negotiate or something. Plus there's another plus I didn't mention about knowing yourself. I came upon some preferred erogenous zones I didn't know I had. And I'm told at my age they're still surfacing. Actually to tell you the truth my aerogenous zones seem to move on me. But I haven't gotten around much to figuring if that's normal or what. I mean it's hard to do, isn't it, in a conversation with someone else. People might think you're trying to get to their zones. Rather than figuring out and harnessing your own.

The waitress came by and eagerly went away. Too much here I am thinking out loud when I could or ordered another hamburger. I don't seem to of eaten in a very nutritious way in some time. Unless you want to count the company as part of the meal. Sure, that goes without saying. Why do people say it goes without saying, then they go ahead and say it anyway. Usually more fully than expected. Could be they're giving you an unsuspected warning. Who knows, I don't. If I

did know these riddles, I'd be less cordial company to myself probably than I am already. What I was leading up to without even getting to a hint of it, is that I was thinking for some reason of General Santa Ana. And how he was always fighting wars. I don't know exactly what got me thinking about him. Sometimes it's just best to bypass the tolls of the day and continue on unmolested with your own concerns. Anyway remember he was the Mexican General who beat us handily at the Alamo. With a superior force I read, but you couldn't expect to ask him for an inferior one. I think that's what got me thinking about the old Santa Ana, his crazy leg. This is what happened, it's beyond believable. During some scheduled battle Santa went ahead and lost his leg, chopped off by a surprising cannon ball. But no problem, though, he just went ahead and picked it up. Actually he probably had one of his lesser lieutenants ordered to pick it up. Someone in charge of lower limbs no doubt. You know what he did? And this is true it's that unbelievable. He gave the damn thing a state funeral. It's true completely true. Procession everything, dignitaries invited from around the world. Really incomprehensible, I know. But true nonetheless. And there's old Santa Ana atop his white horse. Surrounded by scheduled cheering peasants. Following his own leg to the state basilica of Mexico City. More thousands of peasants now near the church sad with their eyes downcast and their straw sombreros tight against their hats. Finally at the church stands Santa Ana next to his leg coffin. Accepting the nodding regrets of the world-wide dignitaries. There to pay their respects to the General's leg. And of course what was left of the General. "Such a lovely leg, General. Very sad indeed General. Please accept the condolences of my people." Actually the dialogue I don't know. I implanted that myself. For me the whole thing was a little over-all sad. I mean with what Santa Ana fighting so many wars all the time, how long did it take the Mexican people to bury him. I myself I think I would make a much better peasant than a General. Me with my peasant wife. And my peasant loving kids. Living nimbly happily ever after in our leaning-over shack. Happily I'm sure beyond belief. What does a General have, tea for breakfast minus one leg for lunch, with a lot of unorthodox grooming to keep him company. It's a very

good thing we live in a Democracy. At least if you're going to become something prestigious and nasty like a General you give out plenty of warning. I retrieved my prisoner card again on a hunch. No, they don't even mention my rank. The Vietcong could think I was planted as a diversionary General what with the common language problem between us. Even with casual torture it must be awful not knowing the answers. It was in Miss Spence's American History class at Brien McMahon. Now I wonder one more thing about that General Santa Ana. When he was completely and convincingly dead, did they make one composite of him at some grave or what? The rock and roll music went back on. The twist by that nice Chubby Checker. I'd better get going. I sighed. I think sighing is easier in air conditioning, specially in this heat. Yeah I'd make a better peasant than a General. Peasants regret, live General's don't take time for it.

The post office was right there where I found it. I mailed all my letters home relieved that I got that done. Did I tell you, maybe I did, back in San Diego I wrote everyone. Mom and Pop, RS and Terry and of course Eugenia and Philipe, Señor Fabe and that nice Juogincito that gave me a hitch-hike back to the Royal Dutch. I wrote them like I was already from Vietnam. Just to get a little ahead of myself with the preliminaries of arriving. I wrote some about my first day in Vietnam. Just in case I didn't know how much my attention span would be affected when I arrived. You know by unveiling events. But so far almost it's o.k. Could be maybe better than o.k. Anyway they got mailed and now I'm more relieved. Yeah I also wrote Philipe and sent him some bucks for extra ice cream when he needed it. That was good too. Then I went looking for the Chief General Provost. I mean the Chief Provost Marshal I think. Now right now I'm on my way walking back to the White Elephant. Pretty directly with enough time left over to be on time. The Chief Provost himself went pretty well after a while. You know to change and update my will for everyone. I shared everything generously with everyone, including the tombstones. Being generous is easy when you're dead. Finally I left, saluting well. I felt completely relieved and christian about myself. With my death completely taken care of finally. Leaving into the heat, I felt intact and ready for all eventualities.

And you know the sun felt extra sunny instead of hot. I made good time with all the right and good left turns walking briskly. I allowed plenty of time for getting lost. Problem with me on military basis is that they all look the same, repetitious with your not being sure what's being repeated. Once at Lowry I got lost twice in the same place in the same day. Without later knowing only from my memory. I moved passed the small BX. The gazebo guard shack is just up ahead. It would be nice wouldn't it, that when you're early somewhere it would be added to your life span. Of course they'd want to subtract late. And on time would get unbearable boring. I've got to stop my speculating. I went in and out the moat brushing by clothes of unwanted particles. And got focused all over.

Isn't that too much. I stopped to show my photo I.D. to the guard and he just waved me in. I got ordered into the finishing room. I'm waiting outside now hesitating. I stepped in forcefully. Lots of lights, four roll driers, two now five, stand-up driers, two water whatever tubs to wash the prints. And around a very large gigantic forty fifty foot table too many uniforms to count.

"You're Winters!"

"Yes I know!" I looked across the table. I don't think the talking sergeant heard me. His shirt said his name was Hanson. He wave me over with a manila folder. "Yes sergeant?" I said walking directly toward him like I knew where I was going. I can't get over all the lights. More light than outside in the sun. Almost x-ray lights maybe.

"Take these and wash and dry them." He handed me a tray of eight by tens. The photographs from here briefly looked confused. "And Winters. Welcome to the Elephant."

"Yes sergeant, thank you." That was quick. I finished getting over to the washer and dumped the photographs in upside down. The water drum started dipping up and then down. Up and down. The water as clear as a fresh spring lake. I looked around waiting for the washing to take place. I learned a lot about photography in tech school. That part of it was good. This place sure is busy. People busy with machines. Machines busy with people. I turned over the photographs. No this is obscene. It's awful. I stopped looking. It's worse

than wrong. There were eight dead Vietcong lined up neat next to each other. An American sergeant with his foot on the chest of one body. Both grinning. The Vietcong his cheek shot off his teeth showing. The sergeant proud, smiling. Jesus what's going on. Does somebody know about this. Violating the dead like this. I shouldn't of looked so much. A hand.

"How's it going Winters?"

"Have you seen these sergeant there-"

"Yeah something else ah? What's left over last week of the barber's suicide raise on the base. All the barbers on the base got together and raised some hell. Not much hell... you can see."

"Barbers from our side?"

"Turned out to be VC that's all." He held one up to look at it like it wasn't there. "Another five minutes should do it." He left without saying anything more.

"Jesus they're doing this on purpose!" I looked into the tub. "Why?" I looked away to the side as much as possible. "Why photograph the dead like this. Displayed like this. So...I wouldn't want to be shown like this. My family RS seeing me like this." I excused myself to go to the bathroom. I needed fresh air.

I leaned my hands in the sink. I looked in the mirror. "Nobody said this war was going to be in bad taste like this. I felt nauseous inside myself. I inhaled and exhaled deeply. I turned around leaning hard against the sink. On the opened toilet door. "Isn't war fun. Wait till tomorrow..." I got some toilet paper and blew my nose. And flushed it twice into the toilet. I turned around back to the sink and washed my hands and face. I hope this isn't a normal day for them here. I hesitated, I had no choice. I went back into the finishing room. If the photographs are like that, what must the real thing be like. More photographs and I haven't even started yet. They were real once, those people. And somebody had to photograph them in person. I tightened my fists around the water drum. And why copies too when one is too many. Yeah one's too many altogether. Some guy standing not in the photograph photographing the sergeant

with his foot. What happened to the photographer? Is he o.k. or what! I sunk my hands into the water. I checked over my shoulders. I let the photographs drip off. I placed them against the plastic drop over the washers and squeezed them drier. I peeled them off one at a time. Moved over the four feet and placed them face up on the rotating drum drier. "This might not be right. But it's also not wrong." I waited tapping my fingers against the metal framed. Looking around for whatever reason I didn't know. Still waiting. Waiting is awful when it involves time. Here comes one, next to it another. Two more. I piled them on top of each other. And the next two. I walked over between the drier and the washer for available privacy. And tore the photographs in half. And half again. And again. Feeling better each time. I shrugged myself for some reason. Put the pieces together like a deck of cards and stuffed them in my back pocket. If the people of America saw this they would be revolted and angry too. If you can't respect people after they're dead, then something is wrong while you're alive. Specially if you killed them. I looked over and around my shoulder. This time more carefully. I suddenly felt more suspicious about myself. They might have a serious rule about this tearing up of property I did. I looked down at the now calm water. Some guy died in war. He tried. You should leave his body alone. How many times can you kill someone for Godsakes. I just have to keep my mind free of this kind of stuff activity. Or I'll get too upset for my sake of being upset. I've got limits for sure. Just like everyone else. And it's too early on for me to be tapping them.

"Winters?"

"Jesus." I turned around unexpectedly.

"You're starting off with some luck, Airman. Your shift has been changed to twenty-four hundred hours day after tomorrow. And unscheduled change. That's it, you're off. Enjoy!"

"You mean I can leave already?"

"Yep that's it. You can leave."

I shrugged my eyebrows. "O.k. sergeant, I'll see you day after tomorrow, right?"

"Twenty four hundred hours right here."

I looked around walking away. Too much, one hour, one, almost two days off. I wish they'd get normal about this twenty four hundred hour stuff. Maybe it was just a bad day here that's all. Sure, that could be it. I walked passed the guard without thinking about it. I leaned myself out against the green door. What am I going to do in the sun again? Go back home. Jesus I mean the barracks and write home some letters. Write Eugenia to say something nice remembering. God I just had a thought I didn't want. This Vietnam war thing has been going on a long time. If it keeps going on as long, RS will be here. That's not tolerable. One out of each family is enough for Godsakes. One day already too much, and too much is already happening. I'll shine my boots that's also what I'll do. Keep my mind clear and relax and get acclimated. There's a place right up there, an alleyway. An alleyway good, next to the American Bank. They even have banks here. What for? Narrow and private and cool. Also I've got to remind myself not to ask too many questions here. They have a habit in the military of answering them. Even ask myself less questions. I dug my heels into the soft dirt. I looked around carefully for privacy. I'm o.k. I kept digging some more. I looked again and went into my back pocket. I bent over putting the photographs in the hole. I covered up the hole with both of my hands nicely. And pressed down to flatten it out. I looked up again to see if anyone was interested in watching me. This might be a crime what I'm doing of some consequences. I started away looking one last time at the little grave. I guess it's a little grave, what else would it be. I should of maybe said a prayer. There's probably a deficit of prayers here. I don't know, could be there's plenty. I'll pray about it later. I wonder if there's someone here that I can eventually confide in. I can't believe it because it's true. Just asking, and it's my roommate Chris. I waved my hand running alongside the basketball court. Some guys were playing. "Chris," I shouted not too loud. I looked both ways and both ways again. I took two quick steps and ran across.

"Chuck, what are you up to?" Chris held out his hand. We shook smiling.

"You won't believe what happened to me, Chris, at that intelligence place."

"I believe it. I believe it. Tell me what," Chris said, looking down the street.

"The sergeant somehow changed my shift to day after tomorrow. Twenty four hundred."

"Yeah, figures. Did you say twenty four hundred?" I nodded as Chris raised his hand in the air. "I wonder why they're overlapping shifts, it's supposed to be o six hundred to o six hundred. Listen Chuck, why the hell don't you come to Saigon with me? Take in some of the local color. How about it?" A little motorcycle cab pulled up.

"Isn't it dangerous there? I mean--"

"Nah, don't be silly. Less dangerous than here probably. We'll have a great time. Come on, let's go." Chris squeezed my elbow. I followed Chris bent over into the cab feeling o.k. but somehow apprehensive. I've already had a full day. I looked well beyond to where I assumed Saigon would be. I hope it's not too far. I moved my hand on my lap noticing my neat uniform. I prefer being in civilian clothes like Chris.

"Don't worry, Chuck, we'll have a good time. Grab a steak, look around and see. By the way if you like my nickname, it's Bruce."

"Sure, thanks, Bruce is nice to Chris. I already ate recently, but I'm still hungry somehow." Bruce winked at me and raised his thumb up in the air. He's confident alright. Maybe I'll be too somehow soon. A lot of traffic pattering along in this converted motor scooter.

"What's that, Chris?" I pointed at some procession. A cart with flowers, a dragon in gold on the side. I looked back to follow it. People walking alongside.

"A funeral, most likely a South Vietnamese officer?"

"Too bad. I guess he's dead, ah?"

"I hope so. If not, he soon will be." Chris slid over and said something in Vietnamese to the driver. The driver nodded feverishly turning around to smile. This place is getting to be poignant already. It's almost all too poignant! I don't like poignant things. I don't like poignant remarks?

Specially with two people getting poignant with their remarks to each other. But poignant places? It turns out sometimes that you become poignant yourself. After it's too late, you get poignant. I looked around to distract myself more effectively. Poignant remarks usually lead to divorces and people running to fire escapes. We passed the main gate. It must be the main gate. We're no longer inside. I looked back to the base.

"Bruce, what are those guys doing there." I pointed to eight nine guys standing eagerly by a wire fence around a large open dirt field.

"Guys, GI's waiting for the dead and wounded to be brought in from out country."

"Jesus." I hardly got Jesus' whole name in it. "That's outright satanic Bruce, and in poor taste, for God's sake." Bruce shrugged his shoulders and tilted his face to the side with a wry smile. I haven't seen a wry smile in a very long time. I started to look back at the fence. But I stopped myself in time. Not seeing things twice here helps I think. I felt undeservedly nervous. What do those guys write home about, waiting for dead people. This place is already unforgivable. And I'm hardly here. Two of those guys had cameras that I saw. I glanced over to Bruce, he looked alright. I've got to conform even if by stop looking. I just noticed everything oriental. Hundreds, more than hundreds, of people moving everywhich way. Some with those lampshade hats. I wish I knew their name. No, children, I can't see so far. Maybe they're home for some reason. Or maybe in school. A rickshaw, can you believe that, a rickshaw right in the open? And I'm looking right at it. And just tugging along. They're mysterious to me, rickshaws are. I kept turning my head following the progress of that rickshaw. Too much. And look. And old man, very old, with a long white beard. Reading easily a newspaper. I like this place more, it's nice. And just passing now a small tree park with benches for people to sit in. A statue, I waited passing a tree that got in my way. A large metal soldier statue. Kneeling on one leg, looking fast straight ahead with an M-16 pointing. All the metal is folded over like dripping. Like melting and angry. Even the statues have it tough here. All that was missing was flames and smoke coming out of the

barrel. That old man sitting, his white beard moving a little in the breeze. That was nice. I'm glad I just remembered that. Reading relaxed yeah that was nice. He must be relaxed for a reason? Something just startled me something else. That whole big statue and it didn't have not one bird dropping. A black statue like that I would of seen. I still like it here anyway. I have jobs more extra careful what I see though. One statue isn't a problem. Sometimes statues get rebuilt. Not even one remote bird dropping. Almost like the birds knew better. Even the birds are dissuaded. Now that I wonder about it. I haven't seen one bird here. Not even one. I'll have to figure that out. That would worry me if it's true and there's no good answer for these absent birds. I mean, if the birds know better, what were we doing here? We came to a fast stop while I'm still thinking about the implications of the absent birds. We pattered another two feet and stopped completely. Right in front of the American Steak House. Two open archways. Three palm trees like on the sidewalk. Bruce got out. I did too, looking around as I backed out. Bruce paid the taxi driver, who was very abundant with his smiling. He stepped on the accelerator pedal and drove off waving from behind. We disappeared into a narrow street. I turned around, Bruce was walking up the three steps into the restaurant place. I followed up closing in behind him. It's cooler here I just noticed. Maybe because I'm inside when I had that thought. We sat down almost simultaneously at a table in a corner. It's nice here, reminds me a little of Acapulco.

"Chuck you going to have a drink?" Bruce said looking around with his neck outstretched a bit.

No, I mean sure a Coke, even Pepsi would be nice, thank you."

"No problem." Bruce just then made direct eye contact with a waitress. I picked up the menu with my hands. She's moving over here closer and just ten feet and already with real extra good motion. Direct but not like time was involved.

"Gentlemen welcome to American Steak House. What is yur order?"

"A double scotch on the rocks for me. And my friend here a Coca Cola. Chuck, do you know what you're going to order?"

"Oh!" She looks pretty from here. "Yes, like I said Coke and just any steak with french fried potatoes." I smiled. And she smiled back. And without premeditation to.

"Why not, two T-bone's thank you miss." She turned following her cheek away gracefully I wasn't in the mood to make a detailed menu selection. I looked around finally more relaxed, looking around for cobwebs for some reason. I don't know why, damp and mysterious that's why maybe. The waitress was more beautiful also for the same reason to me. I mean because of mysterious, not damp. Thin but not hungry looking, well pronounced around her chests and the hip area of herself. I only noticed her breasts because she had that very high V cut type thing up to her near hip. And I got distracted. I think it's rude to look at a woman's breasts without some kind of an invitation. Here she comes back. Even with drinks in her hand graceful and with aplomb. I think it's a plomb. I might not know what that means. Bruce put down his menu. Moving the salt and pepper shaker over in anticipation of getting nervous. Her motion became more apparent the closer she arrived.

Gentlemen, your drinks o.k." An your food will be soon here."

Bruce and I both said "thanks," simultaneously. But I got off the better one. She got turned around and going before I could anticipate my appreciation again. Moving like fog compelled by a fan on easy and slow. I like these oriental people. Sung Ho and now this nice and pleasant motion lady.

"Bruce can I ask what you're doing?" I just noticed him holding his glass up to the light, refectations or something.

"Didn't they tell you at debriefing today, better safe than nauseous." He looked at with one eye behind shot glass. I'm looking for glass, crushed glass, Chuck." What did he say? "No there was no debriefing because they canceled it without a reason they told us. Why?" I felt cautious in advance of what Bruce might be saying.

Bruce sipped his scotch and put his glass down. He tasted his tongue loud and then looked at me smiling mostly to himself. "I'll give you a brief rundown. When visiting Saigon, eyes open for the following. You hear the put-put of a

motor scooter why not turn around and see if it's your friendly neighborhood dragon lady-

"A dragon lady what's a-

"A dragon lady will drive up behind a GI usually with a friend driving and put a bullet in your head!" Bruce looked at me.

"No kidding, why?" He took another sip and almost spit it out coughing and laughing.

"We're the enemy, Chuck!"

"I thought they were?" The waitress appeared herself before I could notice her arrival. Bruce put down his shot glass almost empty. I hadn't started my Coke, looking nicely at the waitress. "Thanks," I smiled. The food looked well ornamented and edible with lettuce, tomato and some two sliced onion pieces. Bruce also thanked her better this time. She smiled back, getting both of us with one smile. She's a good smiler too. Bruce finished his scotch quick, I guess to get it out of the way.

"And Bruce, what else, tell me about this debriefing deal?"

"Right, there's a five hundred dollar bounty on each one of us from the Elephant and-

"Only five hundred!"

"Only five hundred for a whole person, Jesus."

"A whole person." Bruce laughed. "Well, hell, they're doing it for free, five hundred is a hell of an encouragement. Don't you think."

"Sure it is. But-

"How do they know one from another?" I nodded. "Intelligence says they have out photographs once arrive, probably before." Bruce started carving his steak easily.

"How our photographs?"

"We have our South Vietnamese army brothers at the Elephant as a courtesy. And they have VC cousins with bucks for info."

"No kidding double agents and then some ah?" I looked at my food just sitting there compliant like. Jesus, that seems unnecessarily different." I

pictured myself getting killed for money. A reason sure, but not for money. That's discouraging. Maybe I shouldn't of worn my uniform like this so blatantly on me.

"Chuck where are you from? What state I mean?" Bruce leaned his mouth sideways looking at me into a piece of steak.

"Oh, yeah right. I'm mostly from Connecticut. I live with my brother RS, my sister Terry, and my undivorced parents. I used to anyway." Bruce was smiling for some reason.

"How about you, where are you from?" I carefully sipped my Coke. It's a good Coke.

"Ohio, outside of Cleveland. Like all the guys you met I had a couple of years in College. Most of the guys at the White Elephant are college graduates or had some college. Drafted, quit whatever." Bruce looked at his glass again. "Chuck you married?"

"No I'm not. But I'm pretty much almost engaged."

"Who's your girl? What she do for a living?"

"Do? Oh, well, she's not what you might call an American. She's from Costa Rica. And for a living, she's with the tourist bureau there. Helping out tourists with stuff." Jesus not one day in Vietnam and already one lie. I hate lying on such short notice. I tried to think of something more pleasant to change the subject to. "Bruce has anyone been killed at the Elephant?" It didn't work. "You know, I mean by some other unnecessary person."

"Unnecessary person, I like that. No, not that I know of. Not while I was there. But it's nothing they'd advertise. Their a lot of temporary guys there. They come for a few months, a few weeks from the Pentagon wherever, and then disappear." Bruce lit a cigarette and started smoking pretty forcefully. "Now that I think of it, Chuck. There was this one guy, but he wasn't on duty, if that matters. He was teaching English at the American language school, not far from the Embassy." Bruce shrugged his shoulders differently. "I never saw it like that before. One of his students got up from his chair. Walked up, and blew his brains out against the blackboard. Like dam spaghetti dripping, an AP

I know told me." Bruce looked away from us.

"Why he do that?"

Bruce came back angry, then he calmed himself down with a smile. "Just one enemy type to another, that's all. Nothing personal." I don't know how. I looked at Bruce's empty plate. Somehow he had eaten his whole meal without me noticing the details of it. To catch up, I carved at my steak. I placed the chunk in my mouth.

"It's good." I reached for my Coke.

"Yeah for water buffalo." Bruce laughed, a smile barely, out loud.

"Water buffalo. It says American Steak House." You're kidding me, right?"

"No, just their idea of advertising." Bruce sipped from the melting ice in his glass with a cigarette burning between his finger tips.

"Gee, water buffalo no less." Now I just added one more animal to my culinary dead list. I felt discouraged beyond repair. This day comes and goes. Now I've got to eat this, this water buffalo out of respect.

"How did you get into the Air Force, Chuck?"

"What? Oh well I guess it was more their idea than mine. But I have no problem serving my country. I just wish I had more time to figure out why?"

"I hear you?" Bruce looked around for the waitress. "How about desert Chuck?"

"No thank you. I'm busy stuck with this water buffalo. Bruce what do you do at the elephant. Is the place well protected. I noticed the guard shack thing was empty outside going in."

"If the base is hit hard. And it won't be. The Elephant would be the last place to go. But the crypto people inside would be the first. Just the deal they got."

"I don't understand." I waited for more.

"Upstairs there's a guard by the crypto room. You know ciphering and deciphering coded messages. The only reason he's there, one of them around the clock, if we get hit. He walks in and blows everyone away. I've heard then kidding him about where they want there's. You'll pick up on all this as you go

along Chuck? Chuck your share of the bill is four hundred piasters."

"Sure I guess I will pick up on it as I go along. What did you just say Bruce?"

"Your share of the damages is four hundred piasters"

"Oh o.k. sure, can I pay with American currency?"

"You bet. Listen Chuck why don't you just sit there. Finish your meal. I'm going to go around the corner to a massage parlor. I'll be back shortly, just stay put o.k."

I didn't know what to say. "Sure Bruce if you have to. I'll be right here when you come back o.k.?"

He got up from the table. "I'll go pay the check. I'll get your share later." "Sure thanks. Bruce turned away. "Bruce one more thing if I may. I haven't noticed any birds around here lately. Have you by chance. I mean while you were here in Vietnam."

Bruce Chuckled. "No I haven't given it much notice. Not really. Not I haven't. I'll catch you later Chuck."

"Sure I'll be right here." I looked back to carving my water buffalo. I don't know how I'm going to write this all to everyone. Already here a very short time. And already too much has happened for a few words. Now I'm here sitting with an unwanted water buffalo. And the days not over yet. I wouldn't be surprised if the birds know something. Something impending. Horses, cows and dogs know when a tornado is coming. Before the weatherman to. I wish I could fly, just to relax for a while. Sit on a telephone post and watch everyone go by. Try not to soil any one. I carved more at my water buffalo. What will I do here. While Bruce is getting massaged. Strange getting massaged in a war zone. You wouldn't think a massage would do it. I understand a lot of guys here go to...no I don't want to think about that. How can you have an orgasm in a war zone. It's the opposite of everything here. I know I paid Eugenia. I know it wasn't close to a reasonable lottery. But I wouldn't of met and fallen in love with Eugenia if I wasn't available. Good things can come from bad things. Very good things sure. Plus I didn't pay Eugenia for what she did. I paid her for

what we did. It was shared. No I can already tell, this Saigon place isn't a place to get fancy and swift with the truth. Deceit here will kill you I'm sure. But remencing riddle type of ideas here isn't that good either. I put some more water buffalo into my mouth. I think your getting more respect Mister Waterbuffalo than I am. I hope your a Mister. Not somebodies mother or looking for girlfriend. I looked out the archway. It's getting darker. A little prematurely isn't it. Just maybe cloud cover. But still darker anyway. So what? I'd be in more trouble if it didn't. We'd all be. No sunset. Who'd get blamed for that. Not the moon I'm sure. Did Bruce say crushed glass. Did he? I'm going to have to think that remembering. Could be that just slipped through me. Could be its not a cloud cover. But fumes from everything getting ready to collapse. Because it can't be close to night time yet. Not this yet. I'm not sure I have the range of reactions for this place. How long does a massage take anyway. Like everything they probably have several plans. I carved some more of the water buffalo. I should also stop using Jesus name around here to express my feelings. I think hearing Jesus name might make more people nervous about my being uncomfortable. For sure I should of asked more questions about coming here. Work on my vocabulary for one thing. Probably the Pentago prefers to surprise soldiers unwantingly. I mean if they filled in everyone just on the first day details. People would ask for more of a bargain. At the very least to improve the routine somewhat. I yawned, that's surprising. A yawn in Vietnam. My first I think. Why is this restaurant so empty with me here. I carved more of my water buffalo. I should stop carving and eat the poor guy.

I'm going to stop remorsing myself. I'm here and that's all. Just like everyone else, almost. I wish I knew why! I bet the communist wish they knew why also? Now look isn't that nice. A whole complete family it must be. Walking by holding hands wearing those interesting hats. I guess to let the sun slide off gradually. Give the shade some warning. I'm going to buy one for RS and Terry. That's one of the things I'll do for sure. And I'll go on a generous shopping spree, buy everyone something extra interesting. Now look a pedi cab I think they called them, just went buy easily going along. That's all. You

just have to know what to look for. The driver bent over straining. I hope they get paid by the weight of the person. Sure that's something else I can do when I get back to America. Make somekind of fortune and help out these rickshaw drivers. Start buying them some extra comfortable sneakers. Padded sneakers that glow a little in the dark, to cut down on collisions. And if the wheels aren't greased grease them generously. Why not redesign the whole entire rickshaw. With permission of tradition and the people of course. Hire just orphans and unwanted pregnant mothers. With maternity leave right off from the start. Pay then just as much as me after those expenses sure. I mean after all their lives aren't more important than mine. And mine isn't more important than theirs. Can't be free without being entirely fair. I don't see how! And each rickshaw, a little rickshaw in color of the driver and his family. With the pet dog or cat or a parrot if he's the pet choice. A smiling together serene photograph. Not those mug shot like photographs taxi drivers have in America. Also sure underneath the nice color photograph a little biography. With something updated about how the family garden is doing. Jesus this is good. This better than death by natural cause dishes. Jesus I feel now even better that I should of expected. I feel less untampered with. I wish though Chris would hurry with his available massage. Maybe he took an extra long one. Could be a number of things. Oh sure, this I like. I really like. A rickshaw cemetery, for the loyal devoted employees. Health insurance for those expecting dread diseases. A vacation plan there and back. But the cemetery, I mean everyone has to die. I mean there's no choice about it so far. So why not something pleasant, but not pleasant enough to be tempting. No tempting is good, just make life more tempting and keep an eye on everybody. Make the rickshaw cemetery the seventh wonder of the world and the eight why not with something I haven't though of adjoining nearby. And bring the birds back for Godsakes. This is beyond good and imaginable and getting better if I can keep it up. But I can't remember distracted that I'm still here in a war zone. I took a quick and happy sip of the Coke. Then I remembered the crushed glass possibilities. I looked around everywhere near possible to my field of vision. I don't want to

add bad taste to being in a war zone. I spat the Coke fluidly back into the glass. Not a spat actually more of an even flow. A dribble kind of. It doesn't matter. Jesus, I forgot to ask at the Elephant place about having the wrong possible key to my locker. I wish Chris would show up remembering me. Because if he forgot. You'd think after all these many wars we've had. You'd think at the very least we would of learned to postpone them somehow. Slow them down once they got started. Do them on the installment plan. I mean to look at my watch a minute ago. No I did, but I didn't get to the visual part of it. I got sidetracked on the way. Thinking about war. Those photographs. But I'm still on pacific time and this is the Red ocean I think. Asian time maybe. I didn't come here prepared enough, with enough answered questions. Answered to my reasonable satisfaction. Now I'm thirsty. It's interesting isn't it. I looked around more, more carefully for surprising details. Interesting I was saying, how thirsty gets to your throat first. Could be from all the hangings we treated ourselves to over the years. And that got passed on genetically. I heard a guy say history stuff has to get passed to our genes first before we can get relayed ourselves. I don't know, those gene people are getting to be to much for my reasons. What I do know is that the darker it gets. The more nervous I seem to become. And I'm not good nervous alone. I like to share it conversationally.

Here comes the waitress moving just a little sideways, but not near side saddle like. Just looking easy away and coming more towards me. Could be they get that kind of motion form all the wars they've had here. We at least export ours. Which I wouldn't call generous though.

"You Coke o.k. You want anater?"

"No thank you mam I'm mostly satiated already. But thank you for thinking of me. Mam I'd like to ask you a question if I may?"

"Yes, sure." She smiled effortlessly with not even a millionth of a claorie being burnt.

"I've potentially lost my friend. Or possibly he's lost me. Either way I need to know possibly if you know where the most nearby massage parlor is where he went." I sighed meaning to breath.

She turned her hip from the shoulder down leaning even without motion it seemed. She pointed with an easy light finger generally. "Several around really. I dun know exactly." She looked at me still happy, but saying sadly. "Solly I can no help you?"

"No thanks really. I appreciate the effort really." If I smiled I missed it. I didn't mean to look at my watch but I did. That was uneventful and pointless. I'm feeling myself already beyond good luck assistance. Good luck now is irrelevant anyway if you don't have something you can compare it to like an available relevant fact. I got on my feet, for a change of pace I guess. Circulate myself a little. I looked at my shoes. And ended up noticing my uniform. This uniform here is a mistake. There people here who think I'm there enemy. Without an introduction or even interrogation I'm an enemy, and me stuck with a small print Geneva prisoner card. I exhaled my cheeks puffing up. I feel suspicious a little. But I don't know exactly at what thought. Because right now I feel pretty much vacant all over. I moved my shoes a little getting ready for my next possible thought. I hope that Coke didn't hurt the plant here. I tossed the left over Coke into the vase thing. Just in the extreme case that it was evidence they hoped I swallowed. And leave me alone in case they didn't want to. I looked at the rubber plant. It looks o.k. I should of thought of not hurting the rubber plant first. So I did must of heard Bruce about the crushed glass. I've got to think before I act out first. I've been here probably almost forty minutes or more I'm sure. Just waiting with my apprehension. "Bruce how massaged can you get. Unsheduled to." If the waitress did by some unfortunate chance with her accomplices put crushed glass in my Coke there going to be wanting some tangible results. Probably soon. And I don't know what they are. Unless I get them. I put my hands in my front pockets and walked to the edge of the archway. I went up partially on my toes and whistled. No I can't even manage my own best disguise. I tried to look how I felt. So in case to be more ready in case I had to be. I stepped down the three steps, one at a counting them. I'm feeling to much lieing ahead. I'm over thinking myself. The worst probably thing you can do in a lost situation like this extreme one, is not be

to cautious in your outward self. That thought just gave me a unregulated burst of nervous. I feel like pacing. Bur where. I've never paced in a war zone. Not spontaneously unprepared like this. Not anyway anyhow. If I show myself to be cautious in my outward self. People will get the impression that I'm retrating from running. Be cautious in my head, not outside where people might be watching for their own reason that you don't want to know about. But they do.

I've been here in front of this American Steak House walking around pacing around this red vase. For how I long I don't know! I don't want to know. Longer it seems than before? I just noticed the waitress lady. Maybe she must of just noticed me. For all I know she's the happy bosses daughter. Anyway she has as much right to kill me as anybody else without an explanation or an introduction. That's why I'm here maybe that's why she's here. Maybe don't go in graves people do. I wish I had gotten to know her better. Even if she was a Vietcong somehow or just sympathizing, we could of exposed our difference to each other and had somekind of little chat. Who knows. People should talk to each other before they decide whose going to kill who. That way you at least have somebody around to say good bye to. I heard a pedi cab back fire. I ducked too late. It was a squirm. A duck I might of made it. I've got to concentrate so I can be available to my reactions when I need them. On a motor scooter a guy steering with a lady in the back seat. I backed up backwards then turned forwards moving into an allie. They looked non chalant. What else would they look if they wanted to be surprising. I'll just go down finish this allie. Come around the back that must be the restaurant. Up and back where I started. I'm smart not to of run. They might of started shooting eagerly too soon and hurt somebody besides me. There not on a per bullet budget, I'm sure. Unpleasant near misses could of been available injuries. This allie is longer than it should be. And darker than back before. It's just shade. That's what I'll think of it. It's clean though that's nice. Up ahead some more looks like more light activity. Maybe a furnace for all I know. The furnace at the end of the tunnel everyones talking about. That was a close call that motor scooter was. It wasn't it could of been. When you consider the ramifications of the

consequences your better of backing up out of the way. They probably even thought I was dangerous. I stepped over a crate thing and around a wet cardboard box. Maybe I should be looking back more, to have a better perspective of where I've been. So I'd see everything near twice and be more located where I am. And might be without an unwelcome surprise. And if this isn't a straight away alley for all I know, I'm less apt to make the same wrong twice and the same right only once. How many times have I turned though before I figured that out. Only once I think. All I've got to do is find another alley or even street that way and come back behind the mirror image of myself to get from where I left before. And then what. That's not where I wanted to be. But its a start. A stationary start with more light is better than this. The shade idea possibility I lost and gave up on back there by the crate. Big wood crate to. That way also I'll be more apt to be found by Chris, if he finds me. This is getting pretty much already preposterous. What I've got to do is decide if I want to be here or back there, pick one and go back in the route I've been. Which last place to be that's it. I stepped over a small crushed crate. Now a puddle of water I hope. Here or there is that simple. No its there, if I can find it. On the wall look. Some Vietnamese graffiti probably. Probably a warning for people who can't read it.

I stopped to collect myself. And gather up my emotional breath. Good thing I'm doing this on a full stomach. I decided to slow down my walk. I got to feel like I was marching funny. Without an accompaniment or direction. So I stopped. And I'm still stopped. And what I'm not wanting to admit outright to myself is that I'm potentially lost. And I just did. Who heard of an incomplete alleyway. This might even be an up surface Vietcong tunnel for all I know. Thing about getting lost is you can get more lost without even knowing it. Even without your own cooperation. It's good thing I'm back moving. Being lost in a war zone is probably a violation. Makes people nervous, they think your looking for them probably. Look light, sun light. I felt briefly emancipated and progressive my mind. Victorious got lost in the half turn. I'm back to walking I think that perpendicular thing to the restaurant. Trying to look casually straight ahead

but like I knew where I was going. But I don't know that look to well. I noticed I'm taking smaller steps. No street lights I just noticed. No problem yet its still sun out. Walking passed some little Vietnamese stores and kids playing. I'm trying to keep my peripheral vision in check so I'm not too obvious about myself. The kids are a relief though. If there safe and o.k. I might be to. If I'm not they won't do anything in front of kids. I wonder I'd be better off knowing how much time I have to sunset. Put limits on this somehow. An alley good that way that's good. Opposite from before in time and location good. I jump startled. A kid at my sleeve.

"You gi you wan my sister, gi!"

"Why don't you want her?" He got startled. We looked at each other. Me more than him I think. He turned around and left. Not making a sound, except for a puddle. Oh Jesus, is that what he meant. I think he was looking at me for details I didn't have. God a thought. Senor Fabe, why not take a taxi. God jesus always happens in time. Find a taxi. Find a taxi that's it. But what if Chris is now looking for me. At his own risk. I can't abandon him if he's looking for me. Both looking to, twice than chance of one of us finding the other. More than twice if you consider possibly mistakes being made. I'll look for Chris from where I started. Stationary though looking carefully stationary I'll waiting I'll look. Some people leave some kind of atmosphere when they leave. But that little kid took everything with him. It was smart of me not to tell that kid I was lost. Because he probably knew where I was. Ease up on suspicions that's one more thing. Enough suspicions out of hand and you start incriminating by confessing yourself for relief. Trying to get a hold of something tangible available. Now this alley is probably the right one going the other way because it feels parallel. Where did that come from. Just like that get a taxi. Somewhere unknowable waiting to help, what else. I like it when you feel some advantage besides being alive. I stopped? I just heard some sounds. Not bad sounds necessarily. But also not sounds I would want to imitate in a conversation. It might of probably been nothing. I mean it was something but in the nothing category. Kids are fearless about there ignorance aren't they.

He was too much, "do you want my sister?" And he'll probably be home late for dinner to. Too bad kids have to grow up without somebody else's decision, but there own available. I stepped over two crates with a big walking leap without getting elevated. O.k. o.k. I see the light. Sooner than before, it even feels like familiar light. I slowed down walking to get ahead of any possible disappointment if necessary. Just ten fifteen more feet. I picked up my pace ready with unconscious alternatives. Yes and o.k. And absolutely o.k. I felt like an international lost explorer. There's the red vase, the park across there. The little park sure. I stepped off the sidewalk. And sure American Steak House? I felt exalted enough to be relieved and borderline happy. I sighed and it could of done just as well as a breath. Yeah its the American Steak House in Saigon.

Now I know for absolutely certain I've been standing here a very long time hours at least. No Chris no Bruce nothing. I went politely to the waitress lady. And some how she got happy to see me. But nothing from Bruce! Hadn't seen him since before now nothing. I've been maybe hear three even four hours or more at least. Because I've made two trips to the bathroom with permission. And growing in exasperation all the time. No idea of the sunset time. What these people are on mountain standard time or what I know there not because I'm here. But what time there on I don't know. And just this very now I thought. Maybe they've got a curfew from the base. To be in on time somehow. You can't get a five hour massage for anybody's sake without getting married about it. Massage how many body parts in how many hours. Maybe Bruce is o.k., and thought I went back to his no surprise. If he's not o.k., but how do I know that possibly without knowing it. And I can't stay here forever indefinitely. And completely. I'm taking a taxi back, a pedi cab like before. And if somehow for some reason Chris isn't back yet. I can return, even with help. Now I'm making sense good. I've tried and now I'm making sense. A pedie cab just went by without noticing me for a reason I didn't give him. There were alot before, there be more from now. I'll just wait patiently this time. The worst is over. And it wasn't that bad. Just that anticipation worst case scenario of mine. But

that's over. That much worst doesn't happen often all at once.

I climbed my foot over and into the cab. Three minutes no more. "Hi Ton Son Nhut Air Force Base please!" Now I can feel time is going in my favor. Just three minutes no more and I'm on my way. We are, I'm with someone. Puttering, I like this puttering sound. I leaned back balancing my arms backwards on the seat arms. My hands barely over lapping behind the scooter. The sound of the engine, nice consistent almost evenly repeating. I stretched my back even more, feeling the wind in my hair. I smiled feeling better again from the possibilities that could of been from before. Soon I'll be back at the base. None of this looks to familiar thought. It didn't the first time either though. This time less so. Just a different route. Different driver different route that's it. I decided to check my wallet, a habit I have for the reassurance of my own mind. No, yes its gone. Gone from all my pockets. What am I talking about. How could it be gone. Suddenly for this inextinguishable moment I thought it was me. No its my wallet. After feeling good. Now nowhere completely gone. I decided anyway to keep going. I'll give the driver some kind of verbal reassuring promissory note when we get there. Just to wait outside the compound, just to wait and I'll be right back with a near extravagant tip. Sure those consequences are manageable for everyone concerned. Sure just wait outside. What's he going to do kill me for one fair. Plus he doesn't know I won't cooperate in his killing me. Me I'm just another gi from America, probably potentially mean he probably thinks. Why else would I be here anyway. Also I'm bigger and that adds to the mean perspective possibilities. I'm dirty some also. I raised my arm pit to myself. And I stink a little enough. No I'm not a good choice victim for aggression. I started in my mind to practice my promissory note speech. Trying to add as much international body language as I knew. Which wasn't much. Except for kissing and surrender, that's it. I tried to relax my body fooling the rest of myself into being relieved with my decision. I didn't work because I started to think frantically. About being a culprit. Already in Vietnam not long at all and taking advantage beyond my war responsibilities. Here I am willing at my own expense to bring some free democracy here and I

become a monetary culprit. I'm already right off decided to make one of my beneficiaries of democracy a regrettable victim of a rip off. Even if just for a while hell think. But a while too long. He might just leave himself a victim at my expense. I've already done enough to myself for today. And this pedi cab guy is just earning a living for his own reason that might include little children. I closed my eyes for preparedness.

I raised my hand and tapped him on the shoulder. Gently politely. Too gently he didn't turn. I tried again with more of a bounce tap. He turned around smiling like he expected good news. I rubbed my fingers together, you know the money rub. And shrugged my shoulders more than ever in my life. He shrugged his! "I have now money. "The pedi cab seemed stopped in the middle of the money word. He turned and looked at me mostly with his eyebrows. I shrugged again looking depleted sad. I turned my two front pockets out to better show the fullness of my dilemmas. I noticed a hint of the moon. It can't be. Next my peripheral vision to the side a drainage. A deep drainage ditch which I would of preferred its not being there. I looked turned hearing Vietnamese sounds. Angry fast ones? He swerved out of his seat. Came around the front to my side. I got out myself and was almost chest to chest with him. Except his chest came just above my stomach. He's pointing a fast angry finger at me talking feverishly. I don't want to get into a fist fight. But I've never stopped a fist fight in a foreign language. He pointed to the ground then to me with even heftier Vietnamese. He stopped like out of vocabulary words for the opportunity. Looked at me, walked away sideways still looking at me. Around the front and into his seat. He pattered away into more of the moon than I wanted to see. I felt so circumstantial and unmitigated. I wish Andycharlie would be here to help out somehow. "I would of paid you mister. Now were both unhappy unnecessarily." All the worst happened instead, he thinks I'm undemocratic. Me I'm lost again except in a different location. With nothing familiar hardly even myself. You wouldn't think being innocent would carry so many repercussions. The driver could of taken a chance on being humanitarian about it all. I know that comes after democracy. But he could of played the unhumanitarian odds against the tip.

The tip would of been certainly generous beyond available limits almost.

I'm walking around some minutes. And I'm already not surprised about it either. Some open field. I might even be walking pointlessly in a circle for all I know. Indistinguishable steps to nowhere in this getting darker situation. I'm taking shorter steps to reserve my energy. Also I won't get to the wrong place sooner. Also I'll stay in a neutral safe place longer with each step. I could use that Dr. Sullivan showing up here surprisingly to the both of us. With help. He's as much a family doctor as you could get without being related. My grandfather also he was a doctor. Both of them showing up. Just now right now. I stomped my foot and kicked the dirt. I put my hands against my hips hard. And stared at the moon. I'm not looking at my watch anymore. The time knowing what it is...is passed irrelevance. Adding more information to alot that already isn't, makes it worse yet. It must still be a pretty open field I can't see the rest of it. It's quiet to. Except for me here wondering. It's awful and unnecessarily scary feeling blind, when in other similar less stupid situations you can see what your doing. Well enough anyway to know where your not. One good thing about its being night almost is that those dragon ladies and other like people aren't out. Looking for available victims. Everyone keeps hours? Has a more personal schedule than their war responsibilities and chores. Except the lost. The lost don't have a schedule. But a gotten lost schedule. I haven't tripped and fallen that's good, real good. Must be awful falling down while being lost. Probably takes longer reaching the ground in your added confusion. You might even think momentarily before reaching the ground in your add confusion. You might even think momentarily before reaching earth, that your getting somewhere. And when you do reach the ground your on lost ground anyway. Except now flat instead of vertical. Except just more flatter. And more personal.

I've stopped to collect myself. I mean I've already been stopped. I just now decided to collect myself. My bearing maybe somehow. Bearings mean like getting oriented I think. But mostly for ships at sea. I'm still waiting and collecting. All I feel though I've gathered collecting is more darkness. I've

always had a bit of a head start on getting lost. But this is wrong. I looked over my shoulder without a thought to tell me why. That didn't make enough sense. Over my shoulder can be forwards or backwards in this situation of darkness. The moon is bright a little in my favor. That's good I hope. Sure I'm going to call it good. I've got to start making commitments. And might as well start with good ones. I decided for the lack of not moving, to start up some forward motion. I walked with my hands just above my hips. In case I had to grab someone to hold and calm down. Like that David guy in Rowayton. But that was a daytime grab. With minimum potential repercussions maybe. That might be good to. "Yeah, I'm going to call that good to." Probably though must be awful getting killed in a place where your lost. That you don't know where it is. Harder I'm sure to collect your last thoughts. All that's familiar to you is your parting dead body unexpected and unwelcome. If I were the moon. No, absolutely enough as it is. I haven't run across no, no trespassing signs. Except their probably personalized here alot more? At least I'd know how potentially welcome I am. Nothing about private property that somebody serious about. I'd give anything to be in a cemetery right now? At least I'd have a feeling of location! And a little bit of company? Whatever that is up ahead! It looks better for a moment. Not moving? Maybe its just my moon reflecting. I wouldn't reflect that far. Not in my predicament especially. I picked up my pace without getting predatory. Just another fifteen feet. Its bigger than from further away behind me. I'll be damned a friendly stack of hay. This is as much friendship as I've felt for hours. And at worst I can eat some. Get vegetarian about myself! I put my hands chest high on it. Nice hay to! Some couple stacks of hay. And there's probably something on the other side. Hopefully nothing. I'm going to stay here I am. I mean hay is pretty all over neutral. It has no war needs. Plus hay always relaxed me somehow. Sure I'm going to stay here until the first available sunrise. There's no reason to believe the sunrise won't happen. And if it doesn't. No that's not a concern right now. Stay timely on my own time. Stay till sunrise that's it. I started walking along the stack floating my hand on the hay behind me. This is fine. Could even be

perfect without my yet not knowing it. Great a decision finally. I've got to be careful. Not get secure and confident? And get believing that I'm making sense potentially to the point that I'm anticipating hopeful. I'm not complaining though! The hay is stacked to my liking. Ten feet maybe more and four plus feet high straight across. No upward inundations at all. All I need plus myself now is a reading lamp. A club sandwich to keep me company and a copy of Huckleberry Finn. The smell of the hay is pleasant. Fresh you know, relaxing to my nostrils. I closed my eyes to see what would happen to my mind.

Nothing good. So far nothing. I opened my eyes. And felt just a little bit more relevant. Alert still and near almost determined. Border line determined you might say. I know I'm not going to sleep. That's another decision that's good. I think that's two? Two in a row. Not simultaneous, but almost? I might even get a little self made around this! Could be I have already a little? Just haven't had time to collect it around me. No, sleep is out. Be a rotten shame being shot while asleep. Interrupting a dream, like something went wrong with the dream instead of you. Be confusing. Unnecessarily confusing. Well passed distracting. Half asleep, half alive. Bleeding in all the wrong places. Finally dyeing irreparably. Dyeing you know has become more and more a questionable opinion. There are apparently more vital signs than we realized. I wish I could of been a doctor. That's what I wanted when I was young. But I didn't have a qualified mind. Did you know anyway, that during sometimes of the eighteen hundred some people were buried with endurable strings tied to their hands. The strings leading upstairs to a bell over the grave! So if they were buried ahead of time, they could call attention to their dilemma by pulling on the string to the bell up on earth. Spocky really, I bet they came up pissed off. Very pissed off literally. Jesus talk about being misunderstood. What I'm telling you about is the truth to. I read it inside a book once. I've got to stop think and remencing when I should be concentrating on being scarred. I leaned more extra my back against the hay. I should be better o.k. Our of nowhere just like that, except me here. I saw that guy being killed with his brains against the blackboard like spaghetti. Jesus if God intended us to die

like that, it be less generous severe. I closed my eyes hard to get away from myself. I saw the dead barbers lined up against the grinning sergeant. God I'm surrounded alone. I tightened my arms around my shoulders. If this were a book right now, I'd get up right now saying out loud forget it. Maybe first get Lucies or Stacys, Janes, for sure Eugenia's phone numbers out of the book. When leave completely no questions asked. But if I've got to think of remembering things why not uplifting things, now immediate potentially getting worse things, that might not be over. Like me and Eugenia just the other day too recently at the Toro Bar. That got memorable quick and nice for sure. I crossed my legs one over the other. I wonder what really are the chances of me and Eugenia getting agreeable married. We are maybe more opposite than I care to know. But I don't believe opposites attract they get married! But I'm not now going to worry about incidental thoughts of the future right now. Being expressed prematurely. And think of their potential meaning? I petted the hay. I yawned out loud like lion. Not meaning to. I laughed quietly to myself covering my mouth to reduce the available acoustics of myself. Making me think of that Clyde Beatty and Cole Brothers Worlds Biggest Combined Circus. I've never tried sleeping with my eyes open. I heard of a guy in a ghetto who slept with one eye open. But he never knew which one. I yawned again sleepily with less lion in it.

I didn't sleep eyes opened or closed. I don't think I did. If I did it was momentarily till I got thinking of the circus. I think it was the hay got me more and more thinking like it was almost right now. I was living in the YMCA in Norwalk, Connecticut. After leaving the University of Maine by the sheer adding up of reasons I should stay-going against me. I almost immediately enrolled into Norealk Community college with what was left of my educational needs. They didn't find me very appealing. But they let me stay because they needed the money. And I had completely flunked out yet. At the very same time I was working as a milkman. You know delivering milk to people in a truck to people who wanted it. And like I said living at the Y apprehensive to myself. My father thought it was best putting me in the Y. Because I was keeping late hours as a student and keeping early hours as a milkman. What it was is that I

was interrupting the family cycles. He dropped me off silently. And paid the first months rent. He came up directly to me then put his hand on my shoulder and smiled enough for a smile. Finally after looking me in the eyes, wishing me good luck in several words that didn't include the word luck in them. I thought to myself listening that could be it was Pop's way of helping me get self made. I didn't ask. I already had enough answers I didn't know what to do with for that time of my life. Well that whole part of my escape didn't work out to well. Not particularly well at all. I got more potentially unmade than made. I got soon to compensating against myself. I started the milk route way early in the morning till I finished. Usually behind the other milkmen. Always actually. When I got home depended on how lost I got and how soon I knew it. I was also at the same time a part time bartender with mostly pre-mixed drinks at this Long Shore Country Club. I did that some day hours and mostly weekends, I think. In the between of those two jobs I worked must also of been part time at Norden Electronics. Assembling little things is what I was doing there. Then somehow I don't know how, I worked at as a security guard at this wealthy home place called Roton Point in Rowayton. I got fired that's how from being a milkman. That's right that's how? And I took the job at the electronics Norden place that I hadn't been fired from yet. The security job was easy! I just let people in who already knew they were rich and belonged there. I guess, I served mostly for scare crow purposes of would be culprits. What I liked alot about being at Roton Point. Is that I was real near across the street from RJ Paradise. A wood like place with a couch right in the middle. Where willing people of the opposite sex would come and make love to each other on purpose. We used to go some buddies and me from Ponus Ridge Junior High School and inspect the couch to look at it. And all this working and traveling I did from the Y on a bicycle. I was probably making alot of money. I got compensated that way. But I have no idea how much to count it or what happened to it! They probably still owe me between firings and stuff. I would'nt be surprised! I guess, I was trying to make up for lost time, lost time I probably didn't want in the first place. Anyway I just realized I didn't get self made in the least. Even my expression was changing

in the mirror, unwillingly not just changing by aging and stuff like that. Those were trying times. Because I had no idea what I was trying for. So when I read in the Norwalk Hour newspaper about this opportunity to join the circus I took it. I felt potentially relieved. I really did. Just the chance to get off the bicycle had particular appeal. Just getting out of town helped. That line from "Lord Jim" about craving anonymity got started haunting me severely. Also moving around from one place to another had considerable potential appeal. I figured if you have to be a vagabond its nice to have transportation.

Clyde Beatty and Cole Brothers right off seemed nice. I walked up behind this Junior High where they had their tents pitched. There was no application to be filled. Just your available self present. Even the job interview thing was just two and a few more words with mostly looking at your arm and legs. Actually in fact there were two or three job interviews I went to with different crews. At first I didn't know I was being interviewed. I thought I was asking for directions to the personal office till I got informed there wasn't one that existed. I got interviewed with a tent crew that pitched up tents manually by hand. The butchers I liked, they're the guys that sell cotton candy and popcorn to the kids in the audience. But I ended up with the chow crew. I thought that was o.k. providing food to the clowns, the jugglers, that Mexican trapeze family and of course including me-myself. I didn't have to pay attention to the fact that the job paid twenty four cents an hour! Because it included room and board. Actually not a room but a truck we emptied at day and slept to at night. But we could eat all the board we wanted. I did ask the head chow person about the minimum wage law. Which he didn't mind answering, because he had an immediate available answer he didn't seem to mind providing on request. All the entertainment jobs are exempted from minimum wage. Including waitresses believe it or not. I felt relieved of being a good tipper all these years. So anyway I got employed right there on the spot and got settled in.

First few days were really quite great and pleasant! After feeding the performers breakfast politely and stuff I had a couple of hours to myself. We never got a day off, we had time off in between. I'd go for an easy going walk.

Just me moving along in my leisurely ways. A clown juggler practicing along with himself and his talent. Purple tears and red shiny shoes. Mellon size buttons, throwing seven eight balls up in the air. Behind the happy juggling clown was a poor lonely female lion alone in an elevated cage with wood wheels. The cage framed by painted wood designs. Almost like a painting of a sad lion. Except she had feelings, but I could see was too proud to cry. I almost named her for myself. But I decided lion's shouldn't have peoples names named by people. It was much to much enough that we trapped her and took her away from her jungle friends and family. Aren't we something? Once I thought of freeing her. So I had to settle enough hoping my company meant something to her. I never figured out if it did. But at least I have the hope that it did. And I did pray for her once. A good prayer to. I still think about lonely, sad lion. And how dead is the only way she can be free. Like us sad in Vietnam waiting to die by killing. I also spent time with the Mexican trapeze family! Playing cards and stuff and talking some in Spanish. The father trapeze guy once dropped a card on the ground and everyone laughed instantaneously. Dropping to them is different so I joined in also politely with my laughter. The elephants to I also liked. They were more relaxed and enjoying of each others company. First day I used all my money buying the animals snacks. Except the lady lion you couldn't feed her they said. Yeah most of my extra left over time I'd spend curiously with animals, specially like I said the lady lion. I guess mostly because they didn't seem to mind. I thought under the prevailing conditions of myself, except for my fear of heights, I would of liked being an elephant. I prefer their diet for one thing. Also they get along generously better with each other. Not once did I see an argument. And their very tolerant of us. More than we are for sure. The chimpanzees when I felt in a thinking mood I hung out some with them. They were perplexing and ponderous about themselves. But I usually ended up after starting with the lonely lady lion. All over together I was having a pretty impressive and happy time, even relaxing. Me and my captive animals slowly getting befriended. I got to be pretty routine about myself. I once I even thought I could make a life for myself here. Helping out the animals and myself to be

better happy!

But after too short of a short while. You know that word but seems to send people into some pretty unpleasant places. Yet you never see it on tombstones. Could be just one of those on your way words we rely on to facilitate our personal disasters. Not really an extreme personal disaster. Just a sufficing one. I learned casually after a few days that the circus was kind of a haven for fringe kind of people. You know people that neighbors don't find convenient having around themselves. Retired criminals trying to put a fresh start of an opportunity for themselves. Which I have no problem with. After all I was their for my second chance myself. Maybe my first one. That part of it was o.k. But it turned out that everyone in the chow crew eight of us, except me and a guy saving up for a Harley Davidson, were active on going homosexuals. I'm not obviously of course a homosexual myself. But they seemed to know that I was regrettably suspicious of them. As anyway happens sometimes, we did our jobs and kept our distances from each other. What got me though is that they were particularly well organized about themselves and their antics. Always at each stop they know where to go for their homosexual adventures. They'd even come back with extra added on homosexuals. Loner homosexuals is one thing. But happy parades of them got to me some! And you never knew if they were going to come back with an unpleasant out of control one. Somehow they never did. Actually they were pretty private about their antics, even sometimes gentlemanly. And I kept running into that imprisoned lion. Once I even walked into town and bought her a high quality steak. I snuck it to her in the dark. But she was still unhappy with herself eating it. I guess they prefer to get their own. I started getting depressed some in kind of a direct way. I'd like to know if were supposed to be somehow the cream of the animal kingdom, how come so many of us get curdled along the way.

Even getting out of the way unhappy wasn't decisive in what happened next. One day in the night time evening we were breaking down tables and chairs to move on to our next location. The Harley Davidson guy standing in the doorway of the truck yelled an order to us. While we were already on self admitted orders to

be working. I spoke back to him modestly something that was tired and ungrateful. I think I told him to join us. He looked at me hard with all of himself. And jumped off the start. Without an introduction or a warning he came up without stopping to aim and punched square in one of my jaws. I went down mostly due to fatigue and gravity. Unceremoniously I went down! I don't fight people I never have. Not the offering part of it anyway. So anyway I'm on the ground, fortunately next to some nice fresh green grass. I hate doing laundry after a fight. Lying their flat I said thinking to myself, I'm already down here why get up. Fortunately he himself was also satiated with one punch. By the time I got up feeling recuperated I decided to quit. I collected my pay and said goodbye to everyone. I even said goodbye to the homosexuals to. By then I cant to realize I had a problem about them that wasn't a problem. They were nice like everyone sometimes. Mostly of all I said goodbye to the animals. I decided not to say goodbye for emotional reasons to the lady lion. But once gotten off the circus grounds I realized I'd done wrong and selfish. I went back and around and did say fully a goodbye. Enough actually to cry several tears out of both eyes at once. Then I permanently left goodbye. With very little money and too hungry for my own sake and budget prospects.

Where I left was in New London, Connecticut. That's where the Coast Guard Academy is, I think. I'm not sure though. I don't care either. Anyway again, I walked away in this narrow unpaved road leaving the circus mostly behind me. I walked quite a while. The roads always seem to be long and narrow in situations. like this don't they. I don't know why that is. I didn't have enough money for any kind of extended life style. Two days I figured. Almost like a convenient miracle the first sign of a house turned out to be a restuarnt. A small run down shack that looked like it was about to sneeze named Joe's. I wasn't at all hungry because of my emotions but I ate very generously in case I might be hungry later and broke. Why not get ahead of my own predicament on a full stomach I thought. And temporarily I did. But after all the expenses of eating I had just enough for a tip. And that was it-broke, broke as having no money can be. I slept around for two days. An abandoned beach, most are at

three a.m. in the morning. Then I got a temporary part time work break from the unemployment people. Of all people I helped move Otto Grahm out of his house. Because he was moving. He's the coach of the Washington Redskins in football I think. I didn't though get to meet him. But I saw his Bob Hope Desert Classic golf bag. Next to the shinny, very shinny bag was a plate of three and a half cookies. First I disregarded them as cookies. But I kept going back to pick up more heavy boxes. I finally went up hungry to check if they were stale. I went back to work. But came back unresolved in my morality and ate one. I figured they were stale! I was hungry! And I was already partially on derelict rules. Which I think allows such things? But I didn't eat them all. Not wanting to become to committed to my evolving derelict potential self. But I put one in my pocket just in case. That was just one day job. I got paid in cash. So that somebody didn't have to pay taxes. I got a very cheap one room apartment, for free would of been too expensive. It had nimble cockroaches for the first time in my life. But they left me alone. And I was agreeable to. I hung out mostly at the library learning anything that got in my way. While I looked for a job of anykind. I even started saving money I decided when I had any to buy some scuba gear I saw in a store window. I suddenly got to liking the idea of going down deep under water, cool, calm and with fish I didn't know well enough to have an opinion on. So if things weren't going exactly well at least they were going.

After one whole week with things, some things, saw a newspaper front page photograph of two gi's in Vietnam. One was very injured his face bandaged! Another his buddy holding him in his arms looking injured exasperated. I got startled beyond myself I did. Just looking. They both looked like me. I decided all at once without any speculation to go to the draft board. I walked up the ricky steps into the unpainted draft room. That was I hadn't eaten in one and two thirds days due to my rent priorities, of needing a place to sleep. That morning I put a towel in my mouth after showering for a perspective of my not eating. But it didn't taste so good, so I figured I was o.k. So far till then. Calories are everywhere you know if your willing to eat them. There sitting behind the draft board desk was this stationary draft board unneccarily old lady

with not well properly combed hair. Too busy drafting people to get to her hygiene on time I guess. I finally asked her briefly if she had any of those conscientious objector forms left over and available. Even though she wasn't doing anything I felt nervous self conscieintous about interrupting her. She said yes! I think she said yes? It could of been the sound of her head going up and down. I have no idea why she was so old? I found it discouraging such an old woman short on vitality and with nose hairs sending near kids to war. Anyway without too much motion she gave me some paper and three pencils. And said, "state your reasons." I went over to this long narrow table thinking state your reasons. I sat on a lone solitary chair under a color photograph of President Johnson. I remember thinking that he looked like he'd just had breakfast. I'm sure Presidents get three meals a day, even if they don't want them. Probably I don't know why I think that! Anyway, I clasped my hands under President Johnsons belly and tried to encourage my thinking. After a considerable while I felt my momentum on my side and got up to ask the draft lady a question to get started on the papers. I asked her from where I was sitting, "How do you spell conscientious?" You know what? I'm still here getting over it. She got up, one hip moving more effiently than the rest of her, came right up to me and took the blank papers and pencils away. Just like that gone. She didn't even say get out. She just looked at me and assumed it. Somehow this draft lady must of thought knowing somehow I wasn't going to put up any resistance. I felt irked to tell you the truth. Not meaning to on the way out I caught an unwelcome glimpse of President Johnson. I wouldn't be surprised if this draft lady and the President were somehow distantly related. I mean, I was born in Mexico. English is my second language, a distant second. What you have to spell conscientious on such short notice not to want to kill somebody at the expense of your own death. I stood outside under the draft board not knowing what to do for the longest time. Just looking at it. Until I got tired and started feeling absent minded. I tell you some people are born wise others are born otherwise.

After that day things went from bad to worse yet. It wouldn't of been as excruciating if it hadn't gotten good and hopeful for two and a half days. I got

another job. This Dupont family owned this island near New London. One member of their family decided or another member of another family decided to marry one of these Dupont people on purpose. We got hired to accommodate the extra too many people invited by putting up nice colorful tents for them. Not to sleep no of course not, to dance and eat and take notice of themselves. It was fun and good, taking the ferry ride everyday and working hard with other people. But they hired too many people the work got done to fast. So I lost my job. No actually I didn't lost the job, it lost me. The job ran out of hours before I did. After paying back rent I had enough money left for one day a little more before getting destitute again. Walking around eagerly on the chance I might a job. I walked into the customs office just to see what was inside. They had this poster, a wanted like poster. Offering alot of money to turn in drug dealers and their drugs. One or the other not necessarily both together at once. I thought that might have potential somehow. I mean it was alot of money. And just for a milogram of drug. I didn't know how much a milogram was, but I knew it wasn't much. I walked away making my plans. I didn't think of myself as a snitch, but more as a citizen spy in need of money. But it was pointless. I was getting to pointless in those days quicker and quicker. If there was an underworld of drugs in New London or anywhere nearby I didn't know how to introduce myself to them. Not without somebody getting suspicious about myself, including me. Also I don't know about drugs. I mean if you buy them with permission there o.k. But if you can't get permission, if your more of a self prescribed person and poor, its not o.k. And there taking them for the same reason about. To feel better and get some reprieve time away. I could myself of used an aspirin at that point. Sure drugs should be illegal specially the hefty ones. But not as illegal as poverty should be. Anyone caught poor, should be feed on the spot and put up somewhere comfortable with aspirin as an option. And what's more I believe that. I really do.

Problem after three days of more trying, sometimes with extra added effort, doing what makes sense and appropriate all around gets non sensical quickly. Most specially on an empty stomach. And you find, you don't do it consciously

or even unconsciously I bet, but after all these getting more and more destitute days and nights-you start blending into the lower tone colors on the color spectrum. You know the browns, the grays, the rusty hardly reds and very bland greens. Your shoes get skuffy dirty, your wearing tan pants that a moth wouldn't get caught dead pirched on. The original color of your full length coat you've forgotten because now its a bed spread. Your face becomes grayer and more pointed like. You start blending into park benches, unwater trees-everything bland and sad. All of it unbeknownst to yourself as its happening before your very own eyes. It was about that time that I started thinking about the advantages of begging. It wasn't easy. It wasn't easy at all in the least. I couldn't find anyone with reliable begging advice. I found one old gentlemen in the park looking for him anybody with potential advice on begging ways and ideas. He said, "just be yourself." But I was no where near that point. I thought, I already left that point behind me. If I were myself on purpose I'd be eating shrimp cocktail at Chez Pierre or manicotti at the Arrow. No at Manero's eating there secret ingredient salad and a selected steak. I needed to find some begging technique, isolate some energy to do it. And do it. I walked into these small woods behind the rail road station. I practiced begging approaches on this oak tree with my hands spread out at first. The I tried a much bigger tree thinking it might give me confidence and modesty. But I wasn't nowhere good. Even hungry and fading I still sounded like I was asking for a stock tip. Limping on one leg, limping on two legs-nothing convincing to me in the least. My stomach was so empty that if I had vomited I would of disappeared even probably including my shoes. It was futile. The old man was right. You've got to reach the point where its natural. But I didn't have the patience for that. I've been brought up too well, most of the time without even knowing it. I even thought desperately of going up to the old man and begging from him. But I didn't. In life if you have to, you should beg on your own what you earn. I ran out of options. Actually I ran out of options days ago. But reflexes being what they are, they just keep on going and on and on. Isn't the human brain something just when you think it knows you, you find yourself in the woods behind a rail

road station begging an oak tree for breakfast.

I decided to call home. Just like that call home. Not really an inspiration that came to me. More of an exasperation! I hadn't called home in over a month. I wanted to have some self made success under my belt before I called. It was almost a month. I was desperate beyond my desperate limits. AND I knew how disappointed Mom and Pop would get if I starved to death without their being kept abreast of my progress. Rodney Stuart answered the phone like he always did on the second ring. Second ring its Rodney Stuart. My God, it was great talking to him. I could of written a song on the spot. And sung it forever. He told me Mom and Pop were out and Terry was at the library. "Of course," he said. Just when about to say goodbye sadly. Rodney said to me, "You got your one way." I said, "what's my one way?" He meant one A. That draft deal that says your fit to be served by your country. Well everything eventually falls into place. Even though too often its in the wrong place. Rodney and I reengaged the conversation without hanging up. RS told me everyone including Mom and Pop wanted me very much for me to come home. And they would wire me money so that I could. Well to make a short story tolerable. I got the money. Did things change. Jesus even the colors changed and abruptly to. A non alcoholic beer from Germany, a medium rare steak, french fries and two orders of salad brought by a nice crisp waitress. Let me tell you right now if you already don't know, you don't appreciate a steak dinner till your almost near starving on your own and you've failed at begging. But I did get my one A. And here I am. Deciding whether to eat some of this hay.

I picked up another piece of hay and put it into my mouth. Same taste as the circus. I wish, I was still there with the lady lion, even the guy who punched me without a knowable warning. That circus begging time was maybe only eight months ago. That was as pits as it got for me. Now look at me, lost in Saigon waiting for the sun to rise a little more on my next eventuality. I leaned back more against the hay for rest and relaxation purposes. The only thing good about my predicament is that it can't get worse without my being relieved by my death somehow. I got started to get up. My legs were started to

get cramped on their own from unnecessary usage. Sure soon I'll be able to recognize another guy with a uniform like mine and arrange a ride back. Another chance to get life more right. I smiled. I don't know why? Maybe just stretching. I hear beginning morning sounds? Jesus they must be birds. What else? I got up to look. People... A crowd moving towards me from near far away on a soccer field. I'm on a soccer field for Christsakes. Something the way they are. Something wrong the way they are. Huddled together, only their feet moving short steps. And old Vietnamese grandmother woman is crying. Two small kids keeping looking up at a younger woman. She bends over and picks up the little girl. The kids are younger than RS. Their nine people together, moving towards where. The little boy reached for his mother's hand. Why are they like that. Looking not wanting to see. They turn to the side together. And stop together. They even move more not moving. More moving over there. A metal latch on a door from the opposite side. More sunshine. The birds quieter. The small crowd moves tighter closer to each other. The two kids pop out. The little girl wants to play. The older little boy shakes his head. And tries to look stern older. Something here's going to be wrong. I can feel. Two soldiers out of the latch door. Now more. The little girl wants something. She cries. The little boy looks away. The older people are frozen still. Eight soldiers. Nothing is moving except the soldiers. Feverishly towards the group with no expressions. The little girl reaches for her mothers hand. The mother is looking at the soldiers. The little girl can't reach her mother's hand. Two soldiers move out of the latch door. With a third man. He's not a soldier. Not trying to be afraid. The family. They all look at him, even the little girl. They all have weapons. Except the one man. He smiles to his family with from one side. And with one eye. He's afraid. The eight soldiers stopped at parade rest. Their feet apart. Looking away ahead, nothing on their faces except themselves. Why are the children here. The two soldiers with the one man turn in front of the eight armed soldiers. Walking ahead faster. The little girl wants something. She stomps her feet crying. The little boy walks over to her quickly. And tries to pick her up leaning back. He can't. The man not a

soldier has fallen. The two soldier men help him up. His hands are tied with dirty rope. His nose is bleeding. One soldier takes a handkerchief and wipes the stream of blood down his lips. They walk another eight feet. The man bleeding more walking backwards. They place him on a white chalk mark. And one says something loud to him. The same handkerchief. Why am I looking? He slips away from the handkerchief. To look at his family. He's blind folded. One eye. Now both eyes. His nose still bleeding down his chin. Both soldier do an about face. The man strains his neck looking. This isn't going to happen. The small family is closer. The man goes up on his toes arching his back. The eight soldier snap their feet together. From a shout before. More words. All the weapons go up. The families chins go up trembling. The little girl covers her eyes. Gunfire. I cover my eyes. I covered my face on my knees praying. I tried to inhale. My chest. I think I'm waiting. I need something. Another gun shot. Jesus please the quiet. Give us the quiet.

How long the sun. My eyes. I'm squinting. I got to one knee. Waiting then the other. The sun again. The field is empty. The green grass. No more, birds. Blood on the chalk mark. A little girls doll alone twisted around on the field. A stack of hay fell over. My hand. I looked with nothing to see. I said don't run. A stack of hay behind me. Don't run. They think I'm escaping. I stopped one foot out. I looked down at the doll. I walked over. Standing over. I couldn't. Pick it up. I bent over to pick it up. I ran instead. Walking fast. Traffic ahead. I'm an alley. Walking. Breathing. A jeep is parked up ahead. An MP. I hurried. Before he's away. He looked up. And sat up all at once. I slowed down walking towards him.

"Excuse me ..."

"What's wrong Airman?"

"A man with his family killed back there."

"Where?" His eyes are running.

"Over there." I pointed my hand backwards tired.

"Jesus Jack that was an execution. What's your problem?"

"My problem?"

"Yeah your problem. Is something wrong Airman?"

"No...No I guess I just..."

"Where you stationed?"

"Over there. Tan Son Nhut. I just got here."

"Let's go. I'll give you a lift." He reached for his ignition. "Your off to a good start aren't you?" He smiled I think.

I walked around in a hurry. Around the front of the jeep. The engine started. I raised my leg into the jeep. I sat down. Inhaling hard. And looked away at everywhere. The MP is driving fast smoking. I wanted to ask him how far. Then I realized it didn't matter. It's everywhere here. I kept quiet. A fast run. He started whistling. Something, I don't know. My letters haven't gotten home. I haven't even written from here yet. I've only been here. My watch it's gone. I inhaled finally again. And sighed! A lot of traffic. Those little kids. The man. The family. Jesus how can they remember all that. And not forget. The same statue soldier again. The same, just kneeling there. God I'm tired. I'm tired. He's whistling again. I looked away. Whistling that Hi Ho Hi Ho. Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. I closed my eyes trying not to listen. "Where almost there. Hang on. I know my short cuts." Faster, I sat up. The wind and the sun against my face like a rush of a furnace. I'd forgotten about this heat. Whistling again, I'm a yankee doodle dandee." Up ahead yeah, the entrance guard shack. Must be the main gate. He slowed past an Ap. Nodded and accelerating fast away. I'm back. I shock my head, trying not to see the things I was feeling. I've never been this tired before, almost just enough to breath. I don't have to be at that intelligence place till. The elephant right, yeah the White Elephant. We stopped next to the basketball court. And turned. He laughed for some reason. He must of had a thought. He yelled "O.K?" The Ap slowing down. The Ap yelled back, "You bet." Past the radar tower. "Tell me where buddy." I said, "Here." I'll walk the rest. Of the way." He said, "No door to door service." I Glanced at the cafeteria. I felt hungry. I wasn't. "Just over there thanks sergeant." We drove another fifty yards. He turned on his seat and looked at me. "You take care now. Take

it easy o.k." I looked at him. "Thank you sergeant. I appreciate your help." I swung my leg out. And stood up. He looked over his shoulder slowly half turning. Then faster singing. "Hi ho. Hi ho...off to work we go..." And he faded off into silence. I'm back. I'm not going back there. The screen door opened. I suddenly got worried about Chris. I should of been worried before. Walter Cronkite on the TV. A soldier sleeping. A wet beer can on his carpet. Snoring in day light. "The war isn't going well." Walter Cronkite said. Sung Ho knows if Chris is o.k. I'd like to see Sung Ho. See if she's o.k. Chris bed is empty. An ash tray full of cigarettes. A fan sideways. On the cement rotating. Ice cubes still melting. I unplugged the fan. I'm tired. With nowhere to rest. I climbed up my bunk. It's neatly made. I'm so tired.

I didn't sleep. I couldn't. I didn't try. But I'm better. I think I am. I lay in bed. Thinking alot about getting concentrated. Getting on somekind of schedule. Till it's time to leave. I decided to take care of myself. For one thing not to go to that Saigon place. I already know. Eat three meals a day. And take at least one shower everyday. Just to mind my own business. Three meals a day. Take one shower everyday. Just mind my own business. Eat for my nutritious sake. And not to think. About whats all this. It took a long time. Do I feel better. I wish I knew where Chris is. If Sung Ho is alright. I have no reason. To be worried about Sung Ho. Except the war going on. I decided also to take a private physical. Somehow with a doctor in Saigon maybe. at least one every three months. To stay ahead of myself. Make sure I know what's going on. Just stay in shape. I guess. Have a regular dependable taxi driver with the motor running outside the doctors office. And get a physical. I also said the deepest prayer on my knees. Asking God I forget. It had to be the deepest prayer. Because I decided it was going to be the only one. And stop thinking. About whats over done before now? It's out of my control. Probably was before it happened. It's getting darker now. Which I decided to like and prefer. Make choices is what I've got to do. When I have to. Only when I have to. And no more burying photographs. Do something else with them if I have to. I'm feeling rallied about myself almost. And almost, almost relieved. Almost but not quiet.

Being relieved maybe sets me up. So maybe that's good that I'm not as relieved as is my accustomed average relief. I felt confused somehow asking God to help us. But confused is maybe the only way God will listen to us. From Vietnam.

I stretched my arms high over my head. To give myself the idea that I'd had a good rest. I've decided to go get some food at the pay for food cafeteria just passed the Airman's club. I saw it there the other day. Paying here somehow is probably a good idea. Wow, that's a good thought, paying for being here is a good idea. Good, and its a nice nearly cool night tonight. So they do have cooler nights here in this Vietnam. I'm surprised I didn't notice sooner. Because I'm almost at the cafeteria place. Maybe they have music food for sure. There is nicely, a quaint like little blue roof. And elderly Vietnamese gentleman watering. Some flowers. By moon light no less. These are nice to see. I inhaled completely for a change walking through the easy swinging doors. I wanted to say hello to the nice Vietnamese man. But I didn't want to interrupt him in English for some reason I didn't know. But he nodded and smiled anyway. That was nice. I nodded and smiled back. And then walked in. That was before. Now I'm already inside remembering just from before. And its nice here inside. Lots of lights on nice colorful color walls. Rotating fans, lots of tables and chairs. Very few people. I wonder why. And look right there a Juke Box. I'm going to make a very careful selection and play it. I walked directly to it, over I mean under a slow rotating fan. Real slow fan like one revolution every never. But still moving. My song went on? There's only a five man line in front of a cash register. A small line good. No waiting. I'm already started walking there. "Under the Boardwalk under the sea." My song. What luck to find that song. My far away favorite. Reminding me of Stacy. And me at the beach. "My baby and me..." I whispered singing under my breath. Not really a line. The five guys in a circle. Six feet from the register. The Vietnames lady looks bored. "Down by the sea my baby..." I'm listening walking by. Maybe it is a line of somekind. I'm listening to them. Mostly all sergeants.

"I tell you this Tet truce was bullshit from the very beginning. They-"
"How many of our perimeters have they hit?"

"Not just our jack all over. Here, there, everywhere. Fire fights every fucking thing."

"I heard, Chulon, Phu cat, Da Nang. Some MP told me even the Emassy is under Siege in Saigon."

"I don't fucking believe that. Do you?"

"Well I know we've lost one of our perimeters. Reinforcements is the fucking word."

"Some of its got to be bullshit rumors."

"Not with all this metal and shit flying. Rumors or not the ghouks are going for broke."

"Yeah another fucken Bien Bien Phu." I faded walking away. I looked back quickly. There still talking. My song is still playing. I tried to wait to finish the song. Still talking. You'd think they were saying something important. I couldn't wait. The song, outside. The elderly Vietnamese gardener is gone. Red, pink and nice white flowers, sitting there dripping water quietly amongst themselves. It's dark again. What they said inside. What's there point. I myself have to stick to my plan. Stick completely to the plan. Three meals a day, eat them. And the rest of it. A jeep passed fast. Very fast, no speed limits here or what. Another jeep. I'm going to the Airman's Club. Now another not three. One even a jeep. A short cut. Away from this action. Did I mail my letters. Yes, I think. I did. Probably did for sure yes. Sometime before now I did. Just right over this drainage ditch. And my will. That's o.k. in order for sure. With all this traffic. I can hear music already. I inhaled deeply to my surprise. And exhaled. The music stopped. Easier looking without that music. There it is. The canopy intact. I crossed the street looking twice both ways while crossing. I stepped into the dark lit room. Like coming in from the cold. Crowded fast busy. Very loud. The music again. Tennessee, it is that Tennessee guy, playing a guitar with his teeth. I think its Tennessee.

"Do you mind if I sit down here with you?" All the tables seemed taken.

He looked at me slowly. "No bud, pull up a chair. And take a load off."

"Thank you." I smiled, mostly with my cheeks. They're two marines sitting here. I rotated my palms around my hands. Some relaxing isometrics from wrestling. The marines whispering showing their teeth. Now louder. I looked for the waitress.

"I'm telling you brogue. Charlie is goen for broke. Noah not for broke. They ain't got it in them. What did you mean Jack. Did you ever see this kind of fucking concentration before? Ah?" The other one shrugged his shoulders. "Who knows what we know." I looked away. "They're dead meat if they are." The started sounding. Like the same voice. "Don mean shit. If they don't know who they are. Where the fuck there coming from. Yeah just the same. Just more of it. I hear you on that brother. I heard the fucking Major say there hitting us in fifty maybe sixty please." The waitress is standing. We all looked at her. Both marines raised their mugs to her. She looked at me. I shook my head. She took two steps back. And left with her scared eyes. I followed her departure. See if she's going to be alright. Two marines, no one army. "You mother fucking son of a whore." Over there Jesus. At the flower glass partition. One stood up hard, grabbing the other. He already did that. "Your a dead mother fucker." Some cheers from somewhere! A punch after shoving. Through the partition. One man. Blood. I'm already leaving going. I looked back without deciding to. From this side. His scalp hanging over his ear. To his cheek.

"No no thank you." I brushed her shoulder leaving. I didn't get to the apology. Outside finally breathing. The air smelled like smoke. Smoke and dark, cheers and screaming. I hurried myself away. I've got to walk away. But not to far. Take a break, rest anyway. Somehow. Jesus the bleachers. I'd forgotten the bleachers right there. I glanced at the Airman's Club. That parts passed, its o.k. This is now here. I climbed up three, four finally six bleachers steps. And sat down. Exhaling, blowing out the air. "Look, a large whole right through the cement. And right under the basket." I wonder how that happened. They should put up a sign. So nobody will step in. Fall in. And get hurt. I moved higher up the bleachers. To the top most seat. I sat down again. The basketball court light blinked of and on fast. Like they couldn't decide.

I put my hands on my knees. And straighten my back. I wish I knew how to meditate like those Buddhists! I looked around. This is real. Too unnecessary. I've got to buy a watch. Two watches I decided that. One for night that glows. And a Timex, a durable Timex. Each backing up the other. Do that today maybe. And I have to eat. Three meals every twenty four hours. But I don't have a sense of appetite. Around myself. When do they count your arriving here. When you get here the time you did. How about all those time zones. On whose credit do they go. They said one year. But from when. I mean exactly from when. I know this is now. But from when. I want also some credit for not wanting to be here. That's better. I let go of my knees. I feel better. I pinched my lips. The family. The two little kids. Scalpings and photographs. I felt myself standing up. Walking down the bleachers. I've got to go see a movie. Eat at the cafeteria with all the lights. Go see a movie.

I'm almost close to the cafeteria. I kept my mind clear free of nothing. No immediate bad memories. I'm probably feeling better. Why do they keep this place with so much lights. I feel like breakfast somehow. I swung open the heavy wood glass door. I don't remember having breakfast in a long time. They have here all the meals at once. Because of the confused shifts in time. Not many people here. Enough for some company. I got in line towards the food. I'm the only one in the line actually. I half sighed. "What you goen to have Airman?" A cook overlapping the steaming food. He asked me. "Just scrambled eggs please." He looked at me. Looked away holding back a grin. "Just scrambled eggs please." He looked at me. Looked away holding back a grin. And shouted a little. "One order of scrambled eggs please..." He side stepped two steps, turned his head. "Coming right up." The same guy said with his hand to his ear. That's funny a funny attempt. I side stepped myself to the scrambled eggs. "And toast if I may please." He handled me a plate with already two slices of toast on it. I took the plate wavering with my finger tips. The plate was hot. "Come back again you here." I almost smiled. "Sure thanks alot. I'll see you later." I slid my plate down the metal ramp looking for the cash register. They don't need them here. That's right. I sat down alone at the

nearest table. Just in case I didn't feel like company.

"Down down." The second one a shout. More creaming down. Everyone hitting the floor. I'm underneath the table. My scrambled eggs two inches from my nose. I guess there's a reason for this. I swung my head from one side to the other. Still down. "What is it. That's happening." I asked three guys at the next table. Two of them together said. "Probably a sniper!" I said, "Oh! No one told me what to do with snipers. We've been down ten minutes. Twice I looked at my watch that wasn't there. I thought of my locker key somehow. All of a sudden for no reason that I knew. Everyone started to get up. So I did to. Guys brushing off their pants. Sitting down, guys laughing. Not funny laughing. I looked at my eggs. I forgot a fork. Maybe I took a spoon by mistake. I used the spoon. The scrambled eggs are still warm some. "Down, Down." Louder. Somebody shouted "louder." I'm down already, feeling a little rehearsed. I forgot my plate. I swallowed my eggs. "What's going on?" How many times. We waited a long time. A different time this time to. Waiting with my legs crossed behind me. My head on my arms. Just waiting until somebody got a better idea that caught on.

Finally everyone got up. Seemed like in unison. More tired for the rest of lying down. It seemed. One guy stretching his arms over his head. Growling like then laughing. I carried my tray to the conveyer thing. I followed two guys out the same exit. I'm going for my movie now. Walk in half late, it doesn't matter. Through the door three guys behind me. "Down." A screaming whisper. A hand on my shoulder. I went down first on my hip. Gun fire. Lots. I tried to sink deeper. Into the cement. My hands over the back of my head. God I wish I were at the University of Maine unhappy. Already with that Phyllis girl waking. I felt like getting up on my feet and surrendering. But to who. They might take me for the enemy. More gunfire near. I looked up a little. An AP jeep just up ahead. Three guys tight crouched behind. One with a scope rifle upwards. Firing quick firing. The gun fire is hungry. Something behind me. I looked quickly. He's up running, bent over running. Jumping a drainage ditch. And fast into a barracks. "What for." He's coming back. A slamming screen

door. The same gi with a camera in his hand. He jumps crouched over. Fifteen feet over to me. His shoulders by my feet. What he wants to photograph himself getting shot. A real lot of gunfire. Different kinds. Crickets behind me. I can smell the gunpowder. No not crickets. The guy with the camera. The shutter thing. I'm holding more my breath. Save some. This is crazy. Why isn't everyone insane. I wiped my brow. Hot again at night in this daylight. Out of nowhere. Two men behind the jeep. Are standing up. Now bending over one guy down. No somebody got hurt. The guys around me standing. Getting up. Now standing. Me to breathing again. A crowd is moving towards the jeep. Not me! I'm going to the movies. I've tried the front. Going around.

"What I heard man. Some AP sergeant went nuts up on the radar tower? Started shooting at his own men." I'm walking. Behind two gi's. Trying to pass them. Slow down to get more behind. "Shooting at everyone you mean? This whole place is getting off. The guy said. "Your tellen me." How far is the movie An easy movie. Walt Disney somehow. Something. Buy the watch. Check my mail. A reliable watch. With the reliable time. The two guys in front of me turned. Last thing he said, "Maybe that's not what really happened!" The other guy shrugged. "What's the difference." After the movie. Save my disappointment till later. After the movie. The eggs tasted in my mouth. Some popcorn to. All those flairs falling everywhere. Soon there'll be no night time. Did I mail. Sure yes I did. Not the second ones. No, that's right. I didn't even write them. I thought them lying in bed. So I thought I wrote them. Still no birds. Not even at night time, no birds none not one. I'm closer now I'm sure. I miss everyone? Hardly enough time to miss everyone at once. Even the people I don't know I miss somehow. I feel like a burglar. With nothing to steal except time.

I've got five minutes left. The movie hasn't started. "The Incident with Martin Sheen..." No photographs to show if its happy. Or what not happy. I'd like some popcorn. I hope everyone o.k. I hope they have popcorn. I sure would like to get a letter from Eugenia. But I don't think I've been here long enough. Somehow I made it right through that junk yard place without looking. Me short

cuts out from nowhere. Broken down trucks everything machine broken down. Even the machines don't get it easy here. I looked over my shoulder. Still no birds even at night. Birds might be the smartest. They'd have to be fly. I paid my twenty five cents. Into the theatre. Could be its the birds time to migrate. It is quiet, dark in here. I think that's good. Not alot of many people. Quiet a bit now. They blend their clothes. I don't want to move. It looks like I'm avoiding people. Everyone here already feels avoided. I sat down inhaling. Next to...he looks at me. I nodded slowly. Just once enough too much. He's tired. His eyes. His eyes aren't. A lightening bolt his shoulder. He smells salty. Maybe-

"You in the Air Force?"

"Me." I pointed at the middle of myself.

"Who else the man on the moon." He laughed a little burst.

"Yes I'm Air Force yes." I smiled maybe.

"I'm from Trenton New Jersey." He held out his hand. The lights started to dim.

"My name," I took his hand in the dark. "My name is Bobby Jones. What's yours?"

"Sure I'm from Connecticut..."Nice music. I looked at the stage.

"Yeah I'm here on a twelve hour pass. From Saigon. You heard what goen on. Hells lose. Charlie is fucking hungry." I looked at his eyes. I couldn't see his lips moving, talking. "Like I'm saying its bad. Just a couple of hours back. I broke into this shack with my buddy. Bam, "I jumped." Kicked the door open. Emptied my AK AK hard. Killed everyone. Before I knew it. A family I guess. Had no choice. I got fucking pass." I turned to look at the light on the screen with my eyes. He kept talking. "I tell you that AK AK... one hell of a weapon. Beats the sixteen to shit."

I said, "Yes." More at the screen. The smell. Our smell is worse. I got to leave. Wait to go leave. "I have to go John. I forgot something at-"

"Names Bob man. Come back if you find work." He slapped my shoulder as I squeezed through.

"Thank you" I said. I walked away feeling slouched over. Maybe could be I need a shower to take. I straightened up in the lobby waiting. Popcorn, I can smell the popcorn. Where is it. I don't want to go to another seat. See him hurting my feelings. I peeked the curtain. Very dark. When does it get them to start. The music stopped. I passed through the curtain. I can barely see me. I smelled my hands. I don't know why. Maybe for a reason. I walked carefully quiet. The way to the front row empty. I sat down on the edge of the middle. The movie started like that. I'm alone finally good. It started in New York City. Subways black and white. A little light. I slid down. Be more relaxing. Against myself. My legs are o.k. A Vietnam Veteran. A chicken wing caste on his arm. All his arm. Walking into the subway of the train. I can tell. The subway moving. Jostling back to the side. Not a happy movie. An old man is sitting bye. He's sad. An old from habit. Tired. Me to. Everyone afraid. The train jostels. Two bad guys walk in. One is the other. The veteran smiles. And doesn't. The old man looks away. Nowhere at himself. The two look drunk and sober. Jackets moving. The old man is smaller. My eyes closed. "In coming cover. In coming cover!" People running at me. Black and white. Moving side to side. "Goen home old man. Goen home. To your old wrinkled wife...old man." Laughing. My hands are between my legs. They're getting closer. "Yo talk to me old man." I'm scarred. The old man. "Why don't you leave alone." Trapped...the nice veteran is. "You talken to me soldier boy. Hey Frank we got ourselves here. A fucking hero. Just leave us alone o.k," On the soldier. "Look Frankie he's brought his medals." Fingers on the medal. Hard on fingers. The hands on the soldier. Wheres the old man. The ground. Beating. Fighting. Metal in the old soldier. I'm up moving.

Quieter outside. Dark quieter. Breathing. I looked around. To stop. The mail. Nothing. So quiet. A jeep goes by. Helicopters waiting. Grasshoppers on the ground. I smile. The stars. That's nice I'm now o.k. Walking into the intersection the quiet intersection easily I am. I stop. Remember. My name I can't. How can I not when I can't. I bent into my back pocket. The falling stars. My wallet. My license. "Chuck Winters Connecticut." I put my wallet

back. A paper fell out. Walking. "Chuck Winters thats funny...." I'm no hurry. I'm fine. Walking the stars. It's lovely day.

"Look a falling star Jerusalem. Beautiful sure."

"Chuck Jesus Christ where have you been."

"Tennessee right."

"Where the hell have you been. Everyone is looking for you. You look waisted. You alright?"

I slid down from my bunk. "I've been here around. But tired--"

"So you said fuck it right. Don't worry intelligence has gotten very stupid. But you can't fuck it indefinetly. Just show up. Just show up that's all."

Tennessee how about our nuclear war. I heard. "Trying to sleep."

"Nuclear War! Jesus--"

"We didn't have one." Did we Tennessee.

"Fuck no that was a month before you got here. You would of known. We accidently hit the Russian Embassy in Hanoi went deathcom. Nothing that's all."

"A month before not since, I got here we didn't.

"Right-right! Chuck you look like you need a fucking drink. I'll join you."

"Tennessee do you happen to remember. When I arrived here?"

"Arrived here. I don't know." He poured into a glass after looking at me. "How the hell can you forget that. You haven't, "he looked at me more carefully. "You got here three or four days ago." I don't know.

"Seems longers to me?"

"Here Chuck drink this slowly fast, whatever. And listen Chuck that nuke thing. The mail is censored you know." Tennessee sipped a gulp from his glass.

"They censor the mail?"

"Yeah sure. They told you that at debriefing. Right Chris said yours was cancelled. Drink up." Tennessee tapped my glass with his.

"Is Chris alright?"

"Nobody is alright around here. But he's fine or whatever. He said you

took off on him in Saigon."

"No, I lost him that's all. Then I think. I got lost somehow. But I'm back."

"Yeah your back. I'm back and Ho Chi Minh is back."

"Tennessee censoring mail isn't right. It's illegal with us...back home."

"Yep, well Jack if this were America we wouldn't be here. But listen my shift ends in a hour give or take. You going to be o.k. Cause your on, when I'm off."

"I'm o.k. just tired. "Tennessee put his tall hand on my shoulder.

"Good just keep the faith well all go home one way or another o.k."

"O.k. Tennessee o.k." I put the glass down. And embraced him. He embraced me back. Tennessee turned without looking at me. And left down the corridor. Jogging now. He opened the screen door. I should of gone with Tennessee. Gone to the Airman's Club. I looked out the screen door, screen window. It's night again. No more movies. If they say anything at that Elephant place. I'll go there early to confuse them. And I'll say I'm confused to. But I'm glad now I'm o.k. And early. I'm not going to sleep anymore today. I've done that already. But no more movies. I'm going to get back...that's it early.

The screen door opened. I looked at it for a moment. Look at it, busy traffic all over the place. Mostly way down there. I jumped over the drainage ditch. And landed. They've stacked boxes on the cafeteria. Higher than the windows. I kept walking. Guys filling sand bags cursing laughing. Darker tonight I think. Hotter, I don't know maybe. I won't talk about loosing. No forgetting my name. They'll think its personal. I stopped. The sound. I looked around. A man crying...Jesus, my God. Crying I walked across the street quickly. Crying in...The place. I jumped over the drainage ditch. Away from the sound. Under a flood light. Bent into his knees. Crying. Still crying. I hurried more quickly walking. Near running. Problem here where ever you go. Your still here. Just take it easy. There just people. I'm passed the radar tower. The boxes. A guard with a gun watching. I slowed down crossing the street back. Finally the same different quiet. Crying how could he. How will

he stop. By the fence. Near the guard shack. Two black soldiers listening to a radio. I inhaled just walking. And inhaled.

"Don tell me brother it wasn't no white man...Shit!"

"All I'm tell'en you man. Is Don jump to no conclusions."

"What black man would assassinate Martin Luther King ah?"

"I don't know that's what I'm sayen. Maybe one of there black dude...you know the cocki Ass boys." Who knows really you hear me! "I jus hope they get the mother fuck-" "Excuse?" I moved closer. "Did you just say that Martin Luther King got assassinated? They stood straight up looking at each other. "Who are you man?" "I'm Chuck Winters from Connecticut that's all?" "Well what's your problem there Chuck?" "No problem really more than anybody here. I just heard you say about Mister King?" "Yeah, well what about it!" "Nothing, I just like him. And I wanted to stop and see if its true." "It's as true as true gets brother." I looked away. They're even killing each other back home. They're- "You o.k. there Chuck. You look a little discombobulated." One of them laughed. "No, I'm just scared that's all."

They walked away looking at each other funny. Then at me funny. They're luckier in the dark. I told them the truth. And they got scared. Now I can't see them. Where'd they go. I started passed the guard shack, that poor Martin Luther King. Another radio passing the guard shack. Riots a hundred and fifty cities up in smoke. I ran across the street to stay ahead of the traffic. I turned around stopping. I thought the bad news is supposed to come from here. "Fuck me, this place is insane." Now look at me. I swore out loud.

I walked parallel passed the basketball court. "Cities up in smoke," how about Connecticut. I'm going to call home. I heard someone say you could call home. In a special way in an emergency. I'm way passed some the Airman's Club. I'm going to be real early. I'll call on my break. I'll ask where. And I'll call on my break. Next they'll want Rodney Stuart to come here. I won't believe this. The cafeteria lights from before are dark. Those flairs weren't falling stars. They were flairs falling flairs. I'm almost there the guard shack, the small BX, its different from here. Now an AP standing still looking. His blue

helmet reflecting. Now another AP rooving around in a half circle watching with his two eyes. More guys coming from the other way. I went up and down the moat. Not looking at the AP looking at me. There's too much to know here I'm only a kid for Christsakes. If weren't small arms fire machine gun. Guys around me running to the ground. I kept walked more gun fire. Into the elephant.

"What the hell's going on out there?" The guard was rising asked. Their crazy outside. They're trying to kill each other." He looked at me walking away.

"Winters!" A sergeants voice moving in on me. "Your in the ten seventy room tonight." He handed me a cannister of film. I looked at it. "There's something else?" I looked up to him. Forget it I can't think of it?"

"Yes sergeant. Sergeant?" I almost turned away.

"What Winters?"

"To bad they killed Martin Luther King isn't it?"

"What? Yeah well don't worry about it. I need that cannister ASAP got it?"

I hesitated forgetting to say something and left.

Two men walked out of the ten seventy room as I walked in. Good empty with just me. Blue lights, red lights, I put the canister down. I pulled off the work order. I took it over to the Mark two R five. Holding it against the red filter light squinting. "Suspect missile sight VC, NVA..." The dat is blurry. This machine is strange. It's not on. I pressed two switches. Needs to warm up for some reason. Ten minutes. Asap. I got a cold machine. Missile sights I read again. If they can photograph them. Why don't they send somebody just there to disrepair them. I put the order down. "Ten minutes I can write a letter home. I can sit down while I'm writing. Because I'm tired too. I threaded the film under the density lense thing. Onto the other spool. Machines and people. Whose responsible for that idea. I'm not qualified. Now I can relax to be relaxed write a letter home to everyone. I can't rush more than the machine will. The sergeant won't have anything to say. Now what I need paper and somekind of pen maybe. I open a desk drawer out where I was sitting. One piece of paper no pens. I pulled the desk out wider. Great one lonely little pencil. But enough. Jesus I'm tired. I started to start the letter.

I started the letter after Dear Family. This place isn't too bad. So you shouldn't worry. That's all I got in several minutes. I kept going back to think about Martin Luther King. Cities burn. I turned sounds. The machine is letting go of the film. All over. I got up fast. I turned off the machine. It wouldn't. I wouldn't. On my knees gathering it. Film and film. On me. The missile sights. The missile sights are going to get ruined. I said, "stop" to the machine. It kept coming. I got up one foot. Pushing down on my knee. To help the other. I'm tired of myself. Tired, everything over my feet. Friends fighting. Cities burning. Families what. Were photographing. I dropped back to my knees. O.K. O.K. O.K. Give it back to the sergeant. I stuffed back into the metal whole? Slowly one push. Shaking my head. I'm finished am I? I got back up. Bent over to pick up the metal. I inhaled. Much better. The machine turned itself off. Funny machine. Not its not me. It's the machines turned itself off. I smiled, funny machine. Not its not me. It's the machines we hire. I walked outside down the narrow hall. Seems narrower. Two wide doors? I stopped to see if one of those would open. Empty all over again. A transparent black board. Blue dots all over. Black words. Missile mortar strikes 0100-2400 hours. So many dots. Which are the bad ones. I pulled a dot off near the chapel. One on the small BX. Two near a barracks. One near the dispensary one-

"Airman what the hell are you doing?"

I looked at him.

"What's the matter you nuts?" Another sergeant walked in. I looked at him looking at me. "No I don't think so. I'm just repairing the board. That's all. He's looking at me. He turns slowly to look at the quieter black sergeant.

"Johnson talk to this man will you. I think he's swallowed his brains." He walked out hard. Around the blue door.

"What's your name son?" His voice is my friend. I looked at him for the quiet. I handed him all the blue dots. He took them to his smile.

He took my elbow easily with his hand. "So you o.k. Airman?"

"Sure sergeant I'm fine. Thank you." I smiled. We looked at each other

more sadly.

He nodded. "Airman I want you to go to the dispensary with another Airman. Will you do that for me?"

I looked at the transparent board. "I'm not through here yet."

"No problem, I'll take care of business here o.k. But I want you to go to the dispensary. You understand."

"For you?" I could barely hear. I asked.

"No for you and for me. Will you do that?"

"Sure if there's a reason there I'll go." I looked once more to the unfinished dots. Then we went out together.

"Airman Lucas." The sergeant called out not loud. That Airman stepped up.

"Yes sergeant?"

"Airman Lucas here is going to take you to the dispensary. You understand?"

"Yes. I understand. Sergeant?"

"Yes?"

"To bad what happened to Martin Luther King."

"Yes well its all in God's hands." He smiled with tears wet near his eyes.

"Lucas you understand I want you to take this Airman to the dispensary. Stay with him, make sure he gets there. Got it?"

"Yes sergeant I understand." They nodded again to each other.

Outside we walked. We walked together in the dark. Amidst the stars again. Walking next to each other. A helicopter flew over us between the stars. With dust and just leaving us behind. We covered our faces. One of us laughed and kept walking. He knew where we were. Where we were going. We walked down streets not far he said. We turned again? Flairs again. That's what they are. I wonder if you can return the empties. We must be somewhere already. Were turning a street again. I remember Eugenia. The stars are warm this night.

"Here we are buddy."

I looked down from the stars. To him. "Where?"

Were talking up a ramp. "This is the dispensary, remember. It's cool there probably waiting for us o.k." We walked half way through a rotating door. I

stopped probably waiting. He walked up to a desk and talked quietly politely.

"Sergeant my name is Lucas I'm here from the White Elephant?"

"Right they called up ahead. Thanks well take over from here. But stick around in case the doctor wants to talk to you o.k." That sergeant is serious with what he knows.

"Whatever you say sergeant. I'll wait over here." The sergeant stood up tiredly. Looking at me with his one eye.

He's near in front of me with his hand. "This way Airman." He has one eye lower than the other one. They are both looking at me. I hesitated following. I looked back at the airman I came with looking at a magazine. He's in an office. The sergeant is. At the door I walked in more tired. An officer captain. And a folder both. Posters from the world. Beaches sure, green mountains, a palm tree all alone.

"Airman you seeing things Airman?" Its the captain looking. Waiting.

"Yes," I pointed up with my hand. "The posters."

"My name is Captain Stern. I'm a doctor." He's busy on me, pointing his flat hand at a chair. "What is your name?" That beach is like Acapulco. A nice place from the past. I smiled I think remembering. "Airman can you tell me your name?"

I looked at him primarily. "My name has my wallet in it."

"Yes o.k., can you tell me if your hearing voices."

"Yes...I hear your voice captain."

The sergeant came back with the Airman. In and out of the doorway. The captain nodded. He tried to smile. "Come in." He inhaled mostly.

"Your the Airman who brought him here?"

"Yes sir. But I don't know him except around the barracks some."

"Do you happen to know what he does when he's alone."

"No sir, I'm not with him when he's alone."

That makes sense I looked at the captain the sergeant looking at me. The captain strained his face a little instead of maybe smiling. Handing the sergeant the folder. "Airman," its me, "Your going to spend the night with us.

Sergeant Inman is going to give you something to relax and help you sleep this night." He nods at the sergeant not at the Airman. The captain smiles finally. He's tired of himself. The sergeant waves his hand. Then his face for me. I get up. And am standing. Jesus I'm tired.

We walk I follow next to the sergeant. The Airman walks behind. Were in a small room. I turn around to say, "Goodbye?" The Airman turns around from the rotating door. And walks up to me walking up to him.

"Good luck Chuck. I'll tell them at the--"

"Why?"

"Why Good luck? Is that what your asking me."

"Are they going to do something here. That's unacceptable?"

"I don't know, you know. Whatever goes down, goes down. You'll be o.k.?"

"O.K. thank you. What's your name?"

"Stephen, Stephen is my name. Hang loose o.k. brother."

"Yes sure. Thank you Stephen." He left behind his smile.

"Airman..." From the room with the smell of alcohol. He's standing with an unnecessary needle.

Shaking my arm...me. "Winters why'd you go to sleep sitting up."

"What?" I opened my eyes twice more slowly. Five empty beds except mine six. I looked at him with a scar on his cheek. He's white and pale.

"I said why did you go to sleep sitting up?"

My mouth is dry. I looked away and then back. "No real reason than I know. I just did. What is this place. Do you know." He has a tray of chicken. He put the tray down.

"First I have some pills for you. There called thorazine, a psychotropic if you wil...Tranquilizer."

He liked to say the word psycho..." Thank you no I'm fine. My mouth is dry. I feel tranquilized without them."

"You have to take these pills, its the doctors order. One way or another, Chuck these pills go down." The muscles around his smile got tighter. I never saw that before a muscle smile. I knew what he meant.

"Restraints you mean, isn't that unusual for a war zone. "He answered me by handing me the pills with a small cup of water. I lifted them to my mouth.

"I understand you have amnesia?" I stopped. His voice was sideways like

"Is that what it is. I thought that was just in the movies?"

"No. He's surprised to himself by my answer. "I'm just asking."

He cleared his throat without sound. "How about the pills Chuck."

"Oh yeah the pills?" I put the pills in my mouth. And followed them with the water.

He said, without much good in it.

"Good," He smiled naturally. He stepped back. Picked up the tray all in one move. And put the tray on my lap. I looked at the food. It smelled edible. I looked back up. He's going. I lifted the tray up. Leaning over, putting it at my feet. I should of kept that juice thing. I looked around and raised my hand to my mouth. I spat the pills out. There fast, they're already lost their color. Numbers still there. I folded up in a squeeze the unnecessary pills into the paper cup. I can't take pills I haven't been consulted. The sour left over in my mouth. And its supposed to go in my brain without being consulted. The nurse is back reading her notes with her face down like a helicopter. She's pretty. And American no less. Here of all places. He said tranquilizers. This is mental place. My God this is absurd and insane. I got up to talk to the nurse for a correction. I went back down before I got to walking. This is a mental type place. I need a plan that isn't theres. Yes a military mental hospital I didn't think of what's obvious. There going to send me home. No, I won't I won't let them. I'm too valuable alive. All the money they spent to get me here against my advice. No what I've got is minor. And absolutely temporary. Sure I forgot my name. But its not like I forgot somebody elses. What am going to do with these pills. I almost decided to swallow them by hiding them. In my pocket here, until I'm near an appropriate flusing. Ge that's to bad. The radio, Jim Clark died. My most favorite race car driver against a tree. Everyone dyeing whose nice. I looked away, the nurse smiled at me from a safe

distance. Everyone dyeing Martin Luther King, Jim Clark, us. So many people dyeing before their preferred convenient time. I closed my eyes. I decided not to sleep. For the privacy of my thought I closed my eyes. I breathed better. I'd forgotten about that. I can't go home insane even recovered from insane. I'm not expected that way. Maybe they already have a decision of a plan. Doctors can be efficient. Even maybe the Air Force can't discipline it out of them. How long did I sleep. Because I should probably be more tired.

"Airman Winters." I opened my ice, I mean eyes.

"What." I said swallowing most of the words. I hope I'm not leaking the pills. She smiled wonderfully about herself. And now to me. Their not giving me even enough time. "Doctor Fashions would like to see you."

"Oh." Nurse before you can you tell me what this doctor wants to see me about." I cleared my throat to give time to stall." "I mean do you know if he has a reason for seeing me."

"He wouldn't be seeing you without a reason." She's holding on still to some of her smile. I tried to concentrate at not looking at so many of her details. Somehow she was very pretty, with freckles nicely regulated around her face.

"Well nurse could you tell me that reason. I'd hate being prepared without knowing it."

She laughed, lightly a little like a Chinese fan. No hilarity friendly.

"He's just going to talk to you, ask you some questions. Shall we go?"

"Now you mean this now already." "Yes o.k." She said it like she meant yes nicely and agreeably. I wonder what her no sounds like I thought getting of the bed backwards. In case I had a zipper I hadn't been informed about. No they can't ship me home. I have a unnegotiable negotiable contract with them. No not without an explainable reason. And I won't give them one I don't know. I should out anticipate them and myself. If I go intense I'll have nowhere to go when I get tense. I wonder if they'll let me read my records for corrections.

"How long will it take us to get there you know?" I asked walking along not slowly enough.

"A few minutes, five minutes?"

"Five minutes aren't what they used to be." I said to myself. She laughed, a laugh you could muffle with a kleenex. I like those kinds of laughs very much. "Lieutenant do you mind telling me your name. You know for future references future sake?"

"Were almost there Chuck." Its nice to be next to a civilized American woman. I felt nervous enough to be motionless. We stopped, mostly her. I guess I have to accept she's not going to tell me her name. The lady lieutenant knocked on the door that said Major Fashions M.D.

"Come in!" It's a voice that had to push to speak. The lieutenant put her hand on the door handle. She looked at me. And said, "My name is Sandra Luminoso. But don't tell anyone I told you so." She smiled like mischievous like.

"What a lovely miracle of a name. Almost like Mexican. Thanks for telling me your name, really." She smiled again even more easily. The door opened. It shouldn't of. I forgot all about it. I walked in without moving. The problem here now is probably contrast I'm sure. I stepped inside all the way. I didn't look at him to give him any possible advantage by seeing me. I'm still not looking.

"Thank you Lieutenant." He looked up. She's gone after a yes sir. "Sit down Airman." He pointed I think it was his hand. I looked at him as totally as his sitting could allow. He's a problem even silent. I happen to think, I thought, that you can tell alot from a book on its cover. The price if you can afford it for one thing. Also how unusually mislead your going to get reading it. I sat down realizing I already should of. He hasn't looked up yet this Fashions. Extra cushioney chair, with those foot rests to, cushioney also. I looked up from the unnecessary comfort. And there he is looking at me. Paintings is glass. All that's missing is a wine rack. And me maybe. Two mahogany book shelves. A book on Vietnam. The History of Vietnam. Isn't a little to late. Were already here. He has fluffy eyebrows after he stopped looking at me writing. I would think they'd ask him to trim them that fluffy.

They looked like caterpillars relaxing too much over his eyes. His fingers nails are shinny. I'm surprised he's here intact like that. I could use some water to drink. And bath I think probably.

"How is it going Airman?" He looked at me with his whole face. Like he was diving.

"Oh I'm fine thank you doctor. And recovered to. It's unfortunate that I am. I mean here. Because I'm taking up space recovered." He's looking at me. I felt completely observed inspite of my presence. I put my hands over my knees of a change of possible pace. Where do psychiatrist go when they go crazy I wonder. Home maybe. He's still looking. Jesus what's going on. He's overweight in a floppy lose way. With hanging down cheeks. If Boris Karloff had better fed. He could look like him. And he's still looking at me like he wants my incrimination without my effort. I pinched my lower lip waiting on the borderline tension of myself. He's going to speak I can tell.

"I'm going to ask you some questions. And-"

"Good doctor I'll answer to the best of my ability if you don't mind?"

"I was saying, answer them in a manner appropriate to your understanding of each question." I already decided don't correct mistakes at any further risk of being understood prematurely. He made a note. On his yellow pad. An answer like that and he makes a note still writing. Should I call him doctor or what. Probably nothing is best. Why recognize him more than he already has. He's looked up. Looking encouraged and ready to go without me.

"Tell me Airman why should people in glass houses not throw stones?"

I got startled what kind of question is that. Now I'm scared passed tense with an answer I don't know. I got that awful vacuumed...feeling from an answer I don't know. He moved his head halfway...down looking at me through those caterpillars. I'm going to have trouble liking this man in person. He's going to speak about my elapsing time.

"Yes well of course doctor. For starters doctor that doesn't seem to be a very conversational question. Which I assume is on purpose. But you did ask didn't you? O.K. sure, well I'm sure in alot of cities and towns they have alot

of personal ordinances trying to discourage that type of antic behaviors. People might even be surprised that even in the military there are regulations and citations about breaking property up like windows. Except of course under orders for obvious reasons. But you know, even under orders your not supposed to break a window or anything really if you think its an...illegal order. But, around here I'm sure enforcement is very difficult. They just don't have the man power even the time if they had the manpower to get enforcing about it. Anyway, what was the question doctor. Right, excuse me, glass houses and somebody elses stones. And of course it goes without saying that these glass house stone throwing people are going to have some liability exposed for their antics. Even if they miss. Even forgot throwing, tossing just could be a problem. The way people like to get escalated around themselves. But you know doctor you can't really tell about people even in the most best predictable circumstance you might know of. Also in the end it might not be even a problem worth your considering. Because in my life I've only seen one glass house. In Acapulco Mexico that was. And that place had guards on it. Except of course for the green houses inhabited by plants."

The doctor looked at pretty completely for the first time. He looked shorter. I'm almost sure I got it right. I sat a little up encouraged. Partially right anyway for sure. Not as good as a judge of course. But I'm not here to judge anybody. "Airman Winters I want you tell me the meaning of this riddle. You understand?"

"Sure doctor but I haven't heard it yet have I?"

"No you haven't. And try to make your answers shorter."

"Sure doctor I'm understand again. That's why I'm here? And that's why I answered the way I did. Because I suspected a potential riddle at hand. Then I addressed it directly to make a less riddle of it all! Kind of unriddle it if you know what I mean. I mean I don't think unriddling is a word. But either was psychiatrist once right?"

He said "yes," but I think he would of preferred no. "Tell me Airman what does a stitch in time save nine mean to you specifically."

"Jesus a time one. Yes...well, a stitch in time you say saves how many. Nine right that's what you said." I looked at my wrist watch that wasn't there again. God I can't think. All I'm getting is a blank. A substantial blank that is spreading. Now, then I got diverted thinking of passed blanks in my life. I looked briefly marginal at the doctor. He looked like mostly eyes. And I don't know anything about fashions not in the least. Except that I have poor taste by other peoples discretion. "To be honest doctor because I know that's what you want. And that is I have no idea what so ever about what your talking about. It's a new one on me thought I've heard it before. So I don't know. I don't even know why I don't know. Maybe possibly I can get back to you on that. But I should warn you before your anticipation, time questions I don't do well with. Probably I have been that way for some time. Time and I just haven't been doing terribly well together in the last almost two years.

"You can't make an association, nothing comes to you?" He seemed quieter with his question for some reason.

"No like I said nothings come to mind that's gotten surfaced yet. But I've never been a come to my mind kind of a person. I've kept to myself the last few years. Except for the circumstantial people I've met along the way. Like yourself. But its not just me I've had cooperation. I'm not a hermit though that I'm aware of. But you know that's probably some of the problem here in Vietnam. Too many people for one thing. And also too many people cooperating under the same somebody elses idea without asking enough questions." He looked at me with two eyes eye contact. More like collision than eye contact. "Maybe actually I shouldn't of said those last things to you. Because your an officer and all and I'm just an Airman." He didn't say anything. He just went down and started writing. I can't believe it just like that he didn't acknowledge my thought. Not even my implied apology a little in anyway. Now he's humming classical like.

"What are your plans upon leaving the military." He asked it of the folder.

"I'm not leaving the military your honor. I mean judge. No I mean doctor. I'm not a lifetime military person. But I've got an obliging contract I signed

on purpose. I want to do my agreed upon obligation. And you know then exit quietly. The shot in the arm now I remember was very helpful. The little orange pills also were quite convincing. Maybe if I could have a few to carry around. And sure maybe share them with anyone who might need them. I should be fine. Because I'm already o.k." I barely finished my words my mouth was so dry.

"Well I'd like you to go back to the ward." He's on his feet before I could get a tangible thought out. Asking maybe for some more explanation about what's going on. And read my records for unnecessary mistakes. He has his back to me from his book shelves. I got up quietly, then made some noise brushing my pants so he would hear me leave. I wanted no evidence of my being behind that he knew. I opened the door quietly and closed it a little less quietly. And on purpose to. My mouth is so dry I can barely make legible dry sounds. I feel incriminated enough to be discriminated against. Who does he think he is talking to me like that without any warning. I felt angry without knowing enough what I'm angry about. I got to stay much more ahead of these people, anyway somehow. They think to much for any good conclusion. And no more of these dry mouth pills. How can they give anybody elses precise pill without interviewing me first for my particulars. At least to conjecture on my available resistance. They can't. Because there giving them to me for their reasons not mine. What if I'm allergic to their reasons or I mean I disagree with them with a convincing reason to all of us. What do they think I'm negligible or something somehow. Maybe I'm someking of devout Christian and am not allowed their unfamiliar pills. I looked down at my hand, my fingers were going round and around. Like one was chasing the other. What did they, he mean when I get out of the military. If I want to get that entirely out, I wouldn't of come in as knowingly as I did on my purpose.

"You o.k. man?" I turned looking at a black guy my age with a nice quiet face to match his voice.

"Yes I'm o.k., that's at least, you know my opinion here that nobodys asked me about. Or they think its already too late for."

"I hear you. I just got worried, you were banging your head against the wall."

"Yeah, oh, I was just trying to concentrate that's all. That's what I guess I was doing."

He looked at me nicely with his eyes and said. "I'll be seeing you around." And he walked away a little bent over.

"Wait please?" He came back around completely. "You don't seem to be like them officially contented and all." "No guess not. I expect I'm here like you psychiatric."

"No they've got me guessing to. I mean I suspected them first thing like morning of suspecting me. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah I hear you. If you don't mind my asking what got you hear. What did you do?"

"I didn't do anything really too much except to forget my name once too often. And maybe some other incidental things. What probably got to them was that it was on their time. On my time when it happened I was fine. But..." I shrugged my shoulders one of them hurt. "If you don't mind my asking why you hear?"

"I see the people I killed. Mostly children."

"God Jesus no. What you see them in your mind and it gets to your eyes after when their not there."

"Yeah I guess it goes like that. Something like that."

"Jesus so they sent you hear like me?"

"Na not a first. At first they thought I was pulling their leg. Then I started making mistakes. Getting in the way you know. They sent me here. Here they sent me back. Two months later I'm back again." He sighed or breathed I couldn't tell.

I put my hand on his arm. "Maybe we should escape, you know somehow?"

"Some guys have. But I don't want to leave my buddies behind. Listen if you don't mind me asking again. But how is it that you can forget your name."

"I don't really know. It wasn't something to stay here. Now I think their scheming to send me home without my consent, even my advise of any kind."

He looked at me with a smile that didn't go anywhere. Then lonely sad eyes

and said. "Well brother if you do crime you gotta do the time."

"Yeah but here all of it, seems like that's backwards. You understand what I mean. Hear it seems everyone has their own preferred departure. Like drinking and those drugs things. Could be maybe I should of started on those. They don't seem to mind that too much. I think they even encourage with price gauging and stuff like that."

"Yeah I understand. Listen did you see that Fashions guy."

"Sure.... Mostly he saw me. If he were hungry.... I think he would of eaten me just for the nasty taste of it all."

"Take charge guy that's for sure. I wouldn't want him on a life boat with me."

"No me neither he'd, be a problem with the rations."

We laughed a little freely. "Yeah well look maybe I'll catch you around ah. If I don't show up for their medication they send someone after me."

"They got you on those pills. The orange numbered ones."

"No they hit me with a needle when they found me stashing their downers. They started with the needles."

I shook my head inhaling. And it all came out of my nose. I looked at him softly. Stepped up and embraced him. "Good luck to the both of us right?" I felt like crying something.

He patted my shoulder. "Good luck God willing. You take care you hear." He tried to smile.

"Yes thank you I will probably. You to do the same." He raised his cheek, turned half around and walked away down the narrow dimly hallway.

I stayed there a long time. Just trying to wonder without thinking. Then I remembered that nice guy about sending someone after you. I went back to the five beds. Sandria the lieutenant nurse was gone. Convincingly gone because I felt I would never see here again. But I didn't feel to bad about it. People go their own ways that's all. I looked around right now half sitting on my bed thinking. I couldn't escape from here. From what Vietnam to Vietnam to be a fugitive from war. All the word going around ashamed. I shook my head without

moving it. I never felt myself so futilely empty. I don't even feel myself much? So empty I'm full but not of me. I crawled my knees up to my chest and embraced them. I closed my eyes and just tried to be nothing. I must of been sitting here forever. When I opened my eyes to go to the bathroom. I slid off the bed to ask directions to the most available bathroom.

"Excuse me," I said at the desk to a guy I never saw before. "Can you tell me where the bathroom is so I can use it?"

"Sure out this door and second door on the right. It's unmarked but its the second door. But listen don't wander off your being transferred."

"Transferred where?"

"Whose disposition exactly."

"It's the ambulatory ward. Your being med evaced back to the states."

"What. And how about me being already here on purpose. Why's nobody asked me for my ideas about your disposition. What I get asked a few riddles by some stranger I never met. And I have to go back home prematurely like this."

"You got it. You take orders. And I take orders."

"Well sure and o.k. But what if I refuse and demand somekind of inquisition."

"You'll go back between two stretchers." He stretched back on his seat looking here and there.

"I understand you get your way anyway. But why two stretchers instead of not just one. Excuse me that's not important. Can you tell me maybe what's my diagnosis thing, if its been arrived at or whatever. So maybe I can explain it to them more correctly wherever your sending me.

He sat down more relaxed and opened up a folder with one finger. "Doctor says, two or three dissassociative reactions. And he says you have an underlying personality disorder."

"What again, a personality disorder. How can I possibly have a personality disorder when I am who I am. Can you maybe tell me that a little? And just after what fifteen minutes of riddle talk."

"What can I tell you Chuck. He's the doctor." "Well can you tell me how

much of my personality is supposed to be involved in the doctors disorder?"

"What?" He chuckled. "Forget it. No not really. You'll get into that back at Andrews. Your assigned to a hospital closest to your home."

"Oh God that to ah, closet to home. Damn Jesus" I stood there looking out of my eyes desperately at nothing. Without thinking about it I excused myself to go to the bathroom. How can all this be true. True without my knowing participation. I mean its my personality. I've taken care of it all my life. How come nobody noticed it before when that Doctor Fashions noticed it away so quickly. O.k. sure I'll concede some of dissociative stuff. But even that they give me too much credit. I only remember two. He said three. Anyway whats a personality disorder anyway, that I don't have somebody else's preferred personality. I mean give me a fucking break why don't you. But if you do don't bother telling me about. I have enough severe unwanted problems. And that's already two swear words in what how many days. Jesus how many days has it been. I can't remember. Seems like forever and then back for more.

"Airman Winters will you please come with me."

"Oh hi I think." I was leaning almost over against this stationary wall. "Go I guess sure, if I have a choice with this disorder I've been appointed. Another American nurse this one a captain with two orderlies. I went along thinking after generously avoiding her offered hand. Too much beyond not enough.

"Nurse let me ask you a question if I may?" I felt like Cousin Bosco after jumping on the plaster duck.

"Sure what's your question Airman?"

"O.K. sure like you say. Now that you can tell I'm all calmed down and mostly reasonable. This disordered that I've been offered. Who exactly shared in it. I mean who came up with it. Was it just contributed by that Doctor Fashions or what. Do you know."

"You'll be able to ask all that stateside o.k."

"Sure, o.k. seems to be very popular around here. Doesn't it."

"Here we are. This is your bed. Just stay calm you'll be alright. And we won't have any problems." Satisfied with what her eyes saw from my silence. She

wrinkled a tired smile and about faced herself. Alright she said. It's to late for alright I already am. I looked up from the tile floor for the first time. Just as somebody screamed out. "My God please!" Everything was white, the smell the walls, sheets, the pain. Except for all the black soldiers. An orderly ran past me, saying trying to yell. "Code blue." I got into bed trying not to look to deny anybodies privacy. I closed my eyes slipping the sheet over my jest. Somebody groaned deep. And briefly. I turned away. Everyone here is wounded except me. I can hear breathing even with my eyes closed tight. A machine bubbling something. More different sounds. I raised my knees trying to relax my eyes. Praying I heard praying. I opened my eyes. Another groan. A priest reading the Bible. A worn purple sash over his arm motionless. The nurse covered a face. Coughing, "Oh no God." Between teeth. It's not me. Two nurses quick walked to those words. What's going to happen to everyone. A nurse is tapping her knuckle against the machine. Is it her. Or is it the machine. The other nurse has her fingers on his neck. They're looking at each other eager not looking at him. Why did I see that. Vietnamese, talking, I turned sideways on my pillow. Two younger Vietnamese kids almost were talking in whispers mopping next to my bed. Why now mopping. The priest is praying faster looking at his watch. He stops and leaves without looking at anybody that's left. Somebody said hurry please. I tried to let go of my body to relax. But only felt away deeper.

Time, breathing, waiting, coughing. The groaning. I sighed again. Nobody heard. That would hurt. The two Vietnamese kids are back sloshing their mops all over the same spots next to my bed. I looked at them giggling. They away at each other. And fell silent sloshing. How can they ask me their questions through a personality that's got a disorder. How much time has gone by. How does it matter if your not going anywhere you've already been there. I sat up on my bed. The two Vietnamese boys got startled. And moved away bent over dragging the large bucket. All these people Sung Ho, Chris, Tennessee, that Red guy, Anthony. I didn't get to say goodbye. Hardly hello. I felt more sad depressed waiting for more waiting. I closed my eyes like two feathers falling

on a pillow.

"Rodriguez, Murcier, Fabrizo..." I looked around quickly with my eyes open. "Schwarta, Buckley, Espenoza. Jones L, Jones W, Patterson. Donato, Levine, Wilcox, ." Two sergeants calling of names. Soldiers limping, walking, bandaged, in stretchers lining up. They can't want be home like this incomplete. How will I explain what isn't. More names like a telephone book. And more names too many more names. "Winters...last one, that's it men, on board were going home." I got up from the bed on the wet tile floor. Not knowing where I'm going. Men on crutches, eyes faces bandaged, two stretches in one, one man being led by the hand blind. Me walking. I feel sweat on my chest waiting. The teenage guys were still mopping. The line less diminishing. Orderlies helping moving slowly pinching the flower one step then another. I squinted the sun. Outside a blue school bus. Two more men slowly. Now one. I held the door with each hand and pushed myself into the bus. I'm a prisoner of war in my own side. I moved down the aisle not looking at soldiers looking at me. I finally got back to the back of the bus. And sat down alone against the seat. I looked outside through the heat. Soldiers were lined up outside by a warehouse. Talking, laughing one, walking out with gas masks in their hands. A cloud getting darker. The smell of alcohol. And there read names again. A mosquito lands on blood filtered though gauze. More names of what's still alive. With each name a sergeant steps up and checks a dot tag. How much proof that were here. The bus jumped like in a hurry on its own. "Winters?" I raised my hand. He stepped up. The bus started moving. Now faster. He looked at my eyes. Then at my dog tag. He looked at me again with nothing on his face. And walked away. I ran my hands up and own my face. I'm hurt sun burnt. How did that happen. The bus turned faster. And ambulance is going by. Traffic people palm trees, more traffic , all the weapons. I tried to close the window for some fresh air. Everything here is after something. Nothing is from before. Nothing during. No time about nothing here. Everyone dyeing to kill, killing to die. Dyeing one way or another the same. More alcohol in the air. Nothing the same. Except, except nothing. I can't think like this. They'll make me more insane. Small arms

gunfire. Less than more. From somewhere away. Nobody looked. The bus sped up more. A groan, swearing whispered a whispered groan. Good swearing helps too much. It keeps company of the pain. I leaned up and looked up the window. White clouds, the sky is still blue, a palm tree shot in half on the ground. Were slower, quieter moving. Over a bridge, the flight line. The sergeant is getting up. Helping himself up with a stiff arm. More machines than people. So many planes, jeeps, trucks, so few people. No not the names again. How many times do we have to be here. He's smoking puffing after each name. Soldiers saying here and here and here. I have to tell RS not to come here. My fathers wrong, this is wrong. I said, "here."

"Alright men listen up. Your all heading stateside. You'll be stopping in Toyko for refueling. Stopping, disembarking in Juno, Alaska. Then most of you to Andrews Air Force base Maryland awaiting further disposition." He looked at us tired. He paused against his inhaling and said. "God Bless you all." He reached and swung open the door. "And men," he looked back with more cheer. "My wife is stateside stay away from her...you hear." The sergeant smiled at himself. No laughter. He took the cigarette out of his mouth and chucked it out the doorway. Men started to get up partially. Stopping to wait to disagree with the pain. A jet engine roared from somewhere. I got a cold shiver. How did they get me so easily. The left over soldiers still disembarking. Moving while waiting. There just isn't enough of that time in Vietnam. It all of got used up so much to easily. "Let's go buddy." I looked up and moved faster. I got diagnosed under duress. That's what I'll say they got me under duress. I got up to go. I don't know how. But I did. Somehow. For same reason maybe...Just maybe.

I tried to relax walking up the steps. But I felt futile. And victimized all over. I stepped myself through the hatch. I felt like I was going backwards. I sat down next to a marine. His eyes were covered with gauze. His face burnt with ointment thick grease. I stopped looking more than once to sit down. It's impossible to look at other peoples injuries, except to help heal them. I think I tried to sigh, nothing happened. I looked just under my seat,

there was a box of ammunition. The aisle had stretchers three high. I V's running. Nurses moving checking around. Will they make it home in time for America. I'm looking at my tag. On my collar. Just alot of numbers I don't know. The escalator hand rail was to hot to touch. The plane had a metal American flag on its tail. All the seats I can see from here are taken. Some guys have several seats. One is for the wounds I guess. All the nurses. All the orderlies. Are quiet. Except. For our faces. Hard tired lonely orderly faces. My fingers are circling each other. They must have a reason. Now the marine next to me is moving his foot back and forwards, fast. Then back slow fast again. I wish I could help someone even a little. Even myself maybe. He sighed. It wasn't me. The jet engines made loud noises to themselves.

"Airman?"

I opened my eyes. I just closed them. An American nurse with my tag in her fingers.

"I'd like you to come with me." She is saying it soft. Also certain. I got up feeling like I was metal all over. I'm walking carefully behind her not to touch anyone. A soldier sneezed, it hurt him. Now he's coughing. I bumped, turning apologizing to an empty stretcher. A turned myself sideways around an arm sticking out in a caste. I caught myself tripping I guess on myself. Moving a little faster to catch up the up a head nurse. She's in the back of the plane standing. Just standing. I hurried more the ten feet. The jet jumped forward. Three empty seats. She's trying to point with the back of her hand. "Airman stay here o.k. Unless you must to use the facilities." I moved in facing her backwards. She said something moving away with herself. But I didn't hear her enough, not even most of one word. I think she said. I don't know what she said. They probably think I'm potentially disturbing to someone. Since I'm already coming that way myself. The jet moved, hesitated and then burst and burst lunged forward. One hungry jet going home. The jet is rumbling down more the flight way. I think I didn't smile. They should have a hesitating something on weapons. So maybe if you shoot them you have some time left over to reflect and do something about your original aim. Out the port hole window I said to

myself, "Calm down." I can see my eyes against the darkening sky, but not my lips moving. I wonder why. If I calmed down any more they'd have to assume my body to discharge me from the Air Force. I feel bad different like from never before. The jet took off. It's in the air us. I thought of that real nice black marine back at the dispensary. Why isn't he at all with us. Why did I go first. Maybe its the way with the disorder of my personality they diagnosed is spite of against me. Were more airborne, leveling off already. I suddenly thought if we got shot down I'd be saved. But the paper work is all complete and over. Personality disorder, how can they decipher me that way without my available opinion. That's not even good science leaving me out. At least a conjecture of my opinion. They could of at least allowed me a restraining order of some kind. I mean what was second choice behind personality disorder. Maybe I could of given them some available speculation on that. That dissociative whatever amnesia stuff that's there probably to. But that's no problem that I acknowledge enough to worry about and get busy concerned about. What I do with what's left of my name is my business. So I forgot my name, just a temporary almost reprieve that's all. Maybe even just a critique of that crazy movie. And no more than that, that's all and no more. You know that Vietnam even got to my preferred language of choice and tried thinking. Strange now that I have to think of it. I didn't hardly know the questions. I guess even an alleged personality disorder of whatever kind, however you came to acquire it, is the last thing they have use for in the military. Actually to tell you some more of the truth they don't have much use for an undisordered personality in the first place from the very first day you appeared to them. I just don't see the point of understanding. Understanding what's already been understood at your expense. What's going to happen to me. Jesus tell me what's going to happen to me? "Tell me." I said that too out loud. I almost heard it. It's not like me to get this extreme. Even in my own privacy. Of this too much dilemma. An orderly is coming up the aisle. I stuck my head back in closer to myself. He's got a paper cup in one hand. And holding his other hand out like for charity. He's got a paper cup in one hand. And holding his other hand out like for charity. He's

up to pills I'm sure. You'd think if those things worked they'd only need to give you one. And an occasional reminder you already took it.

"Your hand." That's all he's saying. I held out my hand to him upside down from here and a little backwards, to give him a dropping off angle. He did, three little orange pills. No bounce in my hand either. I put them in my mouth without looking at his. He just handed me the water looking away. I sent the water after the irrelevant pills. I have him back the cup. And turned to look out the port hole thing. He left. It's a shame when you have to lie and get decentering about things to protect your freedom. I spat the pills into my cup hands after a brief peripheral look everywhere. Enough of their pills swallowed with those unheralded letters and numbers and I'll start feeling like a publishing company. I tossed them not too easily under the seat. They stick and get discolored gummy in your hand. They want to send something to your brain in the hope they can introduce you back to your mind on their prejudices. Who started this mind idea anyway. I use to know. If I'm out of my mind I should have some of those phantom pains like, like from a belated missing arm or decapitated leg. I decided to put my safety belt on. If the plane crashed it would be redundant. I'm maybe almost angry somehow, maybe that's what it is.

"God I woke up, I didn't know I'd gone to sleep." I rubbed my eyes. Surprised to that I woke up talking out loud to myself. I stretched my legs before I realized I had nowhere to stretch them to. Beyond me I hope everyone alright so far. I'd ask the orderly next time he comes. But I'm afraid he's answer me. I'm feeling a little bit better maybe, could be just something left over from a dream I just had that I don't remember. I shook my head angry enough but not entirely at what I didn't know. Problem with anger is that you eventually have to share it. To eagerly in spite of who you are. And everyone I know, knows how to give the better share of it. The jet seems to be going faster. Maybe it's just me. Probably trying to get ahead of the jet lag. I should just let up and concentrate on not concentrating anymore. It's very hard for me not to think when I have to think to do it. I just this now decided to think backwards to more agreeable locations of memory. And just like that,

backwards and I'm in the wrong location. Wondering about my family. God unsteady. I feel unsteady ashamed. At least if I came home dead they could bury me. This way they're going to have to keep me alive. On purpose to. I don't mind being ashamed to myself. Somehow it seems right. But not to others who don't understand. My family most specially. You know keep it personal to myself. And wait it out with its repercussions. But people ask questions wanting to take a break from themselves the way they do. Liking to add up your misery to get contrasted feeling better the way they do. Then they walk away saying "I understand" best if luck with your inevitable contemplating misery. What do you saying. Nothing that's right. I thought I understood about it all. I didn't. It's not like watching it on TV with a ham sandwich in one hand and a diet Dr. Pepper in the other. The dyeing, the deaths in all the ways, the smells. God the crying sergeant. Where'd he find all the courage to do that. God forgive Jesus a nuclear war they wanted to almost have. All the dyeing while killing of purpose. With everyone invited. Sure I guess I'm insane. I don't make the rules about it. And if I argue my being insane, they'll say, well don't you see that's just proof you don't know what your talking about. Well I didn't kill anyone I'll say. I had no reason not to. I just didn't have the necessary will, if that's how you do it, in the first place. What I'm just talking to myself he or what. Maybe I should just take one of those pills, not three just one. For a little contrast sake. I dropped my head below my knees looking. I found one a little dirty with dust. I'm sucking forth some saliva waiting. If this pill gets stuck in the wrong unwanted place. It could be that something unnecessary might happen. Maybe it could be that I'm almost potentially better off without a mind. Sure the minister reverend Chuck B. Winters available for without a mind. Tell the mindful parishners congregated in each others reconnaissance that I come speaking to them directly from God without a mind made to order. I swallowed the pill with enough congregated saliva. I should of wiped off the numbers and letters, be more my pill. And what would the parishioners say to my available offering without a mind. Maybe I should take one more pill. If ones not enough. No give the first one a chance with me. The

parishioners with their crow watching eyes would stand up in the heartless unison of themselves, after I would notice over a hundred alternating hips in public waiting to make a juggler jump. Fuck you all I'd say, I'd pull off hard my reverential ministerial cloak and I'd resign my tabernacle. And I'd walk out fast unimpeded by their absence. I yawned, if only some of my fantasies could come true I wouldn't mind being real. Of course if I were a fantasy I'd have nowhere to go. That I know.

We've been airborne I don't know how long. Just looking out this silly round window thing. Just looking and looking. Be nice if you could actually see time, see time, excuse yourself carefully and walk around it. I might of dossed off for a while. I'm not sure. Could be I fainted from the burden of all this hazard thinking I've been doing. I do feel dreary maybe and dislocated. I wonder if you can faint from acute boredom. There's no way I can tell if I fainted. Because I don't have a fainting experience in my background to draw from. I crossed my legs just to try a different pace. Another accommodation. I didn't get to say goodbye to Sung Ho. No one, Tennessee, no one. That black sergeant who took his time. Now going home with Martin Luther King dead. I just had enough opportunity to like all those guys. Not nearly enough opportunity to do something about it. I don't even remember exactly enough how long, how many days or what I was there. It's all crunched crumpled up. The orderly just went by and turned around looking at me like he was smelling me with his eyes. I didn't say or do anything. I didn't even have time for an avoidance spontaneous response. I guess I just looked put upon. Just checking on me I guess. I don't know what to do or not to do without cooperating with the idea that I'm insane. It's more quiet. Maybe the high altitude is keeping everones pain down. I hope so. What are they going to do this Andrews place if I don't agree with them. Do they have some review panel of someking. I'll just say thank you for this opportunity to cast a dissenting vote on myself at the expense of your opinion. I'll conclude myself by saying, thank you very much indeed and in fun. But I'm not interested in your insanity. Your diagnoses of me, unregulated the way it was, is to premature for me to benefit from at this time. Because largely I'm

too unsure of myself to reap myself all possibly intended benefits. They'll say well you agreed in Vietnam. I'll say I most certainly did not. And I didn't, remember. Not at all did I cooperate with their insane conclusions about myself. As a matter of fact, I'll say, they formed their conclusions in my absence without my being there. And also there's no question that I was diagnosed unwilling, also under duress. And not all the duress was mine. No it wasn't not at all. And a strange un-introduced doctor even by himself, hitting me with a lot of unprovoked riddles. And urging me on against them. I'm not partial to riddles. I've had too many bad experiences with them. I leaned back trying to recline myself. But I only succeeded in slinking down lower to myself. I didn't recline much, not much at all, except for trying. I need to rest, even if I have to sleep to do it. I guess waking up is going to be different for a long time. Maybe forever. Too much all over thinking and not one tangible conclusion, except that one. And as a final furthermore, one more point I'd say to this panel, if I am ever in need of some sanity. I'll come up with my own. Why should I agree to some stranger's insanity of an alleged variety.

If I slept that deep sleep stuff it wasn't for long. Because I didn't wake up impressed with being rested in the least. If anything I feel more encumbered suspect than ever. Because that's what I should be doing. I should be planning not thinking. Decisions about actions plans about my imposed predicament—that's exactly what I should be doing. God I'm getting somewhere. I can feel it. No thinking planning instead. No but keep all planning to myself personally and in private. I learned that in basic. You can't plan in the military. Your not on your own life cycle. They've got you by the time. Time enslavement in your absence, is what it is. If I got planning about myself they'd add to my diagnosis. I've already got two counts against me. And I'm probably not the one doing the counting. They'd say I resisted cooperation from their resisted ways and talked back at my expense. Before they got through I'd be more diagnosed than left over person. I'd be like a walking rumor unremorseful and unremorseful probably. I tightened my lips against each other to better figure things out. Mom and Pop, Rodney Stuart and Terry, they wouldn't know or be able to handle my

insanity whosoever idea it was. They all like authority opinions alot more than I'd because they got accomadated that way. Rodney is almost ten years old, he isn't old enough to appreciate unexpected surprise insanity. He doesn't know anything about those early psychiatrists like Freud who started the whole too much thing uninvited. I know Rodney, I'm sure thinks insanity is like that Bella Lugoi and Boris Karloff and other vampires who didn't know there own limits. And who were probably unnatural and peculiar before they got switched to being vampires. No Rodney doesn't know insanity well enough to appreciate its absence. Maybe so I can talk to him. But Jesus I'm tired of negotiating that insanity stuff against myself. And I'm what officially insane to myself one day and two days for the other side. There one day ahead. And they'll probably stay that way. And it will probably be worse applying it in the daily practice of myself. Specially since I've already got a pretty well deserved reputation for being eccentric. And from eccentric to insane is just a sneeze and forget the hacuntight. If they didn't have those diagnoser guys in Vietnam I would of probably ended up in lost and found where I belonged. Now look at me lost and found at once. And not by me.

"Would you like a ham and cheese sandwich, some milk and a Hershey bar?" I looked up at the nice voice accepting the small paper bag.

"Thanks." I tried to smile. But I fell way short of my far away destination. I only saw her smile. And almost one nostril and she was gone. Real nice voice though. I appreciate that. I do. But now she as gone as almost wasn't there. I looked carefully into the paper bag. I wonder if rudeness is part of insanity. If it is I hope its a choice. Otherwise how could you apologize. I noticed my collar tag flapping around in my breathing. You shouldn't give people codes they don't know. It's what you might call rudeness by the numbers. It's time that I expanded my dirty vocabulary. After what I've been through servicing my country a dirty word now and then is o.k. Even maybe applicable. Specially if your alone and in private need of yourself. I tossed my coded tag under the seat with two left over unwanted pills. It's enough that I salute my head for them. Really, no I'm not going to eat until I have some

available reason to. I looked out the window to see if by chance there was something to see. If I were an insane Colonel it might almost be different, probably completely different my experience like this. For one thing he wouldn't get a bag lunch. And if got pills he's be saluted first. Wouldn't have any codes anywhere including the pills because he'd know them all. Started some of them most likely himself. Certainly he wouldn't be sent back of the plane in-out of uniform. I wouldn't be at all that surprised if he got promoted to General from his diagnosis. Duress under under duty. Too stressed all over for your country. And if you still want to know more, he's probably get the preferred diagnosis of the lot. Keep it under too many wraps to. You can't tell for sure enough. The generals might only give him those kinds of breaks if he could keep his insanity in check at social occasions and other public stuff like that. Couldn't have a hop skipping laughing Colonel in a parade. And also not get abbreviated, they wouldn't want him to get abbreviated, while keeping himself publicly suppressed. Like talking to much uninspired or hiding under couches without permission. Colonels volunteer their lifes to be that way to be in the ways of killing people. No by the time you reach colonel your life insurance goes way down and everyone elses goes way up. Well, inspite of yourself what are you going to do without taking more risks than your entitled to. I feel morbid. I'm not used to these notions that seem to be hiding ideas. I feel like a ghost without sheet.

I licked my apple. That's all I felt like. I shouldn't lick anything though without looking for attentive viewers. Nice apple though. I wonder why she didn't mention the apple at all. Do they have psychiatrists in charge of reprieves I wonder. Or get a sanity pardon maybe. No, not even close to likely. If they reprieved you once already made you insane. They'd be admitting your like them. No that wouldn't do. I wonder if there's ever been a complete General that's gone insane. That UN place should have an understanding rule that all the generals of the world shouldn't have no more stars anywhere on them than are in the sky from one point anywhere. That would be a start for some perspective. It's mathmatically irresponsible. ANd bad taste so many stars on

earth six feet from our shoes. I squinted to see if I could see more beyond the clouds. I have to accept that I'm a minor player in their insane plans. That's probably the first step. Sure and that makes that consequences are no longer my department. Just go along hoping quietly. Hope for nothing and if something good happens that way I won't be blamed for it. I'll just indulge myself to my life beyond the limits of known ignorance. Sure why not. Oblivious beyond oblivious. Unhappiness is where more of the true things are. God understands. I smiled closing my eyes feeling better after that tangible thought.

I'm keeping my eyes closed. There's no reason that I know of why they should be open. That way if somebody comes by to observe me unilaterally, they'll know I can't see them. And they'll walk away with less than half the truth. Cause I'm not looking they are. I'm already here. I like this closed eyed privacy. It's been lacking at my expense. I tried to see if I could peer out the port hole with my eye lids closed. See some light maybe. No nothing just pink like and some contented blood vessels. You know I wouldn't entirely mind being altogether almost deaf and mostly blind for a while anyway. Much more I wouldn't mind than being a reverend minister officiating God to some congregating people. Sure deaf, blind and relaxed. That's right exactly, not deaf and blind without people knowing it. And mute to, back from Vietnam speechless mute to. I'd listen and see through the tiniest practiced with slits between my lids. I'd be partially mute sort of. I could partially talk secretly. Only mute and deaf to big long extravagant words. Now and then at a too appropriate almost moment I'd say something recognizable and very very poignant. Too poignant for forgiveness or cautious apology. I'd have to work on my poignancy though. Eventually in time with neighborhood people starting to follow my advice inadvertently at first, I'd be suspected of probably being wise. Deaf, blind, partially mute and unnaturally shrewd wise to boot. If not wise entirely well confusing of others. No not that confusing either, confusing on command maybe, more altogether pertinent and easily translatable to the daily happenstance of the neighborhood. I'd stretch my neck like a turkey drinking water in a rain storm. And they'd all know that any waiting minute now I'd come

forth with one of my relevant foibles. Partial sentences at the very first, then very slowed down almost near complete ones. In the eventually of time no one would walk into my house without a couple of pencils and a note pad. At unplanned, even by irregular intervals, I'd say a word, not more than one word maybe and part of another, at an extra ordinary poignant moment to get them wrought up in the fact that they're still living. Words that would show I was suspicious of them in their best opportunities. Sure I like that to, I'd make sounds also. That's right neighborhood sounds reality sounds. Sounds like three squirrels munching on stale bread, but a little louder being that I'm deafly impaired. Hamster sounds, breaks low on break fluid sounds with my stretched turkey neck. Whatever is needed to startle them deservedly. Even sometimes to my surprise I'd make surprising sounds unheard of even by me till that moment. Forget that, they might be mistaken for words. The real sounds I've got to rehearse. I'd even master the one sound of six of them talking simultaneously to no sul advantage. Intestinal digesting sounds would be thrown in as well at my stomachs discretion or my own. Then they would know the madman is about to speak. They'd stop think to listen, without even wanting to. Who can resist a digesting sound from a wild turkey. A whole repertory that's what I'd have. Sure in weeks more than months they'd be intent on their feet watching, listening with ever since and morbid gusto. And for what, an insane, blind-deaf mute back from Vietnam with only forced upon decorations. And not one extra credit obtained while walking around under his own demolition. They'd leave eventually because I'd only have one trustworthy bathroom. The madman speaks that's right. But they'd come back trapped by my convincing appetizing ignorance. Which they personalize to their happy defects. And do you think I'll get any credit. Hell no, you know how people are. Don't you your probably not one of them almost maybe. My words, my sounds borrowed from the real animal kingdom and broken down machines. "What did the fool say today they'd asked in their whispering through their privacies." They come to listen to the disabled American Veteran who talks through his nose while imitating distracted squirrels eating popcorn. And I'm the fool. Give me a break or at least let me borrow one. Hard to believe isn't

it. And I don't have to tell you do I? That they'd be the first to copyright on my available maybe infringement. I just hate it, even from way back in high school, hate it when people imitate me before I do. They'd get together and calculate indifferently if the fool doesn't know the difference between mash potatoes and a tooth brush. He's not going to have much use for an expensive. And they'd be right. Which would be their problem not close to mine in anyway way. I'm unmolested in my money concerns. I'm oblivious as hell you see. When I'm alone and lonely I even smile to myself to stay in shape. Late in the early mornings the insomniacs can even hear me laughing. A brief muffled luckluster laugh, brief and whatever sure oblivious again. I'd have a good time in my own inadequacy. Don't you think my concentrated platitudes are appearing all over the state in popular fortune cookies. Even on bumper stickers causing mild accidents by the mobile reading public. And in the eventually of time the guilty ones with the most construed and consternated profits would start to feel guilty about themselves. Why not they have everything else. They'd solicit the neighborhood members of the Hemlock society in their spare time to come by and offer me some strichnine to help put me out of their misery. Think in all along that it was mine. I've got to stop this. It's getting a little not to risk free to me. I opened my eyes.

Just in time to hear. "Airman Winters your dinner." A soothing woman how nice.

"Already, no thank you. I still haven't eaten my lunch." She smiled and started away with herself. "Excuse me could you please maybe tell me when well reach Toyko Japan." I couldn't see her rank.

"We landed in Toyko several hours ago." She looked at me concerned and I think at my safety belt.

"Your kidding thank you. I must of slept through the take off and landing. I'll be damned." She nodded her smile nicely and finally left. I slept through Toyko, I like that. I slept through Tokyo Japan. Are well landing now or what. Not it must of been an air bump. I looked back away from the port hole. I should look more carefully at the people I almost see. See at what you look.

They'd get a symptom out of that. Miss them outright right in front of me, what would they get out of that. I dropped my hands hard on my lap. And I finally sighed remembering. Remembering that Doctor Stamm, that nice Doctor Stamm. You see I did have two chances not to go to Vietnam. Mister King my soccer coach I told you about, he offered me a chance to get into the National Guard. But I thought that was too obvious. You know what I mean. And after I dropped out unceremoniously out of that University of Maine, they said to me in the dispensary in person that I could come back but first I had to go see one of those trained psychiatrists. I did sort of maybe. And his name was Doctor Stamm. To get redirected or reoriented, I forget exactly what they needed. Whatever it was I didn't get it. But I did get to see that Doctor Stamm. Finally after four sessions he told me I had an anxiety reaction. I was shocked. I knew that before I arrived to him on purpose. That I was anxious and unnerved without enough recourses. Why didn't he ask me right off I wonder? I told him it was perfectly understandable my having an anxiety reaction like he offered. When you find out prolonged like you don't know what your doing, an anxiety reaction is necessary even predictable. Jesus now its enviable. He said without my asking him to that I demonstrated limited insight into my problems. That even made less sense to me. I had all the available insight I could muster under the circumstances of my opportunity. Extra added insights he wanted, was like asking somebody not to get wet running between rain drops in a shower. I mean, it wasn't like I was holding back the preferred best insights. They just weren't yet on my schedule. Plus it was way too premature getting all your insights all together in any particular order. The perdicament that created the insights to be necessary only happened three months from befor them. And I'd just known this guy a couple of hours. And now he's an authority on me before I am. Also further more on the schedule of perdicaments, I didn't personally know that I was in any deep trouble till almost one third of the way through the damn perdicament. No, I've learned already since then with insights its best to let them fester for a while befoire they're ready for speculation of any kind. But I didn't tell Doctor Stamm that. I'd already quit by the time I had that

insight. Last day of therapy Doctor Stamm offered that he would give me a deferment for going into the military. He said because I might go to Vietnam. Just like that effortless I knew that was wrong, even artificial. Sure I didn't want to go to Vietnam. I told you. I would of preferred much more being stationed near Hawaii with beaches and no organized gun fire. But I knew right off without hesitation of any kind it wasn't right my getting away safe without my taking my American chances along with everybody. I told him thanks anyway. He told me I should stay in therapy. I said thank anyway to that to. He said we should talk about quitting. I couldn't believe this guy he was out of control on my time. If you have to say now twice to the same person in the same room more than twice your asking for help or trouble and I'd already had enough of both. Neither of which I'd insighted all the way already. And he says, with me standing up to handshake goodbye. I think we should talk about your unwillingness to talk about quitting. I wonder why those people don't have parking meters now that I think of it. I told Doctor Stamm that there was no such thing as talking about talking. The closest think I could think of in the spur of the moment was singing. But there you've got to have some accompaniment to say nothing of a voice. He finally agreed unrestrained because he ran out of my time. That same very day I picked up my father at the Westport Train station. And told him proudly that I'd quit. Because knew he was concerned even embarrassed by the treatments I was getting. It's really all over to bad though. At the door Doctor Stamm gave a real good handshake. And wished me extra good luck. It turned out that he needed it more than I did because six months later he was murdered carrying black panther bail money to some prisoner in Bridgeport near Westport where he lived. A real bad thing murdering that Doctor Stamm. He was doing good the best way he knew, even if a little long winded and convoluted for my discretions. It would serve right the guys who killed Doctor Stamm if he were waiting for them in heaven for treatment. And was allowed to keep them until they were fully insighted to Doctors Stamm devine satisfaction. And look at me, nowhere close to heaven or earth. If I'd had stayed unbearably happy at the University of Maine. Right now I'd be happy. I shook my head in complete

dismay of myself here at thirty thousand feet again. Jesus the soldiers are awfully quiet and silent. I leaned out my head in the aisle to get a better angle on hearing. I looked out the window probably by mistake. I meant to be practicing what I would look like when I first my family again for the first time. I think I'm getting nervous. I wish I could confess. Confess about something. But its too late I'm already innocent. I felt like a concerned rat in an alliey mouse trap. With people trying to help me along at their own indiscretions. Nothing to see on a recruiting poster. Whats the very real point anyway, of answering questions for some better details of awareness-when your actually not coming up with an answer to the best question available for the opportunity. And whats probably the truth I yet don't know is that the opportune question is already the answer somehow anyway. Just confused in its timeliness. Jesus I could use a note pad and some reliable pencils. Because I think I just almost forgot the thought I just had. And it felt like a good one. And I'm not now too sure if I entirely comprhended what I just maybe thought. But I can't get off this plane taking notes they'll think I'm a crazy reporter. Anyway I don't know if I have the grammar to write about insanity. Probably an incredible amount of punctuation involved, maybe even more puncation than words. Forget the note pad, I'm not sure if I had written down I wouldn't of wished I'd forgotten it already. Except by then it might be to late, remembering can be a problem. No knowledge isn't what it used to be. And I can say that without knowing to much. The orderly guy with pills is approaching all intact around himself. He's almost. Too close.

"Airman well be landing in Juno in a few minutes." He handed me the two little cups. One with the three orange pills and the other with water. I looked up, he's gone walking away backwards to me. Ha, isn't that something he thinks I'm conditioned. I tossed the pills under the seat to keep the other two company. And drank the water as a chaser to myself. I think they said before we could disenbark in that Juno place. Pills, if I make them nervous they can divy them up amongst themselves according to priority of dilemna. I wonder if those pills have of those half life deals like radiation or whether they can

decompose outside of themselves like the rest of us. Not important, but I never thought now that I think of it, that I'd have to one day tame my mind in order to get along in whatever way with people. And these people are trying to define me on their terms. And in a close knitted society like ours definitions get around. Word would go out like a boring wild fire, "Did you hear Chuck Winters got himself defined." That's what people would say. Women I kissed with their agreement intact, what would they say. What will they think and try not to say. They'd get regrettable all over that's for sure. Not that Stacy though at the beach, she was welcomingly liberal and keen into the celebration of herself. No confusion is the only hope we have. It's the definers the successful money everybodies that...no I'm not going to get ministerial. That past thought was just a relaxing aberration, about being a fuddy reverential minister. Translating God around, like God needed a translator more than himself. If he is a himself. I think God would get bored with one preferred available sex. Who would he argue with to an unhappy conclusion. See what I mean. I'm irreconcilable. I don't know. I don't think ignorance is bliss, but it is help. I learned that sometime ago already. Not that ignorance isn't knowledge you understand its just more personally intimately available for use without a rostrum. Calm me down pills. With more enough of them and they could pronounce me dead on their arrival. God some of the wheel touched the ground. I'm quickly looking out the window happily distracted by myself. The jet just retro fired itself I think they call it. I'm staying on board because I don't feel like motion until better I know where I'm going. But this is educationally uplifting, Juno in the dark. Look at that beyond me my experience. Against an incredible moon light. A moose, a near incredible moose just chomping away at the grass. With his horns up eating grass. Eating away the grass as intended, slow motion like having an agreeable conversation unrehearsed. Eating the grass oblivious beyond respect and appreciation. Divine is what it is, it really is. He doesn't see us I don't think yet... He's lucky. The plane turned luckily into a near half circle to somewhere, so I got more of seeing the beyond happy moose. What a sight to behold. A moose right here in Juno Alaska in the middle of our midst and

completely unimpressed by our lofty presence. God I'd give anything to be a moose. Me with my moose wife, my loyal enchanting moose kids. I'd be a respectable moose to, not a bad one. If they have any nasty ones acknowledged by themselves at all. Probably just by our aim their bad. That's us to talking about animals in all our ways and not close to even in their language or even implied permission of consent. We are some bad mother fuckers. I laughed quietly to myself. Just listen to me getting cantakerous to late. I'm too much even just for a maybe human being. The moose got up and went to go. Galloping along in the jaunty jaunt of himself still chomping the grass in his mouth without missing a beat. How incredibly lucky I am to of met that moose. Maybe for sure if I can't be a moose, I can go live in the woods unperturbed except by myself. Get some survival books and take one chapter at a time arriving in the woods one way or another. That's all to bad maybe. Why do they have to deal with disorders and mind diseases anyway. Why not just call it an opportunity that you got unlucky enough to be greeted by. But a disease without the soul being involved invited into the bargain. Where's that old time Catholic church on this anyway. If that Andrews place tries to take more than they already have that I lost unwittingly. I'll, I don't know. For starters I'll just remember forth that moose. Sure that's great, I like that enough to like it alot. Sure me trotting along teaching my moose kids to be self sufficient like me. You can't be homeless alone in nature that's where God is.

I sniffled a little, just a bit of an emotional cold I guess. I got suddenly surprised we were moving off again. We sure spend alot of time in machines and always seem to end up the same ourselves everywhere. Just more spreading of ourselves. I never heard of any emergency near flying missionaries. No this the hurry stuff that's potentially mostly bad. I looked back quickly desperately. No he's gone. So is the spot he was that moose. Maybe I thought he'd come back anyway. Maybe I don't know. You know in that Nuclear war we almost had with nobodys permission, even the moose would of been killed all of them all of us. Way too many for what? Jesus stay on the cross were not ready for you again. Poor guy you'd think they'd let him down. Sure he was devine,

but he also got the pain part of it. In my nonexistent pay with your minds tabernacle church I'd have a Jesus there for sure. And a few of the other ones like that nice chubby Buddah one. And the Hindu one to. Hell all of them. And for Jesus' sake I'd take right off politely from the cross and place a nice real like statue of him a little over the congregation with his finger on his nose about to sneeze. God why did God make up the World in seven days. Did he trust to leave the details up to us. He should of at least, fine seven days, who am I to say and all, but why didn't he just take up a couple hours after the seven days to tidy up after himself. I think I'm thinking too much to be thoughtful about what I think I'm knowing. Maybe I should just take one more pill. Too keep the other one company if nothing else.

"Airman-Airman.."

That's not me. I rubbed my eyes. How long did I sleep unwanted like. I tried to focus my eyes. I went to sleep farway. Did I dream. Too much. A hand came down on my shoulder. "Airman you o.k.?"

I looked up from myself. "Am I o.k., sure almost maybe mostly why?" She's beautiful, I wonder why.

"Were approaching Andrews, get ready for landing." She smiled at the same time sighing. And left.

"Damn its happening to early prematurely for me. And I haven't yet thought of my first apology. Jesus I'm not ready for anything, my family, what's left of America. God have mercy on me please or whatever the heck. You've got available." I feel groggy all over myself. I really slept myself away. I wonder what time its going to be in America. I looked at my watch, yeah a long time ago I lost it somehow lost it. If I had a dream again I slept through it. I buckled my safety belt. I bent over quickly to see if the pills were available and ready. But I couldn't reach myself strapped in. I have to slow down carefully to comprehend myself. I closed my eyes tight to concentrate. I need a prayer something. All I saw, thought I saw is darkness. Darkness and me, now standing at the airport in front of my family. My whole family. All of them. Except they don't recognize me. Jesus, I say its me. And they say prove it.

The plane dipped drastically downward. I opened my eyes quick against my resistance. America so close and I'm not so ready. My family won't be there. The Air Force isn't that dumb efficient. But everything else has gone wrong unencouraged. I unbuckled my safety belt to check on the available pills. Dieing insane unresolved must be worse than going dead insane. I felt like a kid on the high diving board knowing I'm going to jump, but wishing hard I didn't know it while in the air afloat. I reached for a pill. The wheels touched hard America. All I need now is some saliva. I wish I knew more about omens so I could have one. I closed my eyes better so I can hear my breathing. I'm not doing to well at all on the saliva. The previous pill took it all with it. More wheels landing. I cleared my head of any thoughts. I don't want to have any thoughts of myself landing. The plane sped down the runway like a rabbit chasing itself to nowhere. My breathing is pretty much so far within my range. My family waiting again even more speculative. That's the very thought I didn't want first to have. And not fully landed yet. They got contacted and got alarmed. The Air Force sent them and insane telegram about there convoluted son. And brother no less. I felt like pacing until I disappeared below the carpet on this slowing down plane. And still no saliva. I looked out the window the little orange pill between my two fingers. More planes everywhere, its daylight. So far anyway. My fingers are at it again chasing each other. All I can hope for is that the worst isn't to bad more than the worst already. If it is, that maybe I can keep it a secret to myself. And hope, sure hope that hoping is enough. Even if just for a while during emergencies around people. Be spontaneous and hope. No don't be spontaneous and hope anyway.

"You'll disenbark last Winters." I didn't hardly see that face. I almost asked how last. But the first word got stopped by his disappearing. Did I say thank you or does that come later. I felt frozen hot. But still nervous and unregulated beyond my contempt. Sure lieing is still popular. Now more than ever. Sure, I can tell everyone that it was all a paper foul up that I was the beneficiary of. No a brief lie is better. No God its my family I'm talking about. If my family can't accept a little unscheduled for insanity nobody can.

It's also not deep out of the outside insanity, more personal and on the nearby surface of myself. I'm sure of it almost maybe. Sure why not. Specially Mary and Terry.

"Airman!" The orderly is pointing toward the hatchway thing. I got up moving sideways clutching the little orange pill between my fingers. I moved down the aisle feeling lost down founded with nowhere to go that I already wasn't there. I felt like I'd snuck into my own funeral uninvited to pay some of my respects to the premature corpse. I hesitated myself at the hatch my hands over my head holding on to the metal. The orderly is behind me. I looked down at the slowly filling blue bus. More white of bandages than blue around. I'm already walking down. I don't remember deciding that decision to move. I can feel my dog tags swinging back and forth on my chest like a pendulum against my heart. Two no three ambulances drove away fast. One stopped fast, the back door swung open. The stopping closed it. Then sped off. The last step. And I'm here. One last soldier, no longer a soldier is getting on the bus bringing in front of him his crutches. One stab on the cement at a time. I squinted the sun, it seems cold here for some reason. The orderly behind me said something. I looked back over my shoulder stopped. "What?" I said or asked. "I said good luck Winters." I turned around near the bus steps. "Thanks o.k." I said, putting my first step on the bus. A radio, not loud. But a radio. "Monday, Monday...can't stop that day." I pushed up from the rail, to still tired for my own sake. That's those Mama's and the Papa's people I think. The song kept playing. The bus started a jerk forward and I have seated myself. Monday, monday, I hope its not monday here, that could be my first omen, my first prolonged omen. I'm not going to talk to these people, until I know more of the particulars there accusing me of. I'm also not going to talk about my war concerns and apprehensions or they'll get military on me. Not if that Fashions is any average indication. I felt nervous enough about myself sitting down to upchuck. Amnesia is not to bad. Everyone is seen an amnesia hollywood story with a happy somekind of ending. But they didn't call it amnesia. They called it, the bus started to move forward of all the places, they called it what psycho,

psycho neurotic and something extra. That disorder personality option I have to know more about that if its not classified. Could be they just mean their preferred version of eccentric, at worst acute eccentric with whatever thrown they have handy. I was looking out the bus window without even knowing it. It's funny I didn't see any vomiting in Vietnam. Did I? No I don't remember that I did. Strange of all places no vomiting. Vomiting if for no reason than to explain your feelings when you run out of words. I don't know. If death is anything like this it should be more discouraged more than it is.

The bus stopped. I was already stopped when I thought that. But I just didn't stop myself I guess. Look a little circle of grass boulevard. Real grass. Real grass people. People walking passed a bench. A woman with two children. Isn't that something people walking like that and a woman and two children. And one of each to. Just like that out in the open unperturbed and with somekind of direction walking like that. Easy like. Easily with themselves. I'd forgotten that was possible. Ah, too much. Not ready to duck or anything. It's reason-

"Airman wheres your tag. Is your name Winters?" You didn't hear me call your name."

"No sergeant not even when...." He looked at my body like for unhearded details. "Forget it this is your stop. Right there," he ducked down and pointed over and up. "Entrance is in the rear, Malcolm Grow Air Force Hospital got it."

"Sure sergeant I got it."

I got up waiting for him to give me some space. He finally turned and got away with himself. I wonder what's his problem. I'm not responsible for his consternation. I sighed hard moving down the waiting bus aisle. Moving slow like wading in hip high in ocean water. I felt patriotically nausious. What's that thought about Jesus. Now I'm a rebel renegage unpatriotic psychotic. Maybe, I stepped off the bus two steps at once, could be maybe I meant something else I left out. Now I saw on the bus walking the aisle, bandages, one arm where's the other, a face not a face, eyes. I looked up in front of the sun, a ten tall story building. Brown like cement with no purpose that got designed.

Just a building, built by people that's all. I stopped to hesitate and try to figure out.

I walked around with myself for I don't know how long. Longer than necessary for being back in America. If I didn't know I'm close to where I'm supposed to be, I'd say I'm lost. Lost in time that's for sure, because I'm taking too long to where I haven't gotten yet. Lost is fine with me anyway. I'm not supposed to be here, how can I be lost and still get founded. He did say, "didn't he," the entrance is in the rear. How can the front entrance be in the rear. This place anyhow has so far no entrance type of entrance I'm familiar with. I opened my pajama shirt because of the heat while sitting down on a cement bench with no back except my own. I'm going to sit and relax, "why work at being potentially lost?" Anyway probably, I would be lost more when they found me lost already. This building has too many corner parts to it. "How come," I looked around-we have mostly corners in our buildings. Corners and not rounds mostly. I guess, I expect people like to end things by saying this is mine already. And the rounds would be inviting, flowing around like that with no convenient available end. I sighed in spite of myself. Because I'm still not relaxing. Less relaxing I am, waiting to relax more, probably unnecessarily hopelessly. I'm still waiting convincingly for what I don't know what. I noticed a stack of hay, I mean snow. It's winter in America. Jesus I forgot about that stuff. I had it backwards just then, opening up my shirt for heat's sake. I should be cold. I guess a bathrobe would have been too much of a welcome. A shoveled pile of snow. How nice a surprise I didn't notice. Not once I'm sure did I think of snow in that Vietnam. Chris, Red, Tennessee...there back in the heat unwanted. Guilty, well...I don't know. Too much I don't know trying to know it. Guilty anyway that's for sure. They're there me here, I got up on my feet letting go of my knees from my elbows. I'm better spending time lost, walking.

"Excuse me Sir?" Right off I see a sir. He's colonel no less. A serious sir. The only colonel I ever heard talked to to see was that Colonel Now in that White Elephant. He looked at me already, surprisingly he looked about to be

polite. "Can you tell me if you will Colonel, if this hospital here has a front entrance somewhere?" My whole sentence developed a puff of winter steam that headed for his head. I backed up a step away from the evidence.

"The entrance to Malcolm Grow?" I nodded without making anymore steam. "Right there twenty five yards between those two bushes." He pointed fairly severely with his forehead..

"Thank you Colonel. I see what you mean?" I got started away. But he snapped me back.

"Do you have a problem Airman?"

"No Sir, the entrance is my only problem. Now I know where it is, because you told me."

He tried to smile almost and said, "Good." Then he took himself away walking straight the way Colonel do. From the head up is how I think they do it. I returned to the direction I knew before I was going. I walked more slowly in the direction of the rising bushes. Just in case. Taking in as much of the winter, before meeting against the cerebral people. I walked through the glass door uneventfully, after getting the push pull deal perfectly settled in my mind. I only had to stop once.

I'm inside. The place isn't much lit for a reason. Vacant marble with like forty foot ceiling, not much furniture and still even less light. Not close to even enough furniture of any kind to encourage the idea of resting. I stopped myself in front of a lieutenant reading face down something. Same angle as people have when their heads are being chopped off by their royal cousins. A tall desk to, up to my chin. Close to up to my chin. The black gold sign between us read "Information Officer." I tried to clear my throat to alert him to my indifference. But I didn't succeed with any sound or anything. He's looked up. He moved his hand out and hooked it a little down. "Your records airman." He moved his inside mouth around for some reason. Maybe a familiar taste he didn't like. I don't know. "Your records." He repeated like for the third time.

"Oh sure." I handed them to him. I didn't forget to tell you, I got handed

them walking off the plane. They have a lock on them locked around heavy something cloth. I waited watching, what else am I going to do? He unlocked the lock with a small key under his shirt. Just a half of cock around his wrist. He's reading now with absolutely no intensity. Like a dirty spy novel with the ending first.

"Sure, o.k.?" He said. "Up that elvator to the ninth floor." He said no more except to look at me. Making no more sound that got audible except to be still looking at me. So I turned around. What else am I going to do."

"Present your file to the duty nurse." He added throwing his voice to the back of my head. I got to the elevator already having heard him completely. I pressed the button to the ninth floor. Once, once is enough. I smiled, inspite of me that I did. No reason that I knew enough to guess about. Good thing I'm not surprised, if he asked me why are you late. I would of said not holding back anything except me, how can I be late when I'm fifty weeks early. Should I of saluted the Colonel. They're meant to be saluted. They like themselves that way. The elevator door opened. I'm not surprised. But I would of liked being surprised. I would of liked it very much. I stepped inside deep over the crack between here and there. Maybe I shouldn't of saluted him in my pajamas. Another not likely recruiting poster. The elevator is riding up with me, like about to vomit me. Maybe even a disgraceful poster, it could be. A disgraceful poster of the truth. Good thing I'm alone not saying these things. The elevator door opened startling me neccessarily. I got concentrated on my own alleged thinking to be aware of myself in the about to be perdicament. Maybe I could be I'm wrong. Here you'll get forgiven or maybe even something pleasant.

"Can I help you?" Then the overly well feed nurse looked up. "Your records Airman please." I got from here to the elevator without thinking. I think that's encouraging. She raised one cheek before the other going for her key, around her neck in a breast pocket. A boy orderly showed up about my age, out of nowhere except from before he was. She's reading twice looking at me. I'm already here hardly and already incedental with no effort. Good...what else could it be but good. The orderly all in white shifted his weight. She looked

up at him and nodded her ever so slowly. Any more slowly and she would of had enough time to lose weight on the way up again. I liked that thought. I smiled at it. I followed the orderly down the other way narrow hallway. That was my interpretation of what to do. So I went ahead and did it. He stopped silently except for his rubber shoes on the mirror shiny floor. Stopped in front of a varnished wood door. He opened it and stepped back. I scratched my head for the first time in years. I walked around in front of him. Passed a small thing between the glass wire mesh window. I decided right off, to write the guys in Vietnam with my apologies. Apologies for abandoning them with myself. The door closed behind me. A small room, like a cell, except everything is like a bathroom polished. An over my head heavy wire mesh window with the wire on both sides of the locked in window. A bed with sheets and a too clean a pillow. A light glowing at me in daylight. I looked for the light switch. Nothing unless they put it under the bed. I turned around, "I forgot completely I've got to go to the bathroom." I reached for the door handle ahead of me. The hand came off the door handle. After a reasonable turn it came off. My hand did. I tried again. Nothing, not even a give turn of nothing. I'm locked in. What did I do Jesus. I'm locked in with no paper and pencil. Locked in with just barely me. And no bathroom. Not even with an excuse of an explanation about my rights. What for, give me a break if you've got any left over. "Hey." I meant it as a scream, at least an inquiring yell. If I barely heard it myself I probably wouldn't of responded. "Hey you guys people out there, I've got to go to the bathroom." I have my cheek against the heavy wood door. Then on my toes looking through all the wires. Nothing that's a human response. Maybe I'm sound proof in here. Me and my bladder sound proof. Real sound proof I bet. A small room, me from one end to another. They've got to be up to something refined. I can't be locked up here by coincidence. I mean such a small room I could pee from one end to the other. Another recruiting poster that I missed. I hope, God I hope I'm not getting bitter. I'm not good that way to myself. No I'm not, not at all. "Am I good that way." I'm locked in here completely tight. For a strange moment I felt blind. Not enough time to know if deaf was included. "What am I

in some kind of quarantine. Some personality quarantine." And what am I looking at the ceiling for, just a ceiling. I'm thankful for that. Of course its the only part here I can't reach to touch. Could be possibly maybe they've got a one way mirror somewhere. No I can't near be that important. Anyway they are the two way mirror themselves. I looked feeling perplexed more. I reached for the door handle by deciding to. I stopped and sat back down on the bed. Why remind myself. It's already all so unremindful. "So for how long am I here to be witnessed or what." Just an unadorned bed with metal backboards. I'm glad its not comfortable. No, comfortable would be better. A comfortable sleepable one, would give me more perspective contrast to think this out beyond me. The door closed. Closed completely unceremonously with me. Without even a human word of a sound. This is unneccessarily neccesarly rude and in bad taste I'm sure. I lay myself down on the bed. I heard those comfortable words in my head, "Here I lay me down to sleep." "They say that at funerals don't they." I'm not up enough on my rituals or formal rehearsed prayers. " This here is probably a ritual already in itself." What else but a ritual for patriots goen wayward. I got off the bed and went over the two feet to the wired out mesh window. I put my fingers of both hands on the wire over my head. With nothing to see but cement. I feel to unneccarily captive, even before this captive room of me I felt captive. Prolonged cative I felt, agreeably trying to do my duty. If it weren't true it be real unamerican. What could be more unamerican than denying somebody a toilet after going from war. I felt frustrated. Sad enough, I closed my eyes. I could see that happy noble moose running while chomping what's left of his grass. I turned around to fast without a sure purpose. I should knock on the door. Give them and me something to understand. Something agreeable familiar with no words. But, "that's backwards isn't it?" Knocking to get out. And out where for what matter. They might know something about me. Yeah they might think they do. And keep me here forever in their disguise. Not even enough room for casual pacing. I sat back on the bed to give my bladder a break. Get at least gravity on my side. Give my bladder a break anyway. Maybe they'll come for an occasional release of my bladder anyway. You know what. I mean I

just thought, what are they going to feed me or what. I should of just at the very first given them flat down my Geneva Prisoner card. And said in clear words, "Forget it I won't talk without a human being-being present." That's exactly what I should of said and done. Done from the very outright. That's exactly what I shoul of done. Exactly waht I should of done. Now it's too late they'ver got me on their incriminations schedule. Defenseless with a full bladder. And me regrettably on an uncomfortable comfortable bed. This is American unnecessarily abnoxious, fighting for your country and not even a bed pan to show for it. The Constitution and all those freedom bills of rights, should at least include of included the freedom to pee at free will. I guess, well the before fathers couldn't of thought of everything. They wouldn't of liked Vietnam much either. I'm sure of it. Specially that Benjamin Franklin, and also that Thomas Jefferson with his beautiful black children. That George Washington I don't know about. He's gotten over fantasized, probably for selfish reasons. The way people are using each other to gain some personal momentum. Some people I should say. If this is that start of me here. What else are they already going to take, they already haven't taken by not asking.

I laid down flat to sleep. What's the difference with that glowing several several colored light its day or night the same anyway. I never knew on bladder could have so much authority over one person intact or otherwise. I'm unbearably sorry. I have no choice. I could die of an exploding bladder. The telegram home is getting worse. No medals for that I'm sure. Hardly a military funeral. Bury me in a bed pan why don't you. And don't forget to say the Lord's prayer backwards do some of you will understand. I got up on my knees and started pint. What relief, mostly because eliminations of yourself don't require thinking. Humiliating, also unpleasant...no if the American people I know enough to like or avoid were given a voting chance on this here urination, what would they of done doing. They'd say in a pleasant harmonious unison of themselves, "Let the poor bastard use the John." I'm sure of it. And just in time because I'm completely emptied out except for my embarrassment. I gathered up my sheets into an armful bundle and carried them to the corner. On my knee's ping in America.

I've never done anything on my knees like this before. And in the middle of it all to busy to tell you right now. I said to myself, kneeling is for praying to God. So still in the midst of myself peeing I tried to switch my position to something less devine. And peed on myself instead too completely. And now guess what, I looked back at the former sheets, I'm thirsty. I climbed back on the bed too exhausted for no available reason. I stretched myself out. And closed my eyes, even if just for practice.

Did I sleep? No again maybe I didn't wake up. Again or for the first time something at the door turning metal. I sat up. It's daylight again or what. People are coming looking in a neat straight file of themselves. Lead by a polished white grey haired captain. There chattering to themselves about themselves, the captain looking at me, for his own reason wondering. Next to him the chubby black nurse that directed me here unwanted. I'm sitting up more. The rest I don't know. Now they're all lined up along the bed, like a sideways firing squad. They seem look so gentle with their polite manicured faces. There seven of them. Why did I count them.

"What's your name Airman?" He's the captain speaking. His words are smooth like on invited on ice. Just flowing on to me.

"My name captain is Chuck Bromley Winters thank you. "I gave it all to him thoroughly what I know.

"How do you feel?" He coughed a miniscule cough and covered his lips with one finger.

I waited for him to recover. "I feel fine and frustrated mostly. But fine anyway."

"Frustrated why!" He moved on that word like it had cream cheese on it. His ears going up with the rest of his head.

"Why?" I got surprised he could ask so much in one word. I thought of Sung Ho. I don't know why. The the crying sergeant in the darkness. The coffins stacked so high behind the dispensary. So high like Jesus on that cross. "Why...well the why of here is that there's nothing resembling a bathroom here."

"Yes well-"

"I had to relieve myself in those sheets over there." I pointed to the sheets over my shoulder with my thumb.

"These things happen. Somebody will be here to clean up." For some reason I didn't know, his face didn't move when he talked.

"What oh, no thanks. If you don't mind I'd prefer to take care of that myself."

He looked at me. What waiting for more. I didn't have more available to say. "Do you feel angry right now?"

"No thank you captain I'm not angry right now. Not that I'm aware of really. I'm usually always to first to know. I was moderately angry before now, about the missing toilet or whatever. But I guess I decided to dismiss the anger thinking someone probably knew what they were doing...that's about all." He smiled broadly almost beyond his face maybe. And the smile went down to the other six like a bowling ball going down the gutter. Amazing I never saw a seven foot long smile. And without the same origin to. Several of them are taking notes. And now the smile came back to the no longer smiling captain.

"Do you remember a few minutes ago if I asked you what your name was?" He constricted his nostrils and mine. Maybe my urine is permeating him. "I remember I told you my name is Chuck Winters. But I don't remember if you remember." He smiled. Jesus this guy.

"Do you in anyway feel violent right now?" All their eyes moved on me. And the captain's stomach moved back an inch without him. They're waiting more from me. Feverishly now...More now yet.

I hesitated from their appetite. "Violence. You mean violence directly from me." He nodded without looking at me. "No well of course not. No I don't have any violence in me. Not that I know of." I realized I'd overqualified myself. These are the unconscious people. "I didn't have any available violence in me in Vietnam...why would-"

"Why not?" This guy takes his words seriously. Like he's modeling for some special insight of himself reason.

"Why not you say. You mean why not against other people?"

He said, "Yes..."Almost softly, but still on an eager schedule.

"Well because its rude that's why!" The doctor smiled moving his head back. The others laughed more of a giggle. Strange people. I don't even know if this guy is a doctor or what.

"I have a final question for you Airman, then we can get you some breakfast o.k." I waited looking. "Tell me why people in glass houses shoul'n't throw stones."

"You know I'm glad you asked. You are a doctor right?" He nodded agreeable. "The reason I'm glad asked is because. Is because I don't think I made my answer obvious to that Doctor Fashions in Saigon. I've probably thought of four reasons of why since then to myself." I held out one finger for emphasis of evidence. "First of all the doctor himself might of been a little durreded himself. But I can't testify to that myself as a fact." I paused to catch to one of my first reasons. I got a little blank. I could feel myself in labor thinking. I looked up exasperated I couldn't think of one. "Well doctor its possible that in a moment I'm going to have to give you only one reason. Sure, and that is simply...that if you have enough stone throwing people and recipricating stone throwing people in all their joined unpleasant ways, you might as well eventually should go off and have a war. And what's the point of that in the first place. Do you understand?"

"I see. Yes well Airman Winters I'm going to transfer you to the open ward. Your probably hung-"

"You have that kind of power doctor?"

"Power isn't necessary here Mister Winters. An orderly will be here in a minute and he'll get you situated." The doctor exited before any of them. And it would of been easier on all of them if the others had gone first. I think some of them even almost bowed as he went by. Not enough to create a breeze or anything maybe. Maybe just a marginal implied bowe. "Did he call me mister." The others left with no more fan fare. I got one foot off the bed, when an orderly walked briskly in. What did he mean mister. Maybe he just Freudian slipped on himself. I went over and scooped up my sheets. "This way Chuck..."

The orderly said friendly like. What's with Chuck all of a sudden. Where was Chuck when I needed a bed pan. I followed him out? He looked some like the Pillsbury dough boy. Be nice if they recruited live cartoon characters into the military. I moved and caught up to him in the hallway.

"I'd like to ask you a question if I may."

"Sure, why not?" "Thanks well its like this. I have a concern that my family will find out prematurely about my perdicament here. I'm afraid that they might not be ready for the unexpected bad news. You know about me being allegedly insane. Specially if its put to them in the wrong language that might sound unfamiliar to them. I guess what I'm trying to say, without yet saying it...is that, has my family been informed about my being here like this."

"No not yet I don't think. But Doctor Johnston will tell you more about that."

"So your saying no."

"Yes I am." He turned around sideways in the dark hallway. "By the way my name is Airman Rockwell." We started walking slower I guess for my purposes.

"Like the artist Norman Rockwell ah. Do you happen to know if he did any recruiting posters."

"No I don't, not really. Listen before I forget you'll be seeing doctor Johnston probably tomorrow."

"Is that the one with white hair."

"Yes, that's him."

"To bad. I mean that he's got white hair at his early age. Do you happen to know what he believes in. You know generally."

"You can talk to him about that. But I don't think its important."

"Well the reason I think it just might be important, is you undersand this insanity stuff is completely new to me. Coming as it did unsuspected and unscheduled. It's just possible I've been handed down the wrong diagnosis. And I have this hunch that the wrong diagnosis is worse than no diagnosis at all. And understand I don't want to sound like I even know what I'm talking about. I just wouldn't want to get the wrong treatment for the wrong purposes. You

understand?"

And we just kept talking more or less maybe, walking around the narrowly lit hallway, about mostly my concerned thinking. Airman Rockwell asked me if I thought the medication was helping me. I said, "absolutely." I didn't tell him I was dosing myself on my own schedule. I decided easily by instinct almost that I should let these people have a little bit at a time. In case they had a reason for me not to. I mean I'm personal, specially inside. Who isn't?

I got settled into my bunk maybe that night in the open ward. Which is what they called it. I guess they called it open because there were no keys except for the staff people. There are maybe nine or eight here, maybe more, but not less. Some guys are here in route from other hospitals. Most I've heard without talking are back from Vietnam. I got introduced to each one at a time. But I didn't say anything, except something modest like "hi" once or twice "hello." From the next to days on almost, closer to one and a half days it was just the routine of doing nothing. They probably, wanted to see how we did it. I haven't yet gotten to see any Doctor not that Johnston nobody. Whis is good, because its giving me a chance to decompartmentalize maybe my thinking. That might be a word, but it'll have to do. Plus it sounds right to me. We eat, some guys talk. One guy reads for some reason he keeps to himself. I've just stayed in my cloth cube for the privacy of my own reasons. We each have a bunk and the best part is you can swing this curtain thing around yourself to your own particular advantage. I'm next to a window, at the corner here. But I haven't much looked out of it. What's there to see without a reason. I'm not sleeping to well at all. But I've only had one shot at it. Three counting two unsuccessful naps. Nobody here seems to sleep. Except that staff when they get rotated away. I assume they sleep why else would they be here. Nobody seems insane here to me, even peculiar. Just mostly tired and somewhat sad to themselves. One guy here snored last night. Which everyone thought was evidence of him sleeping. But it turned out not to be the case. He said, he was just practicing. That got some kind of a almost happy relieved laugh. I think possibly because the contrast of somebody sleeping would make everyone even more tired. But I don't know that,

its just a possibility of a guess. They got me on more pills of different colors than before. Which means I'm not taking more than before. They just hadn't you these pills and they say nothing not even just take them. What do they think I'm stupid because I'm smart. And they think I'm in more trouble than I know. But now its time to sleep, they call it lights out really. I like getting under the covers. I still remember that feeling. I don't feel confident about sleeping though. Sleepings not easy enough when your not sure why how your going to wake up tomorrow. But I'm closing my eyes just now just out of force of habit. Plus with my eyes open in the dark I feel a little extra dead.

I just got back after breakfast which they let me go down to eat at this too fancy clean cafeteria. I didn't sleep last night, unless groggy counts in some way for sleep. I don't know anything much about sleeplessness. But I'm learning. After breakfast I went assigned to talk to that Doctor Johnston. He assured me to my considerable immediate relief that my family wouldn't be informed about my circumstances until I am ready to tell them myself. Of course that wasn't appealing in the least. But it bought me some time on the low scale of things. And here bargains are already rare, when they happen also they get very qualified. Doctor Johnston sure is one slow motion thinking kind of a guy. He talks in his office like his words are soap bubbles and he likes to watch them pop. With his fingers touching over his chest. And then a couple of slow pops pops popsops. Not that we talked alot of anything. He's inquistive in a surface way. Which I don't care much. Except for some of his decisions with other people he seems quite harmless. He did ask me if I wanted to stay in the military. I said, "sure." He seemed more than unnecessarily surprised while hiding his reaction. He asked finally, "why?" I said, "because I agreed to." That sat him up an inch. Then we changed the subject gracefully with his help. Perplexed is what he seemed. And I thought the suited him and actually it suited me as well. I asked in the available opportune silence that I would very much like to back to Vietnam to be with my friends for the very same reason. And get to know Sung Ho better to. And see if everybody was alright. He listened casually and intently both. Which is something to manage in one educated

lifetime experience. Even if its by the hour. He asked me instead of something of what I said and asked for, "how are you sleeping?" I said, "fine thank you." Which I already told you is a lie. But when you don't sleep for prolonged periods of not sleeping, I have learned, lieing can be very relaxing. Regrettable sure, yes very regrettable but relaxing none the less. But I figured personally to myself, that if since insanity is a lie initself, you know departed from reality, then could be I have some leeway from being spared from the truth. At my own discretions. Specially since I've been concentrating just a few times on self prolonging lies that suit me.

One other thing you learn about no sleeping is that when you yawn it takes you alot longer to fully complete a yawn. Specially the getting your mouth down from it. I don't know how very important it is to know that. But I guess if your awake unintentionally its good to learn something. And that's what the guy said, a nice Jewish person named Weinstein that stuck keenly in my mind, he said outloud like, "the only chance we have is to keep learning." Right away I knew for sure I'd heard something very, very important. Because I knew he wasn't talking about books and University and the other fansy like things, but life. Our lives as they were. Veterans who got self molested. Anyway enough of that for sure. I keep such insights to myself outright, because well because, I'm supposed to be able to be qualified to have them. Sometimes when things remembered come back to me in the night, even just sounds like burning I didn't even know I'd memorized, I just wrap my arms around myself. And wait...for whatever it is that's going to suppose to happen. I expect and guess its just my way of keping more extra company to myself. I doesn't help much always. But you never know and then wait. I just don't want to think and kind of feel about these things. Because there hard to do so. If this is all part of God's plan I wish he had given me a smaller part. Like maybe dishwasher is heaven. Something anyway less opportune here than being a soldier unwanted or otherwise. But I'm not complaining here intently you understand. In my own soldiering way I've been very lucky. And I bet I don't know the bottom least of it yet. And sure maybe perhaps almost there's hope of someking. You wait long enough, old

age if nothing else. Could be even perhaps something just as good. So anyways again. I've been here an extra one and a quarter days. And like I told you after the first day and one full night or so, they let me go to the cafeteria unescorted, unescorted except by myself. Everything was plush I didn't tell you enough. You know, even cloth napkins, with that all new smell of an odor of everything new and abounding. I sat down quietly around myself with scrambled eggs and other things. Then in the first mouthful not yet complete, I looked up. And saw like a mid evil shield carved out of varnish. A hand of metal armor, holding bolts of busy shinny lightening. Underneath it said. Strategic Air Command...Peace is our Profession. I looked over my shoulder swallowing and said, loud enough for me to hear, "Peace on your profession." That unsettled beyond disrepair, that's why I said it. Impolite like, even quietly unfriendly. But by the time I finished off the last word. I finished myself off sad. I just didn't know what to think. And feeling was getting harder and harder sometimes by the minute. Where do you go passed being given up and nowhere more than being lost. And still stay somewhat living. And lost, not just lost, but having been somewhere before-like with a family. I-

"Chuck." I looked up immediately to get ahead of the problem. "Doctor Johnston wants to see you as."

I said, "Sure o.k." Instead of what I was thinking, not again. I didn't see enough of who he was to know who he was these. These staff people sound the same and they dress them up to look like each other. In these places they should let you bring a friend. Just for a little contrast. But they seem to know you. Believe me that's one of the biggest problems here. These people seem to think they know you before you've introduced yourself on purpose. They give themselves much to disease and stuff purifying like that. Why not opportunities. I guess I don't know why not either, since I'm not one of them. I'm walking now lieiurely and tired toward the Doctor Johnsons office. Oh yeah sure, I have to tell you about Henre, Henre Trouasant from these Barbados Islands. He's also an Airman first, not even an American and he to ended up in Vietnam with less choice even than the rest of us. But I'm already about to be knocking on

Johnstons door. I knocked twice inspite of the fact that the door was open.

"Come in."

I sat myself down in the only other chair and dropped my hands on my lap.

He looked up from the small office without looking at me. "There's some paper I need you to sign Chuck. Do you know where Sergeant Desmonds office is?"

"Yes Doctor sure I do. But if I may first I'd like to ask you a brief question." He looked up again from his notes and smiled stretching his shoulders just a bit. "Sure what is it?" I've learned they like the word brief, because they themselves are brief people. Very brief people maybe. I don't know enough yet.

"Thanks well its simply and briefly like this, at that Tan Son NHut place that Doctor Johnson somehow concluded that I had personality disorder. And he-" "You don't have a personality disorder. Probably just an error in paper work or something. Don't worry about it, the nature of your problem is different." "I'll be damned and then some. Because you know I could figure out the disorder part of it. And well, I expect its now irrelevant mostly."

He raised his eyebrows both one more than the other and raised his smile getting up from his desk with an easy push of one hand. "No I'm not aware that there's anything in your records about such a diagnosis. Not the ones we've received to date. And no in my opinion, you do not have a personality disorder."

"Well that's better than good as far as I'm concerned. Now I don't have to ask you what it means."

He had gotten already to the door while I was talking. Which means its time for me to leave of course who else. I got up slowly, even though I felt a little bit less weighted down. I smiled and nodded walking passed the doctor. But probably not in that door. Son of a generous bitch. Here I was and am walking around trying to figure out a disorder that was never mine. Sure of course, I never had a personality disorder. Because now that I really don't have one, I shrugged my shoulders about to knock at Sergeant Desmonds door, I don't seem to feel that I miss it. How could it of been there in the first place. So whose disorder did they give me. What now they've got someone walking around with the

wrong convoluted diagnosis that got sequestered to me mistakenly. I finally knocked. This sergeant guy is very tall. And he's also a Chief Master sergeant I think. The highest you can go in the Air Force on purpose. Really tall, his name tag reaches my nose I didn't know they allowed them to be that tall in the Air Force. Maybe he grew after he signed up. I knocked again, he's nice somehow this ones nice. He waved me in. And got up the way you might expect an oak tree to.

"Sit down please Winters. I have a document I want you to read and sign."

"Sure sergeant." I sat down a school desk with a document on it. I don't like documents. But I gave myself to read it. I stopped without showing that I stopped. I had a strange thought. Really more a desire than a thought. I wanted a cigarette. Just like that a cigarette, never smoked one before, never close to wanted one. And now just a desire before being suspicious of the idea. I went back to reading being a little bit cautious about my perplexity. I stopped being cautious to being alarmed after just the forth sentence again. This doesn't read pleasantly at all. And I don't even understand it. I felt like stopping at the end of the next period and looking both ways before I continued. Like my friend Sandy from somewhere said, because that's why she said I read so slowly. But you can't read this slowly and not die by the end unceremoniously. "Life long borderline adjustment, definite imparement for social and industrial use." Jesus, blocked off no less. No it says adaptation not use. What's the difference. How can they life long borderline me about anything, if...if I have no idea what my life long is going to be all about. Give me a fucking break. And please do it in a private way away from all yourselves. This had to be started in Germanys unfinished Third Reich. First I get impaired without knowing it, even rehearsing for it. I get diagnosed under my duressed absence. Then now, they want to impair my future. Isn't this a little bit to generous for these stranger healing people. I'm lucky I don't have an agreeable identical twin like me, they'd start looking for him. Looking for him just to spare themselves the initial paper work. I felt like swearing the most swear words I knew loud under my breath. Wait...just this now I counted twenty three,

twenty five words I didn't know existed.

"Sergeant?" I looked up in my exasperation which was about all that was left of me.

"Yes Winters?"

"I don't understand most of any of these words whats the-"

"Your not reading it to understand it. Your only signing it to prove you read it." He stopped tapping his pencil with the last word. Which wasn't soon enough last for me.

"Oh..." I said. Except the sound felt like it came out both backwards and forwards at the same time. I looked down at the paper for more. What more could their be if you already used up worst. Why should I read about what I don't understand to sign with a name I forgot, what a week ago. Should I put a question mark after that. What do they want me to do confirm their knowledge of my ignorance shared. I read it again. It got worse. Now they've got me on a third diagnosis, I'm an undifferentiated schizophrenic. What's that mean exactly, that I don't care I'm a this schizophrenic thing. Or somehow what. That it doesn't make any difference in the least or what? How can I go from being a disassociative whatever, then a misplaced misappropriated personality not ordered, to this now, without my being part of the transition that I noticed in the least. Why don't they just embalm me and tell me if I had a good all around circulating time. I would settled just for trouble in the intersection. Jesus, that's what that was. That nice airline stewardess Elanine. That flying silver paper, her chewing gum wrapper got left in Vietnam. Didn't get to my old age. Two of these diagnosis in what less than five days. No much less than five days because I spent a whole almost part of one day in their closet without a bathroom. Missappropriating my urination all over the place. I don't know even what schizohrenia means, except that its not appreciated much in Hollywood. That Bates guy in the motel, he was a schizophrenic with the obliging mother upstairs. In his mind the way they were. No this is slander of the up most human tradition. I'm not a schizophrenic I refuse. I just don't have the time for it. And those that go with it. Jesus and God I'm not even a republican anymore.

They give me decorations against my will, at least not by the request of my encouragement. Now they give me this ultra thing. I got to Vietnam with barely no resistance and several offered out, now this in my complete absences. So complete it doesn't even qualify for going behind my back. And I'm sure these diagnosis go around with the same after taste as rumors. Before you know it your in a nice neighborhood minding what's left of your own business and what? You meet some nimble walking stranger and he says, "Aren't you the schizophrenic that's trying to live at the end of the block." No handshakes I'm sure. Unless he's carrying the recently released antidote. I'm doomed worse than almost that's a maybe to. Probably the only good thing about this, is that I'll be turned away and excused from hell if I'm appropriated that far. Enough is too much enough already. If I hadn't had my drivers license I.D. in that intersection, right now still I'd probably be happily lost in Saigon. Maybe starting an near efficient shoe shine factory for beggars. Of which I would be one, except for my irregular capitalist tendencies. Which are easily dicardable till something better. No, and no I would be insane crazy. I'd temporarily poor. Temporarily poor enough to give me time to catch up to my recovery. Poor people, real poor people don't go insane. They can't afford it looking for food amongst our garbage. To them insane is just another word for selfish. Let me tell you its a good thing I don't have a temper that resembles me like my fathers. What I should do is relax, get secretive about myself and organized with other Vietnam tired veterans. Get colorful and smart will all our various trainings, and go around freezing bureaucrats with or without their volunteered cooperation. A thousand veterans working a hundred years, sure freeze them like dinasours, some you know got frozen preserved. Even with smiles on their teeth and defrost them when their more useful in their uselessness. Start with that Fashions and that Johnston. No in alphabetical order. So we know who to defrost first. And nobody with children. And nobody married to a woman or the other way around if their a woman already. None of them that can show quick signs of mending their ways. And no pretty or ugly men or women with nice mothers. In ten thousand years all wed need is one icecube. Even if we froze half of them,

all they do is procreate more of them. No it wouldn't work. I'll leave them to their absolutions. I wish certainly just they'd leave me to mine. My deaf and blind and partially mute fantasy of sorts had also the possibilities of being tasteless. But what else is left but absurd and tasteless. And me I'm just getting to know the depths of my limits. I keep this up I'll be diagnosing myself and then where will I be. I'll have nobody to compare myself to.

"Winters, Airman."

"Sure what. I mean yeah."

"Didn't you hear me calling your name?"

"I'm sorry sergeant Desmond I must of been busy. I just have to go about singing it right?" He looked at me like he was looking at me. So I signed it. What's the difference its my name not theres. "Anything else for whatever reason sergeant." "No thank you Winters." I got up slowly. I felt slightly drawn and quartered. I sure could use some sleep. If I could find a bed that would have me.

I walked down the hallway intentionally slowly. I see no point in getting anywhere before me being ready enough. I wish my pajamas had back pockets. So I could do something with my hands than just let them tag along. Nice of them though now that I think of it, them later today letting me walk around in my civies. And under my own demoliton to, no supervision. Maybe hey, I can do something with Henre. Relax wander around, away from being understood. I'm not going to worry about them. I'll get self diagnosed trying to figure them out. If they don't have a diagnosis for your severe unhappiness problems are you metally diseased then or what. Probably say come back in a week your early. I've got to spend more time talking to the other guys like Henre. Guys like me misplaced. Jesus I can be slow when I apply myself. All this time and I haven't yet uncovered the hallway. I think I'll hurry back and start over again. You know all these years I never encountered on extra credit psychiatric symptom that got maybe unconscious onto itself. That anxiety stuff with Doctor Stamm that was understandable. I was anxious that's all. Anxious is quite popular, even amongst happy people that share themselves well. But that one severe psychiatric

possible symptom I resolved to my satisfaction and in my favor. I had this reoccurring meandering thought from way back when was not a full sentence kind of a kid. I had already heard from a scientific kid in Mexico about the rope umbilical cord. I hadn't been aware that I came attached, just encumbered I thought. So I became somewhat unduly perplexed about that umbilical cord. From the beginning to the end, I wondered whose was it mine or my mothers. Which end did get severed first. And who got through with it first my Mom or me? How much authority did the cord give me. Not much I'm sure because of the limited vocabulary of the baby. By the way everyones excited about abortion. The other day awake in bed I figured out my position on it, to my nice convenient satisfaction. I favor abortion for women but not for babies. Yeah so, that was the only potential unconscious psychiatric symptom I could come up with awake in bed. How did I resolve it. I don't remember exactly all the details. Origin questions are hard for me. I decided quietly to myself that it was my Mom's in the first place because she started it. But thank God I'm not still a baby. I slowed down some more to stop. I'm not going to tell that Doctor anybody about that umbilical cord I got assigned to. They'll add derranged origins to my diagnosis. These words they use, like bathroom flushings in a bad storm. I guess if they sounded nice poetic like everyone would want one for their barmitsoff or one of those debutant virginity offerings. No I'm beyond very repulsed by my awareness here. Recriminated is more like what I feel. It would help to know what that word meant. It sounds right is what it does. I sneezed hard for some reason that was beyond me. Felt good though, as much fun as I've had since I left America. Instead of being entirely a private investigator like Senor Fabe, my office door would read, "Recriminations made to order." Then in gold plated printings, "Chuck Winters U.S. I wouldn't tell anybody that stood for undifferentiated schizophrenic. If I got pressed in some uncommon ways at a cocktail party I'd say it stands for, undignified and suspicious. Sure private investigator would be good for me under the circumstances of my perdicament. If the bad guys got to close to me with the intent of embarrassing me severly me or even harming me, I'd go into the hospital under my cover of insanity. I'd lose

weight by putting it. On me throw out my mustache and come out new and improved for more action. And for sure no one would suspect me of going around and collecting sophisticated clues about guys even the Air Force appearance in my office. No that's enough for now, I'm not going to deal more with my life at this very moment. I've got more important things to do around myself maybe.

I went back to walking finally in a hurry with a great idea. To relax and maybe have a non alcoholics beer with Henre Trouasant. Yeah, my best ideas, even the trivial kind are more the immediate surfacing kind that surface by spark. Inspired ideas you might say I'm good at, as opposed to the more plan for convoluted ones. I picked up my pace more. Yeah relax and recreate myself and maybe learn something if I'm lucky. You'll love Henre. Henre is my age, except that he's maybe two years older. From Barbadoes, with two sisters, wife and a mother and father each-Henre has. Henre is black. I'm telling that in case you are prejudiced or partially bigoted. I think you might remedy yourself knowing Henre. Anyway I hope so. Henre came to this country to study to be a doctor, which is what he wanted to do all his life since he could think about it on purpose. And according to the available and selfish laws of this country, Henre had to make himself available to be killed in Vietnam. And he was. Drafted I mean. In Vietnam he was a medic. A medic like other medics who had to, in a battle like, with eight, nine wounded and dieing. Henre had to decide when the helicopter came only being able to take six, which two had to stay behind and watch him die with them. God wouldn't make that decision. Because for that matter, because he already has. It shouldn't be done. But Henre did it, even though it wasn't his country. I guess it was the doctor in him, coming forth. I don't know really, it just got too much for Henre when it was too much already before. So Henre and I have become absolute friends. Part of Henre's problem is that he can't talk even when he wants to exactly. He stutters real bad real bad remembering. I heard one doctor say Henre might have brain damage. But I don't see it myself. Might be it was just the doctor bragging. All I know for absolutely sure is that Henre is a nice generously by instinct nice guy. No question, no answers about it. We don't mostly talk alot, some but not in excess

enough for alot. We do mostly things like shake hands and smile. Sometimes we talk, but like I said not alot, no parades about it. Henre is got easily the best handshake I've had in the military. Yes no questions about it, the best. Actually its the only one. Well anyway, this last breakfast with Henre and me sitting privately together Henre showed me a letter. A letter he wrote his wife. Passed the third sentence, I knew Henre loved his wife alot more than...I don't know. But passed the third sentence it got thourghly sad and unexpected. The letter almost got heavier in my fingers. Henre was going to divorce his wife, because he no longer felt himself to be the man. Suttering the way he did. I didn't know at all what to say. Henre said to his still loving family he was of no use to them anymore. Just like that one side of one paper, one side of another thats all. I handed it back to Henre without looking at him. He took it back also without looking at me. We ate not talking. I ate real slowly trying to relax my sad feelings away. I'm just not good at giving influential advice to anyone, specially on short notice when I'm unexpected. I don't mind intruding on myself that's natural, but I don't much at all like intruding on others. Specially while they are busy intruding on themselves, or intruding on people on leary of carefully-those I'm most tentaive cautious about.

"Henre?" I felt a rally around myself coming up.

Henre looked at me from four bunks away. I slowed as to not approach him with too much momentum. "Excuse me Henre for announcing myself maybe prematurely from too much of a distance.

Henre's" smile," near almost a downward smile that didn't make it anywhere.

"Henre I've got what is potentially a near great idea." I continued right on as to not expect Henre to stutter "what." "And my idea Henre is that we, you and I, go to the Airmans club. For each others company away from here and a non alcholics beer." Henre is trying to get a smile up to say something. "So how about it Henre you and me at the airman's club?"

"Sh sh ure oh o.k."

"Sure o.k. well that's o.k. enough for me. You lead o.k. Henre because you've got the sense of direction we need to get there." Henre got immediatley

started after nodding at me, got started with his pants and boots. This is great, I thought, this is like liberation with no warranty necessary. I forgot standing there that I had to dress to. I hustled myself on foot to my bunk area.

I came back successfully and efficiently dressed. "I'm back again Henre." Henre got up from his bed after tying his combat boot. He put his arm over my shoulder and we were out of there.

Outside I got reminded again it was winter. But still the cold seemed agreeable to me. After that Vietnam I'd much rather freeze to death than die on fire slowly. I'm walking here next to Henre listening to each others quiet. Watching around the sky. From my understanding of the directions to the airmans club we shouldn't be far away. Since Henre took the directions and I just heard by staying out of the way.

"There it is right Henre?" Henre nodded just underneath my pointing finger. He smiled finally upwards. "It's good getting away ah Henre, from those helping people."

He smiled pretty o.k. And nodded.

"That's the least derailed quiet you've come up with yet Henre." We both of us slowed down approaching the airmans club. Then we sped up from our hesitating and walked right in under the blue canopy. Were both walking looking around for what I don't know what, I mean the place is empty except for us. Henre is still looking. Finally we got ourselves to sit down. Funny to be looking at emptiness several times.

"Henre if it agrees with your preference I'll go get a pitcher thing of beer."

"Ye o...k." Henre finished up his sentence with a strong half nod, that had hardly no motion in it at all. Implied motion is what it is.

I came back in a hurry without any trouble getting the beer. No trouble at all. The bar lady just took the money and she was satisfied. I poured Henre a glass first out of courtesy and respect. Then I poured myself for some of the same reasons. I sat down with my elbows between my mug. Henre is looking just like straight ahead. Straight as a laser beam with no tomorrow, if there is

most like for the dead people of ourselves, why shouldn't there be for the living.

"Henre?"

Henre raised his eyebrows over my head. And half smiled almost.

"Nothing Henre." I looked away. "Wait a minute Henre it is something. Something that just came back to me from before. But nothing on the thought I just had a moment ago. What I'm saying about the more agreeable thought is that right now I'd like to be back in high school introducing you to all my unavailable friends. They'd like you to their benefit. The other thought I had is that I wouldn't want to introduce you to my high school friends like I just said I would. I'm glad I changed my mind. Too bad were the only ones here."

Henre tossed his head back laughing, like time and a half for over time laughing. I joined in first with a chuckle. Then some more, I missed my laughing opportunities. Henre looked at me and shook his head from no to no. With considerable ease but slowly. Then Henre tightened his lips almost beyond no line. Like he was trying to express a thought he wished he didn't have. I folded my arms and sighed.

"Henre by the way, were stuck with the beer that's got the stuff in it. You know the alcohol stuff. So take it easy on yourself, inspite of what your thinking." Henre smiled and blew some laughter out of his nose. I poured myself another half of beer, a little less. I did it more carefully. I have a hunch I'm not as good with pills as I used to be. And then I used to be only fairly good after the fact.

My eyes opened up unnecessarily. "Henre I just got a thought from nowhere." I took a modest gulp of beer. Henre opened one eye in my direction, raised an eyebrow up high. By then I'd already fast swallowed my gulp. I put my beer down and said one of those "Ahs," that are popular amongst beer drinking people. Henre laughed a merry laugh. Which just added to my about to be impending thought. Could be almost a theory, because it was getting better in my silence. I laughed a little myself with the help of the permeating beer. And mellowed off into a near hideway smile. "Henre its like this, my thought that is, that I've already cautioned you about to listen carefully." I raised the mug to my lips.

Henre took a big swallow. I decided to settle for just a sniff." It's like this Henre, ah, your laugh I've just already heard twice I think has alot of potential. Could be maybe more than alot." Henre is listening to me intently, his lips and eyes relaxed. "And understand Henre this, this is only the first run on a possible theory with potential that is already a thought for sure." Henre I'm collecting my thoughts, because I just had another one. O.K., its like this. And I'm going to say it carefully, so that I don't compromise the thought with a bad inept delivery. It's that good. And I feel it getting better just as I sit here." I raised my own mug to my lips and took a taste. I squirmed in my seat and straightened out my back to gain some available extra momentum. I took a quick sip in case I got thirsty while already explaining myself.

"Cacam Com on Chug." Henre put his mug down.

"Sorry Henre, sorry." I cleared my throat of left over suds. "It's very simply like this. You remember when you laughed several times this recently past." Henre nodded. "Henre listen as exactly as you can. Because this might even have the potential of saving your marriage. "When you laughed by several degrees less than five minutes ago. You didn't sutter maybe. It's that simple you didn't stutter." Henre laughed again, again through his notrils. Not quite the nose laugh from before. But I felt my momentum coming. "No stutter no nothing of a stutter, for sure-right?" Henre looked whimsical but agreed with a shrug of his shoulders. "Anyway...." I'm right now concentrating for my concetration. "Again please understand Henre this is only the first premature run of this idea, which I've already told you, that its only the first run. So don't get your hopes more high that from where you can retrieve them from." Henre laughed almost of Santa Claus proportions. I got a little nervous beyond myself. "Please Henre I'm trying to be concentrated with a good idea. I'm being serious, so please try to regulate yourself some." Henre laughed again but more to his own available self. I put my hand on Henre's shoulder. "You know that's the problem with talking to someone there's always somebody listening." I inhaled for breathings sake. "Look Henre I'm going to go ahead and finish up my thought. I'm feeling a little overly preambeled. And almost finished to boot.

Finally as an unnecessary qualification you know I'm not anywhere near or far a doctor. But that might be the very asset of this idea." I sipped a harty sip of my beer. Already feeling somewhat circumvented. This might be some of that powerful beer I've heard talked about. "I'm ready Henre." Henre is going to say something. No he changed his mind, giving up on his lips in motion. "Fact is again, you laughed in an unstuttered way. "So its easy like this." "I moved my hands up and out like in a water sprinkler. "In one very brief sentence Henre what you shoul consider doing is getting funny about your life." Henre smiled his lower lip while letting out a giggle that sounded like an ironic burglar alarm system. I raised my voice so I to could hear my voice somewhat more clearly. "You start with funny non funny things like slapstick, maybe slapstick with protective head hear on for perspectives sake. The spontaneous when you feel fully expressed with the slapstick, at no warning to yourself you go off with easy one liners. Even just one word one liners. Poignant words, of one word that maybe you only know the true meaning of. And then at an opportune moment when you might feel unduely pertinent. You let off with a funny prayer. That God might understand and be amused by." Henre shook his head to either side with less potential laughter all around him. "Well Henre I'm talking about prayers with minimum consequences potential. Then you see you go off and get into your more serene prayers that no one understands. Except you sometimes and always God. "Henre raised his mug to his open smiling lips. He put his mug down still smiling and almost unrehearsed we both started to get up. With me getting up first with the less distance to climb. I shrugged my shoulders into a question. "Well Henre what do you think. Its got at least some negotiable potential, right?" Henre shrugged his eyebrows and gave me a smile that if I've seen before it wasn't in this lifetime. Henre started out passed the half full empty keg of beer. "Wait for me Henre?" I put my mug down. I hurried to catch up to Henre's company. Now good were shoulder to shoulder almost.

Outside its cooler than cold. Snow is falling easily by itself. Like hesitating tear drops I allowed myself to think. God Henre is a proud guy, just look at him. He put his hands in his front pockets. And I put mine in my back

pockets to stay ahead of the cold. We kept walking slowly, quietly amongst ourselves. "You o.k. Henre?" I asked finally after thinking it twice."

"Yeah...."

"Good Henre thanks." The snow started to come down more briskly with no reason that I cared to think about. Enough to me that it was. I wish it could snow for the guys in Vietnam. The Vietcong to, that would please them unnecessarily a little. I wish I could walk backwards forever to catch up to my past. I thought watching a snow flake fall down Henre's cheek. And melt and then run. I guess I expect you have to accept what you are. Somethings will be the same inspite of good taste and all those common senses designed to keep people transported through society. Henre stopped. I looked up from my shoes. Just right up fifty feet, the American flag is being lowered to spare it from the snow. I think that's the law. Taps started playing the way it always does. Henre took his hands out of his pockets and looked straight up at the lowering flag. Taps is still playing sader than more sad. Taps played on. I took my fist and placed it over my heart like in Mexico when I was only a kid wanting to grow up. Three soldiers took the windy flag into their arms. And started dolding it. The flag moving and moving in the wind like it's trying to get away. Hands chasing it in the snow flaked sky. Finally the soldiers trapped it. And started to fold it tenderly, two of them with only one eye. The soldiers turned around and away and marched it seemed for ever on, into the snowing darkness.

"Henre there'll always be wars won't there."

Henre looked down at me, his cheeks hard with snow.

"Won't there Henre, the killing for life."

"Yeah, Chug...Yea Yeah." Henre now looked at me for the longest time. Still looking now sadder than angry. And we just moved on. Henre said something, I couldn't finish hearing. Could be it is maybe just for himself. We went back into our pockets and kept walking on. The snow was more in all directions. Strange to, a little bit, because there is no wind that I now of. In my minds feeling I can still hear that taps playing. Thinking some too much of President Kennedy getting killed that way. And not even by his own enemies.

I really don't understand, how can I. I looked up to Henre. The snow got harder and more as we got closer to where we were being held.

Henre and I both made it to our bunks unmolested by helpful people. There were already six guys in bed not sleeping. I first stopped at the nurses station not to take my meds. The nurse said she was pleased, "I'm making progress." I said, "Thanks." And hurried up to catch up to Henre. I could still feel somewhere, getting into bed, forgetting. I retrieved one combat boot and balanced it easy against the swinging curtain. So's I could hear anyone tampering to get in. The last day and a little plus I've heard things of corruption. I can now hear some of the guys talking their whisperings about it. These professional people are crazy they think we can't figure out there antics at our expense. The only difference is that they share it and we keep it to ourselves. But I don't want to talk about it. Enough is to damn much, when it was enough before they got started with their corruptions. I mean, what I'm saying is that you can't have an enemy without being one. Really, where exactly does a freeman go to be free. I closed my eyes gently and quietly, thinking I could remember about sleeping and remember up a dream. I sat up in half. With an idea outright. And on purpose idea. Nearby the nurses station earlier. One of the guys asked the nurse. "If guy who went insane got the purple heart?" I got busy in my reaction. I didn't hear the nurse, what she said. First I got surprised the guy who asked hadn't caught up to the idea that we weren't redemable. The fact of a purple heart for a tired and demented soldier, is very unlikely. You just don't encourage insanity. Specially when its appropriate. But I must of started getting this idea while showering myself. Now. It's here abrupt and blatant. The thought a plan to write President Johnson a letter. And tell him right off how we gave our minds for our country. I felt a little mockery about myself. Miss Brown my english at Brien McMahan might call it satire. But then I got serious back in the dark. I'll say like a purple heart wouldn't be good at all. Because of tradition and problems of association. I'll mention us veterans here are getting alot of life long borderline action, that he might look into if he's spared the time. Anyway then I'll say, outright how

about a purple brain. I can even see it now with my eyes closed. A grayish brain like they are. With slight of a little blue. Some red, not dark red, for ambiguities sake. Flowing blue and easy red you might say. Not red something like magenta. Whatever color that is. Next to the brain no underneath. A soldier leaning bent onto himself, sitting like. His knees against his chest. I like it, its getting better. His helmet down half way over his eyes. The ribbon part I don't care about. No wait a minute a string not a ribbon. Like in the tradition of hanging on by a thread. I smiled and opened my eyes too suddenly. I felt nauseated and disrespectful of myself. Sad with the other guys. I crumpled up the letter hard. And threw it in the waste paper basket. Even though I hadn't written it yet. I felt better in my illusion of it all. The waste paper basket part of it anyway. You can't encourage people to kill each other. Kill while dieing in the process. There's been too much of that uncontested already. I wish I were older. Maybe I'd have more of a pattern to myself I hope. I don't know maybe I'll sleep tonight for the effort. Enough anyway to wake up.

It's another day, not yet almost though. No of course I didn't sleep. But at least now I'm not enough surprised about it to care about not being surprised. It doesn't now so much feel like another day, but another location more like. The birds just started chirping. Thank God, somebody still makes sense. One guy, a marine being transfered came in yesterday plus a little more. He slept yesterday and going to the bathroom tonight he was asleep. Could be maybe because he sleeps on the floor. I might try that for the chance of it. Right this very right now I'm sitting outside the nurses office. Just reclining myself backwards on a chair. I learned that's the best place to be avoided by them. Right where they are. It is starting to help me to dislike something even just a little bit more than myself. And its not that I really dislike something even just a little bit more than myself. And its not that I really dislike these nurses and doctors. Its more that there not really people. There people behind a job, with the job coming in a very eager first. Strange if you want to think about it. But actually now that I think of its some more very popular. No I'm

not complaining, not with any intended consequences. I also did write the guys about my apologies for abandoning them. Maybe and that one to. Also though I decided not to get pressing anymore about my going back to Vietnam. Maybe to me it doesn't make sense the killing at the very expense of dieing. I'm not a pacifist or anything fancy like that. I don't need a reason not to kill anybody. If some busy person asks me why I won't kill anybody like in Vietnam, I'll say because its impolite all. And to me that's all is enough. Yeah and also I've written my family. Several times over each sentence. And then several times over each paragraph. But I didn't mail anything, not even my intentions to mail anything I didn't get to yet. The other night I heard this nice jewish soldier named Weinstein, that "the only choice we have is to learn." I told you right, well I got impressed over it that's all. And boy did that hit me like a spark. Because I knew he didn't mean anything like a book. I felt close to, no I did, enlightened by such a nice overhearing. Oh yeah right I did already told you all that. Well it bear alot of repeating.

O.K. sure and why not. I'm meaning now about the corruption going on here by these professional people. Professional people sharing their bad insanity. And I'll bet you all of my unwanted for medals that not one of them takes his just equal share. You know what I heard more last night. Added to what I heard almost the day before. Were all here undifferentiated schizophrenics. We all signed that document none of us got to understand. Sure it gets worse absolutely of course. Why stop at a little poison when a little is enough. The doctor staff people decided that we've all "Got pre existing conditions." I should say had before we got into the military to go to war. And because of that we aren't entitled to severance pay or priority medical, even educational benefits. Give me a fucking break. And do it now o.k. And why does it go one even after you've stopped vomiting yourself empty. Empty when there is nothing there to feel in the first place. These officer people also say that if our conditions, even if we got here preexisting into the military, if our conditions were agravated in Vietnam we could have some benefits. But none of us got agravated that say. They also said, if we signed again and agreed we could leave this Air Force

hospital in three days. Otherwise the colonels in Texas would get our complaint file and review it. We'd stay locked up until they got over with out time. Funny isn't enough lies and you find yourself right in front of a busy cash register. A cash register going the other way. And me and one of the other guys, that Kentucky guy, we got top secret clearances. Those osi peopel of the air force sent agent to talk to girls I dated in high school. Even one I didn't kiss, she wrote me. They talked to all my neighbors from always. Even they went to talk to my families grocer at the Westport Food Center. I tell you if it weren't for life, I don't know what I'd be doing. But its something to think about that's for sure. Last night hearing some of all this I felt like screaming a prayer. But they would of stopped me with a shot. I tell you God gave us a brain. And it wasn't so that we could add a mind to it. It's no surprise to me at all that there are more cemetaries in our America than suicide prevention clinics. There cheaper to get in that's all. People dieing to get some relief and easiness. Then out of nowhere except my thinking. "Chuck your first group, its right now." I looked up at the towering nurse and smiled. Why not. Why not just smile and get it over with. I laughed muffled like. I like that thought. I might just use it again. I hope this group is polite and rational. It's my first group, they don't let you into this group therapy thing until they think your ready. Strange to me they say we were all ready before we got taken by the military.

"Excuse me." I almost got partially tripped over someones foot. Only one empty seat it must be mine. Possibly I must be late. There's that been waiting too long all over feeling, "It looks like were all here." She's a black major talking. Have I seen her around before. They all look alike. Major's I mean. She the Major is quite plump. Surprising because in the Air Force they dicourage fat strenously. She's spacious fat to, you know looking comfortable. Looking like if you jumped on her you could fall asleep for forty five years. I stopped looking. It is rude looking at the impediments people bring with them. Plus watching her, is making me sleepy.

"Gentlemen?" The Major clapped her hands, more of a loud rub than a clap.

She raised her eyes thinking, so that you couldn't see them. Waiting for her results, I noticed a painting. "My name is Major Stamps." She smiled a nice halloween pumpkin smile. "I'd like all of you to go around and introduce yourselves." I'm still looking at the painting. "Tell us something of what brought you here. And just a little but about yourself." Painting maybe in colors with an all around wood frame. A gallon like in pirate days garbage. About to be hit by this gigantic boulder rock. Crashing waves. And crashing more waves and more. I can't see if there are any men on board. I squinted to look better. Maybe some got off safely, starting families off shore. God, I hope it got painted from memory. Be a shame dieing like that, just before getting one last soaking glimmer of life. I got back to the group concentrating the other way. I wonder what they did for psychiatrist in those by gone days probably laughed lots and lots.

"Your name?" I felt a voice flat against the side of my face. I turned more in that direction. Feeling a little tired after the shipwreck. She's looking at me on the borderline consternation of herself. The Major is, I mean.

"Oh you must mean me. Sure my name is Chuck Winters thanks." I don't know why I said neccessarily thanks, a name around here doesn't seem to be enough. Another guy is looking at the shipwreck.

"I'm sorry Major what did you say."

"I said thank you Airman Winters. And please Airman try to pay attention o.k.?" She kept right on talking. No ones is looking at the major, eyes everywhere. And really nowhere. "Do you understand? Now Airman Jones will please tell us what brought you to Malcolm Grow Air Force Hospital." The Major talked while looking at her folders. Folders on her lap maybe. Still looking. "Yes apparently Airman Jones has already been discharged. I hope his discharge plans go well for him of course?" She coughed to hurry herself getting organized. Almost everyone had switched their lean to another near opposite leaning condition. One guy with his elbows on his knees bent over watching the floor. "Airman Murcier, yes there you are, could you please tell us why your here?"

"Yeah right...Why I'm...here." He looked at his hands then the other one.
"I don't know why I'm...here?"

"well Airman what did you do that concerned those around you?"

"I'm not Air Force I'm army?" He looked at the Major for the first time.

"Yes of course army, I apologize. Could you tell the group please."

He looked up at the ceiling, with his clasped hands between his knees. And stretched his back. He smiled like I never saw anyone do before. Jesus...The Major is waiting. And not well either. She raised on hip, then the other one again. And coughed like a slow typewriter. "Yes well I see. We do expect you to cooperate Private Murcier o.k. Until then I will give the group a brief synopsis of what we have here." The Major straightened her shoulders against the back of the chair. And saddled herself on the chair again. "Three weeks ago Private Murcier broke ranks with his platoon on a search and destroy mission. He was located two days later playing with children in a VC suspect Village. That's right VC suspect village. It says here right? She looks up without, any of his weapons or military gear. Would you like to comment or add to that Private Murcier." The private moved his head slowly to her and smiled sadly for someone else. I think maybe. Maybe or sort of. I don't really know.

"That's fine private we will wait. Now Sergeant Twain will you be kind enough to tell us why your here?" The very handsome sergeant she's looking at hasn't said anything. I looked back at the shipwreck for one last time. Sergeant Twain still hasn't said anything. Still looking at the Major like a blank except for his soft lips and soft eyes. He's even going to say less. "O.k. Fine, we have all the time in the world don't we. I will offer the rest of you another overview of Sergeant Twains file. My God, she belched. Several guys chests went up with a laugh. She whispered to herself I guess, "Excuse me?" The Major is reading. With her finger between her lips. She's looking up to Sergeant Twain. One month ago while on R and R from Da Nang Air Force base to Hawaii, Sergeant Twain found out by telegram that his wife had decided against joining him. Mrs. Twain had become involved with another man. Apparently her next door neighbor. He proceeded to go upstairs to his room." The Major paused

looking uncomfortable. "And hung himself from a bathroom shower support. Six hours later a staff cleaning lady found him unconscious on the bathroom floor. Fortunately the shower support had collapsed." Nobody moved except the Major looking around for support I guess. Jesus what's the point here. Nobody is doing any talking. "Sergeant Twain was trasfered here three weeks ago. And has refuses to cooperate with the treatment plan." The Major inhaled and exhaled deeply.

"Sergeant you have to take it more easily. Pace yourself more for just the one day. With so many people willing to kill you why add yourself to the list. I mean sergeant if you commit suicide don't you know your going to die?"

"Airman didn't you hear me. It's the Major looking at me with all of herself.

"I'm sorry Major. I heard something. I got worried that's all. And I guess I didn't think it was pertinent somehow." The Major looked at me then away. But not first making a good surrvelliance of me with one going away eye. Jesus these people, if you can't give us a break. At least give us a head start.

"Airman Winters?" She looked around then to me. "Your Airman Winters?"

"Yes that's right I am."

"Tell us please what brought you here?"

"I just forget my name Major, that's all?"

"And..." She swiveled her shoulders a bit.

"That's all no ands really. I just forgot my name that's all."

Looking encouraged the Major added. "Do you have any idea why that happened?"

"Vietnam was to noisy for me I think. The killing noises?" There's laughter, I looked up. I don't think they heard me entirely. Not funny laughter though. I took a peripheral look at the Major. She's calm somehow. The laughter subsided to the previous absense. I think.

"Were now going to hear from Sergeant Easterday." She stopped herself, about maybe to change her mind. "No go ahead sergeant please?"

"Well I don't really know where to begin." This sergeant is very old like

thirty five at least. Skinny with no smile but a slow busy grin. I didn't know a soldier could get that old in the military. I thought its at least discouraged if not allowed. Sergeant wingurts crossed his legs, the one reaching almost to the ground. He's still not saying anything. Outloud anyway. "My name is Technical Sergeant Wingurts." He smiled I think, uncrossing his legs. I never saw a more skinner person. Excuse me I won't interrupt again. "I got myself stationed at DA Nang, second time around. Worken B-52's, mostly radar mechanic I expect. I been in the service twenty six years next March about. Well, there was no real problem in Da Nang. Not for me anyhow." He crossed his legs up again and this time sat up. "Until anyway this rabbit, a tall fury white thing, started messen with my tools some quiet laughter. Really didn't bother me much. Not much at all, till the son of a bitch started drinking my beer. Well to make a long stroy short I reported him to the captain. Captain Rather put me in the damn...dispensary. And that's when I started getten sick. That's about it mostly. Also expect that now I'm here." Sergeant looked at the floor and smiled at it.

I'm sitting down perplexed. A beer drinking rabbit. Nobody in his right mind would believe a rabbit drinking beer. I don't know, could be there was something bad in the beer besides alcohol. I heard from one of the guys that Thirty three Vietnamese beer wasn't well sanitized. If you have a rabbit problem that's what it is, specially around B-52's. I wouldn't of minded a rabbit alonside me in Vietnam. Even a part time rabbit would of been nice. I'm sure more than a few Vietcong wouldn't of minded the extra company either. But Jesus that Sergeant Twain guy. Suicide is a little overly harsh and sad. I don't think people really know when you commit suicide you die. Too bad for all of us there isn't a temporary suicide option maybe for a couple of years being dead in that way would be convenient and nice possibly. The Major is talking about the meeting being over. And how were going to meet again. And good work. Everyone is getting up slowly, except for Sergeant Kenneth he's gone. Don't those hard drinking people see things beside what there drinking, sometimes. I finally got up myself after the Major got up and left. I'm walking thinking about nothing

too much. Thinking about thinking I guess. Sergeant Twain is over there, standing looking out the large window. His one leg up on a chair and his elbow on his knee. I wish, but I don't want to be intruding by being helpful. I walked over to be beside him. Why do they keep the hallways so dark? Unnecessarily.

"Hi," He said looking at my reflection in the window.

"Hi," I said. "I'm Chuck Winters from inside. Would you like to talk to me maybe."

"No, maybe some other time." He looked at me. I looked away. And went away with myself.

I walked around for most of the next four and half hours. I did lie down on my bunk. But got right up. The bed is starting to hurt just getting on it, to be reminded what its not for. I decided not to go to their clean fancy cafeteria. With their blue table cloths and red cloth napkins. Remembering that shield over my table last time. "Peace is our Profession." Then a very metallic mid evil armor hand holding lightening bolts. Whens peace going to come to our profession. Pretty soon there going to be more enemies than people. With that nuclear war, God already come on. I can't think about that. Where would I go to think about that. Jesus help us, a nuclear war for peace. And people try to say we know what were doing. Somebody's got to do something. Maybe those Berrigan bother priests will catch up. At least there soldiers in the midst of peace. That sergeant Twain you against yourself. But my God an impatient wife, not even a letter instead a telegram. They have a word limit don't they. I feel I've got one myself now. Several key times in Vietnam, I remember now. I felt I was short the right word. But I don't understand suicide of yourself, enough to consider unconditionally for myself. Specially on short notice. Of course the future. No I'm not going to get into the future until I get through today. I wonder what Henre is doing. I wouldn't mind going for another beer. Of course killing yourself is much better than killing someone else. At least that way you don't take company. I'm going to go back to sit by the nurses station. Relax in their absence. Enough wandering around and one of them is bound to come up

to you for something. Something usually that isn't. Good the leanable chair by the nurses half door is vacant.

I sat down, comfort good. At least for what is left of my body. Here comes that Sergeant Twain walking down the hallway the way handsome men do. With considerable sideways motion, almost like he's incircling himself. The nurse here are crazy about them. They feel sorry for him I guess. Also his acute handsomeness and his being fleeting with his suicide attempt, also I think makes them feverish. I hope he finds that helpful. He's coming here towards here. I sniffled my nose for some reason. Sergeant Twain stepped up to the half door. I can feel the nurses about to say something please to all concerned.

"Hi Eric how are you doing?"

"I've never been better Joyce. I've decided I'm not going to kill myself!"

There are four or five words at once. All of them warm and plausible. One nurse with nice blonde hair came out and leaned past the half door. Sergeant Twain backed up two feet. "No I'm going to kill my goddamned wife?"

The very tall sergeant with the signature problems stepped up. He looked upset and interested. "Did you guys hear Bobby Kennedy just got shot in LA."

"Oh no." "Jesus not again." Now what." All different voices. One loud moan. I'm not going to think about that. What's going on. Somebody tell me please what's going on. No I'm not going to think about that at all. All those Kennedy people they'll be fine. All those kids. Jesus I wish heaven was not a place but more of a process like maybe people wouldn't have to wait till the end. Sure certainly.

I got up almost falling over from my chair. I've got to be alone and away from here. "Take it easy," I said to myself under my breath. Walking quick down the narrow corridor. Up to the elevator, I pressed the button to many more times than twice. I felt in a hurry with nowhere to go. I don't even know what the question is to all that. The door opened. Empty good. I felt like praying alot, but with nothing to say. The elevator went down not fast enough. Ninth floor, why do they put us on the ninth floor. It was hard enough getting here. I mean if you had to get away for a personal reason, a fire anything you wouldn't

make it until you were dead. I'm out the circle swinging door. Finally great the snow. I opened my shirt up. The cold makes me feel. Feel, just feel I guess that's all. If it weren't for snow wed probably all of us here to complain about our progress. That Sergeant Twain a smile instead of crying maybe. That Sergeant Murcier what did he do wrong. Is it wrong not to want to do wrong. Or do wrong and then try something better more generous that's not nearly wrong enough to be too bad. God probably gave us insanity so he could relax. I kicked a little mound of snow with my toe. I wonder why snow is white like clouds, that's the white it is. We have only so many breaths to spend in our lives. The same must be true of prayers. I didn't kill anybody. Can I forgive myself what I've learned and still be alive relaxed and familiar to myself the way I used to be. Going my own way on my own terms. Eccentric sure, but so what. Eccentric now seems devine compared to all this. My family won't understand, they saw it on TV. Insanity is not a free will venture that got planned. Maybe it could be insanity is closer to God. At least perhaps if not access, at least some extra added on access of choice to be with God. After all how many insane people got to be president of the United States. Or one of those eager senators with the all too many words, none of them the same. I'm going to stop thinking right here right now. Because I'm feeling that I'm making too much progress. And its not customary of me. Also plus I'm standing somehow in a snow bank and my feet have gotten wet. I've got to think more easily and calmly, not get too much hopeful ahead of myself or I might get lost. And lost from already lost, you'd have to swallow a big compass just to figure out where you are. And then there'd be the next step.

I sat down on the bench from before. Except fortunately its colder. I wonder why they plant trees on military basis. This kind of contrast could lead to potential free thinking of somekind. I wondering now, buttoning up my shirt some, about my diagnosis deal. My reputation what's left of it is at stake. Even when I'm alone with myself by myself it seems, even more at stake. It's like some particular available woman being named a whore. Whore and crazy take up alot of anybodies reputation. Part of my problem is that I'm not too sure

what my reputation was like before some undifferentiated psychiatrist got a hold of it. What's that leave me? Not much enough for what? I looked around for something to distract me. Snow trees us here. And that distant blue available horizon. I put my hands in my front pockets and went back to moving. It didn't work the distraction I needed. Maybe it just that maybe to many of those Freudian slips got passed me unrecognized. But that Freud guy, hes the one that got people interested keenly in insanity. And he got to people in their dreams while they were asleep. Fine if he was in the first dream himself. But he wasn't only God was and is. Is so far for now. How can there be unconscious when your conscious. All this mind stuff started when people got tied to machines in order to go to work to make a living of somekind. When the machines got more than people, Freud had to get us deeper and deeper and unconscious. Your unconscious when you sleep that's when your unconscious. Jesus and now we've got nuclear bombs protecting us for living. God's nice planet has a revolver pointed to its head. I smiled and just like that I remembered I got invited to the snowball Festival with our first American doctor's daughter. Right her name was Janis. I hope it still is. I'm barely eleven years old. Just eight years ago almost. Maybe twelve years old those two years got overlapped somewhat. I got invited by some arrangement of all the parents involved. I didn't know Janice. Except that she is considerably pretty. And she knew me even less. The most bothersome problem was that her father was our family doctor like I said. I guess because being a doctor made him know if Janice got inherited that way also. I'd only been in the country less than a year. I'd already had to hug the hell out of David Burns to calm him down in his fighting appetities. Jane in that Studebaker. Packard kissing me wantingly at her discretion. Adding a knowing Janis on that day I though might be uncommonly perplexing. Also that rubber Johnny salesman mystery we were still investigating that. But I went. Even though I couldn't dance to fall down on the right beat. I went. My tux didn't fit except when I took it off. It hung on me like it was bored. The American kids there with scientific attitudes probably thought I'd started evaporating once I put it on. I was sweating so much I actually did feel

a little evaporated. And weathered all around. The dancing proceeded pretty much without me. I never in my life felt so present in my absence. Janis danced the whole evening with a pretty much more handsome guy than me. A guy who could prove he was handsomer by just looking at me. And then dancing away to the music of the night. Well the fruit punch was good. The music in its melancholy ways was also agreeable to me. So its a memory nicely remembered. Yeah, I guess that's what I'm saying. I've nice memories to remember. And even when they were bad then, maybe now they can be better now. And I can start over with those memories. And see what happens. I raised my face to the sky and the white clouds. And I could feel myself smile. A snow flake got into my eye. I didn't even know it's snowing. What's a snow flake in your...I rubbed my eye with my knuckle. It must of been a big snow flake. No absolutely this insanity diagnosis stuff is not even for the birds. This might even be like a miracle waiting to be exposed-really. What I'm meaning to say, its like that word being a whore. That word is always somebody elses idea, an unhappy idea before it got bequeathed to you. Even way before the whore thing or insane thing got expressed in a shared way, eager and festering the way we do it, it was waiting intense like in some lost and very unhappy person. Certainly no woman doesn't volunteer her reputation before its enforced available to her. Somebody one of those people come up and say Chuck why are you insane. I'll just say because you not. Pull the undesired contrast right from under their unconscious if they brought it with them. I'm sure it will be guys who will try to get me. Yeah for sure, mostly guys I'm sure. Women in my conscious experiences do all the violences less than men. And when they do them, they do them better, but for sure most of those are mostly conversational like. And the very little I've seen of women getting severly nasty, when they were all successful about it-they didn't seem to enjoy it much. Could be I don't know, they have enough better taste to keep it to themselves. Jesus a maybe miracle thought just came to me. That crazy ERA thing, now getting women eager and stuff. That maybe women will rise up gently the way they are. And after all those incredible loving years of subgigation, even going back to those tough caveman days, sure they'll rise up like I just

said and. And help get things straight before its way to late. This is absolutely potentially great, even more. I think its outright plausible. Making a happy difference, women might. Sure why not. Plus they have to. There the only ones left who can. What from their bodies comes life. And alot of them can be mothers, all of them once at least were daughters and sisters. Jesus I'm getting inflated with these available insights, more than insights is what they are. Look what we have now, parades for dead soldiers-promising more dead soldiers. Until what we all get claimed bad by that nuclear bomb thing. And for it sure anyway, how can you ask anybody for your freedom when your born with it intact. The very minute any crazy government gives you some freedom, they can take it right away with one knock on the door. Even if its not your door they can do it. I read about that, with that Abbie Hoffman guy whose smart and funny. But Jesus, what do I know here on purpose anyway. I'm easy B minus student in high school, dropped out thoroughly from college without even most of my cooperation. And now at least diagnosable three times insane, on paper at least. Shame what they do with those trees. I wish I knew what tree they cut down to write me all this down. I'd sneak out of here and plant another one. Maybe two, in case the sawing mills get the first. I feel some momentum kind of, going somehow in some directional way. Sure get discharged honorably and started all over again. Look at me, I'm still surprised wearing civilian cloths. Blue jeans, white shirt, my loafers, I got at the BX thing. I got a winter coat given to me generously by some wives of military guys here. One of them the other day saw me walking around shivering to myself. I didn't realize it gotten outside of me so obviously enough to be noticed. "I said thanks." I asked if I could do anything for them. They said "no thank you." Just like that, "no thank you." It was my most human, experience you know people being nice to people and each other. Seems like a lifetime since something like that. With that winter coat I felt like less of a human impersonator. Oh, no now that I tell you, I don't think I told you before. Late last night I wrote Eugenia a letter in care of the Toro Bar. Felt good writing Eugenia feeling the way I did then. By the Juke box listening to the impossible dream. And then that Born Free I didn't remember I

heard listening to Eugenia intensely the way I was. Actually now still am. What I wrote Eugenia is personal, if you don't mind. Yeah right, its a little to late to claim personal, if you don't mind, Yeah right, its a little to late to claim personal you've already got my diagnosis on you. I formed a little snow wall with the side of my foot. When I die I hope I freeze to death conveniently by somekind of opportunity. I do miss Eugenia. I certainly do. And I wrote here exactly that and some more. I said to Eugenia, Eugenia you were right somehow I didn't make a good soldier. I wrote, that I was soon being discharged honorably after losing my left leg. Then I scratched left leg and wrote right leg. And that as soon as I learned to walk maybe I would come back and see her. And she could introduce me to her kids. I hated to lie like that, I really did, but I was writing spontaneously and with hope. It was a surprise to me to, me losing my leg like that. But a lie is sometimes a start on the truth. And apology once I show up with the two same legs intact, its a good way to rekindle a love, a love experience like that. But then just like that I crumpled up the letter and threw it away. I got started walking away from the waist paper basket. Went back uncrumpeled it and then threw back away again. What am I going to do show up some day and say the legs not artificial its me. And I'm not, mostly I'm not I'm sure.

My shoes are getting a little bit soaked, but there my shoes. So what, well so that's good that's what. Bought and paid for with my own soil even if it was as as a soldier helping to kill generously. Oh yeah, sure good maybe bad news. I like good news when it starts off that way. At least that way you get a head start on waking up tommorrow. Last night all of, Henre as well of course, we said goodbye to three guys. Three guys from the Vietnam war who agreed they were pre existing all over the place and wouldn't challenge anybody about it. They're leaving day after tomorrow, one going to Fort Myer's Florida to get maybe a fishing job. One guy, I forget his name, I'll try really to remember later, he went or is going to San Fransico or thereabouts to join his little brother in a commune like place. The third guy, yeah the guy from Alabama, of course everyone calls him Alabama, in part because that's his name I guess, anyway he

said he didn't know where he was going. He said maybe he'd get lucky. You know his pay got held up in Vietnam so we took up a collection and handed it to him. Of course without a doubt we did all this and some extra way late into the night. I don't know not to share our privacy I guess. We toasted each other with mouthwash. And over me, like a praying mantis with no head. I got very worried suddenly, that those doctors all them, might decide I'm sane. Another mistake timely caught. A spontaneous recovery they want to tell me eagerly about. I shook my head, looking back at the green grass, feeling my socks all wet. I think I thought, I'm probably getting somewhere good. I moved out of the snow drift. I know exactly absolutely exactly where I'm going. I felt like an unrehearsed miracle about myself. At least I know where I'm starting from where I wasn't going to be. I slowed down my running, not at first aware I decided on to run. I have to see Henre. I felt better, I slowed most of myself down to a reasonable walk.

Trying not to be winded and excited I pressed the elevator button once. Give the machines a break why don't I. The easier we take it on the machines, the easier it will be for us. They seem to be staying around those machines. I guess that's a choice. The elevator door opened. Just like that opened. I stepped inside. Funny always since I was a little kid, even much younger than I am now, I always thought that if I went in a forward direction I would never get lost. Because I'd eventually end up where I was going. Funny how your mind, I should say brain helps you out sometimes. Always available the way it is. Its not that way with a mind. Because those people like to share feverishly, sometimes with curious motives they don't even know enough about to understand fairly. The elevator door opened like sesame. I'm tired of remincing back. I stepped out slowly. Why take a chance on showing them I'm potentially happy. That's better I'm more in a hospital walking grove. They might otherwise suspect that I've got a place to go. A nurse just made an irrelevant expression at me. And then disappeared into her nursing notes. I hope Henre is awake enough to be up.

"Henre!" I held my palms up to my chest, like a low level surrender. I

held my finger up to my lips. Henre saw me all the way smiling.

"Henre, listen Henre don't stutter o.k., don't say anything. Just listen." I looked over one of my shoulders wishing it were both. Inhaling I straightened myself to more more near full height. "Henre, this is probably a most verifiable miracle ever under my conditions." I bent closer to whisper better. "Henre I'm going to leave today and go until I go to Costa Rica. I don't understand completely why, but why enough so that it makes sense. To be with Eugenia and my friends I told you nicely about. And my dog Andycharlie. And your welcome there whatever stuttering condition your in. And Henre you shouldn't divorce your wife you should let her do it. Excuse my sentences getting shorter Henre. But I'm getting more nervous with my unintentional bravery." I coughed loud enough for me to hear. Henre kept looking at me. First his smile left, now its back. "At the very worst Henre you and your wife can be unhappy together. If you love each other that's not a bad deal. But I've got a problem for myself." I squeezed the bedpost with my hand.

"Wha wa w..."

"It's o.k. Henre I understand. My problem is like this I'm broke except for twenty dollars. So I'm wondering if you can lend me ten to get off and get started."

"Why..." Henre formed the word perfectly with just some swelling of his cheeks.

"Your asking me why I'm leaving right?" Henre nodded his head with an easy quiet yes.

"Well its like this. And there other reasons to. But I pretty much decided that I'd rather fail at what I want to do than succeed in what I don't want to do. You know what I mean?"

Henre nodded his head after looking away. He's now looking at me. Henre smiled again better than ever. He raised his hip and pulled out a folded bill and handed it to me I accepted it and put into my wallet. "Thanks Henre, thanks alot, repaying you will make me work harder. Once I get to Costa Rica, I've got your address I know right!"

"Ches...o.k." I bent over and embraced Henre. He embraced me back strong and gently. I turned my face away first and hurried to my bunk area.

I'm only one step in and I realize there's nothing for the next guy. I looked at the sad bed one more time and finally exited with myself. I braced myself to look at Henre one more time and leave. I walked passed Henre's bed in a hurry. Glancing carefully to remember the other guys. I turned completely around at the doorway. And raised my hand well to wave goodbye to my friend Henre. A heavy tear formed in my eye. I finally looked up. Henre saluted me. I smiled, tried to turn to leave and did. Me down the hallway, slowly just slowly. I've got to be careful I'm feeling happy almost. Good so far. These next how many feet and the elevator. I pressed the elevator button twice. One for Henre and one for me that's what I thought. The door opened too slowly. I walked in with an extra long step. I pressed the button once. The door closing I pressed countless times for everyone else. Were going down fast enough, not slowly. I scratched my shoulder near my heart trying to get concentrated and more alert. More alert for all the available reprecussions, like always most of them not up to me. The door opened.

Good a couple of near hours away and it will be darker. Maybe sooner. I swung around the circling glass door. God I like those doors, no push pull there. I'm outside. I really am. I zipped up my jacket and inhaled deep enough for deeply. I'll maybe find a hay stack or something and sleep tonight. I paused to hesitate. I don't know why, probably just fear. There's the exit guard shack. Too much so close. I've seen soldiers just coming and going no problem. I started up, walking looking at the round circle of green grass. "Thanks." I said. I noticed that little tree again...I stopped thinking quietly sadly to myself. I wonder if I'll ever know the shadows from between the shades. A strange thought for me. I understand, it doesn't really matter if I'm free. Sure where does a freeman go to be free. Anywhere he wants to. Right? The sun is nice on my face. I've got thirty dollars that's plenty enough for whatever somethings I need. Ten yards the guard shack. I wanted to look back at that hospital, mostly at Henre. I didn't, they'll all be o.k. If not, well that's

o.k., were supposed to die. Just not all up at once. Jesus.

"Hey buddy." I didn't realize concentrating I'd gotten so past the guard shack. I pointed to myself with most of my hand, looking at the AP with a blue helmet.

"Have a good pass." He nodded pretty hard because his helmet wobbled some.

"Thanks, you to if you have to."

I'm out, I knew I'd be out? What did that nice Buddahist guy Reverend Sato say to me once, yeah go with your Karma and God will be at yoursides. I hope he's o.k. to because he chained smoked in his spare time. Not again, I need a cigarette, not even a thought now. Somekind of push or pull. Well one mistake at a time, unless I have help then there might be more. Walking faster to encourage the momentum of myself I looked over my shoulder. Good just around this bend the base disappeared into itself. I kind of made a rainbow swirl with my hand to congratulate myself. I smiled with Christmas all over.

I've been walking successfully for a couple of hours. A nice street like highway, like the Merrit Parkway in Connecticut. Trees, cars going by easily. I'm not hitchhiking on the chance somebody might pick me up. I stopped a little while ago and threw my watch in garbage can thing. I've got to be walking non stop, at least for a hundred miles passed the Air Force. Could be passed enough from the Air Force and they won't think I'm worth retrieving. Anyway how can be returned when they say I wasn't there I was there. It's going to be dark soon. I stopped abruptly to catch some of my breath. Mostly emotional breath I think. I decided to count my money to see if somehow I had more than I first counted. Three bills, I unfolded Henre's bill he lent me to tidy up my wallet. I'll be Henre's best friend, Jesus be kind, its a whole one hundred dollar bill. I turned around to go back, no, I already thanked Henre. I'll thank him absolutely for sure again. And what I'm going to do is try hard not to spend this hundred dollar bill so I can put it in my old age box. With all my mostly happy other stuff. I stretched my shoulders to the sky, getting ready to get started. A nice little hill, between two nice little trees. One a big one. I walked over. I'd love to witness a sunset. I'm due for one that's what I think. I climbed

up the not very big hill easily. God look at this, "well I guess you already know." Hills, a valley, clouds sharing themselves with the sky, all those harmony green and greenless trees. And all the agreeable animals that must be busy taking care of each other in God's own special way. I sighed and sighed again, and again Jesus. I thought the son is supposed to set there, that reminds me about directions. Well just keep going till I'm very tired and then get my bearing about even if I have to ask for help. Sure that's exactly what I'll do. Can't be all that hard, all I have to do is go to Texas and take a left. Go down Mexico, maybe spend some time in that Yucatan place where the Aztecs and Mayans did so well. Then find Costa Rica, it'll take time. But what doesn't, except dieing. That takes all the time. Once I get to Texas, I'll write home my family. Explain I escaped, that I'm on my own and thanks alot for everything. Jesus that could be a very long letter. Almost a book and a half perhaps. And then just go ahead and live. Maybe happily almost. Maybe meet some Marion women, or a nice Kathlene, bound to meet another Charlie. And finally Costa Rica, not no not to start again, but to be again as always. I might even in the time of myself gather up some nice and friendly people and try to get at the bottom of the nasty things about us. There've got to be around alot, with enough of enough time. Not with those nuclears our weapons guarding us to death forever. And we guarding the nuclear weapons instead of easy with each other happily. I'm already more tired that I'd like to be with so many more miles to go before am somewhere. You know I once read about a guy who never slept in Spain that's where was from, he was. Probably, perhaps somekind of a snoring spy. Who'd suspect a snoring spy. Anythings possible. I can't think of anything that's not possible. Even the impossible, even nothing is possible, or it wouldn't be a word. Just maybe have to keep walking, wandering and wondering around. God almighty I hope those mob people and that funny rich Mister Little, who trapped my father, arent' giving him entirely too much stupid trouble. I'll help alot of they are. And God sometimes willing I'll get there, one way or another. Even if I have to somehow disguise myself in extra way. Like that spraying from the blue sky stuff, even the trees those bad guys wanted in that

crazy, crazy Vietnam. And like Henre, could possible be on the way to Costa Rica I'll make another friend for life. Not possibly very possibly. Absolutely why not on that one two. That way well both live longer if one of us dies. The way were supposed to one nicely at a time. Not all at once in a one big unnecessary cloud. That can't be really intended, that's got to be us. After all were all related, with the chipmunks and the beard sure. After really all where were we when the planet earth in that outer space became the planet neighborhood. What about that Mr. and Mrs. Einstein say with all that unnecessary relativity, about near four billion years ago. And before that what about that. Somebody please tell me. And maybe I'll meet you there, if we don't go all and all and every all one of us up at once. Screw up that necessary gravity stuff we brag about. And you bet the milky way will disappear way into itself. Like all the other, what you call them, extra left over terrestrials, who let their eager machines get the best of us. Sure that's got to be about it, were all looking for a place to stay. A real nice place. Well were here, aren't we. Well aren't we. Jesus and all those Buddah like guys. And what about all those eagerly love supressed women. When are they going to get themselves started up to help out, against the bad thats good in us. I heard all that at the White Elephant. I sure did. And that's exactly what I remember this very now, walking into the American dark. Oh no, I dropped to one knee. Then maybe what I remember is that I forgot that kids name, the beggar kid who had a generous lunch with me. I stopped completely unto myself. "What else have I forgotten." I scratched the back of my head. "I can't remember." Wow did you see that, a pick up with an Iowa listen plate drove by nicely fast. And a very young girl yelled, "HI my name is Richell." Real convincing and nice like, "My name is Richell." If I had one finger up in the air, I bet I would of gotten a real friendly hitch hike. Iowa is near around that Nebraska place right. I could of detoured myself and caught up to my conversation with that Maria girl who whispered eagerly in my ear. Too much and just free, what a little while. I stretched my arms up way over my head. Wouldn't it be great and incredible if you could reach up high enough amongst the stars to feel accompanied a little. Enough to maybe get a little star dust on

you from some favorite star. Oh well, its just a thought. I brought my arms down to my side. "Just a thought that's all."

What now down from the stars and I'm dark all over around me. Darker that dark. I didn't get prepared enough to get transitioned down from the light of the stars to this all available darkness. There's no lampost or anything familiar like it. It's easier to be free in the light. O.k. I almost have no problem when I'm going forward to as I remember. And for sure, I've got to stop thinking, even if I have to use my brain to do it. Alone it can be monstrous. I picked up my pace just in case I was walking to slowly. What if I get bored with myself. Then what tell me. I'll get completely lonely, that's where I'd be in the dark. I stuffed my hands into my back pockets, probably maybe for balance. I tried to speed up some more. I hope my shoes hold up. I'm not good in America bare foot. Anyway am I relaxing freely enough already. I don't think I don't know. "But tomorrows another day. Sure why wouldn't it be." I looked around carefully for whatever I saw. "Sure the sun will come up tomorrow. Sure, I mean of course. It's reasonable expectation. Amongst others I might think of. If I had more time to spare about myself. Also the plus of tomorrow is I'll be hitchhiking. I'll talk to somebody. Mostly listen I'm sure. I stopped for the heck of it. Why not after all I'm availably free. I looked up at a star. Like I meant it and gave it a real good wink. I smiled feeling better. Just like that a smile. With no planning to. And without any reprecussions. I went back to my walking. I put my hands in my back pocket, extra deep. I must of taken them out from before. And I just kept walking. Like I was going somewhere. And been somewhere. And actually I have. When you want to try to think about it. I'll know when I get somewhere to. Sure I will. Cause I'll be there. It can't get simpler than that. I yawned moving on. Too bad I'm alone though. Alone isn't the best way to be with someone. Specially if there somewhere else not thinking of you. And you don't know it. An easy wind blew and ruffled his hair. Two birds chirped pleasantly in the darkness. And Chuck Winters walked off quietly amongst the stars.

THE END