

Power, survival, seduction, treachery and madness all articles to be negotiated at the 'Institution,' an edifice in which Henry, Michael, Jim, Brenda, Martin Kranster and many others spend their days bedeviled by illusory plots. Henry is about to become father to an 'unknown' child and a collective bargaining agreement whose substance has become part of the endless thoughts in his restless mind.

'NEGOTIATIONS'

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PREAMBLE:

In a field that was once a pasture, once a forest, once a meadow, an Institution had been formed. Years before, people had constructed it by machine and by hand from glass, brick, rock, wood and steel. Other people occupied it and over the years were replaced by other people who occupied it. It grew somewhat in time, flinging new proportions of itself off into first this and then that direction. Outside, and above, from the perspective of airplane passengers it looked like clumps and groups of different sized and shaped buildings linked by macadam walkways. The surrounding land was still pleasantly shaped field running off into short thickets of wild forest that found refuge along the approaches of a highway. Inside it was more difficult to see what was transpiring. People alone or speaking to one another were often in the middle of very delicate, and not very well understood negotiations.

Henry at home.

It was one of those dead weekends in winter. Like an animal he seemed to be hibernating. Pausing only to eat or stare out of the window, his thoughts and near fantasies kept returning him to slumber. Saturday blended into Sunday. There was dark several times. Friday night, Saturday night, and Sunday night though they blurred together obscuring the daylight interruptions. He slept on and off.

Snow fell intermittently all weekend. It never accumulated much on the ground, though. Every so often the gray, overhung skies would become obscured, and scratchy, grainy dits and dots would begin above his eyes and filter toward the ground. When he closed his lids to doze the snow kept falling briefly in his vision.

What a useless weekend. Nothing. What is Ellen doing? The same thing I'm doing. Monday is work. The Institution. A small worthless job working with some odd, not terribly friendly people. No future. Once my future seemed enormous, an endless series of possibilities... Now? I seem to have no purpose beyond day-to-day survival. There must be more. Must be. I thought once that I would have impact; I would help shape something. Now I will simply muddle through this boring weekend and return with Ellen to muddle through the week. I can't even daydream any longer; every thought brings me back to nothing. Marc asked me to get involved in his organization. Should I? Why bother. My God, I don't want these hours to end, to bring me a dismal Monday and yet I

want it to rush by and free me from this miserable, empty space... How I wish it were summer ... I could open the doors and let it flow into the apartment and walk through open, balmy softness.

ARTICLE 1 'Complaints'

"The problem with this society is we are no longer interested in achievement or expansion," Hogarth was saying rhythmically rotating his forefinger at Henry's chest.

Henry nodded his head, agreeing and disagreeing, disputing and accepting, his mind lost in a swirl of pros and cons unrelated to Hogarth's.

Hogarth continued talking, spilling out words and truths and fictions all carefully punctuated with deep-felt conviction. Hogarth was obviously reciting a lecture he had prepared and revised over the years and practiced to himself in odd moments like a mad, self-made prophet.

Henry was not interested. He was rooted to the spot, his head nodding, his smile frozen and something inside screaming with impatience to leave. He waited for a break in Hogarth's appeal. "...Loss of will, we're finished, we won't create any more, it's all falling apart around us..."

"Well, don't be so pessimistic, it's always been this way. I've got to go, I'm supposed to pick Ellen up at the doctors."

"It's all down hill from here on out..." Hogarth continued, his small, dark eyes resigned though bitter.

Henry dismissed his own smile and stepped backwards with determination. "Got to move along. Got to get Ellen," Henry repeated into the sifting winds that swept grit and sand off the winter highways into their faces.

"So, prepare for the end, we'll be there soon. No surplus, no affluence, no social mobility, no nothing ... The end to the concept of a free society..."

"See you around," Henry replied, backing into the open, away from Hogarth's possession.

Christ, I'm feeling like I'm forty years old ... yet I'm not even thirty, Things have changed while I wasn't looking... So fast. Hogarth who is in his late twenties is an old man waiting for the end. What has happened in the last few years?

Ellen was in the kitchen fixing dinner while Henry read the paper on one of the living room couches. Things did not go smoothly for Ellen in the kitchen and soon she began to fight against pots and pans and the harder she fought the less smoothly dinner progressed. She began cursing with bitter vehemence and knocked the remaining pots around to a crescendo of reverberating noise.

Henry did nothing except smirk with the knowledge that regardless of what he did, he was next.

"I'm not cooking! You cook!" She yelled at him from the kitchen. Henry who didn't cook, couldn't cook and wouldn't cook shrugged. "O.K. We'll go out and get something."

"No we won't," she screamed.

"Why not?"

"We can't afford it, that's why not," she declared.

"Then make supper."

"You make it! I'm fed up."

Henry took a gamble. He left the couch and entered the Kitchen. No sooner then he touched a single pot with the intention of moving it somewhere, then Ellen seized the pot from him and pushed him aside.

"I'll do it! You don't know what you're doing out here."

He smiled weekly in triumph and began to retreat once again to the couch, but he paused. "What's bothering you Ellen?"

"NOTHING!" She shrieked, batting loose hairs away from her face.

Henry retreated.

They ate dinner in relative silence. Ellen apologized for being upset in the kitchen explaining that she was tired.

After dinner they sat down to watch television. Henry watched television through his newspaper, Ellen through her knitting.

"You're ignoring me," she said

"Would you like to make love?"

"No."

"I'm watching television."

"You always ignore, these days," she said.

"I'm sorry." The newspaper in his arms collapsed into a pile and he starred at her. "Hello, I'm not ignoring you."

"Big deal," Ellen continued to knit.

Henry got down off the couch and crawled on his hands and knees across the floor to put his face puppy-like into her lap and peer up through her knitting. "I'm not ignoring you."

She tried not to smile and continued to knit. He stuck out his tongue and began to pant.
"You're ignoring me," he said.

"I know. I'm trying hard to," she laughed.

He sat down next to her. "What do you want to talk about? What should I bore you with?
Should I complain about the economy?"

"God no, I couldn't take that, anymore."

"Politics?"

"NO."

"I saw Hogarth today," Henry said.

"Whoopee."

They sat quietly for a moment.

"My cousin's baby has a strange rash..." Ellen began.

"Big deal" Henry returned to his couch and collapsed onto it.

I haven't had a satisfying conversation or discussion in weeks, he thought and soon dozed off into a nap, listening to Ellen's laugh in synchronization with television mumble.

Rammer, wearing his beige, brown-striped, cowboy shirt, sat at the bar with Johnson. Johnson had surrendered. His eyes bulged incoherently out of his face made silly by drink. His thin arms waggled around in the air balancing himself on on his stool as he laughed with conviction at everything.

Rammer, sweat dripping out of his short, Prussian haircut laughed also, curving his nose into a Semitic scimitar, a genetic gift from long ago Plains Indians.

The bar was active. There was a brawl of happy, laughing honkey tonkers swilling mostly beer but drinking with loud gusto.

Two woman walked past Rammer, catching his eye. "Hello Ladies," he boomed, disentangling his cowboy boots from the bar stool to stand up and present a gallant salute with his beer mug.

The first woman was a dyed, honey-blond with meat on her bones. She had a large posterior and the flesh visible behind her knees was beginning to get too fat. Her smile stretched back a long way, "Hello ... " she cooed above the din.

The girl behind her had long, dangly, dark hair and was thin with a hint of rounded shoulders. Her dress was old and too short. Toward the back of an armpit the frayed lace of her full slip showed. Her eyes were bright blue though she hid them from contact. She

nervously combed her hair out of the center of her face with long, angular fingers.

Johnson had swiveled around on his stool and was gazing stupidly at the thin, younger female near him, as she shifted from foot to foot. Her flats were also old and well worn.

Rammer and the older, larger woman were making small talk already. The woman made a joke and pushed Rammer's chest as they laughed.

Johnson leaned his face toward the thin girl. His mind struggled between 'Howdy' and 'How do you do'. He said "Hiya do."

She flicked her eyes up past him and dropped her gaze for a second while deciding what to do. Then her eyes quickly surveyed Johnson and she pierced his eyes with hers, shifted her chewing gum and said from the side of her mouth, "Hy." (Hoi) Then she laughed a little and lowered her eyes downward as her hand rose to cover her teeth, slightly crooked.

It took several minutes but Rammer and the older woman, Adele, negotiated to leave the bar together in Rammer's station wagon to Adele's house. Johnson and the thin girl, Karen, were basically left out of the joking, flirting negotiation process.

Getting Johnson outside to the car was a problem. Either he was that drunk or having a good time faking it, but Adele and Rammer had to carry, drag and prod him through the cool dark air in the gravelly parking lot.

"Hey, Ram, I'm floaten," he said, scuffling his boots through the dirt.

They lowered the tail gate of Rammer's car and laid him in the back pushing his legs up. Before closing the tail gate Karen hopped into the back of the wagon nimbly, almost gazelle-like.

Rammer at the wheel, goosed gasoline into the huge engine and entwined an arm around Adele squeezing a mouthy kiss from her, absorbing much red lipstick. Then he clicked the car into reverse.

Karen tried Johnson out immediately. A few seconds of kissing, cooing and rubbing didn't do anything, so she stopped and sat back a moment looking at him. Johnson lay still, his eyes starring up at the car's low ceiling.

"Just how drunk are you?" She asked.

"I don't know," he said, smiling meekly with his boyish grin.

She reached over expertly, like a nurse, undid his pants and yanked his shorts down. She grabbed his penis and began to manipulate it.

"Hold it," Johnson said defensively, startled by her directness.

She stopped. "You want it or not?" She asked.

His hands thrown out to ward her off relaxed falling to his body and she went to work

again. She could only produce a half an erection by masturbation and she quietly, catlike knelt down to him whispering, "Don't do it in my mouth."

In seconds Johnson was ready and, she parted her clothing and climbed aboard gliding his erection into a soft, moist hot spot in the center of her person. It took a minute to approach climax and she gritted her teeth impervious to Rammer or Adele or headlights of cars or anything. She pounded downwards in short hard movements her eyes shut and her throat taunt as if she was in solemn prayer.

Johnson seeing her in such concentrated personal ecstasy by unpredictable splashes of headlight became quickly amused, and the fact that this reaction was somehow only dimly related to him caused him to laugh. Her breath quickened and caught in her throat as she trembled to a finish and dismounted just before Johnson lost most of his erection. Seeing his manhood shrivel into an odd position as it were making a funny face at him made Johnson laugh harder.

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"How are things?" Davenport asked, arranging foodstuffs on his tray while on line before the cashier.

Henry grunted but Ellen reacted happily to Davenport. "Hiya doin' Bill. Have enough there to eat?"

Davenport fended the remark with a grunt and then mumbled some of his cynicism "If the food here doesn't kill ya."

Ellen, in line behind Henry laughed politely, "Why, is the food here that bad?"

"Bad? It can kill you."

Henry, negatively cynical toward Davenport's cynicism responded darkly, "The food here's pretty good, expensive maybe, but good."

"You'll eat anything" Davenport laughed, inching down the paying line toward the clicking register.

Amidst the babble of the crowd the three of them found a table together and began to eat in preoccupation, except for Ellen who tried to draw Davenport out with bright, happy quips.

Davenport ate nervously, shoveling food into his mouth and brushing it out of his mustache, as if he had learned to eat in a concentration camp. He had a bad stomach. Finally Henry blurted, "Slow down, relax."

"It'll get cold." Davenport remarked.

"It already is cold. What-a-ya got there, a tuna-fish sandwich and bag of corn chips?"

Davenport blushed and rolled his eyes down onto his plate. He laughed innocently. "The soup."

"So eat the soup first." Ellen counseled.

"I don't know, I just eat fast," he admitted, grinning like a little boy.

They ate for a short while, Finally Henry asked. "You married yet?"

"No..."

"Thinking about it?" Ellen asked.

"Well ... " Davenport blushed again and gazed out absently at the large cafeteria.

"Christ, you've been living together for two years, it's about time. Maybe have some kids." Henry urged.

"Kids aren't for everybody." Davenport said simply.

"How about for you? You're the poppa type. I can tell."

Davenport shrugged in agreement. "I don't think Kathy wants any, at least now," he admitted.

No one at the table but Davenport knew Kathy and nothing was said for several seconds. Then Davenport went on the offensive. "How long have you been married? How come no patter of little feet?" Davenport asked walking his fingers over the table top toward Ellen.

"Five years...right now it's mostly economics," Henry lied, smiling at Ellen.

"Well?"

They all bantered back and forth for several minutes till Ellen ended it. "You two can talk, I've got to go. I've got work to finish."

Henry allowed her departure and silently toyed with their orange juice cartons in her absence. Finally Davenport, lighting a cigarette said, "I think Kathy might change her mind about kids. Her sister's expecting one and after she becomes an auntie she might change her mind."

Henry shrugged, "Maybe."

"Eh, I had a rotten time as kid anyway," Davenport said with a laugh.

"Why bring any more into this cruel world?" He added dramatically.

"Clichés," Henry commented.

There was a short silence.

"I'm glad I'm not a kid, anymore, though I'm not so sure about this adult business either," Henry confided.

"Why, you didn't have an idyllic childhood?" Davenport asked tipping an ash into his

juice carton.

"It wasn't too pleasant. I was wild as a teenager."

"You wild? You don't strike me as the wild type. I was incredibly naïve. I thought the world was a wonderful place till my first girlfriend got pregnant," Davenport said, nervousness around the edges of his voice.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah. I never did anything to her."

Henry guffawed, slapping the table.

"Her last words to me before they sent her somewhere ...Down South I think, were, 'I always liked you Bill.' Davenport said, soap opera style.

Henry laughed again. "Some lover... A gentleman, while she's screwing like an alley-cat with someone else."

Davenport smiled and squirmed in his chair.

Why did I have to say that? What makes me better than him; luck?

Winter was done. The air in their first floor apartment didn't end with the patio door segregating a warmer temperature from a colder one, for the glass door was wide open and billowing, warm evening air puffed through the curtains and diffused throughout the apartment. It gave Henry a light-headed unreal feeling. He stepped outside his front door and walking free of the immediate complex of buildings stood on the lawn. The sky was pierced with silver as evening hung motionless on the horizon, not disappearing as fast as it had all winter. The twilight gave the atmosphere an unusual breathing space, creating a sense that this particular gleam of twilight would last forever bringing with it a human immortality.

The endless, evening sky blasted his slow, sleepy mind with dewy gusts of scented breeze. He felt transported into a nether-world, perhaps Mars. His mood was caught in between optimism and deja-vu sentimentality.

He hurried into his car and drove off viewing a new landscape that carried his imagination off a thousand miles. The old fields, buildings, houses and trees took on a new-world perspective in the procrastinating twilight. As the horizon that last saw the sun flashed a flushed orange-pink Henry sped up, as if in search of more twilight, more procrastination. The opposite horizon darkened considerably and the two contrasts like life and death battled for control of the firmament.

Henry drove toward the pink-ness, now shrinking in the distance but he couldn't drive fast enough and the rather feeble roads constructed here and there kept subverting him from his compass goal and shuttling him to their own directions. Inevitably the battle was

lost and the sky became night and the world was unevenly illuminated by electricity. Henry disengaged himself from his flight and resignedly returned home. There was an edge of foreboding behind his attention that annoyed him and he no longer enjoyed his drive. Instead, he swerved around corners and accelerated down roads not looking, not enjoying the yellow swath his headlights splashed on glum, unfriendly houses and lonely dark fields empty of life. It was just another short episode barely connected to the other episodes of his life.

ARTICLE 1.1 Recognition Of The Parties

Brenda paused at the table, a small cake held delicately in one hand. She cocked her head gently to one side allowing her shimmering black hair to spill over a shoulder from its crown capped by a red handkerchief.

Marc stopped by briefly to talk to her. She joked with him and even flirted a little, though as he left she rolled her eyes quickly as if to say 'Ye God.' She cornered Jim and tried speaking to him, though he only nodded his head, his eyes shooting all over the room, searching for somebody and he elusively slipped away.

Henry wandered in, looked around and went directly to the food table where he made a sandwich. He again looked around through the sparse crowd, saw Marc occupied with somebody and shrugged in lonely desperation. Taking vicious bites out of his sandwich he slowly meandered toward the exit not certain if leaving would be proper.

"Henry," Marc called, chasing after him, and laughing. "I mean, don't just eat and run."

Henry, mid-chew, smiled.

"Come over here ... Jim, Uh...Brenda," he had to search for her name in his politician's memory, as he tried to gather the crowd.

"Coming..." She called using a very sweet, mendacious voice as she excused herself from a new-found acquaintance.

The small crowd that Marc gathered contained many faces that Henry had seen though none of them, save Marc, could he feel comfortable speaking to. Jim stood pre-occupied, in a fidgety way, next to Marc.

"Now the reason I had this little group together was for you old timers and new people who are interested in our union to get together and well meet and..." People amid the circle began to ignore Marc and rudely crack jokes disrupting him. Henry felt obligated out of sociality to smile at their jokes. Jim kept looking this way and that as if he wasn't really there.

The extra conversation stopped Marc from rambling too far. He began to make introductions among the group. When he got to Brenda one of the males in the group said, "Say hey, little lady."

She blushed and ably made some comments in her own behalf.

When it came Henry's time he nodded, noticed that nobody looked at him and shrugged to himself. *TALK! You, you bunch of rude, snot-asses.*

"We have many committees you can serve on ... the grievance committee, for instance... We're looking for a negotiating team ... You're all intelligent people that ..."

The circle began to dissolve and Marc was summoned by someone in the small crowd to answer a personal question. Henry found himself next to Jim.

"So you're looking for a new people?" Henry queried.

"Yeah, me and him..." he pointed to Marc's back, "...are the union."

"What about these people here?" Henry gestured around the room.

"They haven't done anything in six months. Inactive. They showed up for the food today. Need new blood."

Henry nodded. "What do you do?"

"Everything,"

"Where did you learn everything?"

Jim looked around. "Picked it up. What I don't know, I fake."

Henry's eyes went wide and Jim laughed slightly.

"Oh yeah ... is this union shit any fun?"

Jim loosened just a bit, "Oh yeah!" He said enthusiastically.

"I don't have any idea what it's all about ... like grievances..." Henry said purposefully, wondering whether he should mention something about the feelings he had concerning his own superiors.

Jim shrugged. "You could learn, I guess. " Jim said with little interest as he looked around the room.

"Well ... See you," Henry announced as Jim took a step forward.

"Huh? Oh yeah." Jim said moving off.

Henry started toward the exit door but turned to survey the gathering.

What a bunch. A strange click to break into. Do I want to try? Can it help me out of the delicate position I have in my job? Or make it worse? Marc seems to be friendly ... but the rest of them don't seem to show him any respect ... Brenda? What's she up to? I don't think I trust her ... what would she be after?

Undecided, he walked out.

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Henry had spent the day at work inactive. He had literally shuffled a few papers back and forth when anyone walked by. For the most part he slumped forward over his desk and let thoughts in his head take him this way and that.

Jim, on the other hand was involved in several intrigues to the point of confusion. Brenda had twisted him first with flirtatious smiles and then with close heaving bosom, mischievous eyes and warm breath. She wanted his support against Marc in the coming election.

When Jim balked just a bit she turned off all her charm and began arguing.

"But, Jim ... look at what he's done ... He's not very democratic. He's SECRETIVE. Nobody knows what's really going on. And he's very chummy with Martin Kranster. Now can a union leader do that? Is that what unionism is all about? I think we have to make a move now to rescue this union before it's too late and I think you're the person who can do it. And this new person ... Henry? Henry something. Who's he; another crony? This union has got to represent the membership, not a clique of secretive people planning our downfall with Kranster and the administration."

Jim tried to explain but got tangled in his own words. He began disliking himself and then Marc. "Okay, I'll think about it," he said, frowning at himself and causing Brenda an uncertain victory.

Nonetheless she smiled. "Bye," and retreated with a flirty flush.

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Marc, catching word somewhere that something was brewing, stopped by Henry's desk to see if Henry had heard anything. He found Henry cagey and argumentative from his extended boredom.

"I understand that this new person, Brenda, is saying something about me," he led, acting out of blind intuition, pumping Henry.

"Not to me. That wouldn't surprise me though ... Not from what little I know about her. She acts very phony. She's got her own agenda." *Don't we all?*

"What?"

Henry shrugged. "She's horny for you."

Marc laughed. "Sure...You know I suggested putting her on some of the committees ... Now she's against me?" Marc chuckled in irony, "This thing can get to you after awhile You'll see."

"How?"

"Run for an office. The elections are coming up."

"I don't know anything." Henry admitted.

"Neither do I." They both laughed. "No, seriously, you can pick it up," Marc counseled.

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ARTICLE 1.2 'You The People or Me The People'

Henry's first faltering activity in the union local that represented the Institution Staff became strengthened after his second evaluation, when he found that his supervisor, Mrs. Grey the assistant department head, had recommended Henry be placed on probation. Then the action started.

An Abstract:

One o'clock Friday: Mrs. Grey sat at Henry's desk and greatly surprised him. Then she left for a meeting, telling him that she would talk to him later.

One-twenty PM Friday: Henry took the evaluation up to Marc. Marc laughed and banged his desk. "We'll make her eat this!"

Next, Marc called Jim; no answer. He called union headquarters; nobody home. He checked the evaluation over and found contradictions in it which he pointed out to Henry. He told Henry to tell Mrs. Grey to withdraw the evaluation or face a grievance.

Two o'clock Friday: Henry had a second meeting with Mrs. Grey. He resisted the urge to punch her and the stronger, more real urge, to tell her that he felt like punching her. *She's so secure, well fed, highly paid, and respected, though for what I'm not sure... and she knows it. She's the embodiment of this institution.*

She can do no wrong; it shows in her face. And I'm human refuse; the bottom of the heap. I was a mistake here. I have no rights, no respect, no status. I'm paid little and can be dismissed at her whim. She literally owns me. I hate her so much I can barely contain it... What makes me so desperate is that whatever display I make will be interpreted as another indication of my unworthiness correctly diagnosed by my superior, the indefatigable Mrs. Grey. I've met her before, when I was a kid in school.

Henry told her to withdraw the evaluation or face a grievance.

She blew up at him. "You did what? You called the union already? That's just like you to go off half-cocked. This is typical of you. This is your problem. This is why no one can get along with you."

Two-thirty Friday: Henry told Marc what had happened at his second meeting. Marc told him, "Don't worry about it. Monday we'll take care of it. Let her think about it."

Three-thirty Friday: Henry called Ellen and told her, "--and I just turned down that other job ... Now this will be on my record; IF I don't get fired." Ellen told him not to worry.

Three-forty five Friday: Henry got worried. *Perhaps it's true that no one can get along with me. I thought I was aware of my faults. I guess I'm not. I must be a real jerk. No, damn it, it's Grey! She doesn't like me and that's all there is to it. I got in trouble before...in grammar school for making faces and disrupting the class...I got put in the hallway.... I got in a small jam in the service once or twice... No this is different. It's my attitude. What will I do? Can Marc help me? What's a grievance going to do, change Grey's mind, fire her? God, what a mess. Why me all the time? I must do this to myself. Even if we win the grievance I'll still work for Grey. There's no way out.*

Four-thirty Friday. Henry went up to see Marc again. Marc was jovial and talking about something else as if nothing had happened to Henry. "Do you think we can win?" Henry asked.

"Relax, relax," Marc counseled, smiling.

Eight-thirty Monday morning Henry looked for Marc but couldn't find him. Then he looked for Jim. He found Jim. "Did Marc tell you what happened?"

"A little," Jim replied only half interested. Henry filed him in. Jim nodded. "I'll talk to Marc, maybe we'll all meet."

Eight-fifty Monday, Everett came in and Henry told him about his evaluation.

Everett paled, thinking about his own upcoming evaluation.

Nine o'clock Monday, Mrs. Grey arrived and ignored Henry. She traded hellos with Everett who seemed especially polite to her. *Is he worried about his evaluation or is that me reading things into it? I think he's always very polite to her.*

Nine-o'five, Monday. Henry pretended to be busy. He actually found work to do and became immersed in it.

Ten o'clock Monday. Henry found Marc and asked him if anything had happened. Marc told him that he had talked to Jim and Jim would first speak to Mrs. Grey and then they would think of something to do. Henry felt more nervous. *The union is nothing more than Marc and Jim. They are going to help me out of this?*

Ten fifteen Monday. Marshal dashed in. Henry tried to talk to him.

"I know, I know, I heard," Marshal replied as he dialed the phone to call somebody.

Eleven o'clock Monday: Jim came by and asked Henry if anything had happened.

"No, Marc said you would talk to her."

"Oh yeah...She's busy now, --later."

Henry grasping for underlying dynamics of his situation filled Jim in about reasons, real or imaginary, why Mrs. Grey might not like him.

Jim blanched, "--You shouldn't have done that. You can't question her judgment. She

hates that I know she's stupid; but she doesn't," Jim told him.

Eleven thirty Monday: Henry saw Mrs. Grey walk by and tried not to project hatred. Her presence made him feel frustration and panic.

Eleven forty Monday: Ellen called and told Henry that she met Marshal at the cafeteria on her coffee break. She told Marshal about Henry's problem and Marshal seemed concerned. Henry told her, " he didn't look concerned to me."

"Well he ran off and talked to Marc about it," Ellen said.

Twelve thirty Monday: Henry gobbled down his lunch in the cafeteria and found Marc and Jim together diddling over their dessert, and joined them.

Marc remarked, " It looks bad." He had sources he wouldn't disclose in the Department Director's office (Mrs. Grey's boss) and Grey had originally wanted to fire him outright but the Director had said no. Grey had turned in his evaluation and the Director had it now.

"Who said that?" Henry asked.

They wouldn't answer.

"Well what are we going to do?" Henry asked.

Jim shrugged and asked Marc, "Is there enough money in the treasury for an arbitration?"

Marc laughed, "Can't afford it after the Christmas Dinner."

Henry paled causing Marc to laugh again. " Look at him; he believes me!"

He probably half-means it. He was talking tough Friday and his advice got me into worse trouble. Now he seems to be backing out of it, or is that my imagination? I've become obsessed with this thing and can expect nobody else to be ... because it's my ass.

One o'clock Monday: Henry went back to work. The Director passed Henry's desk twice in a short period of time. Both times Henry was busy. *Is he checking on me? Or is it that my imagination working again?*

One thirty Monday: Marc called Henry with some more news. "One reason Grey doesn't like you is because you questioned her judgment."

Henry wondered if that small incident was known throughout the entire institution. "Who told you that?" Henry asked.

"I think Jim found that out," Marc said.

"Oh ..." Henry felt relieved, "...because I told him that."

"Oh, you told him," Marc exclaimed, laughing.

"I suppose that I have become one of those unnamed sources of information," Henry said,

chuckling.

Two o'clock Monday: Jim trying, to look inconspicuous, entered the area and spied on Mrs. Grey, who was still busy. He looked nervous and slowly approached Henry. "I'm gonna talk to her when she's free... Was there ever a time you..." and Jim related to Henry the same story he had gotten from Henry and earlier told Marc.

"Yeah, I told you that this morning," Henry said.

"Oh, you told me that. I thought Marc told me." Jim said looking embarrassed.

"No. Marc just called me and told me the same thing... --We've got a great communication net. I say something and two hours later it comes back to me as some inside information about what's happening behind the scenes."

They both laughed. Jim glanced over to Grey's desk again. "I'll come back later."

Three o'clock Monday, Marshal stopped by Henry's desk, "So what are you going to do?"

"I don't know. I've got the union working on it."

Marshal smirked. "Those two guys ... Maybe you should talk to her."

"That didn't work."

Marshal shrugged. "See you tomorrow, Henry," and he left.

Four thirty Monday. Henry went to see Marc. "Hear anything, Marc?"

"Bye Henry. Nice to know you. Bye." Marc waved, laughing making Henry laugh.

"That bad?"

"Worse."

"Really?"

"Naw ... Don't worry about it. Just look for another job," Marc laughed.

Nine o'clock Tuesday: Henry found Jim and asked if he had talked to Mrs. Grey. "Oh ... I forgot ... I'll talk to her today."

"Listen, Jim, don't try and blow her away like Marc told me. No big-guns union stuff, it doesn't affect her. Just find out why I'm on the shit list."

"I know." Jim nodded, eagerly

DAMN.

My position here seems to be eroding fast. I'm almost helpless.

Eleven fifteen Tuesday: Henry saw Jim talking to Mrs. Grey at her desk. Actually Jim was listening. Mrs. Grey was doing the talking and Jim was listening intently and

nodding his head.

Eleven forty five Tuesday: Jim left Grey's desk, disappearing from the area.

Henry feeling deserted waited two minutes and called Jim, "So?"

"So ... well it's all confused ... Tell you later."

Twelve thirty Tuesday: Henry joined Marc and Jim at lunch. "What's up?" He asked feigning good humor.

"It's bad. She's really against you. She hates you," Jim laughed.

"Christ!"

Marc continued to eat, saying little.

"Well, can we grieve?" Henry asked.

Neither of them answered.

Why aren't they telling me they'll make her eat it? Where's they're spunk? Have they deserted me already? Am I a marked man? Am I untouchable?

"Toni set you up. He's the one that complained," Jim said.

"So there's at least two of them against you," Marc said.

"That bastard... Just because I wouldn't play with him, he did me in spreading rumors and innuendo about me. I mean she was probably wary of me already. Then he started working on her. .. That two-faced pathological, lying shit! I'll finish him. I'll smash that bastard!" Henry swore slamming the table, startling the two of them.

"Are you with me?" Henry asked, standing; unsure of them.

"Sure." Marc said with no conviction.

This union business is an illusion. This is my fight.

One O'five Tuesday: Henry told Everett and then Marshal that Toni had used Mrs. Grey to get rid of him.

Marshal pulled Henry aside. "I'll talk to Grey ... But you've got to learn to eat her shit, like the rest of us do. Smile at her, understand?"

"Yes."

"I don't know what this will do..." Marshal remarked, walking off with a shrug.

Tuesday afternoon was the turning point. First, Marshal talked to Mrs. Grey using all of his talents to charm, persuade, reason, council, turn, alleviate and paint an image. Grey was now unsure of her actions. She became doubtful of Toni's testimony and motivations.

She talked to Everett. In a question and answer session Everett more or less confirmed much of what Marshal had told her. Yet there were things Toni had said about Everett!

Mrs. Grey spoke with Marshal one more time. After Henry de-briefed Marshal he made the last of many phone calls to Marc and Jim relaying nuances from Marshal and Everett of every perceived turn in Grey's thinking so Marc could use the new information with Martin Kranster, the Director of Personnel. And Jim could ply the new gossip into the supposedly open funnel in the Department Director's office.

Then Mrs. Grey summoned Henry.

They spoke kindly to each other. The problem now seemed to be Toni and not Henry. Yet Mrs. Grey would not retract her evaluation (it had been given to the Director who already passed it on to a higher echelon) and Henry would have to go ahead with his grievance.

Wednesday: Like water eroding a desert canyon the momentum built up and began to loosen the thousand foot thick block of rock turning it into grains of sand.

Even Mrs. Grey was on his side! Marc began to feed his sources in the Director's office stoking the fires or smoldering coals with question marks. The Director had summoned Mrs. Grey.

Jim and Henry wrote up the grievance and formally initiated it with the Personnel Department.

Thursday: Accompanied by Marc, Henry defended himself before Martin Kranster in the STEP ONE grievance hearing. Not knowing that the scene had already been written, Henry delivered hammer blows in his own defense.

Kranster withstood the sweeping indictments that Henry made involving the errors inherent in the evaluation process of the Institution. He scratched his head in amusement and offered, "Well if Mrs. Grey realizes she made a mistake in your case then let her withdraw the evaluation and resubmit it."

Not pausing to rethink his position, Henry plunged on bravely, showing promise of talent in his own style of negotiation. "That would be the best thing to do to remedy this situation... However, and I'm sure you recognize this, sometimes people have difficulty in retreating from a position that they've taken publicly... You know, they have to save face. That's the situation here."

"Well..." Kranster began, but Henry jumped in again and painted another picture that momentarily put Kranster in the corner.

Walking back from the personnel office Marc confided in Henry, "You sure came on pretty strong with Kranster...."

"That's the way you do it, don't you?" Henry retorted, naively.

Marc laughed. "Sometimes," he said whimsically.

Friday morning Marc gossiped with Kranster for an hour and agreed again on the best way for all parties to retreat from Henry's grievance. The word 'probation' would be changed to 'observation' and after a month the evaluation would be changed to excellent. In fact, Kranster was already receiving reports from Mrs. Grey that Henry's performance had improved remarkably since last Friday!

Over a dozen people had participated in an intrigue involving one employee in crises. The end result, after Toni got himself in temporary trouble with Mrs. Grey seemed to be nothing -- life went on. The phone calls and rumors and counter-rumors and information and false information and excitement was over. Everyone thought they had won and everyone against them had lost, and yet they were all there ready to play another round.

- *So what happened here? It seems difficult to put my finger on. I smile at Mrs. Grey now
- Kiss her ass in a manner. Did I win or lose?*

First Toni tried to see if I would play with him. Then he tried to use me as his servant and when I wouldn't co-operate he did me in with Grey... Damn it! How do I really know that? I'm just surmising. Maybe it wasn't a conscious effort at all. Maybe Grey simply blamed Toni to get herself out of it after Marshal and Everett turned it around and disagreed with her over my evaluation and put the finger on Toni. It could be that Grey was out for me and Toni sensing that I was weak and knowing that Grey is strong put the knife in. He's like that, scrambling to the winning side regardless. Then Grey put some of the blame back on him when her course of action hit resistance. Or used it to scare Jim claiming there were two of them willing to back each other up against me. God, I can't be sure of any of this.

How did I win? What made Kranster intercede for me and change the probation? Who said I won? What's the difference between observation and probation? Kranster won. He ended the grievance for Grey and kept me happy. But Marc said we won. But he always says 'we won.'

I wonder if the Director played any part in this? Or the Senior Director? God, stop thinking about it, you'll never know... Maybe I should pump Jim or Marshal or... Leave it alone! You know what happened... you won. You'll get a good evaluation. I wish I could tell them all to kiss off. If only my responsibilities weren't growing so fast. Ellen wants to quit and have a baby ... that leaves me as sole support of the family. So I've got to smile at people I don't like.

ARTICLE 2 *What The Hell Is Going On Here?*

The three of them, Michael, Jack and Arnie were happily lost in the sensual noise of the Sidewinder club, piling up rounds of beer before them. A voluptuous go-go dancer was copulating with the air on the lighted stage to the blast of juke box music.

Arnie, drunk already, lolled his head around on the table and mumbled nonsense as if he were drunker than he really was. "Oh Mother, take me away from these bad people: they've led me astray!"

Jack pointed to a woman of thirty, a decade past Arnie, and not beautiful, sitting along the bar with a shorter, plumper very unattractive partner. He patted Arnie's shoulder, "There's one for ya son. She loves yer ass," Jack sang and chuckled afterwards.

"Leave me alone," Arnie protested, "I just wanna sleep."

"Sleep?" Jack questioned above the din. "Ah, you young fellas...Watsa matter sonny, can't get 'er up no more? Too much saltpeter in yer suds?" Jack asked in an old miner's accent borrowed from a classic movie. Then Jack leaned close to Arnie and yanked the pink, fishing hat out of Arnie's pocket and stuffed it ridiculously over his head. "You look like a jerk. Take your hat off in a public place, boy. You're offending people here. Look at these good religious folks here..." Jack gestured to the drunks at the front tables shouting and pointing to the go-go dancer's sexual parts.

The dancer spread her legs and thrust her pubic mound forward. A brave soul jumped up and stuck a dollar bill into her bikini briefs. A chorus of hoots and cheers followed. Arnie, his head on the table and eyes slanted up toward the stage, opened his mouth.

"Close your mouth and take your hat off. You're in church, boy." Jack told him.

Arnie startled giggling and his body wiggled.

"You're not drunk you faker. Sit up." Mike said and tickled him under the armpit. Arnie jumped up banging his head against the back of the booth.

"Cut it out, willya!" Then he slumped down to the table again.

Mike could see Arnie's eyes following the girl up on the stage and betrayed him to Jack. "He's watching the honey pie up there."

"Oh would you like to meet her? She used to be a minister's wife and hasn't been laid in years ... she's waiting for you," Jack said into Arnie's ear.

Arnie giggled again. "I'm in love."

Jack spoke to Mike, "Shall we help the lad experience his first sexual joy?" He asked in a sea captain's voice.

"Cut it out." Arnie protested, sensitive to that point because they were always kidding him about his possible virginity.

"On your wedding night, be gentle with her." Mike told his semi-prostrate friend causing him to giggle and release a puddle of drool to the table top. After a moment Jack left the table and walked to the stage. He very confidently leaned into the light and beckoned the girl. Jack was a large man, with a misleading conservative image; in the smoky spotlight he looked older than twenty-five. The velocity of the dancer's gyrations decreased and she followed Jack's pointed finger to their table and listened to him. He was there long enough to draw a few boos from the front tables.

"Well?" Mike asked when he returned.

"She'll be here." Jack replied nervously.

A few minutes later the juke box plug was pulled and the dancer stopped. She looked around, smiled at the waving drunks of the first table and walked past them to Mike, Jack and Arnie's booth.

"Hi," she said.

"Hi, have a seat..." Jack said, rising to let her in.

Arnie sprang to attention wiping drool from his chin.

"Mike, Arnie, I'm Jack." Jack said pointing.

"Mike, Arnie, Jack," She repeated to remember their names. My name is Sheila." She sat between Jack and Arnie and allowed Jack to order a glass of draft and a screwdriver, both for her. She was sweaty and smelled pungently of body odor. She unhesitatingly pulled her bikini briefs open to show them the dollar bills stuffed against her flesh. "Pretty good, huh?" She asked.

"Great!" Jack replied, his eyes glistening.

"Oh cut it out." Sheila protested proudly. "I meant the money!"

She inhaled the glass of beer and gulped half of her screwdriver.

"We come in here often, how come we've never seen you in here before?" Mike asked from a half-stupor.

"Another beer?" Jack asked.

Sheila nodded yes, still looking at Mike as if she was used to being offered another beer.

"...Just started this week, on Monday, matter of fact." She almost killed the screwdriver in another gulp. Jack, on her other side, made a face as if to say *'What is she; a fish?'*

"Another screwdriver?" Jack asked with no hint of humor or malice.

"No, later." Sheila replied, still answering Mike's question. "I mean, my old man was working construction till last week so we needed the bread ya know."

"You've got beautiful eyes, like my mother's. What's your name?" Arnie asked

"Sheila. I think I told you ... Yeah a lot of guys say I've got eyes like, uh, ... Cleopatra. And nice boobs too," she said giving them a shake.

"That too!" They all replied.

"You look like Elizabeth Taylor, when she was younger," Mike offered.

"Thanks. So what do you guys do?"

"We're all pilots for Delta Airlines," Jack lied.

"Oh really? You guys go to Europe and France and shit?"

"Constantly," Jack said.

"In fact they've been flying our eyeballs off. We've been on the Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles run for a solid month. We've finally gotten a relief crew," Mike said.

"Right, but we only have a twenty-four hour layover till we make Rome. Christ, thirty-five hundred dollars in overtime pay and I can't even spend it," Jack said to Mike and Arnie.

Sheila's eye opened. "Thirty-five hundred dollars?" She asked

"Yup," Mike replied.

She sipped her second beer slowly.

"I can't fly no more!" Arnie whined. "I'm scared we'll crash."

"Take it easy Arn. You've got to, we can't get another flight officer on such quick notice," Jack told him.

"Yeah Arnie, it's your job. You've got to do it," Sheila pleaded with him.

"I'm scared, and, --and no body loves me."

Jack rolled his eyes upwards. "Knock it off Arnie," he hissed.

The bouncer signaled Sheila's attention and pointed at the stage. "Whoops, gotta go, see you guys later. I break again in twenty minutes and a new girl comes on ..." She sprang up and rushed from the table as the music began.

"Wow," Jack said not referring to her shape, intelligence or body odor in particular.

"What-a-ya think?" Mike asked

"I think we should go now. I'm running out of money." Jack replied.

"No, I wanna stay!" Arnie said.

They stayed and in half an hour Sheila returned to their table for awhile and talked. Her 'old man' she related was a warlord for an outlaw motorcycle gang in the area. Mike was enjoying the sky-pilot charade and Arnie the gift of being able to stare down into her bosoms it close range, However, the high prices, coupled with Sheila's unquenchable thirst began to break their wallets. They were somewhat relieved when she returned to the stage after twenty-five minutes of the relief girl.

"Let's be going," Jack counseled.

On the way out, Jack paused before the thirty-ish woman and her unattractive partner.

The thirty-ish woman was surveying the scene eagerly. She was a large framed person, six feet tall with a broad bosom and thick legs. Her hair was a soft, mousy brown and fairly long.

"Hello." Jack said.

Her partner, with a pushed in jaw and heavy glasses glanced at Jack quickly. The thirty-ish woman inspected them and replied, "Go fuck yourself."

Jack was taken back. He regained his composure immediately and stepped aside. A perplexed look crossed his face. He bent his knees and looked down at his groin. He rotated his behind slowly. "Jeeze, that's hard to do, maybe you can show me," Jack replied.

The two women made no verbal reaction though their eyes flicked to and fro.

"Oh I see," Jack laughed. "Two weary travelers from the island of Lesbos."

"Look, smart-ass, if you don't leave us alone we'll got the bouncer..." The thirty-ish woman snapped.

"Watsa matter, can't fight your own battles, shweet-heart?" Mike said, attempting a Bogart dialect.

The three stepped outside the bar leaving the noise and commotion for the cool, wispy air.

They got into Arnie's old car, 'the bomb,' and tried starting it.

"Nothing," Jack said sitting behind the wheel, glancing with dismay at Arnie's inconclusive shape sprawled in the car's small back seat. They shook Arnie awake and put him behind the wheel so Mike and Jack could push-start the car. With Arnie working the gears, clutch and ignition it took several tries to start, and Jack and Mike were soon huffing in the night their vision limited to darkened pavement as they grunted forward and shouted, "NOW!" only to see their efforts wasted by Arnie's fumbling. At first they laughed at him, then they began to dislike him and his car.

"Come on ARN!" Mike shouted losing all patience.

"You get in there," Jack ordered Mike. "Arnie get out and push."

"Once more," Arnie coaxed, pro-occupied with his nervous efforts to do it right. They were successful, and the car sputtered, then ran.

Jack took over from Arnie and they departed the Sidewinder club.

A few miles into the night Jack asked, "Well boys which way?" He slowed the car as it approached a back-roads intersection where four roads converged.

"Which way to what?" Mike asked as the car slid neatly down one of the roads headed for what.

"Anywhere ... I don't have the faintest idea where we are," Jack chuckled.

No one knew. After a quarter mile he slowed and turned the car around, roaring into the opposite direction, shattering the night with determination and misspent purpose. They went through the intersection again and guessed at which road they had arrived by. They guessed wrong.

Shortly, Jack's determination wavered as he, still lost, found himself at the bottom of a steep hill that began at the end of a curve. The night, having seemed an empty stage, now appeared to unfold a conspiracy against them.

Jack began to negotiate the hill without realizing how steep it was. The car with 175,000 miles on it was not prepared for the exertion and began to lug before the summit. He downshifted the gears to finish the climb but luck was not with them. The car wouldn't downshift to first while still moving and without warning it stalled in second gear.

"Christ!" He braked and shut off the lights not wanting to waste the battery, no matter how vain the effort. Holding the foot brake Jack searched for the emergency. "Where is the fucking thing?" He implored.

Arnie catching on said, "It's broke."

"Good God!" Jack exclaimed, anxious and frustrated.

Mike giggled.

"Not funny, Mike. We're on a God-damn mountain," Jack said.

"Coast back?" Mike asked

"No way ... To release the brake and coast backward ... build up a little speed ... never make that curve down there ... Not in the dark. We'll go right off the road and fuckin' die!"

"Well, see you guys later," Mike laughed pretending to open the door.

"Get out and push?" Arnie offered,

Jack laughed out of anger. "Sure. Which way, down?"

"Up?"

"Come on, the car would roll right over us ... You know, if a truck comes over this hill going down, maybe a little wide, we've had it." Jack looked around at the dark woods along the hillside. He chuckled. "Well, we could just park the fucking thing, in gear, and walk."

Arnie bolted upright, concerned about his car being abandoned. None of them felt like hiking in the black unknown.

"If these brakes were any good, we could *try*, coasting ... Are they any good?" Jack asked.

Arnie shrugged.

For the hell of it Jack tried the ignition. It worked. "Thank God!"

Using one foot for the clutch and the other for the brake and gas, in a heel and toe fashion, Jack bounced the car forward rolling Arnie into the rear window. Jack ground up the hill in first, snapped the headlights on as the car edged up to the summit. "WHOOO!" They shouted and roared down the hill still lost.

They took road after road, found a highway, stopped at a diner for a lengthy breakfast that consumed the rest of their money, and got directions for home.

Finally, a gray dawn giving warning at the horizon, their heads buzzing with an ex-boozy fatigue, they reached recognizable territory.

"All right!" Jack shouted, pounding the steering wheel with exuberance.

ARTICLE 2.1 A Person Comes Of Age Many Times

Henry's first negotiation session was ordered by one personal rule: say nothing, do nothing. It was cool, marked by overcast skies and threats of storm and night was racing in from out of the late afternoon.

The parent, affiliate union was supposed to send a negotiator to 'assist' them but the man, Elliot Kirch, was an unknown entity and not due for an appearance till the next week.

Under the glaring, yellow lights over the big conference table near the Senior Director's Office, Marc commanded the new, faltering union team. Jim had constructed their contract proposal and it was huge, fantastic and difficult to explain. And Jim was too tongue-tied to deal with it.

Brenda suspected every move that occurred to be a clever machination designed to undermine and betray them.

Henry expected exposure to a verbal Cabala of the unknown as if he would be in the chambers of mighty jurists discussing theories of contract. Instead he found it to be mostly talk, denial and debate and a few sarcastic jokes, some even funny.

Marc was boisterous and nervous. He tried to dominate the whole group on both sides of the table and did badly. Martin Kranster, captain of the other side did much better fending Marc off, cornering him only to make him more stubborn and deepen the scowls on the union's side. Everyone grew impatient with Marc and began to ignore his jokes to Kranster about management's faults.

"Now Marc, there's no need for this paranoia on the part of the employee, you know we have the best interests of everyone at heart here," Kranster said, his hands spread open from the wrists like a fish's mouth as he spoke, leaning foreword on his elbows.

"Whoa, Martin ... are you going to ... One minute, don't interrupt ... uh..." Marc was

attempting.

"C'mon," Another union man, becoming bored, coaxed more to Marc than to Kranster.

Jim was busy intimidating management by ripping up pieces of paper ostensibly to pass messages on. It bothered Marc and Henry more.

"Cool it," Marc hissed at Jim. "What about Rose Sabrina... Do you deny..." Mark continued with Kranster, nervously, trying to maintain his control.

"Sabrina. Now that's a case we have acted very forthright about and..." Kranster shot back angrily.

They called a caucus and management left the room. Mark gloated to Henry, the only one listening to him. "Oh Boy, I really got Kranster about Sabrina, did you catch that one?"

Henry smiled and tried to shut out all the commotion from his fellow union people. In seconds, Kranster called Marc out of the caucus for a brief conference.

Brenda reacted immediately. "What's he doing! He can't do that! If Kranster is going to tell him something, he should tell all of us!"

"Relax. Cool it. It's no sweat. It happens all the time. They can talk out there and not commit themselves," someone said.

"I don't like it. Who's to say he won't sell us out!" Brenda protested about Marc.

God, what's going on here? Does anybody know? Does Marc? Does Jim? Brenda doesn't. Do the others? Kranster and his side must think we're all dopes... And we are.

Marc returned, feigning great merriment. He heaved with frolic to the point where he couldn't speak. "Oh they're so stupid." He laughed, waving at Kranster beyond the door.

"What happened?" Brenda demanded.

"Nothing." He plopped into his chair.

Soon, the session began again, and both sides became quiet except for their spokesman.

What if I were to burst out screaming here and start banging the table? This business is not so hard to understand. It's verbal waltzing. They're playing with us, and we're playing with them. We're both delaying; they on purpose, and we out of a semi-conscious reaction to them. I doubt Marc knows what he's doing. Our proposal is ridiculous, it will never become real. What force do we have here to make them accept it? This could go on forever.

At last the session ended with Marc claiming great victories. Nothing had happened. The only thing agreed upon was another meeting date and that took twenty minutes and two caucuses.

Outside a drizzle was growing heavier in the night air. They meandered to their cars in

the nearly empty parking lots. Foamy gray cones of light came from the street lights standing like sentries in the night.

**

Henry pretended to be occupied at his desk. He shuffled through papers putting them in separate piles and glanced through a computer print-out he intended to throw away. The office was busy, full of people anyway. Toni was behind him on the phone involved in a long dramatic conversation full of ups, downs and romantic politics to one of his boyfriends. Marshal was in the hallway talking to two middle-aged, but attractive women. He was full of smiles and warmth for them as he talked, and they showered him with adoration making him bask, beaming back to them.

Henry didn't know which to follow: Toni's soap opera, Marshal's conversation or the other activities in the office.

Marshal broke free from the conversation in the hallway by looking at his watch and telling the women he had to do something. He smiled warmly as they left and then rushed inside the office. He virtually plunged into the chair beside Henry's desk and in a scowling whisper, while leaning close to Henry said, "Those fucking bitches, what do they want?"

Henry paused and studied Marshal. "What are you talking about?"

"Women! They are so fucking ..." Marshal's hands groped for adjectives or understanding. "Their intelligence is so different from men. They think so differently. My God, what do they want from me? You know what this one wants?" He asked, pointing down the hall.

"No."

"She wants me to sponsor a program she's organizing."

"On what?"

"On sex in modern society. That's all these wealthy women have to deal with is sex," Marshal said twirling his finger in the air and nodding in agreement with himself.

Henry nodded also, wondering what he was agreeing to. His conversations with Marshal were often in code. But he would be polite.

"So don't do it," Henry offered.

"Oh I want to do it, it'll be good for me," Marshal said.

"Then don't complain."

"Oh I'm not complaining, definitely not. But women are something. They are smarter than men. They know what they want and they get it. Men are still out there playing games, pretending to be hunters. Men are through; it's a woman's world."

"You're probably right in some ways, most occupations are becoming neuter..." Henry began.

"Got to go, now," and Marshal popped up from the chair to talk to somebody else.

He always does that. Talks to me in his contradictory code and when I try to be polite and comment on his conversation using whatever boring entrance lines I think up, he runs off being rude. I should ignore him. But it's hard for me to be that rude on purpose. I can do it when I wander around here thinking about something, my head up my ass ... I see through people... Maybe people see me that way...

Henry went back to pretending to be busy for several seconds. He grabbed a bunch of papers from his desk, stood up and surveyed the office briefly.

Toni was still involved with the telephone. "Now, Vernon, that was not my purpose at all. I spoke to Joel on an advisory basis. He had asked me about... No I never had any intention of ... That is simply untrue. I had indicated, that...."

Henry, unnoticed, left the office looking for something purposeful and interesting to do.

**

Henry lying still in his darkened bedroom, the outside world dead for him, his inner world growing and continuing.

Expansive green parks spreading endlessly over miles of hills swelled with trees and green, warm valleys that meandered from the dissimilar park of his childhood to towns and boroughs across the world encompassing both his imagination, his experience and his repeating obsessions.

Sometimes he returned to quaint, crowded city streets first familiar and then remote, and linked one to another, maze-like through countless miles upon miles of cottages, tall houses, crushed together villas reminiscent of something, seen before if in dreams only, and running unstoppably into other dreams some repetitious in their scenery, some haunting and clueing of something. What was there? He could almost say, yet he kept traveling through; a familiar stranger hurrying past, searching. Who else was there, journeying to these odd composite cities, waiting for the fairy-tale train, taking the bus down invented streets?

**

In the short interim between the first and second negotiation sessions, many changes took place on the union team. Marc, claiming he no longer had the time for meetings removed himself from the team and appointed Jim as chairman. This new climate galvanized Brenda's campaign against Marc as being too close to the administration. The size of the team began to dwindle as others lost interest and resigned, or made excuses as to why they couldn't attend.

In this narrow and close environment it became inevitable that Brenda and Henry should clash. And they did, beginning in a quiet strategy session in the mid-afternoon. Henry felt

duty bound to defend Marc against the gossipy accusations that Brenda kept intimating about him. However, lacking all tact, he kept quiet till he couldn't bare it any longer and then shouted her down earning a sizable portion of her suspicion and enmity toward himself. Jim, throughout maintained a noncommittal neutrality. Jim felt caught in the middle and he dreaded the prospect of having to take sides.

The team, minus the local's president, showed up in the late evening for their second meeting with the administration. Jim was their spokesman. Brenda had made him promise not to leave the room and talk to Kranster without the team.

The conference room seemed small and stuffy. The Administration had set up a pot of coffee on a small end table in the corner. They had also provided some donuts which the union ignored.

Ten minutes after the time they were supposed to begin Kranster poked his head into the room. "We'll be a bit late, have some coffee, enjoy the donuts." He said, happily and then retreated closing the door.

"Oh, the condescending attitude of that man, it infuriates me!" Brenda said flashing her eyes and swiveling her head to see if others agreed with her.

Jim and Henry began gobbling donuts and others followed; Brenda reluctantly.

Soon the session began and Kranster shifted the weight of the session over to Jim asking him to defend a particular article in the union proposal. Jim faltered. He hesitated. He spoke with uncertainty. He paused. He raised his wobbly voice and began talking in tangents about why he wrote the article.

Henry clenched his extremities not knowing whether to smirk at Jim or help. The Administration was dozing. Kranster interrupted Jim to toy humorously with one of Jim's more absurd arguments causing the management side of the table to laugh. Henry's personal rule of doing nothing was falling into jeopardy.

There's silent screaming in my brain. It lies beneath the fear of making a fool of myself. But this rage is boiling into a near eruption in my throat.

An angry looking man that Henry did not know entered the room. He shook hands briefly with Kranster and sat down next to Henry.

Jim paused and looked at the man, "Kirch?" His lips asked.

The man nodded and harshly motioned, "Go on."

Jim continued, haltingly, to defend his article. Kranster asked an absurd question and broke management into squalls of laughter.

Kirch interrupted bitterly, "May we have a caucus?"

Kranster's face lost its humor, "Sure, we'll leave the room."

Kirch closed the door after Kranster's team left and sat across from the union side

intending to do his own form of bargaining. "This proposal is ridiculous," Kirch said holding the document up and eyeing them coldly. His intelligence and careful demeanor made the union proposal seem like a cartoon. Which Henry had surmised it was.

"Our president likes it." Henry defended, lamely.

"Then he's ridiculous," Kirch shot back at Henry.

Let's see what I can get away with. "Maybe you're ridiculous," Henry said in a low voice, making the union team chuckle.

Kirch smiled. "Maybe... but look, don't ever meet with out me... And you have a week to jettison most of this shit." He waved the proposal in the air. "Kranster made fools out of you. Do you like that?"

"No!" Brenda said, defiantly.

"But we're not gonna throw away all of our hopes, " Henry said.

"Look, what do you want here; seven per cent? Because that's what I see. Seven percent pay raise across the board. That's what **other** staff associations have been getting," Kirch said authoritatively, making Jim wince.

"We want Binding Arbitration, ten per cent, shift differential, promotional rights, career ladder and..." Henry said as defiantly as Brenda had been, perhaps more so.

"Hold it! You guys are dreamers. Fuckin' dreamers. Have you got a strike here?" Kirch asked heatedly.

There was silence.

"We can do it," Brenda said.

"Look. Forget what your president wants, listen to me ... I know... Jim, I noticed you faltering there; haven't you got your strategies and arguments written down someplace?" Kirch asked.

"No." Jim smiled sheepishly.

"Christ!" Kirch banged the table.

"Look, I'm telling you, and I've been around... You're in no shape to negotiate. A mediator or a fact-finder would die looking at this proposal... A hundred pages long. And don't tell me your president likes it. The man isn't even here. If he's not here he doesn't even count.

Henry scowled.

*He's the seven per-cent man! We've got to negotiate or way-lay **him** before we can negotiate with the administration.. This is **not** so easy.*

**

"The goddamn fuckin' car again!" Henry railed at Ellen. "It won't start SOME of the time. Not all, just SOME. Take it to the service station they charge me for shit it doesn't need; new battery, new ignition wires. New ignition wires twice in TWO FUCKIN' months! If wires had to be replaced that often you'd have to rewire your house six times a year! And it still won't work. Nothing works! You're always going back to the store to return something you bought brand new that don't fuckin' work. And everything's so small. The TV's small, the car's small, this place is small...getting smaller ... You turn around, you knock something over. Between the thieves, crooks, shit-heads this society is doomed!"

"So what do you want me TO DO ABOUT IT?" Ellen screamed back at Henry.

"Well I want mine!" Henry demanded.

"You're what?"

"Mine!"

"You got yours. What do you accomplish for your money?" Ellen asked

Henry beamed. "Shit." But added, "There are people there that accomplish less and get paid THREE TIMES more than me. I want that. We practically live at the poverty level."

"Bullshit."

"We will when we try it on my a salary alone. After we have a kid."

"So I'll go right back to work," she said.

"Who'll take care of the kid?"

"I don't know."

"Besides, you don't want to work there anymore."

"I know ... I know. What do you want from me?"

"Nothing. I'm just bitching, that's all. 'Cause the car won't start. Tomorrow it'll start," Henry smiled.

"Take my car."

"Sometimes your car stalls out and THEN won't start."

"Then don't go out. Where were you going?" Ellen asked.

"To got milk. I won't go; we'll make up some instant."

"All right. --I hate instant milk," Ellen said.

**

Marc, smiling securely, showed up at Henry's work area and slid into the chair next to Henry's desk, "How's it going, President?" Marc kidded.

"Vice President... Jim wants to be President. I might not make it," Henry said.

"Jim? I don't know. I used to think he was sharp; but I don't know now. It's that fuck Elliot Kirch. I hate his guts. He's got Brenda and Jim all worked up about me 'cause I won't back down from him," Marc said.

Bullshit. I won't back down from him. But Kirch and Brenda don't like you and Brenda doesn't like me either.

"Well, Jim wants to be President. I'll handle negotiations though, Jim doesn't like that stuff. He stumbles for words at the table. We talked it over, already." Henry said.

"Well you'd better get started soon," Marc counseled.

"I know. Look at this shit." He handed Marc some campaign literature from Brenda's party. "She's the first one to run on a ticket." Henry said.

"That doesn't mean anything. People will only vote for the ones they know." Marc, the experienced politician said.

Henry shrugged. "Read that shit. It's all aimed against you and me. We're a 'Secretive click.' Nobody's more secretive than her and her bunch. Who's this fuck George Lyndon? Never heard from him before; he's on the ticket 'To reorganize the communication structure till it communicates.' He says 'There has never been a communication network here and that's CRIMINAL, designed to aid the secretive click in charge.' How the fuck would he know, he just got here three months ago?"

"Getting involved, aye?" Marc chuckled. "They're a bunch of lying bastards. The best rep structure existed during the last negotiations. It always breaks up from lack of interest when the crises is over. Always," Marc added.

"And another thing," Henry grew madder. "Those shits accuse us of being undemocratic. Yet, they used their new reps to organize the election committee and the election committee is all running for office on Brenda's ticket, using their own rules. How democratic is that? And some of their new election procedures are in direct violation of our constitution: No nomination meeting. No central balloting spot... They want their new rep organization to conduct balloting. How can they? They're all running for office?"

"Christ! Marc's eyes rolled up and he slid down into his chair. "Lots of luck kid ... Vice President or Office steward?" Marc laughed.

"Don't laugh. I got on this shit list by sticking up for you." Henry wagged a finger at Marc.

"Me?" Marc feigned surprise.

"So what do we do ... lose the union to radical incompetents?" Henry asked rhetorically.

"Not we --You. I'm gone."

"But you'll still be on the Executive Board as past-president." Henry said.

"Nope."

"Why?"

"I'm gone." Marc smiled securely, again.

"Huh?"

Marc extended his hand for a shake. "Congratulate a new, young executive."

"You're kidding me." Henry smiled, surprised, and shook his hand. "You're going to miss all this."

"Nope. Not at all. I love it. No more union. No more of this Institution. I'll be making some MONEY."

"Yeah?" Henry asked, interested.

Marc leaned closer to Henry, his face almost serious and said in a low voice. "I won't miss it at all. I'll tell you something, People are never satisfied. Give them a fifteen per cent settlement and two months later it's 'what has the union done for me?'" Marc mimicked in a complainer's whiny tone.

"Fools? --Well ... to be struggling for this illusory power over fools must make us the biggest fools of all," Henry admitted.

Marc nodded.

**

Henry, before sleeping and waiting for dreams, let himself flow through fantasy thoughts. At first he was in control and traveled through bright, sunny visions of the West Coast. Then he lost concentration and the bright sunshine darkened into night and became crowded with small, cluttered streets, bungalows and people. Unfriendly people, unknown people. Prostitutes of indiscriminate age, not young, not old, though plump, stood waiting. They were not pretty, not ugly and they stood waiting for cars to stop.

He thought back to the city of his early youth with aging wooden houses and dirtying, brick apartment buildings. It was a Halloween evening and children were thronging in the streets. Henry, small and with less world experience, went into a bar with some other children. The bar was several steps off street level; and it was smoky and warm inside. The costume mask was annoying, saturated with moisture above his mouth it was beginning to shred. The men turned from the long crowded bar to look; they were not men like his father. It was noisy. There were several women in the bar, not many though, and they were very unlike his mother. Henry accepted some pennies from the cashier

after forcing a meaningless, passive, "Tricker-treat," He felt guilty taking the money from the strange man.

Outside a crowd of youngsters surrounded by their mothers stood waiting and looking skyward. Upstairs, above the bar two woman, broad, red-haired women, were teasing the children. The women seemed odd, uninhibited. As the children's calls rose into a demanding, grasping crescendo the women tossed out many lollipops that fell to the ground to be scooped up by eager youngsters. Henry watched. To him the children were groveling greedily for unnecessary junk. At any rate he couldn't summon the initiative to join the fracas. Then the women threw kisses and left the windows billowing with sailing curtains in the cool fall air. But the chanting of the children as if expected and desired coaxed them back to the window again to tease. Something about the woman seemed very untypical to Henry. He felt adverse to taking their cheap lollipops.

A nervous, haunting nostalgia of long ago nights and unanswered mysteries from the hallways of old apartment houses with marked-up doors and garish, yellow lights seized Henry and fought off sleep.

Other childhood memories invited themselves into his head. Joining a "club" in the city, in a vacant lot in front of some cheap, multiple housing left over from the war. A lot filled with old junk and blowing, wallowing paper trash trapped in its endless flight to oblivion by the remains of an aged fence. Henry was six years old.

He remembered the first club house, a small hut made of loose boards and destroyed sections of abandoned wall, an old piece of carpet over the ground. It was small and dark inside, lit by a candle. Four boys were in this womb talking about their rules and customs. Henry was agreeing, feeling dubious and deceptive. He pretended to ask silly questions which they regarded seriously.

He left that club to join another one. A large door leaning against the wall of a building. It was very dark inside. There was only one other boy in this new club, a lonely boy. They seemed to hide inside avoiding the imagined smell of a dead rat that might have, or might not have been, at the other end of the door. What was the purpose of this hiding? Hiding from what?

What was the connection between him then and now? He once worked with creative energy using batteries, wires, diodes and other paraphernalia trying to reinvent what seemed like mysteries. What was the result of all his creative-destructive energies applied for hours to such tasks of lone tinkering?

He had shared the socialization process with a few close friends enjoying the ecstasy of nervous, intoxicated laughter and the making funny faces at other people in the streets. The residue remained in the occasional goofy face made, privately in defense against an embarrassing event, usually in the mirror.

His recollections began to decompose into false caricatures of himself that slipped into unconscious scenarios. He changed his memories by years and returned to the bright, hot afternoons south of the border. Prostitutes with their dresses off, wearing wide, flimsy panties; pendulous breasts pointing everywhere. Hot sweaty sexual union, the mingling

of fluids and then dressing. A parting slap on the rump and some accented words of goodbye. Then meeting friends long gone ... Aching loneliness and then sleep Dreams of abandonment in forgotten Vietnam.

**

In a deserted stairwell, leading to the basement passageways, Jim and Henry had a quick, questioning conversation.

"Why do you think Kirch keeps telling us not to be so sure about getting Binding Arbitration?" Jim asked.

"He wants to settle quickly the way his other staff associations have, throw us a little money and move on," Henry replied.

"Yeah, but is that all?"

"What do you mean?" Henry asked, eager to plunge into a plot.

"I mean he's representing other bargaining units here also ... and we can't get something they don't get," Jim said.

"True ... but aren't they going for binding too." Henry said, a nervous tremor in his brain wondering what he was talking about.

Binding Arbitration, dollars, bargaining units, God, where did I pick this vocabulary up? Do I mean it or am I talking baseball cards again. I didn't really care about baseball cards so long ago...

They continued talking, matching clues about Kirch's behavior, arriving at near frightening conclusions only to remember other contradictory information that deflated all their extraordinary hypotheses and left them wondering about things they were unsuccessful in understanding. Soon Jim's confusion reached a limit and he excused himself and scampered off to another commitment.

*

As the sessions mounted in both their number and futility Henry took a greater and greater lead in negotiating. At first his influence was apparent only in caucus sessions where he continued to stand up to Kirch and debate the negotiating strategy Kirch called for. Slowly and in very occasional occurrences Henry began to speak at the table filling in dead air time or bailing Kirch out of a ploy Kranster threw at him.

It was during mediation that Henry finally emerged as a force at the table and with the reputation of a tough guy. The Administration and Mediator were waltzing verbally through the union proposal making broad fun of it as Kirch gesturing sympathetically allowed them license to continue. With a shrug the big-union professional demonstrated to the management side and supposedly neutral mediator that he thought much of the local's proposal was bullshit, but he, as forced by ethics, couldn't say so.

Jim, suffering under the conflicting pressures of pride of authorship and an inability to speak quickly and effectively in an atmosphere flowing rapidly under the steam of glibber tongues, suffered in silence. Henry had adopted a semi-bemused look himself until...

"And I see that you want Binding Arbitration here too." The mediator mentioned, smiling while he rubbed at his stomach ulcer.

"Along with the moon and the sun and everything else," Kranster said provoking laughter from the Administration side.

Kirch smiled.

"Do you have a NEED for such a thing?" The mediator asked becoming a stern yet understanding old teacher berating his anxious pupils. The union team was silent and lost for words. Brenda in her fury looked to Kirch for an answer as did Henry and Jim. Kirch stood up and strolled over to the coffee pot, an 'I told you so' look on his face. The Administration side began to joke exuberantly with each other in victory.

"It's very important here. In the past there was a time..." Henry began but his words, quiet and carefully formed were cracked like china that the mediator brushed aside as he again berated the inexperienced and vulnerable union team. Henry paused, alone. His words had disappeared. The mediator continued along, sweeping the union's proposal under the table. They were all moving along. The Administration was flipping pages in the union document quickly passing over the meat of it.

"Keep what you already have..." The mediator was counseling losing the battle for them.

"Can we mark it off?" Kranster asked eagerly excited by the positive shake in the Mediator's head.

Henry slammed the table with his hand. "NO GODDAMN IT!!! THERE WILL BE NO SETTLEMENT HERE WITHOUT BINDING!!! NONE!!!" Henry screamed at them stopping motion into a freeze as they listened to his formidable words.

There was a moment of surprised silence as the Mediator changed his role and became neutral once again.

"There's no need for binding arbitration here." Kranster chided.

"No? What about the three percent increment we were supposed to get last year..." Henry began.

"Well now, that's simply a case of ..." Kranster started to recount forcefully.

"WE ONLY GOT TWO PERCENT. AND WE GRIEVED AND WON, BUT THE ARBITRATION WAS ADVISORY AND YOU IGNORED IT!" Henry shouted thickly, his face turning red and his hands trembling with anger.

Kranster pulled his chin in and puffed his cheeks out avoiding Henry's eyes behind the

protection of his own, thick glasses. He said nothing.

"You've demonstrated that you can't be trusted." Henry continued.

Kranster cringed, then slid easily back into his role as spokesman for someone else who couldn't be trusted. "Well you have your feelings on the matter," Kranster said lightly, allowing someone else to crack a joke at the table that relieved the tension and isolated Henry's fury.

Afterwards, in a union caucus, Kirch feeling the uneasiness between himself and Henry, moving against him, tried to make the most of the situation. "See, you can speak for yourselves. That's important. No body else can say it for you."

Henry tried not to sneer.

ARTICLE 3 Time Out For Bullshit Or Is It The Other Way Around?

"So where do you think you're headed?" Henry asked Michael, both tucked away in the near-dark living room as they nursed their beer.

"You mean my future?"

"I guess. Where do you see yourself in five years? Shit, I feel like a job interviewer asking that question."

Michael laughed. "Oh ... I don't know ... like you, maybe, married and all that shit. But I don't know All that responsibility...The same thing every day, it scares me."

"Me too. The responsibility anyway," Henry admitted.

"You've got a good deal here, Henry, Really."

"I guess...Though I could hunger again ... secretly that is, for where you are. Single, uncomplicated. Getting drunk, going to parties, panting after girls. I did that."

"It's nothing, I'm alone most of the time," Michael admitted.

"You don't have women coming out of your ears?"

"No ... Did you, when you were single?"

"Hell no." Henry answered.

They both laughed. Michael confessed, "The ones I want don't want me, and the ones who'll have me scare me off."

Henry hunched closer as if Ellen sleeping in the bedroom could overhear. "I went with this one girl. It seemed like I went with her for awhile. Actually it couldn't have been longer then, oh, a few weeks say. But, you know the intensity seemed to be there, for me anyway. She was not really a knock out or anything. Big tits, though at the time anything

would do. She had dark hair and well I guess she was cute ... after you knew her a little while. But I could never understand the game she was playing with me, Y'know?"

"Like what?" Michael asked, interested, stories of his own forming behind his excitement.

"Like..--She seemed to feel real passion when we necked. She wasn't a virgin. She had been engaged. She acted like she liked me, but she kept holding me off. No sex. Sometimes she would turn cold and balky in the middle of the evening for no apparent reason. She had me on a string..." Henry jerked an imaginary yo-yo. "...I finally told her off ... She got mad and would have nothing to do with me. I tried to wheedle back into her good graces. Sort of negotiate a settlement. But no deal. I'd get half way there, tell her a joke, make her smile and she would turn cold all of a sudden. I don't know if telling her off was the right thing to do or... I couldn't stand the routine; hot and frosty, so it was just as well, I hate that y'know. Anyway are women still that way?"

"Hot and cold? Sure." Michael said.

"No...uh, afraid of intimacy. Unwilling to screw on the fifth date, even if they like you. Did the changing sexual codes knock that out?" Henry asked feeling far older than his quarter of a century.

Michael's voice rose in hesitation as he stretched his neck and scratched, stalling for time. "I could give you two answers. --Yeah things are different. But that's largely bullshit. Or, ah, at least hearsay. Y'know magazines, talk, gossip. As far as I'm concerned it depends on the person. Listening to some guys talk, they sleep with every girl they meet or better."

"Like Rammer?" Henry joked.

"No, younger, better looking guys, who get these attractive, sexy women. They probably do. Or maybe half of it is bullshit. I don't know. You have to be dripping and exuding with self confidence to pile up those kind of statistics. I'm not that self-assured, or lucky either." Michael shook his head trying to find the flaw in his internal debate. "But like I said, I don't want the women I could get, or think I could get. I'm usually a sucker for something else that is..." He paused losing or throwing away his train of thought, "Actually my big problem is inventing interesting conversation...."

They both laughed again. "Me too, me too," Henry chortled. "I couldn't find anything to talk about to the dumb ones who just wanted to get laid so I tried everything and crossed their eyes with bewilderment. The smart ones saw through me and wouldn't have anything to do with a nut like me. "

Michael giggled with glee, and Henry continued, "It was always said that the best way to relate to people, especially women you don't know, was to 'act naturally', be yourself. I never knew who the fuck I was, so I wasted an extraordinary amount of time inventing myself as I went along. I usually tried to be 'different' and ended up coming across very weird."

"I know. I know that feeling ... Then you're stuck with your own creation," Michael said.

They shook their heads in mock sadness and chuckled softly over a problem that could only be judged safely from a distance.

Taking over as chief spokesman from Kirch, Henry opened the next negotiating session and handled himself without being lost for words or exploding into fury. Kranster had the obligation of explaining parts of his proposal for the third time. Coming to some language concerning return from layoff Kranster had harped strongly over a particular phrase in his article. 'Employees must be fully able to return to their duties.'

Kranster seemed less than his jovial self. His fingers touched his bald dome as he hunched over the paperwork before him. Possibly he had graver matters on his mind. Or perhaps the appearance of the Administration's Executive Board Attorney made him less affable. The lawyer, wearing a fine suite of blue pinstripes on his ample frame, seemed to look off into the distance, not seeing very much. He missed little of the dialogue and would occasionally pipe in with some erudite commentary as dressy as his cufflinks. The man had a reputation as a heavy drinker perhaps even a drunk, though this seemed well blended to his slightly eccentric, mildly arrogant demeanor. Henry wore a sweater vest of man-made fibers that had come free with his discount store shirt. Kirch was keeping fairly quiet at his end of the table though some non-union fraternization was taking place with Brenda.

"What does that mean? FULLY ABLE." Henry asked and bent an ear to listen to Jim's interpretation of the article and its solution.

"...Take FULLY out and the article is okay," Jim whispered.

Without breaking facial expression or concentration Henry nodded to Jim and continued talking to Kranster's side. "After all Martin this language could set a bad precedent for management ... Fully able..."

"How's that..." Kranster intoned quizzically scratching his head.

"Fully able... Most of your people are practically senile basket cases ... yet we're not asking for their dismissal ... We understand..."

Kranster blushed and Kirch eager to return from the sidelines joined with a vulgar remark that broke up the session with squeals of laughter.

They changed the wording to read 'ABLE to work' allowing it to remain cloudy and diluted. A point to the union side and a compromise.

None of this verbiage meant a damn thing to me before I almost lost my job in the fight with Toni and Mrs. Grey. Now each word and concept serves as a potential safety-net. Maybe a total delusion... But this is so cool. A few months ago I was a shadow, now I'm pushing my so-called 'betters.' PUSHING!

**

Success at the negotiating table only increased Henry's panic over the upcoming elections. The better a Negotiator he was the more he wanted to be elected First Vice President and the more he fretted over his opponent's campaign. Brenda herself was not running directly against Henry but along with George Lyndon was directing and managing the campaign against him, running a long time Institution employee who glowered when ever crossing Henry's path. *My God what the hell is she telling everybody that they should hate me so much? Am I that much of an asshole?*

Thinking about it helped to erect a sizable ache between his brain and scalp.

- I have two sets of problems in my head. Two viable adversaries: One is invisible, rigid and uncomprehending, corresponding by mail or phone; that's the Institution of all the Mrs. Greys and the Director and some actuarial types in the front office determined to hold on to as many nickels as possible. And the other one is two offices down, smiling the last time we met. God, I'm angry. I'm trying to do a job against the Institution for whatever reason, and I feel like my life-line is being cut loose from behind. What if after busting Kranster's ass at the table I lose the election? What happens to me cut lose from the union? I'll be vulnerable. Right now my fury is largely against Brenda. Kranster may be more above board then she is.

She is so foolish, petty and DETERMINED! And she's making me stupid, petty and determined. What will be the political consequences of all the machinations in progress?

He became propelled at sonic speeds throughout the Institution, moving about with an anxious buzz and urge to jump his enemies and kick them senseless while screaming, shouting and crying obscenities at them as he hammered raw justice for himself like a judge of ancient Israel.

He campaigned for himself, with tremendous energy, as if his survival were contingent upon his success.

He went to all the ends of the Institution. In the power plant he didn't see Rammer and was forced to politic among brawny armed strangers. He spoke to them as he thought a union leader on the waterfront or loading dock would talk making his tongue heavy and brutal against the edges of his words tossing them out harshly like they were dirty fists. He spoke about the need for shift differential and uniform supply. They nodded when he finished and he cracked a joke about his opposition making them smile ... He was the lesser of the evils.

In the art department he delivered his spiel in a moody, contemplative style with a little bit of teasing. This time his tongue tickled a greater variety of refined, abstract words from his mouth, while speaking in an educated, urbane manner.

Then he stopped by the garage on the lower floor near Receiving and returned to his waterfront style, even flipping out a hearty 'you'se guys.' Soon he was coated with a film of perspiration and a pounding headache of excitement as he strode briskly through all the buildings, departments and worlds of the Institution. But like the hunter who has seen

the blood trail of his wounded game Henry had the smell of victory steaming through his nostrils into his swollen chest.

**

Henry really wanted it to be over, simply, easily, quickly and with no additional involvement from him. They had been through the proposal too many times. They had argued and feinted and demurred over the Administration's desired salary schedule too often. The issues were overworked and satiated. They were repeating the same arguments too many times. Henry's weary mind allowed Elliot Kirch a free reign at the table allowing the man simple, sometimes errant arguments. Henry didn't care if Brenda and Jim ran negotiations at that moment. He had been away from the table long enough through the apprehensive period of their second impasse, thinking and worrying about the prospect of a strike to dicker once again over the same ground.

But the Fact Finder gestured a little to richly, his glimmering cuff links showing under the sleeves of his dark, expensive suit. His tone was too senatorial, his tongue too glib and self assured over a well-oiled, highly structured vocabulary. His range of focus too unsympathetic. Henry became annoyed.

The Administration's labor attorney was also present and seated next to Martin Kranster. The attorney smiled slyly at the corners of his pocked face. The attorney and fact finder seemed to share tailors.

Henry had enough. He broke into the wash of words stubbornly and like a lost animal trotted doggedly against the current. He banged the table and unaided by a thick tongue put a rough, forceful lid on everyone's argument and then looking around innocently asked for a caucus. Kirch seemed bewildered, but was afraid to resist and be defeated so he reluctantly backed Henry's demand as if it had been his decision originally.

The Fact Finder, cut off mid-eloquence was perturbed and shifted arrogantly down to his short, faster words with no gestures and sullenly consented. The Fact Finder and the Administration sauntered out clutching their briefs and bundles.

"What's up?" Kirch asked, struggling for control.

"The deal is wrong. He's pressing for the salary schedule and we need some things first," Henry answered.

"Well tell the man," Kirch replied.

"I did, but he doesn't listen."

Kirch shrugged.

He doesn't listen because you go behind the scenes and soft sell what we want, damn it. You're too much a 'middle man' to be useful here. Henry edited his thoughts and re-arranged them diplomatically for release. "Look, Elliot ... If I or the team wants binding arbitration, but you stay silent YOU'RE telling them that you don't support US..."

"No ... I support you ... Don't got me wrong. Binding's great, every contract should have it, but I just don't see it here. I mean, look at it this way ... Why the fuck should they give it to you?" Kirch asked.

Henry shut his eyes for a second to slow his rising impatience. "Because they want something from us..."

"What?"

"The salary schedule." Jim piped in, giving some aid to Henry.

"And besides, Kranster wants binding so he might try and sell it to their side?" Henry volunteered.

"What? Did HE tell you that?" Kirch asked, mirthfully.

"FUCK NO ... Look he's a middle man here. He gets the shit ... Somebody gets fired some place and he had to defend the supervisor for the Institution, with nothing to say about it With Binding Arbitration he gets a little power. He gets the rationale to centralize the personnel function here... See?" Henry said.

Jim saw and shook his head thoroughly signaling agreement. Brenda was puzzled.

Kirch shrugged again, though a slight, odd smile crossed his face as if something now had occurred to him. "All right man," he said to Henry.

Jim, appearing interested in the proceedings for the first time that evening, signaled with his hand that he wanted to say something. He opened his mouth and slowly let the right words shift into place.

"We've got to get a commitment for Binding Arbitration BEFORE we take any big stuff like the salary schedule. I mean we shouldn't even talk about the fucking thing first," Jim said.

"O.K. but I still think you'll have to give away the store for binding," Kirch commented.

Henry forced a smile. He opened his mouth to give away a secret. Perhaps a secret hope that he had previously only shared with Jim. "Hasn't it occurred to you that the Administration might break precedent and settle with OUR bargaining unit first? Look how far ahead we are of the other bargaining units here..."

Kirch tried to be poker faced. He was privy to some of the other bargaining unit's strategies. Perhaps his personal interest would be best satisfied with a weaker settlement for Henry's unit. Henry recalled his treatment at a meeting with the Professional's Association Bargaining Unit: He and Jim had sat on uncomfortable hassocks as the PA unit's leadership sported a non-committal lack of candor. Henry and Jim were treated with deficient credibility. No strategy was shared, no door left truly open. The Professionals, considered themselves (perhaps rightly) to be the preeminent group at the Institution and believed (with historical relevance) that the Administration would always settle with them first, leaving the crumbs for the other bargaining units, like the Staff

(Henry & Jim) or Security Police. Only the Security Police was unaffiliated with their parent union and out of Kirch's reach.

"Settling with us first, pressures the other units to settle," Jim piped in, telling Kirch the obvious.

Kirch shrugged, "Good point." His poker face was cracking with a slight smile.

Henry couldn't suppress an enormous grin as if the cat had leapt from the bag. Brenda seemed angry or perhaps bewildered. She had made a personal ally of Kirch possibly because he could be had so easily. That was a male-female thing. And possibly because she didn't trust Henry. Maybe she had put her faith into the wrong partner.

"We'll get it," Henry said as if the prophet Issiah had spoken to him.

The session soon continued with both parties being cajoled, pushed and threatened by the Fact Finder to meet half-way as he attempted to mediate the dispute as much as possible (if not entirely) before actually fact finding. He pushed till one side snapped back and then angrily left to go to the other group in a separate caucus room where he pushed and prodded till they wouldn't budge. He bullied where he could and finally bullied Henry into a yelling match and left smiling.

Little by little, articles of the joint proposals were modified, eliminated or agreed to. The articles piled up like a clutter of mismatched rocks that would unbelievably be expected to solidify into a hill whose peak could not yet be envisioned.

Like unrelated incidents from several lives, the separate and varying provisions of the growing agreement took a connected form and shape of its own; too big to comprehend in its entirety yet with its own coherent, though unrevealed purpose. It was emerging from the stubborn self concerns of both parties, reflecting many meandering, contradictory interests, into a real element with a strange wholeness of its own.

As the session ended because of the Fact Finder's extended commitments over thousands of square miles and his intentions for a vacation, their next session would be a long wait. Reluctantly the team parted from the aching, slow excitement and left in their own directions.

Outside the night was so black and foreboding it seemed that beyond the darkness hung a misty brown stain. There was a humid smell of anxiety present as if everything and nothing could happen.

**

Once again Henry's tranquility was disturbed when he read the latest campaign propaganda put out by the opposition side. He spent the day strutting about the office and entire floor walking with foot-crashing determination and solemn-faced purpose. He walked fast wherever he went and he usually traveled for no real purpose. His chest was swollen, his muscles half flexed and hands cupped GI marching style. Between his brain and throat were streams of curse words ready to be muttered. His mood was one of cold

rage and in a delicious, near trembling fantasy, he viciously defeated evil foes smashing them numb in front of awed audiences while wrecking his moral vengeance upon them.

He would soften and say "hello" to people he passed and then resume his hidden fury, feeling like a neurotic Gary Cooper waiting for noon.

Wait a minute. Why the fuck am I carrying on like this? I never got involved in anything like this before. I'm usually outside looking in and perceiving it as a game that is being played with obvious results for everyone but the players. They are telling lies. They are wrong. So what?

They don't think they're telling lies, they probably think I am. I'm right to me, they are right to them ... different perceptions. It's more than that, it's a moral wrong ... there I go single-handedly combating Marxism, Fascism and everything short of tooth decay ... Pull back a second. Get an outside perspective, O.K. they are telling lies, who will listen?

Remember what Marc said ... nobody pays attention to this stuff, they vote for the people they know regardless of all the tons of mimeograph shit handed out. The membership probably doesn't read that stuff, or worse, understand it!

Just get around and meet everybody, and sell yourself. They say you're a monster;

OK campaign as 'Henry the monster', 'a really tough negotiator' that'll diffuse your unpopularity. Don't bother campaigning against them ... it'll only give them more credence....act as if they don't exist. If someone asks, 'who's this George Lyndon?' Roll your eyes and smirk, say something like...'you really want to know?' Keep calm Go out and make the rounds, campaigning again ... Do it at least once a week till the election week then go out every day ... twice on election day to get out the vote ... lunch time especially. It's just amazing how seriously I am pursuing social recognition This is the first. I'm amazed.

Temporarily relaxed, Henry sat down at his desk still maintaining a vigil, however, for the movement of his opponents who generally had to cross his path to attend Brenda's strategy sessions two offices down.

ARTICLE 3.1 I've Seen That Picture Before

In a book store Henry came across a book containing photographs, supposedly in historical perspective, of erotic art. Actually the book depicted a man and woman or women and men copulating, manipulating or orally stimulating one another. Page after page contained different hued and proportioned women either coyly posing with one another or legs a sprawl, mouth open, forming a receptacle for the male interest.

The pictures were thirty-to-eighty years old, representing different nations. Henry noticed the women's faces. He remembered them from somewhere. By and large, they seemed to be prostitutes, many now dead. The rest aged.

He could see both a stupidity and a cunning-ness in those less than beautiful features --

camera aware. He could almost hear their voices and their businesslike negotiations usually over the price of a 'fuck' or lesser matters which all of them didn't perform all of the time. Where were they now? Did any marry and change their lifestyles, or did they go to their deaths content, or unconcerned, of the fact that imprisoned on paper was their total and time continuing repetition of life's creation - the physical sensitization and release?

Henry felt slightly stimulated. No, guilty! He released the book and casually sauntered from the book rack searching out of his side vision for any disapproval of his voyeurism from other customers, perhaps not so bold.

**

The people on the floor above him were familiar by face and name and Henry had transacted business with most of them. However, either they regarded Henry as aloof or Henry believed they did for when he floated by he did so silently, his eyes watching for any sign of recognition. At the slightest sign of recognition he would have smiled, nodded, or waved, but they only eyed him mid-sentence in their conversations and looked away.

He drifted by, his mouth buttoned and his eyes searching. He was sure they saw him as a cold son-of-a-bitch and treated him accordingly. He must have impressed them with the aloof image when he started working at the Institution, and now, striving for consistency couldn't change the image.

Exiting the floor, his business in one office completed, he felt a wave of anxious embarrassment. Was he really aloof and cold? Perhaps, however, they saw him as a quiet, tough guy. The thought pleased him slightly and Henry returned his own floor acting as a quiet, tough guy. Ironically it never occurred to him that the people upstairs might be shy and waiting for him to speak first.

A tall, skinny, slightly hunched-over woman sauntered determinedly toward Henry's desk. Henry looking up from papers scattered in front of him, squinted and recognized her. Though he disliked her, he forced a warm smile and flashed a short wave, "Hello."

She approached closer, without changing her expression. Finally she reached him, wearily sat down in the chair next to his desk and leaned forward. Her breath, influenced by a bitter, thick coat of cigarette smoke caught Henry sharply.

He leaned back to avoid contamination.

"Listen..." She began, "You sent this ridiculous form letter to everyone in my office. I wouldn't vote for you if no one else was running ... You have your NERVE sending this garbage to MY OFFICE." She scolded, coldly brandishing a crumbled 'VOTE FOR HENRY' paper that Ellen had helped to prepare.

Henry, momentarily flushed and leaned back in his chair, absorbing the punishment. His mind formulated a defense. He felt guilty. A rush of unformed indignation began to sweep over him, however. Without pausing to form words he leaned forward in his chair

and grasped the innocent campaign literature from her hand. They struggled and the paper was torn in half. Henry held his name and stand on positions; the outline of his record on negotiations remaining in hers. She drew back, startled, and crumpled his record on negotiations into a tight ball which she dropped indifferently by his desk.

"I see you can't discuss anything in a mature, adult fashion." She said to him, her eyelids lowered.

"Fuck you," Henry hissed angrily.

She sashayed away leaving him in an unfulfilled rage. Henry wondered about possible repercussions, contemplated certain attack strategies to offset possible consequences. He tried to reassess the incident. He felt guilty for campaigning, especially for sending dittos after deciding that they weren't effective, felt bad that his negotiating record was treated like garbage, and general fury over the incident. He knew he had to apprise Jim of the occurrence. That's why Jim was going to be President, he knew how to be liked.

Two days later Henry got two anonymous letters through inter-office mail. One was written in red ink by someone's right hand, the other was scrawled in black by someone's left hand. Both messages were similar, referring to the resemblance between his face and common excrement. *At least this was handled in an adult fashion.*

*

Michael was at his desk, bleary-eyed from the night before. His elbows were on his knees, his head held low and barely visible. Henry poked his head in and then almost left, he stopped short and then entered. "Hello, Mike."

Michael grunted.

"Late night?" Henry asked, wishing he didn't have to ask, wondering about the best way to proceed onto business.

Michael grunted again and ran his hands through his hair. Henry paused.

"Well, maybe I'll come back later..."

"No, no...have a seat ... talk at me. I'll wag my head yes or no," Michael said.

Henry, uncomfortable, sat down by Michael's desk..

"Mike ... How'd you like to become more active in the union?"

"That bunch of shits. Christ, you said yourself that they are worthless, crazy radicals Marxists?"

"I'm not...Jim's all right. Marc was O.K. And if some decent people don't become active, then the union will belong to oddballs. Besides it can be fun... Administrators won't fuck with you..."

"They don't fuck with me now, I ignore them."

"Well think it over..."

"What would I do?"

"Communication rep ... Office Steward, grievance committee, maybe the negotiating team."

"Heavy duty! What do I have to do on those committees?"

Henry shrugged then laughed. "Help me out."

Michael looked perplexed.

Henry sought to convince. "I've told you that Brenda and George Lyndon are trying to take over; to turn this into a class struggle kind of thing. They don't understand our situation here or what collective bargaining is about. They've got the Office Stewards and communication organization and the union paper all locked up with their own people

"... Funny thing they can't reach the membership. They have no idea what the 'people' want, which is more money and to be left alone... If their slate gets elected and it should, ---there is no organized group running against it, then they will control the executive board of our local... so they'll have the union and won't know what to do with it. Jim asked me to handle some grievances but Brenda's been interfering from the sidelines, trying to make me look bad..."

"Brenda..." Michael smiled "...she needs to be fucked. Fuck her silly, Henry and she'll come around."

Henry stopped mid-motion and relaxed In his chair. He was mad at Michael.

Damn it I must seem like I'm raving like a lunatic about the red menace. What is she doing to me? For whatever reason, it's probably no different than what I'd like to do to her ... cut her out because she presents a threat. She may be an ideological, doctrinaire whatever ... she may be power hungry ... I must be power hungry too. Michael's talking about something. I'll just nod my head... About a girl he saw in a bar. I doubt he even talks to them. He pisses me off. He's such a kid. He's got so much to learn. Booze, I gave that up; it gave me the shits...which I could use right now, I think I'm constipated. Maybe I ought to go drinking with Michael. Pick up some voluptuous thing and get laid... Never! Bullshit. I'd feel guilty, probably get VD ..."

"... So it was a good time ... We ought to go drinking together sometime," Michael said.

"Yeah...sure.. Well, I've got to get back ..." Henry rose.

"Henry, just fuck her and your problems will be over," Michael advised, grinning.

"Yeah sure. Use my fist, ram it in." Henry said, taking his anger of Michael out on Brenda's verbal mention.

"All right!" Michael declared.

Henry waved and left, quickly. *Do I sound crazy when I talk politics? Maybe I'm too impulsive, to much escapes from me like a rush of air from a punctured tire. I've got to learn control, and tact. Brenda has tact. Charm people not beat them over the head with the terrible TRUTH ---my version of it. Use tact and charm ... take it easy ... I've got more power than her anyway ... right now at least. Michael may be right, maybe she needs to be laid. Not by me though, I don't even like her.*

*

It was late but not late enough to leave, so Henry was forced to loiter in his work area. Toni had not been on the phone late that afternoon. Earlier, Toni had either worked at his desk or was in quiet conferences with Mrs. Grey or other higher-ups.

Henry was frigidly. He fumbled through papers on his desk and feigned extreme disinterest in Toni's movements behind him, hoping the man would be going home or somewhere else, soon!

"You know it's funny..." Toni began, presuming that Henry was his audience, cueing onto his every word. "...How things happen in this Institution."

Henry slowly swirled around in his chair. "Huh?" with surprised look, an 'are you talking to me' expression on his face.

"The way things happen around here." Toni had a sly, self confident smile on his face reminiscent of an earlier self confident smile. Which had also occurred in the late afternoon when only Henry and he were in the entire area.

That bastard! I remember too well. I was new here and he played around trying to interest me with that nonsense about his being a high level, important consultant. All the money, fame, degrees he made up. His houses in Switzerland, his villas in Naples.... His... 'What are your perceptions of me Henry? That sly smile. 'How do you see me?' Amid all the lies, deceptions, bullshit.

Along time ago an older boy was my baby sitter. He laid down on the floor and said, "Touch me anywhere. Touch me anywhere... especially here..." --Invitation unaccepted. "How do you see me? ...Have you ever..." That quiet, unflinching, intimate tone, ... "had an experience either political, religious or SEXUAL that you have repressed?" "Touch me here. Trust me, believe in me, worship me, be my friend or I'll abuse you, use you, dominate you, or use Mrs. Grey to get rid of you ... send you back to the hopeless masses huddled for self respect under piles of futile pages of want ads...'

"What are you talking about?" Henry asked roughly, afraid that he might already know.

"How things change," Toni said.

"Like how?"

"Politically."

"What do you mean?"

"People come and go ... I'm still here," Toni beamed.

"So am I," Henry said, defiantly.

"Mrs. Grey might be leaving soon," Toni offered.

Henry's heart leapt ... for joy? "Yeah, I heard something about that..."

"Do you know who might replace her?" Toni smiled. "Someone in your place would no doubt be concerned with that I'm sure."

"Why **my place**?"

"Vulnerability... Your position here is vulnerable. I'm sure you're aware of that."

"Who might take over?"

"I've been mentioned as a candidate."

My God! How could they? He's crazy; they must know that.

Henry smiled triumphantly. "You?"

Toni was offended. He became defensive. "Why not me?" He demanded with a sharp edge to his voice.

Henry shrugged.

"No one else wants it," Toni said, simply.

Henry frowned.

"In the upper ranges where I and most others of my equal rank are, our salaries are as high or higher than Grey's. It's only a title and additional administrative responsibilities. I'm not sure, of course, if I want it. It means evaluating people's performances..."

What does he want? To scare me? Get rid of me? Get me to play? Get me to treat him deferentially? Kiss his ass? Maybe I'm assigning meanings to idle behaviors, like Brenda's. Maybe there's nothing there. No, he's got a motive. No one wants it, except him, A title ... power, that's his thing Houses in Switzerland, villas in Naples. 'It's a shame Henry how self-centered and untrusting people are' Quote from the master ego-centric, super-suspicious, liar himself.

Maybe I should tell the Director? No, It'll seem like I'm the crazy one spinning tales about Super Toni ... I don't count for much around here. God; ...and I'm stuck. I feel such an overpowering frustration ... An inability to fight back directly. It makes me mad...

"I don't think they'll choose you," Henry said confidently, trying to maintain his anger.

"Why not?" Toni demanded.

"Well ... I hear people talking..." Henry began feigning an 'in the know' confidentiality.

"What do they say?"

"Your life style is too incongruous to..." Henry said. *That's what they should be saying if they are saying anything...*

"Oh? Why?" Toni asked nervously.

"Well ... I'm just repeating what I've heard..." Henry said adopting a tone similar to Toni's.

Toni's eyes darkened as if the wheels of paranoia were at work. Yes, he'd been found out! He would have to begin questioning a few choice individuals about how they -and others- currently *perceived* him.

Henry felt a small sense of accomplishment having wound Toni up as a self-destructive time bomb. The man deserved worse.

That's the way to do it! If only I can remember how to do this. -If only all my enemies were as flawed and plainly evil as he!

Feb. 6, 1977

ARTICLE 4 *The Negotiator...*

Kenny, one of the lower level supervisors, slid into Henry's work area. Henry gave Kenny a short wave and when ignored turned his attention to something else. Kenny, instead of scooting by Henry's desk, sat down in the chair next to it.

"Hello," Henry said.

Kenny, looking elsewhere, said nothing, so Henry shrugged and returned to the paperwork he was fiddling with.

"Want to talk to you," Kenny said at last from the corner of his mouth, still looking straight ahead, away from Henry.

Henry, fixing his gaze downward into his work said in a pre-occupied fashion, "Yeah? 'Bout what?"

"About this shit downstairs with my boss," Kenny said.

"What?"

"This new deal the union pulled ... I'm all for it don't get me wrong. Hell I told Dan to file the damn grievance; you can ask him."

Henry, ready to become angry, pressed, "So, what's your problem?"

"Well, now my boss is on my ass to do the part of Dan's job he don't have to do anymore and it ain't gonna get done. I don't have to. Kranster agrees with me that I don' have to do

it and it's the employees' job."

Henry got mad and slammed his hand down on his desk. "Damn it Kenny. You told me and Dan to pursue that grievance and get the duty changed from DAN IN YOUR DEPARTMENT to ANOTHER DEPARTMENT."

"I know, I know, I agree, I agree. But it's our job and I ain't gonna do it. I'm the supervisor and I don't have to so Dan will have to do it anyway. Filing the damn grievance was stupid, just makes more trouble."

"Damn it Kenny. You wanted to file this grievance," Henry said.

"I did not. I'm not in your union, I'm a supervisor," Kenny stated.

"BULLSHIT!" Henry sputtered furiously. "You brought Dan up here and told me that duty should not have been assigned to an employee in your department and you would SUPPORT a grievance..."

"I do, I support the grievance. But you see, it's a lost cause..." Kenny said.

"WE WON IT. Dan doesn't have to do it." Henry re-explained.

"But he does..."

"I got the fucking disposition here...." Henry pulled a typed carbon form from under the pile of papers he had been playing with and shoved it over to Kenny.

"This doesn't mean a thing. He still has to do it," Kenny said smiling.

"Bullshit. He doesn't and that says so, damn it."

"He do if I say so, I'm the supervisor and I could legally fire his ass if I want. I know, I checked," Kenny said, smugly.

"Why would you want to fire him?"

"I don't, but I could if I wanted and the union couldn't do a thing about it."

Henry grimaced and absently began flipping through the papers on his desk. In a hushed, though angry tone, he said, "The grievance is over. You got it started. You told me you supported it and he don't have to do it ... Don't back out of it."

"He don't have to do it and I won't do it either. Shit, it won't get done. Let 'em go fuck themselves." Kenny laughed. "By the way ... there aren't any grievances against me ... are there?" He asked, concerned. Henry, bewildered shook his head as Kenny rose to leave.

Upset with the discussion he had with Kenny, Henry found it impossible to return to the tasks he had begun. He kept flipping absently through the paperwork on his desk.

What's my problem? Maybe I couldn't understand what Kenny was trying to say and I got mad at nothing. What did he tell me? Maybe I should go talk to Jim, compare notes on

*Kenny... Get away from this office. Find out what's going on. Jim has more experience in this line of work ... I'm only filling in for him till the election ... after that if I'm lucky it'll be my job ... ha, ha.. Kenny sure is a wonder. He contradicts himself with every other statement. Hell, we all contradict ourselves, but not that rapidly. Kenny's afraid for his own ass so he attempts to back out of all commitments, hoping you'll let him ... Hoping that you forgot his original position so he can change it. He's too afraid of any kind of trouble, which is typical around here. When you come down hard on him he retreats again.... Now, I can figure out what he said ... his scheme to use the union to get a duty transferred out of his department, backfired ... the employee was relieved of the duty but Kenny's supervisor stuck **him** with it. Ha! Instead of standing up for himself he tries to wheedle out of his original position and transfer it back to Dan who had it in the first place. What gets me is that you can't argue with the guy. As soon as you attack one thing he retreats and agrees with you, and as soon as you agree with him he disagrees again...Ah, No wonder Marc wasn't too thrilled about handling grievances What the hell am I thinking about? Bullshit.*

Henry's dream.

There was a house, on a hill it seemed. The house was modern, a bi-level. One had the feeling of crisp fresh fall air and early morning sunlight --bright and startling. Perhaps the interior furnishings expensive, it was hard for him to tell.

There was a woman, a young woman with short red hair standing by the washing machine. Sunlight beaming through large windows gleamed off the bright linoleum floor. Her short red hair was freshly brushed, clear and fluffy. Her dress was short revealing long clear skinned legs with only the slight sheen of blond, downy hairs indicating a fragility, an aristocratic youth.

Henry could not envision himself but he was moving closer to the woman who could not see him approaching. She was busy turning dials on the washing machine. Henry had an erection. He felt great passion. There was brief scene of male copulating with female; some confusion. He still approached the woman. His focus was on her head, now turning, a right-face profile. She was lovely. She completely turned and smiled to him. It was Ellen, and Ellen was lovely. They kissed, tasting each others' mouths.

"What ever happened to Rosie..." Henry asked Jim, fumbling for her last name.

"Sabrina." Jim answered, taking a monstrous bite out of his sandwich smearing its contents under his nose and onto his chin.

"God, are you hungry or what? You ought to tie a feed bag over your face," Henry joked.

Jim still managed to laugh. He paused to swallow a half pint of soda and then asked, still chewing, "What about her?"

"What ever happened there?"

"She's gone."

"But I thought Marc told me a long time ago that you won that arbitration.. somehow."

"We did."

"And she's still gone?" Henry asked.

"Yup."

"What was the story there?"

"She wasn't a good typist ... but she worked here for a couple years in a department where there wasn't a hell of a lot of typing... Then she got transferred. Her new boss decided to get rid of her and Kranster called her into the Personnel office and gave her a typing test which she flunked. Then he gave her two weeks notice," Jim related before aiming for another huge bite.

"Wasn't she sixty or something and waiting for social security?"

"Sixty one."

"Goddamn! So what happened?"

"We won the arbitration and she was reinstated but they put pressure on her and she got flustered and upset and got sick and never came back..."

"Damn it. You know, just when you begin to think Kranster is all right, just doing a job, you find him ditching old ladies ... How much was she making?"

Jim laughed, "Next to nothing Kranster is doing a job. Only that's part of his job. He's done numbers on my head."

"What do you mean?" Henry asked.

"Promised me things and then backed out of them ... You listen to him and you begin to think everything is okay. I mean everything ... the staff is just a bunch of complainers, which is also true. You'll see. Wait, till you start handling a lot of grievances, after awhile you'll be turned side-ways ... People will complain their heads off ... Kranster will waltz you around and convince you that the Institution is right and you won't know what to believe." Jim belched after his final point.

"But why the fuck didn't Kranster find a niche for her till she qualified for Social Security ... what they spent for her salary is wasted in pencil shavings around here?"

Jim shrugged.

What if go to Industry to make a decent living? That bothers me. Could I do that?

Fire an old lady so she can eat canned cat food. Do I quit my job or do I start spouting

shit like, 'This Institution isn't responsible to baby sit for certain incapable individuals.... We are here to produce...' What would I do in that situation? Kranster probably feels that he did the right thing, that he was justified ... A piddling salary like that for another year. It infuriates me. The next grievance I handle I'll really bang down on him, go all the way with it. I won't let him talk me out of it ... I won't listen to any of his promises and compromises. Damn!

"So shit, I'm in her house, see..." Rammer was smiling. "...and you know, it's like one of these bungalows; rented, probably, because there's shit all over the fucking place. I mean most people who **own** a house won't trash it up like that."

"Yeah, OK, The house is fucked up." Michael prompted in anticipation, smiling toward Henry.

"Yeah, shit all over the fuckin' place. So we have a drink ... and then... Then," his eyes lit up. "she puts on some music and says, 'Do you dance?' Y'know ... She gives me some shit that her old man don't dance...Sayen' it like her old man probably don't fuck either," Rammer laughed, then continued, "So we dance and she gets close...I mean close. She's rubben' on me," Rammer laughs and claps his hands urged on by the glee in Michael's eyes and Henry's sly smile. He unconsciously touched his genitals, an old habit with partially masturbatory roots aided by past experience with gonorrhoea and nervous energy. "And she's rubben' that belly on me and I get a good hard. Well shit she's panten' and kissing my neck and says how she needs a man. And she grabs me and says 'Let's go to the couch, honey.' WHOOOEEEEEEEE. So, we're fuckin' and goin at it. And she's really thrown' it. And BAM..." Rammer paused for dramatic affect: "Her husband walks in."

"Damn!" Michael exclaimed.

Henry chuckled.

"I don't know what the fuck to do. I'm half naked and I got a hard in her and I'm slappen' it to her and Damn. I stopped, looken' for something to hit him with around the room. I see the iron nearby ... Shit all over the place. He says 'Hi,' and walks in real easy like 'so-what?'"

Michael laughed.

"He sits down, pulls off his pants and shit and walks over to the couch. Then he sits down on the coffee table and asks this bitch for a blow job. He tells me to go to it. He **LIKES TO WATCH!**"

Michael laughed." So what did you do?"

"Went to it..." Rammer said, matter-of-factly.

Michael shook his head: *What bullshit. I wonder what Henry thinks of this? Henry probably thinks Rammer's a jerk. Could it be true? Where are these women when I look for them? Maybe she's homely and very heavy.* "What she look like?" Michael asked.

"Not bad, blonde. Not too smart. Not bad. Hard to figure, though; why she was married to this weird guy."

Michael wondered: *It could be true. I've heard these stories from other guys. Hell, one guy had Polaroid snap shots of ... I don't know how I feel about it. I don't think I'd want to be married to a woman like that, though I'd never say so, to a woman!*

Henry also wondered:

It could be true. I wonder if Michael ever did anything like that. I've been in a slightly similar type of situation... Not with a woman and her husband.... Makes me yearn for the hot places ... Ha, ha. The husband part is warped enough to be authentic ... Otherwise, a men's magazine story. What makes some people do that? Is that considered swinging? I can't see Ellen and myself even living in that type of possibility. Though when I met Ellen she was harder, tougher, wilder than she is now ... So was I, I guess. That impulsive freedom of youth burns off after a couple of years ... After the times change and you get a little older... I hung out on the edges of a booze and drug type culture for a short while. Are people plastic? Could I be somebody else right now? That thought thrills me. Damn! What about Ellen --now that's interesting. If I dwell on that thought I'll probably get guilt pangs... Rammer's into another one of his stories... This one seems more old hat ... I'll get him to tell the one about the fat broad in the station wagon, I don't think Michael ever heard that one and it's pretty good...

The weekend was back. It always lingered on the end of the work-week and continually presented Henry with complex questions. Which was better; to be wasting his time at the Institution waiting for the weekend, or to be in his apartment over the weekend waiting for the work week to return? Even if seven out of ten weekends were dull, dreary affairs Henry generally preferred them to the imprisonment of the Institution.

He helped with the vacuuming. Read the paper. Then he sat down on the couch and stared out the patio doors to the highway across the rear of the apartment complex. He encouraged his fantasies for awhile but soon found himself running the most powerful negotiating team and grievance committee on the planet. He was almost half through solving all the world's problems when Ellen interrupted him. At first he was annoyed that so sweet and satisfying a fantasy should be disturbed and he ignored her. She was very friendly, and soon they trotted off to the bedroom.

They parted clothing and touched and Henry worked through the routine keeping his hip and back movements from becoming just so-so, as his continued penile thrusting slowly approached a familiar feeling that existed a long way away. To save himself from the mundane he envisioned an alluring fantasy. As it took shape the excitement lured promise of a coming climax. Rounded women on the beach, plump thighs... keeping his head as empty as possible... But he began to tire of these thoughts before ejaculation could be realized. For rejuvenation he sought out hints of unknown personalities. Mystery without commitment. Foreign perfumes. A tight, well worn panty stretched taut over a bulging ass cheek. However, as he strode into the physical warmth an alien thought sent to punish

him subverted his fantasy and he finished alone, coming into a void unconnected to any living thing with guilt rising inside of himself.

**

Reaching backward with one hand attempting to locate all the historical variables of his beginnings Henry often lost his balance and fell, becoming lost in the maze of contradictory recollections and perceptions usually merging with the dreams of his every-night.

Looking ahead he had no vision beyond the nearest door and could barely imagine any particular future.

Sometimes, however, he had notions of himself as a big time union negotiator walking determinedly through the night drizzle, his jaw set, his thin briefcase subtending his quick stride. Through dim lights he would make his way to an obscure block-house building and clack rhythmically down the linoleum lined concrete halls and tap ever quickly up the deserted staircase to emerge at the negotiation room, the savior of the local union, the prophet of righteousness to frighten management. The intensity and aggressive energy behind this fantasy would fade and leave Henry ambivalent and unfocused.

Sometimes he would imagine himself in the more practical role occupied by Martin Kranster. The image frightened him.

**

There was an odd set of entrance ramps onto the highway in which the left-hand lane had to yield before merging. Henry coming from his apartment every morning had to slow down and crane his head the wrong way across several blind spots to see if traffic was clear. Just as he started to edge into the lane a zooming, aggressive automobile bashing horn sounds at him, (reminding Henry of death and destruction) appeared and sped past making him jerk to a stop.

Henry, frustrated at being beaten and stopped, would curse angrily as he started from zero to speed after the car hoping to catch it and do what?

Damn-it, why should he have the right of way? I can't see!

They were preparing the old, new house and Henry was in crises. He worked under terrible pressure attempting to accommodate the moving deadline they had. Things did not go well. Things broke in his hand, crumpled, were dropped into dusty, musty spider infested corners. The cellar was damp and dark and sent shivers along the hairs on his legs.

Ellen called down from upstairs. It was hot and tinged with a fresh paint smell upstairs. There was no hot water. Henry ran down the crooked cellar steps smashing his head. He hated the house already. The hot water heater was rusty and smug with no simple switches that said on or off. The wiring was ancient post and cable, some ad hoc newer

stuff and skinny extension cards stapled to the old beams.

Eventually, with boiled water, Henry began to steam clean the old carpets using a rented machine. He worked for hours, dripping with perspiration battling the soiled rugs.

The neurotic pictures and obsessive fears slowly began to fade; the ugly, ghostly bogeymen stopped appearing from dirty, ancient corners of the basement, tapping him on the side of his imagination to startle him. They faded into the pain of his toil exchanging ideas about witch biblical curse was really the one implied about men, or was man different before labor? Nonetheless, Henry worked himself toward heat exhaustion.

Afterwards at their apartment, Henry lay down to nap, visions of vulgar women parading around his mind, strutting half-naked, extending his pleasure, teasing him into sleep, where they disappeared. His tiring fatigue did not permit a deep rest, just a short nap interrupted by spotty quick dreams of no captured significance.

He awoke to find Ellen sitting on his couch stroking him gently.

"Have a nice nap?" She cooed.

Henry grunted and prepared to make love to her. He made love with his mind half out of synch, invaded by itch spot dreams from his unsatisfying nap. He entered Ellen with no imagination left. Their moves were masturbatory for him, a sliding oily function on his penis. It would take forever. He imagined exotic Latin woman, dark, broad, crude and voluptuous with large rounded behinds calling for him, pleading for him. The feeling grew better. Ellen's vagina made shuddering, sweetening moves for him releasing him, taking his discharge.

Making love hasn't been good for me recently. What is it that I want? What am I hiding from myself? Or is it the pressure from the Institution: The lack of challenge at my real job and the dizzying challenge from the election and negotiations. And the move into the house... and having a child?

**

They were moving. Henry struggled down the small crooked stairs to the basement lugging three drawers from the old desk. His heart pounded, gushing blood into his headache.

He laid the drawers down at the far end of the basement wall and wearily swayed up the stairs, grunting for breath.

Ellen sat cross-legged on the kitchen floor fumbling through pots and pans to pile into a cabinet.

"Where's the iron pan?" She asked, looking up at him, her hair dirty and tied down with berets to keep from falling in her face which was pale and plain.

Henry felt resentment; he hated the iron pan for the moment. He put his hostility and tiredness into a careless shrug as he trudged foreword through the living room exiling

himself. For hours he would lift, feel pain, put down and lift again feeling a separation between his mind, very aware of the tense, dissatisfied discomforts and exhaustion; and his body stumbling on, its muscles ready to grasp and heave one more time.

Eventually numbness set in. The blessing of the laboring classes. His anxiety vanished and he worked endlessly falling into a weary, repetitious, though comforting rhythm.

He vaguely noticed a dim humor to all his efforts as he watched sizable quantities of belongings, acquired often needlessly over the years, disappearing from his **old, new apartment** and reappearing in his **new, old house**.

**

Henry and Ellen had gone shopping again. After a halting trek through the mall, Ellen looking in store display fronts and Henry watching the milling people, they began to drift apart. Ellen entered a dress shop housed in a blue velvet capsule adorned by odd lights and displays while Henry strayed purposelessly into the bookstore.

Odd emotions, borne no doubt of neurosis, plagued him like matching obsessions. He wafted in between impatience and fatalism as he argued in his mind, while his body moved down rows of books that his eyes marched over. He loved to read yet dreaded the unsure toil required in starting a new book. Therefore he didn't read as much as he browsed.

A book caught his eye again, the one with the erotic photographs. On impulse he paused, cleared his mind temporarily of the debris of a hundred battles and eagerly flipped the pages open. He saw the faces of the participants more clearly this time. There were attractive American blondes in one or two photographs. Wasp faces with clear bouncy hair, cheapened expressions to match tight silk underpants withholding backside chunks that rolled out underneath.

There were Latin American women with rough faces, some Indian curves to their features, doing their work well, though with ideas of money and survival behind the pleasure at task.

The pictures from Europe in the 30's were interesting to Henry. Several of the women, eyes cruelly focused, shameless smiles below aquiline French noses seemed to be enjoying themselves evilly. Others were simply displaying nice bodies, all that they owned. Henry was disturbed by a picture of young, muscular, German men doing their duty (with much determination) upon a young woman caught between them. A war had been brewing at the time and war is usually good for the sex business. Many of these women were in for lucrative times while others expired from unspeakable abominations.

The pictures had had no effect on his sexual interest, his imagination having been satiated with them from the last visit. For an instant he believed that he had stumbled upon an important key to human existence. He left the book store to find Ellen. Walking with brisk determination at angles through the great meandering mass of humans parading in two directions he sought Ellen. He would have shared his discovery with her though it was doubtful she would be interested, and quickly forgot he had recognized anything at

all.

At the office looking at female interlopers:

Look at these women! Strong legs, large behinds, swollen breasts. Attractive? Would they still be attractive after three or four years of marriage? This one with the short brown hair and thin features ... aristocratic nose, fragile, straining, finely cut nostrils; a work of art? Yes. Perhaps thirty two. Ass too large to be a model. Shorts too tight for modesty. She's turning a bit. I can clearly visualize her pubic mound, and the crevice that begins her vagina (A crevice that many men dedicate their lives to ha, ha.) ... and turning around again ... Her panties leave a tell tale shadow stretched tight under her shorts. I can almost feel her behind. I could hold it in my hands and copulate into her Hold it, I'm getting excited. I don't need that here at my desk. She's talking quite animatedly. Very middle-class... Sophisticated about parties and catered affairs, no doubt. I wonder about her husband. Well dressed, perhaps. Keeps to himself, plays golf and tennis. Are they truly intimate? Shit. I think she caught my eye on her. I'll pretend I was looking absently in her direction, with no intent at all. Our eyes met again, she seems to have let a smile creep into her conversation with this other woman. Is she standing differently now? Posing on purpose for me, and smiling ever so slightly? Or am I imagining it? Or is that something women or men do subconsciously, instinctively? Maybe she's looking... She wants to play around. Sex, hard and eager with perspiration acting as a lubricant between straining bodies.

I used it to regard sex with wonder. Years ago when I was sixteen and virgin my friend laid his girl friend. I found out about it and felt embarrassed in their presence. What made her consent to it? To spread her naked legs and let him enter, leaving dangerous semen behind, inside her? What did IT feel like; what ecstasy did he encounter inside of her body in her secret places? What did he do with her breasts? I think I had a crush on her, but even after they broke up (How could they have broken up, after all he had FUCKED her?) I couldn't bring myself to talk to her. She was friendly enough toward me. All I could do was smile and say, hello ... and fight off a blush ... My God, I ended up playing hard to get till it wasn't a game anymore... till I couldn't get her. I was always jealous of my friend for taking her first, and making it so I never could take her. Oddly enough she may have liked me more than him... I'll never know.

Today, I guess, for many people copulation between males and females is much different... It's like this woman. From the way she is talking and standing, she knows how; her body can be made ready for sex. She can lay down with a man easily, join into him, take him. His semen will be helpless, soon dead, she is infertile on purpose. A long time ago there must have been love. Romantic love unspoiled by the kind of sex used like physical combat. Nice people, Women who smiled for reasons other than some guy admiring her pubis. Men unlike myself (I'm a voyeur) who took an interest in a woman's face and expression and personal character. Bullshit! for a million years we've been sniffing pussy like dogs. Gimme, gimme, gimme --feels good! (Stop smiling, People passing by will think you're crazy sitting at your desk smiling like an idiot. Especially a union man. Now I'm smiling harder ... I might start laughing. My face is getting red)

When I was small... I can remember my first girlfriend. I was six or seven or eight... Standing in the dusky shadows of bushes in someone's backyard. We swapped erotic information with each other, most of it incorrect, and enjoyed it tremendously. No one was around, as if that afternoon had lasted longer anything could have happened. That delicious, guilty mystery of woman in that little girl psyche. How much would she give me? She showed it to me making my life fulfilled for years. When I was ten years older I saw it again and at last, AT LAST, made a response to it. A faltering response but I finally did it. Now I'm becoming a father and it's all behind me. All the mystery and dark shadows, and bushes and quick excited glimpses and exposure. All the magic-joining and the savoring of it. I wish this woman would go away, her conversation is annoying me (Is it partially for my benefit?) She is upper middle class, she knows little about anything except middle class protocol. A visitor to the Institution ... An ass, a mindless ass ... go away.

Damn it, I get these emotions and memories I try to pin down from long ago. From the beginning or end of the world. From when I was a small child... and I can't pin them down. I can see them in pastel shades, enhanced with accommodating sounds, and smells, humidity, textures and tastes. The feel of autumn winds or rustling leaves in a city I haven't seen for seventeen years. Old friends now grown, now dead. Where are they now --those who survived? What happened to me? Who was I? Who am I, now? I can't find these things and pin them down into verbal data; they float by gently, innocently, always out of reach, the door partially open slams shut and won't budge just inches from my fingers. I have an artist's vision in my head and it stays there painting vistas in human personality when I dream and spotting deja vu flickers at me at odd moments of passive madness during the day. And with this is my dread. --My fear and obsessions and those rigid cognitive battles over my place in this world. I can easily be haunted into a depersonalized void, a filmy layer of misconstrued conflicts separate me from becoming just another satisfied cog in society; a thing I want and don't want, leaving me in dingy subterranean tunnels lit by glaring yellow electric light and going for countless, lonely miles to nowhere.

At other times I'm not that haunted. My neurosis is just an oily brown spot between my body and my mind; something I can adjust to, just turn the thermostat down a couple of degrees to compensate.

And sometimes after a few victories it's gone and I'm free and unburdened as if all my clutter of mementos and keepsakes from the past were tossed out leaving my drawers and closets clean. Allowing me to travel through life with only a wallet and a lightened step... a new, borrowed personality more satisfying than the old.

**

The elections were held. George Lyndon came in by a landslide.... buried under it. Jim won the president's position by an equal margin, though it hadn't made any difference, his only opponent running on Brenda's Equal Democracy Ticket was arrested the next day on a decency charge. *It made sense, only a **nut** would run against Jim.*

Brenda headed the list of Office Stewards elected and managed to pull through a

number of her party members (who had run unopposed). Henry, to his surprise, won his battle clearly and was the new First Vice President, and chief union spokesman for negotiations and grievances. He was elated. So elated he smiled through the first meeting of the new executive board sitting across from Brenda who refused to look at him. He was so elated with his new position he skipped the second executive board meeting feeling indefatigable.

Soon his elation ceased. Henry, alone in the office on a deserted Friday afternoon paced the floor nervously. He balled up his fists and felt enough angry power emanating from his being to smash buildings.

In detailed rumination he went over the sequence of events time after time after time. Elaina asked him to handle a problem. No, first she asked Jim; Jim referred her to Henry. Henry listened. Henry had a conference with her supervisor. Henry got a written withdrawal of Elaina's not-official reprimand. Elaina was not pleased. She talked to Jim. Jim asked Henry to talk to Elaina again.

Elaina wanted what? For a half hour Elaina beat around the bush, and read Henry some notes she had scribbled to herself. She wanted... war. A letter calling for what? Henry became frustrated, attempting five logical arguments to get to her, he was unable.

Henry spoke with Jim. Jim explained in amused political detail that Brenda (that name again,) had put some strange ideological notions in Elaina's head; a letter of support from the union calling for complete capitulation from the Institution and a formal grievance.

That explained Elaina's paranoia concerning the Institution out to get her, in a sneaky plot as it exploited the working classes, etc. Henry was amused at how Elaina's impulsive supervisor had been elevated to become an arm of the invisible counterrevolutionary forces.

"God!" Henry exclaimed, circling the floor. Henry had made another effort to console Elaina, wrecked with tension and near tears, only to be repulsed by her stubbornness.

So, it was over no? No. Brenda had engineered Elaina's appearance before the Executive Board while Henry was on vacation to accuse him of plotting with the Institution... Or of being inept (a worse charge from Henry's viewpoint) or...

Henry trembled in rage. Didn't they understand that the problem was solved as best as it could? --That it wasn't feasible to bring the matter up to the Senior Director and ask him to capitulate in a problem that hadn't reached him? That formalizing an already solved difficulty would only bring Kranster in on it to reverse the Supervisor's ambivalent decision and draw hard lines against the union position. Then what? The union would resort to all of its ineffectual tricks in defending an untenable position. Didn't they understand that a formal declaration of war over Elaina would make it worse for Elaina? To condemn Elaina's supervisor would put Elaina's neck on the chopping block (and Henry's because he had made up with Elaina's supervisor after the reprimand was withdrawn).

It didn't matter, Brenda was still out to get him! The attack was on! Brenda hadn't ceased

to plot, plan and engineer his defeat, regardless if he was the only capable negotiator dedicated to the union's position.

Here I am at the next executive board meeting: Bloch accuses me of incompetence. Brenda makes a motion that all grievances be supervised by the board, her board. Jim is helpless. The board members (sheep) looking for an exciting idea back up Brenda with body language. I rise. "You people! Please THINK! You (to Bloch) how the fuck can you sit there (you shit) and say that I've been friendly with the Administration? I have put my job on the line for the union (and the union put it's thin line on my job!), I have fought the battles, me and Jim. You? You were too frightened to come out to support us on our job action (a planned 30 minute walk-out parade with signs and a chorus of rah-rah chants that sucked most of the staff along, even if some were less enthusiastic than others. I ended up standing on a stone wall screaming negotiating demands to the crowd and wind, surprising even myself and making certain I never get promoted here). You were in the office ... Sucking your boss's ass (possibly).

"And you (now Brenda) You don't know a grievance from a (?) You In the name of democracy are the most undemocratic person here! You claimed we were secretive. We were a union, now we're political factions. Democracy? You run George Lyndon for the new editor's post and he goes around trying to talk his opponents into dropping out of the race. Democracy? You care about the union? You run somebody for President who's facing a five year prison term ? ... And somebody for my job who knows less than you do about negotiations and grievances? ... What are you doing with Elliot Kirch; got your hands in his pants? (low!) If anybody is siding up to the Institution and the Professional's Bargaining Unit after hours it's him. Everything you do is secretive, political maneuvering ... You're a terrific instigator and manipulator, what do you want here, power?" My tenuous 'power,' which I earned through the force of my personality against the obstacle of my lack of social skills and tact (ha, ha).

-Now she's red in the face, destroyed, in tears; unmasked. Bullshit. Now I tell them.... I walk out, and Jim says 'there goes the best negotiator we got.' Bullshit.... Boy I really get carried away in my fantasies. What should I really do? Find her and tell her off? That would make it worse. Get Jim on my side and engineer a power play of my own, "The New Justice party" vs., the Equal Democratic party. (Ha, ha ... our slogan ... will be 'Justice by the edge of the sword')

Henry sank into his chair for a moment. He considered all of his options. Then he sprang up and quick-walked to Jim's area.

"We've got to do something about Brenda."

"What?" Jim asked amused.

"We've got to make a move now. We've got to recruit our own faction. I just heard that George Lyndon is back, He's on the communication committee again. see?"

"Lyndon?" Jim frowned

"Now you get the picture?"

"No..."

"Either she's using Lyndon again for his mobility or he's using her for her contacts but between the two of them they're trying to take over the union. She's got the board in her pocket and he has the mobility to reach the membership."

"So do I ... so do you," Jim said.

"I know, but you told me yourself that she's bad-mouthing the two of us," Henry said.

Jim shrugged.

"What do you think's going on?" Henry prodded.

"I don't know. But I don't think they're taking over..." Jim said, sheepishly.

Henry sunk into the chair he was sitting on. "My God, Jim. Then I'm crazy. Either I'm mad or it's obvious that she's been orchestrating a political take-over here for a long time, and damn it, it's to her credit, that's she's been highly successful. She's got the rep. structure and with George Lyndon running communications will soon have a handle on all information between the board and the membership."

"The membership don't care. They don't read that memorandum stuff anyway," Jim said.

"You're right and the membership has no input onto that Executive Board either. You and me are floating. Either we organize our own faction or we're finished. And damn it, they are so politically naive concerning collective bargaining that the union will lose what ever small measure of prestige it has gained. Can you imagine any positive effect from declaring war on all supervisors?" Henry went over the same ground a dozen times from every angle till Jim was overwhelmed.

"Maybe you're right ... But I'm not the kind of a person who looks for a fight. You do," Jim admitted.

Henry was unsure whether to feel flattered or hurt by Jim's comment.

"What do you mean?" *Maybe it's true what Marc told me, that after the strike vote during the last contract negotiation you wrote a letter of resignation from the union, to avoid facing jail.*

Jim toyed with a piece of paper on his desk. He spoke slowly, hesitantly. "I just don't fight as hard as you do ... I never really got off on negotiations... I figured...let you do it ... you like it I trust people more then you do. I take them at their word. If Brenda wanted power why didn't ... I don't know... Maybe you're right. So what do we do about it?"

"Why what? Why didn't she run for President? Did she have to?" Henry pressed.

She can run the board and you without the position. I'm the one with the balls around here ... So I should be President ... Then why the fuck am I bothering you, looking for your support? I don't trust my interpersonal skills to see me through politically...Maybe

I'm blowing this up out of proportion.

Henry sighed. "I don't know ... Tell me this ... She's gunning for my ass. No? Am I right about that?"

"Yes and no, Yeah she's after you ... but she thinks she should be involved in everything. She really wants to build up the union," Jim said.

"Don't tell me you believe that democracy shit?" Henry asked angrily.

"No, but SHE believes it. She believes she's doing the right thing. She doesn't conceive of herself doing a power play," Jim said.

"But... but... oh shit," Henry shook his head. *I see her doing a power play ... Jim sees her mucking things up out of naiveté...*

"Maybe we're both right," Henry said.

"I'm not saying you're wrong. I just have to think about it. I'm not as eager for war as you are... or **her**," Jim admitted.

Henry laughed. *Maybe that's it, Brenda and I have the same inclination; to run everything.*

Michael had talked Henry into attending a communication training seminar that the Institution was sponsoring. As a result Henry sat in a circle of people, all of whom he did not know beyond face and "hello" discussing the 'here and now.'

Whenever the group members put aside their giggly discomfort and began talking about what they as individuals were about they were scolded by the seminar leader for telling stories and not focusing on, as uncomfortable as it was, what processes were occurring within their group.

Henry, safe in the comforting prospect that he could yawn and get up to saunter out without worrying about what his supervisor might say, remained bored and distant from the group. Finally he began, "I really don't know any of you as individuals ... I only see you, most of you that is, as union members... I feel comfortable with you in a crowd responding to me as a union representative..." Henry admitted truthfully, secure that what he said would be interpreted as nonsense and therefore able to be revealed. The seminar leader, pipe clenched in one chubby hand, nodded happily at Henry's statement.

"Why is that?" Another clever participant asked, making the seminar leader nod his head enthusiastically before leaving and going over to another group - Michael's.

The group discussed Henry's statement to death finally making him feel defensive as if his role as chief negotiator was in question so he shifted the focus over to a small blonde girl-woman. "Why are you sitting like that, all hunched up?" Henry asked.

"...I'm a little afraid of the people here."

"Really? Me too?" Henry asked feeling bold.

"Yes ... especially you," she smiled.

Henry felt bad "Why?"

You seem to be ... well, a powerful... powerful personality ... I don't know."

What bullshit. I like that --to be regarded as powerful... Though it's not true, I don't think. Most people don't see me as powerful or do they? Does Toni see me as powerful? Does Mrs. Grey? Nonsense. I wish Mrs. Grey did.

"Maybe it's only that I don't know you and I'm wary of men in general," she admitted.

Aah! I liked the powerful personality better!

Everybody else in the group agreed with her second statement making Henry feel bad.

*I guess they **don't** see as powerful. Maybe I should assert myself more here and see what happens...*

The session ran on for hours and Henry ended up in an argument with an obnoxious administrator who admitted he was a male chauvinist, contradicted himself, told Henry he thought he was a "bit of a jerk" and then said he was kidding. Henry, bluffing to the hilt became enraged; stood up and threw a chair against the wall. The entire room grew quiet and all the groups turned their attention to Henry.

What the fuck did I do? I couldn't have been acting if I went to all this trouble ... I must really be full of anger.

"I'm sorry...'Got carried away," Henry said to everyone and sat down feeling sheepish. Having established himself as a powerful, if perhaps, unstable personality in the group, Henry sulked. Unable to walk out having displayed something that bothered him, he brooded over whether he had been acting or lost control; the latter frightened him.

Eventually, both Henry and his adversary grew quiet and a new leader took over the group, a young, long-haired man who claimed to be very knowledgeable about encounter groups. He began doing odd things such as walking out, returning and sitting on the floor, or moving his chair very close to someone else and asking, "Now why did I do that?" "Now why did I do that?" The group invariably made up long, hypothetical answers that touched upon the metaphysical and philosophical. "To show how distance and well ... culture, I guess, condition our way of responding," the little blonde girl-woman said.

"For the hell of it." Henry's adversary said.

"I agree," Henry responded hoping to establish friendship with his adversary. "I doubt there was any actual reason, except you felt like it," Henry added.

"No, I disagree. He must have had a reason or he wouldn't have done it. Henry's adversary countered, continuing to be an adversary.

On they went in countless convolutionary circles until they invented and became caught up in a little world defended by distortions, compromise and non verbal negotiations.

When Henry, frustrated by his efforts to make friends with his adversary, told the group of his efforts and explained in what he thought was the plain truth that his adversary contradicted himself just to be on opposite sides with Henry he was greeted with sympathetic blankness from the group. Their little world became wearisome and difficult as alliances broke and were reformed. Henry moved over to the long-haired man's side. Very much like the Institution they attempted to survive as best they could until it ended and they all left for the day.

"What did you think?" Michael asked.

Henry shrugged. *A world in which after a great deal of effort --still nothing is real; just like our own.*

Henry and Ellen decided to drive to the beach.

The murky clouds would occasionally part and blasts of stifling hot sunlight would boil the humidity. There were several victims of the heat stalled along gritty highway shoulders, the hoods of their cars pointing toward heaven, their befuddled, bewildered faces watching traffic zoom by them.

The traffic would then congeal into a jam as a particular entrance lane, swelling with vehicles would dribble onto a larger artery, slowing things down.

They took a side road that transverse a section of near rural country. There were farms here and there, maybe a few of them still operating. The houses were old, often unpainted and the yards were littered with junk, rusty tractors, old cars without tires, farm implements, obscure materials.

Henry's eye searched for residents. He found none though surmised them to be stocky, dressed in worn, loose fitting clothing. The women losing the attractive sheen of youth and sexuality before thirty. He spied an old house protruding from behind a group of ancient hard wood trees. It's dry cedar shingles had been burnt dark and crispy by many summers. A flimsy, aged curtain was stuffed over a cheap, half-drawn window shade. Who lived there? What type of people ate their dinners in its non-modern kitchen. Did they have a television in their living room? What thoughts did they think? Did Henry know one person who could explain what it was like to live there?

"I like it here," Ellen said gazing off into the still heat shimmering in the fields outside the car.

-Of course, -- Ellen. Ellen's family came from a rural area.

Through the rear-view mirror Henry caught a last glimpse of the old farm house as it disappeared. behind him into the past.

"Me too, It relaxes me. It seems much simpler to live here, than the way we have to live."

"It would be dull for you." Ellen said.

"Everything's dull for me," Henry said.

I can't really picture me living here. Or can I? No, I wouldn't fit in.

"It's a shame ... It's all gone now, practically," Ellen said whimsically watching a field of summer wheat dip its sticky ends in a near squirm of breeze

At last they reached the beach and peeled themselves off the sticky car seats to walk a half mile to the sand.

Once parked on their blankets Henry fell into his favorite hobby. He watched the women. Some were nicely plump, others running to bumpy fat. Still others were highly attractive with even, sophisticated tans and well kept hair. Henry liked looking at all of them, though he was the least interested in the sophisticated looking ones.

Through this eye or that, at varied head angles he watched women through the safety of his sunglasses. Ellen seemed moodily quiet; she lay on her blanket and squinted along the beach. Henry sneaking glances admired the curve of Ellen's back and tush. He felt oddly guilty at watching his own wife and a snicker escaped his cheeks.

"What's so funny?" Ellen asked.

"Nothing."

A man whose resemblance reminded Henry of an old friend walked by. It wasn't, though.

"Want to swim?" He asked Ellen.

"Not really. Do you? I'll watch."

Henry grunted. A short woman in a black, one piece bathing suit ambled through the surf up her calves. Her yellow hair furled and unfurled like a flag behind her. She was short with strong with broad thighs that swelled upwards into a wide behind. A nondescript women with large breasts, partially-visible walked by in the opposite direction from the golden-haired woman. He watched them both briefly.

"What are you looking at?" Ellen asked.

"Interesting bathing suit, the black, one piece," Henry leered.

"Bathing suit?" You're looking at what's in the bathing suit ... I know you. Ellen teased tickling his leg.

Henry chuckled as he watched the golden-haired woman stroll out of sight.

"You ought to buy one like that."

"Why don't you go into the water and cool off," Ellen advised.

"Later," Henry lay back letting the sun warm him to a near doze. His mind danced with optimism as he briefly recounted all the future possibilities his life might explore. He savored the elation because he knew that it wouldn't last.

Henry feeling groggy from the sleepy void of a long weekend at home cautiously descended the steps of his new, old house and irrationally inspected for demons or poltergeists before ascending his exercise bicycle.

He hesitantly cranked up the pedals creating a thumping racket that disguised an intermittent whispering of imaginary voices that said nothing. He knew it was no more than an internal mechanism --attempting to discern patterns to sounds that were muffled by a bad ear. Not a deaf ear, just one exacerbated by a childhood prank, military gunshots and the wearing of communications headsets when he didn't want to. He wasn't really psychotic, just neurotically worried that he was. Though when Everett sat close to a colleague in the far back office to Henry's rear-right, and lowered his voice to just above audible, Henry wondered if the chatter could be about him. This bothered him too.

Through several steps of anxiety he pedaled, tightening the tension on the bicycle wheel to shut out his mind; to take a vacation from the projected possibilities that raged within.

Alone, and in heightening physical discomfort he pedaled on into minutes that hung timeless before him. On alone, forcing his will into completing an unpleasant healthy challenge. Above him, unseen, the rest of his life went on.

Finally, with blood boiling in his lungs and the taste of red dust in his mouth reminiscent of his Southwestern basic training, his heart beating harder, the exercise timer went off and he relaxed his speed and wound down the tension knob. He gulped for breath as pain receded and weariness flowed through his limbs. It was an agony he would repeat.

He staggered upstairs to the living room where he dumped himself upon the couch. His pocket watch, used to time the twenty minutes of his ordeal was still in his shirt pocket, it's mechanical ticking out-of-rhythm with his pounding heart disturbed him. He took it from his pocket and slid it into his pants where its tick-tick-tick merged into his pulse.

Later, he was sparked out of residual lethargy by haunting obsessions regarding negotiations. What was this one up to? What did so-in so mean by that comment? What should he have done? Did he make a mistake? Should he feel embarrassed?

Then he would fill with determined resolve to fight more fiercely for what he thought important and would impatiently pace the house hoping to produce Monday morning instantly so he could get to work and produce the perfect world.

The custodians crowded around Henry's desk to discuss a grievance. "Can they make you walk all the way over to the far building to pick up a mop, 'cause they won't give you a key to the downstairs mop closet? I mean that ain't right; why the hell should they do that? If

I walk ... Now look it dis. I gotta clean the bathrooms by four o'clock. Now how the hell can I do that If I gotta walk all the way down..."

"What bathroom?" Henry asked.

"On this level."

"It's stupid," another one said.

"Sure it's stupid. I gotta lug a mop around 'cause they won't give me a key..."

"Who has the key?" Henry asked.

"Big John."

"I'll talk to Big John." Henry said wearily.

"It ain't his fault. Frank gave that order himself. At least that's what Big John said."

"Big John's a liar."

"How do you know?"

The interrupter flicked his cigarette angrily and paced behind the main-talker. "I know."

"You don't know!" In seconds they began to argue vehemently, all four of them shouting and gesturing, calling each other stupid.

"All right, I'll talk to Frank . I'll see If I can got you a key or get another bathroom, You shouldn't worry about it anyway. Just work your forty hours and go home." Henry said.

They still complained and Henry began repeating, "I'll talk to the guy, Don't fuckin' worry," Using his custodian-maintenance syntax and handling the syllables roughly as if he had a work-hardened, callused tongue.

Finally, three of them drifted away, strolling off in different directions, most likely intending to hide or lay low till five o'clock. One lingered on.

"It ain't right the way Big John deals with us. We ain't garbage. Everybody says custodians are garbage. I ain't garbage. I was a foreman once. 'Had a hundred and twenty guys worken' under me. Two years to go before I could got my pension and poof." He shot his hand into the air as if it were a navy jet catapulting off a carrier deck. "They sold the fuckin place and I'm out on my ear. Fuckin' garbage. Big John never had a hundred guys under him. He's got six of us and can't do it right."

"I know," Henry said, nodding sadly. They looked at each other for a moment, then the older, gnarled man walked away. "See ya."

"Yeah." Henry said, still nodding his head.

**

George Lyndon sat by himself before the union executive board with the odd smile that grew out of the triumph of his aloneness.

The meeting ran smoothly. During standing committee reports Henry patted himself on the back while giving an account of his actions on a particular grievance he had some success with. At officer reports, as first vice president, he explained briefly why the local should remain wary of Elliot Kirch from headquarters. "These guys just want to settle in a hurry and go, they don't give a shit about the contract. A little money and out." No one seemed to be listening so Henry spoke for the record which no one would read.

Brenda was pensively quiet, her head low at the far end of the table as she doodled with much concentration on the corners of her memos.

When they came to the portion of the meeting concerned with new business Jim recognized George Lyndon of the new publication committee. It seemed that he would perform the editor's job even though he had lost the election. He began speaking in his quiet, needling voice, his smile still half drawn upon his lips. "The executive board has appointed me to chair the publication committee, under ... (He acted deferentially while naming the union officer responsible for publications who had beaten him in the election, and then withdrew.) "I've made a list of guidelines here to go along with our union paper, The Scoop" He motioned to Brenda, now alert, who began to pass the sheets out. The guidelines contained such warnings that racism or fascism would not be tolerated and that all sympathy was to go to the exploited worker. No Administrative viewpoints were to be aired, etc. Lyndon's smile blossomed.

Henry was furious, though he managed to keep it suppressed. On the inside he was screaming and shouting and tearing up the guidelines and jumping over the table to shriek at George Lyndon and provoke a confrontation. On the outside he remained frozen, receiving his copy of the guidelines with a slight smile. He even quipped, "The paper hasn't really been printing much fascist material lately." Only Jim snickered.

Unable to contain himself he addressed a question to Lyndon. "Are you planning to change the name of the paper to the 'Daily Worker?'"

Lyndon leaned back in his chair to contemplate the question. The overhead lights reflected miniatures of the Executive Board from his lenses, blotting out his pupils.

No body responded including Jim. Brenda made a motion to adopt the guidelines. It was seconded and put to a vote; everyone except Henry voted for it. Henry, feeling alone and much like George Lyndon, motioned to MaryEllen, the recording secretary. "One abstention."

**

Henry was in an informal grievance hearing between the custodians and the Director of Maintenance Frank Hayward. The director, a large, gruff, though pleasant fellow, had the look of many years of duty as a senior NCO in the military. His directorship was an enormous jump in status, and mindful of his limitations as a minor bureaucratic aristocrat in the upper Administrative echelon, he usually presented himself to his subordinates as a

former subordinate with new duties and perspectives.

The custodians, some with little logic or pattern to their argument protested everything they could think of. They were jammed against the walls in Hayward's small, white office. Hayward, sitting judge-like before them (though slightly confused) issued monarchical mannerisms on behalf of the occasion.

Henry was glad Jim wasn't there or else it would have been hard not to laugh.

"Why do we have to clean up the shit the night crew supposed to do?" One asked.

"Why, the hell, should I have to walk alla way to another building 'cause I don't have a key to the broom closet at..."

"I was told not to ..."

"If there's shit layen' on the floor and sometimes there is ... these pigs around here can't stick their ass over the toilet...who cleans it up? Even if it ain't my assigned bathroom but I'm only walken' by..."

"You clean it up ... it's your job." Hayward said.

"But! But..." The custodian exploded, filled with rage and passion for justice. "...it's not **my** assigned bathroom!"

Henry, fighting the urge to just disappear and let the battle rage on, shifted somewhat pompously and very self-confidently into a loud authoritative voice. "IF, there is shit on the floor..." He paused for effect as everyone stopped yapping to listen to him. "Then it SHOULD be reported so the security people can find this person. AND these things have happened BEFORE. There is no reason to keep cleaning up shit from some goof who likes to use the floor."

"Certainly!" Hayward said to a chorus of "Yeahs" and "That's right."

Henry added in a diplomatic tone, "But the stuff has got to be cleaned up..."

After an hour of wrangling, the custodians, temporarily filled with catharsis filed out of Hayward's office being promised that certain procedural problems would be changed.

Henry lingered on. Hayward said to him, "You know what the problem is don't you?"

"Being custodians," Henry said simply and honestly.

"You damn right."

"Well, it's good then to let them bitch every now and then," Henry said.

"I do." Hayward smiled.

There was a non-adversary silence for several seconds. Henry, thinking back to military days, said, "I used to do that stuff too, custodial..."

"So did I," Hayward said.

They smiled at each other.

Everyone will be happier, work-wise, until tomorrow morning when reality returns. I can't make them clerks -not that the clerks are blissful, I can only try to get them a career ladder into maintenance positions should they actually want to work toward a goal, maybe even tuition reimbursement, maybe a few extra dollars. I can't change their lives. I'm having a lot of trouble changing my own. And, hey, some of them do get caught sleeping on the job... It's not a perfect world. But how would Brenda and George Lyndon have handled this? With a declaration of war? That's why I think I'm more right than they.

*

How damn honest and moral can I be if I sometimes stretch the truth, posture, or use dramatic histrionics to gain a point negotiating? How come I don't mind it? I enjoy it and it scares me. And I can be pompous and demanding when I want to also. I enjoy it. Except when I'm under attack from my own people, Brenda and George Lyndon, though Jim thinks he can neutralize them.

Do the ends (helping the 'downtrodden' employees...some of whom are lazy, complainers... like me?) justify the means? Oh what bullshit. Why should I worry about the small lie here or there when I'm more honest than most people. But I do worry about it ... after the fact. So it does bother me? God damn, shut this argument off; take care of yourself first for a change. But I am. I'm in this union business for my own interest and satisfaction. Making sure I never advance at the Institution, ha, ha. But I look after the interests of others ... the custodians for example. I like it. Do I do everything for myself? Does everybody?

**

Henry had learned to negotiate a grievance. Enclosed in Martin Kranster's office he maneuvered his grievances toward success. Sometimes hammering the table and demanding justice. Sometimes abandoning hyperbole and speaking frankly and 'off the record' to Kranster. Sometimes cajoling and sometimes tossing good-natured sarcasm and jokes.

He asked for more than he needed, entered into Talmudic argument, rebuffed, refuted, shouted down and belittled all counter arguments. He peeled back layers and layers of honesty and truth all for partially deceptive purposes and came relentlessly closer and closer to the problem overwhelming Kranster with the size, amount and quality of justifiable evidence and at least gaining promise that the 'matter will be looked into.' Then the wait where Kranster chameleoned into a new posture and returned to position one.

Henry would then start all over with enraged, shocked betrayal, touching upon the entire body of negotiations, threats of arbitration or law suits and then settling into the process again. There might have been some successes yet all seemed to return to where it had

been before. Or did it?

Dreams:

There was a ballet of action in his vision. Persons changed rapidly and the scenes intermingled one upon the other. He was commanding a battle somewhere at night. Flashes of artillery fire and impacting explosions lit the field.

He was banging the negotiating table and demanding something. His resolve was enormous, bearing indication of a great stubborn strength which gave off a piercing cold exhilaration as Henry rose ten thousand feet in his own head, on a whim of self-patriotic ego-mania.

He flicked quickly into another scene. A woman approached; voluptuous to near over ripe. She was a light skinned Black woman with auburn died hair rolled into straightened curls. Her bosom heaved in dramatic breath as she twirled in dance swirling her skirt waist-high. Her meaty legs separated and rejoined cocked into an alluring pose. She wore a skimpy bikini brief crowded between the large globes of her quivering behind. The scent of her perspiring thighs reached Henry's nose.

Something silly was about to happen and Henry drifted worrisomely back into a negotiating team caucus where they were all arguing in concentric circles about something incomprehensible and foolish. If he tried, though, he might be able to understand it. It alluded him and he dreamed of urinating endlessly until he awoke to do so.

**

Saturday. Henry worked all day around the little house. He raked leaves and despaired over the sparse grass and abundance of weeds. He attempted a dozen jobs with screws, hanging-brackets, wood putty and latches. The house betrayed him constantly, revealing unknown flaws; a rotten window, an uneven board. He became frustrated and cursing, gripped screwdrivers fiercely, and worked furiously. Ellen lumbered after him already protective of the unknown life growing in her.

Night began to fall, closing him in; driving him out of the dim, drafty old portions of the house, out past the old quiet bedrooms now empty, toward television, his only solace.

Didn't finish. The window isn't done downstairs. Shit, I hate this falling-apart house. Hope I can sell it. Who would buy it? I did. Damn it I'm depressed and hating myself ... I'm so locked up in my head, no one can join me here. Another empty, nothing weekend. When the baby's born we won't even be able to go to the movies. We need friends. Couples. But who? Marshal is unreliable and his wife's a pot-head. Besides he's in a different bargaining unit, ha, ha. Michael's a kid with no mate. Jim's single too and doesn't really socialize. Who is a married, almost a father, with a less-than-meaningful job, small-time union negotiator with a wife compatible to Ellen? And a tongue in cheek, alienated, neurotic personality? God, I must be one of a kind. That's just an excuse, if you

want friends you can find them. Where?

At the union convention Henry and Jim sat in a huge auditorium and listened to an eccentric looking lecturer far away upon a distant stage.

"Man and woman are, today, this far apart..." The lecturer drew two lines at opposite ends of the chalkboard. He turned and paused for dramatic interest. "There are role differences, physical differences; muscle structure, bone structure, height, weight etceteras...and genitological differences ... in case you hadn't noticed."

The audience laughed with the lecturer's far away smile.

"Now. The difference between man and animal; or wait, **People** and animals?"

He smiled and a female voice shouted, "That's better!" creating some snickers and guffaws. "Is what? What's the difference?"

"People are more ... aggressive," Someone up front said.

"But are they? In hunting-gathering societies with few people and plenty of food do people run around killing each other? Or do they kill each other when there are more people than food and instead of everyone dying the strong and clever hoard, or steal the surplus and let the weak and foolish perish... an over simplification, perhaps. But are people really more aggressive, naturally? ... Then say, wolverines? What if wolverines had the atomic bomb ... or cats? ... Cats like to play with the field mouse, or bird, or uh rabbit they've cornered and crippled, ever notice that? And do they eat it? Sometimes.

"No, people are not necessarily more aggressive it depends on the circumstances. No, the difference is TECHNOLOGY. We make things that today make things that make things. Technology; the car, computer, assembly-line machine, television, automated tools. Technology. Now, I believe that the next EVOLUTIONARY breakthrough will be TECHNOLOGICAL."

He returned to the chalkboard. "Men and woman were this far apart designed for certain purposes. Different purposes. With technology we shall change that..."

"First we shall change their jobs, roles and then what?...Change them. First, probably we will relieve women of the awesome task of childbirth... Menstruation, Pregnancy, Labor ... Birth ... How many have gone through this?" Hands reluctantly went up.

"...Men?" Hands came down and nervous laughter perked through the auditorium.

"With technology women will soon be relieved of that ... making sexuality what?"

"More fun." Someone shouted, creating laughter.

"Precisely," The lecturer smiled. "It will also bring men and women closer..."

Laughter.

"THIS WAY..." He erased the lines on the chalk board and moved them closer. "No babies, no uterus ... will there still be differences? ... Yes, man must be hard and enter ... Woman must be soft and receptive to entrance." Not a sound but a self-conscious cough that reverberated through the auditorium.

"Give me one that's hard." A young woman impulsively whispered. Only her friend smiled in order to relieve the social ostracism of her comment. The woman turned her head forward and attempted to become invisible.

"... Also certain role differences and character differences are apparent in order to stimulate attraction. What next? Will there really be a need for genital sexuality without procreation?"

There was no answer.

"No ... Sexuality will exist after a time only as a physiological activity and then during this evolutionary change genital differences will disappear and men and women will be..." He erased the two lines and drew one. "-none. Only people, and sexuality will have no basis to procreation, family structure, incest, oedipal complex if it exists..."

Some smiles from people in the audience.

"Friends will share it as a physiological stimulant ... a new kind of sexuality without genitalia."

Henry felt uncomfortable sitting next to Jim for a second. "No more females, god damn," Jim said, making Henry relax and smile.

"Then... will there truly be a need for sexuality, or aggression, or sleep or eating, or any of the drives we have today? Probably necessary drives today as technological animals ... But soon, via technological advances we may pass beyond the animal into new realms. Realms that only imagination may take us too.

"Many philosophies or theosophies speculate on preserving the personality beyond physical death. But what is the human personality, today, but a complex physiological thing formed by the need to draw breath, take nourishment and accommodate other needs? Formed by the body and shaped by the bodies of OTHERS? How much of our basic desires to be held, or part of something comes from the, may I say, erratic, neuro-physical drives of our parents and childhood playmates?

"Man created technology and technology will recreate man, or excuse me, people. We have discovered no everlasting truth about ourselves or our universe. Every great breakthrough or discovery becomes questioned, re-examined and found to be inconclusive. The only reality that we have is that technology grows more complex and as a result so does our society ... and it's taking us someplace ... Maybe to destruction or maybe elsewhere..." He paused.

"I hope I haven't frightened anyone? Enjoy while you can ... Thank you!" The lecturer waved with one hand.

There was laughter and loud clapping.

Henry feeling even more cut off amid all the social chain reaction of deafening applause and united human heat sat back in his seat and offered a soundless show of his hands meeting in forced rhythm. In light of his present lesson the motion seemed more than meaningless.

Jim, unmoved, sat hunched in his seat leaning on an elbow. "Let's go eat," he said.

Later, they ran into Elliot Kirch, who was half looped and made a tour of the bar where they found the eccentric lecturer plying a young female delegate with cocktails. He had an arm around her chair and was talking quickly and quietly toward her huddled, down turned face.

Henry fought a mischievous urge to interrupt the seduction with an idiotic question about technology.

They followed Kirch upstairs to meet some important union big-wigs who were having a private party.

'You shouldn't feel happy about a contract, You should feel you've gotten the best deal you could. You'll like some of it, dislike some of it. The other side will like some of it, feel uncomfortable with some of it. A contract indicates the good with bad; and you just have to live with it.' Whoever said it, Martin Kranster, the mediator, the fact finder, Elliot Kirch ... it ran through Henry's mind as he sloshed through the pouring rain toward a phone booth; his car hopelessly stalled in the shopping center parking lot.

- 'The good with the bad, you just have to live with it' ... How dose one negotiate with God (or irony) for clearer guarantees against misfortune? Or do you complicate your life by an explosion of intricate neurotic perceptions each one a frustrating contradiction of an earlier one just to attempt a modification of the odds against you: locked doors, rocks in your pockets, whistles in your teeth to ward off the attackers that occasionally step out of your imagination to chase you down a street.

Then you live a life with locked doors and rocks in your pockets making everyone you pass into a potential assailant. I need to have jumper cables, a spare battery, ignition spray, electric wire sealer, a bus schedule, hidden money...

Just call Ellen ... when the rain stops the car might start.

ARTICLE 5 Everyone Must Party

Andrea Brighton, the Senior Director's assistant was commanding a busy conversation at the far end of the large room. The general hustle of the Institution's party seemed either remote or very natural to her. The collection of professional, so called, experts from many departments, administrators and staff employees mingling hesitantly under a

symbolic banner of alcohol consumption created just enough noise to shut all others out of her conversation.

She possessed a commanding stature, with a very quick, expressive face. Her vocabulary was filled with the athletic, aggressive jargon used by top level administrators and she talked more often about the 'game plan' or 'target date' of the latest program of the Institution than about Institutional gossip. Possibly, being in the highest power circle of administrators she was ignorant of general gossip and committed by position to divulge none of what she was witness to.

Dominating her small circle of males and females she discussed business in her excited style rolling eyes and smirking with conviction over this or that. The people listening to her smiled approvingly and sneaked in the occasional remark to stimulate her once again. Every so often someone else would weasel into the conversation, take over, arouse no response but Andrea's smooth verbal defense of something she knew about and the interrupting party would gracefully slither away looking for a more yielding crowd.

Henry and Jim, the Staff employee union leaders mingled and were receiving more attention than the average celebrant.

The party lasted well beyond the end of the work day. Even Andrea swallowed more and more alcohol and her little group in the far corner became giddy with excitement and one by one sought more enticing, earthy conversation or possible chances to meet and talk with the more important, more powerful and perhaps the more attractive.

Andrea, her last partner borrowed by their boss to respond to his conversation, looked around for an administrative wallflower to become a recipient of her attention, and quite surprisingly found none. She eyed the floor quickly to spy out those she could go to. The Senior Director was talking with several important guests. Kranster was talking to Henry and Jim (union-management business, no doubt.) Henry was talking heatedly at the moment, Jim was starrng off elsewhere and occasionally waving to someone he knew personally (he seemed to know a lot of people). Realizing she was alone, her smile faded and she looked down, unfocused, to the drink she was toying with. Her thoughts became filled with loneliness and self criticism. Had she driven away everyone else, or had she skillfully provided an entertainment to keep them together for so long?

"Hello there," Someone in a white turtleneck and wool sports jacket said.

It was Rammer proceeding conservatively on a new conquest.

"Hello ... " She said sensing that platonic talk was suddenly not the goal of this new encounter.

"Who are you?" Rammer asked, smiling, his tone unsure.

"Andrea Brighton ... Senior Assistant," she added in an elitist urge.

"Oh..." Rammer hesitated, wondering if he was out of his league. "John Rammer, Senior Engineer." He smiled rising to the challenge.

"Oh hello." She shook his hand unsure of who he was but convinced that he had enough class not to be frightened of her.

Rammer sat down and began his uncontrolled sexual leer over his simple, crew-cut boyish charm.

"What are you grinning about?" Andrea demanded, annoyed enough to lower her eyelids and take a deep drink.

Rammer still acting along the lines of his dictum 'pussy is pussy' plunged along anyway. "What's a nice girl like you doing working with all these old men?" Then he threw in his staccato baseball laugh.

Andrea was appalled. "What's an engineer do?" She asked coldly.

Rammer, sensing that he was preceding the wrong way pulled back and cleared his face abruptly. "Would you like another drink?"

"No," She smiled warmly, still allowing him to sit next to her.

They watched each other several moments. Rammer felt the more nervous, until finally he became reckless. "How would you like to come to dinner with me tonight ... After all, this party is getting old."

"No." She smiled warmly again, her eyes playing mischievously with her own word.

Rammer shook his head slowly. "Well, have a good time, maybe I'll see you a little later, okay?"

"Okay," Andrea said warmly, still smiling as Rammer bowed gracefully out chalking her up mentally as a 'lesbian' and pounded some cohort's back before bursting out with his staccato baseball laugh.

Michael and Jack were circling the main body of the party and as Michael stopped at a table to make a sandwich, Jack crowded Andrea.

"Hello," he giggled.

"Hi."

"Hope Rammer didn't blow you away."

Andrea sighed in relief, "Oh, you know him?"

"Yeah, we play soft ball together," Jack said.

"What's he do?"

"Power plant ... operating engineer...What do you do?" Jack asked casually, looking at her while stirring his drink.

"Sen...an assistant to uh..." Andrea defaulted to just being a person.

"God ... this is almost as bad as a fraternity party." Jack said as someone guffawed.

"College man?" Andrea asked, disliking the phrase instantly for being so dated.

"Yeah ..." Jack named an Ivy league school he had attended unsuccessfully.

"How was it? I went to..." - And Andrea all expression and command began talking about the ivy league school she graduated from. Jack, smiling interestedly, allowed her reign to talk expressively as he made the occasional comment and provided her with additional drinks.

Arriving late and smiling criminally Johnson appeared with his new, sometime, girl friend Cathy who was wearing a luscious, long gown. Rammer teased him and kept in practice making a lot of noise as he flirted jokingly with her.

Johnson, still sober and therefore nervous, traded a few remarks with Michael before stealing her away from Rammer, who had brought drinks for them.

Across the floor making an ever widening escape circle from Henry and Kranster, Jim stalked off after food and females. Henry, smirking to himself over his fate, was now bound with invisible rubber bands into an exchange between Brenda and Kranster over the rights of employees. Kranster's heart wasn't into the argument and he was trying to escape the almost bitter recrimination that Brenda flung at the Administration. Henry stood off to one side of the unlikely pair and greeted union members and Administrators alike, sober and withdrawn enough to calculate that by the amount of people approaching and talking to him he was among the more powerful people in the large room. That thought lent him no comfort either as he plunged to Kranster's defense with Brenda by keeping his end in the conversation alive and sticking to more general or philosophical subjects.

As another administrator came over to Kranster to say hello, Henry spotted Toni, with a male friend, glaring at him from the bar. Henry, standing amid an illusory circle of power seemed to have an unpleasant effect on Toni. Henry (playing, now for Toni's benefit) smiled and plunged in to say something comical to the other administrator who Henry as grievance chairman knew. Then he turned to shake hands warmly with Frank Hayward the Director of Maintenance, who was looking for someone to talk to. Henry was sure that the ease and nonchalance of his posturing would not be lost on Toni.

Andrea, running out of steam and resolve relaxed her dynamism. "I'm really rambling on, huh?"

"No, not at all. I enjoy it," Jack said.

"Bullshit."

They both laughed.

Andrea paused, searching for the right words which were not, always, the ones waiting to roll down her tongue. "I ... have a way of dominating things, though I don't do it because I feel a need to dominate, it's just because I seem to be filling a void that ... I don't know

... What do you do here? Your job?" She asked smiling, her mind almost made up, speaking with determination from under a pleasant, releasing veil of alcohol.

I play softball. First base," Jack smiled. "I'm on the staff," he grinned, "Under-worked and overpaid; just kidding...I'll probably get into something else soon. I have been avoiding ambition but," he knocked on an imaginary door, "It seeks me out."

"What?"

"Securities?" He offered, hopefully.

Sizing him up for a long moment she began speaking slowly and deliberately, "Listen Jack, I like you ... " She touched his wrist. "...I want a promise from you, though, that what ever happens tonight ... and I'm not saying anything will happen. She stopped and watched him. "that you keep it to yourself. I do have a certain position here." She nodded for affect.

Jack, his heart pounding, his head forming lies for Michael about his great seduction, became puzzled. What exactly did she mean? Was she drunk and ready to fall down?

Uncertainly and seriously he nodded waiting for her to collapse and become sick, a great joke on his evening.

"Then ... let's go," she announced brightly expecting him to understand, and they both rose easily and he followed her out, slowly, as she said some sober good byes. Remaining two feet behind her as he headed for the door Jack briefly surveyed the party, picking out the individuals he knew for closer examination. Michael, looking uneasy was standing near a tall woman wearing shorts by one of the buffet tables. Rammer was telling a side splitting story to a soused group of engineers. Johnson was glued to Cathy as they swayed back and forth on the dance floor (obviously he wasn't into her yet or else he wouldn't be rubbing it on her belly). Jim was making funny talk to a willing secretary and Henry, swilling alcohol, was sitting against a wall watching the entire goings on with detached amusement.

Henry was the only one to notice Jack slipping out with Andrea and he tossed off a short non-committal wave as Jack nodded and disappeared into the hallway.

Michael, on his own at the party, was a short space from leaving. He felt angry at Jack for deserting him so early before he had a chance to get loaded and feel his way around.

He made some small talk with a fellow he knew from work but personally regarded as a jerk. When his jerk - acquaintance deserted him to talk to another individual Michael knew but could not tolerate, Michael became desperate.

He felt disappointment in Henry also, who had spent most of the night hanging around with Institution big shots or union types. Now, Henry wasn't even in sight, having probably left without stopping by to say hello.

I gotta break into a party slowly. Have a companion to ease me in. Get loaded slowly and then make some broad, usually unsuccessfully. On my own, sober, I'm useless, I can't

even talk right, I couldn't even create an interesting conversation with that creep from down the hall. It's my fault. Jack pisses me off, would I do that to him? Probably not I'd invite him to sit down and talk with us ... But he'd probably steal the girl! This broad standing next to me in shorts... She's been here for a little while. She seems alone ... I wonder.

She was approximately thirty years old, tall, like a building with the base larger than the top. Her thighs were sensually spread, swollen outward, pleasingly to the Greek eye anyway. Her belly rounded and hinting downward strongly. Her breasts were not large, and her hair with blond highlights was cut short, curling out by the nape of her neck.

Her face was handsomely attractive and her general appearance was voluptuous enhanced by the long tan of her legs from soled feet to tight beige shorts and scented with an uncommon perfume. Her sun glasses were perched on top of her head, crown-like.

Michael found himself distracted and separate from the crowd. The tinkling of glasses and scattered conversation closing him in, --the darkened large room made him feel uncomfortable.

Michael peering at her glasses guessed that he was slightly shorter than she and no doubt younger. But she seemed alone and so was he. His heart began to beat faster and he took a large gulp from his drink. She seemed preoccupied with her plate, maneuvering a fallen remnant of chopped liver back onto its cracker.

Michael looked for an empty table to escape toward with his creative monstrosity of a sandwich. There were none. He reached for a pickle which he slid under the bread and brushed her forearm slightly. Then he glanced to see if anyone was approaching her. There was no one in the crowd who seemed to be aware of her. --But him.

She turned, noticed him and smiled. Their eyes met and seemed to hold too long. Michael nodded. She looked away, back to her plate. Michael began to feel foolish, having seen hints where probably none existed... yet? He felt hung out, empty in space. His mind raced. He felt a flush of embarrassed panic... Should he retreat back into the crowd? How? He wasn't brave enough to be a coward.

She spoke while still maneuvering chopped liver on her plate. "Some party!" Her words came easily.

Michael had trouble with **his** words. He muttered, "Huh?" in a hushed monotone in case she hadn't been speaking to him.

"Some party. Do you know these people?" She looked at him again. Her eyes were clear and large and he was already smitten.

He shook his head to the negative meaning he didn't **want** to know these people." The people here..." He couldn't seem to put a sentence together, also a nervous tremor in his hand was vibrating his food plate. It was becoming so comical that he laughed. She did not run away. Her eyes opened wider. She was prepared to share the joke.

"What's so funny?"

"The people here are pretty funny, but the food is good." He took a bite from his sandwich. Man, was he hungry.

"Have you eaten yet today?" She asked.

He thought while chewing, "I don't believe I have."

"I have a girl friend here but she got stuck with some guy, a guy in a suit. Maybe a salesman type. Do you have salesmen here? I haven't seen her in a half hour. But you're right the food is 'delish'. This is my third helping."

"No we don't have salesmen here... I don't think we sell anything. Could be some marketing types. Mostly a bunch of meeting-happy windbags," Michael said.

She laughed, revealing large, even teeth. Healthy teeth.

Smiling charmingly, with no further idea of what to say, Michael nodded. "Yeah I guess I'm ready to leave..." Preparing his exit line.

"Oh, she asked taking a bite of the chopped liver cracker. "You should finish eating first... Where would you go? " She asked interested, her eyebrows lifting, those great eyes watching Michael.

Michael shifted, wondering if she dated slightly shorter, younger men. Then again he was wearing sneakers. There was a moment of empty silence.

She cocked one tanned leg lowering her stature somewhat, putting her eyes on an even plane with his. She seemed to be waiting, not annoyed-waiting either.

"What's your name?" He asked.

"Eileen" she said very quickly as if the reply had been coiled to spring.

Michael shook his head not thinking.

"You?" She asked quickly. "Your name?"

"Mike."

"That's a nice name. "

He watched her. She watched him. She knew she'd have to play 'twenty questions' with him, but decided to go for the hardest one first. "How old are you?"

"Twenty two."

She nodded with her eyes, picking up another cracker, this one with herring. "That's a good age," she laughed. Her eyes lowered to her plate. She did not want to be asked the same question.

"...So where did you say you wanted to... you know you were, like, off to?" She felt nervous and looked at him for direction.

Mike felt a strange calmness. A comforting calmness. "Where ever you'd like to go." The words came from the inside of him and it did not have the smugness of a pickup line. No, to Mike it was magic. It was happening for him.

"Let me tell my girl friend..."

The party would turn out all right for him.

Henry on the receiving and of a phone call:

"Well, so I have to know if I'll be out of work in two months or not. First of all I'm going to Graduate school at night and you have to register in advance for the coming semester. Well the semester begins prior, or no, I take that back, AT THE SAME TIME as the time I might get laid off. I have to register now, however and PAY. So If I knew for sure about when I was to be laid off and if it is certain or not then I could go full-time to Graduate school. Also, I would like to know if I can bump somebody with less seniority..."

"How long have you been here?" Henry asked.

"Well, two and a half years, but that's as a part-timer at eighteen hours per week . Then, a year and a half ago I became a twenty five hour a week part-timer. A year and one month ago I became a full timer ... And I'm concerned about when my hospitalization plan runs out because that's important if I'm laid off, I will lose those benefits..."

Henry, feeling lost in the dark amid a swirl of possibilities being discussed from the unreachable depths of the telephones, nodded his head in sympathy.

-All these complicated difficulties, all real possibilities... From looking for food in the woods to this...

**

A young attractive woman sat at his desk to ask something. Consciously, like a guilty boy, he sneaked a quick glance at the restrained -though suggested-- area under the seam of her jeans. *Did she catch it? Is that why she closed her legs and hunched down?*

She took a long while to look through several sheets that Henry had handed her. She said nothing except mumble to herself. Henry felt uncomfortable, not knowing what to say and he wished that she would leave. Finally she stood. However, she asked him something and, quickly hitching her thumbs into the fabric squished into her crotch, wiggled her torso seductively to smooth the fabric down.

Was that an invitation? An unthinking manipulation to provide comfort?

Henry pretended to ignore it kept his eyes bored and focused into her trivial question. *Why am I put into these situations?*

*

Marshal entered the office with his typical whirlwind. He was late for, or missed, several unimportant appointments and needed to check his calendar regarding the timing of meetings he deemed more vital for his potential advancement or amusement. He noticed Toni on the telephone deep into one of his personal dramas replete with the usual obfuscation of his motives. Marshal backed into his cubical out of Toni's line of sight and hung his tongue out in mockery of the man to Henry's delight.

Toni completed his call and after packing his brief case stopped by Henry's desk to provide a pathological litany of his presumed whereabouts during business hours. Obviously they were lies or he wouldn't have bothered; he was probably going home.

"So if anybody asks you'll know where I'll be?" He smiled sweetly using his goody-boy persona.

"Phone there?" Henry asked ready to note it. A departure from his usual blank stare when Toni attempted to purloin him into a receptionist. But Henry just wanted to make Toni squirm.

"Oh, I... I think we'll probably be walking in the courtyard for our conference..." Toni said hastily, surprised by the tactic.

Toni left quickly after that, and Marshal full of red-faced, good cheer leaned on Henry's desk. "So where's that crazy fuck going?"

"Probably home. I think he had a fight with his new boyfriend..." Henry said.

I have this urge to tell the entire Institution that Toni is a disturbed, con-artist. But I should drop it because it would make me seem crazy for talking about it.

"Well, I need the phone; he's always on it," Marshal said gleefully.

Henry was sorry Marshal needed to make a call, he was in the mood for some conversation and Marshall seemed to be in an affable disposition. He felt like turning his piqued interest over females into some theorem in order to reality-check against Marshal's current philosophies.

"I'm gonna call that Claudine from the other building..." Marshal admitted, glowing with intensity.

Henry nodded, fairly oblivious of any meaning to the admission.

"We'll do coffee..." Marshal giggled.

"Uh huh. What for?" Henry asked.

"All you have to do is touch her... and she'll lay..." Marshal said, almost reverting to his code-talk.

Henry sat upright. "You want to fuck her?" He asked with alarm.

"Shhh!" Marshal 'shushed' to tone down Henry's voice.

"Why not?" Marshal asked innocently.

"You're married!" Henry exclaimed. *As I am!*

"So?" Marshal inquired as if he wondered what was wrong with Henry.

Henry went blank, and shrugged. Marshal backed over to the phone, still warm from Toni's clutch. "I never made any promises... Hello, Claudine?"

Jeeze! No use comparing these taunting emotions with him; he gives in to them. Maybe I should too. Hey sexy, tugging the fabric out of your crotch, let me do that for you! Ellen... The baby... I can't do that... Am I the only one like this?

Positions changed, people waffled, old conversations became forgotten. As time droned on monotonously, like the ticking of a grandfather clock, the words that were once spoken became erased as if they were sand castles by the surf.

Henry re-tread his foot steps on a particular grievance with Kranster. He determinedly dug his feet in again. Kranster kept waving him off, pouring the matter into legalistic simplicities that easily rounded the contract.

"Damn it, we've been over this before. You knew what the hell we were talking about then," Henry said.

"Well ... I don't know that we have..."

"Bullshit, C'mon Martin I brought this up two days ago and you said..."

"All right, all right ... But look..."

Henry again began hammering all the fine points, nailing the perfect pattern over and over again. Finally he began to get in mad.

"Cool down, cool down." Martin counseled, smiling.

"What the hell is it ... We're in your office; are you posturing in here? Aside from the grievance process and what ever position you're forced to take... You do UNDERSTAND the problem, No?" Henry asked playing no roles, no games, pleading for justice.

Kranster nodded, "OK."

Henry relaxed. "All right so you understand. If we have to go to arbitration we'll go. An arbitrator can present the solution."

"Well ... yeah..." Kranster hesitated and rubbed his nose starrng off humorously a thousand miles from all the problems in the Institution. Abruptly he returned to reality. "All right so we'll have a disposition ready for you ... You can carry this thing forward if

you're not satisfied."

Henry stood to leave. "Okay." He made a slight joke and they parted with a repartee of sarcasm.

ARTICLE 6 All God's Children Got Problems

To his buddy Jack, meeting Eileen was just 'great.' He avoided talking about her or 'it,' which lent the event far more credibility in Jack's mind, "Way-to-GO-Mikey-boy!" But the slap on the back almost made tears flow. He had such a throat full of melancholia he didn't know how to exorcise it.

Henry was the catalyst for that. Though Jack's age, to Michael, Henry was decades older, an almost father figure (older brother? Mentor?). Driving by (thankfully) he saw Henry on his porch. Defending his castle against twilight with a beer. Ellen was napping or asleep already. (Good, he needed Henry's ear).

The tale did not come easy, and he went to its finale directly. "She said she thought she could really care for me and thought it best we didn't get started. She didn't know where it would go..." This barely conveyed what he felt when she put her arms around his neck and tearfully kissed him searching his eyes for?

He ruminated, regretfully that maybe she was looking for a refutation and declaration. Maybe he could have had her then, but the same thing was bugging **him** too! He was certain he would fall in love with her (or convince himself he was) and never be able to say goodbye... until it was too late. A woman eight years older was cool right now, but what about when he was a mere 32? Could he really deal with it?

Painfully recriminating thoughts plagued him also, maybe she was just bullshitting him. Maybe he was too much of a kid for her, didn't make enough money, was inadequate in some other way etc. But he **knew** better. He believed her! And he even thought the door was still open for short while anyway, but he didn't know what, --if anything -- should be done about it.

Henry listened quietly. A good grievance chairman had to be a talented psychologist. How many 'contractual' disputes were actually personality clashes or hurt individuals looking for a bit of advice? To Michael, Henry had that unique ability to get to the heart of a matter seeing through charades and accretions with little difficulty. Little did Michael know, that Henry's abilities were of little help in his own life, but that was another story, this was Michael's.

"Do you want to marry her?" Henry asked.

"I uh... only saw her twice..." Michael defended against the preposterousness of such an allegation. This was something he **had** already thought about, however.

"Could you see yourself marrying her?" Henry pressed with the alacrity of a bargainer at the negotiating table.

"That's what I can't really say..." Michael admitted.

"Then you have to let her go," Henry advised, feeling sadness as his thumb scrapped off a piece of beer-bottle label. "I sense that you're like me, if you find someone you are unable to take half-way measures. And she sounds like the smart kind of woman who will not stand for half-way measures. At thirty, women who want to be married, can not afford to waste two more years waiting for someone to grow up. It's a fact."

"But..." His counter arguments were futile. Jack sleeps with these women and if they break up he shrugs. (Or he claims to). *Can't I have some **time** with this?* But, even Michael knew better. He only had one argument and that was with himself.

"Would you marry a woman eight years older than you?" Michael asked.

"How much money does she have?" Henry joked. Michael could only manage a weak grin. Henry thought... "No."

Unfortunately that seemed to be Michael's answer and he looked downcast. His eyes were almost misty. Henry looked away down the street."

Michael heard Ellen stirring in the living room, and didn't want to make pleasant conversation, "I got to go, say hi to Ellen for me," He said rising quickly.

"Mike," Henry called.

Michael didn't turn around till he was near his car. "Yeah?"

"You all right?" Henry asked.

"I am. Thanks!" He waved and then waved again to Ellen as she opened the front door. In a flash he was gone.

"Why did he run away, afraid of pregnant women?" Ellen joked.

Henry laughed, "He's got 'wimin' troubles," Henry said.

"Michael? He's nice. I wonder if I could fix him up with anybody?" Ellen mused.

*

At bedtime Ellen was strangely quiet. She lay still after Henry turned out the lights. He could feel her tension almost magically, as if it traveled across the sheets to him. Unless it was his own tension he could feel.

"Ellen?" Her name alone was the question.

She said nothing for a long moment. " ... What?" She was hostile, reluctant to answer.

"What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

He lay back angrily, smirking at her in the dark. *What is she MAD about --out of nowhere?*

She wasn't mad. In seconds she bolted to the bathroom where trembling precariously she vomited supper.

"Ellen?" Henry trailed after her, offering assistance. She didn't want any. He became frustrated and sat upon their bed in the dark listening to her choking and whimpering in the bathroom.

She returned to bed and shook. She piled as many layers of blankets on as she could find, her teeth chattering.

Henry glared at her. Then he risked another rejection and felt her forehead for fever. It was cool and she offered no resistance.

"I feel so scared and I don't know why..." She offered weakly.

Henry immediately shared the symptom. He forced a smile, "It's called anxiety ... probably about the baby..."

"NO!" She protested through chattering teeth.

"It goes away ... " Henry counseled, rubbing her back, knowing that it eventually returns. He was feeling his.

"Must be something I ate," she said in a tiny voice, her teeth behaving themselves for the moment.

Henry defeated the urge to confront the truth and brandish it like a Jurassic object fished out of some murky depths, "Maybe ... it'll go away."

He did his best to calm her fears; modeling for her with yawns and sleepy consolation. At last her breathing aped his and Henry believed she was asleep. She lay on her side, eyes wide, almost doe-like, stiff and ready to bolt, waiting, waiting.

*

In his dreams she became younger, not noticeably in years, but in passion. They weren't married yet and she was mysterious and slinky. She was full of hidden agenda laughter and sly, eager smiles. In this dream she had a small charm beside her nose, a tiny turquoise stone, star-like framed on a small gold bed. It was okay. He kissed her and they undulated together easily. They began to make love; uninhibited, lusty love...

ARTICLE 7 By The Sweat Of Your Brow You Must Live?

Snatches of Michael in hard and fast times looking for a connection to belong to:

"I'm in pretty good shape, Bill." Michael said stretching and yawning. Conceiving of

himself as having rolls of muscle and sinew.

Kathy paid no attention but Davenport still worried about his bronchitis-like cough peered intently through his cigarette smoke at Michael. "Oh yeah?"

"Yeah."

"What-a-you do lift weights?" Davenport asked.

"I do fifty push-ups a night."

"Fifteen?"

"Fifty." Michael repeated nonchalantly, smiling at Davenport's wide-eyed shock, before feeling stupid acting the brute with civilized, liberal, people. Perhaps they would mock him.

Kathy sat back and sipped her coffee, staring off at no one, a cognitive process chewing up some idea in her head.

Davenport crushed his cigarette out.

Michael stopped stretching.

"Fifty pushups?" Bill Davenport asked, smirking.

"Yeah..." Michael said unenthusiastically, wishing he hadn't brought it up.

"I'm lucky I can push myself out of bed in the morning," Davenport joked laughing his way into a coughing spasm. Kathy laughed too, and Michael wondered if there any negative dynamics to her commentary.

*

Harrison slapped his beer down on the bar and dragged his brawny elbow through a slight puddle of wetness never feeling it. "You know what we oughta do?" He asked smiling cockily as he tapped Michael lightly with two fingers in a nudge to dramatically punctuate his forthcoming declaration.

"What?" Michael asked feeling his voice float creakily from his small frame lost in the loud bar peopled by big bodies laughing and moving carelessly, brushing each other tauntingly.

"Kick their asses," Harrison said crashing his fist down (no fingernails) on the bar before prodding him again with two fingers for his response. "Eh?"

The man behind Michael lost in himself telling a story-joke and doing some body movements as part of the punch line lost his balance and stumbled backward against Michael temporarily pressing Michael into the bar as a shudder of laughter reverberated from the men behind Michael in response to the joke. Michael recoiled as if the laughter was directed at him and shot a disturbed look at the man behind him.

"Sorry pal."

Michael grunted.

"Don't mind 'em Mike. What-a-ya say?" Harrison asked before being swatted on the shoulder by a thin, tall man with thick, short brown hair -reminiscent of a scrub brush, another friend of Rammer's.

"Harry, you still here from the other night? Don't you sleep?"

"Fuckin' aye! Well hey." Harrison turned and guffawed as he hand-shook the thin man spilling into a conversation only the words of which Michael understood, the meaning unknown, shrouded in years of past, personal history belonging to other people.

Michael's thoughts fled in panic, as he sat unattended in a bar full of men he didn't know. He tried concentrating on his beer but his mind berated him; he belonged elsewhere.

*

"I've been an agnostic most of my life," Michael lied with no malicious intent, feeling some mild anxiety after his announcement, that God perhaps would speak to them forcing them all (Michael especially) to the floor by the power of HIS voice talking from everywhere above.

Harold stroked his finely trimmed blond beard, his eyes half shut behind his rimless glasses. He shifted his large frame in the easy chair and peered down into his beer can, "There is a order... I feel ... Perhaps it's unknowable ... it doesn't matter ... The universe works with such precision that there must be some mathematical rhythm to it, some sixth dimensional irony that keeps it tuned ...The question of good and evil is not a question of God's, but of man." Harold spoke so softly and solemnly ending his statement with a shy smile and flick of the hand portraying the balanced universe that Henry felt in awe of him, this almost Unitarian minister, this dropout from theology (Was he a prophet?).

Henry loosened and let a flood of words out. "Man is reaching for something, perhaps it's knowledge of all the truths of the universe. If they exist, or the...THE truth, or perhaps it's just justice ... what ever it is, it's definitely tied up with technology, Technology has grown as man has grown."

"To blow up the world ... Kaboom!" Michael said idly peeling a label off his beer bottle with a fingernail.

Henry felt relieved at having spoken, wondering if he had said anything worth communicating or was it only a smattering of words barely reflecting the tips of torrents of arguments that had raged in his head on occasions.

Harold nodded his head and lowered his eyes as if about to speak. Michael feeling uncomfortable, if not silly with the discussion, said, "Let's talk about pussy." It seemed to be a subject matter on his mind these days.

Harold perked up as Henry laughed, "Ah, that deep pleasure barely knowable to man."

"Have you penetrated that mystery lately?" Henry asked as they all chuckled.

ARTICLE 7.1 *Sometimes...*

Henry and Ellen were driving south bound on a two-lane concrete-surfaced state highway that they traveled fairly often. It was slightly after Five P.M. and the summer sun cast an orange warmth upon the earth.

They weren't talking, but sitting contentedly and watching the road toward home. Ellen sat in the rear passenger seat because the front seat-belt had recently jammed and was unworkable.

Approaching an intersection, the traffic light hanging in suspension above --turned yellow and Henry believing he had ample time to make the light began to transverse the intersection.

A car, a green ford, in the north-bound lane winked its amber left turn signal telling traffic impersonally that it wished to cross Henry's oncoming path.

In a split second it edged several feet toward Henry then stopped. Henry, slowing up slightly on the gas, had the right of way and in a minute, finite, non-deferential thought decided to continue. *Why should I wait, jamming on my brakes in the middle of the intersection? Don't bluff me; you wait for me, blinking turn light.*

He proceeded, thinking with a small portion of his brain that he would soon be past the intersection and onto the next section of road where he would see a rolling green field, once a farm.

A freak interruption occurred. The blinking Ford, now massively close lurched once and then twice out in front of him; too close for him to do anything but brake, and steer left in an attempt to swerve the impact from being head-on.

Through the windshield Henry saw the angled side of the strange interloper Ford too close. Unavoidably close. It was an obstacle he could no longer avoid.

His last seconds before impact were spent steering and braking, believing that he could still avoid this horrendous fate looming unexpectedly before him.

He viewed the collision through a narrow tunnel of concentration highlighted by the exploding silver shower of tiny glass particles blowing outward. With a heavy thud and crunch of metal tearing inward and crumpling. Henry said thickly, "OH my GOD!..." As if these were his last sentiments on planet earth.

Impact was over and the other car, once a blurry haze of apparition appearing before him had magically spun out of sight.

They were stopped very oddly In the midst of traffic.

Henry, agitated and speaking thickly as if dry sponges were curled in his throat turned to

Ellen, now a little girl, terribly frightened and restrained by a seat belt against her fragile stomach swollen with the unseen, unborn. Ellen was ashen pale and near an explosion of tears.

"My God, you've been Hurt!" Henry cried out in anguish.

"No, No, I'm okay. Are you okay?"

"Get out! Get out!" Henry ordered, before the searing flames of his imagination engulfed them ending their lives and future possibilities.

Ellen's thin, child-like arms tugged ineffectively on the door. "It's stuck. I can't get out."

Henry with the strength of bulls and determination of mad generalisimos swung his perfectly undamaged door open. "Out!" He ordered standing by the door to receive her trembling and now bulky body. She was small and frightened, and he walked her slowly out of the darting traffic her sneakers trudging in short baby steps to the grassy curb.

"Lie down!" Henry ordered taking command of the world. "Are you all right? Is the baby all right?"

"I don't know, I don't know," She wailed, too shaken for wet tears as she clutched her strange belly and shivered.

"Lie down."

She lay down meekly, a pale trembling puppy in the grass, her knees clenched together tightly. Her pocket book was soft so Henry placed it under her head and stroked her. "I'm okay,," She said smiling weakly, attempting to regain composure "...really."

Henry felt abandoned into a dream as if reality no longer existed. His car was stranded dumbly in the middle of the road. It's right fender area was horribly mutilated, torn and twisted and ripped raw. The hood was bent also. He felt detached from the incident. He had trouble comprehending the entirety of it. It was some mystery that had interfered with his drive home, leaving his car ugly and worthless and him dimly aware that life went on, watching it and feeling as if he were imagining a surrealistic vision.

I'm standing here looking at my car all fucked up. Something's odd.

I hope they total that fucking car and give us money. Oh God what if we lose the baby? I will have hurt the baby and hurt Ellen and destroyed part of our future. Let the baby be okay; I'll sell the car after it's fixed.

Henry noticed a white scratch with the hint of blood on Ellen's arm. He recoiled in horror. "Oh my God you're hurt." He stooped and gently caressed her arm. She looked not seeing it and lay down in the grass again.

Henry furiously rose up to search for the other driver and beat him mercilessly. He spotted the Ford at rest pointing in the wrong direction in the road to which it had wished to turn. The driver was a teenage girl, who stood dumfoundedly next to her car holding

her lip.

"Do I have to tell you how stupid you are making a left turn into approaching traffic!?" Henry called angrily, letting it suffice for a merciless beating.

She numbly walked over to the curb. "Are you alright?" She asked him.

Henry pointed with concern to Ellen lying prostrate in the weeds.

"Oh my God are you alright?" She asked Ellen seeing her pregnant stomach.

"Are you okay?" Ellen asked in return.

"I'm just worried about you," the girl said.

Henry stepped into traffic to close his car door and cross the intersection to commandeer a telephone from the gas station one hundred feet away. "Stay with her, please," Henry decreed to the girl who seemed ready to follow him. People, congregating at the intersection stopped Henry, "Ambulance and Police are coming." Henry thanked them wondering how they knew; were wires plugged into their heads? Did society actually function with out orders from supervisors?

A middle age man in shorts mentioned to Henry that he contacted somebody on his radio and the ambulance was coming. Henry was heartened by such altruistic behavior on the part of his fellow citizens. He thanked the man profusely deciding he should abandon at least some of his cynicism in the future.

Two ambulances pulled up screaming, making Henry feel guilty that he wasn't splashed with blood. The rescue squad people looked like hardened military types with the exception of a tanned, barefoot nymph-waif in white shorts. The rescue squad men gently took Ellen's pulse, swung her onto a gurney and slid her into the ambulance. Ellen looked very pale and tiny tucked under the sheet in the inside of the ambulance, her sneakers and belly sticking up innocently from under the white sheet.

For several moments Henry stood alone amidst the milling people at the corner watching motorists avoiding the two wounded cars (like dying beasts) littering the intersection. However there was a bit too much gawking for Henry. The vehicles crawled extra slow around the bruised hulks to allow their occupant's much time for a fascinating perspective of someone else's tragedy. His cynicism was returning.

A car pulled up next to Henry and a heavy, gray-haired woman jumped out of the passenger's side. "Where's my daughter?" She demanded, concerned with no one else.

"On the way to the hospital," Henry declared matter-of-factly, linking her with the damaged Ford they had examined.

"Oh my!" She shrieked, near shock as she clumsily hurried back to her car.

"She's okay. She had a little cut on her lip. I don't even think she's bleeding," Henry said to slow the woman down.

"Oh, all right," she said waddling back to the car.

Society's official representative arrived. He was a tall, lanky, almost gawky-looking state trooper who calmly, and unconcernedly strode around the intersection commanding traffic this way or that with a quick authoritative flourish as he inspected the vehicles. Henry relinquished command and began mentally preying that the baby would be all right. (He also wondered about the agnostic relationship God and he had had with each other in the past.) Ellen and he had worked so long and hard on that baby, remolding their lives to fit around it. They wanted it and would feel empty without it.

After the tow trucks whisked the cars out of the road, removing the spectacle that had slowed traffic down for a half mile in four directions, the trooper approached Henry. He brushed aside all artistic, emotional and philosophical aspects of the accident and concentrated his questions on feet, distance traveled under a yellow light and other legalities as he filled out a detailed accident report.

The trooper questioned and re-questioned Henry and after checking his driving documents left Henry sitting in his police car while he strode around the intersection again, looking like a tall duck, as he paced off distances.

An hour or so had gone by since the accident. Henry had the feeling that his life was now changed forever as he sat in the warm, untidy back seat of the police car. He knew the feeling was false and he dismissed his present predicament as temporary making it an illusion or blurb of unreality. Soon the trooper finished his report and zoomed off with Henry to the hospital in order to question the other driver and Ellen. Henry watching with trepidation saw the speedometer needle touch ninety and pop above as they whizzed along the highway. They slowed, briefly to slip around a traffic circle.

"Had an accident here, an hour ago ... " The trooper mentioned, fiddling with his radio dials.

"Oh..." Henry wondered If he was speaking to him.

"Two tractor trailers...One ran into the back of another one. The rear one had its cab flattened ... Like a two-by-four A fatality ... The guy lived around here..." The trooper's steady finger pointed to a mangled road sign.

"Oh... Christ..." *What a cheery job you got Could have been us, though.*

They zoomed on to the hospital.

There was a man at the cookie area glancing at Michael. The man wearing soft beige knits, round shiny shoes with long black heels had a plunging neckline with silver medals swinging about the hair on his chest. The man also had a styled hair cut. Michael made it obvious that he was ignoring the man, as he read a tomato juice can through bleary eyes.

"Michael is that you?"

Michael looked up noncommittally; there where other Michaels in the world beside him.

"Mike, hey!"

Michael focused on the man, feeling his body tense up defensively. The man approached clacking in shoes that did not bend upon the supermarket linoleum. Michael began to glare.

"Don't you remember me?" The large face smiled pleasantly.

"Dob?"

"Hey!"

Michael softened and they shook hands. Michael felt funny wearing a tee shirt, cut offs and sneakers, as they chatted. They made pledges to get together soon, exchanged addresses and phone numbers and parted, shaking hands again.

The same evening, sitting in his apartment drinking beer, the very distant, meaningless talk on television making him cranky, Michael telephoned Dob and was invited over.

"Yeah, we gotta party here every night ... downstairs, y'know... Hey Mikey dress nice, y'know?" Dob told him.

"You mean I got to look like you?" Michael asked.

Dob laughed. "Naw... but nice ... no sneakers for this crowd I'll fix ya up nice...I mean nice... Somethin' that'll do a number on ya, melt your ear wax."

Michael grunted.

He dressed in a neat pair of slacks, and a plain, though form fitting shirt and pulled his black boots on. He even dug through his drawers looking for his gold plated I.D. bracelet, found it, studied it and tossed it back into the drawer.

I could use a woman, Get laid, make it. I'm honey. Don't want to jerk off. I'll feel guilty. Maybe I can meet a girl and get something steady. Help me forget about what's-her-name ha, ha (sigh) it still hurts!

What if they're all high class, stuck-up, sultry types? What if one pisses me off - they can do that; and I can't get a hard on? What should I do...eat her out ... claim I'm drunk? Shit, maybe I oughta just dance and feel their bodies and got turned on and then beat off later ... good old right hand... that way I don't have to take the shit those sultry women can dish out to make you play their game. And I'm sure that is the type of female that Dob hangs out with.

Damn, I'm getting nervous. Shit, it's only a party. Calm down, your armpits will get damp. I should have called Henry and gone over there. I like Henry; talk politics or what ever. I'd like to be like Henry in a couple of years. But there's no opportunity for sex over there... Ellen is nice; she's been friendly to me. I wonder if before she got pregnant maybe she was signaling me. Because I'm young and new. Bullshit! Don't even think like that! I

must be so fucking crazy. The semen must have seeped up into my brains! I gotta do it with a woman soon, kick that dogwater out... Ellen's nice; Henry's all right; don't think that shit about them. What would she want with me anyway? I'm so naive compared to Henry. Henry has got it together. What am I doing thinking about Henry?

He got another beer, drank it quickly, ran to the bathroom, urinated and rinsed his mouth with mouthwash.

*

Dob lived in a luxury apartment complex clustered around an outdoor swimming pool and an indoor lounge that led to an indoor swimming pool. Dob's apartment was expansive and expensive as were the furnishings and decor. At least it seemed so to Michael's untrained eye.

"What the hell do you do for money?" Michael asked.

"Sell cars. Some real estate on Sundays. I've got a good deal."

Michael paced the length of the apartment staring at everything. "Wow... hot damn..." Then he began asking about the women at the party.

"Relax, Relax." Dob said, sitting on a leather hassock and slowly swirling the ice cubes in his cocktail glass. "It's a sure thing ... You'll get some good stuff, I'll see to it."

"Shit, Dob, I'll be honest with you I haven't had any in ... (it was three months but he didn't want to be that honest) ... hell six weeks."

"You're kidding!" Dob was outraged.

"At least a month." Michael shrugged.

"God! I don't go a night."

Michael frowned. - *He's lying.*

"Ya had something wrong with your pecker? VD?"

"NO."

"Relax, relax; you're pacing all around. Don't be nervous."

"Where's your booze?" Michael asked. *I won't be nervous for long. Hell, I hate being new to anything, especially a party where I don't know anybody. But I won't be nervous, I'll most likely be smashed.*

The lounge was dark with soft brown tones. A small, but loud band was already vibrating the air and some of the dance floor. The interior was awash in glittering, sashaying, slithering females bedecked in cosmetics, allure, soaked with perfumes and well dressed. They looked, for the most part, to be models, airline stewardesses, executive secretaries, fashion buyers and boutique managers. None of them looked like lawyers or teachers.

Conversation seemed to be minimal, or to Michael's ear superficial. Most of them were probably older than Michael. He glanced around quickly to spot Eileen, a hope against hope, but she wasn't there. There were several men dressed like Dob, though many of the men were leaning toward affluent chub or were tall, skinny and beginning to bald. Michael, a boozy buzz in his head was able to smile the smile of the wolf among the chickens. Women slinked past Dob and Michael who took over a particular wall as their mating zone.

"Dob." One cooed.

"Marcy." Dob said smiling at her winking backside as she slinked away smiling provocatively over her shoulder.

"Dobbsy," One hugged him.

Michael was amazed as he stood in paradise watching through glaring eyes as a fantasy unfolded before him. *Maybe he does do it every-night!*

When alone for a moment Michael leaned close to Dob and shouted above the music into his patron's ear. "Do you get into all this stuff?" Michael's arms opened and gestured to the entire gallery around them.

Dob smiled. "Yeah."

"You've had all of them?"

"Well ... Enough new stuff keeps moving in so you never got it all," Dob shouted back to Michael.

An exquisite blonde floated through the crowd toward them, "Hello," she said inaudibly her mouth forming the perfect hello for Dob.

"Valerie, babe," Bob hugged her briefly and then introduced her to Michael.

Michael feeling brazen and boozy nodded and took her hand, "Let's dance. O.K.?"

She made no change of expression and moved several feet to the dance floor where she began to dance with Michael coolly but well.

Michael decided to out dance her.

Get her to perspire. Nope, she won't fasten her pace, here. Shit, she's really beautiful, but she's got no expression. She's exactly the type I thought would be here, sultry, bitchy, rich and beautiful. My God, I can't imagine sex with her!

(A vision of himself manipulating the beige legs of a store mannequin flashed through his mind.) He began laughing.

She watched his laugh for a second and slowly lowered her massacred eyes and turned her head away. The number finished and before Michael could say or do anything, she laid a hand on his forearm, startling him, "No offense, kiddo but you're not my type," she

said, quickly surprising him. Then she released him to spin away.

Michael stepped forward quickly grasping her arm softly, cool to the touch yet warm and real beneath the surface. "Listen sweetheart (Bogart) you're not my type either. Nonetheless with a combo of your brains and my beauty we could have made ugly music together. So long sweetheart. "

She almost smiled, roiled her brow slightly and stood among the throng watching Michael disappear into the crowd searching for someone else.

He found someone else. Without makeup and a learned, cultivated poise that she was still practicing, she would have been an average looking woman and out of place in paradise. Her father was more likely a machinist than a professional. She was younger too and Michael, loaded with unusual confidence and easy old-movie charm, was able to overwhelm her and dance several numbers with her. She was considerably shorter than Michael and had to look upwards to see his face, giving her an angle of perspective that Michael, himself, was unaware of. When he danced fast she perspired trying to keep up. Michael was pleased. After dancing her thirsty he parked her in a more quiet corner of the lounge and talked to her.

It seemed she was an assistant bank branch manager (Drive-in). She had been a teller for a few years and had recently moved into a better financial situation. She was fairly new to the apartment complex, And, no, she didn't know Dobbs. *Not in his league ... Oh well, but in mine, ha, ha ... know your limitations. I feel better that she isn't another one of his receptacles.*

Drinks were expensive at the lounge bar and Michael was spending significantly as he exchanged empties for fulls ... Noticing that his boozy buzz was slowly creeping into his coordination and conversation he slowed his drinking to sip and talk. She didn't seem to notice, liquor wasn't her favorite nectar.

"Let's go outside for some air." Michael said, not even catching his own cliché.

"Okay ... it's too noisy in here anyway," she replied eagerly.

They escaped into the evening as Michael following her, leering at her buttocks. He swooped her around the corner of the building out of sight and spun her around. She smiled, her head beginning to swim from what she had forced herself to consume. He kissed her passionately.

She doesn't mind. Rub it into her ... Oh shit ... what the fuck's her name? Linda?

Leena? Ah, I'm getting to be like Dob. I'll hate myself in the morning.

"Oh Leona..." Michael implored quivering in need.

"Yes?" She asked her voice full of mirth.

He began to laugh ... "I need you."

"How?" She asked not breaking their embrace.

Michael paused, evaluating the proper phrase. He was aware of his heart beating nervously fast, "I would like to make love to you."

"I noticed." She kissed him and undulated once into his clothed erection.

"C'mon ... " He mumbled waiting for her to make a suggestion.

"No."

"Oh yes..."

"I won't sleep with you tonight," she said rubbing the back of his neck with her fingers.

He looked down into her face, becoming very attractive in the shadowy, evening air. Michael was already falling in love, he was too easy this way!

"I've got to go, Mike ... I have to get up early tomorrow and I'm feeling a little stoned. You can call me if you like." She paused watching him, looking and gauging his disappointment. "I had a nice time this evening. I think you're very nice..."

You're wrong. I forgot your name before, and I already feel bad about it. I'm in love with you now, tomorrow I might not like you, and you know you want me to wait till I'm sober and come back for more. You've been here before.

Michael was disappointed but he hid it diplomatically. "Well I don't want you to get the wrong impression about me... that I sleep around or anything ... I usually don't ask on the first date... Usually I come with a chaperon -and that can be taken both ways... Actually I'm not that nice, I'm a beast; but any woman smart enough not to have me is good enough for me!" He said sweetly kissing her fingers as he spoke.

She laughed, though she probably missed some of his self-deprecating humor, and kissed him again. She allowed him to escort her to her apartment and gave him her phone number. He promised to call, and she kissed him goodnight.

Michael, alone again, meandered back to the party which had dwindled considerably in size from the time of his arrival. Emotionally and physically he felt as if he had briefly entered an odd state. He didn't feel bad, though.

Michael wandered through the emptying lounge till he found Dob drinking with a red-head. "Hiya doin', old buddy." Michael said and plopped down onto a chair across from them.

"Mikey, how's it going? Hey, Valerie's out by the pool; go get her. She's with some creep she don't like. Go get her tiger." Bob coached.

"She don't like me either," Michael mumbled making the red head laugh. Feeling no restraints he rose and walked toward the pool. Valerie saw him approaching yet said nothing to the thin man sitting across from her near the pool's edge.

Michael intruded directly into the intimacy of their private conversation and leaned an arm on the man's shoulder. "How about going for a swim?" Michael's asked. Valerie's yes showed mirth. *I'm gonna hate myself in the morning for acting this way to amuse a beautiful woman I don't care for.*

"What? Get outta here," The man said indignantly to Michael.

"What do you do for a living?" Michael asked the man.

"What?"

Michael repeated his question.

The man smirked a little, craning his head to glare at Michael. He hesitated for a moment. "I'm regional sales manager for..."

"That's what I thought. Go inside for a towel unless you're out here to swim or something. I want to talk to what's-her-name." Michael pointed to Valerie.

The man, feeling intimidated, stood and asked his partner, "Val, you want to go inside?"

Valerie remained sitting, a very slight smile burning at the corners of her lips.

"No she doesn't." Michael announced, "She dislikes you as much as she dislikes me ... My turn ... KIDDO!"

Valerie smiled. The man stood his ground for a second and then left, his face burning with rage. Michael deflated into the chair across from Valerie. *Hey pal, don't take it seriously, you shouldn't fight for a woman who despises you unless you're a moron!*

"Hi Kiddo," he said.

"Hi Kiddo," she repeated.

"What if he decided to fight for me?" Valerie asked moodily.

"Who? SalesManager?" Michael asked

"That's not his name..." She furled her delicate brow at him.

"You'd like that? ... He wouldn't fight me, I'm invincible right now, though I actually feel bad about acting like an asshole..."

"Invincible, oh really?"

"I knew he wouldn't fight. He's too smart."

"Uh huh." She nodded her head as if to ridicule him.

"You ARE the most beautiful broad I've ever met..." Michael declared almost surprised at himself.

"Broad?" She questioned, her teeth gleaming on the word.

"I've been watching old movies lately. Woman," Michael corrected.

"OK."

"...And even though I don't particularly like you, I want to KNOW you, to ... Know how beautiful women ... I'm attracted to you like a moth to... a flame, I guess. Curiosity?"

"Why don't you like me, because I told you you're not my type?"

"No, that's when I began to like you a little ... You were honest and, besides you're not my type either," Michael said, relaxing into a comfortable slouch.

"Is your type that dumpy kind that you were with tonight?"

Michael was surprised that she had noticed who he was with. He smiled allowing time for her to realize that she had committed a statement. She realized it and slowly blinked her eyes.

"Ooo, is that a 'tell'? What's your name?" He asked.

"Don't you remember?"

"No." *I'm bad with names tonight, but I have to remember Linda's... Leona's because...*

"Valerie," she said, defenseless.

They stared at each other guardedly for several seconds and then Michael stood. The night was still soft as if it had gotten caught on evening and couldn't change. The moon bloated the air with silvery tranquility. Michael's head swam in a sea of song-like enchantment. He gazed softly down at her, He seemed temporary to have found a reserve of power, but he felt so satisfied he was reluctant to use it. She was beautiful to him at that moment. -But unlike other men Michael knew that she wouldn't be beautiful to him for ever, and that gave him courage and a sense of coming despair. However the silvery dark moment hung peaceful for him as he watched her soft hair and eyes.

"What's the matter?" She asked.

"What do I do now? I have no idea. I'm getting pretty loaded. What do I do; ask you to sleep with me?"

"I won't," she said, but not defiantly.

"That's okay. Is there anything to you?"

"Like what?"

"What does beauty do?"

"Beauty is a fashion model."

"Great. I think I can communicate with you, I'm amazed. I thought all everybody did here, was rut ... which isn't always a bad idea."

She shrugged, almost offended. "What did Dobbs tell you?" She stood to face Michael.

Michael shrugged, "Nothing."

"A different girl every night?" She asked.

"Yeah."

She shrugged. "Not with me ... we had a relationship that didn't make it, that's all."

"Oh, I don't care..." Michael said, painfully waving the past away with one hand.

Her eyes began to water. "He didn't go into details I hope...That bastard!"

"No, no, hey look...." Michael moved forward.

"I'm gonna give it to him." she clenched her fists.

Michael grabbed her. "Cool off, sweetheart."

"Bullshit. Let me go." She struggled.

"You need a swim beautiful lady," Michael pushed her to the pool teasing her. She fought back, a smile of determination on her face and struggled optimistically attempting to toss Michael into the pool. Michael grinned. "Sweetheart, you hadn't ought to done that. Now you're gonna cool off." With great ease Michael summoned up his reserve of stubborn strength and flipped her into the cool, still water.

She surfaced, exploding into hysterics either laughing or crying or probably both. Peeling wet strands of stringy hair off her face she didn't look so untouchable. She tried to angrily splash Michael, but he nonchalantly jumped into the pool with her. "Now I like you even better." Michael said.

Through tears she coughed and smiled and swam to the edge to hold on. Michael swam over to her. "Let me kiss a beautiful lady," he said with passionate clownishness.

She kissed him lightly then pushed at him.

"Go away!" She pretended to demand.

"You like me! You like me!" Michael exclaimed making her laugh again.

Dob appeared at the edge of the pool. "Mikey! God, you still are crazy! He glanced over to Valerie and got a splash of water in the face. Michael reached up to grab him and pull him in but he retreated too quickly, wiping his face with a colored handkerchief.

Valerie swam to other side of the pool and climbed up the ladder to get out. Michael followed her. "I'll get my shoes tomorrow," she said lightly.

Michael made faces as he swished the water inside his boots.

"Listen, I do like you ... get in touch when you're a little older and maybe rich, okay?" Valerie said.

"Okay," Michael said laughing and she kissed him on the cheek. She threw an angry glance to Dob on the other side of the pool and ran up the stairs to her apartment.

Michael swaggered over to other side of the pool a maniacal glint in his eyes. "Hey Dobsy, c'mere ..."

"No you don't. No you don't. I got my lambskin wallet and cards and everything..." Dob said putting his drink down and moving backward, his hands out in front to fend Michael off. The red-head laughed and Michael ordered her, "Get him, get him," as he moved in.

"He's too big," The red-head protested.

"Naw, the bigger they are the bigger a splash they make," Michael grinned.

"Now wait a minute buddy ... uh.." Bob ran into the lounge and slid the glass door shut. Inside the band was packing up to leave.

*

Later, the red-head in the bathroom, Dob, treated Michael very deferentially, patting his knee. "Mike, you ought to move in here. Have a blast."

Michael shook his head dreamily. "Couldn't afford it ... Besides I don't think I'd really fit in here ... But I did have a good time, tonight. Sorry if I got too crazy."

"Naw, That's you Mikey --crazy. That's what I love about you. But you had a good time, that's important," Dob said.

"Yeah." *Sometimes it is. Every dog has its day. Today was mine.*

They had a hearty laugh over Michael's adventure, "God it's been years since I've done something like that..." Henry said, debating whether to tell some of his stories.

They were silent for awhile. Michael began, "You know ... I feel that something's changing, I feel that all this impulsive wildness is no longer me, that it should go away. It's harder for me to do. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I do. I was very much like you not long ago ... It goes away." Henry said.

"But what replaces it?" Michael asked.

"You'll find something."

"But how can I be happy without it. I'll be just another boring shit."

Henry shrugged.

"Are you happy?" Michael asked.

"What does that mean? Sometimes I laugh, I feel good. Often I feel tortured, more by myself than anything else. I feel like I'm a rut ... and that's not all of my own making. In fact it may be beyond my control to get out of the rut. When I laugh sometimes I'm standing outside and watching, like I'm faking it."

"I feel that way too sometimes, but ... I feel better when I drink."

"Bolder?" Henry asked.

"Yeah...,"

"Me too," Henry said.

"But you hardly drink anymore."

"You can't drink for ever ... Oh yeah you can. And it's pathetic, these wrinkled old boozers of forty puffing on cigarettes and sloshing their brains. There has got to be more to life than that."

"I agree...but what?" Michael asked, genuinely perplexed and waiting for an answer.

"I don't know ... Marriage, family maybe ... all that shit I scoffed at ... but always knew... we all know that the human race moves on. To what I don't know... but on. All this concern for ecology or energy is not for us, it's for the future which like the present will have to take care of itself anyway. Do you follow what I'm saying, because I'm not sure if I do?" Henry asked.

"Yeah ... I've thought about that sort of stuff, myself ... So I should change?"

"No, allow yourself to grow. Don't stay locked in that 'have a drink, have a laugh' thing for ever ... grow, mature, contribute, build a better society. Ah, bullshit! Actually I'm jealous. Go have a blast. Scream your fucking lungs out; world, screw you!" Henry shouted.

They both laughed.

**

Another late afternoon when only Henry and Toni were in the office. Toni in a playfully bizarre mood decided to impress Henry with his life as a Secret Agent. In hushed tones he called information for the number of the French Embassy in Ottawa and then after dialing (his home phone, weather, time?) began speaking in a non-conversational monotone in French. It sounded to Henry that he was counting or announcing parcels of random vocabulary. Henry wished he had a tape recorder but grew incensed that this show was being performed for his benefit. --To reiterate that the man may be capable of anything.

In fury, Henry raced for the phone near the far corridor belonging to Mrs. Grey's secretary. He grabbed for it and his finger plunged for Toni's lit extension. He wanted to announce into the dial tone reverberating with a potpourri of foreign verbiage, 'What are you doing?'

Toni hung up before Henry could raise the phone. Henry sauntered back to their office. Toni did not look up or make any more phone calls that evening. Eventually it was time to leave and Ellen arrived. She said good night to Toni who without looking up from what ever paperwork, or play, he was doing, answered Ellen with a 'Good Night.' A small victory. Temporary as always.

**

Henry in memory of the hot-places:

Mid-day in the South West beyond the border. A white heat outside near blinding in its bright intensity. Inside it was hot and still with an exciting mixture of scents and aromas spiced by a foreign music. In a rough room in the back, hard cracked concrete floor, bed and bathroom with shower and toilet... A large bed covered by a rough, grainy bed spread. The woman, broad, busty, several layers beyond voluptuous. Thin, worn panties spread across her large round buttocks, hand holds of flesh for Henry there. Peeled back quickly in a magic motion revealing hair between her legs. A pink gap emitting pungent, enticing odors drawing Henry into it getting him lost there, losing him. Finally his unsure, embarrassed, out-of-control, self-concept shut off and allowed him without sense of himself to rut with wild, quick pleasure creating additional heat. Films of perspiration grew between the friction of Henry's young body against her softer more experienced flesh. Her dark hair spread in a mat to her shoulders, a near kink making it stand out awkwardly giving her a more common, rough appearance, She was climaxing, her eyes shut and her teeth gritted her breath leaking out quietly. Henry slowed to smile, repressing a laugh - how funny it was to watch her, to be so distant from his own act. At last he was caught again and he kissed her mouth and teeth and loved her briefly as he offered his all.

Done. After climax. A few words, a pidgin joke, wipe, wash, talk. A napkin thrust between her legs to catch him running out of her. Slowly dress, time to either pay for more or leave.

At night, urinating in an ancient courtyard urinal, in public, the whores calling and cheering from the surrounding balcony. Wave back, soon would it be off to war? And then?

Oriental women, starring back into Henry's face. Looking into those different eyes, a different smell, a different sound, across the world and still finding pleasure and money and negotiating their mixture.

ARTICLE 8 Life Is A Series Of Processes

Michael had gone out to lunch with Johnson.

Johnson did not take his lunch hour too seriously. First he stopped at a bank to cash a check, then jerking his car through the gears and smoking the tires made his getaway. Michael sitting next to him grimaced at the helplessness he felt taking a ride in Johnson's car.

However, Johnson maintained an ear to ear smile sparkling on his face as he whisked Michael to an out of the way bar for lunch. Once inside Johnson immediately abandoned Michael while he flirted with a waitress-bar hostess he knew.

Michael ordered a beer from the bar and drifted toward the back where the pool tables were and waited. Johnson didn't budge. He remained leaning in a crouch over the narrow sandwich and pizza counter as he spoke in low intimate tones to the hostess, his ass wagging behind him as he shifted the position of his feet every so often.

Michael finally decided to play a game of pool, by himself, until Johnson joined him. He slowly shot through the game and then digging for quarters shot another one. Then, angry at himself, he walked over to Johnson's crouching back feeling a strong urge to punch him brutally in it.

Just at that moment another customer, an older heavy set man in greasy working clothes summoned the hostess over to his table in a rough, boozy manner and Johnson's prey, the waitress, eluded him, scooting under the counter.

Johnson was now abandoned, he noticed Michael approaching. "Where you been, boy?"

"Playing pool." Michael said curtly, his eyes angry.

"Shit," Johnson moaned.

"We gonna eat or you gonna crap around?" Michael asked assertively.

"Take it easy son." Johnson said, flashing his disarming smile as he yawned and ruffled his fine blond hair. "This little female is HOT stuff, I'll tell ya."

"Yeah, Do I get some?"

"Whoeee," Johnson laughed and patted Michael's shoulder.

"I'm hungry," Michael complained.

"Take it easy ... we might get it for free. I'm worken' on her," Johnson said.

"For food or sex?" Michael asked furling his brow.

"Food," Johnson laughed. "I never pay for sex."

Michael shook his head.

Eventually they ate, though Michael had to pay for both bills, Johnson needed all of his

cash for something or other. But, Johnson kept teasing the waitress, whose name was Holly, and promising Michael that something good was going to come from all his efforts.

"Another beer, sweet," Johnson asked Holly in honey tones.

Holly hustled over to their table and glanced at Michael. An odd glance. A *'who might you be, I don't mind seeing you,'* kind of glance. At least that's what Michael perceived.

"Thank you, babe," Johnson said winking when she brought his fourth beer.

"Johnny, you don't have to do all that shit. Just make a date and take her out. 'Score' or whatever you call it... fuck her brains out, but you don't have to do that sweet, honey, babe, wink your eye crap," Michael said with almost sarcastic vehemence, taking out his general frustration with Johnson's antics.

"Can't take her out," Johnson said softly.

"Why?"

Johnson didn't answer immediately.

"Why?" Michael protested.

"See these three guys coming in here now? See the first guy in front?" Johnson pointed his chin toward a stocky, well dressed man with a professionally styled hair cut.

"Yeah," Michael said glancing at the newcomers entering the bar. The two men in the rear of the procession of three took a booth and the lead man who Johnson had pointed out continued to the bar.

"That's her old man," Johnson instructed Michael.

"Oh."

"You don't mess with him," Johnson said wistfully.

"Why?"

"HE is the Pusherman," Johnson said somewhat dramatically.

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah...Heavy duty. Don't mess," Johnson sipped beer and nodded his head.

"Carry a gun?" Michael asked, curious.

"I ain't gonna frisk him to find out."

"What's he push?" Michael asked.

"What don't he push," Johnson answered.

Michael swung around in his chair to study the man at the bar. He turned back to Johnson. "Look Johnny just walk over to him, see... Sit down next to him... Uh brush him aside with your elbow, say 'Excuse me, asshole...'"

Johnson started to chuckle.

"Look dude, I wanna take this bar wench Holly out to the kitchen, you know, for some cardiovascular exercise... How'd you like to hold the camera and take some pictures. We could make, like, a work-out film."

Johnson started to laugh.

"Hey don't laugh too loud. He'll think you're laughing at him ... Hey, here he comes... 'You laughen' at me blondie?'" Michael mocked in a tough-guy voice.

Johnson turned his laughter into a giggle and took another sip of beer.

At the bar, the Pusherman was holding Holly's arm at the wrist and was talking very slowly and pointedly to her. Holly shook her head twice and broke away going first into the kitchen and then across the floor to Michael and Johnson.

"Gotta talk to you," she said urgently to Johnson and motioned for him to follow her over to the pool tables.

The Pusherman, sitting by the bar, watched Johnson walk to the pool tables and talk with Holly. Pursing his lips contemplatively he glanced over to Michael now sitting alone. Michael nodded his head slightly and took a swig of his beer. Michael pursed his own lips contemplatively.

Johnson and Holly spoke intensely for several minutes. At one point Johnson, seeming to plead with her about something, pointed to Michael, and Holly glanced along Johnson's arm in Michael's direction. At last, Johnson returned to their table. Holly refused to look in the Pusherman's direction strode quickly to the kitchen still appearing distraught.

"What's up?" Michael asked Johnson.

"...Uh..." Johnson shrugged. Nonetheless he looked far more concerned about the situation than Johnson usually was about anything after four beers.

"Who is the PUSHERMAN?" Michael asked.

"...He's a wholesaler..."

"In what?"

"Practically everything. I been trying to buy some coke off him."

"Coke? ... Not Coca cola, huh?" Michael teased with an edge.

"Not for myself..." Johnson wasn't laughing.

"You mean not **all** for yourself. --You deal?" Michael asked slightly serious.

"A little... sometimes. Nothing big ... Listen, can you help me out? This here situation is a little ticklish. I been nice to Holly to get to her man. They're haven' a fight now and she's afraid he might slug her around ... 'Course now she **likes** me," Johnson made a face. "So she's looking for our support ... I told her that..."

"I'm an associate of yours?" Michael asked whimsically.

"Sort of, so just play it cool," Johnson advised pushing the air back in front of him.

"Nothing like taking a two and a half hour lunch and getting killed in a shoot out among dope pushers," Michael said.

The Pusherman casually stepped off of his stool and strode menacingly over to Michael and Johnson's table. He sat down, "Lou Pirellas" He said to Johnson and shook hands with him.

Johnson introduced himself and then Michael who also shook firmly with the Pusherman.

The Pusherman tilted his head toward his two comrades in a booth across the room and said, "My men."

Michael, innocent with a lack of involvement, played a role out of the old movies. He was cool as ice. He sat in a relaxed, lazy, brooding posture and sipped beer slowly glancing out evilly at the world through half-lidded eyes. He even stuck a hand into his belt as if he could pull out a pistol and blow everyone to bits.

However, he did fight off a few stray thoughts. Watching the Pusherman's large head wag and his thick pinky with its big ring tap the table made Michael crazily gleeful. *I could pour beer on the Pusherman's head; that would be different. I hope this is over soon. I'm actually bored, even though I KNOW this could be dangerous. Johnson can be entertaining though not on my time! For all his shenanigans he's always broke and drives a junkier car than I do. He comes up with some great looking girl friends but after a few weeks they seem to dump him.*

After some preliminaries Johnson and the Pusherman began to negotiate. They talked in code words feeling each other out and Michael, totally lost to their intent simply played his cool-man role icier. Finally some credibility was established between the parties and they began the actual dealing for a certain quantity of commodity. Holly was mentioned as a tacked on after thought. Johnson impressed the Pusherman that Holly was not his interest.

"Haven' troubles?" Johnson asked, pointing his chin toward the kitchen. He was asking as the dis-interested outsider looking for a tidbit of conversation, as if discussing ornery women was on the same plane as mentioning a particular race horse that had become cranky for no reason.

"Yeah, the bitch is getting fussy," The Pusherman confided.

Johnson sighed, "Listen ... I kinda promised her she wouldn't get slapped, not that's it's really my business. I just don't know how to be tough with the ladies. It's a failing I know. I admire someone who can put these women in their place..." Johnson lied and waited, his pale blue eyes hanging in dead space. Even Michael woke up. It was the crucial line. Everything could go wrong if the Pusherman was offended.

"Nah ... Shit," The Pusherman said raising his hands in the air. It was over, the tension wilted, they had bluffed the Pusherman. Or he had bluffed them.

"Okay, let me talk to her.. make it cool again," Johnson said and went into the kitchen to catch Holly. The Pusherman shook hands with Michael uttering only one word, "MIKE."

Michael replied "OK." Soon Johnson returned from the kitchen looking relieved and Holly followed hesitantly. She met the Pusherman at the bar and they talked quietly.

"Let's go," Johnson said.

"Where's your shit?" Michael asked, hoping that Johnson was not carrying it.

"Get it later, son." Johnson said cheerily as they left the bar.

"How come he let you get away with that crap? It's obvious she likes you." Michael asked.

Johnson laughed evilly, "Beats the shit outa me. Maybe you scared him," Johnson laughed. "Boy I got to piss... But I wasn't about to spend more time there. Shit, that silly woman might have followed me into the men's room, can you imagine that?" Johnson laughed.

Michael said nothing. He looked at his watch and smirked.

"Maybe he's about to dump her, he's probably got women all over the place. You got the blow you get the 'ho!" Johnson said by way of explanation as he violated the speed limit.

*

Later with Henry, Michael described what had happened during his extended lunch.

"...So Johnson had built up a rapport with the Pusherman's girl and he couldn't betray either party. The Pusherman had the goods yet Johnson's connection was the girl, so he had to keep his credibility with her without getting in the middle of a family quarrel..."

"I didn't think Johnson was clever enough for that. But he sucked you into it. He volunteered you for what could have gotten ugly," Henry commented disapprovingly.

"I know," Michael agreed.

"Nothing that exciting happens to me anymore. Thank God," Henry said.

"What do you mean?" Michael asked. You keep telling me about the three million dollar contract with Binding Arbitration that you're pulling out of your ass and the political in-

fighting going on to control the union," Michael said.

"That's exciting? To me it's an obsession that keeps me awake worrying and thinking ... I guess it's exciting."

"Maybe you should go into the drug business," Michael offered jovially.

Henry resisted the urge to tell Michael that he had been on the fringes of the drug business once or twice. He grimaced, displeased with the idea and its memory and leaned back in his chair. "You know there is some sort of satisfaction to all this plotting, talking, dealing ... you against the other guy, moves and counter-moves, strategies...I think, unfortunately that, that is how the world works, on a basis of adversity with the pragmatic middle ground, the zone where anything is accomplished."

Michael still high from lunch shook his head blankly.

Henry frowned. *I must be boring. Why do I go into these philosophies. I sound like an old man whose done everything already. Oh, tell a joke.* He couldn't think of one and for several seconds the two of them sat quietly staring off into space.

*

Two days later Michael was back at Henry's desk with more tales about Johnson:

"Johnson and I went out drinking again last ... He's kind of weird. He was telling this joke about being in the service and getting shipped overseas...but he was being sent to a place where there weren't any woman and he put a female midget in his duffel bag... He never got to the punch line he just falls into this fit of hysterics ... I guess from all that booze reverberating inside his head. He met that broad Holly again last night ... the Pusherman's woman. I think he's crazy."

Henry, tuning in and out of Michael's conversation, began thinking of Johnson, and drinking, and meeting woman ... He nodded his head to keep Michael talking.

As Michael was about to expound on a related subject, his hand cutting the air in a repetitious accent someone appeared next to Henry's desk, behind Michael.

The newcomer, an average looking young man wearing beads stood, beaming a smile at Henry.

"Yes?" Henry asked.

"You're Henry, right ?"

"Sometimes."

"Well, how about now?"

"Sure."

"You're with the Union and I heard good vibrations about you, I can dig the whole scene."

I'm talking about the union. We've got to all be tight if we want to make it..."

Henry nodded his head, "Uh huh?"

"Well, like now I'm here and I was told to join up and I can dig it."

"Yeah ... that's great," Henry said and directed him to Bloch the union's treasurer, to sign up.

"Well bye." The newcomer said.

"Right."

The newcomer showed his fist, "Unity, right?"

"Right ... right, right, right..." Henry repeated wearily as the man faded off out of sight.

"God," Michael exclaimed. "He's one of those guys who picked up his personality at the movies. Me too, but I prefer the older movies when men had some character. 'I can dig it.'" Michael mimicked. "He's another go-getter for your union, a sacrifice to Martin Kranster."

"At least he wants to get involved. I should run after him before Brenda recruits him and turns him. But right now I just don't give a shit."

"I pay my dues," Michael proclaimed.

**

Something had happened to interrupt Johnson's relationship with Cathy though he wouldn't admit it. Instead he had one of his standby girlfriends meet him at work a half hour before quitting time and he wandered around the Institution with her, showing one to the other. The girlfriend was dark, Hispanic looking with a voluptuous round figure and a long, black pony tail. She looked somewhat short next to Johnson who fair as bleached yellow snow was an ethnic galaxy away.

Johnson parked his girlfriend, Jill, with Michael for a few minutes so he could hunt up Rammer and borrow some money. Michael was not eager to loan Johnson any more funds at that moment.

Michael, awed by such a voluptuous, out-of-place individual, in his department attempted his best to imitate small talk. Jill, her knees crossed and revealed under her hiked-up skirt, smiled coyly and asked some questions about Michael's job at the Institution.

Johnson back from the Power Plant with only three dollars picked up Jill and deserted Michael heading for Henry's desk.

"Henry, I gotta ask something about union business," Johnson announced.

Henry, assaulted all day by requests, questions, complaints and grievances put on his cardboard persona. "Yeah?" He asked with no enthusiasm.

"I wanna change my shift," Johnson claimed.

Henry's eyes took Jill in and they widened. Blood blushed his face and a smile crept into the corners of his lips blowing his union persona off.

"What?"

"I want to change my shift so Jill can pick me up at four thirty. See, she gets off at four fifteen and can pick me up and my car is in the shop and..."

Henry nodded numbly at Johnson just to keep him talking so he could glance at Jill, "Work in a bank?" He asked her.

"No." She answered, and Henry struck up his own short conversation with Jill amid Johnson's plea. He rarely did that and always hated it when people did it to him. But when it came to union business he was the Master and they just had to wait. Besides he had wasted time on other of Johnson's pleadings and foul-ups.

"My car was almost totaled and I got to work at my usual time... But then again..." -- *you're not me.*

"...So, can I change my shift?" Johnson coaxed.

"Did you ask your supervisor?"

"No."

"Is there somebody else to cover your department? Are you putting your hours in?"

"Yeah, I take a half-hour lunch." Johnson said clear eyed.

"Bullshit. You? You take three hour lunches. And if you get written up, don't come to me about it," Henry grinned.

Johnson smiled. "Nah ... Nobody ever complained."

"Ask your supervisor, If he gives you any trouble I'll talk to him."

"Thanks," Johnson said, uncontrollably using his broad, shy grin.

Walking out Jill bounced the basketballs of her backside as a parting, winking gesture to Henry who pressed his knees into his desk, slapped his leg and chewed the atmosphere. "Damn."

The area deserted, Henry, while pretending to work at his desk, launched a fantasy.

Broad expanse of brown skin rounding in sweeps up and down. Running over it, her pony-tail loose, tickling. A kiss; wet tongue, tasty kiss. Hold her under the arms, rub it into her soft swelling belly. Go down on her and 'sniff'. Hairy hidden mystery. Soft back arches up to fuck me back. Over and over apart and together, short than longer strokes, machine-like. Coming in her giving her a baby ... Baby? Ellen. Oh shit ... having guilt

over a fantasy. It's wilting. Just as well, won't get any anyway.

**

"Take your clothes off babe," Johnson advised Jill in his dark, half trampled apartment.

"Bullshit. Take me home. I told you I didn't want to come to your lousy, dirty apartment."

"Then clean it up," Johnson laughed.

"Fuck you!"

"That's the idea Jilly... Fuck me." Johnson rose to fix a drink for himself. Beer and bourbon. "Want some?" He asked.

"No." She said sharply and flung a dirty pair of his under-shorts across the room. "All this shit laying here."

"Why you so mad?" Johnson asked turning up his boyish charm.

"I'M NOT MAD!" She hissed.

"Okay, okay... some coke? I got some but I don't use that shit myself."

"Maybe you can give me some, but I won't do it here."

"Sorry, then no stuff, babe."

"Johnson, take me home ... please," she cooed.

"Hey, Jilly doll, I love you." He set his drink on the nicked coffee table and nuzzled her neck. They kissed and she rubbed and squeezed him.

"Oh baby." Johnson panted.

Jill threw back her head and laughed in high pitched staccato over and over.

"What's so funny?" Johnson asked ready to share her mirth.

Jill kept laughing and hid her face in her hands.

"So?" Johnson asked disentangling himself from her. He took a deep drink.

"Oh good... Oh baby" She mimicked in a deep horse voice. "I love you," she added and burst into laughter.

"Christ," You want some coke?" Johnson asked crossing from the couch to the kitchen.

"No," Jill said, laughter filling the holes and edges in her voice.

"Come to mama, baby ... come," Jill said, extending her arms to Johnson who grinning crossed the room.

They hugged and kissed passionately.

"Where you been for three weeks lover?" Jill asked coldly pulling her head back to glare at Johnson.

"Oh fuck!" Johnson said exasperated, slapping his hand onto his couch exploding an invisible cloud of dust. "Busy ... on a big deal...a big buy."

"Iz-zat so ... You gotta a new girl?"

"Who Holl..? Bullshit I was only..."

"Holly! So you do have a new girl!" She pulled back and swung herself around showing her broad back to his pained face.

"Oh Jill ... Shit!" He whined.

"When you get ditched you always come back," she murmured over her shoulder.

"You got other boy friends." Johnson tried.

"I can't wait for your ass." She bolted, blinded by tears toward the door.

Johnson up in a flash raced her to the door and wrestled with her slipping on his carelessly thrown, throw-rug and brought her down next to him. They yelled and struggled with each other.

Johnson excited in several different directions parted her legs and began tugging at her panties.

"Oh you gonna rape me?" She asked and then staring at the ceiling went limp.

Johnson feeling silly peeling panties off a mannequin stopped. "Come on Jilly ... please."

They lay in silent shadows for several long seconds. Jill on her back; Johnson on his knees.

"Please ..." Johnson whined.

Jill moved slowly through the dark which hid her expression and looked at Johnson's strained face.

"Okay." She whispered ... Me, you," she added, rising up to give him his favorite delight.

They pulled off bottom garments and on the hall floor Jill straddled him, hunted for his blind member, inserted it idly as a task, and passionlessly produced love for herself timed perfectly to slip off just before he finished.

"Jill?" He croaked.

"Do it yourself." She said rising. Standing above him she swooped down to retrieve her panties as Johnson, weak and out of control involuntarily messed on himself. She stepped

into her panties. "I don't need that stuff dripping down my leg... You ain't no good to me," she commented in excuse.

"You bitch," he protested wearily from the floor, rising and wondering if he wanted to go through the routine of slapping her, calming her down and making it good again. But he was too tired so he allowed her to leave and searched for a tissue and finding none wiped himself with his dirty under-shorts. Finally he returned to his old constant, alcohol and consoled himself.

Article 8.1 'Death is that land from which no body has returned' - Didn't Will write that?

Henry awoke from a dream about Ellen's father and ruminated about his last visit to see him in the hospital after what seemed like a minor heart attack. He was still a young man, just middle aged, in good spirits... *That was a Sunday. On Monday Ellen came downstairs to my area early. Walked into my office with a smile on her face; A nervous smile*

"My father died." Smiling.

I stood up stabbed with dread.

'My father died' She said again. No people on the floor. I was prepared to cry ... still dry-eyed, though. She wouldn't cry, which baffled me; she was so close to her father. Daddy's little girl.

"It hasn't hit as yet... it never hits right away." She said with a nervous, smile as she fumbled her bag and dropped it. I didn't think I could cry for anyone besides myself, and even that rarely. But I was willing to cry. I accidentally slammed my finger in the file cabinet while closing it. We had separate cars because I was supposed to go to school that evening.

I followed her home, crying a little for her. Half an hour to get home. By then she was bawling. That pink, screwed up beautiful-ugly, adult-kid's face crying for her Daddy. She lost her Daddy. Sobbing. Such pain. I wanted to take care of her forever. Can that feeling last through anything, I wonder? Maybe, maybe not...

We got inside, clenched and cried together, heaving and flinching. She for her daddy, me for her. What pain. Fifteen minutes of sickened wailing. An irreplaceable loss. Something gone that could never ever be resurrected. Final. How we cried. Slowly after that I became her daddy ... He a was a nice guy. My son will be his grandson, that's amazing.

Henry rolled over to sleep, yet his back muscles were stiff and apprehensive as if he was being watched by the dead. He tried to relax and think of his sex fantasy with Jill. He couldn't find an escape. He lay still, thinking random thoughts until sleep slowly surprised him.

**

Henry in one of his rare returns to a drinking establishment sipped a beer with Michael at a booth toward the back of the bar. They had consumed enough to feel warm and comfortable and allow the other people and goings on to pass by like wispy apparitions.

They talked of life without becoming morose or desperate, to understand their small spot in the great unknown scheme.

Michael picking the beer-bottle label off its bottle asked Henry, "Did you ever feel this ... feeling of dread that..."

"All the time," Henry said laughing.

"...Something bad might happen."

"YUP."

"You know, I wonder if it's related to ESP or deja vu or, you know....maybe life is a dream we've lived before. Does that make sense? I guess not. You know what I mean."

"YUP."

"Sometimes, I feel that, well I'm the only one aware of what's going on ... That life is a funny game with a ... an unpleasant end or..." Michael said.

"I know what you're saying and thought that way myself. Today I try and not look at it so artsy-fartsy about other dimensions --or maybe life is a dream, or deja vu or whatever. I prefer to think of that feeling of dread as just a spot of neurosis inside my head," Henry said.

"But isn't it a warning that bad consequences are arriving ... I mean we all die."

"You're right. But the species goes on, Ellen's father died but his grandson is about to be born or grandchild, anyway."

"Doesn't it bother you that one day you will end that the thoughts in your head will stop, that ... unless you believe in Heaven or Hell..." Michael pressed.

"Michael ... I know, I know. But first of all we can't do anything about it. And are the thoughts in my head so unique that they must go on? Maybe. Maybe not; the thoughts in other people's heads don't always seem so unique to the universe. What does it all mean? Much of life seems to involve encounters or ... or well, negotiations between people over survivability, status and sexuality...Is that so fucking great? What's beyond that; anything? Is there a purpose behind all that? Is humanity a species going some where? Evolving to some perfection? Becoming god-like? Hell, I don't know. Boy, I love these conversations they take my mind off all those things that bore me to death."

Michael shrugged, "I don't know what it means either, but it scares me sometimes. And it's not something I think about much or talk about ever, except to you, or Harold..."

Holly entered the small cape cod house nestled amid wild rose trestles bristling with thorns. The house stood on a quiet street in a working class residential neighborhood. She sighed from exhaustion as she dropped her bag next to the door and flung her jacket across the living room chair. From another room she heard her infant son crying.

"Ma! Ma!" Holly called and waited.

After several seconds she slumped onto the sofa, "MA! MA!" She called angrily.

"Holly is that you?" Her mother asked, strolling out of the kitchen.

"No it's a talking horse." Holly waved her hand.

Her mother was a large woman with a pleasant face. She stood placidly watching her daughter.

"Brian's crying," Holly said.

Her mother said nothing.

Holly stretching her hair from her scalp and yawned luxuriously. "Did you feed him?"

"No. You usually come home early enough to feed him."

"Well I was late, I'm allowed," Holly replied.

"I ain't saying anything."

"Could you feed him?"

Her mother hesitated. "Sure." and slowly vanished into adjoining room.

Holly listed her legs to the sofa and relaxed. Within minutes the crying abated. "That's a good boy, Brian," Holly called.

She closed her eyes and began to doze, the early sun warming her neck.

Just as a flickering images of sleep began to surprise her, her mother's voice awoke her.

"Why don't you go to your room ... undress, it'll make you feel more comfortable."

"Yeah," Holly's eyes opened and peacefully went nowhere for several seconds.

"That new fellow, Johnston, or something called. He seems such nicer than that other fellow."

"What did he want?" Her eyes examined her mother's face.

"Just called for you is all ... I said you were working nights now."

Her eyes flashed back to the ceiling. "He's always broke ... I think he's a bullshitter. Most men are bullshitters."

"Well ... He seems nice on the phone. That other guy ... he sounds like a gangster."

Holly stiffened. *He is a gangster, but he's never broke.*

"He scares me," Mom said.

"Me too," she admitted, reluctantly.

Her mother disappeared again and Holly gradually lifted herself up from the sofa and padded, barefoot, towards the kitchen. Mom was gobbling a chocolate bar.

"Mother! You ain't supposed to eat that. It's no good for you!"

"Just one."

"No!"

"I just want half, then." Mom folded off a third, left it on the counter and took the rest.

"Could I have some breakfast?" Holly asked.

"What would you like?"

"Toast, and some juice, make yourself some breakfast, too."

"Not hungry."

"That's from eating all that sweet shit." Holly rushed to the waste can and pulled the lid off. She saw the refuse of candy wrappers and an empty cookie box. "MOTHER!" She yelled angrily.

*

They sat at the table. Each quiet, perhaps even sullen, ignoring each other.

I work to support her. She won't even look for work. She could work days. She stays home and eats, eats, eats ... junk! Fat Ma. Hope I don't look like that. Don't want men to see her, they'll think I'll turn out that way. Wouldn't even feed the baby, 'cause I was late,' Can't I even come home an hour late? What is this, She makes me so mad!

*

I'm stuck with her kid! I had to raise her, now I gotta raises her kid. I knew that marriage wouldn't work. Now she's hangen' around with this bad egg. Sleeping with a monster when he calls her. Then for days she just lounges about. She's gonna get herself into trouble, I just know it. Why does she have to be so snotty? If I want a candy bar it's my business. Whose, whose mother around here? She wanted me to feed the kid. When I feed him when she's here she gets mad, says I'm not doing it right. So I waited for her. Ah, No use fighting. She just gets me mad.

ARTICLE 9 *The Social Contract Has Some Provisions For 'Moving On'*

"What's the matter with you?" Michael asked Henry, who sat immobile at his desk, his face cast in solemn disgust.

"I'm fed up with this place."

"Oh, What else is new?"

"Really... There is so much back-stabbing and paranoia: Reading memos seven times to see what it really means. Afraid to leave five minutes early in case you get caught. They won't tell you the next day; it'll show up in your evaluation as a check mark for unsatisfactory under 'Work Habits'. People plotting, scheming to get one notch up on the next person. Doing one another in with innuendo, gossip, private deals. If a higher position is vacated people almost slaughter each other to get it. They scheme for months in case an opportunity comes along. The power plays that go on are almost sickening..."

"Business as usual?" Michael commented, more in the mood to talk about himself than hear 'reality' from a sullen Henry.

"Is it? People are afraid of their shadows, everybody, even the big shots. I'm caught up in it now. I'm playing, too, and I didn't particularly want to, but I feel my survival is at stake also. Is it like this every place? All the time?"

Michael shrugged, "What happened now?"

Henry leaned back slowly and hesitantly began to unburden himself: "There seems to be something between Marshal and Everett and I'm caught up in the middle. Who do I support, and why? If I stay out of it I could be on both their shit lists. If I come in on one side I get on the other's shit list and then if they ever reach an understanding I end up holding the bag. So right now I'm trying to be on BOTH sides like a quadruple agent. I could be successful but talk about confusion... What do I really want to do? Be on neither side. -- But I might owe Marshal ... for talking to Mrs. Grey when I was in trouble... *I am talking like diarrhea, probably sound crazy, and will chase Michael away.*

"Sounds like fun," Michael said.

Henry laughed. "It's a challenge. I get to negotiate with myself about how much of a phony to be." He put on a short demonstration talking like a puppet with a swiveling head, eyes wide in mock sincerity, as he agreed with two invisible patrons that their imagined, temporary enemy (each other) was human liver-eating excrement.

"Well have fun," Michael said laughing as he prepared his departure.

"Certainly," Henry said with mock sincerity, while grinning like a mad-man.

The two girls sat huddled at a corner table in the bar and giggled in whispers, occasionally flinging their long brunette hair over their shoulders.

Michael and Jack having impulsively sped over near deserted highways in Johnson's now working car (borrowed in exchange for a loan) sat at the bar. They had not spent much time together recently. Perhaps they needed a rest from one another. Perhaps Jack had something else going on. Maybe Michael was growing out of his protégé role. Yet Michael was certain there was something on Jack's mind he would not share with Michael.

"Johnny's car sure has some zip." Michael said.

"Johnson's an anachronism," Jack laughed, beginning to sound like the old Jack. "He probably thinks that gasoline is still a quarter a gallon."

"Look at those two, they could be sisters," Michael remarked.

Jack turned to look at the two girls. The girl on the right, aware of being watched froze mid-giggle with an incredibly long cigarette in her face. She nervously lit it and looked to her partner. They immediately broke into repressed squalls of laughter and huddled to whisper.

"I don't know, Mikey, they look weird ... let's try, though," Jack slipped off the bar stool and, drink in hand, walked toward their table with Michael behind him, smiling.

"Here they come, here they come." Felicia whispered.

"Big deal," Marcy whispered back and they both hid their mouths to snicker.

"Hello..." Jack began.

"Uh sorry, we don't want you to sit here," Marcy declared.

"There's room at the bar," Felicia added.

Jack's eyes froze into Marcy's. He calculated, she flinched; her cigarette hand trembled.

"I'm from the County Board of Health. We've had several reports of VD from your table over here ... epidemic proportions," Jack announced.

Michael tuned in, "--Uh excuse me Dr. Diamond, but we've made a mistake... The bartender insists that Frank and Harry over here, both transvestites, are really..."

"Beat it," Felicia ordered.

Marcy resisted an embarrassed flush and puffed obsessively on her cigarette as Jack and Michael returned to the bar.

"Wise-ass, shit," she hissed.

"Hey, Marcy ... let's really do a number on these shits ... see those older guys over there ... One with the bald head ... almost bald ... They been looking over here all night..?"

"Yeah?"

"Let's come on with THEM!"

"Great..." Marcy cooed breaking into a tremendous smile.

Michael, overhearing the patter between the two girls and the older men next to him at the bar, smirked and rolled his eyes at the dialogue.

"Well yeah, I been noticin' you over there," one of the men said, grinning joyously as if Christmas had come early.

"Really?" Felicia asked, bubbling with a mendacious agenda.

"Oh yeah."

"Well, we BEEN noticing you, noticing us," Marcy piped in, her condescending put-on going over.

"Oh ... Have a seat here ... uh, boy girl, okay? Sit here next to me..."

"I'm Bill here. This is Joe..."

"Uh..." Joe smiled eagerly giving up his bar stool.

"Oh, Bill and Joe ... how nice," Felicia announced, rolling her eyes to Marcy who smiled evilly.

Michael and Jack both straining to overhear pretended they were making quiet small talk.

"What are you ... what do you do?' Felicia asked both of them.

"Uh...I drive a bus..." Bill said.

"I'm unemployed at the present."

"Groovy," Felicia said.

"What do you do?" Joe asked.

"Uh, I'm an actress ... well a student." Felicia said.

"Student actress, huh, and you?" Bill asked Marcy.

"Student," Marcy said abruptly, fading back into the dim background of the bar, becoming motionless almost invisible.

"Yeah, I drive a bus ... See a lot of interesting people ... Coulda gone to college ... I had the grades...but I'll do this for awhile till I got bored, go into business with my brother-in-law..."

"You married?" Felicia asked, lighting another super long cigarette.

"Uh..." Joe paled, "Separated," he lied with a weak smile.

"I don't give a shit," Felicia laughed, in total command as she arrogantly whipped the flame out of the match and tossed it away.

Joe laughed nervously.

"His old lady's married not him." Bill piped in.

"You?" Marcy, out of the noisy silence, asked Bill.

"Naw, I was once, but that shit ain't for me." Bill laughed.

"You know, you got nice hair really." Joe said. "Both of youse, as a matter of fact ... Really."

"So do you," Felicia said, embarrassing him. His stubby fingers flew, self consciously, to his thinning pate.

"You know when it started coming out ... I was in high school. Really. But you got nice hair."

"Is that all?"

"Well, hell, no ... You're attractive, both of youse."

Michael shook his head.

God. Why do I spend so much time looking for original, creative, non-cliché things to say to women? All these clowns say is 'Nice Hair I drive a bus to meet interesting people ... My God. I'm struggling to reach them. REACH them? And I usually fail and these thirty five year old weasels with paunches all they have to say is 'nice hair.' Maybe that's why I fail. I spend too much time inventing clever things to say that usually come out weird... I should act naturally, be truthful ... No. if I were truthful I would have nothing to do with many of these women. So why do I bother with them? Who else should I bother with?

"This is for our benefit, you know..." Jack leered, winking at Michael.

Oh damn, another lesson to learn. Michael smiled feeling foolish for castigating himself.

Jack tapped Michael on the forearm with a mischievous smile.

"You gotta a nice tooth there..." Jack said in his dumb-guy accent.

"Oh ... well thanks ... you too."

"No mine come out at night and sit in a glass of water," Dumb-guy Jack replied.

"Uh ... by the way what do you do for a living?" Michael asked.

"I drives a truck. Run over some pretty interesting people now and then."

"Really?"

"Yeah ... See these interesting pock marks on my cheeks?" Jack asked, his eyes on Bill's cheeks, visible behind Michael's head while he stretched his clear face from the jaw.

"Sure, ACNE?" Michael asked.

"No ... I was a goalie for a dart team."

"A goalie for A DART TEAM?" Michael exclaimed laughing loudly.

"Yup ... I was the best ... They called me ... They called me GREAT SAVE ... Jack.."

"Great Save?"

"Sure. Here comes a dart whizzing at me ... I goes for her WONK!" Jack vibrated his head as if his cheek had stopped a dart. "Great Save!" Jack chortled as if he were now the defense players and fans of his dart team

"OK!" Michael laughed. "Great Save! Michael cheered, slapping Jack's back. "Great Save!"

Marcy and Felicia may have been offended by the good humor the supposed victims of their charade were having. But eventually Michael and Jack forgot about the odd foursome and reacquainted themselves with one another. Only when the foursome left together did they stop their conversation to watch the departure.

"So it was for our benefit. Do you think these guys will get lucky and fuck them?" Michael asked.

"Probably," Jack shrugged. "Are you jealous?" He asked Michael.

"Yes and no. I wish I could fuck women I don't like," Michael admitted.

Jack laughed and slapped his back. "You are still one crazy kid," he said to Michael.

"But you know what I'm saying, don't you?" Michael insisted.

"Yeah," Jack nodded his head.

"Women just amaze me. When it comes to things they do and don't do, like sex, I get confused thinking about it. Like why did we turn them off? We are better looking than those other clowns..." Michael implored, seeking wisdom.

"We approached them when they didn't want to be approached. Then we wouldn't be hurt when they wanted to hurt us, so they tried harder. Would you really want to get to know them?" Jack asked.

"No. It was more fun doing what we did," Michael admitted.

"You got anything going on?" Jack asked.

"I kind of ..." *got stuck on Eileen...* Michael wanted to say, but stopped. At this point Eileen was becoming a foggy memory, but one linked with the bittersweet. "--I met this

Bank Manager recently. She's okay. We're going out Saturday night... You?"

Jack shrugged, and turned his eyes to the television. "Nothing new..." He seemed to mope.

Again, Jack was not his usual self. He caught the late sports scores and admitted losing a bet on a particular game. He had little interest in the replays, something unusual for him. Michael felt different too. Not so much a kid scampering about with Jack looking for crazy trouble. Michael mentioned a rumor he heard about Andrea Brighton.

Jack stiffened but remained blank. Somehow the conversation drifted to women again and the magical gifts they sometimes bestow on men, often without rhyme or reason.

"Mikey, you're right, this getting 'pussy' thing is a funny business," Jack lamented, out of character.

Michael, almost worldly at the moment, ventured a half-baked idea: "Could it be possible that if a woman really cares for you she won't have sex with you, versus a woman who's in the mood and likes you but doesn't expect anything could give 'it' to you?"

"Probably," Jack agreed. "Any woman on any ten occasions is likely or unlikely to do anything... Who can figure it out?" He asked with untypical humility.

"I thought I was sort-of in love not long ago. I guess time makes it kinda fade," Michael admitted, "Though I have had some startling dreams..."

"Yeah... Love..." Jack said feigning interest in the latest sports replays. But he didn't smack the bar or shout anything funny. No 'Great Saves!'

They were quiet. Sex without love; love without sex. Women who gave their heart for one tiny moment versus women who give their bodies for the same. For one of these mysteries or the other, both of them felt like losers.

"I like my father, but I don't know, sometimes I just can't think of anything to say. Do you think that's odd?" Michael asked Henry.

Henry, distracted by commotion in adjoining areas was also keeping an eye on Mrs. Grey and Toni who were in deep conference across the way. Henry recalled that Michael had just asked a question and his mind raced for the subject they had been talking about.

"No, do you?" He probed, drawing a blank.

"Well, I don't know. I just can't make conversation with him sometimes."

Henry brightened into a smile. "That's okay. I had a worse situation with my late father-in-law."

"Really?"

"Yeah, you see, they are all descendants from generations of farmers Hundreds and hundreds of years, And they all lived in..."

"Who?"

"My father-in-law's family," Henry repeated. "Anyway, they lived in the country and when they talked they rambled. And he was missing some teeth and when he was tired I couldn't understand what he was saying. Once we had dinner and he talked through the entire dinner and I was really trying to listen, but...."

"What he talk about?" Michael asked.

"Oh, anything a field, What happened by a creek fifty years ago, A model T Ford, the war, anything. And they seemed to have these crazy, creative opinions about things ... with little relation to reality. Bizarre political notions."

"So?"

"So my family has probably been small time merchants or tradesmen for thousands of years and we talk fast we par with our words argue, dicker, discuss, negotiate, what ever. It was difficult to talk to him, he would ramble and I would argue. But I liked him. So we went hunting."

"You? Hunting?" Michael asked.

"Sure."

"Shoot animals and then eat them?"

"I shot a cardboard box and didn't eat it."

Michael laughed.

I remember trudging after him in the cold fall, gingerly carrying a loaded shotgun. Finally I stopped hunting and we didn't have anything to talk about. A shame, he was a mellow man ... Must have been a good boy when he was little like our unborn son...

*

Brenda, walking briskly through Henry's area, smiled (mockingly?) at him, a reflection of their earlier confrontations. Henry half-hoped that she would continue walking and not stop, even though he was fairly lonely.

She stopped, "Listen," She grinned demanding, waiting for his full attention.

"Listening." Henry announced declaratively.

"Something's going on that I don't like and I think a we should do something about it."

"Like what?" Henry said nonchalantly, his pulse starting to rise.

"I feel that Kranster is deliberately undermining the contract in order to wear us down."

"Uh huh, that's his job. Our job is to deliberately expand the contract to wear the Administration down," Henry said.

"Well, I don't approve of us cooperating with him," Brenda replied, her eyes almost too intense for Henry.

"How are we cooperating?" Henry asked, pretending to be more mystified than he really was to mask his rising resentment.

"By sitting at the same negotiating table and taking his abuse."

"What abuse? We give him more than he gives us ... How we gonna negotiate if we don't sit at the same table?" Henry spat out, heatedly.

"Don't get yourself all blown up Henry. I just think we ought to do something stronger."

Damn! Here she goes again. Crazy! What does she want; a fucking strike? Before the Fact-Finder's report comes in? Strike? Who goes to jail, her? No me and Jim. Shit. Tell her off, tell her to go get fucked! Hold on. If I blow up at her she'll just screw me worse.

"Oh, well, yeah, sure ... Well, if we go on strike ... We should first wait till the Fact Finder's report comes in ... Especially if it's more positive than negative concerning BINDING ARBITRATION. -Let the Administration reject it, not us... Then we're striking with **cause**. Of course, we have to consult the membership ... Take a strike vote. Do it DEMOCRATICALLY (*good*). Again, there are some problems about striking. A good strike usually lasts a month at least..."

"Well ... I wasn't proposing anything specific, but doesn't that abuse that Kranster showers on us make you angry?"

What abuse? The abuse behind my back that haunts me comes from you.

"Well, sure... Maybe we, ... the negotiating team should talk about it COLLECTIVELY." Great, 'collectively,' Her word ... the negotiating team- Jim and me can breeze over her there ... Heh, heh.

"That sounds okay... You understand me, then? What my feelings are?" Brenda asked.

Fighting off a smile, Henry forced sincerity, "Certainly." He said with a straight face.

"Don't be so glum" Brenda protested, tugging his cheek allowing Henry to unload an enormous, repressed smile.

"That's better," she said walking away.

Henry, alone, maintained his beacon smile began giggling to himself.

I did it! instead of blowing up and telling her off I placated her. I was diplomatic. I cooled her off, diffused her and didn't get her angry at me. Did I? I didn't tell her the truth. Which is ... that Kranster is heaping no great abuse on us ... her anyway. We aren't even negotiating. I'm dealing with him on grievances. We're waiting for the Fact Finder's

report. A strike could break this fragile union up... I could go to Jail. For what? What's the truth anyway, only my conception of it. True, I understand more of this process than she does. But, maybe you can't go around screaming the truth, everybody will end up hating you. Just manipulate it.... Maneuver, be diplomatic ... Then you forget what the truth is ... Winning is important. Winning what? By handling her diplomatically I allowed her to handle me. She probably thinks she maneuvered me by having the ability to use the Executive board against me ... and I know that, but does she? God, am I becoming totally devious and self concerned? Good, Maybe if I can stand myself that way I'll be successful after all. Can I stand myself that way?

ARTICLE 9.1 Hard Work And All That...

A year of plotting was coming to its climax. Jim in his funny hat, Henry in his alternating moods of optimistic highs or depressed, pessimistic lows were both ready for 'destiny.'

Henry, was still planing and re-planing strategy, building it and rebuilding it like a giant castle on tank treads designed to withstand any siege its owner could fathom. He had his six dollar hand calculator and a couple of charts to match against Martin Kranster, two assistants, a labor lawyer and a multi-million dollar computer system.

He had figured salaries, maximums, minimums, percentages, shift differentials and benefits till they dropped like solder into his memory. Jim was certain that Henry and he had a better idea of the economics of their negotiations than the Administration side.

On soaring power fantasies Henry and Jim had built strikes that crippled the Institution and left them its maters, only to be dismantled in anxious, gloomy glimpses of disaster as they quivered privately and fled abroad in disguise leaving chaos behind them.

Finally, after much time had elapsed and many threatening actions from the union including two Job actions they were seated and waiting in the last chamber of their deliberations for the presentation for the Fact Finder's report.

The Fact Finder, wearing a suit of many hundreds of dollars worth of material and prestige, and using a thirty dollar pen made his usual glib, easy talk with Kranster and the Institution's attorney. It reminded Henry (as he sat to the side, waiting and watching) of the frustrated fury he felt as a boy construed to have misbehaved by the teacher and dreading the 'principal's decision.

Henry had the same feeling; he was ready to scream his side of the story out against the injustice done to him but had to squirm instead, on the inside of his headache, imagining dreadful scenarios while he kept his tears locked up till the more powerful (who always held his meager fate in their hands) passed their pleasantries (always unrelated to his torment, as if her were a side annoyance) and dealt with him.

At last the Fact Finder released his pronouncements while both parties maintained a non-committal silence. The Fact Finder formed possibilities for the future in less then precise sentences which were scribbled down by a dozen nervous hands.

Then the parties separated. Henry maneuvered his group: Binding Arbitration for a salary schedule with lower minimums. They called the Fact Finder back in for several clarifications. Henry showed the Fact Finder that he had misunderstood the new salary schedule and the inequities it caused. (The Fact Finder did not wish to understand it.) He waved his hand in the air, "You're crazy to worry about this...."

Negotiations. Desperate and fast. Henry bluffed the Fact Finder who was putting his pen in his pocket to wrap everything up, as he detected a double cross over a benefit: "No tuition reimbursement through Master's degree, NO contract!" Henry's hand snacked the table.

"I don't believe you! You're crazy to throw this deal out the window! You're going to sink this entire contract for **your personal** tuition reimbursement!" The fact Finder scolded meanly.

"I already have a master's degree. It's not for **me!**" Henry shouted back.

Jim and Kirch sat with their heart in their throat. Henry didn't consult with anyone. This was between him and Fate.

"**They** won't believe you!" The Fact Finder, angry, then stormed out and maneuvered the other side to accept the union's 'new' demand.

In two hours it was over. All they had to do now was bring it to the membership for ratification, (The next impossible feat). Elliot Kirch was finished with whatever it was he had a been attempting to do. Jim was depressed and frightened by the responsibilities he would have to bare for Henry's decisions. Brenda was bewildered. Henry, wound up like a talking maniac was unsure of how he felt except for a painful, intermittent pressure in his intestines --something wanted to force its way out of him.

Henry twirled around obsessively under the warm water raining out of the shower nozzle, his brain attacking and defending itself. He fretted about the last remaining details to negotiations including the amount of trust, none or minimal, to assign to Kranster in drafting up the remaining articles. Things he should have said, done or thought of plagued him to the point where washing his armpits took on a neurotic, repetitious quality. He felt alternately cranky and elated under the shower stream, sometimes retreating into childhood frustrations and boredom and sometimes soaring into adolescent fantasies of power, glory and recognition. Washing himself enticed the hidden urge to masturbate, its allure escaping from locked up dreams along with hints of other things. He briefly envisioned the broad buttocks of a voluptuous woman centered on a pornographic magazine cover. The buttocks became real in his mind, its scent, bitter and repulsive yet beckoning. Its flesh soft and yielding to his touch. An invented personality and face was ready for him to enjoy by himself. He stopped it quickly and finished rinsing in the warm pleasurable water. Many details of the contract remained to be solved. Some would never be solved.

**

Henry and Jim were sitting at a quiet table at the rear of the cafeteria having a late lunch. Henry was still exultantly gloating about the contract settlement and Jim was still murky and depressed. They talked about union-management matters not directly related to contract negotiations.

"You've seen the board. You've seen what they look like. Withered old, stingy looking men..."

"And women," Jim added.

"Their purpose is the opposite of ours, to keep us here between the hours of 8:30 and 5:00 looking as busy as possible. Answering the phones by the third ring and all for the least amount of money. Our purpose is to get more moneys and to gain some sort of flexibility or balance. To be treated fairly, maybe?" Henry asked.

"...And what about the purpose for the Institution?" Jim asked hesitantly, preoccupied, a displaced, far-away look on his face.

Henry shrugged. "To divide up Society's surplus. What else, We both know that this place doesn't ACCOMPLISH much."

"So you don't see anything personal between the board and us or the other unions like the Professional's Association?" Jim asked.

"Not to begin with... It begins with a fight over money. And money is power. Then a built in adversity takes over. Us in our work shirts and funny hats." Henry pointed to Jim's hat and sweatshirt. And pulled on his own blue, wool watch-cap which he had taken to wearing during the cooler weather. "...Using all our cunning and deviousness against their full time professional staff, Kranster and company, computers and attorneys."

"The funny part is they don't really know what they're doing either. Kranster doesn't know what's going on. He doesn't understand the salary and wage schedule anymore then we do ... Less. The computers don't work half the time and their over-paid attorney is a booze hound."

"I know." Henry said feeling slightly let down because minimizing the opposition diminished his Herculean efforts. But he said nothing and felt that he was overly defensive on the subject.

"Everybody thinks it's some well thought out plot. It isn't," Jim said emphatically. "They don't know what the hell they're gonna do next anymore then we do. That's why I was never sure about Brenda hatching plots. I don't think she's that well aware of what she's doing."

Now Henry felt defensive. "Damn it. I've predicted in advance what she might do and she's done it!"

Jim shrugged. "You mean taking over the executive board?"

"Yeah ... Look I'm not saying that we're surrounded by clever manipulators calling all the

shots. In fact I agree with you that there probably are no plots. That things just bungle along. That we, --all of us ... Their board, Kranster, the director's are all winging it, bullshitting, fumbling along and trying to take advantage of situations as they occur.

"But damn it, Jim, there are patterns here. Patterns of adversity. People taking care of their interests first. People acting and then reacting. And it sometimes looks like plots. And sometimes there may plots. Take my case. Toni wanted to get rid of me. He went to Mrs. Grey who wasn't too fond of me and Toni reinforced certain things..."

"I know, I know," Jim said, "So you're saying then, there are some plots."

"Some..." Henry said wondering whether he was contradicting himself or trying to understand a complex, illusory issue. He continued, straining for credibility, "But I know that everything isn't a big plot... It's amazing that the world works."

"I know," Jim said, eating very slowly, which was unusual for him.

Henry awoke from futuristic dreams concerning their unborn child. It took several moments to clear his head. Where was their child? He relaxed and slumped back into bed. Soon, the child would be born. He felt nervous. Ellen stirred. Soon.

Ellen no longer goes to work, I have go by myself. Soon when the child is born I'll be home by myself for awhile. Home by myself... alone! How I hate that. I used to be home by myself so often ... writing novels and making movies in my head; walking around acting out some of the parts stopping to pause and wonder if I was crazy or not. Well, on to work ... Shit.

**

The moisture tumbled down slowly, hesitantly from the gray, brooding skies over Henry as he meandered down from the parking lot toward the Institution complex. He was hurt, he missed her already, her morning prattle, a comforting sign that somebody else was there. Someone he could tune in on when he wanted to, or had to. Nothing, just him, alone and miserable. He felt darker than the skies.

Avoiding the rain he ducked into a nearby building and fled downstairs to take a covered shortcut to his work area. It seemed few people knew about it making it lonelier than the inclement outside.

Here I go entering subterranean passageways, passing under yellow bare light. How many times have I done this, or is it only my dreams that sees to bring me back here... I can't tell.

Thoughts, obsessions and fantasies fought over one another in his head passing judgment on the separate moments into which his life seemed split into. Yet his thoughts remained circular and inconclusive, they didn't rush breathlessly up the peak of the mountain unleashing the most fearsome anxieties. Nor did they splash into the deep where depression was waiting. They tumbled against one another creating enough friction to

make him feel hostile.

He was the first one on his floor and had to dispel the heavy darkness from the interior with the main circuit breakers in the hallway.

He entered his work area. It was quiet and deserted accomplishing as much as it did when it was busy and bustling. He took off his coat and hung it in the closet. Taking advantage of the freedom afforded by emptiness he strode around the area, as if supervising it. Henry caught his reflection in the tall, glass windows at the far end of the room and watched himself standing alone under the electric lights overhead. "God, alone again..." he muttered and returned to his desk. "Bullshit," he mumbled angrily.

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Marshal was approaching him. They closed rapidly at an even pace stepping quickly along the broad sidewalk. There was no mistaking each other now, and glances here or there (to a wristwatch with no interest in the time it symbolized) were only distracting and misleading. Finally, out of control, Henry broke into a smile and quickened his pace.

Marshal had more control, though he spoke first as they met. "Hi, How's things?"

"Hey, what's going on. Fine. You?"

"O.K. Where you off to?" Marshal asked.

Henry shrugged, "Actually, things aren't fine, my neurosis has spread to my automobile."

"How so?"

"It's developed some odd symptoms recently, that come and go with no traceable reason ... that's why I'm walking."

"Well, it's a nice day," Marshal said, his small bearded face looking preoccupied and not eager to prolong their conversation. He shifted his gaze past Henry and reached into a pocket for something which he didn't seem to find. "How's Ellen. No baby yet?"

"OK. At home. No, not yet."

"...Where did I..." Marshal mumbled to himself as he fished through both pockets.

Henry contemplating a harangue about bureaucracy, big business, modern technology all in relation to his automobile, decided not to pursue it but to file it away. He could always develop it into a lecture for Hogarth, who depending on his mood might enjoy it, though more likely he would branch into his own lecture and the two of them would end up shouting and pleading for justice on differing topics. It would be difficult to disentangle himself from such a jungle of words and disconnected emotion. He giggled at the mental picture of that scene and Marshal digging through his pockets blushed and smiled in return, "I think I left it home."

They parted easily with several sentences and a laugh and Henry walked on.

ARTICLE 9.2 A Contract Is Paper, People Are Real

The birth of Henry and Ellen's future possibility began storybook enough. Ellen's first contractions were sharp but short. Her doctor, in no great rush, advised that she "Wait awhile." So they waited and talked nervously with sly smiles about the future in Ellen's swollen belly. Who was in there? What was in there?

By afternoon the pain was becoming uncomfortable for people of modernity. They left for the hospital and were separated briefly, to be reunited in the upstairs labor room. Ellen was beginning to squirm every few minutes for longer and longer stretches of time.

When? When? When? After hours of waiting was wrenching in intolerable agony, near tears and beyond being comforted. Henry and Ellen's hands became united, clenching flesh. Ellen's flesh was being pushed to its absolute limits. The doctor, unsatisfied with the progress of her cervix crawling centimeter by centimeter, advised no sedatives yet. More pain.

"Oh God, give me something. Help me, I hurt."

"It's okay. It's okay." Henry counseled, wishing he could fall into the chair by her bedside and sleep. But her hand clenched his, then flew over her head chasing seconds and cognitive fictions before coming back to her side and clenching his again. The television set on the upper wall kept showing people at their utmost, idiotic simplicity, smiling, yapping, betting on things, telling stories of no profound worth and going on and on.

"Oh God, Henry, help me. Make then give me something. Knock me out. Oh Lord in Heaven, help me, be with me."

No modernity. No svelte, sultry woman, hips cooked lithely, lips pouting, cool and collected. Ellen was unprepared. "I never thought it would be like this," she protested near tears, blocking out everything but the pain coming from her inside, assaulting her person and making her a collections of flinches and complaints.

Later, the doctor with his hand up her vagina, nodded his head and shortly he broke something and produced a flood of bloody water that pumped out with her chortled screaming.

Henry looked on wryly. His mind, was growing numb. He hovered over her cooing, "Relax, relax, relax."

"Henry do something. Help me, Make them give me something."

Henry did not know what to do. He was lost. He considered going up to the nurse's station and banging his fist on the desk demanding his grievances be settled. Instead he stood in the hall way looking stupidly and then returned to coo, "Relax, relax, relax."

As the hours climbed on, long painful moment after moment, the doctors agreed that it was finally time to push.

"Push?"

"You feel full down here?" The Chinese intern asked.

"Do you feel like you have to move your bowels?" The disinterested resident asked.

"I don't know. I just hurt." Ellen cried, her face screwed up.

"Push, honey," the Nurse said, looking up her spread-eagled vagina.

On top of all the weary pain she had to push down into it. Her face turned red and she cried. "Ow! I hurt," and collapsed. "I have no more strength. I'm finished. I'm through." Henry holding his breath and pushing nothing, soothed her brow, "Push, push, push."

She pushed. Her legs were cranked up like a monkey's on the bed rails. They collapsed. "I have no more strength to push. I'm through. Doctor, take the baby out I don't care ... In this day and age you must have something."

In this day and age we still have pain to bring forth our children; and sweat upon our tormented psyches as we toil for bread at the negotiating table...

"No Ellen, you have to put the baby in position," The doctor said.

On and on for another hour the little girl, her face red and curled in tearful anguish called for help from every quarter.

At last, delivery, They wheeled her in, gave her a spinal to end the feeling and pulled the baby out. He gave two short yelps, then they laid him, deflated, sloppy wet on her belly.

"Ah..." She said, relieved. The little follow turned from purple to pink and wriggled around, looking up in her direction.

"Ah."

Henry, sitting behind her in the delivery room, smiled uncontrollably behind his mask. His breath sliding out of the gauze blew moist-hot into his eyes and he fought back the strongest urge to cry.

Alone, Ellen in the hospital, Henry was obligated to attend an affair. He purposely arrived too late for the wedding ceremony and decided to pay his solitary greetings upon the family, recite the baby's good health and other statistics. "Yes, Ellen's fine, just fine..." provide a check for the groom and when no one was looking slip out the side door.

Unfortunately, he got shouldered by his uncle and paraded in between the tables to be placed helplessly at his designated eating spot.

"And have a nice time."

"Thank you," he said lamely, looking forlornly at Ellen's place-card set before her unoccupied setting.

While eating his fruit-cup he became surrounded by pleasant talk exploding from the young couples and unattached singles at the table. He shrunk his concentration into his spoon, yet was unable to close out the enormous hubbub of conversation that he knew nothing of. Alternate flushes of panic and loathing toyed with his brain urging him to flee.

What the fuck am I doing here listening to the chatter of people I DON'T KNOW? I hate these things even when I'm not alone. Why did I have to come? What would I do home, eat ravioli out of the can? Eat the food, take it easy, relax! Eat the fucking food.

He relaxed and growing dispassionate about the surroundings simply observed with an amused eye what was going on around him.

The women, especially those who had been teenagers fifteen years ago were terribly made up, dripping with jewelry that dangled and glittered on the tops of their polished bosoms. Several looked like what Henry envisioned expensive call girls to look like. The men with these ladies of the evening seemed clunky, lacking in self-awareness fleshed out stick-figures -to Henry's mind, anyway.

Maybe that's what you need to be in order to be financially successful. Have all the wealth that you can draped over your wife's tits. That means I'm doomed. I can't stay at that Institution for ever ... Hold it. That's only me seeing what I want to. All people are not like this all the time.. Look at me wearing a suit and I'm sure I look clunky too ... I didn't want to stay in the military, a person has to belong to something... the union?

Maybe Detached, waiting for the soup, almost smiling as he watched the 'hookers' and 'clunks' dance with one another he was captured.

"Who are you?" The tall woman sitting on his right asked.

He withdrew his left knee from Ellen's empty chair and turned around. "I'm Henry..."

Henry, watching the world beyond his table hadn't noticed, but conversation had toned down into small ones held in intimate groups. The band was taking a break.

Henry's neighbor had limited options for conversation as the couple next to her were still passionate and turned inward toward each other.

So, she captured him easily, tying his up with questions and jokes, leaving him occasionally for the bar just at the right inconvenient moment in their chatter to condition him to fetch alcohol for the both of them. Now she would only leave him to pee.

After a momentary reluctance, Henry was willingly captured. In the back of his mind certain abhorrent, quiet possibilities began to form. These possibilities grow stronger as the dinner progressed and the liquor made both of them looser. She, out-drinking Henry two to one, got especially merry. He never asked her to dance and she didn't seem disappointed. Awaiting desert she maneuvered him to take a walk with her for some fresh

air. Finally he began to perceive her.

She laughed impulsively and glanced back frequently at Henry, making him wish that someone else was with her and he was elsewhere. She was tall, perhaps a bit taller than he but that included heels. She was voluptuously rounded, meaty, and he thought of himself in her presence as being slim, almost wispy. She spoke at him quickly, with a silly, sensuous giggle sliding after her giddy comments, commanding the conversation. He was tense, trying to be worldly and macho but he sensing that he was coming off as a jerk making asinine repartee' to her talk. Though that could have been Henry sensing the unobvious.

"Oh it's wet here!" She laughed grasping her gown and pulling it up to her calves to kick her shoes off.

"Get those, can you? She plunged ahead into puddles almost ankle high, giggling.

"Sure," he said convinced that he was a jerk, a neuter slave reaching for her shoes. (Large feet for a woman.)

I hope it's not too wet, you'll be able to see through ... I've got sheer panties on," she said swaying for balance ahead of him.

Henry, heard her but was convinced he wasn't sure of what she said, and feeling embarrassed said nothing. He felt more uncomfortable behind the jerk self-image he had concocted for himself. In the faltering light piercing through the rows of bushes that secluded the sidewalk from the street Henry could see her large ass cheeks bubbling through her dress as she walked ahead. Sexual longing struck him and her shoes felt terrible in his hands. He was convinced that her flirtations --if they were flirtations-- could be counted on for nothing certain. Yet, still, here was one of his fantasies from an afternoon nap, a steamy shower or a series of moments alone at his work desk. No matter what he wanted to believe, in his intuitive mind he knew it was here in front of him.

"Whoops, I stubbed my... Shit..." The hem of her dress touched water as she let go to balance herself on a tree trunk and feel her toe. "Henry!" She sang.

Henry, acting as if the water around his shoes bothered him, followed, unnaturally, till he reached her.

"Hold steady a moment," she cooed leaning on his shoulder to feel her foot. He stood stiffly next to her watching her half-revealed breasts puffing and swelling as she moved her upper torso.

"I got crud all over my feet." She announced. The phrase 'all over my feet' resounded several times through Henry's head till he mentally mimicked her, repeating in long exaggerations 'AALLL OVVEERRRR MMYYYY FEEEEETT.' She laughed and bounced ahead pulling her dress up. She splashed water and shook with a tremendous giggle. She leaped forward again flashing leg to the thigh, --meaty legs, sexually female, but no svelte model she.

"Come on, Hen. You're too slow," she said, looking back at him with seductive, whimsical enjoyment. The look of a woman with secret agendas, and hidden humors, almost ready to be shared.

After a brief flight of bewilderment Henry felt a sudden pang for Ellen out of the surprising unknown. His image of this earth goddess before him changed. She became a shallow, plundering horse. His stiffened muscles relaxed and he plodded through the water carelessly.

"Here's your shoes," he remarked, wearily, extended his arm.

"What's a matter?"

"Nothing."

"I can't hold my shoes and my dress up at the same time," she pleaded, still trying to balance her stance between a little girl's pout and a seductresses' pose.

He sloshed through the water toward her, her shoes dangling in his outstretched hand. "A big girl like you can figure something out. Here."

She lost a quick, pleading eye battle and recaptured her shoes clutching them to her gown. "Oh all right." She sneered lightly.

Henry became convivial company for the rest of the afternoon. All he wanted was a brief vacation from himself.

Henry had to go into the city for a job interview. It was a blustery winter day, alternating between threatening darkness and bright sunshine. As the bus curved upwards over stained concrete ramps high above parts of the downtown district, Henry was astounded by its massiveness. The city covered miles of acres, sometimes towering above him in honeycombed office buildings. sometimes sprawled beneath him in small neighborhood greasy with five decades of soot and oil.

Henry felt jolted by its vastness, all peopled by folks he did not know. Off the bus and into the wind he assumed the crisp, unconcerned attitude he perceived everyone else to have. He went a step further and slipped into the arrogant, self-assured personality of a young business executive, a personality Henry felt dressed for.

On the street in front of the bus terminal stood a gaggle of cabs and several prostitutes. From the corner of his eye he surveyed long bruised legs and skimpy skirts. Wigs and make up. One shouted roughly to another, clutching a pack of long cigarettes in one hand. Henry passed on.

He didn't like the city, its danger and excitement flowed back to him from his late adolescence. *Booze, maybe drugs, paid for sex, throngs of teenage girls protesting something. Traveling the dark unknown streets, living an anxiety dream, waiting for it to unfold. Pint of scotch in his pocket, newly heralded ability to swallow it raw (for a time*

anyway.) *Down the dirty streets, looking for lusty fantasies. Falling in with the permanent elements on a cold bench in the middle of the street. Pissing in a dim subway (into a corner? --was it real?) laughing heinously at the long stream, never ending from his swollen bladder...and all of its philosophical implications. Alleys and horrified people frightened off by this young, mad poet, ready to piss in rebellion. The city was an evil intoxicated swirl. Puking next to a leg attached to a body that puked (his.) Barf on pants. Laughing like Pinocchio along with two professional winos. Where did buddy-roo take off to? Abandoned? No meaning, no philosophical implications, poetry all bullshit, just cold, dark with hot laughter burning the throat going out, coming in. Seeking the soiled soft flesh lumped and perforated between a woman's firm or soft legs. Laying down mid street, a problem for society and its agents, in order to "rest"... "Fuck everybody" -The world's perception in a nutshell. The dim lights lost in the circling impenetrable haze of darkness. He could of died there.*

Henry's identity as a successful business executive popped. He shrugged off the frightening recollections of old images, struggled to construct something for himself. He found something: Henry the sarcastic, trouble-making union negotiator. With his new identity he briefly reviewed his earlier image of the city. Who was he in those days, not Henry, not even Michael? What was he trying to do, then? (What was he trying to do now?) He finally smiled, separated by years and plunged ahead, looking for the right streets.

**

Dreams:

Henry had crossed the table. He was working for management. He seemed successful as attested by the expensive suit he wore. A tough contract had just been concluded and the firms' employees had been dealt with conservatively at best. It had been Henry's cunning and ruthlessness that was the major factor in management's success. He was greatly appreciated by upper level execs.

Henry was having a small a victory dinner with several other calculating, pragmatic executives in an intimate upper class restaurant that catered to the wealthy business crowd.

He was intoxicated and becoming boisterous as he reveled in his victorious pummeling of the union. He was gloating-mad and bubbling with obnoxious, vicious self-conceited humor.

A woman; the hostess, About thirty, tall almost elegant in slacks. Tight slacks that molded her derriere to all who were interested. Henry patted it. She smiled. In the logical sequence of shifting nonsensical dreams the other executives disappeared, perhaps the restaurant disappeared. Or maybe Henry dreamed them into oblivion for two hours but the memory was no longer there.

He was alone with the hostess, a lusty grin on his face. He embraced her and grasped the cheeks of her ass pressing her groin into his. She was willing (even eager) to undress. Henry roughly yanked his clothes down and prepared to enter her with less forethought

then skewing a chicken for the rotisserie. What of Ellen, his love? His guilt? His shame? His fear? He had nothing but positions unrevealed and postures to bargain from. He had extracted all his victories at moral expense. The truly successful Machiavellian diplomat. Integrity had been sold for pleasure and profit. Now was the time for fucking.

Her ass had swollen to proportions that occupied most of his experience. It waited for him, Her legs were up and parted. It was for him to ravish. His burning needing hardness was melted into a vibrating fizzle of shattered images as an emotion washed through him.

The emotion, powerful enough to wake him, reminded of a mystery . It was anxiety.

Henry hung between the sweetness of erotic pleasure and a fear that was fast hardening into guilt. He had trouble reconciling the dream of himself with himself. What about Ellen? What about himself? What about his new son?

**

Coming from his house, instead of the apartment Henry had the right of way entering the highway. He had no legal obligations to halt before other traffic and was usually able to merge leftwards into the right lane and head for work. Since the accident, however, he found himself imagining the sounds and sights of slamming, tearing metal. He could no longer rely upon the odds and his sixth driving sense. He had to look. Sometimes the cars obligated to the yield sign crossed it thoughtlessly and slipped in front of Henry's vehicle. Henry would have to brake sharply and beat his horn, "You stupid bastard!" He would yell soundlessly at them.

- The yield sign is my favor, why don't they stop? When I came from the other direction I had to stop. I did then, why won't they?

Jim had a quick word with Henry and left the latter's office as Marshal sauntered in with a hangdog expression.

"How's it going?" Henry asked, wondering if he would have any interesting stories or would be rude and uncommunicative.

"Huh? All right. You getting tight with that James-cat?" Marshal asked.

Henry shrugged.

"That **union** business," Marshall said with pleasant mockery, laughing a little.

"Nobody fucks with me now," *Except other union people.*

"It's **masturbation**. You don't get paid from it, it just feels good," Marshall said.

The word touched a nerve with Henry. "Speaking of which what's up with you and Claudine?"

Marshal looked sullen. He sat at his desk and ignored the question for several moments.

Henry returned to what he was doing. "We finally had coffee," Marshal admitted unexpectedly. He left his desk and advanced to the middle of the office.

"And?" Henry prompted.

Marshal flinched as if recalling his fingernails scraping a chalk-board. "Yeesh, she's not for me... How about you, you picking up any freebies around here? Big union guy. I see some little chickies hanging out. More than before," Marshal joked.

"I'm a married man. I gotta be strong," Henry said with a sigh.

"Yeah, I suppose so," Marshal concurred lamely. He sat in the chair at Henry's desk and said nothing.

Henry proceeded to lecture him about the obligations of fidelity.

Marshal grunted, "But to say NEVER is to turn off fantasy... How could **anything** exciting ever happen?"

Henry accepted the point but continued to negotiate. He had become an evangelist for faithfulness and contended pointedly to convince *himself* of his arguments.

ARTICLE 9.3 *The Enemy Of My Enemy Is My Friend*

Since the settlement, Henry and Jim found themselves holding frequent, quick discussions in stairwells, corridors, basement passageways and outside in the gusty wind. Unlike before, their strategy was not composed of fantastic and frightening conjecture, but realistic negotiating tactics. Rather than free associating about strikes, job actions, walkouts and other war activities they talked about trade-offs and give-aways for the final bargaining between Henry and Kranster.

There was still a feeling of tension and unreality to the negotiations, but the big issues had already been agreed to in Fact Finding and they had lost their virginity in the process. There was no need (at the moment) to worry about gathering strength and attacking the Institution. The Institution and the union had benefited each other. The Institution had split the staff union away from the Professional's Association who were now in the process of making their negotiation demands; and Henry aware of this split had welcomed it hoping to pick up a few extra crumbs. Now the task was to use the union's illusory strength and duplicity to bend the membership and the Institution toward a 'livable' contract. Anyone who opposed that would be the enemy regardless of which side the opposition came from. Henry and Kranster were forced into an untrusting alliance with each other to finish up and complete the process.

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Henry felt some elated success from the settlement. The Institution (that monstrous, immovable body of brick, stone, glass and culture) would be slightly changed, and HE, Henry had had an impact in that change.

Wandering alone through yellow, glaringly lit underground passageways the emptiness reinforced Henry telling him that in some ways the Institution (it's lower, unused secretive portions neglected by everyone else) had become his Institution. The loneliness both mocked him anxiously and provided an unclear freedom for him. He walked on slowly, displeased with his destination and willing to linger in his long cinderblock, pipe-laden purgatory. He felt like the clown, the wise clown, putting on a deceiving act, fooling even himself, as he played one game and then another. What was his real purpose? He felt that he had one. But what was it? Unable to resist, he made a slight face to himself and smiled cunningly. Henry the little gnome fooling his way past everyone: The assistant, the negotiator, the union leader, the grievance prosecutor ... the man? Why did he take it all so seriously, this nonsense? Was the essence of it --nothing? He had no answer so he closed his mind to the question and the emptiness closed in. He began to feel socially unconnected, and becoming uneasy fled the passageways quickly.

Henry was in a whirl, paged on the phone, approached in person, asked multitudes of questions. A flux of problems from crucial to absurd: Union business, Institution business... Henry on his feet, crossed distances to different buildings, met, counseled, advised different employees. Left. Met counseled, advised other employees. Slowly the pressure of meeting deadlines, of encountering a person's self-interested fury about some minor, typical matter of procedure expanded fifty-fold into the overwhelming shape of an enormous difficulty requiring a major union effort. Encountering the same person on the second day of one of these problems after having laboriously worked out a strategy only to find the problem to have mysteriously vanished and a new problem rising: "What can the union do?" Fury rising. Energy levels increased, blood pounding, eye to the clock. Moving, moving... Remembering commitments, striving to meet them, trying to toss the smaller ones aside...

Pounding a brisk, determined, militaristic pace across the breadth of the Institution, returning to relax through lunch ... crises!

A friend of Ellen's stood near his desk...no smile.

"Hello." Henry waved.

She came closer, "Can I talk to you."

"Sure," Henry full of nervous levity.

She began crying, Her boss, an arrogant young administrator ... the tough junior officer acting out McArthur's role had accused her of ... Her new promotion was now ... Her salary would be ... Henry could see the shape of a puzzle.

Upstairs, distaste rising. The confrontation with the administrator, his defense a haughty superior to inferior attitude ... With little restraint Henry (within ear shot of others) burning with fury, unsure of the legalities involved in the case, charges going off verbally escalated the confrontation. A slight retreat by Henry explaining his presence ... The supervisor advancing on Henry. Henry exploded into hissing obscenity. The supervisor,

backing down, momentarily afraid of physical violence. Henry going too far, shouting a string of obscenities, standing, leaning over the once arrogant fellow, destroying him ...

Storming out. Calm returning to his head.. *protect yourself from repercussions*

He stopped by Kranster's office to explain his side of the grievance before the telephone reached Kranster He would negotiate into the best position; the shouting and obscenities hadn't helped the grievance only Henry. By being repentant with Kranster the latter took a 'Dutch Uncle's' role and advised him to calm down and apologize to the supervisor. Later, however, (after some obsessive brooding) re-evaluation of the incident began.

The repercussions, at first, were negligible. A flurry of phone calls and memos to different echelons in the Institution. The supervisor's supervisor had injected herself into the scramble.

A tall, skinny, slightly hunched-over woman had written a letter denouncing Henry as an immature person who used obscene, abusive language in a wild frenzy against an unsuspecting supervisor.

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Henry got his...

Henry and Jim were talking, Henry leading.

"So I got blown away ... What a job..."

"How do you feel emotionally?" Jim asked.

"Ripped, Totally fucking ripped, Shit, I was really set up ... She came to my area and we talked INFORMALLY and then she (the supervisor's supervisor) went back and told that punk and his employees what I said. Damn it, so they're all down my throat and at the meeting all of them accuse me of betraying the union."

"I know, I was there," Jim said.

"Goddamn it. She betrayed a confidence...And I'm all confused now ... I mean all of them basically said that the grievant and one other person were lying and the rest of them were telling the truth ... You know what kills me, what eats me up?" Henry confided.

"What?"

"The other person was Ellen. You see this problem goes back a long time since before Ellen left on maternity leave. It was a clique. The two of them against the rest. Ten people supporting their supervisor over the union ... putting pressure on the grievant to withdraw the grievance ... and me ten feet in the middle. And it all blew up in my face And I made it worse by letting this former-second lieutenant get to me emotionally... Oh well what the fuck." *Could Ellen have caused some resentment? My Ellen?*

"Well, you'll never know the real situation..." Jim said.

"I assume that the clique did not want Ellen's friend to take over her job. And that was the crux of the issue... But no matter who gets the job, they will eventually resent the new work-leader... And that skinny broad who has already sent me obscene hate mail because 'I wasn't mature enough...' --I am still very pissed off... Then again, like you said who knows what the fuck really happened?"

Jim smirked noncommittally.

Oh shit, is he getting ready to ditch my position for political expediency? Stop it. Why does everyone have to think just like me? He doesn't have to take the blame for my acts ... Be independent, stand on your own feet! Don't be overly sensitive Yeah, but Jim will remain neutral. So when that clique in Ellen's former department has a beef they won't have to come to me, they can go 'over my head' to Jim and he'll take care of it. Fuck! They think they've... Hey look at the bright side, you reamed a second looney's ass and got away with it. So what if his boss lied to you and put you in the embarrassing middle of a bash-Henry symposium. They never voted for you anyway. Ha, ha.

Why am I doing all this shit? Because I love it? Yet, I still want to get even, to go back there and blow them away ... Smoke 'em, do a number on them, get that supervisor's supervisor in hot water with her superiors. Am I pursuing the concept of justice, or vengeance or fighting personal wars that I helped start? Well I'm in the middle of it now ... If nothing else I've learned something...

"What gets me ... They don't even care that you're negotiating their contract for them for nothing. And you do all the other grievances..." Jim offered.

"They don't remember. I don't care..." Henry said tiredly.

Jim laughed. "Maybe, I mean you might have made one mistake ... IN THEIR EYES... Yet they want your blood I can't understand that."

Henry shrugged. *They are like me, only worse, Jim old buddy... --I've got to get out of this place before it consumes me!*

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Returning from lunch Henry found a note on his desk from Brenda, 'Call me IMMEDIATELY. Extremely urgent, Brenda.'

Oh shit, what now? Is she gonna chew my ass out too? Ask for my resignation? Oh boy. I feel the tension mounting and mounting, I'm tighter than a drum... Maybe this business isn't good for me.

Henry stood, staring at the message for much longer than it took to read it. He looked for signs of what was to come. He used the pose as a cover up for the avalanche of thoughts crossing his mind. Slowly, and resigned to what ever awaited him, he walked toward her area. In anticipation of conflict his resolve grew, pulse quickened, pace picked up. He was prepared once again to fight.

Brenda spotted him and quickly excused herself from her office to talk in the hall. She

appeared very sweet, shy and demur. His brow wrinkled in anticipation of coming fury.

"Jim says you're looking for another job," she queried.

"Yeah ... ?"

"Why?" She asked.

Henry, softening somewhat and frowned, "Why not?"

"We need you here, Henry," she said simply.

Henry was taken aback, "You're kidding," he said, smiling.

"No, really. It's important for the union that you stay here."

"I thought you hated me?" He asked.

"No ... I mean you can be easily disagreeable," she smiled, "--but you've been important to the union."

"Then, how come you've plagued me for so long?" Henry asked. *You may be one of the reasons I want to leave.*

"I just disagreed with some of your methods..."

And me with some of yours.

"But, I can't do it alone, I can't. I can't run the union alone. I just can't." Tears began running down her cheeks. "I mean, I don't know what to do with grievances and, at negotiations ... I don't understand everything, especially the money..."

Henry began feeling compassion for her. "Jim can handle it," he said.

"No, He's leaving too," she replied.

"WHAT?" Henry exclaimed.

"He told me ... You didn't know?"

"No!" Henry declared.

Why didn't he tell me? Christ, If I stay I could run for President. Big deal.

"Whose gonna run the union?" Brenda asked.

"God, I guess ... the union's all yours." Henry smiled, bewildered.

"I don't want it!" She protested.

She doesn't want it? I'm amazed. Maybe I was wrong about her. I'll never understand.

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Henry walked at full speed and broke into a run every so often, searching the main building of the institution for Jim. Finally, he caught sight of Jim's funny hat bobbing up and down among some file cabinets piled in the hall for storage. He raced up to him, but forced his voice low.

"You leavin'?" Henry puffed.

Jim broke into a grin. "Brenda told you?"

"Yeah ... floored me. Is it true?"

"Yeah."

"Why didn't you say anything?"

"I looked for you awhile ago.... I just found out or decided..."

"I was in with Kranster on a grievances..."

They stood staring at each other. Henry began to giggle. "Who'll take care of the fucking union?"

Jim shrugged. They both chuckled.

"Fuck 'em." Henry declared.

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Dreams

Henry returned to a large, older building in the city. He wandered from floor to floor looking into the open doorways at Hellenistic parties carrying on against the backdrop of the lonely interminable night in the city. Innocently, he wandered upwards to higher floors finding, quite expectedly, rooms and rooms of erotic pleasure. Amid fuzzy light spilled out of doorways nude women pranced and posed ending in ballet splits upon the cold, aged floor where their apartments joined the hallway.

Triangular vortexes of light split reality into the visible and the obscure divisions of the nude forms. Henry, smiling with a boyish whimsy he never seemed to own, wandered egg-eyed past dozens of examples of near possibilities. Their breasts heaved near him, their vaginal pubic hair dissolved into floor shadows. Upwards Henry traveled, passing all possibilities. He exited the building and saw a sky full of stars. The building dissolved into a small, cramped room or apartment. There was a woman there. Henry again felt the overriding urge of sexuality. He was drawn to this woman. He felt a need to indulge, to feel her buttocks, to enter her mystery, to open her pores, to stimulate her secretions. Who was this woman? Was it ... Brenda? He was amazed.

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Driving to work Henry's attention was captured. Some road side refuse took on a quick wind-blown resemblance to life, waved briefly with the breeze and startled Henry as if it

were a cat ready to dash in front of his car, only to turn into neglected garbage that sputtered and died.

**

Henry and Jim were talking.

"So who'd you blow away this time?" Jim asked, smiling.

Henry shrugged, "Why?"

"I don't know, but I never had so many enemies till you started doing things," Jim half-joked.

"Yeah, but you promise everybody whatever they want and then avoid them till they forget about it. When they're wrong I tell them so. That's better than letting them stay bogged down in their own illusions for ever. Right?" Henry responded.

Jim stepped back a half step and rubbed his eye, "Yeah..."

"You want everybody to like you..." Henry said.

"I know." Jim smiled.

"I'd like to be liked ... But I just can't tolerate bullshit... It's a failing. Maybe I'm more defensive than you ... maybe I'm more aggressive ... I don't know ... I seem to fight for things."

"I know ... All right, I agree," Jim said putting his hands up in surrender.

They paused a moment and Henry changed the topic, "You know it's funny... The NEW EXECUTIVE board ran for office on the platform that we were secretive and incompetent. Remember, George Lyndon claiming our steward structure was unfunctioning?"

"Dysfunctional," Jim corrected.

"What ever. A disgrace. That HE would build the perfect union structure. So where is he now? Where are any of them? The whole board has practically disappeared ... just like the old one. Instead of Marc running the show it's you and me ... with Brenda in the wings. I kept worrying about the big fight I was going to have with the executive board. ... You know how would I fight they're radical and impractical ideas. Apathy, inertia and self-interest did it for me. No one even comes to the board meeting anymore," Henry bragged.

"I know," Jim said.

"That's good isn't it?" Henry quizzed with his usual iconoclasm.

"I'm not sure..."

Jim changed the subject a few comments later and soon he became animated and the conversation touched upon the hilarity of getting fucked over doing battle for the union, "I've been on grievances where, there I was battling it out with the supervisor and I look around ... I've been deserted. The employee withdrew the grievance out of..."

"Yeah..." Henry coaxed.

"Fear. Most people are afraid to file grievances," Jim added.

"Yeah, I know ... What the fuck was I going to say? Oh yeah, two things. Sometimes you're on a grievance and the next day you talk to the grievant; QUOTING them verbatim and they stare at you...'I never said that'" Henry mimicked, his eyes bulging in innocence.

Jim laughed. Having come through so many recent obstacles it was easier to joke. They were sharing a brief camaraderie.

"'I never said that,' Who me?'" Henry mocked again making Jim laugh harder, "People are so malleable, like clay ... Me too, I guess, I don't know," Henry admitted.

"Peer pressure, people are afraid..." Jim repeated.

"And they're never happy, no matter what you accomplish for them. -I love it, sometimes --doing this. It's a high when it goes right... But lately... lately it's been making me miserable. Why do you do this?"

Jim shrugged and looked at his watch. "Beats working, I guess..."

"Beats doing what someone else wants you to do..." Henry offered.

"Well yeah ..." Jim began drifting from the conversation.

Feeling overly verbose in Jim's sudden taciturn presence, Henry fell silent and waited for him to leave.

"I gotta make a call ... be right back," Jim began trotting across the work area.

There I go rambling again. Why the fuck do I do this shit? Number one my job stinks.

He leaned back in his chair lifted up a sheath of papers hanging off his desk top with one foot. A look of disgust crossed his face.

I hate being a peon. Working UNDER people with less or maybe equal ability.

Why Mrs. Grey is superior to me I'll never understand. Her salary is almost THREE times mine. That's not even the point. It's not so much the money but the position. I should tell her what to do, 'Hey Grey run this stuff over to the printing department and ...

She would get lost without people to do everything for her. During my period of 'observation' I created all the objectives and outline sheets for her newest project.

And Toni, Shit.... 'Toni, get off the fuckin' phone and get to work.' Ha, ha. God I hate it. The union gives me an illusion of power. Do I get carried away with It? Yes I do. That scares me. But Marc did that, I remember him glowing and beaming and whispering in irrational terms about all the 'POWWERRRR' he thought he had ... that used to annoy me. Jim used to do it also, The two of them would gloat about banging supervisors around, coming down hard on so-in-so. Bullshit! I was the first nut to actually bully supervisors. Big deal.

I don't know... I'm getting tired; I should leave. Let someone else worry about this crap. Let Brenda take over. Once she becomes the establishment some other Brenda will come along and plot her downfall ... secretive clique. Fuck 'em.

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Phone call from Brenda.

"So listen, since neither you nor Jim will be around much longer..." She began, digging at him, her voice edged in a cynical, sarcastic humor, "...the least you guys could do is let me in on what's going on."

"Like what?" Henry asked.

"Like... Like... jeeze, come on. Isn't anything going on except limbo until the contract's ratification? I mean you guys have sandbagged me with this union, the least you could do is help me."

"I am ... To do what?" Henry feinted, reluctant to begin explaining the situation he had with Kranster working out remaining details.

"Don't leave yet, give me another year to handle things ... to catch on," she pressed.

"To what?" Henry asked stalling for time to think of a reasonable excuse.

"Grievances for one ... writing a new contract proposal for next year's negotiations ... figuring money," she said.

I wouldn't know where to start ... I don't know if I could help you to understand. This is not about ideology...

"I'm really scared of being left alone here with no experienced people to help me," she pleaded.

"What about all your committed people? Your communication committee, office stewards, what ever?" Henry baited.

"What about them? They just need some rebuilding..."

Henry was unable to resist. "I told you what would happen After a settlement, any settlement, every settlement --all interest wanes. The fun is over. The job actions, and posters, and marches and shouting... no one gives a shit except about WHAT THEY GOT. I have to be careful not to be sandbagged... Everyone's dying to know where they

fall on the new job reclassification and salary schedule. And one or two --or three committed people are left to take care of business. It happened before, it just happened now. It will always happen."

"It's not true," she declared, almost hopelessly.

"Then why are you afraid to be alone? You won't be alone if what you say is true ... Nobody cares. You get them a settlement, some money, some additional benefits, some more rights - they don't give a shit. They're not happy. They complain, yet they won't contribute any effort or interest to do anything about it ... You start a grievance for them, commit yourself and they back out. Fuck 'em," Henry gave way to his recent bitterness.

"Oh, I don't agree ... I can't. I can't ... You've got to make them see how important the union is," Brenda pleaded.

"Some of them are already grumbling that we sold them out. Let THEM negotiate next time."

"They'll give it all away," Brenda declared.

Henry paused. His voice grew somber. "You're right ... maybe. But damn it, sometimes I feel that I'm negotiating in a void. For whom? If only for myself then I should go somewhere else and get paid for it," he launched his near-honesty off into the blackness of the telephone and then heard her coming back at him in varying directions trying to talk him into staying, not hearing him at all. He ended the conversation quickly, offering new found optimism and went back to staring across the room.

ARTICLE 10 Climax

They spent the day preparing for the ratification meeting. What seemed like great hopes in their last session with the Fact Finder now emerged into weak wishes, riddled with doubt.

The three of them, separately, began to feel misery. Brenda talking among her contacts in the communications committee lost her self-assured confidence. She talked about the binding arbitration the union won and the concept of justice it may allow and received blank stares from her people. "Yes, but how much money did we get?" They asked. "Listen, where did I come out on the new wage and salary structure?" They asked singly, almost leering.

She optimistically spoke about the better language in the contract and began to hear rumors of the sell-out of the union negotiating team. Her new-found pessimism reached near panic. "You aren't telling us all of it," one or two protested.

She caught Henry on the run through her area and first unloaded all her anxieties on him and then proposed new solutions. "I think we should tell them everything. Let them decide by secret ballot so nobody feels pressured into accepting this. We should be objective about this thing..."

Henry glared at her. He had also spent the day covering the same ground with a larger number of people. When they pressed him he lashed back curtly telling them to wait till the meeting. When they inquired about how they fared personally he embarrassed them with kidding comments about their own greed. If they didn't know what 'binding arbitration' was he ignored them angrily or thrust his old campaign literature or union memorandums into their hands, "Didn't you read this stuff?" --or "Why weren't you at the last meeting?"

Now Brenda added some more hesitancy to the dish being served. He was approaching impatient fury. "BULLSHIT! For a lousy year we told them what the hell we were after, It was on my campaign platform. The only details they want is how it affects them as individuals; those details we WONT give out." Henry said emphatically.

"But they're complaining about..."

"They are always complaining. Where have they been all year? Suddenly they smell money and now they're all out of the woodwork. I have been open about what issues the union wanted. Telling the newspapers, the membership, EVERYBODY! Now we tell them what we got real dramatic-like and sell it to them. Build the enthusiasm. -----I've got people lined up to make the motion to ratify and to second. We take a fast hand vote and finish the show," Henry argued.

"NO! We won't force it down their throats ... A secret ballot, with plenty of open discussion beforehand." Her nostrils were quivering.

Henry's tongue got thick. All of his well thought logic shrunk into simple half thoughts and banzai charges that betrayed him. "Shove it down they're fucking throats. If they don't like it, fuck 'em!"

"NO! NO! NO!" She shouted.

"All right, I didn't mean that." He relented and stood still a moment letting her talk, not listening just waiting for his powers of speech to return.

"Listen," he interrupted. "Yes, we shall present the package ... but we must present it in the best light or else we are guilty of an unfair labor practice. We can not do a secret ballot and here's why. You think people are complaining now, wait till after a secret ballot. They'll claim it was rigged. They'll go around asking each other, 'Did you vote...' others will say, 'no' if it turns OUT to be an unpopular settlement. So they say to themselves everybody I talked to voted no, therefore... Show of hands out in the open. Nobody can claim it was rigged besides how can we arrange a ballot in three hours?"

"We can do it..." she prattled on.

"Do you like the settlement? Is it a fair deal?" Henry asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"If they don't like it or understand it are you prepared to go to jail for them? Or pay a fine? Will they back you up? If this doesn't go off that's it.... it's out. After a year we've

had it. There are no more avenues."

"If I have to I will," she said defiantly.

I don't think I will.

Henry waved and stormed off looking for Jim.

"Don't get so mad," she called after him.

*

Jim had isolated himself in a small storage room off the passageways in the basement. He was working on two separate presentations for the ratification meeting.

Henry, half-bewildered, shared the refuge waiting for Jim to make up his mind over which presentation to use.

"This one, we just tell them all we know... and my line is 'NOW IS THE TIME TO DECIDE' ...then, uh..."

"Davenport." Henry reminded him.

"Davenport says, 'I make a motion ...' and then..."

"Michael seconds."

"Michael? I don't remember..."

"Michael or Johnson, my people." Henry said proudly.

"OK.... Should we open the floor for discussion?" Jim asked.

"Not if we can help it. Let's run right to the vote ... If they catch us we just open the floor and see what happens.... If they don't like it we're fucked," Henry said.

"I know..." Jim admitted.

They were silent.

"I think we should give them the positive sell and then let them discuss it... only keep a handle on it... say one minute per question so we don't bog down..." Jim offered.

Henry shrugged, "Do it the other way first and if things go bad, let me take it. Now ... Where are my lines ... this is my glory ride down the tubes," Henry confided.

*

At four o'clock the membership began to collect slowly in the Institution's cafeteria. Henry nervously ran from the small platform-stage to the back of the room checking on things. He talked briefly to Davenport and Michael uncontrollably shutting them off as people as he mechanically checked the parts they were to play. "Sure" they told him, "I

got it." --And he buzzed off smiling deafly at what ever joking comments they might have offered. He greeted Elliott Kirch semi-warmly and seated him on the stage away from the lectern and microphone.

Finally Jim called the meeting to order and was greeted enthusiastically as he ran through his opening lines, losing his place only once. Next up was Henry greeted by silence but his lines were sharp and forceful as if he were campaigning for Chancellor. He drew laughs for his punch lines and applause for his enthusiasm lines. Next up was Jim again. Beginning his new set of lines on the ebb of Henry's applause he spoke with more determination and stilted his speech with more immediacy like Henry's. They had orchestrated the last few minutes well.

Henry had presented the positive points to the settlement and Jim had eagerly checked them off on selected protest signs used in previous demonstrations that now lined the stage. ('Binding Arbitration' did not get a big hand).

Jim pulled through the last winding curve on his downhill run "Now is the TIME TO DECIDE..." Jim's words clear and inspiring hung momentarily in the still, hushed air.

Davenport, nervously tugging his mustache announced, "I make a motion that we ratify this settlement as a basis for our next contract."

Johnson and Michael, both strangely sober and somber, looked at one another. Johnson shrugged and Michael, his face flushed and heart pounding yelled out, "I second the motion," surprised by the enormity of his own voice amid several hundred people.

Jim looked to his left meeting Brenda's frightened eyes and Elliot Kirch's nervous expression. Henry sitting a foot away smiled and lifted his eye brows, "Try it Jimmy, " he whispered.

Jim nodded gravely, "All THOSE IN FAVOR, SAY I mean, RAISE THEIR RIGHT HAND..."

For a second nothing but Jim and Henry's hand in the air. They looked at each other fleetingly, saying in their eyes, 'Oh well, two dead ducks.' Then in an eye-blink a hundred, then a hundred and fifty, then a hundred and seventy hands rose, then a hundred and...then a voice from the back of the large room, a word at first inaudible. What was it?

"DISCUSSION." It became clearer above the hum of excitement in everyone's ears.

"I said DISCUSSION! ... A motion is on the floor ... DISCUSSION!" It was Hogarth angrily pounding his chair arm, "DISCUSSION!"

Rammer walked into the room and asked someone, "What's going on?"

"Discussion," The cry was thrown out like an invisible volleyball being punched from here to there among the crowd. Then a hundred conversations broke out.

Henry shrugged, "Well, almost..." He said holding his hand over the microphone.

Elliot Kirch stood and maneuvered to the microphone. He quieted everyone down for a few minutes and answered several questions about the settlement before getting backed into a corner by something Hogarth demanded. Then Kirch began to retreat.

Henry very resigned and secure at the moment felt a loathing for Hogarth and then amusement. - *I can't blame him for doing what I would have done had the situation been reversed.*

Kirch began to flounder, They distrusted him more than Jim or Henry because he was a smooth talking outsider. He was smooth but not smooth enough to handle several hundred people. When he verbally dealt with one person another jumped in and twisted his argument into oatmeal.

"I never said that..." Kirch defended, beads of perspiration gathering on his forehead.

Brenda tugged Henry's sleeve, "Can I say something?"

"Sure," Henry agreed happily, watching the confusion as Kirch lost the audience.

Brenda spoke briefly and idealistically to the thirty or so people who listened to her in unconvinced silence.

The meeting was dissolving into chaos or worse. Henry took the microphone.

"ALL RIGHT! LISTEN!" He went into a short speech that brought quiet back to the cafeteria and went on to outline simply and positively the basis of the settlement, including money. He shot down questions almost from the hip, easily and brusquely. When he got stuck Jim baled him out and Kirch, recovered, dealt with questions that Jim or Henry didn't hear.

As simple as they made it, many people did not understand much of the settlement. But Hogarth, sitting in studious silence, did. When he made a comment it was a leading one. - One that Henry could easily seize upon and use to help sell the proposed settlement.

Hogarth realizing the package was good for him was now sold and helping them. Slowly it began to turn around. The hours had sped by, Henry again took the spotlight with the microphone. "This is it, folks, we take it, or guess what?" He said to a hushed, confused crowd. Only a few were smirking over his performance.

"We've negotiated for a year now. After Fact Finding it's over. It's STRIKE or RATIFY. Let's decide now."

Kirch threw in one more comment about the integrity of the negotiating team and Jim, on cue took the microphone. "There was a motion and a second All those in favor raise their ..."

It was unanimous.

Henry, seizing the last word, took the microphone back. "How about a show of appreciation for your negotiators." He gestured to Jim, Brenda, Elliot Kirch and

MaryEllen their recording secretary. A round of applause went up for Henry too, which embarrassed him. They were almost there...

The big room dissolved into small retreating conversations as people filed out. Davenport and Michael shook Henry's hand and spoke to him though they couldn't reach him behind his dizzy eyes and grinning leer. He buzzed around the stage talking briefly to people that stopped by. Alone for a second he glanced around. Jim was immersed with several of his friends, everyone else seemed headed away. Henry, as the Henry of old, began to wander toward the exit.

"Well they accepted it," Brenda said as he passed her.

"Yup...boy I could use a drink," he said idly.

"Me too." She looked at him.

He, nodding his head, projected his thoughts twenty feet in a hundred directions, but avoided her thoughts. "Well, we did it... see you tomorrow," he said to her and bound out of the large room heading home quickly before a sense of himself descended to plague and question him.

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The chaos of the ratification meeting was still pounding into Henry's headache as he drove home. *How did I do? I think I was good; I thought I was persuasive... Damn it! Did I mislead them to sell the fucking contract or is it the best deal they could get?*

It's done ... Yet Kranster could still try and screw us, using junk language when we put together the written contract itself... Shit.

What I did, or may have done; is to be a salesman ... They asked all kinds of intricate questions...and bought it anyway, maybe out of weariness, many of them didn't understand all of it. So, Jim was right, Brenda half right, tell them. They applauded at the end. Christ, I must have been dynamic. I feel terrible.

What do I do now? Where do I go from here? I can't do this again.

He drove the car determinedly through the early, quickly-cooling, fall evening. Odd, obsessive thoughts jumped out of his weariness to assault him. (What if he wrecked his car and...) He pulled into his street, growing darker in the coming shade of dusk and gunned the car harshly into the gravel driveway of his new, old-house. His emotional stability was whirling around tilt. Tired, self-obsessed fury and depression wound through him. He could cry, he could sulk, he could punch something. His mind was locked onto the work that still remained.

Stepping out of the car he spotted a small patch of yellow on the darkening green of the lawn. He paused. What was it? He gingerly approached the streaky patch and smiled in innocent, simple delight. He surveyed the block. It was shaded. The streak was the last patch of sun peeking from behind a solid bank of trees. It was the last ray of sunlight for the day. Henry feeling a buoyant hope and satisfaction, even happiness, trudged slowly

into the yellow streak and kneeled to catch the vision of the sinking sun. He grinned.

EPILOGUE

As quickly as Jim had decided to leave the Institution he changed his mind and decided to stay. After turbulent discussions across a secluded cafeteria table, usually about sex and similar relationships, Henry and Jim would touch upon the future of the Institution and the union with or without them. Left unsaid, Jim could not envision either without him. Henry was eager to.

The union elections were coming up. Henry knew it because paranoid reminders began cropping up. An unsigned leaflet accusing Henry, Jim and BRENDA of selling out the union to Martin Kranster and the Institution was found purposefully discarded on Henry's desk.

So it begins again.

As the weeks unfolded, interest in union activities grew. A former protégé of Brenda's (the Nurse) began spreading tales among the custodial staff and cafeteria workers that Henry was an elitist who had insulted them among the highest counsels of the Institution. Brenda was mentioned as an accomplice. The story of Henry's confrontation with Ellen's friend's supervisor was circulating again, somewhat changed in structure; and the thin, hunched-over woman who worked near the source of such rumors began giving both Henry and **Brenda** evil looks if she passed either on the Institution's walkways.

*

Jim and Henry at Henry's desk; Henry talking.

"Here it is all over again," Henry waved his arms to encompass the universe, "Election time and interest grows ... We must be doing something right. If people thought we were powerless or lacking in the illusion of power they wouldn't be campaigning so fiercely for our jobs."

Jim grunted.

"I wonder how Brenda's taking this ... being named as a co-conspirator?" Henry asked. "Those originally were her tactics..." He added.

"And Bessie (The Nurse) learned it from her," Jim said idly, scratching his chin and looking at the ceiling.

"Marc used to say, 'I love it, I love it!' We drown them in newsletters and 'they don't know what's going on.' The Professional's Association hasn't even gotten a settlement yet. And we brought in a showcase contract. Tuition Reimbursement through the Master's Degree. People complain about their jobs and I tell them to go to school and get out of here to get a better job..." Henry ranted. "Now this gossip about conspiracies." Henry related bitterly. Jim was quiet and Henry said nothing further. There was silence.

"I'm listening." Jim coached.

Henry continued, "That Nurse is a fucking paranoid ... I know, I handled a grievance for her."

"I've handled three!" Jim said.

"She thinks everybody is out to get her and she's so nasty to everyone she thinks is out to get her, that they ARE out to get her though they're afraid of her. You know what she did?"

"What? " Jim asked.

"Accused Ellen's friend to her supervisor of being psychologically disturbed. The Nurse actually claimed to have somebody evaluating Ellen's friend's behavior at all times..."

Jim laughed. "That's insane."

"She's crazy."

"Why Ellen's friend?" Jim asked.

"Because I went to bat for her.... Actually a senior job's opening up in that department and she wants the job and the supervisor wants to keep Ellen's friend out of it, even though she has seniority - so this is handy.

Henry paused, "I wonder how Brenda's taking this ... being on this end for a change?" He reiterated, enjoying the irony and its sense of justice.

"Not well..." Jim sighed. "She wants to kill..."

"That would hurt rather than help ... She's nuts too. It's funny to be on the same side with Brenda. I wonder if she's using us because she isn't as well known, as we are, in the Institution... And after the election is over..."

"You still leaving?" Jim asked, leaning back in his chair at Henry's desk.

Henry's talking pace slowed.

"We've seen it before," he paused again, "I know what's going to happen. There's nothing new to learn. I can't go through all this again. I have to make a living. I have tape on my cracked storm windows. 'Democracy,' Gossip, Bullshit... Feeling good after a grievance, or bad, just doesn't change reality for me. I need a real job. I can't deal with the whimsy of fate here. If I lost an election I could become jackal's bait for Toni or Mrs. Grey should she take another disliking to me. I can never get a promotion, I stepped on too many toes."

"The present election is shaping up over me because the Nurse hates me probably because of what Brenda once told her and then forgot herself; and the Nurse hates almost everybody," Henry added.

"She may be getting front money from another union for the election." Jim said.

Henry shrugged. "Yeah Brenda said that too. Maybe. A new ingredient introduced. It changes nothing. Fuck all of them, Brenda included."

"But I'm stuck with her." Jim said.

"Why?"

"Because she's all that's left."

"Why stay?"

"Who else is there?"

"Brenda," Henry said.

"She can't handle it and she knows it. She doesn't want to..."

"Bullshit! She'll handle it through you, anyway." Henry said forcefully feeling resentment.

"I gotta go," Jim swung himself off the chair.

"Jim..." Henry said.

Jim acknowledged Henry.

"You're wasting yourself here. Really."

**

Henry and Brenda in a dim hallway of the Institution. Brenda talking. "I hate that bitch. You know what she's doing to the union. --What she's saying about us and the contract. She doesn't care about the union..."

Henry wagged his head, happily.

"She's an administration plant to destroy the union," Brenda added.

Henry stopped wagging his head. Brenda's dark eyes glowed in sexual delight up toward Henry. Henry steadied himself and moved out of the range of her hot, baloney-breath.

"I'd like to set her up. Prove she's got management money. Fix her." Brenda paused near tears.

"Oh, that's not very DEMO-CRAT-IC. You know democracy builds unions," Henry chided.

"Democratic? This isn't building our union it's tearing it apart... When we campaigned last year we were positive for the union, not negative.

Oh, you are something!

"I'd like to..." Brenda twisted her hands. The words, 'kill her' were not explicitly said but

Henry nodded in satisfaction.

"They say we don't communicate. We do!" Brenda cried.

"Don't worry, they say that every year." Henry reassured. *As a matter of fact that's your worn out slogan. This new bunch isn't very creative.*

"How will we save the union?" She asked, ending her crying.

*

Even George Lyndon showed up at Henry's desk. Instead of blowing up, Henry treated him commodiously and soon George was smiling and talking glibly, "This new group is certainly counter-revolutionarily," he offered.

"Yes they are! Putting self-interest above the meaning of the union," Henry volunteered eagerly.

George nodded with glee. "Uh one thing...I know **your** organization is pretty tight..."

What organization?

"But they're saying that you're an elitist..." George continued.

Who's they ... the four people in your area? Funny, YOU told them that last year. "Oh?" Henry asked.

"If I were you I'd counteract that," George advised.

"Well ... You're right, but I've been talking to a lot of people too..." *Davenport.* "It's not that bad a problem," Henry in all his wisdom counseled.

George nodded. "I hope not. By the way ... What position do you think I should run for?" George asked.

Oh. Want a little support? Henry nodded thoughtfully at his new ally George Lyndon.

To complicate things, at home, Ellen driven berserk by the baby and all his instinctive demands turned occasionally very bitter and shrewish.

Henry driven by more forces from more directions than he could effectively catalog disappeared from the Institution and via aid from Marc reappeared dramatically in the business world.

Unfortunately, Henry couldn't just skim through life in broad strokes laughing cleverly and enjoying with gusto. He always carried his greatest parts, or worse, his imagined greater parts in hidden reserve like small pockets of clutter and conflicting self esteems; far out of sight and difficult to summon. The new question in his life asked whether the move from negotiator-persuader to business (to seller of failing perceptions) was healthy

or morally demeaning or was it really a move at all; was he kidding himself?

And yet, even gone he remained. In dark nights and early mornings before dawn his brain watched him moving through the last unsuccessful campaign, roaming the Institution's byways in search of power-ploys, votes and himself. Hinting and haunting reminders of never final negotiations.

Spring 1976 - Sept. 24, 1977

Second Draft begun December 1976

Post Script:

Henry in his uncertain, new role as a sales executive (far across the river) accepted a temporary assignment leading weekend seminars at the Institution. On one Saturday he intercepted a shocked Toni returning from sabbatical, toting armloads of junk, with joking pronouncements of having taken over Mrs. Grey's position. (Toni looked faint).

*

Time had gone by and a new round of negotiations visited the Institution. A Staff negotiating team dominated by Brenda was jailed for failing to obey an injunction against their strike. George Lyndon manned the picket line that, after much internal debate, Henry crossed. Months later an Administration counter-action against the Professional's Association led to an investigation of several members. Toni's credentials were exposed as fraudulent and he was dismissed. Marshal divorced from his second wife. It was later rumored that Jim, despite his arrest, had applied to law school. Michael quit drinking and married at least twice. Mrs. Grey retired.



Edited September - October 1999

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