

FOUR STORIES

HE LOVES



AND

SHE LOVES

JERRY KATZ

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EUCALYPTUS BOOKS
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he sits on the bed, black t- shirt and shorts, face in his hands. she stops dressing and stands next to him wearing an open lemon cardigan over a not yet buttoned, braided white cotton blouse, otherwise naked. "I know I do this to arouse you." "isn't that what nice girls are for?," looking up at her she moves very close to him, and resting one hand on his head, nail polish an opaque ocean blue, presses her muff against his lips until hand, groping her breast, he eats her, relaxing the tie-up behind his ears, experiencing momentary relief – erotic ecstasy giddily mixed with warm colors. he undresses, lays backwards. she gets on the bed and lays down beside him. breathing (literally) in her aura, her sensual presence filling his space, he slowly rolls on top of her (prior to `kissing scene' in *on the waterfront* with Marlon Brando, director Kazan urged a hesitant Eva Marie Saint to `think of your husband'). "I'm married," she mutters, almost inaudibly, as he sinks into her, and they necessarily fuck absorbed in deliberate, unhurried, thoughtful, movement her utterance consciously, reverberating in her head, before ending in an erotic, semi-consumed rush.

sex is easy when one looks good – salaciously sensual face, opaquely reflective hazel eyes, enticing flesh, and thick, straight, natural blonde hair, scissor cut sensuously at the lower neck line. but while turned on by the arousal she elicits, she's not completely satisfied by it.

he stands and lifts her up against his chest. "finish me off," her voice slurs, sharply biting the lobe of his ear, as he lowers her onto him, and arms hugging each other, they quietly but fervently move. when they're done, he eases her off of him;

and with a sigh, after kissing him, gratefully, she continues to dress, the after image of her brightly colored sweater, soft open blouse and breasts, her naked snatch and bare bottom, now burned in his brain. but what of her image of him? TV ad groomed short dark hair and sideburns, appetent, dark eyed gets what he wants look, medium facial/ body hair, and a smooth, lightly muscled, well-proportioned physique and genitals, which when she saw naked for the first time, she was surprised at the extent it had momentarily gotten her almost unmanageably aroused, and she thinks, while quite relieved now they've finally done it, she's going to stop provoking his response unless he starts showing more interest in her other than that, for lack of a better way to put it, to him, she's just a pretty piece of ass, which, oddly, phrased differently, is much what he is to her. but submission seems to be in her DNA – provoke and then submit to the arousal the provocation has raised. and it was good enough to satisfy her physically. enough that the still remaining mental and emotional needs remain hidden.

or does it really matter? the charge that went through her when he rolled onto her, and at the very moment she said, "I'm married," they fucked. but he has been warm and affectionate. the passion and tenderness he'd given her that preceded this, that aroused her, she's never really sought, nor enabled, from her husband, who very well may have had it to give her. and she suspects if the situation was reversed, the outcome would be the same. but she still wants her husband to know just how much she's enjoyed becoming involved in an amorous relationship with, and then fucking, freely and pleasurably, another man, and that marriage if it's primarily

based on desire, is silly, and doomed to fail, though desire, it would seem, essential to procreation, is, generally, what brings partners together. so she's a slut. and she's aroused by the thought, but clearly aware of the negative trajectory of that, does not intend to continue to be a slut much longer.

with the dawn of the next day, alone for a while, she hopes to, although no longer stay married, resume a functioning relationship with her husband. most of all she wants to help him regain some power. he wasn't always this way, she knows, bare-boned and often resentful. he was once part of a bohemian intellectual scene, passionate, literate, at times a bit pretentious – two of his sociology professors offered to sponsor him for a Woodrow Wilson, without even knowing his grade average, partly because of his style – their eye contact in class during lectures, and the suave, dapper way he dressed. maybe they were just attracted to him.

but when he simultaneously began smoking pot and becoming part of the hip underground, seriously, to the extent he was up all night, literally stoned, every night, for the better part of a decade, it became his meditation and catalyst to vision – he changed physically as well as mentally, to the extent of relinquishing the coded language of the academic, which had, at least in part, sustained his previous sense of self – those nights and early mornings were the happiest moments of his life, though insulated from everything else, and after, as well, a previous brief excursion with pop insouciance, he was forced to reject the we-ness of any group or movement as mostly collusion in behalf of self-interest.

some of his bitterness, she senses, is towards his former wife, who he's described to her, somewhat in jest, as, *the vagabond who just walked out the door, standing in the clothes that he once wore*. his real problem, however, she's sure, has little to do with his former wife or anyone else. though he finds considerable fulfillment in his art, which he does 24/7, he otherwise has nothing to do, partly because there's no social outlet for him to publicly share his work, due to his lack of meaningful engagement with others. he has even said to her, "any artist's, poet's, writer's, musician's, etc., success, is the result of social activity, even the so-called outsiders, have advocates."— that and perhaps a resultant paranoia in which his actions tend to network in reverse. but despite his efforts to gain recognition and appreciation, there's been documented attempts to shut him out, partly because of past power struggles, and partly because of the explicitness of some of his work. ironically, he abdicated social behavior to be an artist.

he was lonely. he needed help. and she found him. it was the way he held her, and she knew she loved him, and knew the way he held her was love, and that she didn't need anything else, or so she thought.

she doesn't want inertia or resentment to undermine her intent, and has the novel idea to reveal both her 'infidelity' and her resolve, while she and her husband are having sex — rather than feeling apprehensive the idea excites her, and, shortly, when they're together, somewhat indolently lounging in the bedroom, half dressed, pretty much as she'd been the afternoon when she finally had sex with her soon to be

erstwhile lover, briskly combing her hair, making static, clicking sounds, while naked from the waist down, their eyes sharply lock in a hot exchange. he hastily removes his clothes and their mouths mash, before falling onto the bed. they fuck energetically, her fingers stroking his face, neck, and hair, as she, sparing little detail, tells him of her affair, breathlessly, but engagingly cool and seductive, whilst in rhythm with their intense movement, their fucking morphing into screwing (etymology of the verb, implying an accelerated twisting motion), and at the apex of their simultaneous releases with satisfied sighs, she wraps her legs, luxuriantly, cozily, around him.

he listens quietly, even politely, their mutual satisfaction at the sex they've just had, the modifier, and while his response is, predictably, not completely what she'd been hoping for, he agrees to end the marriage, yet proceed with the relationship, leaving it up in the air whether they continue living together, as they equally share all expenses. this makes her momentarily very happy, and reinforces her knowledge that love, while not opposed to, is something other than sex.

some residue remains, of course, and when they once again become horny enough to reengage, she, teasingly throwing her arms around his neck, neither waiting to undress, he does her on the floor, like she's a naughty little girl in need of a lesson. she eagerly loses herself in shame and lust, but resists his attempt to fuck her anally, which in this instance she sees, correctly, as retribution.

when she tells her lover of her decision to continue her

relationship with her husband, though ending the marriage, he wishes her well, and concurs to end the affair, which is no loss to him as, essentially, he got what he wanted.

being a slut doesn't abate as quickly as she'd supposed, however. in a culture where every day activity has become increasingly eroticized, her looks and work as a sometime model, sometime production assistant at a movie studio located in a downtown L.A. loft, makes having liaisons often and easy. if a young lady crosses her legs as an adjustment, and then stares, this obviously doesn't mean it's an invitation for genital penetration, or that she's asking to be eaten, though it's often taken that way. but it's not until she accidentally witnesses a sexy, provocative, promiscuous, dark haired colleague, bare down to only her black bra, being gang fucked, apparently consensually (but who knows?), in an adjunct office, by a small group of men and one woman, including a young producer she'd recently shacked up with in an old cheaply renovated hotel room, east of Main (just for the atmosphere), that she's seen enough to turn her herself away from, at least momentarily, having more gratuitous sex.

they both covertly acknowledge, though they'd like it to be otherwise, theirs is a relationship inadvertently restricted by the male dominant mores Judith Butler claims is true of all heterosexual relationships. but if male dominance, as she says, is a universal fact, which he knows it is, isn't she, in this, conceding gender, something she denies, as a fact? he agrees with her that any hard and fast definition of gender, is too restrictive and public interest in (and surprising acceptance of) the recent 'sex change' outing of a celebrity, shows

how much people are thinking about that. but to deny defining characteristics just because they're more diverse and complex than what has been allowed, he thinks is a mistake. Jerry does understand, however it can be related, that sex and gender are not the same. in his book, Words And Images (1997) he wrote, *the feminine component in the male is not necessarily homosexual. the masculine component in the female is not necessarily lesbian. the so-called sexually normal person is androgynous. biomorphic (organic) is neither a gender nor a sexual orientation....I'm willing explore the man in the woman, the woman in myself.. and, the issue is not the sexual fantasy. the issue is the physical need which generates it. sex is always genital. once you've had an orgasm, whatever the nature of the fantasy, it ceases.*

"Jerry, will you come over here and fasten my bra?" turned on, of course, by generically submissive female commands, requesting, in fact, he moves to her, he stands behind her. fingers sensitive and nimble hook her up. he lingers, intoxicated by the perfume on her neck, and buries his face in her hair. yes, it's all a performance, including the actual imagery, but does that make it unacceptable or wrong? she pulls on a cerulean blue flowered print dress, then asks him to zip up the back, before slipping her feet into black heels, and they're off to their destination.

almost anything unrelentingly personal and specific is an expression of defiance against the always inhibiting status quo, but to believe that through the necessary dynamic of change, any new structure, i.e., new status quo, would inevitably be meaningfully less restrictive, is not to comprehend the restrictive nature of forms....of any norm.

if their relationship is sexist (he's of the opinion that anything erotic is porn), it's also tender and passionate. is she really less free to create an identity than he, if identity is not based on fact? if society and language is structured in such a way as to mandate and restrict options, then, as neither of them are responsible for having created the structure, although the structure is a dynamic everyone participates in, then is he not, given his values, as much a recipient of the restrictions as she? is her attractiveness to him, almost an obsession at times, just the reflection of the wish fulfillment of men, or does it extend from something more intuitive, maternal – *you have what I lack myself, and now I even have to scratch my back myself*, to quote lyricist Lorenz Hart – an idea feminists, in general, debunk, as merely male fantasy, and, of course, to the paranoid mind, a means of control?

if this is true then why go on with this story? “onward” (as his former wife advised), anyway!

when they arrive at the downtown loft to attend rushes of a new film, the place is already pretty boozed and doped up, and they both quickly get very high, which they balance out by sampling grape leave wrapped hors d'oeuvres and toothpick speared vegan `meatballs'. the pre-screening entertainment begins with a couple doing a parody on the gender specific clichés of old standards, she, singing the 1932 ode to the suffering working-class housewife (Sinatra version 1945), Try A Little Tenderness, followed by A Fellow Needs A Girl, he, I'm Just A Girl Who Can't Say No, and concluding with the Cole Porter, via Mary Martin, show stopper, My Heart Belongs Daddy, the reversal of roles, delighting the crowd, including Catherine, but Jerry thinks responses like this are

mere cover-ups, and do nothing to alter the paradigm. Jerry sees the standard song, along with jazz, as one of the most important cultural contributions, and truly reflective of urban America prior to the residency of rock. yes, songs written by men, at least overtly, alluding to almost exclusively heterosexual relationships within a binary definition of gender. they are, however, often unisex in their frequent interchangeability; thus, The Boy Next Door becomes The Girl Next Door, according to the persuasion, shall we say, of the singer/musician, even if it isn't sung. must genuine works of art like the Stan Getz/Gary Burton rendering of Little Girl Blue be relegated to the trash bin because of political correctness? re ballads, *'you've got to kick the shit out of them'*, artist George Herms once said to Jerry. Catherine, a Southern girl from Virginia, still responds to, and is more a product of, sexist, white rock. she's currently become interested, however, in the, mostly Black and Latino, electronic re-mix scene in L.A., which she's been exposed to through her job, because it's more interesting, subtle, and sexual. Jerry listens to some of the music too, more for the mixes than the beats. he likes Flying Lotus whose BBC Essential Mix, he thinks is just that, and has his album, *Cosmogramma*. but his culture is, at least was, jazz, not rock, nor is it now the various hip hop transmutations. he's been exposed to that culture, however, because of his photography, which for almost twenty years now, has included a lot of graffiti.

Catherine, who is also a writer, had returned to school, completing her Masters, and after signing with an agent has successfully negotiated a book deal for her debut novel with the subsidiary division of a major publisher. she wishes

she could be more help to Jerry in that respect, who has self-published a number of books, including a recent novel, *Forever Anna* (title is a spinoff on the 40s romance novel, *Forever Amber*), but the sexually graphic content of his fiction, along with a point of view that may be easily misconstrued, and his refusal to conform to a standard writing format, virtually precludes any consideration by a traditional publisher. if one were to see Catherine, one would more expect her day jobs than that she is a writer. fortunately, it's in her writing that she's able to cope with, explore, but not quite resolve, this duality. "you don't live in Brooklyn?," Jerry chides. "of course not." "then how did you get the book deal?" "I slept with the right person." "lucky fellow." "it wasn't a he."

"caring about people instead of desiring them – that's a thought I don't usually have, but one I'm more frequently having," Jerry says, turning to Catherine as they exit the 10 freeway at Cloverfield, and proceed north one block to 26th, a shaft of blinding late sunlight on her face and unprotected eyes. "why do you say that, Jerry?" "I guess for the first time I'm appreciating the selfishness of desire." she doesn't reply, but supposes his remark may have had something to do with a polite and discreet conversation between she, Jerry, and several very young black remix artists at the event they attended, who were openly and neutrally friendly to the both of them. while there was no pointedly sexual innuendo, Jerry is always made aware of Catherine's attractiveness to others, and the fact that he's considerably older than she. earlier in the day, while driving on Cloverfield, headed towards the freeway, as they passed the Department. of Motor Vehicles

on Colorado, he pointed to their empty parking lot and said, "this is where I gave Fiona Apple driving lessons," and she laughed, sure that he was joking, but wondered why.

marriage is a legal document. it's dissolution requires a petitioner and respondent. a Judgment of Nullity has been awarded to Catherine Laurel Lambeth as petitioner, from Gerald Lewis Katz, the respondent, entered in Los Angeles County Superior Court, on June 15, 2015.

that 'love has no sexual orientation' seems to be the new truism. no progressive vocabulary is complete without it. Jerry wonders if 'desire has no sexual orientation' wouldn't be more honest. an idealization of sexual choices seems to always be the tactic when political or social gain (image) is the issue. he credits Butler for not copping out to that... and Catherine, for that matter, who doesn't downplay her need for pleasure.

Jerry, however, is more and more beginning to realize how much his (compulsive?) heterosexuality is out of step with the times. can a heterosexual love affair still be topical when even persons much more conservative than he, though admittedly quite younger, are willing to cross the line? when millionaire actors and actresses declare themselves to be 'gender fluid' (perhaps gender affluent would be more accurate), or dabble in pansexuality so as not to feel type-cast? and where does that leave those who can't help being homosexual or lesbian, or anything else? numbers seem to indicate women are more apt to be bi-sexual than men, or at least they seem to be more willing to say they are, because

the mother is the love source – it doesn't matter whether the gender is male, female, or negotiable. Jerry finds bisexual women frequently attractive, in fact it is a factor that arouses him – his next door neighbor says, rather disdainfully, "sure, straights like nothing better than to see two women going at it." he ponders how much it has to do with that he feels, and is, an outsider, and that he's being cut off from the more sexually sophisticated social interaction he'd naturally be drawn to, as a result.

he longs to live again in the old way – to sit on the lawn in the shade of a tree, several hours before dusk, on a summer afternoon, in Washington Square Park, where he once hung out with a girl who was taking writing courses in the literature dept. at NYU, recalling the years of the distant past when the Grove Press bookstore was on 7th Avenue a couple blocks from where he lived, and he was reading Genet, Sartre, Ginsberg, Henry Miller, Kerouac, and Bowles; when lamplight and shadow still held mystery after a fruitlessly unrewarding day.

"is this to be a productive day or am I going to 'bequeath' my 'spring passion to the nightjar'? " "what do you mean by that, Jerry?" "it's from The Patterned Lute, by Tang poet Li Shang-Yin. I didn't mean it, literally. I just meant how much I'm deterred by my sexual obsessions." "unless sex is the point." "well, it's not the point right now." Catherine walks up to Jerry. she coquettishly stares into his eyes, her scent seeping into his pores. his penis hardens. they go to the bedroom and spend the rest of the morning there. when they emerge they're both too tired to go out.

“go for it, Jerry. I know she has a big crush on you.” “it’s probably because of my writing, my image.” “I think it’s more than that.” “there’s also the question of our age difference, Tao.” “what’s the question, Jerry?”

with her in the evening after her class, down the ramp outside the brick building, lights on them, Acer Zen Book UX305 tucked under her arm, long dark hair, wearing a warm black coat, they stop, suddenly kiss for the first time, carefully, slowly, then cascading hungrily, immersed in passion, holding hands as they walk across the well-lit campus lawn. “time to tighten up,” said LeRoi Jones turned skeptical revolutionary Amiri Baraka referring to lovers with eyes only for each other.

“Andrea said you’re the best kisser, the best ever, by far.” “she’s only nineteen.” “that’s why she’s in a position to know.” Tao always has a comeback.

things are happening in him he thought were dead, long gone. once again ‘being out’ with someone in the night, who adores him without qualification, opening up, nuance by nuance, a lost universe of intentness, glamour, and meaning, as they walk hand in hand, strategizing to go to the apartment she shares with two other students, to have sex, out in the night where the ambience absorbs the consciousness, making one want to linger. to fully appreciate ones environment, one has to have an involvement to play it against; spontaneous, unplanned, that’s the best way, unexpected, but there has to be something to play it against. when the absence returns, though, as in the ending to Antonioni’s Eclipse, the ambience of projection can swallow one up.

fatigued but exhilarated from the trip and the accelerated activity, after making a careful surveillance, he moves to Andrea's bed and lays back on her mattress, almost as soon as she closes and locks the door of her room. she sits on the bed next to him, playfully leaning forward, letting her hair fall, completely covering his face, then unzips his trousers, and first looking, almost facetiously, into his eyes, lowers her face and, delicately but lustfully, gives him head. she pulls up her dress, and after tugging off his pants and shorts, salaciously settles on him. he feels her up while they fuck. by her sounds, he knows her orgasms are sharp and satisfying, after which she won't relinquish him from her grasp. they spend the rest of the night until first, one, and then the other, of her roommates return, laughing and teasing, having a low-key lovers' conversation. the next day before her classes, the day of the evening he will be doing a reading there, once again demur, like she was before they returned to her apartment, they kiss and make out the entire morning, her face and eyes always intently into his, neither searching nor proposing, but unequivocally there.

"don't be foolish and deny it, Jerry, this is just part of the perks. enjoy." "it's obviously more than that to her, Tao. what happens when our mutual fascination, which is being sustained by the bubble we've created around ourselves, bursts?" "then it's over," Tao replies, grinning slightly. "it's happened to me a number of times, and I see it happening with others all the time." "but that's with people more or less the same age, doing the same things, taking the same drugs, having the same goals, or lack of goals, so it's different." "don't flatter yourself, Jerry, it really isn't, it's the

same." "she mentioned wanting to take MDMA with me." "well?" Jerry shrugs. "I just don't want her to have to suffer a painful loss of innocence. I've fallen for her enough to care." Tao sighs, "you people from the west coast," then nods. "I'm experiencing what I never thought at this late date could ever happen." "give her credit for understanding that, as well, Jerry. take my word she's aware it's an elaborate one night stand. take as full advantage of it as you can, and afterwards you'll still probably be friends." when they leave Tao's pad, after he directs Jerry to the proper subway entrance to get him back to his hotel, his fear kicks in of losing what it is she's opened up for him, and that her image now embodies, something really indescribable, and the quotidian routine that it's taken place in has made it all the more surprising and desirable. but Tao is right. without a deeply profound connection beyond the circumstances, there's no way it can possibly go on, and his prognostications prove pretty accurate, but not before a hot rise and ellipse on his last day and night there, following the reading, culminating nocturnally on a beach, a short subway ride from midtown..

Jerry arrives back in L.A. at the same time Catherine returns from visiting distant relatives in Perth, Australia. she looks beatific to him, eyes sparkling, sporting a healthy skin tone. they arrive at their apartment almost simultaneously, mid-afternoon. Catherine is dressed like an office worker, not the seductive predatory office sex kind displayed in the porn pages, but one who actually works, wearing a light jacket over an open collar avocado blouse, grey skirt and black shoes, her face flushed with the strain of exertion. the aura

of travel is all about her. his heart perceptibly quickens, engaging her presence, a reorientation and strangeness. they are both genuinely happy to see one another, happy neither had to wait for the other, and can unwind together. when he talks about his stay in New York, he describes the responses to his work and the contacts he's made, but omits mention of Andrea. they decide rather than eat dinner out, to drive the mile to Co-opportunity and do a little minor shopping.

Jerry, of course, is extremely interested in what Catherine did, and how things went in Australia, and always in the back of his mind, whether or not she had sex, which as she later revealed, she did – quite a bit. but even with the internet, Perth is a long way, and so her holiday romance ended in pretty much the same way Jerry's did. it also dawns on him for the first time, there were no calls, emails, or texts, between them!

it's late when Andrea calls. Catherine, experiencing jet lag, kisses Jerry goodnight before going to bed early. he and Andrea have a heartfelt and surprisingly pleasant conversation, considering the circumstance. she tells him she's moving out and getting an apartment of her own in Queens. he feels a pang knowing that because of their love making she can no longer be in the same place she was before that.. she tells him she misses him acutely, fighting off an impulse to cry. to console her (and himself) he says he wishes he were there to hold her in his arms, and, yes, fuck her. "I'll get over it," she finally says, before saying, "I love you." "I love you too," Jerry just manages, somewhat hesitatingly, to reply, before she clicks off. Tao was wrong. there's no easy way

out of love. his heart is heavy but he'll get over it, too.

he's grateful he and Catherine have an open relationship. that he doesn't have to live a dual life with her, or she, evidently, with him, is what allows him to be whole. he and she met on line. she was a face book friend of the daughter of an American expatriate scientist who lives, and does research in, Glasgow, Scotland, who was also a face book friend of Jerry's. he looked at her portrait, read a little of her bio, and clicked the add friend box, something he'd never done before, as he's pretty sure they're just auto instigations, nothing to do with the prospective friend's wishes, and she accepted, mostly because she accepts almost all requests. the first thing he noted that he liked, in addition to her allure, was a persistent sense of humor – hardly an e-mail that didn't include some caustic remark, that and some sexy on line chat, also an activity he had never before engaged in, having considered it porno. it soon became apparent they had something in common, and as they both lived in roughly the same area, eventually hooked up. in the sixties Marshall McLuhan and other seers prophesized the death of non-visual language. now things have come pretty much full circle. not all the words or minds that use them are literate, however. Paul observed in Tao Lin's novel, Tai Pei, that he and Erin both agreed to having negative feelings about people who dwell on visual sensations when high on hallucinogens, rather than on people. this seemed a needless dichotomy to Jerry who, at one time, experienced much of the former – but while a conceit bordering on intolerance, it may be partly due to the primacy of the word in electronic interaction. people have become so dependent on processing the written word for

communication, they no longer know how to speak, or even more, listen very well (to anything but music).

as one advances to what is (perhaps, mistakenly) called old age, the inner voice often supersedes external structures. when one listens to music the tones deconstruct from the specific musical form, and exist more abstractly, because, also true of speech and conversation, what may be viewed as cognitive deterioration, may be more an unwillingness to indulge in, or listen to, rationalization which keeps the mind locked. here, the ear also listens more abstractly to accents, texture, rhythm, inflection, etc. the body language of the sounds become elementary fixations to the listener, hindering cognition of the secondary aspect of language, which is the meaning people must pay attention to, in exercising the need to become free of these restrictions. this understanding came to Jerry while listening to the guest responding to the host's commentary or question on a daily public affairs show at a listener supported FM radio station, and he just didn't want to absorb either the guest's thought processes, or her personality. so, in that particular way, he concedes, in some instances, the media can be the message. he also realizes what he and Catherine have is not primarily emotional, nor intellectual, but something more abstract, which is psychological, as well as sexual, and much of the mutual affection they feel for each other comes out of that. it is actually an attempt to penetrate mystery and objectify love. it is odd, or at least ironic, that some feminists, so adamant about intellectual objectification, are so opposed to objectification, if it's biological.

when you say something is just a performance you're saying the deepest part of you is not engaged. if there is a physical object then there is an identity. there is a critical sense behind learned behavior. the form is learned, the impulse is biological. matter can be shaped but it's still matter.

in the sixties, singer Janis Ian, a teenager at the time, scored a big hit with her song, *Society's Child*, about how a young white girl was forced to relinquish a relationship with a young black male because it was condemned by 'society'. the song, more in tune with 30s social realism than the love generation songs of the 60s, was especially lauded by liberals like David Susskind and Leonard Bernstein. the latter had her on his show where she performed the song, building to the phrase, *I can't see you anymore, Johnny*, poignantly half sung, half sobbed. what's interesting, but not discussed, in terms of sexual choice, is when Ian later had lesbian relationships and defined herself as a lesbian, how much did her shift in focus have to do with in the song the girl was forbidden to have a heterosexual love affair with an African-American boy her age? what does this say about the arbitrariness of sexual choice? did she identify to the point of feeling if she couldn't have a heterosexual relationship with whom she wanted, she wouldn't have one at all? or did she feel the attraction towards the African-American boy, something forbidden in the world she grew up in at the time, a step towards her lesbianism, something even more forbidden?

Jerry watches a workout group of young mothers running while pushing their strollers in the morning, and focuses on one ponytailed woman in black tank top and sweats, the skin

on her upper body, and has the feeling of holding her, of being held. it's not just role playing, it's the estrogen.

Oh Wind-up doll, everyone knows/Wind it up and away it goes/It does the things it's taught to do/I guess I'm kind of a wind-up dolly, too Wind me up, I really walk/Wind me up I really talk/Wind me up, and I'll come straight to you Take me home, I'm quite a prize/Wind me up, you'll realize/ Just how much a wind-up doll can do You can see what makes me tick/Little strings and gears/I can show you one more trick /Break my heart, I'll cry real tears Wind me up my dreams will start/Here's a key, unlock my heart/Wind up dolls sometimes get lonely too/Wind me up, I'll fall in love with you these lyrics are from the 1963 song, Wind-Up Doll, sung by Little Peggy March. it was the b-side to her one major hit, I Will Follow Him, and both were very effectively used by Kenneth Anger in scenes from his movie, Scorpio Rising, the former while panning the shop of a macho biker as he peacefully, almost tenderly, worked on his machine. Anger emphasized the ambiguity of gender, as to whom the lyrics were to be identified with, the biker, or the dream-girl he may have been fantasizing, as a toy motorcycle went `round in circles. contrast this to the words *you'll be my fodder, I'll be your reverie*, from the twin girl group with the provocative name, p. s. eliot, in their 2007 song, We'd Never Agree, as a reversal of roles.

Jerry is somewhat going through a crisis re his views of women and the ideas of `femininity' that were formulated his first week in junior high school, when he observed the older girls wearing lipstick and their noticeably sized breasts. he

didn't know what a female genital looked like until sitting on a bench with several other fellows outside the boys' locker room that first semester, a photo was passed around of a young woman (it was said to be someone's sister) sitting with her legs spread, wearing only a sweater. it was very erotic. much more so than what he had conjured up in his mind. and more liberating – knowing freed his imagination. he thinks the terms of his desire was always determined by distance. in a family of four males and one female, his mother, pretty, with a good figure, was the symbol of quiet, cool, sexuality. she didn't, like some mothers, pamper her sons. her sexuality was more subtle, aloof, even repressed, which is why he too often associates sexuality with repression, and love with loss. his first images of sex in real time, before he knew what it was, was glimpses of her cleavage, legs, and nylon hose, when she wore a slip at her dressing room table. his mother was the only woman he'd ever known who'd never worn a pair of pants. in the beginning, it was always pretty, quiet girls, to whom he was mostly attracted, whose silence and self-possession seemed almost intimidating, an expression of contempt and rejection, directed towards him, a tool his mother must have used (if only unconsciously) to counter the yang energy of her domineering husband and three sons. contrast that with the background of his former wife, who as a little girl took baths with her older brother. he still wants to believe in the mystery and power of women (it was that same semester, having just left his house one afternoon, and staring at the sky as he walked down the street, he had this epiphany that *Juliet is the sun*, that the female image, mated to the cosmic universe was the motivating factor in his life, which aside from moment to moment hedonism, was his first

conscious *raison d'être*), not as a fabrication of the male mind, but as with the male, embodied in the mystery of the universe, the mystery of life. as for the mystique surrounding it, he knows one regarding manliness can be equally restrictive, but if being equal requires becoming neuter like some elderly couples who morph into each other, then wearing the obligatory suit jacket and skirt the increasing numbers of female executives, lawyers, academics, and politicians, wear, is a symbol of commitment to the conformity and restrictions set predominately by males – the extension of he to she. is this equality? and, ironically, if the so-called male is changing to becoming more sensitive, pliable, more like women are reputed to be, he'll make that trade, anytime – be rid of that neuter shell supposed to be the man of power. Simone de Beauvoir maintained that existentialism allows the choice for women to change from object, i.e., the other, created in minds of men, to the subject it is alleged men already are. if just culturally based, then what is autonomy? and if autonomy is culturally based (and he doesn't think it is), then, for him, that's good enough. there is an autonomous state which is biological – pre-verbal, pre-conceptual, in which the mind disengages back into the unformed.

Jerry disagrees strongly that love between a man and a woman must embody any particular characteristic, such as a woman's devotion to a man. he thinks discussion of gender definition mostly spurious, and barely addresses what is still the institutional power of men over women, including the structure and meaning of language, which has been the case during the entirety of human history.

dusk, alienation, sexual repression, feelings of longing and loss, all sensitized, coalesce, into beauty, love. *nice work if you can get it* (Monk version, of course). *bewitched, bothered, and bewildered, he loves and she loves*, (sigh), *and to feel in the night the nearness of you* – when one steps outside for the moment, breathing in the cool head-clearing air, white and colored neons blanketing an overcast sky, there are traces of a woman in a man's mind, and one must expect, vice versa. with all the abusive and fraudulent activity one has to endure daily, it's the well-spring of love invoked in a look, a smile, an imperious face, in the subtle invitation of body, that is a saving grace.

Catherine feels, at least at present, not much conflict between her 'looks', including how she's perceived by others, and her inner self. not being in conflict with it does not mean, however, she thinks they are the same. she grew up in an upper middle class section of Charlottesville, the historic (Jefferson, Madison, Monroe) town of, now, 50,000, with a population ratio of about 70 percent white, and about 20 percent black. her father is a liberal physics professor at the nearby University of Virginia, where she attended and got her B.A. in English Literature before moving out of the state. her family's religious affiliation was tempered by the fact her father, a scientist, had little interest in the gospel, although her mother, was active in non-religious church affairs. their attitudes about sex were rather restrictive, however, towards their only daughter, and Catherine's early dating included the presence of a chaperone. Catherine, from the very beginning, was the 'object' of many boys' fantasies, and after learning how to drive, and receiving a modestly priced late model car

as a gift for her sixteenth birthday, her dating became more and more clandestine, sharing less and less with her parents. being too young for punk, too middle class for country, and not inclined towards hip hop, she gravitated to what was left of classic and indie rock – sex drugs and rock and roll, but moderately. she wasn't really into music per se. she had no favorite groups, no crushes on musicians. what she was into was subtle sexual interplay – the nuances of which she got, on a more benign level, from observing the faculty functions of her parents, but there wasn't much of a universe there for her she could relate this to. it was with a high school physics teacher she had her first sex, who seduced her, and the second with a younger boy she played opposite to in a school play, whom she seduced. her parents are both New Englanders, and by the time she'd lived a couple of years in Los Angeles, she'd almost completely lost her southern accent.

asked about early moments related to sex that particularly affected him, Jerry tells Catherine, “one occurred in high school. I was dating a pretty, well liked, girl who was dating other guys as well. the relationship was just there enough that I could think of her as a girlfriend, and I think, even though we weren't 'going steady', she would have thought of me as her boyfriend at the time. one early Saturday morning, we were sitting at a picnic table in that area of a neighborhood park, facing one another, the morning after she'd had a date with a slightly older boy from another school – I always had an apprehensive feeling, during and directly after, when she went on a date with someone else, which would quickly dissipate, as nothing that was out of the ordinary, in my mind, just generally, making out, would transpire, so I was

not expressly prepared when after asking her, 'how did your date go last night?', she replied, 'we screwed.'" a slow smile suffuses Catherine's face and she nods. "my visual recollection of that morning is very strong," Jerry continues, "cool, slightly overcast, the splintery picnic tables and benches, in the shade of the spice scented pepper trees, small piles of leaves on the sandy dirt, cracked red and blue ornamental bulbs from a party the night before precariously hanging from an over-head electrical wire, and her image, sitting opposite me, as clean and clear as if she were there – white button up blouse, a small silver chain around her bare neck, and a just above the knees black skirt, light brunette hair, loosely fastened up with a tortoise shell comb, her brown eyes staring intently, but nonchalantly – I could take a deep breath and it would encapsulate a whole universe in time." "I guess I don't have to ask if you and she had ever made it before that occurred." "that was her first time. it happens that way...frequently, I think." "did you and she go into it?" "not much. the word she used said everything – a sudden pall, like a sucker punch to the gut, and a thrill, simultaneously went through me when she said it. she said she liked it very much, that it was intense, direct, and fulfilling, whereas going 'halfway', wasn't. she said just prior to their having sex they were having a kind of philosophical conversation, the kind two people who don't know each other very well sometimes have, and she asked him, thinking about where they were at and why they were there, 'what does a date mean to you', and he said, truthfully, not particularly coming on to her, 'a piece of ass on a dark night in a parked car'. it was a dark night in a parked car. it was easy after that. she said she had no inclination to avoid it. but when I asked

her if she intended to continue dating him, she said that she'd already turned down his request for a second date. I think she didn't want to be thought of as just a score, and besides, it was his distance, and subsequently her lack of involvement with him, that made the whole thing possible to begin with." "what about you and her, did you continue to date her?" "no. that ended it. she said although she liked me as much as before, she knew it would always be on my mind." "is that true?" "I think that would have depended on the kind of sex we might have had as a result. I would have liked to continue dating her because it added flame to the fire." "but she knew better." "that's right." "and that changed you?" "I stopped taking dating, romance, as seriously after that. the negativity and `gin' feeling nascent in me became more pronounced, but gradually, especially after moving out of the mainstream, it ceased to be an issue." when Catherine, turned on by the story, kisses him with a loving but slightly prurient feeling he's not quite sure he's experienced from her before, they quietly begin making love.

definitions of gender aside, Jerry and Catherine function much as equals. this sometimes lessens the erotic edge between them, more for Catherine whose libido responds to behavior and imagery commonly associated with masculinity, even hyper, if reasonably refined. she's enamored of one of the young remix artists in frequent contact with her, and an impending sexual liaison with him is reaching the point of no return... as far as masculinity goes, to her he is something of a different order, a newer definition of masculinity, perhaps, in which she, for the first time, other than with her second teenage sexual episode, has, subtly, taken the lead. when they

finally culminate their desire, on a warm, breezy, sensually nostalgic evening, outdoors, amongst the soft white and colored lights, after a live mix in a park-like setting in north-east L.A., she acknowledges, as when she decided to terminate the marriage, she's at another crossroads, and concludes the only honest thing to do, although she doubts her relationship with Daniele will go very far, is to leave Jerry. there has to be something new to nourish the soul, a different aura, a different universe, before familiarity once again holds up the mirror image and reveals, basically, the inevitable sameness. the music Daniele and his friends make has pulse and immersion more truly sexual, at least for her, than the grosser, though erotic, music she grew up with, and that served as background for her early sexual explorations.

Jerry is quite upset, when she tells him she had sex with Daniele and thinks they should live separately, especially the latter, as it shows she prefers Daniele to him. yet it's muted with an overlay concerning the identity crisis he's been facing regarding the meaning of gender. he's begun to evolve past the shallow lure of romance. he believes identification is the glue, so to speak, of any relationship, and that sex is mostly just a come on, if he has to, he can now do without. if he ever 'falls in love', It will be with someone he can share more than just sexual attraction, but time is running out. that's the one thing he's surest about – the solipsistic, perhaps masochistic, urge towards oneness, which Catherine is the opposite of, is closing in on him

they are both mellow as they go about facilitating the change. as Catherine already has a place to move to, Jerry, for the

time being, decides to stay put, and even helps them move her belongings to Daniele's rented house in Echo Park. where the next rent money is going to come from is a mystery, as Catherine, lately, has pretty much been supporting him.

when the move is almost complete, Daniele has left, and her car is filled with the last load, they stand together in the now dusk filled three-quarter bare front room, a devastating feeling of loss mutually hits them for the first and last time, especially Catherine, who has been mostly occupied by preparations for her new life. she cries as they kiss goodbye – is this the last manifestation of the female in a male dominant relationship? and why is it that saying goodbye is what most moves him to love? “don't worry about the money, Jerry. if need be, I can still help you out, and Daniele mentioned his intention to use some of your photos,” Catherine says, her refined southern drawl, more pronounced than he can remember at any time since their first few meetings – how the external always seems to return at the critical moment of departure, and he recalls reading the news that day, one of the people running the NASA program responsible for the flyby of the spacecraft that sent back pictures of Pluto, referring to the planet (or planetoid) as “alien beauty,” a phrase he thought was, if generic, still factual, and very beautiful.

when Jerry and Catherine do meet up after a long hiatus, Catherine is quite talkative. “Daniele grew up listening to N.W.A., but he's never been to Compton. he says the only time he was in Watts was on a field trip to the Rodia Towers with his high school class,” she laughs. “but the legacy is hip

hop?" "he admires the early history because of the energy and spontaneity, but he didn't grow up in the Bronx in the 1980s, and the more recent rap scene he thinks is bullshit and exploitive. he said he's a musician. he mixes sounds, including live sounds. you should listen to what he and some of the other remix artists are doing, they're very creative." funny, Jerry thinks, how personal advice always seems to be in the mouth of betrayal. "if he's into sounds he should listen to the work of Robert Ashley," Jerry replies, "nobody had a better ear than Ashley."

Catherine appears to be genuinely happy. he doesn't know why he thinks deep down she still loves him. it's quite possible both is true, he thinks; she's quite happy in her relationship with Daniele, and deep down, she still loves him. is this the devotion women are supposed to have for men Simone de Beauvoir asserts in her 800 page screed, *The Second Sex*? Catherine looks hard at Jerry, appearing to him quite strong and lively. "you should accept who you are, Jerry, an enormously talented, beautiful, person, who has chosen solitude, just as others have chosen freedom, and still others, companionship. it doesn't mean you have to be lonely." this hurts, and he thinks unintentionally unfair. he thinks of the lines from a W H Auden poem; *for the error bred in the bone/of each woman and each man/craves what it cannot have/not universal love/but to be loved alone*. he knows Catherine doesn't think that way, and neither does he.

the beats scene is highly a head scene (pot) and psychedelic, and as cruel timing would have it, something Jerry was once very much into, but was never, until now, particularly

Catherine's cuppa, but through Daniele, has begun to regularly turn on, initiating considerable change in her neurology. Unlike Jerry, however, whose drug experience was extremely inner, involving mostly solitude, Catherine's is extremely social, effecting a noticeable personality shift. – in general, lusting for everything taboo in her repressed background, whereas enhanced consciousness leaves Daniele self-confident, yet modest. marijuana opens one up at the same time it slows one's biological processes down, so in a social situation where there are multi-variables, lessening one's ability to control, the result is frequently to quicken (speed up) as compensation, which can put considerable stress on the nervous system. she's also quicker to make cruel remarks – "you ought to get stoned, Jerry," although quite aware of Jerry's extreme background in that regard, including twenty-five years plus in purgatory as a result, healing and reintegrating his nervous system, while falling out socially. but if there ever came a time when it was really necessary or intimate enough, he would, again.

one thing she and Daniele have in common is no attraction to marriage, let alone having children – so, while energized at the moment, the tension is still the threat that their relationship is as rootless as her relationship with Jerry has been. Jerry, oddly, has found recompense in two photos of Judith Butler (who is married in a long-term lesbian relationship) he's downloaded – one a fetching portrait of her as a little girl (if she never did another thing that would be enough) the other as a young woman, handsome in dark shirt and windbreaker and boy's haircut, calmly, but intently, looking into the camera. in both photos, he's captivated by her face, the

look in her eyes, connecting with something in his nature (a word she evidently rejects) other than his erotic obsessions, inducing in him a quiet but intense introspection.

writing, at least fictionalizing one's stories and that of others, has become painful. rather than functioning somewhat as a catharsis as it once did, it seems to be aggravating the problem, stirring up things he's actually gotten beyond. he feels living and loving are their own rewards. what chance is there for him. they even kiss different, now, though it turns him on. he could, if he wanted. don't give up. or is it don't give it up? he doesn't knock young love, a feeling for sex and beauty, if it's honest, but naïve. often it's exploitive re pop culture. lyrics interesting. hardly call a lot of it even an attempt at music. he's being condescending. wisdom takes time.

it's a freaky, substantially rainy, Saturday afternoon, mid-July, less than a week after Jerry's birthday. he needs to get out, and takes a knit cap and his camera, hoping to find some rainy day shots to his liking. bumper to bumper in a steady downpour, going east on Santa Monica Blvd., he turns on Beverly Blvd., and 2 blocks east of Fairfax enters the Erewhon parking lot, purchases a whole food supplement for men over forty, and decides to go back – no shots, but he's happy he left. rainy day thoughts about Catherine. they never had much in common, except love. it was always an emotional, however affectionate, tug of war between them. she has much more in common with Daniele who she's also closer to in age. even that she's a white southern girl and he's a black northerner, gives them something in common when it comes

to dealing with social justice issues. Daniele, like Catherine, comes from an academic family, whereas Jerry's father became wealthy (very wealthy before he lost a good sum of it playing grain on the margin) as the owner of a successful business. Jerry's grandfather abandoned the family when his father was twelve, and after finishing the eighth grade, his father had to go to work. work was the key word in his father's vocabulary, and Jerry, as the eldest of three male siblings, did everything he could, at least after his teens, to avoid it. love, however, is not engendered by practicality. he misses everything about Catherine, especially her affectionate humor, even about sex.

the storm has passed and the following day is hot, humid, effecting not so much heat discomfort in Jerry as lethargy. but by evening another storm should have arrived, with expectations of rain all night and through the next day. this time he hopes to use his knowledge from the previous day and get some worthy shots. a cooling breeze is shaking the tropical palms, and he can already smell the oncoming rain. it's intervals like this where nature reasserts the promise of something fresh and inviting, that makes life truly worth living again for Jerry. he steps outside his door. it's cooled considerably, beginning to rain, and when he steps back inside even his overheated front room has begun to take on a fresh sweet, herbal smell, like a bed of damp pine needles.

as nobody feels any pain/tonight as I stand inside the rain,
which Jerry had always misheard to be, *the night is locked inside the rain,* goes through his head, two figures appear in front of the screen door. Catherine enters first, Daniele right

behind her, faces fresh, their hair lightly coated in a frosty mist, Catherine looking beautiful, and Daniele, dreadlocks dangling, a dark angel, face reflecting lamplight, both projecting strong auras coming in from the rain.

“I don’t know, Catherine and I have hit this weird plateau and we’re not communicating. you’re like a ghost, Jerry.” “which you need to exorcise before you can continue.” “ yes, we were both drawn to coming here.” “and you’re hoping somehow contact between the three of us can work things out.” Catherine moves closer to Daniele and Jerry, the three of them huddled together in a semi-circle. “why don’t you and Catherine fuck, Jerry.” Catherine’s hazel eyes are shining, and Jerry’s heart starts to pound. “while you watch?” “I can step outside, if you want to be alone.” “no, stay Daniele,” Catherine says, kissing him, placing her hand on his shoulder. “whose idea was this?” “Daniele’s, but I’m all for it. I want you to feel the same quiver of illicit pleasure it’s given to everyone else, including Daniele and myself, at your expense,” Catherine answers, looking sensually and soulfully into Jerry’s eyes. Jerry’s heart is pounding harder. all the ennui he’d been experiencing has been swept away.

while the three of them stand in the bedroom, tentatively, staring at nothing particular, Catherine, breaking the ice, slowly and hotly, presses up against Jerry, careful the front of her body makes contact with the tandem parts of his. as she sits on the bed and starts to undress, Daniele says, “I don’t want to watch”, and leaves the room. she’s wearing a chalky mint-green blouse and a modest grey skirt, neither of which she removes, and the consciousness with which she un-

fastens and pulls off the bra from underneath her unbuttoned blouse, then kicking off her shoes before sliding off her panties and socks, approaches that of a striptease. Jerry undresses quickly and completely. there's a sensual hush as he moves to the bed, and mounts her, rustling her skirt as they fuck, her legs cradling his waist, tongue in his ear, fingers running through his hair. Catherine aroused almost to a state of delirium, at one point, shouts, "Daniele, are you still there?" then silence again envelopes the room as, now immersed, they move until the horny card is played out. it doesn't take long for either of them to come, which when they do, Catherine's orgasm is twice as sharp, twice as long, as Jerry's. "why didn't you fully undress, Catherine?" Jerry asks, as he eases out of her, knowing it gave an edge to the sex but not knowing why. she gets up, smiles, and standing, unfastens her skirt, slips off her blouse, then sits back on the bed, flushed and looking refreshed. appearing as though alerted by a sudden thought, she gets up, and walks, naked, into the front room, Daniele nowhere in sight, lifts a joint out of her purse and returns to the bedroom. she lights it, takes a toke. "this won't hurt you, Jerry," she says, handing it to him. he tokes and hands it back to her. they repeat. "are we done?" "No," Catherine replies, grazing her lips against his, and sliding her index finger deep into his anus. they kiss, passionately, with the newness and hunger as if they'd just met. Daniele reenters the room, the air saturated with the aroma of pot smoke, abruptly turns around, and walks out. Catherine sighs, leans backwards. Jerry, grasping her ankles, pushing them upward, once again enters her, then massages the soles of her feet, bringing a pleased smile to her face, and they seriously fuck for a very long time, this time coming together, then kissing tenderly while laying together, still

sexually engaged. "I missed you, Jerry."

they dress and go to the front room. the door is open, and Daniele, of course, is gone. it's unfair but what isn't fair if it is what it is.

half hour later, to neither's surprise, Daniele texts Catherine. `you can pick up your things tomorrow, or whenever you can get around to it. don't forget to leave your key!' the last line has a bizarrely surreal ring.. Catherine starts to cry. "moving all that stuff right away is going to be difficult, Jerry." "stay here, Catherine, until you feel settled. then we'll see, we'll see."

next day is hot and humid. the expected storm never materialized, so Jerry's glad he took advantage of it while he could.



MISO SOUP

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JERRY KATZ

EUCALYPTUS BOOKS

(A Snoop Kat Production)

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can't keep my eyes off stylishly slim femme with the straight scissor cut to the neck brunette hair, wearing a lapis blue print summer dress, standing, socializing in a predictably amicable manner with a small group, mostly men, looking for some excuse to, but feeling fat chance of, entering her universe, further stiffened by the fact that while she doesn't actually fatally catch me staring, she's aware of, and somewhat annoyed at, my attentiveness to both her and her interaction. it is then fortuitous that while on the terrace of the court outside the plated glass doors between the hotel and two other high rises, each alone, walking in opposite directions towards one another, that we should meet, when on the verge of passing, about to exchange polite, meaningless, prepared, smiles, we simultaneously spot two adult coyotes, evidently from the nearby hills, the female with the nap of a baby coyote in her mouth, intensely staring at us from a granite overhead ledge of the building next door. they continue to nervously eye us for several more moments, then turn and quickly disappear. we turn to each other, incredulous and bemused, then strike up a friendly conversation.

a score of questions quickly runs through my head – are you alone, are you married (there are no telltale rings on the fingers of either hand), do you have a partner? (she must) nothing even approaching discretion. having been moved by the momentary interaction with the coyote family, there seemed to be a portent in us having experienced it together. looking fresh, hair slightly rifled by a humid breeze, hazel eyed stare, exposed, excitable skin up close, from the calves to the knees, delicate, carefully shaped lips, poised small set of not to be overlooked breasts, nipples pricking the cloth –

classic objectification of female image as gateway, if it doesn't become a diversion, to everything else. but my overwhelming need is to sample her wares, a need, I don't believe she shares, her response, most likely, more subtle, except, perhaps, as a mirror image of my projection, which reinforces the image. it's interesting these endowed and created attributes are nurtured, as a small girl, innocently, irrespective of the sexual-political context they will be used in, including the self-annihilation that might follow. one should read the last chapter of *within a budding grove*, the second book of Marcel Proust's, *In Search Of Lost Time* where he engages in contemplating the nature of beauty and love as manifested in the nuances evoked by the physical images and behavior of a group of insouciant young ladies, creating an entire universe of more than two hundred pages.

it pleases me she came alone, that, as it turns out, she's not attached, and that, like myself, rather than continue here, she'd prefer to be having an, as yet, undefined experience. "there are a lot of funky hotels in this area," I offer. frankly staring, she says, "I'm not particularly horny." "just a place to be alone and still be down here, while we plan what to do next." her assenting smile having taken on a lascivious edge, we hasten to leave on that permissively upbeat note, and by the time we get there and check in, the promiscuous effect has completely taken over our thoughts.

we sit, almost yoga style, facing each other on the bed, her face, passive, her hair, the clipped edges, just short enough to give her a mobile, fresh, look, blue dress wrapped tightly well above her knees – image, image, image. how does she

see me if I won't describe it? we don't hesitate to perfunctorily kiss, the genie already out of the bottle. we make out, and heavily pet, the noncommittal, prosaic atmosphere, inciting in us a generic feeling to be bad. we have serious sex (it takes so little time), both of us coming, then twice again, before it's quickly over, no buildup, no design, little meaning. sitting on the bed, once again facing each other, our features and naked bodies projecting the cool, radically indifferent atmosphere of the unfamiliar surroundings, we are moved to something deeper. we dress with tender and thoughtful fondness towards each other. are we going to also don the masks of the selves we came with, or have we the means to transform, the tight fitting blue dress, now just a symbol, an inert, distant, relic of lust.

the day has cooled considerably. we stand on the sidewalk after leaving the hotel, her arm locked tightly in the crook of mine. we are several blocks from Fifth and San Pedro, the epicenter of Skid Row with its incredibly dense encampments, encompassing ever expanding streets to the extent it is a city in itself, obviously not an option, and we walk south and west towards the garment district before compulsively turning back and walking in the opposite direction until we happen upon The Catholic Worker Soup Kitchen on Sixth St., where, after hardly a moment's hesitation, we spontaneously volunteer. two of our co-workers are off duty police officers from the LAPD, still in uniform, open collar, and without sight of their weapons. we help cut veggies and serve, alongside the two young police officers with whom we engage in polite conversation. evidently Emma's and my fondness for each other are on display more than we suppose, because one of

the two officers asks, "what are you two lovebirds up to today?" "we're both cheaters and have just left a hotel after having been at an event at a more upscale one downtown, and impulsively found our way here," I respond, as I put my arm around Emma who blushes from ear to ear. seeing that I was being earnest, and that it was somewhat meant to be a confession, the look in the officer's face becomes one of compassion and understanding, and he says, "I cheat," then turning to his friend, says, "he cheats, too." we continue to work in the warm atmosphere we've created. when we leave it's late afternoon. Emma takes my hand, and says, "when you told them we were cheaters, though I don't know why it is that we are, and you put your arm around me, I felt happy inside." returning to the lot where her car is safely parked, standing, I ask, "would you like to have more sex?" "yes." "should we go back to the same hotel?" "that wouldn't be cool." "that's right, it would be cooler to have a different ambience. I didn't mean we had to jump right back in bed." "where did you park your car?" "I left it home. I took the Expo rail line." "is there any reason for us to stay down here.?" "are we slumming?" "I don't feel we are, but it is interesting how we gravitated towards doing what we did." "there is an attraction, but a good dose of reality, I think, would put an end to that. it's interesting, first walking past all those gift shops, a little bit closer to Downtown, that people who are obviously poor, are so disposed to, even emphasize, spending their money on non-essential, from a perspective of absolute survival, cheap, pretty, disposable, items.... dolls, animated toys, games, t-shirts, food treats, etc., esp. on their children, spending, as well, on a more traditional ritualized beauty in the Flower District, whereas in the Fashion District,

the only area not included in the so-called revitalized section of Downtown where there are also non-Latino shoppers, people are looking for bargains." "how abruptly the odors changed from perfume and incense around Maple to stench as we walked further east."

it is unambiguously nighttime now and a pretty much unexplainable compulsion compels us to head north and east instead of west, if for no other reason as a defiance of predictability, one predictable element, being, soon, having to, most likely, temporarily, leave each other's company. Emma is driving a low-mileage, ten year old hand-me-down Accord. we're both over-dressed. I'd assumed from her easy interaction with what seemed were prosperous people, she was financially well off, but as it turns out they were associates of her older, married, sister, and though she doesn't inhabit the world they do, she accepted the invitation, because why not? as for me I'm wearing over one of the long sleeve solid color t shirts I generally wear, when it's not too warm not to, a trendy looking suit jacket which I got for twelve dollars at the Good Will, but have worn publicly only one other time, and jeans (I don't own a suit), a disgustingly kind of 'Indy' director image. the security guard questioned me, anyway, before allowing me entrance. we are, however, what we do, and as Allen Ginsberg once pointed out, when you go to a bank you're a banker.

within a few minutes we're driving in a hilly sector of Lincoln Heights. I've frequently photographed graffiti in the flat, warehouse area between Alameda and Spring, but lately that seems to have been a little played out. as neither of us have

eaten since breakfast we flip a coin, heads for Little Tokyo, tails, Chinatown. it comes up heads, although I have that proverbial hankering for Chinese food. we're both vegetarians. "do you have a place in mind?" "yes, Kinjiro, but it's pricey." "if it's good, one-time I won't mind." "it's very intimate, I'd better call them to see if a table is available." I watch Emma while she's on her cell, because her image is still not quite familiar, detached, as if she's a different person, as if I'm watching a scene from a movie, with a certain degree of fascination. she clicks off, smiling. "they've one unoccupied table. they actually only take email reservations, but I know somebody who works there." "is that who you talked to?" "no, they said he's currently in Japan, but I first asked to speak to him. we're fortunate anybody answered as they generally don't during dinner hours." as I find out Kinjiro is an artisanal (self-described) Izakaya style restaurant located in a plaza on E Second St. both of us settle for the few non meat dishes which are very good, green tea, and a sixty dollars plus bill for each of us. it is very intimate, small with a shiny industrial mod ambience, kitchen visible – a strong, but not completely definable aura, which, for some reason, lingers in my mind afterwards, the meaning only to become obvious at a much later date.

the element of danger in art is the sense of danger in the individual whose inner state is being threatened. Ian Buruma, in his book, *A Tokyo Romance*, which catalogues his time with the Japanese avant-garde theater scene of the seventies, stresses his hunger to be sexually wild and free there. but the events he describes, never-the-less, seem tame, just words, not because of the acts, some of which, technically, might be

thought of as extreme, but because of the insulation from vulnerability to anything outside of their art, and the rational mindset behind it. although he uses the term, transgressive repeatedly, where is the feeling of danger either psychic or physical? Ryu Murakami's first novel, *Almost Transparent Blue*, although difficult to read, and a result, largely, of his imagination, is transgressive because of the palpable feeling of danger emanating from himself through the extreme events he describes to the reader, and so, as art, feels authentic, echoing, somewhat, the least revealed, mostly unconscious, hints of darkness of my own feelings while in Japan, during my time in the military, a decade after the war.

"is your friend gaijin or is he Japanese?" "the former, when he's in Japan, which is frequently, that is. he's more of an acquaintance. I couldn't help noticing how well you use chopsticks." "it's what I use when I eat alone. it's the only eating utensil I've used for years." "what do you think influenced that?" I think it has mostly to do with that I'm a vegetarian. you can't pick up a pea or a grain of rice with a fork."

driving back I'm beginning to see I've been looking at Emma, though accurately, as a mere projection of my fantasy. when she drops me off where my car is parked in the gallery lot at Bergamot Station in Santa Monica, it is close to midnight. she gives me a deliberately low key, genuinely affectionate, peck on the lips before driving off. we both know our lives, of a sudden, are accelerating towards irrevocable change, and both need the space to sort out and assimilate our commitments.

there was a long hiatus in my fiction writing from college to about a dozen years ago when I took up writing fiction again, and discovered the only thing that could still motivate me to write it was sex. all my stories, and my one novel, since, are erotic, although I'd like to think there's a lot more to them than that. I'd pretty much felt, with the completion of my second collection of short stories, *Just Another Rainy Day*, that I'd satisfied that need, but I continue to add to it, as I do to my already published *Memoirs Of An Outsider, Vol. 2*. I have, however, intermittently, been working on an unfinished story I'd initially rejected, which, with the addition of a few pages, has taken on a new interest, due to my relationship with Emma and the particular things we do. several of my best previous stories (*Horny Love Stories*) have included Japanese individuals, one story, *The Tyranny Of Benevolence*, actually taking place in Japan. Emma is somewhat drawn to Japanese culture, not traditional, but popular culture, the edgiest aspects of it. the alleged combination of ritual and abandonment seem to have a special appeal to her. little by little, I'm beginning to see she's not (or, at least is no longer) just the pristine, but sensual, female I initially took her to be. the commercial area of Little Tokyo in recent years constitutes, roughly, a square half mile, with the stores on Second St. now a bit more high end than those on First St., though most shops are situated in the triangle of plazas. this is in addition to the banks, new apartments and hotels.

Emma's male acquaintance has returned and moved, into the trendy, but not too overly priced, given its amenities, Hikari apartments on Second Street, which is only steps away from where he works. although 30,000 Japanese lived in Little

Tokyo before the World War 2 internment, most of the tenants are Caucasian.

Miles invites us to dinner at his apartment. Emma says his actual name is Milo but that he plays the trumpet so everyone calls him Miles. It's interesting that he's thin, not tall, but intense, and sensitively wired, almost a cliché of one kind of Japanese male stereotype, although he has light, almost blonde, cropped hair, whose appearance is somewhat Scandinavian. His one-bedroom apartment is spare with white walls and white carpeting, with an open full range kitchen, no furniture, other than a plain white sofa, a bed, and two bright red bean bag chairs for contrast. The rent is a little over two thousand dollars a month. As it turns out he plays the saxophone, and Milo is not his given name, he tells us, but one he appropriated from the name of the sax blowing, railway brakeman artist Larry Rivers played in the Robert Frank movie, *Pull My Daisy*, but everyone calls him Miles anyway. Emma is happy that 'Miles' and I seem to have more or less hit it off. "What do you actually do at Kinjiro, Miles?" "What I'm doing here," he replies, stirring the miso soup, which he ladles into each bowl, then adds finely chopped chives, just before we sit down, cross-legged, as there are no chairs, just a low table, but plenty of clean white carpet, raising a very real fear in me that I might spill the soup. "Miles is not a chef, Jerry," Emma hastens to explain, "although he probably could be. You could say he's assistant to the owner, who oversees all aspects of keeping things running smoothly," her voice emphasizing the last word, as Miles smiles enigmatically. "but you evidently spend a good deal of time in Japan, Miles, what do you do there?" "pretty

much what Emma told you I do here, Jerry”, he says, though I still really don’t know what he does here, and feel vaguely uncomfortable about, especially about what might be Emma’s role in it.

the dinner, as it was at Kinjiro, is very good, though without the “low key but elegant” ambience, and the romantic ‘tete-a-tete’ between Emma and I, although all of it is rewarmed dishes Miles took from the restaurant, evidently with the owner Jun Isugai’s consent, which includes mozuku seaweed salad with grated yam, mizuna-daikon salad, agedashi tofu, grilled uni-giri rice balls, and udon noodles with hiziki, which pretty much covers every vegetarian dish they offer. “do you eat Japanese food often?” Miles, noting my utility with chopsticks, asks. “not at all. I once was very much into macrobiotics, and it still remains somewhat a basis of my eating habits – brown basmati rice, beans, garden salad every night, small amount of fruit in the afternoon, and cooked whole grains for breakfast. I also eat homemade seitan with dinner.” “then you wouldn’t think of this meal as particularly healthy.” “no, I do, even with the noodles and excess salt on occasion, it is as healthy as any dish I regularly eat.” Miles nods, smiles, mostly to himself. what impresses itself on me is the questions he asks seem to be coming from the perspective of someone who is Japanese, not even Japanese-American, but Japanese-Japanese, and that he takes them personally. it is also true Emma and I are guests and he’s the host. but I have the unsettling feeling, at this moment, the both of them are the hosts and I’m the guest of both of them. Miles is curious as to what type of music I listen to, although he’s too sophisticated to think in labels. “I don’t listen much,

anymore," I say, "I've several hundred albums which just sit without being played." "why is that?" "in addition to significant deterioration of my hearing I think I'm headed more towards silence. before Emma and I met I could go days without one single conversation – I think we maintain our equilibrium largely through listening." "if I understand you correctly, when you say listening you mean listening to yourself, whereas listening to music is listening to others. is that so?" "both, listening stills the talking mind. although I would say listening to music is listening to sounds outside oneself, the only tuned, tonal, music I now can count on hearing correctly is in my head. it's just with me my mind or ear no longer wants to hear 'notes', but more as sounds independent of that. I'm not sure if this is a sign of aesthetic progression or deterioration." Miles, whose interest has queued up considerably from what, to me, had previously seemed feigned, laughs appreciatively. "at any rate I can still listen to quiet group improv where the participants clearly listen to each other." "can you name an example." "the cut, *Quadrasonic Question*, from the 1992 Surman, Bley, Peacock, Oxley, Adventure Playground album has that quality, though it does deal with tonality." "atonal, yes. do you play an instrument?" "I have a keyboard but I rarely plug it in. I was a singer... of standards, before I lost my singing voice. I once had a very real desire to do an album with Charlie Haden although I didn't know him." "are you familiar with the work of his daughter, Petra Haden?" "yes, I think she has a brilliant musical intellect." Miles beams, clearly energized. before we leave we both thank him for the evening. he says he's been offered a gig at the nearby Blue Whale. "I'll let you know when that is set," he says. he seems at this point to be

talking exclusively to me. “as I said, my hearing has deteriorated quite a bit. I guess that has something to do with all the times I went to hear Coltrane’s group, sitting close to the drummer, Elvin Jones,” I say with humorous intent, although that may be quite true. “that could do it,” Miles replies, still with that enigmatic smile.

there’s always a romantic, but displaced, feeling after exiting a well-lit interior into the night air when two people are just beginning to feel close. Emma having listened attentively to what had been going down with Miles and I is almost mesmerized by the ambiguity of it. her presence next to me in the car as we drive west is in contrast to everything that had happened before we left, and I want her very much. my shaft is hard and we passionately make out all the way back to her place, and fuck once before we get out of the car, without coming, then go inside and fuck to exhaustion, first on the floor, then on the sofa, then in bed. I wake about mid-morning. Emma is sleeping so quietly and peacefully, I get up, rummage her kitchen, and make breakfast for the both of us, thinking, not without a sense of irony, I’m doing the same thing this morning as did our host last night. when she wakes and wanders in, sweet and sleepy, standing framed in the doorway, it’s an undiluted pleasure to see her first smile.

“how did you meet Miles, Emma?” she hesitates and her look seems to be fending off something. “I had lunch there some months ago, he came over, we had a pleasant conversation, that’s all, nothing auspicious.” what she tells me certainly sounds reasonable, but my intuition says she’s being evasive, I don’t know why and I’m somewhat disquieted by it.

the night of Miles' jazz date at Blue Whale, we park in the Office Depot lot on Second St. and Central Ave., which is a few blocks from the club, after careful consideration that the lot won't be secured when we return. when we arrive it's between sets, and Miles, spotting us almost immediately after we enter, leads us to seats close up. at the bar Emma, getting fancy, orders a Pina Colada, while I, the perennial spoil sport, a lime-cherry flavored mineral water on the rocks. the big surprise is the set, my having expected more updated straight ahead jazz with free jazz overtones. in addition to tenor sax Miles plays hichiriki (a double-reeded flute), the guitar player, shamisen, the percussionist also uses shoko, a bronze gong. the non - Asians in the group are Miles and the bass player, who is African-American. all of them wear popkiller t-shirts, making them look more like a J-pop group than what they are. the music is sparse, spontaneous, totally improvised, with a good deal of non-linear interaction, markedly a group effort. yet they occasionally manage to swing, because of the instrumentation, to weird effect. Miles' tone on all of it is sure, cutting, and clearly formed. while playing he frequently looks my way. the audience is attentive, and at the end of each piece there's unrestrained applause. afterwards Miles introduces us to owner, Joon Lee. the Pacific Design Center on Melrose in West Hollywood is sometimes referred to as The Blue Whale. on a gruesome note, Blue Whale is also an alleged internet game of assignments in which, according to Wikipedia, the final assignment is suicide.

when I arrive at Emma's she's not home. I have a key, unlock the front door, and enter. as I'm not expected, I call her mobile number but get a voice message. the empty space of

someone I'm attracted to as much as I am to Emma, appeals enough for me to consider sticking around a while, though, to me, and probably to her, that would be clearly unethical. as I open her front door to leave I spot a folded piece of notebook paper lying in a patch of light by the door. I stoop to pick it up, thinking Emma inadvertently dropped it and it might be important. there is an address and phone number on it, both which I recognize to be Miles', and a time, which it approximately is now. and yielding to a compulsion I know I won't otherwise be able to let go, even though she may in the meantime return my call, I get on the 10 freeway and head towards Downtown.

there's just enough opening to peep in without being seen. at first my intent is to just rap softly and wait for a response. but curiosity at the oddness of the situation gets the better of me. the room, reflecting light from the overhead window is a gauze-like white haze. there's a spare white divan centered on the white carpet. Emma is sitting on it, naked, except for a short, white lace lined, lingerie slip, one strap dangling below her breast, and garter-less sheer white hose, mint green ribbon at top. her hair is up, and she's holding a lit joint between her fingers. she tokes, exhaling a little smoke, which adds to the gauze-like haze, a blissful, stoned look on her face, an image more erotic than any I have ever witnessed, and hands the joint to Miles who is naked except for a crimson silk robe, hair slicked back, revealing a lean, taut, attractive body and sizable genitals. he tokes, his face similarly blissed out, slides to her.... I'm too transfixed to do anything but watch.....as they soundlessly fuck in a white, narco haze, slowly building, almost not moving at all, come together in

quiet murmurs, then quickly separate, not wanting to conflate the act with anything else, Miles rising and relinquishing the divan of pleasure to Emma, who lays back, legs spread then, exquisitely crosses her thighs with satisfaction. I don't know what to do, but I can't just leave, I want them to know I've seen them. I rap my knuckles lightly on the door and wait. when Miles answers, the sash of his robe tightly secured, wearing sandals, I instinctively looks past him and enter the room where the white divan is empty, Emma sitting in a violet colored summer dress on one of the red beanbag chairs, light streaming on her still stoned-blissed face, her brown eyes picking up the violet from her dress. for a nanosecond her look is startled, then dissolves with precision into untouchable stoned purity, before modulating into a nuanced smile, which I return with surprising calm, a deliberate attempt to reassure her.

it's several days later before I see Emma again, or she sees me. naturally I want to know the extent of her involvement with Miles and what she feels her commitments are, if any, to me. "have you had sex with him before?" "no, we'd never even kissed. we still haven't, to be perfectly factual." we both laugh, even though my heart is beating rapidly. she's become exponentially more desirable to me, if that's possible, just because of the physical sensation, the aura and absoluteness of my viewing that event. though I'd be foolish to think we could, or should, duplicate it. "then some aspect of our relationship stoked you into it." "yes, I think it did." "can you say what?" "our relationship is almost totally 'reality' based, which is good, but reality can get you just so far." "and with Miles' help you were able to get beyond it."

“momentarily, because he supplies a mystical dimension – more to do with the context, the ambience, the erotic spirituality, the detachment, especially the pot.” “as a visual tableau it seemed so complete, what you could only apprehend if you were outside of it. but without the states you were in it wouldn’t have been anything.” “and you found yourself with the total contradiction of wanting that while observing it in someone else.” “what do you think Miles’ interest is in this?” “I think he’s more interested in you.” “really...part of his motivation?” “yes.” “it’s interesting.” “what is?” “that he wants to be Japanese to the extent he thinks he is Japanese.” “maybe he is Japanese.” “I hardly think you can say that.” “I mean now that it’s acceptable people can choose their gender, why not their ethnicity and nationality.” “as long as you reject biological basis for gender, which I do not, however fluid and complex that may be, you can ‘choose’ anything, and I do have feelings of discretion when it involves surgical procedures.” “with your thinking people should remain trapped in what they don’t want to be.” “not at all. I admit that’s an issue. I don’t deny change. autonomy is the goal. but autonomy is a state of mind and the first step towards autonomy is acceptance. you can’t change what you don’t accept is there.” “you can react against it.” “evidently he’s ignoring it.” “I don’t think either of us are in a position to know that. he does everything so well.” “depends on what you mean by ‘everything’.” “he and I don’t stand around discussing whether you’re valid or not.” “I’m forced to admit this hits home. “it sounds like you’re really enamored of him.” “I just admire him, that’s all.

I work for Miles, sometimes.” “doing what?” “modeling

women's lingerie." "how did that come about?" "he sells knockoffs of high end lingerie. he needed a model." "and you fit the bill." "exactly. most of the lingerie are copies of Japanese brands and he has a model for that. but he also does high end brands like La Perla, Agent Provocateur. the Japanese brands are creative, colorful, funky, and often cute, and tend to appeal to youth culture, whereas the the luxury lingerie I model which are more monochrome, black or white, with color accents, tend to be sexy, but more mature." "that would figure." "are you being sarcastic?" "not really." I can readily picture Emma in La Perla underwear, but say, "aren't you generalizing a bit, Emma?" "I'm just repeating how the brands market their products." "I'm a bit of a lingerie aficionado, myself, Emma." "that would figure, Jerry." "Liu Wen?" "yes, the Chinese 'supermodel', she's gorgeous." "Peach John?" "the other model does the Japanese brands, Jerry," Emma says, laughing. "was that the lingerie you were wearing the other afternoon." "yes, we had just finished a shoot." "there were no lights or photographic equipment." "miles put them away before we got into each other." "well said. did all of this begin before, or after, we met?" "before. we had already done a couple of shoots that turned out very well." I don't mean to seem like I'm grilling you, but were you intimate with him during those times?" "I don't mind. no, it was just business. Miles, in addition to being fastidious, is generally pretty detached." "and you were paid?" "every time, quite well. I understand, Jerry, there's a perverseness lingering in all of us." I can't dismiss the feeling, however, she's not revealing everything. "is what Miles is doing legal?" "I'm not sure. if it's just a knockoff with no change or innovation, it may not be. and they do arrest people for selling

copied merchandise if they misrepresent it as the original. Miles doesn't do that. he tends to simplify rather than add. he's actually very talented in that area." "just another thing he does well, Emma." "that's right, Jerry. you're foolish to let jealousy eat you up, alive, instead of emphasizing the things you have in common like he does you." Emma kisses me, seriously, and I melt inside. "have you met the other model?" "she's based in Tokyo." "is she Japanese?" "yes."

several hours after returning from another shoot, now early evening, Emma, dressed up wearing a tight black dress, heads towards Miles' apartment, perfume permeating the driver's side of her car, eyes fixed on the mesmerizing headlights of the heavier west-bound traffic – this will be the third time she will have done this and the first since she revealed to Jerry her 'day' job with Miles, declining, as he suspected, to go any further. it doesn't take much for Emma to look seductive, and lace lingerie along with her tight dress, heels, lips delicately painted, lustrously combed hair settling in the crook between her neck and shoulders, goes a ways beyond.. Miles will introduce her to a particularly valued client and then leave. why is she doing this? two things – money, and... the thrill. she secures her car in the underground parking garage, takes the elevator to the third floor and knocks on Miles' door. Miles opens it, dressed in a white tux with a white bow tie, greeting Emma with an untypically broad, impishly facetious, smile. a well built, athletic looking, rather handsome, man, one would guess in his mid-forties, rises from the white sofa, and walks over to them. the three smile, on-queue, as in a movie. Emma and the man shake hands. Miles says to Emma, "I have an engagement and have to leave now."

without further explanation he exits, closing the door after him. one would expect an awkward moment should occur between the two remaining individuals, but they both laugh, facing each other, sizing each other up, the man inhaling Emma's perfume. "my name's Dante, you're just as beautiful as your photos." as the photos he's referring to feature her in her underwear, she thinks he's looking right through her clothes, thus the obligatory blush is genuine. she can feel an almost overwhelming physicality coming from him, and wonders what he wants and how they're going to go about it. so as not to let financial negotiations negatively affect the ambience, the price has been determined, the amount already paid to Miles, who will give the sum to her. "let's have a drink. what would you like?" this is the first time the rendezvous has directly taken place at Miles', and she looks around, no liquor in sight. they walk to the kitchen. one of the cupboards serves as a substantial liquor closet. after checking the fridge for ingredients, they concoct whisky sours, blending the lemon juice, syrup, and a more than recommended amount of scotch whisky, shaking it in generously sized highball glasses, adding cubes of ice, then return to the living room and stand by the open window, looking at a section of the Downtown skyline, sipping their drinks, not wanting to appear nervous or anticipatory. "are there dimmer lights in here,?" Dante asks. Emma answers, "yes," and shows him where they're at. he flicks off the bright lights, flips on the soft, amber colored ones, and says, "I want it to be romantic." "I don't think you can will that. it is, and will be, whatever it is." for the first time they frankly stare at each other. her reply clearly turns Dante on. he looks her over, again, as he did when she first arrived. they sit together

on the sofa, facing each other and drink more seriously, Dante puts his arm around her and starts to kiss her. it feels good, and she wants to be overwhelmed, but she pulls away. "did we come here to make out?" she teases, embarrassing him, but inciting his prurient ardor. "then let's go to the bedroom." "let's first do it in here," she replies. the ambience is just right, light playing on Emma's face, shining into the depth of her eyes, fixing on the soft grain of her lips. he removes his coat, tie, and shirt, naked torso, face, and close cropped greying hair, gorgeous to Emma in the dim glowing amber light. reaching back she unzips the top of her dress, unhooks her bra, and slips the dress off her shoulder baring her breast, feeling wild and wicked, exceedingly aroused. he pulls down his pants and shorts without removing them, they French kiss, and he lifts her onto his erection. with Emma sitting on his lap they fuck, arms around each other, he reaches down for one of the glasses, presses it to her parted lips. she sips and swallows. he then takes the other glass, and, draining their drinks, they fuck, dropping the emptied glasses to the floor. "this couldn't be better," he says, as she rubs her nipples against his chest. they are getting close and kiss-talk. "tell me when you're ready," he says, running his lips horizontally along Emma's, both their arms tightly wound around each other, his tensile mass presses hard, without moving, until Emma comes, in involuntary, spasms, excited further by the rush of Dante's ejaculation. they sit, continue to hold one another, enjoying a moment of impersonal, but mutual, satisfaction, then he lifts her off him. they walk to the window, listen to the sounds, savoring the view.

not much time has elapsed since she arrived, and yet she

wonders what else to do. of course there are all the other tropes, but what meaning would there be in them? Dante surprises her by echoing her thoughts. “you know, Emma, you’ve already provided the satisfaction that has made this a worthy transaction.” she knows he doesn’t quite mean the way it sounds, but as she’s getting paid, handsomely at that, and does feel empathy for him, for the man, generally, in this kind of situation, to be exact, it is not her job to make such a determination. obviously, as this is a date, they can’t just wrap things up, and she has no intention of leaving until Miles returns and pays her, even if she has to sleep there overnight. before they can completely mellow out they go to the kitchen, clean the glasses, mix more of the same, but smaller, drinks. then go to the living room and resume pleasant talk. Dante, not surprisingly, plays soccer, is in a league with mostly younger players, and asks her if she’d like to watch a game, sometime, to which she’s tactfully non-committal. he also wants to know if she has a boyfriend, to which she thinks, oddly, she doesn’t know how to reply. she does know that jealousy and sexual competitiveness is a waste of time – each individual situation is unique if it’s worth anything at all. of course she didn’t reveal her occasional ‘night’ job to Jerry, and that’s part of the reason why. but she’s been deliberately deceptive – she knows there’s no way you can rationalize deception in a positive light, it’s always a sign of weakness, and that’s not good. Jerry has the right to know she works, however infrequently, as a ‘high-end’ hooker. as their satisfaction wanes their erotic urges quicken, this after all, is what she’s there for. they quickly finish their drinks then go to the bedroom, removing what’s left of their clothing, and lights out, get on the bed and fuck for almost

two hours, on and off, doing everything they can think of, and enjoying it. when they get up they immediately dress, straighten the mess, wipe the kitchen sink, and wash and dry the glasses. "I want to leave before Miles returns so that this remains personal." she knows Dante has a fantasy, they all do, but her intent is not to feed it. to his credit, Emma thinks, he doesn't ask her for her phone number. at the door he hugs and kisses her, then reaches into his coat pocket, pulls out some bills and hands them to her. "this is a bonus." she holds the five one hundred dollar bills and carefully examines them before looking up. "donate them to #MeToo," she says, as she hands them back to him. "are you joking?" "no, I'm not." "you donate them," he says, handing her back the bills. "I will." Dante is clearly taken aback, but says, "I enjoyed being with you." they shake hands. he gently closes the door. if she keeps the money she won't have to wear the knockoff lingerie, she could wear the originals, Emma jokes to herself. women's lingerie is designed to please men, primarily, anyway. Miles, most likely, will not be pleased, she thinks.

it's been a couple of days since I've heard from Emma. the last time I tried to call her, her phone was off, and though I'm a little concerned, I identify with her enough to want to give her the space. in the meantime I hear from Miles who wants to know if I would write something about him and his group, which I tell him I'd be glad to do, and he invites me over for brunch which turns out to be a restaurant catered affair with a number of people filling the apartment, but strangely, to my thinking, no Emma in sight. the guests appear to be younger, trendier, frequently tattooed, pop-culture retro - The Cramps t shirt, rather motely, but glamish, than I would

have associated with Miles. I overhear one fellow use the word acheabilly. is that a music genre? Miles stands out in contrast, pale-faced, wearing a faded red plaid, half buttoned, cotton shirt, and form fitting faded jeans, slightly bowing, as he greets me with a smile. "have you seen Emma, lately?," he asks, in a casual tone, raising my concern. "not in several days," I reply. just then his cell rings. Emma's on the other end. he immediately tells her I'm there, and she asks to speak to me. when she feels she's straightened out my concerns, to her, not my, satisfaction, I hand the phone back to him, and walk away, opting not to listen in. as the event progresses, almost everyone gets very high on one thing or another, devolving and transforming what would otherwise be a fresh afternoon into an ambient haze. in the course of, and context to it, Miles introduces me to two, very pretty, petite, young ladies he says models for a new knockoff line oriented towards young Americans and Euros, who, as it turns out, are sisters. I find them both to be extremely attractive, and get on with each of them extremely well. things begin to run down as evening approaches, and as I'm about to leave, Miles nudges me and we step out the door. "this is weird, Jerry, both Angela and Olivia asked me about you, and wanted to know, separately, I swear, if I'd set something up. he hands me a piece of paper, with the phone numbers of each of them. "did one know what the other was doing?" "it doesn't seem likely. they're close but very competitive towards each other in issues of this sort." "each told me she was married." "that was part of the attraction. this generation has a different set of rules, or no rules. Angie said call her anytime. and that you really turn her on." "they look to be the same age, are they twins?" "they're less than two

years apart.” I quickly scan the apartment through the open door, somewhat relieved to see they are gone. on the freeway back, I’m enjoying the evening atmosphere, high melding just right with the sobering night air, in the dreamlike maze of traffic. Miles is amazing in the role he seems to play as a catalyst. at this moment I’ve ceased being disturbed at Emma’s call to Miles, and the fact that she hadn’t called me. after getting home, and making a light dinner, I look at the note, turned on reading the numbers, tired, anticipatory, and go to bed early.

I call Angela (whom I assume to be the older sister) first, and she’s very warm and receptive, happy I took her up on what, she may have feared, was an indiscretion, dispensing the slight nervousness I was experiencing. she said she’d leave the front door unlocked and would be in the bedroom ready for me, letting me know her husband is away on tour with his band. the house is quite a ways back in a somewhat blighted but verdant hillside in Echo Park, wood framed and slightly in disrepair. I open the door and enter the front room which is full of low, and a few high, end art objects, a fragrance of amber incense, and a good vibe, walk down a long narrow hallway of white walls and stop at a room with a closed door. I slowly turn the knob, peek in and she’s sitting on the bed, a petite beauty, waiting wish fulfillment, ready in a short, pink lingerie top. with long, loose straps, only partially covering truly delectable breasts, and sheer white lace lined thigh high hose, smiling so naturally, almost innocently – no drinks, no small talk. what was it Miles was saying about no rules? she watches me undress, then sit on the chair facing the bed. she gets up, walks over and taking my sex organ, strokes gently

and sensually, as she leans forward, tits hanging, and I suck her nipples. she bends down and I close my eyes as she does it, running the palm of my hand on the soft skin of her thigh above the hose. we get on the bed, I peel off her black G-string panties and we fuck – intimate, dirty, affectionate strangers, sensuously detached, debauched and goaded by the cold, sharp, pine odor of the hillside from the open window. the room is messy, strewn with their clothes on furniture, on the floor, giving one the sense of the randomness and disorganization, that might be their lives. an unshaded bulb light, casting shadows onto the dim areas of the wall, adds a noir density to the licentiousness that, willfully, our only knowledge of each other is fucking. it's the image, fixed and framed, but not static, not in time, when called upon, that will remain.

a week later I call Angela's sister, Olivia, wanting to be refreshed for the occasion, but fearing if I waited too long it would dissipate her interest, wondering how she could add to what I'd already experienced. she opens the door to her old Spanish tiled apartment building perched atop a precipitous south side bluff, ambiguously bordered between Silverlake and Echo Park, overlooking Sunset blvd., which I reach by walking down the steep flight of steps, night sounds in my ear, to her front door on the terraced back of the building. she closes it, and we face each other, bodies touching. the living room has a sweet, musty, odor from the oriental rugs and dark, polished furniture. it's an amazing feeling to having had, only a week ago, fucked her sister, and now be standing, body to body, face to face, with her erotic, almost twin – totally different, yet, as a result, already familiar... just a bit

Chandleresque. brushing our lips across one another's, we lightly kiss, arms around each other, feeling our bodies through our clothes, with the certainty, after the long delay, what transpires is going to be very good. it's late, very late, as she had to call me back several times, until she could verify whether her husband, an airlines pilot, was to return early morning, or the following evening, depending on his flight. her tongue plunges into my mouth, releasing (in her) a ton of pent up, horny passion. we go to the bedroom with the peach hued stucco walls, and a very large, white sheet and teal blue duvet covered bed. Olivia removes her warm coat and skimpy wrapper, then sits on the bed, in almost the same lingerie as her sister's, except the top is mint green, and even shorter, wearing the same, sheer, white, lace trimmed thigh highs. their figures are similar and equally gorgeous, but the auras are quite different. Olivia's skin is lighter, and voluptuous in a more oral way, stimulating an urge to devour. I've still on my beige t-shirt which seems to blend. we immediately start fucking in the middle of the king sized plus bed, on top of the sheets and bedding, her flesh hot, not in the usual sexual application of the word, but literally hot like she'd been at the beach all day in her bikini. feigning indifference, she offers virtually no resistance, which optimizes the debauchery, palatable thighs nonchalantly, but brazenly, raised, sultry, amoral, passively yielding, using all the bed, stiller and stiller, then cease. very very late, we say goodbye, kiss somewhat sadly, both of us comprehending the tragedy wrought by love and lust, leavened, in her case, by deception. she closes the door and I 'ascend' the steps to my parked car. her name, Olivia, in my mind, I instinctively associate with the nearby, once infamous, Olive motel.

Emma has another session with Miles. she can't help herself, she's magnetically drawn to it. sometimes, though rarely, she has the urge to be anally fucked. the only person she's done that with, lately, is Jerry. it's not an issue of humiliation with Jerry because she knows he loves her, but it is, still, somewhat forbidden pleasure. Miles is all cock and no sentiment. he's like the Mugwumps in Burrough's, *Naked Lunch*. although somewhere in him is buried feeling, his persona of objective gentlemanly-ness, while authentic, is also a façade. in this instance Emma feels she's a surrogate for Jerry, and it turns her on. still in their street clothes, they fuck, hypererotically, both genital and anal. when finished, Miles strokes Emma's anus with a cherry scented wipe, they then go shopping. Emma buys a t-shirt for Jerry with a Japanese logo. she asks Miles to translate, and he can't. to her surprise, she thinks she catches a flicker of jealousy in Miles's eyes, which he quickly suppresses. she's not sure, however, for whom the jealousy is directed, Jerry, or herself.

"I thought Miles was fluent in Japanese." "I think his knowledge is rudimentary. he can speak it enough, that with a little help, he can get by. evidently he can't read it unless the alphabet is English." the t-shirt is a rich cobalt blue with a black panther graphic in the center, bordered by horizontal and vertical characters. neither of us think the image is particularly reflective of my character, but the color and design compliment my looks, and I like it anyway. Emma is being uncharacteristically, and genuinely, sweet. she asks me to put the shirt on. then we immediately have sex, very good sex. now that I've been objectified, virtue of Emma fetishizing the shirt, I can identify with those women who complain. but so

be it, turnabout is fair play. Emma is a natural lover. her hands, alone, can subtly arouse and sooth. Miles is an alien from another planet. I know that's part of her attraction to him. still, I like him, and he seems to like me. the interesting thing about Miles is the aura of mystery he cultivates could lead one to suspect he's hiding something extreme, like a dismembered body in his closet. I more suspect, if he's hiding anything, it would be that the closet is empty.

Miles needs a name for the group, which is getting more recognition, being reviewed in jazz and new music publications. there's the possibility of touring Europe at some of the upscale venues in Holland, Germany, Poland. they had just been using their own names with the word quartet after, the way it is too often done with jazz groups. he asks me if I can suggest something because I am a writer and a 'creative person'. "at your recent event, while mixing with the crowd, the words, 'cornbread and miso soup' kept running through my head. I think it was the contrast between Little Tokyo and some of the people who were there vibe. why not call the group Miso Soup. in fact I'd just shorten it to Miso." "Jerry, that's brilliant." I don't mention the title was also suggested by Ryu Murakami's grotesque portrait of a serial killer, *In The Miso Soup*. fortunately, they've achieved some status in the avant-garde music scene in Japan. "we're going to soon do our next recording. maybe we can use you on keyboard on one or two of the cuts to extend the sonic range." "I can't sight read." "all the better." "won't all this conflict with your business interests?" "it already has. my assistant, will have to do the day to day operation. if I could get the right offer I'd sell the clothing line, but I actually enjoy it. for me it's a

uniquely creative endeavor. I kind of thrive on contrasts.”

Cornbread And Miso Soup would be a good name for an avant-rock group I think, and the combination actually excites my appetite, which gets me thinking about the two sisters, Angela and Olivia. I more or less assumed what occurred with them was meant to be one-niters, but the urge to see them both is so strong I give in to the compulsion and call a somewhat surprised Angela who calls Olivia, and within an hour's time, they've come over for a visit, and to look at some of my photos. both of them have, predictably, I suppose, separated from their husbands. both of them look quite sexy wearing different colored short print summer dresses, Angela with her hair up, staid and proper, Olivia with her hair wild and down. the three of us almost immediately start playing, before, dropping the façade, go to the bedroom and begin a threesome, first half-clothed, then undressed, which lasts the entire afternoon to great satisfaction for we, the participants, doing things, I presume, not done in straight twosomes, like Olivia, cradling Angela's head in her lap as Angela and I fuck, clocking with her phone, the time it takes for Angela to reach an orgasm. not so oddly, perhaps, almost all the genital sex I have is with Angela, who has let her hair down, Olivia, now with her hair up, seated enticingly, voluptuously sensual thighs crossed after having had my mouth between them, raptly devouring the sex between myself and her sister. still it is amazing the degree of subtlety with which the ladies sexually interact with each other during the tryst, never quite spilling over into overt lesbianism, Angela holding Olivia's hand while Olivia has an orgasm from oral copulation, or her hands affectionately caressing Olivia's nipples, as Olivia and I

finally fuck, Olivia's fingers slid between my lips while Angela, head down, sucks, and lastly, Olivia and I solemnly kissing while Angela and I again fuck, as the three of us come, sensitivity being the hallmark all the way around. almost from the outset we'd gotten very tight, nothing random, which greatly enhanced the completeness of pleasure. afterwards, I'm especially attentive to Angela's feelings, as she apparently has a crush on me. by presenting themselves in tandem, they've managed to secure considerable work and notice. does it seem three-ways are a likely part of their procedure? who knows.

Emma just returned from a trip. as a result her finances need to be straightened. Miles is in Japan with Miso, and taking care of his clothing line there, so she can't depend on him for help. I am busy with my creative work, living off my savings, which will, in the not too distant future, run out. I loan Emma money for her to pay her next rent. I feel fortunate to be living the life I'm living, and think Emma feels the same about hers. there is a considerable difference in age between us. for the first time since, I think of how we fortuitously met, watching the coyote family on the ledge, vulnerable and beautiful. how, after sex, we walked hand in hand to skid row, first trying to bypass it, and volunteered at the soup kitchen there. how we are, now, it seems, through experience, at least from my perspective, two totally different people. there's no question our relationship is serious, but Emma is still too curious to want to settle down with anyone, including me. I suppose the basis of my attraction to her is her beauty. why does one want to fuck one person and not another? there could be a number of reasons, some actually

valid. yes, and all of them are projections. if it was just sex anyone who was good at it would do. with me the issue is more about my work. there's an empty hole in me from lack of simple appreciation and modest recognition. Miles is one of the few people who has perceived this. what will be will be.



A YOUNG LADY

JERRY KATZ

EUCALYPTUS BOOKS
a Snoop Kat Production

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a young lady, a college student, who is almost 60 years younger than me, and has, lately, become my constant companion, is sitting, naked, on my lap, her hair rustling lightly in the cross draft through the open door, as we fuck. Antoinette is her name but everyone calls her Nettie. she began as the agent for my writing and visual art, and is now my lover. in my case her proficiency for the latter, so far, has quite outdistanced, through no fault of her own, the success she's had with the former. I do not write in a traditional format so she can't submit my work to a traditional publisher, nor do I sanction putting my photos in frames because I feel they require the intimacy of being held. as I no longer have friends, and she's too young and inexperienced to have yet made 'professional' contacts, there's no way there can be word of mouth re my work. although I was once part of a very hip scene which was the only time I had public access, though I do have a website, online exposure would be meaningless as I belong to no group, mainstream or other, from which a readership would emerge. furthermore, as my relationships have, unfortunately, and unintentionally, resulted in what I've termed, networking in reverse, most of my bridges have been burned, so I can't call upon, as have my former peers, help from the past. most of all, somebody has to like your work, even the most extreme outsiders have advocates, but through all this she's determined, and, for the first time, as she is also very easy on the eye, feelings of love, and arousal, are on an equal plane.

Nettie's friends are mostly female...fellow students she's bonded with. her closest friend is Amanda, a 'pristine' beauty she's known since grade school who projects an Ice Queen

aura of inaccessibility, and who has become intimate with the both of us to the extent that people frequently, and mistakenly, have the impression we are a threesome. belying her seeming repose, Amanda, who is enrolled in the school's TFT program, gravitates towards a fast, sexually diverse crowd, including three lesbian acquaintances, one of whom is ardently on the make for her, whose offers she neither encourages nor rejects. it comes to a head one evening after they leave a party, Connie (Consuela) riding in front with Joana, who is driving, and Sasha, a dark haired Jewish-Russian girl, seated close to Amanda in the back seat of the car. they're driving through a dark stretch in Agoura Hills, windows open, the fresh, sensual, nighttime odors in their nostrils. Sasha edges closer to Amanda, putting her arm around Amanda's shoulder, then kisses her, a long drawn out kiss, while pressing Amanda's breast into the palm of her other hand. they momentarily separate, then Sasha begins to undress Amanda, fingering her for a very long time. Amanda having offered no resistance to the kiss, experiencing, in addition to the sensuality, something complete and satisfying, senses it would be useless, futile, and contradictory, not to submit to Sasha's further advances. the girls drive through the darkness in silence, a retro love song on the radio, until Connie turns her head to look back, then quickly reverses it, and gasps to Joana, "they're doing it," Sasha, bare bottom except for a strapon, mounted on top of Amanda who is naked, legs spread and raised, her usually porcelain cheeks faintly flushed as Sasha pushes a thick purple dildo in and out, Amanda's arms tightly wrapped around Sasha's torso, moving in rhythm with Sasha's thrusts, until she intensely orgasms and is, then, still. they continue to listen to the music, the

now unnatural, but respectful, quiet remaining until they arrive at Amanda's apartment. Sasha gets out, walks with her to the back of the building and they climb the stairs to her upper. they stand silently in the cool air for several moments In front of Amanda's door. "this won't be the last time, will it, Amanda?," she utters, then kisses her. Amanda sucks and swallows Sasha's tongue before thrusting her tongue deep into Sasha's throat, her hand willfully groping for Sasha's genitalia, then massages Sasha's clitoris until she comes. blushing, Sasha returns to the street and gets back into the car. "that was fast work, Sasha," Joana says, expecting like a high five, but Sasha just smiles, a thoughtful, somewhat melancholic, look on her face. "you haven't fallen for Amanda, Sasha, have you?" "yes," Sasha replies, her eyes starting to tear. "you took a lot of time back there," a smiling Connie joins in "she's got a lot of spirit. she made me come."

the next day Amanda calls Nettie, who vicariously responds, and tells her everything, quite excited, even elated, about having had sex with a woman for the first time. from there the romance quickens, their having lengthy episodes at every chance. her interest in her boyfriend, at least sexually, has waned, and he, anyway, ends the relationship, a matter of pride blinding him to the possibility that her having sex with a woman might actually awaken something dormant in their sex which had become static and predictable. Amanda's predilection is mostly for men, however, and it isn't long before, when she's becomes engaged with a new male attraction, she parts with she and Sasha's sexual ways.

we sit together on a low brick wall in a grassy area adjacent

to the sculpture garden between the art building and Macgowan Hall where we decided to meet after Nettie's last class. "I can't get over you're an economics major, Nettie." That's why we got together, remember, Jerry, I get this all the time!" "I know, I'm stereotyping." I feel the context we're in right now is quite creative. I'm very happy and grateful, engaging her colorful image which radiates a cheerful, spirited warmth, looking at her legs in the sunlight, at her thick, reddish, blonde, curls, moved by the intentness that is peculiar to youth when relating to an older person who matters. there's an indescribable feeling in calling forth in her my past, liberated to vision in the present, to quote Marcel Proust, 'made out of all the years I have lost'. she's not short, but just petite enough to excite the tenuous masculinity of an aged, but currently sexually stirred, man. "you don't intend to go on after you graduate?" she shakes her head. "I don't particularly like school." "when I first went to school here..." "you went to UCLA?", Nettie interrupts. "yes, most of my friends were frat boys who were business majors. we'd socialize on the library steps until one or another would say, "I've got a class," and then go off to the bus ad building. but I'd stay and socialize with the new arrivals. I often skipped class, didn't read the assignments, or take notes. finally, after several semesters on probation, they kicked me out." "then what did you do?" I went straight to the draft board on Westwood Blvd, even before I got home, and had my number, they were drafting then, advanced to the head of the list, they told me I had two weeks to back out, and ended up with a two year hitch in the Navy, which was shortened to nineteen months when the defense budget was cut." "what did you do after that?" "I returned to school, becoming part of

the scene of artists and writers, hanging out with my small group of friends on the wall by the walk opposite Kerckhoff Hall, and stayed there another two years before leaving for good. I went there four and a half years, five and a half total in college” “did you graduate?” “no, I have no degree.” “jerry, you’re fighting the world.” “don’t I know it.”

our initial financial arrangement does not designate any actual payment, I couldn’t possibly pay her, but whatever income my work generates, both literary and visual, as a result of her efforts, would be split fifty-fifty, even if she were no longer involved. none of this is going anywhere, however, as any success, given my goals, really rests on my ability, and willingness, to break this social impasse, which has gained some potential, at least, due to our romance (‘romance – a feeling of excitement and mystery associated with love’), and calls to question what my true motivations were In placing the ad, although with no mention of gender, in the Daily Bruin, as well as plastering the message boards on campus (I was thrilled at first seeing her!), and hers, for answering it. as a matter of fact, our intimacy is such we have to find excuses **not** to fuck.

Amanda’s apartment is being upgraded, and as she’s currently in-between boyfriends, she’s staying with us. this allows our household a bit of needed expansion, also serving as one excuse re the above. Amanda mostly lives in the present, and in it she looks for whatever opportunity there is to access. she’s quite open and consistent about what might be called her amorality. Nettie, who has known Amanda most of her life, is aware of this, and it seems she may be, at least

unconsciously, trying to put both Amanda and I to the test. what it amounts to is it is pretty much decided, though unstated, between the three of us, Amanda and I are going to have sex at some time during her stay, and the buildup which inevitably occurs between us, conveniently comes to a head while Nettie is out, the afternoon before Amanda moves back to her apartment, when she `accidentally' walks into the front room wearing just a sheer, short, skin-toned slip, straps hanging below her breasts. I quickly undress and we wordlessly fuck on the sofa, our aroused bodies comfortably conjoined, our ears tuned to the sound of our movements, for not more than five minutes, before coming together, moaning, then get up, and without looking at each other, dress.

the following day when I confess to Nettie she just shrugs, "I knew as soon as I got back, it wasn't hard to read in either of you." of course there's going to be feedback. no other way is possible. but we have a very deep commitment to each other by now, and, I think both of us believe, despite the things that inevitably happen, our love will prevail. the pull of sex at a given moment can just be too difficult to resist without not feeling one would suffer physical harm if one didn't give in to it. the buildup of the need in such situations, however, is, generally, intentional, and is therefore, not forgone. therefore one must deal with the issue of accountability. when Nettie and I first had sex, and how it continued for some time, the tone was not that dissimilar to what has occurred, even if there was no obvious other involved. sex is frequently adulterous and incestuous, I've decided. in the initial attraction a suppression has been given a voice. the idea is that having sex with another person is really change, when, in

reality, it is just more of the same. the appeal is in the forbidden fruit. adultery (thou shalt not). the stimulus will soon wear off. at any rate, sooner or later, Nettie is going to make me pay for my five minutes, and I may as well savor and enjoy what I've done to deserve it. Amanda, however, is having some misgivings. when she calls our home phone she wants to know if I talked to Nettie. I tell her I have and she immediately rings Nettie's cell. they talk for a long time.

when I'm with Nettie I live almost completely in her aura. it involves a mysticism I totally accept. I understand why feminists reject this notion and I respect them for it, though I don't think the basis of it is male dominant. I don't deny questioning the truisms of gender and role playing. but she is my daughter, my lover, my lawyer and administrator, all in one. as intellects we are equals. age has nothing to do with that. our intellects interact modifying each other's, and the combination of her youthfulness, practical nature, and this mystical aura, is very powerful.

my lack of social connection frustrates Nettie, at least to the extent she sees it's my own doing. it is not an area where I command her respect. but it is overshadowed by a fierce loyalty generated by my obvious feelings of hurt and betrayal, especially the degree, to which she agrees, I and my work have been shut out. she doesn't know yet, however, how my past, especially the effects of being stoned, has shaped that.

I pick Nettie up at school, as she took the bus this morning, and we are headed out to dinner. I tend to have a weird

feeling when I'm on the UCLA campus of not being in either the past or present, or, am in both. the feeling is not one of nostalgia, nor is it a happy feeling, it's more a feeling of not belonging where I, once, perhaps, did. because of the different years I was there, the different groups I related to, the different roles I played, and the different corresponding areas I occupied, one aura or another emerges, depending on what part of the campus I happen to be on. this prompts a corresponding surge of love for Nettie, as though she is redeeming all that went wrong.....I think she is, and she knows it, a second chance I never dreamed possible. as we drive, I glance at her animated face, and she kisses me, I believe, reading my thoughts. we have vegetarian yakisoba (grilled seitan substituted for the meat) on Sawtelle, and as both of us are particularly feeling our sexual jones', hurry to get back.

"I can't just withdraw from a reality that gives me energy and meaning." "you should give some thought to what your motives are, Jerry." "I have no `motives', creatively, Nettie, but, unfortunately, issues of access and image get in the way of that. as soon as I push the negative, am drawn to power at the expense of love, interfere with something delicate, I tighten up, then need the eroticism from my cock to loosen up the flow. the flow locks and unlocks. is it possible to stay innocent?" Nettie nods, somewhat salaciously, and although it's been only a half day since, without bothering to undress, we, once again, have sex. "are you pleased with me, Jerry?," she asks, refastening her skirt. "an incredible thing to ask," I reply, somewhat surprised as Nettie's image-presence is, to me, the closest to total reassurance I've experienced, but not without comprehension.

“Jerry, just because you conflate pop culture to high art doesn’t mean you’re superior to anything else.” “I know that. each person is unique, born separately, and will disappear separately.” “yes, but I mean the much maligned compromise of the bourgeoisie, which is an inevitable result of centuries evolved humanism, has meaning in itself.” “I’m a bit surprised you think that way, Nettie, but perhaps you are the best, most practical, example of that.” somewhat embarrassed by my response, Nettie hastens to add that what she said was pretty much the view of her economics professor, with whom, as I will find out, she shares a mutual crush, verging on physical consummation, the rationale of which, most likely, will be the lit fuse of the aforementioned payback. this provides a dynamic tension that has been lacking, and which, at least unconsciously, had left us both feeling somewhat incomplete. but it is not the Nettie whose self-containment I view as, partly, the manifestation of intellectual independence. during the next several days, Nettie appears to be increasingly preoccupied, and on the evening of a monthly seminar, when she fails to return at the usual time after class, neither calling nor texting me, short of some emergency, I am fairly certain of what has transpired. when Antoinette returns in the a m, I am still awake as, even usually, I am a poor sleeper. she looks the same as when she left, which is to say, well-groomed and incredibly desirable. she undresses and goes to the bathroom. I listen to the running water as she brushes her teeth, then gets into bed next to me, reeking a sweet perfume. seeing I’m awake she kisses me, and says, “I’ll talk to you tomorrow,” rolls on her side, and almost immediately falls asleep. with the warmth of her body and dissipation of the anxiety of the wait, I fall asleep, too.

with the internet and, or, digital printing, of course, anyone with the resources, including me, can publish. my website, Words and Images jerrykatz.com, includes all my writing in its most updated form, as well as a few of my photos. most of my books are also in limited edition hard copy, and I do my own covers. but there are probably a million people who can say, with, perhaps, the exception of the design, the same. this is how the internet neutralizes itself. in social media like twitter and Instagram, of course, the opposite is true, but the fame is fleeting, the influence shallow, and quality non-existent, for the most part. if one is part of a scene or movement, a certain amount of exposure may be assured via preaching to the choir, where everyone agrees to relate to the same things. but as in pre-online days, it's quite possible, some of the most obscure underground websites and blogs, are the most interesting. Nettie, despite her seeming conventional-ity, is aware of some of them. she is also very proactive, and has convinced a medium size real time publishing house to look at my work, which has been precluded by mainstream publishers because of formatting issues, by presenting these as assets rather than as liabilities. I am amazed at her acumen in that regard. however, I feel, any attention that doesn't focus on the content of the material, is selling the work short. the exposure can be widespread or esoteric, but all of this is moot if a lit match doesn't ignite a fire, which is to say, something innate and less definable has to occur between the creator and the perceiver. alas, the publisher, though evidently interested, but noting there are no reviews, and wanting to know who I know, who knows me, who can write the blurbs, does not want to risk the expense of just another book whose eventual reputation may, or may not, exceed its

sales....or worse. even if a reviewer from a major newspaper or magazine one has an in with creates a buzz, it won't matter without it. it's not a matter of sales, it's a matter of communication. very few professional writers have it on a level that is not contrived. sometimes fame comes much later, sometimes not at all! while Gilbert Millstein's 1957 NY Times review of Kerouac's On The Road created the mainstream buzz, its 'it' factor came from somewhere else.

right now, truth is, not to reveal our habits, I love Nettie so much she could piss in my face and I'd like it. or I in hers.

though not regretful about her erotic engagement with her economics professor, she values our relationship enough not to let it go forward. it would be sticky if her classes with him were still in session, but that was the last seminar, a convenient time to give in to her lust, and the regular class had its final meeting shortly after she's set to graduate at the end of the new quarter. she says she'll skip the commencement.

one reason she won't go, though she hasn't stated it, is she is not close to either of her parents, her father, an art museum curator, and her mother, a paintings conservator, who recently relocated to the east coast, and though they would attend the ceremony, she knows it would not be out of any great interest, partly because of the nature of the degree. there has never been a rift between them, and they pay all her expenses, including, of course, her tuition, and would continue to do so as long as she was in school, but I've picked up the hurt Nettie feels as a result of their odd indifference to her. I realize, to some extent, I am a surrogate for her

parents, just as she is a surrogate daughter to me, although neither of us are interested in symbolic role playing! it would be weird if I met them, and if we are to continue, at some point I'm sure I would, because they are both four generations younger than me, who would be a generation younger than my nieces. another reason for not attending the commencement, and this is just speculation, Nettie would not want to see, or relate to, her economics professor with me there, not that there'd necessarily be reason for him to attend. "you have a very lucky boyfriend," he said to her as she was preparing to leave his condominium. "he'll do," she replied. it hurt when she repeated the exchange to me. and for the first time since it happened I was able to picture the sex they had. they were feeling, and being, bad.

rainy day in the park where I do my morning workout, giving the green grass turned partly yellow, and the dyed orange field lines, a warm glow, an almost insulated feeling, sheltered beneath a blanket of grey clouded sky. I am conflicting between just being in the vision of the moment, and reflecting on the axes I have to grind. are you a writer? not w/out a recognizable scene, not w/out reviews, not w/out talking heads to tell them who I am. as I've revealed to Nettie, I once had access but was in too bad shape to benefit from taking advantage of it, and I made a decision about being able. never again did I want to be in a situation where I had the connections but couldn't use them....that I'd rather be able and have the work than not be able and have the connections, painful as that is turning out.

FedEx drops off a package. it's a gift from the professor. "it

was a little weird, he liked the lights off even when we weren't, if you don't mind my using the word, fucking." "maybe he was ashamed of his body," I reply, hopefully. "he has a very nice body." "how old is he?" "about thirty. he told me his exact age. for some reason I don't remember. things were going on before we met." "so it was a step backwards." "a necessary step, yes." after a moment's silence Nettie says, "don't worry about it, Jerry, I'm happy the way things are." "I've read new studies show women erotically need change more than men. I think that could be misused to give credence to the myth, once aroused, women are insatiable." "I've read that too, but I think a lot of it is men don't sexually understand women very well, otherwise the issue is pretty much the same all the way around, and so many other things are going on besides that. it's just better, more real with you. with us it's so extreme, there's a chance to break through the set patterns. with my economics professor, doctor Mazur, Connie, short for Conrad, it was the same old thing. even though there's only about a seven year age differential, the blind spot of male dominance and authority was apparent. I suppose I was attracted to that, but knew it would become more an issue if we were to continue to be involved, whereas with us I've never felt so grounded and confident." "neither have I. but it seems I functioned as the catalyst for your making it with him." "not really. you may as well know I've been very sexually active. every individual, as you say, is susceptible to suppressed desire and need for change. my parents are academics, and he was both interesting and interested. we were both interested, to be fair." "you posit all your attraction to him in the past tense." "that's true."

it's obvious Nettie has a wild streak although her attractiveness neither belies nor suggests it. one can look at her and see someone quite `proper,` or one can feel that `when you get her alone you'd be surprised', itch. the latter being, most likely, how the professor viewed her. in a recent discussion we had about orgasms, she observed that when we fuck (quite passionately) I care more about her orgasm than she does of mine, and that the only time she cares about a man's orgasm is when she "sucks cock." it's true, not to appear object oriented, she does give exceptionally good blowjobs. "but you wouldn't rather suck than fuck, Nettie?," I ask, considering how good fucking is with us. "obviously not, Jerry, it has nothing to do with preferences, it's just a very lustful part of my past." "how so?," I ask. wondering, given Nettie's age, just how far back that could be. "you know, the parked car ritual in some dark spot. that's how dates frequently ended, because of a fear of getting knocked up, rather than intercourse. I liked it a lot, more than I let on, the feel of a hard cock in my mouth, and the cum, especially when it made him moan." "sucking and fingering." "yes, it usually ended with both of us having orgasms, sometimes simultaneous." "you did that with him?" Nettie blushes. "no, it was almost all genital." somehow this bothers me a little, more than if she had said, yes, she did. "the truth about orgasms with me is the more messed up I am the more dis-associated sex has to be. but as I get closer to an orgasm, everything is filtered out, anyway, the image obliterated, abstract, except, sometimes, the inner image of an erotic `piece of ass' persists. the eroticism of the image is just a projection, but pure pleasure, not the object's pleasure, but mine." "but you don't feel that way with me?" "so far, no."

none of this has significantly modified my view of Nettie, at least not negatively, but I miss the intentness of a very young lady in awe of a much older man, who has been deeply affected and moved by him, as he has, not just reciprocally, been moved by her. the focus may change, and different, even contradictory, elements emerge, but if that aspect does not continue to exist, there will be no relationship at all. not from Nettie's view, nor from mine.

Amanda's feeling down, and as it's her birthday, and as she's an actress, Nettie and I take her to see Godard's, *Vivre Sa Vie*, which of his early noir films was my favorite, and I think, of that period, his most serious. in addition to everything else said about it, it is also, more than any other movie made, both an ode to, due to its pervasiveness to the extent of it almost being the subject of the film, and given the brutal content, indictment of, the trench coat and the cigarette, esp. the latter. when it comes to the scene of Anna Karina sitting, alone in a movie theater, the camera focused on Falconetti's tears, then cut to Anna Karina's teary, replicated response, I look at Amanda's face, lit in semi-darkness, and there are tears streaming down her cheeks as well. though I try to suppress it, my next thought is, deplorable as that may seem, sometime in the near future, Amanda, Nettie, and I, are going to have to engage in a threesome. the near future comes sooner than later, but Amanda smartly insists on making it a foursome, and I'm forced to quickly relinquish the idea.

Nettie says her parents mean well. they're just more didactic than loving. their interests are mostly centered on Art. they fail to appreciate, or understand, the considerable creativity

of their daughter, which is a living, breathing, thing.

“because you don’t engage with the other writers and visual artists you may have something in common with, Jerry, you’re lacking in support.” “there’s a narrative that goes beyond that, Nettie. it doesn’t matter how bogus or arbitrary it is. the freer I get the more I can see how much each group’s attitude almost totally exists by self-conception, and sustains itself by attracting attention you either have to play along with it or be left out. there may not be anything of intrinsic worth in any of it, and it’s mostly politicalhow much actual, or assumed, power can be achieved in the real world.” “jerry, I wish I didn’t have to say this, but with your attitude, you’re doomed to failure.” “it all depends on what you mean by failure.” “I think that’s specious. life is, partly, a war of opinions. if you aren’t willing to engage then I don’t see how I can help you.” “you don’t seem to understand, Nettie, I want to engage, with my work, not rhetoric, but I’ve been shut out.” “it goes beyond that, Jerry, you’ve withdrawn socially to the point where no opportunity now exists. if you’re willing to live just in your vision, and accept the lack of appreciation and recognition from others that, for your well-being, I think you urgently need, then so be it.” “it may well be that.” Nettie is upset. I know part of the attraction, and love, she feels for me, is in having a role to play as my facilitator. I do wish to keep that aspect alive.

it’s getting dark early and I need to move my car if I want to avoid being ticketed before I get out in the morning. Nettie is late and I haven’t heard from her, and, anyway, I’m feeling blue. I pull up close to the driveway of a building in the

middle of the block as she pulls in behind me, filling in the other parking space, and, crossing the street, we walk hand in hand, back to the apartment. *worry worry worry, all I've got a worried mind*, and, *I'm the little red rooster, two legs across the bed*, respectively, have been, oddly, as I am not much into the blues, running through my head all day. they are, actually, melodically, the same song. this feeling makes Nettie's radiance seem slightly strange or foreign, perhaps emphasizing that we, like all others, are separate persons who have, for deeply incomprehensible reasons, chosen to commingle. she's nourishment I depend on as well as the fount of love.

I'm not sure why I'm so displeased with myself, what I should be doing I'm not. I know I took her criticism of my social isolation to heart, but not because I thought her obvious points were particularly strong. "where've you been?" "negotiating a possible deal for your work." "how is that?" "the editor/publisher of Manic D press was a participant in a panel discussion on independent book publishing today, after which I talked with her and several other attendees. I'm not saying anything will happen but she agreed to take a look." this rings a bell. a couple of years ago, when I went to the L.A. Times Festival Of Books at USC, I brought along my first short story collection, *Horny Love Stories*, just in case there was someone of interest I could show it to. I met her at their exhibit and showed her my book. she was not encouraging. she said 'it looks like you're already published.' she suggested I read something they'd printed, and pointed to a book on display written by a transgender person. we shook hands, amiably, and I left..... with the book. their emphasis is on feminism and social justice issues, social issues, whereas

mine is more on personal ones. "I'd be concerned they'd think my work sexist." "I don't think your work is sexist at all. and is, I think, relevant, in fact, to what is currently being discussed. I also think your writing is unique," Nettie adds. "she said she was 'interested', Jerry." "well, I won't stand in your way, Nettie, if you insist." we both laugh. despite Nettie's effort I know nothing will come of this. but my blues have totally dissipated. perhaps, I just need to stay involved enough to care.

the shootings, the fires. more than that, where is it all at? how long can one neutralize oneself by batting it off... the growing intensely apocalyptic mood....can one ignore? well, I've been trying. the internet , if not responsible, is the amplifier for most of this. but the inanity of its usage just assures a healthy, creative, development must be outside its confines. the potential of technology, as anything but a banal tool, always peters out. yes, to an extent, we are what we eat, eg., the automobile has made us more abstract because we aren't as restricted by our physical movements. but if we evolve to a degree no longer defined as homo sapiens, it won't be because, we're, as Yuval Harari incorrectly asserts, just data, (wants to reduce our complexity to something finite, and ultimately, dispensable), but because of our organic response, resistance to, and assimilation of, that data. this implies essence. existence is essence. if we are really evolving into our virtual projections then it will be the first time in the history of the universe this has happened. though I'm actually not sure it hasn't always been the case.

Nettie's parents are a bit more fun than I'd supposed.

without apparent irony they view me as being much on the same level of maturity as their daughter. her mother tsk tsk me that I do not do my drawings on acid free paper, although I have, lately, been using a `permanent' ink art pen. it's weird that role more than age seems to be how one is positioned with others in society. although they haven't, thankfully, read anything I've written, they do like my visual art, especially my photographs, and think I have a unique eye and vision. "I'm willing to have a show at MOCA," I tell them, to which they're not sure how to respond. Nettie laughs at the archness of my remark, but they are pleased, or perhaps better said, relieved, with what they think our relationship is and as a result, with Nettie.

the closed circles surround us. Nettie and I have both come to terms with the fact there's nothing much she can do for me, re public exposure to my work, other than whatever personal contacts, given our interests, may organically develop. this has only served to make us closer. she says she has no serious ambition, career-wise....just to do what she'd be good at, and survive. but it is clear to me there's a preciousness she's nurturing in abeyance to an, as yet unknown, future catalyst.

Proust was right, and nonpareil, in illuminating the function of perception and memory on the psychological processes of the mind, but was wrong in his attempt to encapsulate time. it is through acceptance and in the letting go of what we hold and resist, such as we see depicted as M contemplates the effects of time (so-called), while viewing the fresh image of Gilberte's sixteen year old daughter, not in his subsequent

final attempt to procure, order, and possess it, that the fragmentation falls away, and we are momentarily able to experience timelessness.



TOKYO STORY

JERRY KATZ

EUCALYPTUS BOOKS
(a snoop kat production)

Jerry Katz © 2020
Jerry Katz design © 2020

sitting on a bench in a public square in the middle of Shinjuku warming myself in the hazy sunshine, slowly eating the wedges of a tangelo which I purchased, like much purchased here, from a vending machine, scraping my teeth against the white pulp on the inside of the peel, as the busy flux of people crisscross by in all directions. I zip up my jacket anticipating the chill I will feel in several hours when the sun sets and I've no place to go, running out of money, my monthly rental having expired earlier in the day. of course, like many other homeless, I imagine, I never thought it would actually come to this, leaving my meager possessions, including my phone, behind for the few yen they netted. all I've left is the warmer clothes I'm wearing and a backpack filled with underwear and socks. I begin trekking with no particular goal but drawn toward nearby Kabukicho although it would be foolish to spend any of what little I have on a room and sex, something I'd not had too much an urge to do when I could have afforded it, but now is fueled by a quiet desperation, hoping for a miracle of intervention, but dreading tonight I will have to spend either trying to sleep on the hard floor of the Shinjuku train station or in the central park which is several miles from here. it is evening now and as I walk the crowded streets, somewhat comforted by the mass of humans including a good share of attractive women whom I would like to possess, vicariously wondering who they are, what they're doing, and from whence they came, am overwhelmed by the composite rectangles of candy colored neon and led lights, which, in the white glare, are almost blinding. in this, no place on earth is like urban Japan, especially Tokyo, and nowhere in Tokyo is it more that way than in Shinjuku. having no place to go I commence to merge with the surroundings, it

becoming an alternative universe, a pop explosion in the history of Japanese art, merged with the modern American industrial aesthetic needed to create this throbbing wall of calligraphy, walking slowly, methodically, just on the edge of desperation but not plunging into it. at any rate I've enough to survive on the street for a while, but then that was my thinking when I still had a rental. perhaps I can find some social services for foreigners, or the U.S. embassy, and get myself deported. but the stimulation is waning and I'm instinctively looking for a place to lie down in this mass of humanity, wondering why I didn't make more of an effort to address the catastrophe before it happened but knowing that knowledge of a situation does not in itself provide a solution, marveling at my almost total negligence, indifference, and inability to address issues of survival. it is about 10 pm now and I've been walking around the red light district of Kabukicho for a while, worn out and thinking of turning back to the east exit of the train station but it's too early to do anything there now but hang out. the same survival instinct? is guiding me now, and I turn around and, despite my weariness, begin to trace my steps back to the square I was sunning myself in what seems now ages ago earlier in the afternoon, a motivating idea churning in my head. in Kabukicho to procure a date for a so called love hotel I would probably either first have to hustle to get set up, or risk engaging a very young tachinbo on the streets near Okubo Park, or more attractive to my senses, but more inconvenient, take the train to Oguisudani. in Shibuya, however, while the love hotels there may have similar options, I know of an agency adjacent to the hotels, and could with the help of a clerk electronically make those choices. but first I need to recoup my energy,

and as I arrive at the still crowded square, ready to drop, I make some space on the grass next to a low wall where people sit and visit on, and immediately fall asleep, oblivious to the illegality of sleeping outdoors in public, awoken as activity begins to build, then walk to the Shinjuku train station, select a rice cake with dates, alfalfa sprouts, and miso, from a dispenser, and after using all the facilities in the restroom while waiting for the first train, pay the ¥150 for the six minute ride to Shibuya station, where later in the day I'll take the short walk up to the quaintly named, Love Hotel Hill. Love Hotel is definitely the Disneyland of the commercial sex universe, a fantasy world down to the minutest detail. although I've never been to the former, nor will be to the latter until this evening. all transactions are automated. you touch a screen to select a room, choose a date, set a time and rate, which generally has two options, Rest - 3 hours, and Stay - overnight, and pay (there are also certain amenities which, potentially, can make the arrangement quite expensive), then return to meet the woman you've selected, who you also pay, and walk with to the Love Hotel and room you've selected. I do this at about 5:00 pm, opting to Stay overnight, but wanting to first see, and greet, the young lady I've chosen while there's still daylight. my choice was based on looking at a monitor of women in their lingerie, until one stood out - in my mind, pretty but pensive with unusual features and a clearly seductive figure, though in an unassuming pose. along with the photos is a list of what each girl will and won't do. the female clerk nods thoughtfully before saying, "she's open, but selective, and speaks English." I'm then asked to return half an hour later when she, her name is Aimi, will be there. when I return feeling a small

amount of trepidation, as photos almost always lie, am not disappointed when a door is opened and she emerges wearing a modest soft beige blouse, a skirt that doesn't hide her figure, a broad, seemingly fresh, smile, and a key in hand. she keeps turning her head back and smiling as we walk in the invigorating late afternoon-becoming-evening air, stop at a multi-colored pastel neon lit façade, enter a side entrance and ride the elevator. she opens an outer door then locks it, then an inner door which clicks shut as we enter a surprisingly luxurious, elaborately appointed yet spare anime themed room with a large bed on a raised platform in the center, as if readied for a performance. for a few seconds we stand facing each other, and still smiling, she looks me over, her smile modulating to a frank awareness of my already projected discomfort at any attempt to invent a separate personality for the occasion. the fact that she's challenging me indicates she's not willing to forfeit her own needs for pleasure either, and I feel my penis swell for the first time in a long time.

"I want to clear up, any possible misconceptions before we proceed, if that's ok with you." "yes, I would like that." "to me that list of do's and don'ts required is all bull, though it is protection, esp. if you don't want to have sex with someone. on the other hand, sex is only pleasurable if you do, and I have no rules in that regard so long as it's mutual." "yes"

we fuck with our clothes on the first time, on the raised bed, conservatively, strangers, frankly dirty, missionary, her bare legs raised and pushed back, obliterating talk with action for a moderate time before intensely coming. "that was a good start," she says, rolling on her back, face flushed, back of her

head on the pillow. laying on my side I lean to kiss her, but she turns away. "I'm not feeling romantic," she says, her hand gently teasing my face. "that's all right. when I was very young I picked up a prostitute and while we were fucking when I started to kiss her she pulled her mouth away, saying, sarcastically, 'oh, you're a lover.' wonder what the #Me Toos would say about that." "they'd probably laugh their shirts and skirts off." "I doubt it." "I'm glad you chose this room. it's bright and cheerful. some of the other rooms in an attempt to be immersive depress me." "do you always feel that way?" "pretty much, yes. do you want me to undress you?" "why don't we undress each other." as we have both come, there is no haste to the, at first, more serene, then increasingly suggestive, disrobing, pulling, tugging, feeling her talented hands, fingers, messaging skin, our clothes dropping, her tongue gyrating in my ear, until we're naked, and then we kiss... for me ending a long drought. it's dark now. we go back to the bed and seriously fuck, Aimi getting off on my horniness, continuing after we've both come again, until arbitrarily stopping. for me, now, it's about how much interest we can generate towards each other, including other than sex, as our financial arrangement is for us to be together all night. the only thing I'm sure of is how long the room is booked for and then where will I go? eventually I'm going to tell her. Aimi gets up goes to a closet and removes two long silky robes. we put them on and sit together on a burgundy love seat, our robes open in front, with juice glasses in our hands, comic images in a cartoon commercial. weird how things like this can induce affectionate feelings, and she's looking very pretty, almost demure, her brunette hair with the red high-lights up now. it pleases me the oblong shape of

her face, large dark eyes, and that she has a somewhat longish nose, and as I saw, when I picked her photo, a pensive look that now incites an erotic urge to go deeper. I look her over and spring another erection. she moves closer, then mounts me. “do you want me to let my hair down?” “yes, while we fuck.” this time there is an ecstasy to match the titillation with rapidly moving colored, closed eye visions.

“would you like to walk outside?” “once you’re out you can’t come back even if you have more time.” “but you have a key.” “it won’t let us back in.” “how is it your English is so fluent and idiomatic?” “I have a degree in English Literature.” actually this doesn’t surprise me. “but you need to do sex work to survive?” “I don’t need to do it. I do it because I like it. there are a lot of myths, some are obviously true, but some are not.” “how does this relate to your degree?” “it doesn’t, there’s no relationship to it at all. what do you do?” “I write words nobody reads and create images nobody sees.” she laughs....“that’s too bad. what kind of images?” “photos, street art.” “do you live nearby?” “I had an apartment in Shinjuku, but as of yesterday I’m homeless.” “and you paid ¥8,000 to have sex with me?!” I nod. although I expect nothing I’m extremely relieved she knows. “what do you intend to do?” “if I can’t locate an agency to help I’ll see if the US embassy/consulate can arrange to send me back. they do that sometimes if you’re totally destitute, but they confiscate your passport until you pay back the loan....I don’t intend to do all that,” I finally confess, “I don’t know what to do.” “when did you eat last?” “I had a rice cake this morning.” she gives me a long hard look as she makes a decision. “we don’t have to stay here. being you’ve already paid, you can

stay with me tonight, but first we should go shopping.” “do you have a car?” “yes, or rather I have use of one. it’s not mine. it’s parked close by.” as we leave the hotel and walk side by side in the **now** healing night air I am inundated with both a feeling of helplessness and gratitude.

we walk to a nearby lot and after we get in Aimi’s car, turning towards each other before she starts the engine, I am totally taken by an achingly strange, reflective, but crystal clear, ambience, and the utter déjà vu of the moment. “where are we going?” “Natural House, it’s a health food store, but we have to hurry. it closes at 10:00 pm. I shop there every week.” “I shopped there sometimes too until I began to run out of money.” “are you a vegan?” “a vegetarian. I was once very much into macrobiotics, before that I was a fruitarian, but I eat yogurt and cheese. I haven’t had meat in over forty years,” I say, hoping she won’t dwell on my age.

“you can’t stay permanently in Japan without working,” she says, as we weave through traffic. “I was on a 90 day visa, but managed to get a work permit and stay.” “how long have you been here?” “two years.” “and how have you survived?” “on my savings.” “what made you move to Japan.” I was kind of at a social impasse in Los Angeles, and felt I needed a change, but essentially things have just remained the same.” “do you speak Japanese?” “not really, that requires contact,” I say, feeling a flush of abject shame. “it seems to me your problem is social.” “yes, it is.”

Natural House reminds me of Erewhon, a natural foods store in L.A., that has a boutique style and caters to a young,

somewhat upscale, crowd, but was in the 70s staffed by hippies, who mostly shopped there, except almost everything in Japan is packaged. there doesn't seem to be any brick and mortar stores where you can buy bulk grains and seeds, etc. the only fresh food is the produce. after selecting organic sunflower sprouts, daikon, homemade seitan, garlic, olive oil, and rice balls, we drive to a boulangerie for a French baguette as most Japanese breads are very soft, just before closing.

Aimi's small house which is unremarkable on the outside is tastefully furnished and sensual with books and toys of all sorts lying about. as it is on a hilly street, from the front porch is a nice view, and in the back is an enclosed meditation garden. there's only one bed. so we're going to sleep together though I first offer to stay in the front room. but we're not going to have sex. "do you own the house?" "yes." she's manifesting a whole different aspect of her personality which is more dominant and protective. we stay up late after eating a delicious light meal. we undress and get into bed together although it's unlikely I'll be able to sleep. I feel her warm naked thigh resting against mine, and then we're kissing, passionately, tenderly, my shaft once again hard as she leans forward and blows me, then pulls my head down and I eat her, extirpating the poison in my head, for a long time, licking and gnawing her clit, gently pressing the edges of my front teeth against it, until she's making urgent, quiet sounds, and I continue to press as she intensely orgasms, our roles completely reversed. we then get up, go to the bathroom, brush our teeth, sit for about ten minutes, before getting back into bed and now soundly sleep.

Aimi gets up a little before I do, bathes and returns to the bedroom. I sit on the bed as she lifts the blinds. her profile from head to waist with her hair up in the morning light, has, unable to avoid truisms, the delicacy and fine detail of a Utamaro print. "there's shampoo if you want it." I shower instead of bathe, vigorously washing and rubbing for a long time, rinsing and roughly drying myself before returning to the bedroom where Aimi sits on the bed dressing, and with undisguised interest watches me as I rummage through my backpack, put on clean underwear, socks, and a cobalt blue t shirt, then my unwashed long sleeve t shirt, jeans, jacket and shoes – so easy to fall into domesticity. "that's all your clothes?" "yes." "we can go get some clothes and wash what you're wearing. we don't have to pay for it," she says, before I can object. as the day progresses I'm going to learn a lot more about her. for instance that she's part owner of several of the love hotels in the area. her car, or rather the one she uses, is an old Mitsubishi, and the smell of burning fuel when she starts it up mixed with the fresh rainy day morning air, climate disaster aside, creates another similar undefinably pleasurable moment of déjà vu. we go first to a Nippon bank in Shinjuku, then to Patagonia in Shibuya, as clothes from the trendy fashion stores there, would be, for me, in my situation, useless, before returning. "are you working tonight?" "I don't know. I'm scheduled to come in at 6:00 pm. but I can cancel. I'll see how the day goes," she says, her generally mild, humorous gaze, intensely boring into me. that she might want to have sex with still another stranger with all that has been happening with us at the moment arouses both my desire and curiosity. "I intend to pay you back for everything and give you something you might otherwise not be

able to possess in addition, I don't yet know what, but I'll figure it out." Aimi laughs.

errands done we sit in the garden. bright sunshine alternates with sudden chill as cumulous clouds pass over the sun then float away, flashes of bright hope to sudden depression then back again. I am nearly overwhelmed by the freshness of the new context, of the exhilarating freshness of Aimi's presence seated opposite me. still curious, I ask, "in what way do you use your degree." "I grew up in Kyoto, a pampered third child of a traditional wealthy family", she starts, as if reading her biography, "whose financial dealings were, as it turned out, not entirely respectable, went to private girls schools until college, then to Kyoto University which is where I got my degree plus a masters in writing. I'd begun a doctorate program because I wanted to teach, when the tragedy that hit my family redefined my life – my father suddenly disappeared. it was discovered his business dealings were partly involved with Yakuza, and he was never seen again. I eventually inherited a portion of his wealth as a result of a family trust though much of it went to taxes." "is your mother still living?" "yes." "in Kyoto?" "yes." "what do your siblings do?" "my eldest brother is a private investigator. his interest began for obvious reasons but found he had a flare for the work. my second sibling illustrates and edits manga books. he was named after Saburo Sakai the WW2 aviator who flew his Zero in formation with two other pilots over an allied air field doing loops to Camille Saint-Saens', Danse Macabre. both are married and, with their investments, are doing well." "where do they live?" "Aoyama." "and this is the reason you failed to pursue a PhD?" "yes, Kyoto is not Tokyo, Jerry."

“couldn’t you have continued your studies elsewhere, even in the US?” “if it had really been my true goal, but as it turned out it was not.” I nod. I am moved by Aimi’s candidness and openness, but feel there are pieces of the puzzle still missing that are vital to my comprehension of who she is and as to the purpose of our meeting, other than, obviously, my survival.....and admit I am thrilled by her badness.

it is about 5:30 and Aimi has finished dressing for work, wearing a school girl short skirt which seems to be a universal fetish in Japan and, untypically, a lot of makeup and perfume. she puts on a handsome full length light weight white coat she’s taken from the closet. “I can’t predict just when I’ll be back, so make yourself at home, Jerry,” she says, with the usual caustic inflection. “you might want to walk around and check things out, just for the exercise.” she gives me an affectionate peck before I watch her sensual body move out the doorway, and then as she proceeds seamlessly down the street. lights out I am resting my head on the pillow of a raised tatami mat after having taken a long walk, somewhat startled awake, when the door opens at about 10:30, having conditioned myself to the fact she might not return until the following morning. “it was a Rest rather than a Stay date. not too eventful,” she says, primly crossing her legs as she sits down beside me.” “who was your date?” “a student, but a hip, streetsy one, who said he moonlights at a clothing store in Harajuku. he was very young. I only had one orgasm but it was a good one. what got him off was fucking an older woman who was wearing a schoolgirl skirt. that always seems to do it. he didn’t know much but he had good instincts. aside from that he wasn’t very good company though, so except for

that the night kind of dragged.” “if your date was for only three hours you came back kind of late,” I say, fearing I’m behaving a bit like an inquisitor. “I don’t watch the clock, and I had tea with a very sweet girl who finished about the time I did.” I nod, speechless. then she kisses me warmly, this time like she really means it. “I’m going to take a hiatus, Jerry, until we can work things out between us.”

gender has become the number one topic among the woke. how to define it or whether it exists at all – that there is no physical basis to anything, there is only language and the construct of language determines who we are. ‘well I’ve got news for you, baby’, I think aloud. the caveat with Aimi is she’s not sure what her sexuality is based on, how much of it she projects exists but in the minds of men, so while her orientation is a hedonistic reaction to her background, the satisfaction from pleasure she experiences is indeterminate. whereas I consider satisfaction can be anything so long as it proceeds from wholeness, which, ultimately, no matter how seemingly arbitrary, if pushed, means biologically based. if one is nurtured just by dada and/or pop existentialism, can one feel that way? although I’ve always been turned on, and influenced by, its creatively liberating qualities.

the streets of Shibuya are by no means deserted but are considerably thinned out, especially of tourists, since the arrival of Covid-19, and part of Aimi’s decision to suspend her sex work is related to that. thus the young man from Harajuku had the distinction of being the last paying person to have had her. I think she also didn’t want the last paying person to have been me! this, somewhat to my surprise, raises issues

re her libido, as she has somewhat depended on the variations of role playing and control afforded her, while at the same time being able to rationalize it is her job. but she is not monogamous, and is still in need of erotic surprise. one could suppose our having a sexual relationship would not be monogamous either, just another of her roles, but whatever may have been in the beginning, this is not just another fantasy because it requires real commitment.

Aimi is lying on the bed in her underwear, reading, as I can see from the cover, Thomas Mann's, *Death in Venice*, quite apropos, I think considering the current situation. its protagonist, Gustov von Aschenbach, a famous author, lingered at a resort in Venice as a cholera epidemic enveloped it, willfully eating tainted strawberries, the other guests departing, finally including the object of his unquenchable lust from afar, a fourteen year old Polish boy and his family, suicidal, because his passion was stronger than the reality of the situation. one could, in this regard, suspect my spending much of my last yen for a night in a 'love hotel', except that an extremely unlikely reality intervened favorably, and I had little to lose, anyway. Tokyo has a relatively small homeless population, but that doesn't account for those who live in cyber-cafes or rent pod apartments. the more a society treats the symptoms rather than the causes with more and more restrictive accommodations, the more sordid the possibilities – over the years this kind of stagnation can lead to a permanent underclass, barely surviving. at any rate now we are confined, to a degree, wedded to an unnatural impasse. neither of us are drawn to sex as a routine. it is an unusually cold day in March. the wind is whistling through the bamboo. on the

radio is a Japanese jazz version of the Cole Porter tune, I Love You, several woodwinds quietly playing in Mulligan counterpoint. it is a nice ambience. one which suspends time and place. for those who are not momentarily too affected by external events, suspending time and place can be a good thing. something like being stoned, not as extreme, but without losing contact with the outer world. but is it not shameful that I am letting myself be taken care of in this way? I am reminded of what Walter Benjamin felt when, broke, and returning to briefly live with Dora, his former lover, about 'nesting in the ruins of one's own past.'

I am, momentarily at least, no longer dependent on Aimi financially, as my younger brother Burt sent me \$5000 for a portfolio of my photos which he already had, but is paying me anyway, because of the direness of my situation, as well as sending me funds to retrieve my Nikon full frame camera which had been held for non-payment of a maintenance bill. with Tokyo set for a possible shutdown after a sudden rise in the pandemic, I can still do some street photography, which is one of the reasons I moved here. Aimi still wants me to stay with her. this may seem exploitive on my part, but we've become quite attached to each other – I'm a shoulder to cry on, as she more and more shows her fragile and vulnerable self, and now, as we've once again become equals, have acquired an insatiable need to fuck, just about anytime, anywhere, including, surreptitiously, but brazenly, in outdoor public-adjacent settings. I am also photographing her a lot, many sensitively detailed natural light and shadow portraits, Utamaro as a guide – delicate angularity as opposed to just roundness, as well as extremely dirty ones, as much intense for what they

suggest as what they reveal. there is a subtlety in her oddly extreme features, rivaled only by the very occasional young lady (or young man) in Harajuku fashion who can combine a delicacy of skin and features with eclectic, brash, over-the-top clothing style. Aimi is a natural subject, nor has she much ambiguity about being sexually objectified so long as, in her mind, it goes both ways, which she's aptly shown to my satisfaction when she's behind the lens rather than in front of it. the sickness of male dominance is the false notion the male wants and the woman responds, which is just bull.

but the trap remains. neither of us feel free. neither of us, though more street-wise than most, feel we are adults as neither of us have had to work to survive, nor have we children dependent on us for survival, and watching others who do, trying to survive, exacts guilty feelings from the both of us which is exacerbated by the virus.

adding to Aimi's vulnerability is she's physically and sexually beautiful but knows she won't always be. it is hard to just take and appreciate the gifts one is given and let go when it is no longer there. of course the process is incremental. this was especially the case in Japan shortly after the war, when appearance and sex were one of the few things in demand one could barter. but Japan now has the world's third biggest economy. and any abuse of its citizens by Americans or other foreigners would hardly be tolerated. I myself, perhaps partly because I am Jewish, am not nationalistic, and as Aimi conforms more or less to the image of women I've always found attractive and have dated or desired, and in one instance, married, I do not particularly in our interaction focus on the

fact she is Japanese, that is, our unfamiliarity, yet it is her being Japanese, i.e. the other, which forms the erotic basis of our attraction. this is reinforced by the external physical presence of the country itself, in which I am the other, and which in the absence of any meaningful cultural connection, for me, has become somewhat of a fetish. this is not the case for all Americans, as some do make that connection through their art or personal relationships, such as with electronic music composer Carl Stone, who lives and teaches in Tokyo, or musician, composer John Zorn, who's championed many of the hipper performers of the Japanese avant-garde music scene, or writer, internet blogger Tosh Berman, who lives in Los Angeles, but is married to Japanese visual and performance artist Lun*na Menoh, and is a devotee of postwar avant, and popular, Japanese culture.

both Aimi and I are outsiders who feel alienated from our own cultures, yet belong to, or identify with, no alternative ones. not had been the case for me but has come to pass.

"Aimi is conversing quite actively on her cell. "what's up," I ask, after she abruptly clicks off. "I have one `obligation' to fulfill as I'm selling my interest in the hotels." "doing what?" "helping setting up a video." "a porn one?" "Jerry, you're psychic." "with you in it?" "no, would you like to go?" "why not. but I don't understand why you'd be involved in a porn video if you're not in it." "it has to do with who gets a piece of the action, financially, that is," Aimi says, facetiously, as, standing in her bra and panties, she applies a thin coat of red-violet to her lips, slides a beige sweater over her head and down over her breasts, slips on a tight black skirt, combs out

her hair, and perceiving my unabashedly ardent attentiveness, blushes. "as I said, this will be the last time I will be involved in any of this."

the room, unlike the theme rooms in the hotel is plain with just essentials, mainly a bed. the blinds are drawn and klieg lights are already positioned when we get there. so are the director and videographer, who are both Japanese, the former wearing a floppy hat similar to the one worn by Akira Kurosawa, as well as the two actors, a tall, athletic, African-American with no extra body fat, and a petite, dark-haired German girl, with a sensuous, subtly seductive figure, and smooth as velvet very white skin. the video itself is to be totally devoid of plot. that is, what meaning is in the physical visual characteristics of the two participants and their attitudes and actions as they perform. the video begins with the male, shirt off, pulling the skimpy pastel aqua lingerie away from the female's body, then picking her up and settling her on the bed. he completely undresses and with the lens alternating between her lying on her back and his strong back and buttocks as he moves towards her, quickly mounting her, slowly entering her, they begin to fuck, or more accurately, he begins to fuck her, missionary, for 17 full minutes, with little variation, in real time, creating a mesmerizingly erotic tableau, the camera fixing on the small details, his lifting the small of her back as though he's holding a package, as he pushes in her intensely, her hands feeling for and clutching various parts of his body, her bare heels resting on his shoulders, her legs then bent extremely backwards as he obtains added leverage, his genitals not visible, completely in her, her mouth opening and closing, head restively turning from side

to side, a loose fitting bracelet jangling on her right wrist enhancing the erotic sensation – but mostly, the camera fixed on the color contrast of their skin – strong, assertive dominant dark brown male on soft submissive white female, this is the meaning and the selling point of the video, a black male is `doing` a white woman and the woman is liking it, as it is for all the others like it on the porn websites, the cheating white wife, cuckold husband, BBC (afro/disiac), videos. but is it that they're extremely racist too obvious? not just racist, but oversexed impotent men and frigid nympho women are watching them. my guess is anyone who is even moderately into internet porn has watched them, not just out of curiosity. one thing is dark and light skin, juxtaposed, offer the ultimate objectified contrast. but it, of course, comes with a loaded stereotypical mythology. another is, generally, they really fuck! with most internet sex there's a lot of playacting, close-ups of genitals, semi-hard erections, and angles that would challenge a contortionist.

when the klieg lights go off and the room lights go on the atmosphere is steamy. the actors quickly dress and exit, separately. I look at Aimi, and her skirt is halfway up her thighs, her hand unconsciously in between them. she smiles, completely mesmerized. and so am I. "do you think they faked it?" "no way, I was closer than you, and I heard their orgasms. it was real." there are hugs all around as they bid Aimi adieu.

as we drive back to her place I ask her how she feels. "I had a strong desire for him to fuck me the same way, afterwards." "that's interesting, I had a desire to fuck **her** the way he did, afterwards." we both laugh, the fact that she is Asian and I

am Caucasian not lost on either of us, as she turns towards me, looking sweet and consumable. "then you wouldn't want to fuck me, now?" "yes I would." neither of us can hardly wait to get back, and the sex between us is very good, one of the few times ending without that subtle feeling of something lacking, and for the first time, perhaps, in sex, we really care about one another.

"my brother Haru has invited us over for dinner," Aimi says, a bit tentatively. "I'd like that." "Saburo and his family will also be there," she adds, encouraged, but with a humorous ring to her voice, evidently imagining all of us together in that context. "I promise I won't drop the chopsticks," I say. "it's not you I'm worried about, Jerry.

have you been to Aoyama?" "yes. I walked down Omotesando Street one rainy afternoon in a sea of umbrellas. so many young, apparently privileged, good looking, sexy looking, women in one place." "in Japan?" "yes." "more than in Shibuya, Meguro, Harajuku, Shinjuku?" "no, not really. I guess affluence appeals to my impoverished senses. I once assumed I was going to be rich and trendy. the farmers grow the food they (the rich) eat." "sounds like you're a Marxist." "far from it, but I watched a video focusing on life on a family farm – planting rice with the aid of machinery, growing crops, breeding small livestock, etc., very organized, hard work, rest in the evenings, stuck in one place, in the urban sense culturally isolated, but no society without them. the kids wearing backpacks, just like the rich kids, walking to school, school teacher, studying and writing characters, fresh faced and innocent, but with the potential for disillusion and cynicism

that comes from being exploited already unconsciously showing on their countenances” Aimi nods surprised and moved by my response, because it was unexpected.

I’m afraid I’m going to have to take a raincheck as far as a detailed description of the dinner. researching and describing the food alone would extend this writing into a novel. yes this is a story. fortunately, Lydia Davis’, short, What Was Interesting, and I emphasize short, has come to the rescue. if it doesn’t interest the writer then it won’t interest the reader. I hardly agree. I might chance it to minimally depict her brothers – but, wives and children all wearing face masks? suffice to say, from a humorous perspective, that between the pickled veggies and the grilled fish, which unfortunately, neither Aimi nor I can eat, although there was plenty else we could, and did eat, Saburo, whose wit and street savvy aligns well with his profession, gave me a light tap on the shoulder, and said, without moving a face muscle, “Jerry, let’s slip out to McDonald’s for a cheeseburger.”

Aimi said they all told her in Japanese that they like and approve of me, and as a result she appears on the way back satisfied in that respect, but driven, in a way I have never seen her. it’s late and as we’re driving through a dark stretch, she turns to me with a piercing look and says, “fuck me.” “here, in the car?” “yes, in the car,” she replies, sharply swinging into an empty lot and parking behind an adequately high wall. we move the front seats as far back as they will go and practically maul each other pulling off the necessary pieces of clothing. a little cramped, but once we settle into it, we fuck intensely, oblivious to the night air and the ambient

sounds, Aimi moving madly in a way she never had with me before. for a long time, maybe a half hour, we fuck, the longest continuous sex I've ever had. although my orgasm comes much sooner than hers, I hang in there because I know how much she wants satisfaction. when we're done, both of us, still partially undressed, she first looks me in the eyes, then buries her face in my chest and starts to cry, violently. when she's done we put back on our underwear, she start up the motor. we drive, silently, the rest of the way back.

the first serious stories that influenced me in terms of identifiable content, were F. Scott Fitzgerald's, when I was about 19 and romantic love was the major motivating factor in my life, and it was those moments in his stories, esp. Winter Dreams, from a literary view, that first corresponded to mine. in the beginning of The Rich Boy he alleged and called out the creativity, softness, corruption, cynicism, and sophistication, of the rich, but although deeply affected by it, at that time, I tended to ignore the social factors and focus almost entirely on the mysterious aura of romantic love. "I think the opening sentence to the story, 'Begin with an individual, and before you know it you find that you have created a type; begin with a type and you find that you have created—nothing', is quite pertinent." "you remembered that?" "I reread it recently. the disillusion of romantic love was my first major disappointment. but still elements of meaning survived, feelings of love, regret, and loss. existentialism, on the other hand, the next phase, began with nothing and ended with nothing, but, fortunately, then, I was beginning to embark on a spiritual plane."

as for artists (all formats) I admire or have been moved, inspired, or influenced by, I would not, necessarily, want to meet them, at least, solely on my response, because for them this is how they would define me. and I, like any creative individual, have my own process, in which I use whatever is relevant or of worth to me. to them I feel no personal debt.

something I've wanted to do almost since I've been here is film the density of Tokyo's neon signage. I'd made experimental film in Los Angeles as a young adult and my second film was of the then neon lights on Hollywood Blvd. and Downtown Broadway, shot from the bed of a moving pickup truck. I thought I was using an out of focus telephoto to get the abstract footage, but because the Bolex camera I used was not a reflex camera, when I looked through the viewfinder, I did not realize the lens was not in the taking position on the turret, and I was, therefore, fortuitously shooting the neon lights without a lens. the result was quite amazing. this may seem like a contradiction, but it had the brightness and brilliance of the North Pole on a cold, but sunny, day, had the ice been colored, a cold beauty, getting brighter and brighter and more brilliant as the camera got closer and closer to the multi-colored light source in subsequent waves. I would like to rent a pickup truck here in Tokyo, and Aimi could be the driver. finding a vintage (50s) Paillard Bolex 16mm camera which may be difficult, is important because the older Bolexes, unlike the older Beaulieu's did not restrict, or modify, direct light from coming into the camera when there was no lens in place, and are there still 100 foot rolls of film to fit it? I find there are a number of ads on line, and I'm able to strike a deal with one seller for just a one night rental, as he is

curious as to what condition the as is camera is in, and there is also available film.

we settle on three destinations; Shibuya, Kabukicho Shinjuku, and the center of the electronic district in Akihabara. we set out after dinner at about 8:30 p m. but it quickly turns out what I envision is just not going to work. whereas in my early film, which is no longer extant, the images, however fortuitous, was the result of a mistake, Tokyo 2020 is not vintage Hollywood Blvd. and Downtown Broadway in L.A., the pulsation of the latter was ideal for abstraction. also in my earlier film I shot single and short frames of sparsely spaced manikins in the, haut Beverly Hills clothing stores on Wilshire Blvd. which I used as intrusions interspersed in the otherwise, totally abstract (not just abstract but solid color) footage. the calligraphic quality of Japanese signage, in my mind, best needs to be photographed with a lens, preferably a tightly focused one, and although there are countless videos of Tokyo at night, I do not believe, nor have seen, any which even remotely evoke and explore this really unique dimension of Japanese culture. to make a long story short, refreshed by the scents, the naked night air in my face, I am content to just absorb the scene with greater focus. I get back in the truck and we drive around for a couple of hours, Aimi doing most of the driving as I am neither proficient behind a right side steering wheel, nor driving on the left side of the road. however, at my urging, Aimi also gets up onto the bed of the moving truck for a short spell.

Aimi has a female friend she knows from her former occupation who is staying with us and likes to do men with a strap-on, and she chases me around the house, though I seriously

try to avoid her. I tell Aimi I'm going to stay at a hotel until she leaves, but Aimi finds the situation hilarious. "why don't you let her do it?" "are you serious?" "not really, but maybe we could have a threesome." "how would that work?" "she would 'peg' you while you do the same to me. of course you wouldn't need a strap-on." Yua is all for it, and that evening after our looks start getting more and more personal, we spontaneously undress. Aimi, still wearing a pull over sweater bends over dropping her arms onto the kitchen table, fingers clutching its edges while I spit on my cock and easily enter her and as we start to really get it going I can feel Yua behind me, spreading my cheeks, and then the cool, smooth dildo penetrating my anus. the three of us move silently for a while, becoming quite aroused, but as the erotic sensations build in my anus, my penis softens and falls out before I can have an orgasm, and, Yua, moving in a frenzy, fingers to her clit, comes, before pulling the thing out. I've had the experience before that anal and genital stimulation in the same person at the same time is contradictory. there is a short interval in which we just stand there. I intently look over Yua, whose face is flushed, looking very good, very doable. I take her by the arm and, forcefully, as she struggles, pull her into the bedroom, pushing her face first onto the bed, spread her cheeks, and my penis now rock solid, winches into her anus, and with one hand on the back of her neck, pressing her head against the sheets, move in her, until I have an intense orgasm. Aimi, standing by the doorway, watches with fascination. after bathing and cleaning herself, Yua dresses quickly, intently conversing with Aimi in Japanese, while packing her things.

“it never occurred to me you would be the first person I’d witness raping someone, Jerry. but don’t worry, she said she’s not going to do anything about it . she said she asked for it. she’s been through really a lot, you wouldn’t believe what she’s had to deal with, but she’s very resilient. you didn’t have to get involved, you could have just passed.” Aimi is more than just upset. I can feel the change come over her and I know what’s coming next. “violence towards women, Jerry, is the one thing I can’t tolerate,” I nod in agreement, “and I think you should move out, at least for a while.” “I realize how serious what happened is now, and I feel as bad as you do about it,” I say, sensing there may be more to her action to move me out. “are you sure there isn’t more to this than just what happened tonight?” she hesitates for a moment then says, “your patronizing, flippant attitude towards a perceived bourgeois nature of my family.” “I do not think my attitude towards them was either patronizing or flippant, but I knew that had something to do with it, and in fact felt a change in your attitude that night, and felt what led to our having sex in the car was a result of what I perceived was your family’s patronizing attitude towards you....that while affectionate, they saw their little sister as a lost soul. it didn’t occur to me then that the reason you cried that night was because you were grieving the loss of your father, your innocence, but I did not think whatever change you were going through had anything negative to do with my behavior.” this tempers a little bit the ache I feel. I can sense Aimi wavering a little and could possibly talk her into not kicking me out. but once a relationship turns cold, I’ve experienced, the damage can never truly be repaired, besides, I feel unjustly persecuted, and I agree to move out.

in Fitzgerald's *The Rich Boy*, he describes when the psychological rapport is broken between the lovers, after she observes his erratic, narcissistic, drunken behavior at a party, early in the story, yet they strive for reconciliation, as the doomed relationship goes on and on. I do not want that.

writing this is making me feel bad, but I feel good that this is only a story, and, being it is already 24 pages, am looking for a way to end it, and the only reason I wrote this part is because of the impasse in our relationship, and that we were relying too much on sex, and so I was taking Lydia Davis' advice, looking for *What Was Interesting*, but I know this is a copout. you can't just like wake up in the morning and say it was a bad dream. almost all my dreams are bad, anyway, which is why I write to make myself feel good.

if there is any lesson in this it is once you've been given a gift, you will inevitably look the gift horse in the mouth, no matter how careful or grateful you are, out of guilt or ineptness. this is just human failing.

I am lucky to find, esp. during the state of emergency, through Gaijin Pot Apartments, a cheap rental in a Tokyo suburb, and Aimi takes me there, even though there's good public transportation, and I don't have much to move. I make her copies of all the files of the photos I took of her, and she of me, and tell her she can use them anyway she desires. at any rate, thanks to her, I'm in much better shape than before we met. it's time for me to be a better person. as we ride to my new apartment which is only 6 min from Shibuya on the Tokyu Toyoko line, Aimi is projecting the warmth she's never,

to that extent, shown towards me, and I am having recriminations about my thoughts of the doomed relationships caused by delusional attitudes towards sex and romantic love, that Fitzgerald and the other moderns harbored. I've begun to feel like there is already a small rapprochement that could broaden to a new and wiser acceptance, including a compassionate assessment of the suffering of others through one's own suffering. she tells me Saburo told her he may be able to get some of my writing published, and also some work, as there is need in the manga industry for writers who can edit Japanese translations of English to make them more idiomatically correct. I could do it on my own time and that he'd contact me. the 1DK is small, and the building and surroundings are not particularly pleasant. we're standing on the scarred hard floor in the empty front room facing one another. it is a cold afternoon, but the sun has just come out, brightening. "I hope you'll occasionally come and stay with me, Aimi," a picture in my mind of the old black Mitsubishi pulling up and seeing her smiling face in it. "I would stay with you tonight, Jerry, but that would just reinforce our mutual dependence on sex." of course, sex is how it began. but then that is usually the case. we soulfully look into each other's eyes. we kiss. a very long, deep kiss. then leaving it up in the air we do not say goodnight.

2.

I looked at a 'documentary' (more of an advert) this morning on you tube, one of those with a clownish Paolo Guzman presentation that explore 'a day in the life of' a 'typical' (mainstream) Japanese worker at various jobs or professions, who live in Tokyo, beginning in the morning filming the

person getting out of bed. this video begins with the attractive 'housewife', who in it is named, Tomomi, and her three year old daughter waking, kissing her daughter, getting out of bed, saying to her, "Karin please go wakeup daddy," who sleeps in a separate room, making breakfast, kissing her husband goodbye as he's off to work, dressing the child, performing various duties, taking her daughter to the park, when her husband returns, baking a cake for lunch, both playing with daughter until husband has to return to work, cleaning, working on her blog which advises women on 'how to make you your best partner' (she gives seminars on self-improvement), dinner, bathing with child, putting the child to bed, then having a couple of hours to herself working on her laptop, before going to bed around midnight. the apartment is a 2LDK – 2 bedrooms, living, dining, and kitchen, and typical of what I've seen of Tokyo apartments, the rooms are quite small and crowded with the artifacts of a material existence. because the apartment is apparently new, everything looks fresh, but one could picture, with age and neglect, different tenants, the same space particularly run down. what is interesting in this day of enhanced feminism, is that a presentation positively featuring the word 'housewife', by definition a description of a woman whose main function is to stay at home, keep house and care for children, is still being marketed, so to speak. the compression of a day into a 15 min. video of course makes it seem like there's no room for anything else. as for social life, her mother babysits one night a month so she and her husband can go out. but this is not about a regressive family trapped in the past. the couple is young, likable, attractive, culturally aware but down-to-earth, at home in the most recent electronic technology, with

seemingly progressive values, and at least, potentially, affluent. one thing that particularly interested me was the cooking aspect, how the kitchen is equipped, super modern and functional, and what she cooked, which was, it seemed, traditional Japanese food such as donburi, updated into easily made appetizing dishes. and another thing is husband and wife not only sleep in separate beds but in separate rooms. doing some reading on that, this, I discover, is a growing trend, not just in Japan. there are a number of reasons for it, depending on the relationships, or lack of, but one reason I personally can identify with is a need for private space. we are separate beings no matter who we inhabit, and who we are inhabited by. one quarter of Japanese couples sleep in separate beds. it is interesting also that she, the wife, is thirty eight given the age of the child. another interesting thing, the three year old already possesses a cell phone with internet access and sometimes compulsively presses play on you tube, even during meals.

I see my tools and my art, as I saw their things. and though I wouldn't want to live their life, one could perhaps say they serve the same purpose. I also happen to read several reviews and the lyrics to Fiona Apple's fifth album, Fetch The Bolt Cutters. could any lives be more different than Fiona's and the Japanese couple's, the latter's steeped in conformity? it certainly wouldn't seem so. but maybe it would depend on what either defines as burden or commitment.

non-the-less there is much to contrast this in Japanese street fashion, namely the so called kawaii street fashion, esp. yami kawaii, the dualistic notion which combines yami (sick) with

Kawaii (cute). when I first looked at the book titled Fruits a number of years ago, which were photos of DIY street fashion in Harajuku, it was, visually stunning eye candy, then seemed repetitive losing its edge. but I don't think there has ever been anything quite like it, the amalgamation of any color, design, type of material, to its antecedents of earlier formal wear (kimono) and theater (kabuki). at any rate something very extreme. by far, the most extreme of this would appear to be that which depicts symbols of physical and mental illness with cuteness as a fashion statement; a means, perhaps, a pop form of coping with, and, or, dwelling on, depression, morbidity, or worse, yet in the context of sensuality. and while, thematically, not entirely unprecedented, goth style comes to mind, the almost matter-of-fact literalness of a young, attractive individual, who one might describe as soulful, revealing in a video, for most of her life her longing to die. chilling, but an attempt to create an aesthetic; the difference between 'abject' and 'aesthetic' reality? what do we mean when we put together the words beauty and soul in art?

I have to use a spare computer in Saburo's studio to provide adjustments to the dialogue so that I have access to the illustrated mangas, as all of it is digital. anime artists are notoriously under paid, but I'm getting paid well, and my work seems to be appreciated by everyone involved.

Aimi has come in a couple of times mostly out of curiosity, and, as one of the female characters is named Aimi, I have taken the liberty to have fun with the dialogue, somewhat at her expense, yet to the amusement of the others in the studio. she and I have also visited each other a couple of

times, cautiously trying to create a more sustainable social coalition, but the ending to that first afternoon at my apartment still remains the last time we kissed.

the reason why she kicked me out has become increasingly clear. I was dependent on her, and what happened with Yua just provided the emotional fuel for her to act on that. I am, in a sense, still dependent on her in that, however legitimate, I am surviving and striving because of my arrangements with her brother. I have looked at my past, and even once made a chart of the most important personal influences in my life, drawing connective lines, like in studying the branches in a family tree, and although there were many, the prime sources that everything extended from, even the most meaningful moments of my life, were only two. I would add Aimi to this number because all my meaningful connections allowing me to sustain myself in Japan since the two years I was able to do it myself, on my own, have stemmed from her. of course all associations began with me, as did the much more numerous ones that had nothing or little to do with the prime sources, and did not particularly go anywhere. the caveat is, she, herself, as a trust baby, is not psychologically independent either, and may explain, to some extent, her motivations for both helping, and rejecting, me, although I believe it was, initially, out of the goodness of her heart.

inevitably the sexual pull provides the impetus for us to briefly come back together. it's almost dark. the usual projected Hiroshige afterglow, air beginning to cool, violet, blue, cold white, pink, evening stillness and scents, disappearing. "I've planned to rent a girlfriend," I joke, to which Aimi doesn't

respond. the unfamiliar stare between us, our first kiss. we choose to have sex outdoors with adequate bedding. silently we undress, and without a speck of foreplay consciously and serenely conjoin, immersing ourselves in the ambience, belly to belly. I am very hard and she very receptive as neither of us move, inhaling the evening perfume. it's dark now and we are both aroused, her legs wrapped around my torso, her arms around my neck. by instinct we remain still, centered on, and eventually lost in, erotic and ambient feelings that are totally abstract. we continue to not move, tender feelings giving way to intense primal ones, both coming together, delirious, but tempered by longing, still not moving, pressing, not separating for a long, long, time.

Aimi has, I suppose predictably, taken up with someone else, a much younger man. for us, I guess, it has been somewhat, out of sight out of mind. the virus, moreover, has resulted in Saburo, though not required to, having temporarily closed the office. he is sympathetic to my plight both financial and regarding his sister, and encourages me to "just ride it out." Aimi's new boyfriend, a gaijin from the UK west country, the same region and culture that produced the street artist, Banksy, and at an earlier date, performer, PJ Harvey, is barely out of his teens. slender but dynamic, he looks like the hero in one of Saburo's manga strips. however when he removes his shirt, revealing a full coat of tattoos, any suggestion of innocence quickly fades, and in his case this is not just an expression of rebellious street fashion, as he is actually a yakuza trainee preparing for his initiation into the criminal syndicate. it may seem odd, given her history, that Aimi would become involved with such a person, but with her

business dealings and sexual predilection, this is still another predictable episode in her trajectory, which arguably, could be viewed as an instinct towards self-destruction. and it was Saburo, who used him as a cosplayer for his drawings, who introduced him to her. to say that Aimi is enamored of Jacob both sexually and of his life style, would be a vast understatement, to the extent that she has developed an edge that is a distant echo of a Sukebon girl gang member of the 1970s. it is to her credit though that her attitude remains considerate, even concerned, about my welfare. I think she still sees me as the confidante whom she needed before we met. Saburo, like he is with Covid-19, is playing a waiting game and thinks it will pass. to him it is his little sister once again putting her finger into the cookie jar. I'm not so sure. I think it goes deeper, it just shows a smug position on Saburo's part, and why should one necessarily root against love? when I accept Aimi's invitation to have dinner with she and Jacob, who has moved in with her, I am not surprised as to how it goes. Jacob is both polite, and to my mind, menacing, in that it is clear any discussion can go so far. his stance is, not surprisingly, stoicism, and the implied action that comes with it. as any subject could become volatile, there is very little one can joke about. lack of a sense of absurdity is a clear characteristic in this kind of situation, a sense Aimi has a lot of, and so it must be an effort for her to suppress. he reminds me somewhat of skateboarding punk rockers of the late 70s who were not musicians but tended towards violence, except he's quite good-looking with a mild almost fragile air. but there is no doubt in my mind that Aimi's attraction to him is towards the criminal, subversive, element which she needs to keep refueling her passion. and sexual hunger when it is really

intense can obliterate all other variables. the disaster is when it's satiated, the necessary variables are no longer there. no matter what the outcome Aimi and I will never get back together again. we've reached the point of no return.

so far Jacob has pretty much left Aimi out of his activities with Yakuza, which as a young 'apprentice' should be one of servitude to the boss, and it's hard to ascertain what he wants from her except that she's good looking, and sex, which they must be getting a lot of. perhaps it is the belief that for a Caucasian to succeed in Japanese culture it is best to have a Japanese partner, especially, as crime family syndicates rely a good deal on secretiveness, if she can enhance an image of respectability. I am thinking, anyway, of finally leaving Japan, returning to Los Angeles, look towards publishing my work and showing my photographs, including the ones I took of her. but I fear Aimi is going to crash. the young neophyte's loyalties, whatever his feelings towards her, is for the syndicate. it is truly ironic, given her current situation, that her excuse for dropping me, the one thing she would not tolerate, was violence towards women. she sympathizes with him, however. it's been part of her nature to respond to the same elements who were responsible for the loss of her father all along. but her nature is not submissive. she won't obey and they're going to clash. it happens sooner than later. I don't know what the issue was that provoked it, but she took a relatively mild beating and Jacob is in jail. Saburo wisely had his things removed from her house and into police custody so he would have no excuse to return. Saburo, of course, is feeling quite guilty (story-wise it hurts I had to allow Aimi suffer even a mild beating because I'm a believer in

beauty...but I could have come up with something much worse!). in a way I'm back to where this story began, except, thanks to Aimi I am not broke. I still have a desire to give her something she, otherwise, could not have...but I still don't know what! perhaps not finding that uniqueness is a symbol of our failure. my one regret is that I've had no opportunity to fall in with whatever artists in Japan I would most have had in common, who are only well known in certain elements of pop and avant-garde culture, who, like me, live their creative lives for the sake of living their creative lives and not much else, yet are curious and knowledgeable of everything. my failure is, as it was in my home country, and as it will most likely always be, a social one. I was forced to choose solipsism over a community of contacts. in my home country, because of fruitless power struggles and the personal spite of those who did not want to think I fit their narrative, regardless of my contributions, I had been deliberately shut out, even though I am, by nature, a reasonably social person. and now, as a result, I have become increasingly concerned, not so much that my work be known and celebrated, but that my work survives. at one time I took this for granted. but I realize I've nobody to leave my work to, no person or institution to retain my work and maintain and perpetuate my legacy. my deepest fear is it could very well end in a Rosebud moment.

in the midst of this contemplation my phone rings. I am neither surprised nor expectant to hear Aimi's slightly hesitant but assertive voice at the other end. "jerry, I'd like to see you. can we meet at the train station northwest exit, at about 5:00 pm?" "Yes, where is your Mitsubishi?" "it's in shop." my somewhat benign state has shifted intensely.

I see Aimi before she sees me, walking ahead of me towards the gate wearing a warm black coat, her hair tied together in the back below her neck, an attractive figure if I were a stranger and looking for someone to meet. she turns back and seeing me, stops and smiles. I catch up with her and we warmly hug. we exit at the crossing but do not linger in the park. "where would you like to go?" "let's head up Dogenzaka Street." "towards the love hotels?" "towards the shopping area. it's more individualist and funky than the other areas near here." it has been an overcast day and promises to be a hazy, murky, night. it is apparent Aimi is not in a particularly celebratory mood. and neither am I which is echoed by the nocturnal gloominess, the distorted diffusion of colored lights. as we walk together, almost touching, it is clear the effect the outcome of her recent liaison is having on her and needs to talk, her arm in mine, rambling on her entire past as we reach the center of the area, fog having settled in, the night become more and more hallucinatory, finally, as I hold her tightly, breaking into quiet sobs. we continue walking, hands conjoined. I can feel the temperature of her body under her dress and thick coat and just want it, warm, naked, entwined in mine, as we walk past the first hotel on Love Hotel Hill. was this our unconscious plan, the anniversary of our first meeting, or just an inadvertent part of our playlist? now that our intent is clear we climb a hilly street before mutually choosing one with a coldly mod façade, not concerned with décor, picking a cheap room with no theme but desolate and noirishly threatening. turning up the heat we undress except for our shoes, on her thigh a still not completely healed bruise, entangle and screw. too late for our trains we sleep well in each other's arms till dawn.

more time has passed and I have moved to an apartment in Shimokitazawa. absent are the short skirts of Shibuya and Shinjuku and present the narrow verdant residential streets which could be part of Los Angeles which is more compatible to my needs and sensibility and where I do a lot of walking, not the least, enjoying looking at hip, attractive, women there from afar. given both the content and formatting of my work I am not surprised at having not been picked up by a publisher, although I am working on a translation of my fiction into Japanese with a friend of Saburo's, not only unheard of for an unknown author, but one whose works have never been published (other than self) in his own native language. but it is questionable how much longer I can remain in Japan.

Aimi has relocated to Kyoto and is helping care for her mother while resuming her PhD work at the university, which is under moderate covid-19 restrictions, and is engaged to a young writer, a Japanese-American just begun to teach there, who possesses a gentle and refined nature, and is knowledgeable and empathetic of her background to the extent she's regained a bit of the sheltered quality she had as a girl, the exchange between them being somewhat of a satisfying swap of innocence and experience.

Saburo gives me a lift to the airport so I don't have to take a limo. he's been a good friend. had she still been in Tokyo I'm sure Aimi would have, had I asked....a last ride in her old black Mitsubishi. the terminal is not crowded, and as are we, everyone in view are wearing face masks. I have no luggage just a carry-on bag. we knock elbows and Saburo drives off, symbolically ending, at least temporarily, the Tokyo Story.

