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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
LANGUAGE AND EXISTENCE

by

(C) DOLORES WOODS

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF EDUCATION

IN

PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT ...Educational Foundations:.....

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1980



THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Language and Existence" submitted by Dolores Woods in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in the Philosophy of Education.

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ABSTRACT

An introductory dialogue prefaces the novel, You're a One-Legged Woman, and indicates the novel's educational implications and philosophical significance. In the novel, the author attempts to portray the absence of a dualism between subject and object, language and existence. The objectivity of the language is dependent upon the subjective attitude of the language user. Different attitudes to language are exhibited by various characters and by the reflections of the heroine. The unity of meaning that exists between the subject and her situation in the world often conflicts with the meanings and world views that are presented by other characters. Understanding of the views expressed by language is often thwarted by the large subjective meaning that is being contributed to the words. Interpretation of reality by language is a constant factor in the novel. All existence, human or otherwise, requires interpretation which thematizes the reality that is lived. How one can interpret one's existence in the world is portrayed from a multiple of perspectives, but the power of interpretation belongs to anyone who can take and use this power and be believed. In the final analysis, the author looks at the exchange between subject and object as a description of consciousness and considers how this activity of consciousness finds objectification in language.

Preface

I enter the interrogation room. Three people are sitting in virtual darkness behind a long desk. A chair is in the middle of the room under a hanging lamp. I stand beside the chair. Waiting.

--Why are you here?

--I have written a novel called You're a One-Legged Woman. Emanating from a phenomenological perspective, the novel depicts the interrelationship of the subjective and objective aspects of existence. Incorporated into this interrelationship is a view of consciousness and language; language being an objectification, however simplified or impoverished, of the activity of consciousness. This view has, I believe, vital implications relative to the practice of education.

--You may sit down.

--Why are you presenting this information in a novel?
We have very little time.

--The novel was my instrument for gathering and recording reflections of experience in a life-world. As I believe my theory to be quite original, this empirical approach seemed more suitable than a comparative approach referring to more established views. The novel now stands available for consideration and analysis.

--A novel is fiction.

--A fiction not unlike a laboratory experiment where one tries to reproduce the natural conditions of a particular subject and introduces one or two variables, or a fiction where the experimenter changes a situation to make some condition visible. Because a novel is fiction, I was given license to bring into "outer" existence, as much of the "inner" being of the heroine as I was skillful enough to accomplish. The subjective realm was liberated, restricted only by the social objective aspects of language. In order for my novel to be accessible to the public, the most standard form of writing was required. This created an ongoing conflict between the subjective presentation of the main character and the standard meaning and structure of the words and syntax. This conflict between subjective and objective meanings permeates the complete text of the novel.

--Why didn't you choose to do a case study and look at real people in a factual situation?

--It would not have served my purpose. For one reason, I would still be the person doing the interpretation. I would, however, be writing under the auspices of revealing the "inner-life" of someone else. There is a deviousness to that which I believe is not quite ethical. Secondly, by doing a case study of other people, I would have deprived myself of the personal, subjective and "unspoken" reality

of any one person. This novel is closer to a real life situation as we have access to the mind of one person, and the dialogue of others accompanied by one person's interpretation of their actions and words.

--You realize, of course, that by bringing your work to us in the form of a novel, you are making a statement about what you believe is the essence of education?

--I think you might agree with me that for every individual who is involved in being educated or educating, one of the main tasks is the transformation of the unknown into the known. This statement about education refers both to the subject learning more about his or her self, and also to all subjects learning more about the world we live in.

--Whether the "unknown" is distorted during the transformation is a problem that I think should be mentioned, but is too debatable to be discussed at the moment. For now, please continue with the role of education in this transformation.

--Part one of the statement the novel makes is that sometimes an explicit and direct presentation of knowledge as information is not conducive to the accomplishment of this main task of education. It is pleasing when meaning coagulates into cogent presentation, but for educational purposes, such direct and concise intentions may not only hinder people in the task of discovering what it is that

they know, but it may also prohibit another person from grasping the full meaning of what is being said. Direct explanations and definitions can be too easily repeated without comprehension of significance, or too easily refused acceptance because of the weight of the other person's convictions or interests. Part two of the statement the novel makes about education is that education must be a least a two-way process. It is not just the "taking-in" of things to be learned. Just as important is the expression of all that the subjective consciousness has taken in: the transformation from the subject's unknown "felt" meaning to the subject's known, explicit and objectified meaning. In phenomenological terms, this would be expressed as the difference between living in the world and "thematizing" one's existence in the world. Every person, just by being alive, knows what it is to be a person-in-the-world. Yet, this knowing is often denied expression. Why and how is this so?

Reasons for this inability to express one's existence in the world that are present within the novel are:

a) Lack of skill with the objective means available. Every person should have the power of interpretation to objectify his or her state of being in the world. If this power is lacking, a person must depend on others to interpret the world, and even his or her own being in the world, i.e. by use of "stock" contemporary phrases.

b) Lack of confidence ~~that one's~~ expression of what one knows will be recognized by others. The receptive field that is necessary to invite expression and bestow meaning along with the speaker is often painfully absent. This receptive field is something that particularly a young person has little, if any, control over.

c) Lack of belief in the self as an important and significant enough being to be considered a worthwhile object for reflection. This lack of belief is often accompanied by a credulity in the significance of the work of others.

d) There is often an inability to meaningfully express one's existence due to the diversion of other preoccupations. "Senseless chatter" is an example.

Educators should be aware that some expression of a subject's existence will be made. Whether this expression is to be meaningful and articulate, or whether it will be in the form of petty vandalism or acts of violence is a measure of the success of education. There is also a consideration of "which comes first". It is my opinion, that the need for objective knowledge will not be felt if the avenues for expression are not available. Instead, the "lacks" mentioned above will create a general antipathy to the acquisition of objective knowledge.

Education should enable a person to "thematize" his or her existence by use of some objective means. Although language is the most common way to express one's being in

in the world, any of the arts such as drama, film, sculpture and mime are also valid media for expression. This notion of media for expression can be extended to include architecture, and all forms of technology and science as means by which a subject makes his or her own personal impression on the world.

--What you are doing is shifting the emphasis from what is to be known to the explication of a knowing subject. Perhaps this can be kept in mind while we read the novel. Can you tell us more directly what your novel is about?

--A woman on a roof with a rifle. The heroine, San, has a desire to make an impression upon what she feels to be an inflexible, unreceptive world. Having moved through many patterns of social meaning, incorporating them to her existence and then casting them off, San is no longer motivated, or captured, by any social image of herself. Her attitude towards not only the other characters (who bring their own lived patterns of meaning) but also towards words and the way words interpret or represent reality is part of the "objective" influence that affects her intentions.

The philosophy of the novel concerns the intermeshing of the concrete and the abstract. I wished to portray the absence of a real distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, subject and object. Complete subjectivity encompasses the world in its view but is solipsistic to absurdity. Complete objectivity distinguishes everything

as distinct from the subjects' perceiving, thus detaching what can be known from those who know. Yet the place where the perception of the subject ends and the existence of the object begins is not obvious. The novel represents my attempt to capture and exhibit the sense of flux between these two ideal poles of conceptualization.

--Would you like to elaborate on what you mean by "sense of flux"?

--The interaction that occurs between the individual and the people and things that form the situation surrounding the individual. In the novel, the interplay between the main character and the others is both centrifugal and centripetal: directed outward to penetrate the beliefs, theories and attitudes brought in by the other characters; and directed inward to focus on the self and the thoughts of the heroine. This is also what the heroine refers to as the universal process of all things.

--Where do you situate language within this flux?

--I see language as acting both from its objective-social characteristics and also acting in its primary function of expressing a particular human existence. A large number, perhaps even a majority, of words in the English language express the concepts of grasping, coming-out-towards, turning, taking in and holding. Thus, I suggest, conceptualizing the basic physical existence of the human subject. The objective aspect of language carries:

the history of this subjective expression; the society's accumulative attitude towards objects and their qualities; and the temporal structures that separate the present from the past and the future.

Every individual, however, establishes his or her own relationship to language. At the beginning of the novel, San considers words as bricks; object-things which people pick up to hurl at others. Words are seen as boxes of delineated meaning which can be applied to accomplish a person's ends. Words are also something which she has hoarded to savour her own identity; long conversations leave her with an exhausted feeling she compares with her life-blood being drained from her. In her own reflections, however, she comes closest to "owning" her language; using language to express her personal relationship to the world.

The three people rise from the long desk and retreat into the darkness. I wait. One person comes back into view.

--We are interested. You may leave your novel on the chair. Please return here in twenty-four hours for our opinion.

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YOU'RE A ONE-LEGGED WOMAN

by

Dolores Woods

1

Distance. If she could attain the proper sense of distance, she could accomplish her intention. From up there on the twenty-third floor, the moon of her left thumbnail was enough to cover any human object down below on the sidewalk. The cars were doing their ritualistic round and round, as if they were moving on a child's electric track. They felt like a parade of beetles busily working their way over the surface of the earth. Crawling over the earth's skin. Or, San's skin. She wished her leg would stop jumping.

At least the rain was interfering. The immediacy of the grey drizzle created an enveloping space that separated her from the line of moving beetles, the bouncing umbrellas, and the jerky scurrying of the nine-to-fivers. Using the rifle as a crutch, she hopped back to her shelter. The rain had gathered her long brandy-colored hair into thick damp strands and was dripping off the darkened ends onto her khaki shirt.

"Hey, San, are you up here?"

The grey sky and the grey reflections on the black roof were blending into one. No positive. No negative. Just the surrounding mist penetrating through her. No marks. No boundaries. ★

"San! Call out if you're up here. You never go out on the street this time of the morning, and you're not in your room. Give me an answer, will you?"

"All right, Clarence, I'm here. But I don't want any company."

"Where are you? I can't see you."

"I'm here, under the ventilator shield. It's the only place where I can stay dry."

"I don't know why you're always on this roof. You spend more time up here than you do in your flat." Clarence peered under the tin shelter. "Hi."

The stoic attitude San had tried to achieve vanished when she saw Clarence. "Do you ever look funny with that bread bag over your head. And where did you get that old oilcloth? The rain won't kill you."

Clarence placed his hands on his knees. He looked like a turtle with its head sticking out. "It might kill me. I might catch a cold, a fever and pneumonia. And die. Just because I came up here to find you. And here you are. Sitting under a piece of tin and playing with a rifle; grinning. You really did borrow Vic's rifle, eh? Does he know what you're planning on using it for?"

"No." San looked away. "I didn't tell him. He's out of town."

"You don't want to carry out this harri-brained scheme. Come downstairs. I'll make you some coffee and breakfast. We can have a nice, warm, dry chat about this."

"I'm not about to be distracted. Not this time. Today is the day I stop stepping aside and start making some sort of impression on that concrete ritual going on down there."

"Not today, San. It's raining out here. This isn't the day to start anything." Clarence stood up and extended the palms of his hands upward. As if his catching the rain would prove his statement.

San craned out from her shelter. "No day's ever the perfect day to start anything. In four days another month's rent will be due and I haven't paid this month's yet. Mrs. LaRose will have to let my flat to someone who can pay the price. And I'll be out looking for a place to live...thinking about practicalities. The next time I wake up to the meaningless existence I'm living, another eleven years will have disappeared." San pulled her head back under the shelter and looked straight ahead at the concrete wall. "I'll have made no impression. No changes in the world. People will continue living in their protective clam shells, locked in by who and what they think they are. Fearful of coming out, and too defensive to let another's thought penetrate their being. I've got to do something to get freer movement."

Apparently satisfied that rain was coming down, Clarence was again leaning over, his hands on his knees. "It appears you're feeling a bit crowded. But this is

rather an extreme measure, isn't it? Think of the consequences."

"I'm not worried about myself."

"What about Mrs. LaRose? How is our dear landlady going to feel about you popping that rifle off on her roof?"

"Terrible. She'll be so excited about feeling so terrible that she'll hardly be able to contain herself. Everyday she flowers into a bouquet of new disasters that I have to listen to. My stomach transposes into cornered rats whenever I hear her coming down the hall."

"If you can't tolerate her kind of pressure, what are you doing up here anyway? Have you even tried looking over the edge yet?" Clarence, with his plastic head cover and green paisley cape, ran to the three foot wall around the boundaries of the roof and leaned over. "Looking down from here," he yelled, "you'll probably get dizzy and fall over. You. Standing on your one beautiful leg of flesh. Balancing yourself with that peg leg of yours. Leaning over the parapet. Trying to zero in on some unsuspecting moving object. You'll never be able to hit anyone." Clarence stood up abruptly. "You'll probably just get sick and throw up. It's not going to be very earth-shattering if you throw up on those 'clam shells' instead of blasting them to pieces. Ridiculous. That's how it will look."

San set her mouth in a determined line. She had already looked directly down to the sidewalk and was not

going to do it again just to prove to Clarence that she could. "I can do it," she muttered. "All I have to do is decide that it's necessary."

Clarence returned to crouch outside the ventilator shield. "Well?" San watched the rain drip down the back of his neck. "You want to do this stunt, San?" he asked. "If you do manage to shoot, never mind actually hitting someone, you'll make a good story for me. 'Autobiography of a City Sniper: The Real Story Behind the Headlines.' Of course, I would have to write it for you, but you've told me so much about your past life, I'm sure I could handle the task quite admirably. You shouldn't disapprove. You'll be hidden away in some lunatic asylum for disturbing the peace. This isn't a normal thing to do. This is the sort of stuff that made The World infamous. On second thought, if you're really going to use that borrowed rifle, why haven't you already finished the event? Or saved the city some trouble and turned your anger on yourself like the rest of us do? I'm getting wet."

"I'm not rushing into this. Any act of violence I do will be deliberate but totally indiscriminate. It may be considered a mindless act of abandonment, and I may be put quietly out of the way afterwards, but I'm not doing this without consideration of the reasons why."

"Move over, San. I'm coming under."

San picked up the patterned shank that fitted around her stump and made room for Clarence. "Can't you get rid of that horrid, wet oilcloth?"

"Oh, sure." But by the time he had arranged it to cover his exposed shoulder he had practically dried its surface; his pyjamas and San's shirt were wetter than before. "Listen, San. There can't be any reasons why. You have to either learn how to get on with the world the way it is, or ignore it and find your own personal pleasures; but you can't burst into other people's lives like this."

"So that's the choice: either get on with the world the way it is or find a private escape. As if the two ways were different." San gave her severed leg one last rub and attached the shank in place by closing the valve. Her tattooed leg was ready for its peg. "I'm finished pouring myself into distorted molds, Clarence. Housewife, mother, sexpot, indigent, casualty. Rolling the mind into a suitable form, then allowing the undesirable edges to be cut away with the authority of a cookie cutter. No more. And there's no such thing as a truly private escape."

Clarence, unsuccessfully, tried to nudge more room from San. "What do you mean? There are plenty of escapes. I want to escape now; right into a hot shower. You can jump over the edge if you want. That's an escape."

"Look, Clarence. It takes a lot of premeditation to be a city sniper. It's not done on a whim. It's not the

obedience to impulse that attracts and pulls people out of tall-storied buildings. If those people had a chance to reconsider what they started, they would reverse the film and leap back to the window ledge, roof or whatever. Instead, by the time they realize they have jumped, there is scarcely time to scream. One more number added to the suicide count."

"At least it ends their problems without hurting anyone else." Clarence placed his arms around his raised knees in a hopeless attempt to confine his bulk to the limited shelter.

"Altruism." San filled the word with contempt. "Suicide is altruism carried to its extreme conclusion. Casualties, people who have no place in the system, no feeling of satisfactory contribution, generously remove themselves. They don't have strength or courage enough to strike out and make their hurt known. But either way people are hurt, Clarence. One person commits suicide and the rest of society becomes a little more afraid of themselves. Fearful of what will happen if they don't guard their actions carefully." San wrapped her fingers around the peg and twisted it into place. "It's like hitting a window, to make it fit the frame rather than adjusting the frame to make room for the window. The glass lies shattered."

"What?" Clarence looked around. "There isn't even any glass up here."

San grasp his bare knee and shook it. "I meant, instead of changing the frame, that's the structure of society, the system, people force themselves into the space available. When they can't do that anymore they break."

"But we're not dealing with glass people. People are flexible. Adjustable."

"What have we adjusted to, becoming?" rejoined San angrily. Unable to remain seated any longer, San changed position so that both her knees were outside the limits of the shelter. She grabbed hold of the edge of the ventilator shield, and with her peg leg extended a bit further than her sandalled right foot, she swung herself out and up, and pivouetted around to look down at Clarence.

"Nifty," said Clarence, as he moved over to take up the middle of the dry area.

"We've adjusted," continued San, "to become voluntary prisoners. Our initial training started early. Ten-to-twenty in the institutes for education. Compulsory attendance, compulsory reading, compulsory thinking." San buttoned her khaki shirt, reached down and picked up the rifle. "We became accustomed to set questions with inflexible answers and the absolute right of judgement given to the person in power." San began to pace in front of the shelter. The short canvas skirt she was wearing shed the light drizzle that was still coming down. "Suicide," she shouted, "doesn't do a thing to change all that; it

will keep happening over and over. Suicide doesn't do anything for all the living casualties trying to fit themselves into a framework invincible to personal impressions." She stopped in front of Clarence. Erected to her full 1.7 meters, her whole structure should have announced her fulgent wrath; she should have appeared threatening. She peered down to see his reaction. Clarence was sitting complaisantly, looking comfortably amused. "Fire to it all!" she yelled, and stomped the stock of the rifle on the roof.

Clarence stuck his head out and looked. "What are you so excited about? You don't have to work. Snap yourself up a husband, send for your kids, and live a life of leisure."

San wasn't even going to answer such rubbish. She walked over to the parapet. The cartridges were in her top right pocket. She would have to see if she remembered how to cock the rifle.

Clarence came rushing out from the shelter. "Wait a minute, San. Don't break a gasket." He stopped to rearrange his cape. "What's wrong with being a mother anyway?" He pushed himself between San and the parapet. "I only meant that you could adjust to a nice easy life without worrying about the woes of the world."

"Adjust! Do you think our neighbours, Helen and Kathy are adjusting to the endless chattering, screaming, crying and petty squabbles of their children?"

"Sure, they already have."

"And the repetition and dreariness of their own voices as they remind the children to wash their hands, make their beds, eat their dinner? I hear the mothers screaming in frustration more often than I hear the noise of the kids." San turned and began walking to the other side of the roof. The rifle barrel was in her left hand. The stock occasionally dipped into the puddles of water as she used it for a reassuring balance.

Clarence moved quickly to overtake her. "You're over-reacting, San. A mother's aspirations are supposed to be filled by looking after her young."

"More altruistic suicide. What personal satisfaction can there be in that ritualistic process? Only the joy of losing one's own thought. Burdening it on one's children for them to spend the rest of their lives cutting through. Perpetual suicide. Spending one's life on the daily drudgery that deadens the body and numbs the mind."

Scrambling in front of her, Clarence barred the way. "But they like it," he said raising his hands in exasperation. "The whole world defends and praises the mother. She teaches you things like why you should come in out of the rain."

"It's another box where people voluntarily incarcerate themselves. Commercialization of motherhood, a world-wide phenomena, designed to attract females into the lair. Hide

them away in the slums and suburbs to look after the children. Out of sight." She pivoted about, heading for the parapet. The muscles around her mouth were pulled tightly, and her chin protruded with more intention than was common for her. She turned to Clarence who had caught up and was walking beside her. "And for that, young girls dream happily of their oncoming deprivation. After ten to twenty years of serving time they emerge back into the world to talk daily gossip. Only daily probably means daily five years ago. The pattern of their former existence has ingrained itself in their thoughts, but it's a different world 'outside'. The private events of the past have no relevance, and are of no consequence to new conversations. All ex-cons are aware of that."

"All right," Clarence shouted. "Don't be a mother, then. But are you really going to do this?" San turned to look at him. Despite the oilcloth, his pyjamas were soaked. He seemed beyond noticing. "You're going to shoot people down without knowing who they are? Or what they've done with their lives? Without giving them a chance to reconcile themselves to the fate you're dealing them?"

San walked over to the parapet, and rested against it. "Any discrimination," she answered calmly, "would mean a recognition of individual deeds of good or evil. A person might think that injury could be avoided by sinking into even greater mediocrity."

"I know. I know." Now it was Clarence who paced in front of San. "The result would be less rather than more freedom of thought and movement. You want to actualize some open system wherein a person isn't captured by doing the same routine every day. Thinking the same thoughts. You want to break the determining patterns and clean away the trivia from the minds of the people." Clarence stopped to confront her directly, took off his pyjama top, and began to wring it out. "All right! If you're really going to do this stunt, I don't know why I can't engineer some activity around it. Blow it up a little."

"Can't you just leave me alone?"

Clarence ignored the question. "What you need is a manager. While you're being so concerned about others, you don't seem to be able to plan your life from a distance of four or five days away. You don't realize what a gold mine you are." Finished wringing his top, he gave it a shake and put it back on. "You've never learned to sell your assets properly. I could turn your weight into money. Living proof that man, excuse me, woman, -- how about mankind? -- can do any damn thing that's decided upon. Driven by desire for change, love, sex, fame, power, greed or whatever. I can see it now. Headlines: Mad Woman Has Answers To What's Wrong With Your Life."

"Clarence, why don't you go back inside? You're starting to rave. I know that you're looking for that one

'really big story' that will take you to fame in that lousy, stupid, grubby newspaper that you work for. The paper for all moonlighters, moonshiners or just livers of subterfuge and subversion. Forget it. I'm just going to stay here, become accustomed to what I'm going to do and why, and then carry it out. I'll shoot, there'll be a bit of commotion, and then, protest made, they'll take me away and my problems will be ended." San shifted her gaze to look down at the traffic below.

Clarence wasn't about to be put off. Grabbing the oilcloth again and holding it above his head, he came so close to her it seemed he might ram her over the edge. "I know you've got problems, San. Lots of them. And you don't even want to turn them into a profit. The problem with you is that you're a one-legged sex symbol. Your courage borders on stupidity, except now it's crossing the line. You don't believe in the power of the individual, yet you'll do anything to express you individuality. Your heart's on the left but your nose is sniffing to the right. You're so full of contradiction that there's no trend to your actions. You're like a knight. If you move one direction you're sure to make a right angle turn somewhere else."

"I'm not a chess piece, Clarence." San brushed her hair back to keep it from dripping on her neck.

"You sure aren't. Chess pieces know who they are. But you! One moment jumping about, turning direction in mid-air. Next moment doing a quiet zoom across the country. Just when a person is getting used to you being so active you think you're the king and bemoan your lack of protection. Decrying the insubordination of those who are supposed to keep the enemy away. But you're not even sure where or who the enemy is."

San attempted to interject, but Clarence was wound up and the centrifugal force of his spiel forbade disruption.

"You refuse to recognize cut-off lines and empty spaces or even black and white. For you they don't exist. Yet you don't seem very pleased living in those thousand and fifty shades of grey that keep slipping around and changing in front of your eyes. You see the whole world as alteration and flux. You're a ballbreaker." Clarence threw the oilcloth down and took off his plastic helmet. "I'm soaking wet and already getting hoarse. I could be sitting inside with a tall drink. What am I doing out here anyway? What I'm going to do is go in, have a hot shower and a bite to eat, and give some meditation to your erratic behavior. Are you hungry?"

"A little," San shrugged.

"Good. It will make you feel human."

"Looking at your extra thirty pounds, you've never felt human yourself."

"Go ahead. Insult me. I'm still going to go inside and make a plan of attack for your next few days. I think I'll warm myself with a hot rum, and then phone the boss. Let him know I'll be out on a job for a while."

Clarence walked towards the small shack. Originally built to cover the top of the stairwell, it had been enlarged, and now looked like an odd-shaped lean-to. By the time Clarence reached the door of the shack, he was whistling. San could hear him until he reached the elevator one floor down. She returned to the refuge of her shelter.

She took off her khaki shirt. Her pink tank top underneath was barely damp. Clarence was right about one thing, even if he couldn't control his appetite for food and prosperity. It was miserable up here. Too bad the sauna in the lean-to had never been finished.

Her glance fastened on a strip of dandelions growing along the inside edge of the parapet. She must be hungry. Thinking about dandelion greens. There was an old tomato juice can too. She could add some rain and put it beside the heat from the ventilator. In five or six hours she could have some soupe de verte. Maybe. But the look around had made her feel desolate. So many delapidated good intentions. The swimming pool; cracked cement collecting debris. That old tennis net hanging half down and rotting. Even the potted poplar trees looked tired. Summer leaves drooping, despite the moist air.

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Dispersing her thoughts about the surroundings as best she could, she settled back to figure out how to load her borrowed rifle.

2

"San."

"What?"

"I've something for you."

"What is it?"

"Just something to eat. Do you want it?"

"Of course. Aren't you going to bring it out to me?"

"I can't. I'll get wet."

San had been on the roof a mere three hours of the possible four days, but already she was tempted to go in and partake of the pleasures Clarence was offering. Her mind wavered: refusal of the bait initiated her hunger further; the wish to accept made her condemn her own lack of fortitude.

"Clarence, the clouds are breaking up. The rain is scarcely a sprinkle." No answer. "If I come over there and pick up the fried beans, the potatoes or whatever it is you've concocted, by the time I get back over here it'll be swimming in the plate with the rain." Still no answer. Perhaps it would be just as good to meet him under the shack roof. It would be nice to have a stretch. She should wash up anyway. "All right, I'm coming."

She entered the shack. No Clarence. No food. Maybe he'd been only teasing...shredding her determination.

Perhaps a look in the change room. She stepped from the stairwell area into the lean-to added to house the conveniences for the pool enthusiasts. Cracks in the wall were large enough to allow illuminating seams to appear on the floor: One foot on the dark strip, one peg on the light. Dark, light; foot, peg; and she was across the room. She turned the water taps on at the sink in the lavatory. Nothing. Shower taps likewise. The first spit of air, rust and water made her jump sideways, almost losing her balance. When the shower pipes started to grumble and spit, she was less startled. She left the taps open to clean the pipes and returned to the shelter. Pointless to think of Clarence and food; better to divert her attention elsewhere.

Someone else, in a former time, had tried to create a different aura on the roof when those two potted poplar trees were planted. Probably it was some misplaced Westerner attempting to turn this barren roof into a vision of the flat, sparsely poplared prairie. The black roof might be the tilled summer fallow with the fringe of weeds along the edges. The bent poles holding the tennis net could be a piece of discarded machinery. The pool; a dugout for the cattle. All that had been lacking was a couple of poplar trees, stragglers, in the corner of the field. With these added, the anonymous farmer must have been almost able to smell the freshly turned dirt. Ready for the rain

She had enjoyed watching the poplars change from month to month since her return from Italy. Watching the variation from hour to hour with the change of light. There were times during the early morning or on a cloudy day when there was not enough sunshine for the poplar leaves to show green. Against a white hazy sky they moved as dark animated figures, using the wind to orchestrate their trysts.

It was likely the wind participated in forming the odd shape of the trees. They grew fairly straight and close together until they reached the top of the parapet, then they separated, only to amalgamate at the top branches -- creating a frame, as if for a cameo. The sky always seemed more brilliant there.

Her first sight of the potted trees was in January; their bare skeletons exposed to the cold, often grey smoggy air; their branches looking like a complex pattern of nerve endings. Stretching outward from the spinal column in ever denser clusters and ever smaller dimensions. Stretching outward to meet wind and snow. All through February and March she watched the tiny passages grow thicker -- pregnant with the budding leaves. Finally the green flesh was added again for another generation. Sticky red and yellow afterbirth, having the appearance of caterpillars, hung from the branches and fell on the roof. Glueing itself to her bare foot, her shoes and her pegs. And then practically a month of white fuzz. Nothing, of course, like the

quantities of fuzz that used to fall where there were acres of poplars. There it sometimes covered the ground, drifting around like snow. Poplar trees sending out their sperm to propagate more of their kind, filling the air, waiting for the proper connection. Making her sneeze.

Growth finished, within a short while the leaves would be falling again. These poplars weren't growing all that much; stunted by the six-by-six box their roots were confined within.

Even for poplars they hadn't grown very tall. Probably about three fishermen. She smiled to remember the Sicilian fisherman. Standing at the head of his boat as he took her out to the grottos, he had appeared incredibly tall. Seven feet, over two meters in height, he had remained in her memory as a readily available visual reference.

"Shades of the flood!" Clarence ejaculated as he ran out onto the roof. "What've you got all the water turned on for?" San leaned out of the shelter. Clarence was dressed in a green short-sleeved shirt and beige trousers and was setting the tray he was carrying down on the poplar frame. "While I was coming up the stairs, the water hitting the metal walls of the shower sounded like it was time to bring out the ark. Aren't you out from under that vent yet? It's a lovely day out here now. Haven't you noticed?" She stood up and looked around. The clouds had broken up.

Clarence bowed, pointing to the tray of food. "Would madam like anything to eat? Drink?"

"It looks like a beautiful suggestion. You're not going to take it away like you did before?"

"Before? Oh, I called out to see if you wanted to come down and have something to eat. You didn't get there by the time it was cooked, so I carried it up for you. Go ahead and eat."

"Wait a minute." San went into the shack and turned off the water. She brought out two of the rickety turquoise lawnchairs and unfolded them by the poplars. She was about to sit down when she thought of the rifle, picked it up from the shelter and returned to where Clarence was already sitting. "Beef stew?" she asked as she looked into the bowl.

"Left over from last night, but I added some spuds. Now, while you're eating, I want to tell you a few things. First of all, what you really want isn't solitude. You want attention, lots of attention. That's what this is all about, isn't it? Well, I've started to work -- with your interests in mind. The old Clarencian network is on the move. The photographer from The World will be here in a few minutes. We'll get a picture of you sitting up here with your one shapely leg pushing against the parapet, your chair tipped back, the wind blowing in your hair, and the rifle clutched in your hands. With any luck, we might be able to make you look like a wild woman. Ready to effect

a cure on the ills of humanity. Perhaps before you start to blast away, you should tell this ignorant reporter a few great apothegms to help with the enlightenment of the world."

San picked up the small bun and broke it apart. Couldn't be much more than two days old. "You're not taking me seriously, Clarence."

"Sure, I am. Through my expert coverage we can be assured that the public will get the full benefit. It's not often that I receive advance notice of such noble self-sacrifice for humanity. More often these things are in the final stages of action by the time I hear about them. But with this I'll be able to recount the whole story right from the beginning. When this is finished, I'll be in demand as a feature writer by every rag in town. So start talking. What do you know? I've got all day."

"You're wasting your time, Clarence. Just like I'm probably wasting mine looking for any meat in this stew. You won't find out any great apothegms from me. After all of my time trying to live the best life I could while struggling for survival; trying to balance sacrifice and interest to the credit of both sides; moving from one situation to another; studying in the hope that I'd find something valuable...there's nothing left. I probably know only, maybe, four things."

"Well? Continue. I can remember."

"What is this stuff you've given me to drink? It has a texture of sticky slush."

"Don't try to avoid the question. What are the four things you know?"

"I can't eject them like the shells of sunflower seeds, coated with saliva and ready to spit out. Maybe I don't know four things. Maybe I only know three. Or two." Whether it was the questions or the dismal, dead food she was eating, San wasn't sure, but tears of frustration were welling up.

"Don't be an idiot, San. Of course you know more than two things."

"Do you know what an idiot is, Clarence? Someone whose ideas and thoughts are so private they cannot be communicated to others. A little idiosyncrasy is interesting or amusing, but too personal a way of making connections, of mixing one's own ideas with the stuff of the world, lacks verification; lacks a shared meaning with other people. Without public consensus, the speaker can be classified as an idiot. So what should I do with the four things I know? I may as well arrange them at right angles to each other like four fence posts. Maybe balance a platform on them and see if I can stand on it. I would have the same amount of success as my ideas have of being fairly understood. Understood with fairness."

"What makes you think that you're so incomprehensible? I've known you for six months now and I understand everything you say." Clarence picked up San's drink, sipped only once by her, and proceeded to drink it.

"You receive everything with the exact meaning that I send it? Ingress is equal to egress without regress or aggress?"

"Even you can't be sure what that puzzle means," scoffed Clarence, moving his hand as if to brush the words from his mouth and disperse them into the air. "But when you're not trying to be difficult, I completely understand you."

"No you don't. Everyone seems to have placed a sanction on my ideas. No one hears what I say -- sure they listen, but then they modify, reinterpret and change -- they hear what they want or expect to hear. Everyone generally thinks that they know what's being said because they attach their own meanings to the words. But a new idea isn't really comprehensible until it has accumulated a history of associative thoughts. Shared meaning is circular; you have to know what's being talked about to know what's being talked about."

"Pete's alley, San," interjected Clarence. "Why don't you stop fencing and tell me about these 'four things'? I can tell you if they make sense or not." With decisive movements, he placed the empty glass back on the tray and set his hands on his knees; waiting.

"No. Impossible. All you can do is project my ideas through the network of your way of thinking. With your interpretations speeding along faster than I can state my meaning, all you'd be able to return would be a distorted, misshapen caricature of what I had offered. I have to know that I'm tossing my ideas into a receptive place. Otherwise, you can so easily say that it means nothing. Like farkleberry seeds in the desert; doomed to lie wasted."

"You don't have to worry about me doing that now," said Clarence, rising from his chair. "Here's Ivan, the photographer, accompanied by your favorite landlady."

San could feel the nervous activity leaping and gathering in her stomach. What disaster now? Ivan walked briskly onto the roof and looked around as if sizing up the situation. Camera case in hand. He was noticeably shorter and smaller than Mrs. LaRose who, already wringing her hands, overtook him and greeted Clarence.

"Hello there, Clarence. San. How are we this morning? I thought I would show this fellow where your flats were, except he seemed to think you would be on the roof. I really don't care for strangers wandering around. You know I had such a terrible night last night, people slamming doors...."

"That's too bad," offered Clarence. "Especially when you're such a cheery sight for others. Is that another of your new colorful summer outfits? Deadly," he said, as he took her hand and shook his head incredulously.

"Clarence, you've seen me wearing this a thousand times. But," she said turning to San, "he's such a dear boy. Oh, my. What's that gun doing there? You're not planning on shooting it are you, San? They're very dangerous, you know. And accidents, too. By the way, San. The rent. I don't think I can accept a cheque. Last month...."

Clarence kindly interrupted this fast flow, picking up from where he left off. "And you're looking lively as a humming bird. Wait. Wait," he said, preempting the air space and thwarting her attempt to finish talking to San. "Famous events will be taking place on your very roof, and you, as hostess, can be part of them."

"Me? Really?" Mrs. LaRose put her hand to her breast. "What are you up to now, Clarence?"

"We're going to be taking a few pictures for a story and you would be perfect in them. After a while there'll be a few other people coming in; you could contribute some sort of snack if you wish."

"Heaven's to Betsy! You should have told me a little in advance. I'm not ready for this. I suppose this will be quite exciting." She glanced at Ivan who was adjusting his camera and took a deep breath. "Well. I'd better run along and fix my hair. Perhaps it's time to add a highlight...." Mrs. LaRose broke off abruptly. "Don't start without me, Clarence. And," she fastened her gaze on the rifle, "what about....?"

"Don't you worry about anything, Mrs. LaRose," Clarence assured her. "It's all in good hands; everything is under control." So saying, he ushered her off the roof, holding her hand all the while.

Ivan was circling the area where San was sitting. Observing her potential as a photogenic object, no doubt. "Best to take low shots." He spoke as if San could listen if she wanted, but it was obvious that it was unimportant whether she heard or not; answered or not. "We'll want to make your legs look longer." He moved close to her and looked downward. "Not as skinny as we'd like. Get up, and let's see how you move."

San glared at him in disbelief. A wave of antipathy engulfed her. "See you burn first," she said. He blinked; his eyes had the character and depth of a parrot's except the skin under his eyes pulled in close to his nose forming permanent wrinkles. He must have pouted or cried a lot as a kid, maybe he still did.

"Good to see you here, Ivan," said Clarence as he approached.

Ivan stood back from San, placing his hands on his hips. His voice full of derision, he addressed Clarence: "So this is the lady you were telling me about? We should get a few shots of her sitting on this wall, looking down at the city; or leaning over the edge, rifle in hand."

"I'm not going to sit on that edge. It's less than a foot wide." San picked up the rifle and ran her hand over the stock.

"Don't push any panic buttons, San," said Clarence. "Sit back and relax. Ivan and I will figure this out."

They walked around; Ivan strutting; Clarence doing his usual accommodating schuffle. At one point in their discussion, they appeared to be pacing out distances between salient objects.

The photographer initiated only repulsion from San. His body, a skinny stem of assumed arrogance; his styled black hair, probably dyed; his height of fashion clothes; the smell of some perfumed shaving lotion. She remained seated on the lawn chair. Her legs stretched out in front of her; "feet up" on the poplar frame; the peg leg crossing over the ankle of her other foot. Clarence and Ivan came up behind her and stood -- Clarence to her right, Ivan to her left -- looking down at her peg.

"Of course, a cheese-cake showing off her wooden leg," said Ivan.

Clarence nodded in agreement.

"Unusal peg," said Ivan. Obviously the earlier failure of his conversation had created no inhibiting caution. "Hand carved?"

"Yes," said San, volunteering no farther.

"Do you have to wear flat shoes all the time?" This Ivan was all questions.

"No," San answered.

"She's got three pegs," elaborated Clarence. "One to go with high heels, which she seldom wears; one for flat shoes like the sandal she has on now; and another for when she wants to run around barefoot."

"Who did the fancy paint job?" probed Ivan. "Salamanders, dragons, fire, water, caves; it must have taken some time to put all that color into such a design."

Ivan moved to rub a manicured hand over her wooden shank, but San raised the rifle barrel between his hand and his intention.

"Sorry," he said, lifting his hand into the air in an exaggerated motion and simultaneously casting his right eyebrow halfway up his forehead and taking a step backwards.

"Awfully touchy, isn't she?"

"Sun's getting hot," appeased Clarence. "San, you should have a hat. It would make a good prop too," he said to Ivan. "It's been a long morning for you, San. Why don't I get you a drink?"

"Another one of those aborted eggnogs, cooled with mint-flavored ice cream? No, thanks."

"Okay," laughed Clarence. "I'll dash you out a tall Bloody Mary. Celery stick and all."

"You don't have the makings for one."

"Doesn't matter; I'll get them."

With the memory of the stew still fresh, San could hardly refuse. "Would be a nice...."

"Say no more, I won't be long."

San smiled self-mockingly. Was she so easily placated? Still, it might mean that she would be alone for a while.

"You coming Ivan?" Clarence asked.

Ivan was already putting his camera in the box.

"Salutary thinking there, Clarence. Be right with you."

They left. The quiet was a welcome reprieve.

San leaned back and closed her eyes. The warmth of the sun touching her face, the fluttering of the poplar leaves in the breeze, the crescendo and decrescendo of a siren below, all had a lulling effect. It seemed only a moment before Clarence and Ivan were back on the roof.

Clarence had his strategy all prepared. "We're going to go ahead this way, San," he said as he sat down on the poplar frame in front of her. "I'll interview you while Ivan takes whatever shots he feels arise. Oh, here's your drink." He reached into a cooler. A bag of ice cubes, a large can of tomato juice, Tabasco, a bottle of vodka and a stock of celery, cut, washed and placed in a plastic bag, indicated he was ready to have an afternoon of Bloody Marys. Setting out three glasses, he began to fix the drinks. "There are a few questions I want to ask you, San. Like: how did you feel about being born?"

"No one feels anything about being born, Clarence. By the time one realizes it has happened, the event is years past." She watched him take out a celery stick. "I hope you've washed your hands."

"Of course," said Clarence lifting one corner of his mouth in what could have been a smile, except that it tightened up, making a grimace. "All right. But once you'd realized it had happened, did you curse the day?"

"Never. A lot of people are born. Why should I, in particular, curse the day I was born?"

"Well, how do you feel about it? Ivan, when she smiles in that grim way, try to get a close-up will you?"

San sat erect in her chair, took the drink Clarence offered, and tried to erase all expression from her face. "You asked for it, Clarence. Born. Much had happened before that event, but I knew nothing about it. It must have been my mother's fault." San grinned. "I should have been born knowing where the human race had been, what it had done in the last twenty years, the last fifty, the last thirty thousand. If there is such a thing as innate ideas, and great powers of inductive reasoning that humans are born with, I certainly missed out. I was given, and believed, an all-inclusive myth; supposedly the past of the human being was fully recorded. Realization of my ignorance was almost totally obscured. As it was, for me the world began with me. And I didn't even realize I thought that until a few years ago. One should be born with a sense of history. I, however, regarded the world with two senses of value; before and after."

"Christ?"

"No, you dodo, before and after me. But the 'before me' held little interest, especially while I thought that the explanations were all wrapped up. And the 'after me' ...well, nothing seemed to happen. Everything took so long. Waiting to grow up, waiting to go to school, to be old

enough for sex. And then, waiting for my own children to grow up. So many years wasted waiting while I could have been finding out what it was to be an evolving consciousness. Generation after generation of humans becoming increasingly aware of who and what a human being is, becoming more self-reflective, separating themselves from their environment enough to realize how vital a part their surroundings play in their interaction with the world."

"Hold back a moment. You're running on like a young race horse with the bit between her teeth."

"All right." San brushed the hair back from her face and took a swallow from her drink. "But how come, during those first years of learning, I didn't know about creating art and music to develop the intellect, heighten the emotions, and give an appreciation of the variety of patterns that humans have used and use now to organize their world? While I lay under the sibilant leaves of those old poplar trees, why wasn't I transforming the sounds into great scores of music? No. Instead I was thinking it was a boring, timeless world. I wasn't stretching back into history, or elaborating into the future. Of course, history isn't very visible on the prairie. Not like it is in Rome or Naples. History on the prairie is one's father's old school bus. Retired to the grassy acre behind the house. Containing two benches and a wood burning stove. History is seeing the sleigh runners and the wooden

wheels. It's all present. All there. Just like I thought I was all there, from the beginning, like a sprout. All I had to do was wait for the right timing and the right opportunity. Never thinking I would have to create the person I wanted to become."

"But you were right," said Clarence. "That's the way it is. Get in the right spot at the right time, and you get the breaks."

"Sure, Clarence. Perhaps some great hand of fate will stop that roulette wheel you're on and the attention of the world will focus on you. Meanwhile others who continue to go around in circles blame themselves for being without the 'knack' or 'talent'. A predictable outcome of the man-from-a-seed philosophy; waiting for the proper conditions. Everyone waiting to follow some stage maturation plan. Blaming their failures on some quirk or deficiency of the seed."

As always when she considered such things, a feeling of hopelessness invaded her. She sipped her drink; it was awfully hot. "It's a passive philosophy, adopted to quell conscious activity. This is a burning drink, Clarence."

"Hand it over. I'll top it up with some more tomato juice."

"I suppose," challenged Ivan, "you've never 'waited' yourself. Your wishes," he said, looking at Clarence filling San's glass, "are quickly obeyed commands. You probably think that you've planned and attacked, then followed through, all of your life." San had assumed that Clarence

had asked Ivan to hold his tongue, but apparently he couldn't keep back his rude comments any longer.

"Wait? Of course I did. Becoming aware of consequences long after the determining events were lived. Ambling through life with the usual lack of premeditation." She took back the glass Clarence handed her.

"Better?" he asked.

"I think so, thanks." She returned her attention to Ivan who was sorting through some lenses. "No, I didn't even keep up with good hindsight. I was seven years old before I realized that we were poor, and sometime within the next decade or two, I comprehended the difference poverty had made to my 'natural' development."

"And I suppose," said Ivan, "you blame a lot of this misfortune on being born female in a male chauvinistic world?"

"It might have been affecting me, but I wasn't aware of it. I was probably four or five years old before I realized that I was female." San got up from her chair and walked over to the parapet. Leaning on the wall, she watched the movement below.

"Do you want a couple of ice cubes?" said Clarence. He had them in his hand. When she declined the offer, he used them to rub across his forehead.

"You couldn't have been that unaware of your sex," said Ivan, who was taking a profile of San's well-developed breasts.

"There were a lot of clues, I'm sure, but I didn't seem to recognize their significance."

"Like?" asked Clarence.

"Like, I remember mating the pumpkins."

"Pumpkins?"

"Yes. As a child, it was my job to make sure that all the female pumpkin flowers had been touched by a male pumpkin flower. It was easy to tell the difference. The male pumpkin flowers had a soft, fuzzy, yellow protrusion coming from their center. The female flowers didn't. I'd pick the male flowers and rub their yellow fuzz off -- on to the inside of the female flower. Once the fuzz was all rubbed off, I'd pick another male flower and continue the process."

"Sounds like an appropriate beginning for a nymphette," said Clarence. "How else did you spend your time?"

The memory was pleasing. "Mmm. Sitting in the garden, picking peas and eating them. Wrapping my fingers around dandelions to see how much of the root I could pull out, all in the name of working, you know. But there was always a sensation of satisfaction if the earth would release the whole root. And pulling carrots. Running to the pump to wash the carrots or radishes before eating them. Then back to mating the pumpkins. Each of the male and female flowers had a little bulb behind the blossom. The bulb looked like a miniature pumpkin, but the male bulbs never did grow into

pumpkins, only the female bulbs did. Even they would wither and die unless I'd made sure they'd been touched."

"You say," queried Ivan, "you were unaware of the sexuality of all this?"

"Pumpkins are plants. Who thinks of the analogy? Now, I don't know why the thought that flowers have two sexes is startling. But how did you get me talking about all that?"

"You were four years old when you found out you were female," prompted Clarence.

"I might have known when I was three, or seven, or twelve, each time knowing something not quite the same. What difference does all this make?"

"San." Clarence stopped for a moment to finish the piece of celery he was chewing. "It all helps me decipher who you are and what went wrong; why you're up here. Like I said," he cracked off another bite of celery, "this isn't a normal thing to do. You must be fundamentally angry about something. What was the final straw? The mind-breaker? The untenable illusion."

San didn't want to answer. Turning away, she went back to sit on the lawn chair.

Clarence continued his prodding. "Come on, San. Open up. Spill the beans."

Bending her left leg at the knee, San brought her wooden peg close to her body. She sat; the sandalled foot still on the roof, her peg resting on a vinyl strip of the

chair. Hands on her knee, chin on her hands, she remained silent.

"Her problem must be men," interpreted Ivan. "It's the only thing that really disturbs females. She probably had her first sex too early, or the man was inconsiderate or rough. Or maybe she has difficulty having affairs at all these days. Let's leave her alone to sulk for awhile; there are some things I want to talk to you about, Clarence. We have to get her to loosen up, move about...."

She ceased to listen. Untenable illusions, no. Just illusions dispersed. Along with the hopes that another group of people would be more sensitive, more aware; would know something worth knowing. Or the hopes that another year would be better than the year before. Try again and then...next year. If there was one lesson San had taken with her from the farm, it was "wait until next year". The waiting didn't work. She knew that when she listened to her father crying in the kitchen: "look at the hail, the God-damned hail. This year. This year would have been a crop like '52. Sixty-five maybe seventy bushels to the acre. Cursed hail will knock it down for sure; binder'll never be able to pick it up; we'll be scraping it out of the mud. Listen to it, hammering like hell. Last year. Last year I put all our money into insurance. Didn't hail. Then, it was the cock-suckin' aphids; suckin' the juice out of the grain. Remember that, Liege?" he asked mother.

"The black field, the few stems they left weren't enough to turn the cattle in to finish it off. Remember?" He watched the hail while his body shook. "We're gamblers, man of mine, gamblers," Liege consoled. "Then why," he sobbed, "don't we quit? Year after year. The year the ground was too wet to plant, and it snowed too early to harvest. We picked it up in the spring that year, remember? And the year the wheat was so high it looked like it would run sixty bushels. All stem and no heads, lucky it ran twenty-five. Year after year brings in nothing but the seed bills." Wait, and see what happens, then rot, like the seeds. Dependent on circumstances.

"Don't look so forlorn, San," interrupted Clarence. "We're here. Life isn't so bad."

San, still caught up in her reverie, answered Clarence by speaking her thought aloud. "No, it couldn't have been so bad. There were years when we had to shovel grain away from the spout of the threshing machine into the corners of the square wooden granary."

"Who is 'we'?"

"Huh?"

"To whom does the we refer. The 'we' who used to shovel grain?"

"My cousin and I."

"And that's when you had your first sex?" Ivan interpolated.

"No." San conquered her reaction to Ivan by shifting her attention to something else.

"Get that, Ivan?" asked Clarence. "Did you see that warm, secret, little smile? She's thinking about something pleasant."

"Clarence," San replied, "I was thinking about sliding down the pile of wheat to move the grain to the corners, instead of moving it with a shovel."

"You were smiling at that?"

"The smile was for when I would go home after sliding down the mounds of wheat; the feeling I got from picking the kernels of wheat from the folds of my vagina as I lay in bed."

"But no real sex?" incised Ivan.

"Don't be a fool" San countered. "I was only six or seven then. My cousin was younger still."

"Well," rejoined Ivan, "tell us about your first traumatic sex experience, the first time you were raped, the cause of your anger with a sour world. Spill it out. We need some juicy stuff here, not sweet tales of childhood."

Like aphids.

"Hello? Are you still waiting for me? I'm ready to have my picture taken."

"Pete's alley!" ejected Clarence. "I'd forgotten about Mrs. LaRose. Ivan, why don't you go and take a couple

of pic's of her to keep her thinking she's part of the action?"

"No problem. I'll flatter her fancy. In the meantime, why don't you fix us up a snack? And maybe a round of drinks that isn't based on vegetables. I took the day off for this, I may as well relax. Maybe you can get San to warm up a bit, and we can get something lewd going." Ivan turned away from San and in a voice of dolce far niente, called out to Mrs. LaRose. "Come over here by the poplar trees, Rosie, and we'll see what we can do."

An all-pervasive anger started to overwhelm San, consuming her passive resistance, her tolerance, her preferred patterns of action. "Stop. None of you is going anywhere." Rifle in her left hand, San stood up and pivoted on her peg leg, and then facing them, leaned back on her right foot which was turned outward. "You can't walk up here, interfere with my thoughts, open me up, observe me, find a few anecdotes, and then, invasion in operation walk away until you're ready to amuse yourselves a little more -- as if you were totally detached from all this." She took a couple of steps toward them. "You asked me how I felt about being born. Born into a human world where people consider themselves as separate entities. Atoms. A human world where the minds are tightly closed; systematized; everything they think and say, prepunched on a telex tape. I knew you would just run your old, worn tapes through,

even on my last four days; but I'd hoped you might be interested enough to listen, enough to feel. But no, you're considering me as already fitting into some ready-made role. And worse, you've decided to discover this at your leisure. When you're comfortably fed and watered. No. Now is my time, and I'm going to make myself felt. What happens to me, matters to you. I will make it matter. I'm part of your world. Through words, ideas, or bullets, I'm going to get through to each and everyone of you."

Clarence, Ivan and Mrs. LaRose all stood with a look of stupefaction. Ivan's facial skin was pulled into a tight mask. Mrs. LaRose looked wounded, as if she considered this a personal act of ingratitude.

Unmitigated anger flared through San and took possession of her. Irrational. Unreasonable. No part of her intentions. But even as she felt it burning in her chest, her head, her arms, she recognized the feeling. It was like the over-reaction she had sometimes to a show of insolence by other drivers on the road. Crowding her side of the road. Throwing out an obscene gesture. Suddenly, her senses alert, she would feel invincible. No fear. Only the heat of anger taking over as the accelerator went down. Then, as now, she was prepared to do anything. But knowing that wasn't enough to challenge her fury. "If I can't touch your thought, I'll touch your body. Infiltrate your personal system."

Clarence was the first to shake off the astonishment. "Wait a minute, San. We do take you seriously. I wasn't just going to pry you open and then use you for table talk. You're going to shoot out there anyway, aren't you? At unknowns?"

"You're an unknown, Clarence. You have no room for me in your way of thinking, in your interpretation of what I say."

"Really, San, I knew I wasn't fully understanding you. I knew I wasn't giving the proper significance to what you said." Clarence continued asseverating even as he and the others were backing towards the door. "You've got to believe me. That's why I've called up some of the people who know you, so you'll have others around you who understand what you're saying. What it is you want. People who will find out about the four things you want to tell someone. We really do have your interests at heart."

"There isn't anyone. And I don't want to talk to you either. Get away from here. All of you. Get off my roof." San raised the rifle, ready to give emphasis to her words, but the three had already scrambled through the door.

4

San stood looking at the door where they had left. She'd not touched them. But they had surely touched her. Trampled through her, left her unrecognizable. This hurt, dumb feeling must be given voice. The perceiver tried to come out to meet the perceived, but to no avail. She might as well have been soundlessly beating her head against a brick wall. Bricks. That was how they spoke, with bricks. She crumpled forward, closing the noxious gap present in her stomach. As she straightened, the anger accumulated in her body released into one loud, long penetrating scream.

There was no one to hear. If they did, they'd be sure not to come out. But San heard it, and as she listened, she stopped.

Cathartic, but not very constructive. Must not allow such liberties in the future. Cool premeditated action. Not emanating from the heat of her own excitation. This incident would be meaningless if it was cast aside as a reaction to a private quarrel. Interpreted as an isolated incident. No. It must be a symbolic action, taken on someone unknown to her, generalizable as an expression of a common condition.

It was her roof now. Bricks of buildings and people were far away. Impulses to fight back, to hurl bricks in

return, had subsided for the moment. She turned away from the door and walked back to the middle of the roof.

Now, Mrs. LaRose was different. Her words weren't bricks. They were as intensively involved and in action as worms crawling around inside a dead corpse.

Heat from the August sun had dried the surface of the roof. Her flat downstairs would have been stifling. She spread her khaki shirt on the roof near the potted trees and sat down. The rest of her clothes felt steamy from the hot humid air. She decided to continue undressing.

Someone might arrive. Unlikely. Mrs. LaRose allowed San to be there, but most people were cautioned away by the scrawled sign: "Roof dangerous, Not Available to Public". The last line was crammed in and not quite legible, but people understood. San got up and finding a loose weathered board, propped it against the outside of the door leading to the stairs. She rid herself of her sandal and the rest of her clothes. Spinning around on her bare foot, she lowered herself onto her khaki shirt and landed cross-legged facing the trees. She was pleased with her agility; daily practice in balancing and stretching had shown its results. Given the angle of her outlook and the height of the parapet, the other apartment buildings were out of sight. She no longer felt crowded. Listening to the sound of the breeze amongst the poplars, and sitting like a young warrior, she viewed the changing sky in front of her.

The sky had abandoned its morning tones of grey; its late afternoon blue served as a background for the movement of the clouds. Changing and in motion. So different from things hardened into shape. To the west, where the only dark purple clouds were, rain caught the sunlight and appeared as orange mist.

Someone was trying to push in the door. "San, let us in."

The man didn't want in, he wanted out. And if he wanted out, why didn't he go downstairs where he could go out all he wanted? "No visitors," San shouted.

"San, there are some people here to see you."

She recognized Clarence's voice. "Go away, or I'll fire the rifle right at the door you're standing behind."

"San, Mrs. LaRose is getting pretty nervous. Either you let us in or we'll have to notify the authorities."

Or they could wait there until the building fell. Or go away and forget all about her. There must be countless possibilities other than: let them in or face "the authorities."

"Is that what you want?"

"Who is with you?"

"Just a couple of your friends. One's a sociologist. Arranged to be here ever since this morning when I called him."

San remained sitting; her back straight, vertical to

the roof. She made an attempt to guess who was there. Could be Ramsey. More likely, McKay. Any opportunity to observe a deviant specimen. Used to blush just to have her sitting across from him in his office. Couldn't get his eyes up to "see-level". Every few moments he would try to raise his eyes to meet hers, but they kept drifting down to her breasts, jerking away to his desk, then back to her breasts again. Impossible to get any serious academic help from him. Whenever female students had entered his office, he had jittered in a state of anticipation. Fully expecting them to try to get him to bed, trap him into marriage, or at least blackmail him into giving them a high mark, he awaited their lustful lunges.

"San?"

"Sure, just a moment." She stood up and gave a long stretch, clasping her hands together and reaching as high as she could above her head. If her guess was correct, this was going to be fun. Picking up the rifle, but not stopping to put on any clothes, she went over to the door, knocked the board out from under the knob, and moved back toward the center of the roof. "Okay."

Clarence wasn't first out; he must have been feeling a bit chary. Dawson McKay stepped out onto the roof. He stopped midgait. "Hel...ah...er...lo...." He was not going to be able to cope with this. He was actually trying

to pretend he didn't see her nudity. "You're looking ah...lovely...no...er." Paralyzed by indecision. After all, he had a reputation to uphold. What would his colleagues do? Chide him for missing an opportunity, or charge him with being a deviant himself? The bright red of Dawson's face turned ever brighter, and still retreating, he pushed Clarence, who in turn stopped someone behind him. All three backed through the open door, Dawson slamming it shut in front of him.

Clarence returned forthwith, chuckling and attempting firmness simultaneously. "Now, San, was that nice? Well, yes. Rather nice, I'd say. Lovely tan, you have there, San. Too bad Ivan just left. Maybe I could catch him." He moved to the parapet to yell over the edge. "Ivan! Come..." Using the butt end of the rifle, San took a swing at him. "It's all right," Clarence laughed. "It's all right, San, he can't hear me."

"You'd better leave, Clarence."

"I'm leaving. Don't get in a ruffle. But I'll wait at the door until you're ready for your guests. Anytime within the next ten minutes is fine."

Returning to the roof, Dawson seemed exactly as he had been in front of the class, a crowd of three hundred, San remembered. He was still too fleshy to achieve that sporty, best dressed but not overdressed look that he wanted. Not too formal, not too expensive but deliberately casual. Clarence was leading him and the other man.

"Well, San. It's nice to see you ready for company. Shame of course to see you covered."

"Covered, that's right, Clarence. Breasts covered, bottom covered. Sensitivity covered."

Everyone was standing in the middle of the roof, an awkward moment San had no intention of smoothing. Dawson broke first. "Good to see you, San." San, the pheasant under glass, with Dawson poking a few traditional phrases to sound out the response. "We hadn't heard from you since...ah...we'd heard about your accident. Heard you had gone to Europe." His eyes no longer had a specific problem with her breasts. There was distinct competition from her leg. "Didn't know it was so serious."

"Just a foot," San volunteered.

"Ahem, ah. I want you to meet a friend of mind. Bill meet San." The man was built like a football player. Soft brown curls played about his ears.

"William Trent," said the man, "and you're San...?"

San thought last names ridiculous. What did he want? The countries of her ancestors, left behind a couple of generations ago? Maybe the occupations of her great grandparents on her mother's side: San Sarta-Steindrinker, descendant of the dressmaker wife of the town's most notable drinker. Maybe Trent wanted the name she used when she married that Blackheart. They were taking her lack of response as a refusal. "San d'un Piede." It took them a moment.

Dawson blundered. "Did you get married again?" Then realizing she had jested, blushed and laughed.

"She was 'San Cavallier' when I met her," said Clarence.

"When did you meet her?" asked Dawson. "Did you know her before...?"

"Nope. She's been 'Cavallier of the one foot', ever since the first time I laid eyes on her. I was in the pub down around the corner having a drink when she walked in. Couldn't see her legs or that fancy peg she uses 'cause she was wearing slacks, but I saw she was a limping woman, and you know what Montaigne said about them." Clarence gave a short pause. "He said, 'No one has really made love until he has lain between the legs of a limping woman.' Can't blame me for showing an interest." Dawson cleared his throat again and Trent looked away. "Well," Clarence continued, "I should be a better host. I know you two have

just finished a hard day at work. Can I bring you a drink?
"Stocked up this morning. Anything you want."

"Good idea," approved Dawson nodding his head into his
thick. "Could you mix me a martini?"

"In or Vodka?"

"Either would be fine, thanks."

"I'll have a sherry, if you have it?" asked Trent.

"You're in luck, I've had some Canadian sherry in
stock for some time now."

"I've never tried...."

San left them talking brand names of various sherries,
and went to sit down in the lawnchair. The purple cloud
had collected with the dark blue of others, and the orange
mist was no longer visible. The air was still hot and humid;
the leaves were silent. Dawson and Trent approached her.

"Now, San," said Dawson, "perhaps we can have a talk.
I never got a chance to properly introduce Reverend Trent.
When Clarence told me of your troubled state of mind, I
thought you might want to talk to someone."

What kind of "managing" did Clarence think he was doing?
He knew what anathema professional altruists were to her.
What did he invite? A personally frustrated social categor-
izer and an imposer of dogma. Maybe Clarence really would
like to stir her anger further. Get her shooting.

"Perhaps," interpolated the Reverend, "she'd like to
speak to me alone." Her silence had been mistakenly inter-
preted. Dawson, acquiescent, was starting to move away.

San raised her hand and halted his motion. "Don't believe it," she said to Dawson. "I disagree with the perpetrators of the two thousand year old hoax." Turning to Trent who was taking a seat in the other chair, she said: "Too bad you bothered."

"I could," ventured Trent, "ask why you think it's a hoax?"

"A hoax. Like one of the 'Big Shows' at a carnival. You walk through the 'front' and there's nothing behind it. But you can't go back and get your money refunded or warn the others." San's voice deadened, low and barely audible, realizing the impossibility of overcoming centuries of liturgy. "Followers of Islamic, Christian, Jewish faiths, jumping into boxes of meaning, voluntarily depriving themselves of even the possibility of an open system of thought. Submitting to the heavy accumulation of patterns of belief. Living to die."

Trent sat up in his chair enthusiastically. "You'll have to do better than that, San, if you're going to convince me of any hoax. In the first place, the spirit can't carry the flesh with it when it joins the divinity. We must give up our fleshful existence. And, aside from the afterlife, we who believe gain daily sustenance from our devotion; thus the boxes as you call them give us the strength to live."

"One mistake, three kinds of a fool."

"Really," smiled Trent, "how so?"

"The human being, like all other physical things, participates in an outward movement towards what attracts it and what it needs to sustain itself. Our mental processes duplicate and extrapolate from this process. Thus the 'spirit' is dependent upon the flesh for its existence. Without the flesh, the 'spirit' has no need to move anywhere, no use, no purpose; with a shock to the flesh, such as a bullet to the heart, the organization ceases to exist. The nexus that united all body organs and established channels of meaning and exterior references is broken. The body is abandoned to its individual components which can't sustain themselves." San didn't want to plead to be understood, plead for an impossibility. This man had invested his life in what she disdained. One couldn't expect him to be able to reason against himself.

"Wonder if Clarence needs any help with the drinks?" asked Dawson. "Should be back soon, ah, San?" Dawson had been standing listening to the discussion. "Guess I'll have a look down the stairs."

"So," continued Trent, "you don't believe that the soul and the flesh are unified temporarily?"

"I don't even think like that. The only separation is a verbal one." San spoke with a resolution that was unusual for her. Yet there were times when it had occurred before. Times when, forgetful of herself, she would say exactly what

she believed. "And that one mistake -- the belief that there is a spiritual existence that is popped into the flesh like a seed, later to be popped out -- leads to the rest of your belief system. It's a fool's pride that thinks there is anything different between your 'sustenance' and the gratification found in any other devotional outpouring of self. Common to all addictions. Except that choosing a religious being as the object of such outpouring has the superficial appearance of being inexpensive, while draining the energy of generations of peoples." San laughed. "But however arbitrary are the demands they make, Gods, as love objects, are never fickle; every version of God has acquired a set of beliefs, rules and restrictions that the followers must conform to."

"How can you pretend to be so sure of all this, San?" asked Trent, his voice and manner all expressing deep pity for her views.

"Because the simplicity of my view is verified everywhere I look. The physical motion of all things moves outward to receive. Why should it be different for the human? the gap between the physical and mental is pure fiction, and you and your ideas and mythology are greatly responsible. Propagating and encouraging credulity and ignorance."

Trent interrupted. "If you value simplicity then you should realize the simplicity in trusting the wisdom of God. While your outward movement is undirected, has no focus

upon a perfect being, my love of God gives me courage, strength and direction."

"Escapism. By pouring yourself into some idea of a perfect mold, you try to escape confronting the reality of movement." Trent shook his head in response to San, and sat back in his chair: Stalemate.

Dawson returned from looking down the stairwell. "How far did Clarence have to go for the drinks?"

"Just a couple of floors."

"Hope the elevator didn't get stuck."

"Didn't you ever believe, San?" asked Trent.

"As a child, I believed. Never questioned., 'I believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost'," San quoted. "Still do."

Trent looked around in surprise. "You do?"

San nodded. "The father, like all stereotypes of fathers, supplies a rigid set of rules and beliefs. The son is the misunderstood flesh. The holy ghost, those systems of organization which develop in relationship to the flesh. The occasional glimmer of consciousness."

"That's not a very sacred interpretation."

"Ah, here's Clarence with the drinks." Dawson went to meet him and help carry the supplies. Clarence was carrying a basket in one hand, three glasses in the other. Dawson took the glasses.

The frame that contained the potted poplars was becoming littered. Dawson set the bowl of half finished stew and the utensils on the grass next to the tree trunks, and placed the three martini glasses on the tray. The picnic cooler containing the vodka and its accoutrements was pushed aside as Clarence unloaded the basket. San watched as he removed the vermouth, gin, sherry, six bottles of beer and a jar of olives.

"You didn't tell me what you wanted, San," said Clarence, "so I brought extra beer, and an extra glass for a martini. Take your pick."

"With this display before me, I feel obliged. Pour me a martini too, Clarence. With Vodka? And two olives."

"Also" added Clarence, "I took the liberty of ordering some fried chicken. Just in case anyone is as hungry as I am." He began pouring the drinks. "Now, what's up? Did you convince San she should acquire some religious ethics?" he said grinning.

"San," answered Dawson, "seems to have the idea that religion is a mental rut, to be avoided if at all possible."

"Ruts," said Clarence, as three olives rolled into the glass. "That's what I believe in. Nice comfortable ruts. Some of us never have believed in the razzle-dazzle of religiosity, but we have to believe in something. Now me," he said handing San her drink, "I believe in a nice salary, an expense account, a pleasant night with a drink in hand."

he lifted an empty glass as if making a toast to the evening, "and...a little excitement."

"Do you?" pursed Trent. "Do you agree, San, that we all must believe in something?"

"It helps one get up in the morning," said San, refusing to be drawn in again.

"A comfortable rut. That's probably what you need, San," recommended Dawson. "Destructiveness, personal or social is generally caused by people who are not attached to their society."

San responded by shaking her head.

"Have you ever tried it?" continued Dawson. "Becoming hooked in? You might like it?"

"Sure, I've been caught. The first few times I got 'hooked in' as you say, I was so captivated and secured that by all reason, I should have never been able to disengage myself. I was hooked in to everything that would make a well-ordered, smooth-running society of drones. I believed the ideas I was fed, as surely as I believed eating stopped hunger. Some things, of course, were so much to be expected that one didn't even need to consciously believe them. Those are the things that generally knot a person in permanently."

"What do you think 'those things' were, San?" Dawson asked quietly. He took the drink Clarence offered and sat down on the edge of the poplar frame.

"Expectations. Like, young girls grow up, get married and have children," answered San.

"So you feel your way of life prepared you to fulfil these expectations?" Dawson, exuding all his solicitous professionalism.

"Preparation was intensive," San smiled bitterly. "It consisted of writing one's first name with the last name of every boy one knew. Practicing changing one's identity to accommodate the winner. Who will I be? San Plinkle? San Dryonovick? San Funk? Oh, I also read a lot of pocket books and true story magazines to understand more about love and sex, and the problems I would have to overcome. Living the crud in imagination to be ready to live it in reality. With the weight of the artifacts I had incorporated, I should have been pinned down and secured forever."

"But you just bit the grappling hook and got away, right?"

"Sure, Dawson, that's right," responded the cavallier.

"There are other ways of getting hooked in, you know," suggested Dawson. "Meaningful work...."

"Yes," agreed Trent. "It's a great satisfaction to know that one is doing meaningful work." He rose from his chair and moved to join Clarence who was standing at the parapet, probably prematurely scouting for the chicken wagon.

"Indeed it is," added Clarence, Mocking? He couldn't possibly agree that Trent's work was worthwhile. They stood looking down at the circling shells, beetles-with their eyes beaming. Although the bending rays of the sun still lightened the sky, down below the streets would be in darkness. Dawson sat down beside San.

"What you're feeling, San, is a personal frustration, with your inability to find a place in society, a place in the job market. You've been away from the rewards of a job for so long you can't appreciate them." He stopped to pour himself another martini. A breeze was starting to move the leaves of the trees and challenge the thick humid air.

"You're angry," Dawson continued, "with the mere notion of being fitted into place, a job that is, simply because at the present time you're outside. Surely you don't think, however, that this gives you the right to take your frustration out on anonymous people? People who are managing their own lives successfully?"

"It's not just me, Dawson," replied San, each word a slow-motion spear, whispering out, emitting from its source of tension. "It's not just me who feels what's going on, The anger is everywhere. Only everyone thinks it's personal so it remains hidden, or we make jokes to let off the obvious festering."

"Don't exaggerate, San," said Dawson. "Don't cover the world with your personal dilemma."

"I'm not." San shifted her position, bringing her knees up and wrapping her arms around her legs. Her back pushed against the bullets in her khaki shirt pocket. Mustn't forget she was not withdrawing anymore. These days must culminate in decisive action, not....

"Are you sure?" Dawson asked, not accepting her flat denial.

"Whenever I approach the 'job market', I feel I'm entering into one huge prison work camp. But, everyone's clamoring to get inside. The unemployed are the escapees, running for their lives. Or banished slaves running to the first master that can be persuaded to accept their service."

"All that is only because you've never been a part of it," responded Dawson. His carefully tucked in voice was being held back even more than usual, causing a perceptible raising of tone. "Looked after as a wife, then as a student. We could say you've spent the last six months recuperating from an extended vacation in Italy. Wouldn't mind going there myself one day."

"I have been part of it."

Clarence's laugh interrupted. "You mean that day and a half you did as a secretary? You'll have to try the working routine for longer than that, to say you've participated in it."

How much longer would she put up with this grilling? Behind the poplars the sun's rays were entering in streaks

through the unjoined clouds. It would soon be night. "It was a year and a half the first time, Clarence, a day and a half the second." San reached her left hand down to the roof; the rifle was still ready. "Exhibiting," she said to Dawson, "a diminishing tolerance for impossible occupation of time."

"Why did you ever go into secretarial work? You must have had some idea what it would be like," Dawson replied.

"Survival," San answered tersely. "Two children to support. There was a vocational program that gave one salt money for attending. An escape route from financial dependence. A route plannable in advance."

"The government," said Trent, "is taking on a new role; homebreaking."

"How long did the course last, San?" Dawson prodding. Professionalism, pulling methodically, looking for the break in norms.

"Five months, then I was out looking for a job."

"No trouble getting that, I should think," said Clarence, "not with your more obvious qualifications."

"The only thing that was obvious, Clarence," responded San, "was that my employer thought the same way you do. He always wanted a 'good looker' for a secretary. 'You don't mind me saying that, do you honey?' he said. I should have quit then. Before I started." The sounds of three or four sirens could be heard gathering momentum. Perhaps they were

coming to see the roof. "Horrible. Spending one's days transcribing stupidities from one form of presentation to another. All right, I suppose, if one likes losing consciousness in the mechanics of it all."

"You were fired?" asked Dawson.

"Not quite," San responded. The sirens were right below. "But it didn't take long for the boss to start complaining." No they weren't stopping. Going right past, taking no interest in her roof just yet. Dawson looked at her questioningly. "Complaints," she continued, "like: 'Why didn't I put blonde streaks in my hair? Wear tight skirts, and perfume? Curl my hair and shave my legs and underarms?' I really wasn't what he thought I was at all. Meanwhile I was getting a lot of flack from the rest of the staff. A reworking of the filing system in my office had changed a busy eight hour day into a slack two hour day. I spent my extra time learning how some of the other office machines worked. Everyone thought I was trying to take over another job. After I found out their sentiments, I withdrew to my desk where I read books and did my correspondence courses to get into the varsity. Between typing the letters and answering the phone, of course. I had already given notice by then, so I couldn't really be fired. 'You'll be sorry,' they all said. 'Be back here looking for your old job before the year's out'."

"So that was your taste of bureaucracy? And your bitterness has stayed with you all these years," said Dawson. Was he trying to be soothing?

"No," rejected San. "I was lucky. The long-termers had been there so long that they could never have adjusted to moving and working somewhere else, allowing that anyone else would hire them. If they lost that job, it would be their last. Some old-timers actually worked; they were relatively secure in their jobs, but others had to guard their work closely to make sure no one found out how little they did; and still others had the insurance of being friends with the boss. Sycophancy has no bounds."

"San," said Dawson, "you encountered a very typical bureaucratic process, but there's no reason for you to be so distressed. I'm sure we can get you established in some sort of occupation that's suitable for you."

San remained quiet. She got up to stretch. Maybe there was a beer left. What did Dawson want? For her to become a manager of other people, like him and Trent? Never looking at their own lives because they were too busy dealing with others? Or like Clarence? Jumping out to pry into other people's lives and then quickly back into the privacy of his own?

"We can't," Dawson continued, "let you randomly express your anger on some unsuspecting innocent."

"No one is innocent!" San turned to face him. "If you're part of any 'in group', you're creating those who are 'out'. You're creating casualties."

"What do you mean? Casualties. I've never hurt anyone," said Dawson. His voice retreated; ready, however, to defend.

"Everyday produces an increasing number of casualties. People who don't fit into the molds you help prepare. People who don't fit in the education system, the employment set up, or what you call the 'normal' family." San grasped the arms of Dawson's chair and leaned over; her face less than a foot from his. "A casualty is one who suffers or has suffered from others who, being in the position of defining, categorizing, and judging, manipulate and distort a casualty's missing parts."

"Yowee!" yelled Clarence. San started and turned to see him cupping his hands around his genitals. "I don't have any missing parts," he said.

"Everyone has a missing part. They're half blind and deaf because they can't know how they appear to others. They can't know what view of themselves they take in from others."

"Who cares?" said Clarence. "I'm happy."

"Sure. Because you never stop acting on others long enough to consider how they see you. That's childlike, but not evil. It's evil for people to take advantage of the missing part of others and use it to increase their own

advantage. The worthy judging the less worthy; adding to their own sense of importance while whittling down the casualty's image. Teachers and employers who have no intention of responding to you as a person. As they decide your worth, you toughen up your feeling. Pay no attention to your own discomforts. Desensitize, so that nothing of one's own pain or anyone else's pain can have any effect on the hard covering grown over the tender sentiments. Till finally, one has no concern for one's feeling. If the mind decides, the body can suffer. Relentless domination with no mitigation. Not for one's self. Not for others."

"Nonsense." Dawson stood up so abruptly his chair fell backwards. "Your problems have nothing to do with outside manipulation; they're entirely your own." Dawson began walking quickly across the roof. "The way I conceptualize the situation is this: -- he made a ninety degree turn and kept walking. "You're having a severe and irrational reaction to the movement through too many social mileau." Another turn and he was headed back toward San. "Rather than exerting a certain amount of discipline upon yourself to adjust to any particular situation, you've continually moved from one circumstance to another." He set his glass down on the poplar frame and strided out again. "Reality, the real world, does exist and continues to repeat itself. The life of a mother and wife yields some rewards,

the life of a sexually promiscuous female has...ahem... other recompense. You'll have to learn to live with the norms." He did an about-face. "Live a normal life within one social group, whether it's some of your deviant friends or whether it's a more traditional group. Had you accepted any one form of group life, this situation would not have happened to you." He stopped in front of San.

San thought of her rifle, over by the chair. "This 'situation' is not happening to me; I'm going to make it happen."

"Of course you'd like to believe that," Dawson said, pursing his lips, "but it is really a response. We, who study such phenomena, must find out what factor can be added to make you feel you would like to act in a different, more acceptable manner."

What defense was there against someone who pushed you into such a theory, purely to help? No war of words could make an impression, an indentation, on such a person with all the answers. No wonder she thought of the brutal force of the rifle. Against such structures, such concrete, nothing else would be noticed.

"Hey. There's the chicken truck." Clarence's diligent watching had paid off. "I'll go and carry it up for us."

Dawson and Trent, however, assured Clarence that they had to leave. After recommending that Clarence keep a close

eye on San, and promising her they would come up with a plan for her future, they bid their goodbyes and left.

"Do you want some chicken, San?" asked Clarence. He sounded disappointed.

"Okay, sure, anything," she answered. She deflated onto the lawn chair. Her anger had dispersed, drained off into conversation. Like being bled.

6

Her first night on the roof. Why was she there? No movement down on the street, barely any sounds. No moon; it must be clouded over again. Alone at last. They had all left, taking their answers with them. Religion, work and pleasure; iron bars to create molds for their flesh, thoughts and voice. For Dawson she was a loose thread, hanging out of place. Disrupting the regularity of the society she should be hooked in to.

She sat facing the poplar trees, listening to the sounds of the light wind in the leaves. Her body reciprocated with the sensation of a tingling maze. Like a shiver that stayed on, and on. Sounds penetrating the material of the flesh. If she wanted to take Dawson's advice, she should have prepared her flesh with a droning sound. Constant human chatter, tucking in whatever didn't accord with normality.

Education for the limitations of a rut, that's what they wanted. A single repetitive melody with a heavy predictable bass. Mindless voicing of the liturgy. Obedience. With these sounds, sensitivities of the body blunted. The subjected flesh would long for continuation of the repetition. And so anticipating, reproduce them in its desire for the droning to fill the expectation. And the flesh materializes as canvas or binder twine. Tough. Or scratchy, picking up whatever ooze it contacts.

Sounds weaving different threads of flesh. If she missed out on some of the essential conditioning to co-habitate in this world, what was the reason? Perhaps those sonatinas, mazurkas, waltzes and fugues she used to practice on the piano gave too many alternative modes to express her personal feelings. The keys were always ready to proclaim her anger. Transpose it into gentle melancholy and then cheerfulness. She could listen to her mood throughout the metamorphosis.

Perhaps it wasn't that at all. Whole summers used to ease past listening to the waves hitting along the edge of the slough; listening to the gulls overhead; and the almost constant wind in the poplars. Tenuto, sostenuto, rubato; variations, collecting and fading. Winter, brilliant blue and white, and the rhythmic crackling of running feet over the snow. And always the breaks, allowing awareness of the silence in the background. But whatever had formed her most ingrained sentiments, it certainly wasn't making her present daily living easily abided.

Clouds moved and the moon lit up the roof. She leaned her head to rest on the back of the chair, put her foot on the poplar frame and crossed her legs overtop of her right. Looking through a clearing in the clouds to the stars, she imagined walking into a room filled with sounds coming from musical instruments. The sounds transformed into visible variations of colors, and weaved into intricate



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patterned silk cushions. Bright multicolored cushions were scattered about the room. Soft and comfortable.

She started. Noise in the stairwell. Surely Clarence wasn't bringing someone back up here this time of night.

If he was, she'd kill him. That would make him intimately enough involved with the story he was so keen on writing.

Quiet/soft steps. Someone must be trying to sneak up on her. She reached for the rifle, and remembered that the bullets were still in her pocket. The agitation of her own system was drowning out the furtive sounds. "Who's there?"

7

A figure appeared in the darkness. Too bad the light above the door wasn't on.

"Hello, little one."

There was only one person who insisted on calling her that. "Hello, Michael," answered. Her muscles relaxed considerably.

"I hope you don't feel I'm intruding. Clarence told me something about what was happening. I thought it might be a good time to drop in and see you." He walked to where she was standing and gave her a kiss on the forehead. "By the way, Clarence sent up your toothbrush. Here," he said as he handed it to her. It was wrapped up in a washcloth.

Clarence must have gotten Mrs. LaRose to unlock her apartment. "I wasn't aware you knew Clarence."

"Not before today. When he phoned this morning he said you were involved in some desperate action and he was contacting some of your friends to see if they could offer some advice. Apparently, he's using your address book to spread the word."

"Clarence has never suffered from fears of transgression upon other people's privacy."

"In any case, I decided it was an opportune moment to take a break from the shop. Late summer doldrums. I'm

told you're planning on spending the night up here so I brought a couple of foam mats, a pack with some bread and cheese, my flute...or we could just do some quiet musings, if you like."

"You're not going to start asking why I'm doing this, telling me what I should be doing, what I should think, or the foolishness of striking out against an impossible situation, are you?"

"It is not my intention. I would just like to keep you company, if you don't object."

"I'd rather be alone." San's first reaction had blurted out. Michael adjusted his baggage and turned to go. "No wait." He had an absence of tension that made him easy to be around. "It has been a while since we've spent some time together, and I'm getting the suspicion that if you go away, Clarence will find someone else to watch me."

Michael grinned and started putting down his gear. "It's regrettable that you've stopped coming over to the house. We've missed you."

"I've been there."

"Once, since you returned from Italy. And that must be four or five months ago."

"Who's living there now? Andy and Josh still there? Candace?"

"Candace left."

"Aren't you two still linked?"

"She moved out the beginning of the summer." Michael spread the mats out on the roof. "She had some things she wanted to do on her own." He began untying the sleeping bags.

"You seemed to get on so well...."

"I guess she wasn't sure how much of our life was her contribution. Thought she might be a living concomitant. She had something to prove to herself, anyway, so she's staying clear of me. I've been doing all right though." Sleeping bags rolled out, he sat down and began pulling out his shoes.

"It seems a shame.. That he was doing well? That Candace had left? The sentence was left open.

"I thought so, but what can one do when someone else decides not to stay?" Did that mean he missed her? "But," he continued, "the work at the art shop goes on. I'm doing what I want by way of experimenting on canvas. Pays enough for food and rent." He lay down on one of the sleeping bags. "And some friends of mine have a sailboat that I took out for a few days just last week. Have you been sailing lately?"

San sat down on the unoccupied sleeping bag. "Not since that time with you," she answered, "over two years ago."

"Maybe we can change that. I might be able to get you some sort of special membership in the yacht club; there's always a fellow out there in need of a crew." Did Michael really think she could be so opted so easily? "Knowing you," he added, "your peg won't be any handicap. You might have to leave it off. Hard edges, you know? You could allow the leg underneath that fancy cover to acquire a beautiful golden tan like the other one. Rather a fine idea, don't you think? I know how much you enjoy yourself when you're out on the water."

Participate. Get your body and mind together in action. No worry. No concern about what happens when you come out of the involvement. Come in, everybody to all-inclusive motion.

Michael seemed not to notice her silence. "It's always pleasing to remember," he continued, "that first time you came sailing with me. You'd not been out before and there you were with your feet tucked under the strap and hiking out so far over the water that your hair touched the waves. The nothing of a bikini you were wearing. And your nipples standing an inch tall from the cold water splashing on them..."

"We had a perfect wind that day, also," she added. "Steady, not too hard, or too light." She was caught by the delight of the memory.

"An utterly fantastic afternoon. The wind, and water. The sail reaching up to the blue sky. Your exhilarated and exhilarating state."

"And the sailing lesson," Sam remembered. "Some lesson."

"I hardly remember that. What happened?"

"Nothing at all except you handed me the rudder before I knew what to do with it, and leaped up to the helm. You expected me to listen to you tell me about the proper position of the luff, while I handled the rudder which I had no idea how to move to keep the boat upright. I thought you were yelling something about me being a laugh. And then, just when I had things a bit under control, you mentioned a lesson wouldn't be complete without capsizing, and over we went. Just like that."

"Right. There was no point having you worried about a detail like that. Once you've done it, no problem."

"Rather fun, in fact," she agreed. "And then we made love. Unfortunate."

"What?" asked Michael, as he sat up, a gentle, puzzled tone in his voice.

"Unfortunate, our brief coition, then nonchalant separation. No accumulation of feelings and intimacies, no time for our bodies to become mutually knowing. No time for our thoughts to gather significance and build up pleasures."

"San, we had a most enjoyable day together." He reached over and took both her hands in his. "I can never understand, though, why you always seem to want more. Remember that song you made up around that time?" He reached over and took his flute out of his pack, and played a line of the melody. He stopped. "Do you recall the words?"

"I don't sing it anymore. Things have changed."

"Do you still know the words?"

She ~~had~~ But they were false words for her now. She was no longer that sort of seeker. Michael began playing the tune from the beginning so she joined in with the lyrics:

"Never knowing where I'm bound for,
Discontent with where I've been,
With a soul-consuming feeling,
For something yet unseen.
I always find a good beginning,
But never any end,
That can bring me satisfaction,
That makes me feel content...."

Michael continued playing the tune, but her voice drifted off. Yes, in those days she believed that if she could just look a little further, she would find what she needed. Find, not construct. Ah, the emptiness when one hasn't developed a strong "I" that can act on the world; impervious to any lacunae.

"Aren't you going to finish the song?"

"Oh, sure, Michael,

Just a need that needs fulfilling,
And a dream that can't be found,
Cause I don't know what it is,
That makes me turn around.

So you search for something better,
In each person that you meet,
But they're full of themselves and happy,
And they think themselves complete.

Now is there something wrong with people,
Who can be just who they are.

Or is there something wrong with me.

Always looking from afar.

Always looking from afar."

Michael went into a long riff on his flute. She bent her knees and pulled her legs as close to her stomach as she could to try to fill the void lodged within her. She knew one way to escape such vacuousness. Act outward from the center of one's activity; an outpouring of existence, like Trent had with his God. She knew also, however, that all those people who professed to be acting outward, aimed at some immutable belief, seemed to be unable to extend themselves beyond their own parameters. She stood up, picked up her rifle and walked along the edge of the roof.

No more concern about the lack of extension among people. No more attempts to collect and diffuse meaning in a world where everyone cried out for hard, cold, clear-cut delivery. No more ignoring of the clam shells that precluded mutual feeling. She had looked for her alter-ego

but found many turned backs. She stopped and looked over the parapet.

"What are you doing, San?"

"Just stretching," she answered. She felt the pull. Tempted. Temptation, the desire to incorporate all one's extensions. To stretch out through space. She could use her bullets to tap the shells of those people who tried to limit others from their existence.

In former times she tried to penetrate shells in a more intimate, personal manner. Carefully, tenderly working her way through the hard, protective construction. But the soft belly found inside inevitably commenced to cling, to enclose, and then tighten around her. Included in another's shell, it was as if she had never broken through.

"San, why don't you come back over here? Lay down? Relax a while."

What about Michael? No shell there. Centrifugal man, doesn't need any. He probably never even asked Candace to stay.

"If you want," he suggested, "I can rub your back or brush your hair."

"You're right, Michael, it's time to rest. I think I'll move a mat under the poplars."

"Good idea," he responded. "I'll move...."

"Uh uh, please stay comfortably where you are." She had no intention of letting him join her tonight. He was

well aware of how often she had put aside plans, distracted by a delightful interlude. Grabbing the corner of a mat, she pulled it under the trees.

"It's all right, San," he assured her, as he watched her dragging the mat. "Whatever you think best. No fuss."

Casually and without further commotion, they prepared for the night.

She laid awake as long as she could to watch until he slept. Friend, foe or a conqueror, she wasn't sure. Listening to the poplar, her hand on the barrel of the rifle, her khaki shirt under her head, she waited. Gradually her thoughts began imaging, randomly gathered words and ideas taking pictures.

She awoke. All was quiet. Hardly even any noise from the street. She had been one of those traveling warehousemen, except that instead of articles for sale, hanging from the wagon, there had been a number of skulls. One for her life on the farm. One for her married life. Another imported from Italy. Bizarre logic. She shook her head and went back to sleep.

It was early dawn when she awoke again. The poplar leaves were still uncolored. Dreams were still vivid. The elevated room with the ceiling of bright wooden beams and slivers of glass, sparkling and infinitely high. Below, the emerald green with its coral reefs. The dream was still with her.

Looking up, her body had arched toward the light, and then, she had dropped down into the depths of the water. At first, fear. Impossible to breathe under water, she had known that, and had held back, fighting the movement. What happens when thoughts go where they may? She had been vaguely aware she was within a dream; with that awareness the fear had dispensed. Free to move wherever she looked, she had done so. Through the coral arches and small intricate tunnels, then swiftly through the green water and up into the slivered light. Fluidity of movement, as fast as sight. But the more she had realized she was moving as if she were only thought, the more cognizant she had become of the impossibility. The more hampered the motion had grown.

The dream had left her pleasantly aroused. She was tempted to wake Michael. He'd be agreeable she was sure. While considering the notion, she wandered into the washroom. Cold water. Now she was really awake. She moved back to the sleeping bag to retrieve the rifle. Not there. Not underneath the mat either. She should have taken it with her. Maybe Michael? Still in his sleeping bag, he appeared in the midst of uninterrupted slumber.

San hurled herself down on the covered figure. "What did you do with it?" she yelled. "Where is it?"

"Hey!" Michael tried unsuccessfully to rise. "What are you so excited about?" Using one hand to fend off San's attacks and the other to brush his light brown, tousled hair away from his face, he continued to feign surprise. "Take it easy."

"What did you do with the rifle?"

"Threw it over the edge."

"Threw it over? You idiot!" She was trying to get a good swing connected, but he had captured her right arm. All she could do was ineffectively aim with her left fist.

"Easy, San, uh," he grunted. "Your rifle is over, uh, there. Leaning against the wall. Can you quit leaping up and down on my stomach now?"

"Oh." Her anger defused. "Why did you do that?"

"If you move down a little, it will be more comfortable." She wriggled back an iota. "Better," he grinned. "You shouldn't sleep with a rifle. You could have accidentally pulled the trigger during the night and killed yourself. Or shot the good foot."

"When did you take it? Just now?"

"No. I waited till you were sleeping, and then came over and moved it. Why don't you leave it there and forget about all of that nonsense?"

"Because I must stop this facade of isolation. I've thought this out before. I must break through the indurative tendency of people to cut through their extensions and lock them out. I've got to get through to...."

"If you keep straddling me like this, it won't be but a few moments before I'll be breaking through to you. And in a more intimate way than you're talking about."

She remained quiet and studied him closely. Despite his rather angular face, he was looking relaxed, friendly, comfortable. His eyebrows were lifting up and wrinkling his forehead. She could see the blue sky mirrored in the pupils of his speckled brown eyes. Within the reflection, her own image peered back at her, slightly distorted, as it stretched along the left curve of each eye. Memories of the dream she had awoken from suffused through her. She leaned forward and kissed him on the neck. He smelled warm and inviting, and she felt marvelously powerful. A virago. She sat upright. Removed her khaki shirt. Lifted off of him. Unzipped his sleeping bag. Then threw back the top cover.

"Hey! It's brisk out here."

"Not for long," she said, as she swooped down to wrap her lips around his penis. Redolence of the wind and sea and a cozy nest. As if they had been in the sea this morning.

"Crazy bird," he said, laughing. Swooping bird. Even their thoughts were close.

Her tongue did a few preliminary circles and then with a resounding pull, left him wet and slippery. Sitting astride him as she was before, without the interfering cloth, the petals of her flower opened, and wet with its own aromatic dew, enveloped his stamen.

His eyes were laughing at the result of her attack. Again she saw her own face with the blue sky along the one side. For a while, conversation and even thoughts dispersed.

Not unsimilar to when she used to sit astride her horse on the farm. Bareback. Bare feet. Her legs pulled in tightly to hold on. Her flower head bristling. The yell, "eeooah" as the vibrations took possession of her.

The flowers interfused. Sensations seemed mutual. She collapsed, spreading her full weight on his body, tickling her nose with the hair on his chest. Michael made room for her on the mat. Lovely to lay there. Looking upward at the clear sky. Drops of water ran down the sides of their bodies. At once warm, then catching a breeze; cold and shivery. For a few moments, all was quiet.

"Congratulations," proffered Michael. "It's good to see you're joining us people of the world. Back to the human pleasantries. Right?"

Cold, hard, detachment returned. She sat up and turned round to sit on the end of the sleeping bag, facing him.

"Now" he continued, raising himself up to rest on his elbows, "that you remember how good it feels to be alive -- and you did feel that way didn't you? -- you're not going to want to do anything to have them lock you up somewhere, are you?" Or stop someone else from enjoying and living life, like you have just been doing?"

Typical of all people? Or just typical of men's thought about women? A bit of sex, enjoyable as it was sometimes, and all the ills of the world were supposed to be erased. She crossed her legs and leaning her weight forward, stood up. Putting on her khaki shirt, she moved to collect the rifle. "Why don't you go and make us some coffee, Michael? I could surely use some."

"What?"

"Just go. Get out of here."

"Wow. That was a quick turn." He shrugged and reached for his clothes. "Don't bother waving that rifle. I'll bring you a coffee. Settle your nerves. No problem."

As he left there was a sound of applause. She pivoted to see its source. A sea gull had landed on a piece of old cement by the dried swimming pool. She had heard the clapping of its wings.

The sea gull, herself, the roof, and the clear empty sky. Why was it that people liked the endless blue of a cloudless sky? Vacant. Unmarked. People, like flies, left marks wherever they touched. Making their mark in

the world by carving their initials in a desk or an old tree. Marks gathering grime. That old tomato tin was still there against the parapet. She picked it up and threw it into the pool. The gull darted into the air. Yesterday, everything was closed in. Touching, but spacious, all around her. Today it all felt hard and isolated. Everything except the roof. The black surface was already soft and sticky from the sun. And she was the fly, trapped by the surface tension. Sticky.

She picked up the rest of her clothes, her toothbrush and a towel from Michael's gear and went into the shack. This time she took the rifle with her.

When San went back out on the roof, Michael and Clarence were sitting on the lawn chairs. Relaxing with a beer under the mid-morning sun, as if this were a leisurely holiday. The possibility of making any impression whatsoever on them seemed increasingly unlikely.

"...and that's what she did," Michael was saying. "One moment we were lazily recovering from the throes of lovemaking, the next moment she was waving the rifle around, without any explanation, telling me to get out. Well, here she is. Good morning to you, San. Have some coffee? Perhaps it will restore you. Bring you back to your sensual self. Clarence thought it would be in fine order to open with a beer. Join us if you wish."

A third chair was waiting. "I'll stay with the coffee, thanks."

"Cream and sugar?" asked Michael.

"Black." For all of us flies making marks.

"No sweetening?" Michael was emerging from his miffed state. Making peace overtures. She wasn't ready to succumb.

"No white poison." Ah, poison form humans; life for flies. She must oust the image. Too depressing. Comparing insignificancies.

"So what happened?" Clarence asked. "Give me your side of the story, San."

"What?"

"What happened with you and Michael?"

"Clarence, do you have to be in on this? Isn't there something else you have to do? Somewhere you have to go?"

"This, my love," said Clarence, "is my first break in an already busy day. I've been working on my special project, you, for over an hour this morning. It's going to get really hot up here. Remember Ivan? The photo man? He'll be back with a few blow-ups of some sneak shots he got of you yesterday. And out of your old address book I plucked a few brain waves. One of the more notable mentions I called was your ex-husband."

Sneak shots? Her ex? She wasn't prepared to deal with this. "I don't believe it." She took a sip of her coffee, watching Clarence over the rim. "You wouldn't be able to reach him by phone. He wouldn't be bothered." Clarence was smiling and shaking his head to negate each obstacle.

"To the contrary. Your estranged mate is interested enough to be here on the roof this afternoon. I also phoned a lawyer friend of yours; only when I talked to him he sounded like he knew you pretty closely."

"You've outfoxed yourself, Clarence. One of those two will phone the cops and you'll not get any story at all."

Clarence grinned and shook his head. "Nope. San; you don't understand people. They liked the secrecy idea; they're going to be on the inside."

She slumped back in her chair. Defeat. The anger that was sparking, heating her body, was met with the realization that nothing could be done about Clarence. Why argue? The only alternative would be to return his words on a rifle bullet. But, to what end? To have a death categorized as another personal feud? Perhaps a thwarted love affair? A jealous encounter? If Clarence was her problem, she could just leave. They were watching for her reaction. "I've got nothing to say to those people. I don't want to see them, listen to them. What are you trying to do, Clarence? Contact everyone who ever hated me? Tried to destroy me?"

"These fellows don't hate you. They're all concern. Ready to help you out; whatever you want. One of your lady friends, Leona, took a real liking to the idea of a gathering up here. She's going to bring along some of those liberated women you chum with."

Chum with? San had never been one to chum with anyone. She took another sip of the tepid, thin, brown water. How did Clarence always manage to make such wishy-washy sustenance? She looked over towards the parapet.

"Well, what do you think?" Clarence prodded.

"It's a horrible idea. Horrible. I shared a few situations with those 'chums'. But just because we know each other at one time, you think you can lump us all together as if we ratified one viewpoint."

"Don't worry about what I think. You'll see for yourself. It's all going to come together in one grand going away party. You should be appreciating what might be your last quiet moments. Have you stared over the edge yet?" Clarence rose from his chair and went to look over the parapet, as if compensating for her lack of attention. "Missed looking down today? Probably the first time in weeks," he said to Michael. "What's the matter, San?" he continued. "Losing interest in the outside world?"

It would have been nice if some people had never learned to talk. Too bad she couldn't have got some agreement on that. "Michael?" she said, ignoring Clarence. "How is it that you entered this zoo Clarence is setting up for me? I can't see how you have anything to say to him, unless you've accepted a subheading of 'male', sharing the common misery caused by the 'female'."

"Don't, San," protested Michael. "I'm not expressing any mass resentment. You know me better than that. I was only surprised by your anger. Especially so soon after we had been together so beautifully."

"So warmly, preverbally, pre-idiologically, pre-categorically. Then as soon as you opened your mouth, you said, 'Did the good fuck fix you up?'"

"I didn't say that."

"It's what you meant. And -- you know -- it's almost true? Almost enough to tempt one. Lose oneself in love-making. Baking up love, gobbling it in, then collecting the new ingredients to do it again."

"Ah ha, Michael," Clarence said, as he returned to sprawl into his chair. "You're a piece of cake."

San interjected. "Cut it out, Clarence. I didn't mean to disparage. But when two people are feeling close enough to be physically intimate, there should be some meeting of thought, some conscious togetherness." Some mixing. Syncretism. "But just when I thought we were really feeling close; chop, chop. Isolated. With a few words the complete absence of fusion was revealed. What is one to do? Find an unknown who hasn't yet said anything that cuts into the shared feeling?"

"Sex doesn't make two people into the same person, San."

"I know that, Michael. But why should one have to sacrifice all that the identity of 'I' means, for the sake of a bit of intimacy."

"You don't."

"You don't, maybe, but it would seem I have to. I can't disassociate disturbing words from the blending of the senses."

"Blending?" Clarence pulled one side of his mouth into a mock smile and lifted up the opposite eyebrow.

She looked to Michael. "I mean, joining the other -- including the lover as one stretches through time and space."

"That's not comprehensible, San," Clarence intruded. "Idiot talk, too personal. Time, space, those are metaphysical words."

"No they're not, Clarence. Michael, haven't you ever felt yourself stretching?"

"Of course, what's this? Sure, I stretch."

"We all do," Clarence added.

Impatient with their lack of understanding, San stood up and moved away from the chairs. She extended her arms and whisked them through the air, feeling the waves as she broke through. She pivoted, and remembered doing the same motion the day before, unencumbered by clothes. "We stretch ourselves through time. This day is different from the day before. Yet, I can still feel what yesterday was like...we are temporal."

"In contrast to being eternal," said Clarence, trying to help.

"That's rot. In contrast to living in the present." Her moment of exuberance dispersed and she returned to her chair. "We remember; words, thought or spoken, can bring back the same feeling that we had a day before, a year before."

"What does that have to do with sex?" Clarence was now smiling on both sides. "A straight across, I-have-the-answer smile."

"Everything," she answered. "Damn, was she trying to tell Clarence something? "We keep everything we touch, and that which touches us." She looked at Michael. He was sitting quietly, looking down at his hands holding the beer. Thoughtful? Absent? No way of knowing. Clarence had raised his brows questioningly. "I mean," she attempted to elucidate, "everything we encounter as we move through time and space... stop looking so pained, Clarence, --days, months, things, objects, people we meet as we move around -- remain part of us. Imprinted on our flesh. Except that that sounds like we're malleable clay waiting to be 'shaped-up'. But initially everything we perceive is part of us; not distinguished as belonging to me or, belonging to something else. Remember when we were camping Michael? Remember the sound of the grouse?"

Clarence butted in. "I, Clarence, don't even know the sound of a grouse."

"A grouse," San explained, "captures air between his body and his wings, and makes a thumping sound; a 'whoomph'," San smiled and folded her arms up like wings, then hit the sides of her chest, pressing the air from her lungs. "Whoomph...like that."

"What does that have to do with sex?" Clarence asked. "Or stretching across space? Or camping and the sound of a grouse? Talking to you is like making a chain; link after link is added without knowing what it's going to be used for. The grouse is doing a mating call, I suppose."

"Yes, yes, but while Michael and I were lying still, in the dark, it was impossible to tell whether that loud, thumping sound was really the sound of the grouse, or whether it was my own heartbeat thumping loudly; as if I were nervous or out of breath. When you feel what is happening around you, you're stretching yourself through space to incorporate everything that is encountered, claiming that which meets you as part of yourself."

"Now I get what you're saying," said Clarence sitting up in his chair. Michael still hadn't raised his glance. Clarence pressed on. "It's like a morning hangover; when the jackhammer that's tearing up the street five blocks away feels like it's operating on your brain cells." Clarence knew all about hangovers.

"But it doesn't have to be sounds," San added. Sometimes it's literally space -- territory that one is so familiar with it becomes part of one's self. Sometimes it's other people and the temptation to stretch, hold, and enclose them as if they were new territory to be claimed for one's own."

Michael stood up, set his beer on the roof, and walked

over to the edge of the cement pool. He stooped over, and picked something from among the weeds.

As she watched, her thoughts of territory and stretching merged. "I never realized it before," she mused aloud, "but that must be why I get so distressed at marks of delineation. The cutting up; cutting away. Just when a nice enveloping grandeur is present to me, someone starts cutting."

Michael returned with a dandelion. He stood behind her, twisting the flower into her hair. "When an area is full of jackhammers," he reasoned, "construction workers, or angry people, there is an advantage to be able to dissociate from it all."

"Sure," San agreed. "There are advantages. We cut ourselves off from other people so they can't hurt us, or interfere with our way of thinking. We dispossess sounds so they won't affect our bodies."

"And do you do that, San?" Michael asked. He moved toward his pack where he extracted a pipe and some tobacco.

"Everyone has to," she answered. "Our bodies are constantly prepared to react to what's outside. Like a response to thunder; unanticipated, my body recoils. But immediately, I claim dominance over my body, and the next time the thunder crashes, I am unaffected. It is 'out there'. Intolerant of this insubordination of my body, I re-establish command of the flesh and assume a more proper distance from such noises of the world."

Clarence popped open a beer and leaned back in his chair. "You didn't jump at that sound at all," he said.

San wrinkled her nose at him. "Some sounds are just too familiar to notice," she said with a grin, turning her attention back to Michael.

"And how do you decide your territory, San?" asked Michael.

She pulled from her hair the dandelion that Michael had given her. "I suppose," she said, "all we have to do is decide where we cut off our extensions." She proceeded to pull the yellow blades off the flower, one by one. "Me, not me; me, not me. This petal is me, I'll leave it on; this is not me, I'll toss it away." And the ambience of the world is cut into segments and claimed or not claimed. She lifted her hand with the disowned petals, and let them fall to the roof.

Michael scraped a match on the side of a cardboard matchbox and lit his pipe. "San," he said, "you still haven't explained anything about how this relates to your anger at my comment this morning."

"Apart from" -- Clarence laughed he interposed -- "the in and out of it."

San ignored Clarence's repartee. "You tell me, Michael," she responded. "Do I lose myself 'out there' in the feeling, the touching, pulling and inviting? Do I extend myself to include you and lose my particular

sense of 'I'?" If I do, I need to be part of, and agree with, all that includes and is voiced by you. Thus I lose my own opinions entirely. But if I don't 'lose myself' then I'm going to be distressed when you say and imply disrupting things. You said we have to stay separate persons; sharing the action with each other but keeping our thoughts distinct." Her voice withdrew, becoming increasingly quieter. "But then what would it matter who I'm with? Best would be a mute. No collection of meaningful phrases. No shared sentiment cumulating into mutual thoughts verified by spoken words." Her voice was almost inaudible. "Just private fantasies. A private love affair not even broaching communication."

Clarence stood up. "This is all too much fine wire for me," he said.

"Wire?" San cringed. "Wire's the exact opposite of any kind of blending."

"Well, it sounds too much." Clarence moved toward the shack. "I'm going downstairs. I'll see where those people I called are. If you plan on going on about something like this again, I'd better be prepared. I'll bring you the wooden Pepsi crate in the hall. You can use it for a soap box."

"Sure, I can just see me. Standing alone, here on the roof, balancing on a soapbox, and yelling into the wind."

"Why do you spend time thinking about such things, San?" asked Michael.

The question was intercepted by Clarence. "You want to know why, Michael?" Clarence offered from the door. "She's continually turning nice material events like sex and casualties into abstract generalizations, that's why."

"Goodbye, Clarence" interrupted San.

Clarence, however, was already whistling down the stairs.

"Hail, people, I'm back."

San turned in her chair to see Clarence standing in the doorway. "Clarence," she said, "you just left."

"But you have guests. Dawson's back. Ivan's downstairs; he'll be up shortly. Mrs. LaRose is here. And someone else you never expected." Clarence stepped away from the door, welcoming everyone to the roof as they moved past him. "That's a charming hat you have on, Gloria," he said to Mrs. LaRose as she walked by him.

Mrs. LaRose bustled over to where San was sitting. San was watching Clarence's voluble conversation to Dawson and an unfamiliar woman as they slowly moved toward San and Michael. Beaming and blushing, Mrs. LaRose was standing in front of San, her hand on her hat. "Don't you think so, San?" she asked.

"What?"

"I said, I think it will be perfect for the pictures, don't you?"

"What's perfect?" asked San.

"This hat. I bought it yesterday. I think the large brim gives me an alluring, mysterious look; don't you think so?"

"Oh, sure," San agreed, and looked back at the newcomer talking with Clarence; she appeared to be the latest

amalgam of synthetics with the human form. High stalactite shoes left her with no more surface to stand on than San had with her peg. Coupled with the long slim skirt, the hobbling effect must have been only a few inches short of absolute.

"San," said Clarence, "meet your old friend." San looked at the woman's stiff blond curls, the perfectly shaped lipsticked mouth smiling expectantly, and had no recognition. Clarence filled her in. "Eleanor Kressal from the days of your home town."

"I'm so glad I caught you," the woman said. "Clarence tells me that had I been a day or so later I might have missed you all together. Your brother asked me to look you up. I'm just stopping over for a few days and then I'll be off to England." She gave a light laugh and looked down at San.

The woman took on her more accustomed setting. Eleanor, a neighbour of her brother Derrick. San was beginning to feel boxed in; she reached down to touch the rifle lying on the roof by her chair. Shadows directly underneath. The sun directly above. It must be close to noon. "How are the kids?" she asked Eleanor.

"Your children said to tell you they're fine. So grown up. You should see them. You know Derrick and his wife look after them so well, it's as if the children were their own. Cygnus, or Cig, as we all call him, says to

tell you his baseball average is...something or other, really good, at any rate. And Lyra is becoming more of a 'teenager' everyday. Regular kids, you know? It makes one feel old, doesn't it?" Eleanor was talking more and more rapidly as she glanced from San's peg leg, to the rifle, to the beer.

Dawson moved a lawn chair up for Eleanor. "Would you like to sit down?" he asked.

"Why," she smiled at Dawson, "no, thanks. I was just stopping by for a few minutes. San, Clarence told me you were in some sort of difficulty." She sat down on the chair Dawson had left for her. "You should come back to Akmor to live. I'm so sure you'd be happier there. You could have your morning coffee with Betty, Mary Ann and myself. In a smaller town, people still care...everyone is important, and you can know everyone."

San shuddered. Yes, where the private lives of the inhabitants are served daily over breakfast, coffee, lunch and dinner.

"Heads up," Clarence called out. "We have a surprise for you." Beside the doorway to the shack, Clarence and Ivan were stapling a poster to the wooden wall. The top of the poster was already attached, and they were waiting for the proper attention before they ceremoniously rolled it downward.

"Isn't this nice?" said Mrs. LaRose. "They're doing a bit of decorating." She moved over toward Clarence and Ivan, and Eleanor and Dawson followed suit. Michael stood up, but rather than joining the crowd at the unveiling, moved to the poplar trees and sat down on the frame.

"Are you ready?" asked Clarence. "San, what are you doing standing there by yourself? Come on over."

"I'm fine here; go ahead," San answered. Clarence had the others clear a pathway so that San could see from where she was. As they rolled down the first few feet of the poster, blue sky, arms and the back of someone's head were revealed. Positive that it wasn't some innocuous decoration, San watched with trepidation.

Either the wind must have been blowing or the person must have been twirling around, because the hair was fanned outward. Bare straight shoulders. With a start, San recognized herself. When? How without her knowing? The 'sneak shots' Clarence mentioned. Ivan. She stared curiously at her figure, life sized; a view of her naked back, as she would be seen if her face were turned into the wall. A clear picture; even the muscles in her back and shoulders were visible. Her waist sloping outward to her buttocks. The thin strip of untanned skin across the rounded edge of her butt. She looked again at the arms; reaching into the blue sky. The hands formed into fists, she appeared to grip the space above her.

The peg leg with its salamanders, caves and fire, came into view. "Why, it's a naked picture of San," said Mrs. LaRose. "I don't know. I don't think that's a very nice...what kind of pictures are you young men taking? I'm certainly not going to pose...."

"So," struck Eleanor, "San is posing for nude pictures now." Eleanor looked determinedly self-possessed, but glanced between San and the poster to consider both weird objects.

"Very nice, I'd say," volunteered Dawson, blushing trying to keep his grin to a minimum. Eleanor stepped away from him and included him in her glare.

"I didn't pose," San said, grimly.

"San, you must be so embarrassed," said Mrs. LaRose, protectively leaping between San and the poster. Was she trying to shield San's eyes from the shock of seeing her own body? Maybe she thought someone would put a coat on the ~~post~~ nude?

But, San asked herself, was she embarrassed? No. Mrs. LaRose was, but she wasn't. The poster showed off a shapely figure; the peg looked like the heel of a tall boot. Not embarrassed. Angry. Clarence's intrusion on her privacy had gone too far. Why did he and Ivan think they could get away with exposing her nudity to anyone who came up here? "Beasts!" she shouted, and rifle in hand, moved to tear the poster off the wall. Mrs. LaRose/

stepped out of the way, but Clarence moved in front of San, blocking her from her object.

"You don't like it?" asked Ivan. "Too bad," he sympathized spuriously. "It's the best of the lot. I've made up copies of this one too," he said pointing to the rolls at his feet.

San stopped trying to push her way past Clarence. "How many copies?" she asked.

"Only a dozen or so at the moment," answered Ivan. He stood, guarded, a slick raven; keeping its distance, but ready to plunge. "But as soon as Clarence gets his story finished and out on the market, I can turn out copies unlimited." He gave a laugh. He was about two feet from the door; San was six, and Clarence was blocking her path. "They're as good as done already," Ivan continued. "Maybe some society, like 'Help the Handicapped', will pick up on it and use it for a billboard."

"You can't do this. I won't let you."

"You've got nothing to say about this, dear lady. As soon as you pull that trigger, you're going to be public property. That doesn't just mean that the forces of law will determine your fate. It means lots of press and publicity. You're going to be public property, and Clarence and I are going to have the franchise."

It couldn't happen. For a moment she stood still, her hand still clamped around the rifle, then she turned,

picked up a chair, and went to sit under the poplars. She couldn't let them get away with this. But she must keep her own intentions clear. This was to be her action.

As she sat there, under the shade of the trees, trying to sort out the events that seemed to be catapulting away from her control, tears, unattended, slipped out from her closed eyes, made a trail across her cheeks, and dripped down on her peach colored tank top.

San wished herself away. Away anywhere but there on the roof with tenterhooks cutting into her from all directions. She looked up from the chair where she was sitting. Clarence, Ivan, Mrs. LaRose, and Eleanor had left. Dawson was looking over the parapet, tapping his hand on the ledge as if driving mental points home to his memory. Michael had moved to the shade of the low wall and was playing his flute. Except for Michael, they were all tenterhooks; stretching her into some frame of their own dimensions. It all felt so immediate. So present. Now. Now. But it was like that whenever people were around her, crowding her. Quite the opposite to the sensations given by the poplars; going through their own process, mindless of other struggles. Or the stillness of Cumae. Quiet, peaceful, city of the Greeks. The anonymity of centuries.

Of course, Cumae couldn't always have been a quiet spot. But if it was the perfect resting place for marauders, if the Roman structures had extended over and alongside the remains from other civilizations, it made little difference to the cool, moist air, or to the marble patio, with its remnants of statues. An unsheathed feeling of spaciousness had pervaded her whenever she sat on one of the eroded walls and looked across the plain --

curving down and out from the hill that elevated the ancient city. Within a few steps, she could stand on the patio and see the cliff descending abruptly to the sandy shore; giving one's thoughts the tendency to drift. It had seemed the ultimate spot for gazing out to sea and pondering idle philosophicals that never attempted resolution. But in times long past, if the questions did become too pressing, one had only to wander through the long series of underground portals to ask the ambiguous, all-knowing Sybil, who would give them an answer.

Even the tourists there seemed ethereal. Speaking their foreign languages, their attention directed to lives past, they seemed to be walking by from another age.

Dawson was standing beside her making noises. "Perhaps," Dawson said, as he sat down on the poplar frame, "a return to your home town would be a good idea. The stability, the security, the proximity of friends and relatives might benefit...."

Michael had stopped playing his flute to listen, and now interceded for her. "I don't think," he said, "that you know San well enough to make any suggestions about what she should be doing. Security for her is like a mass of ropes tying her down."

"I think," objected Dawson, "that I do know San. I've watched her for years around the varsity. Had her in a course of mine, read her papers; she's a very visible girl; she was so even before.... Besides, it's my business to

know people. One can see people in various situations and then make generalizations. It seems to be a very good idea for her to go back to her home town. Revitalize her family roots. Reaffirm her solid beginnings and take up her future with her children."

It had taken her so many years to break through, to exhaust and put aside the axioms that those people in her home town assumed to be truths. Why go back? To see how happily her children had incorporated values execrated by her long deliberate rejections? "No. No, Dawson. I couldn't do that." She felt the corners of her mouth pulling down heavily, as if small weights had been attached.

"If you can't go back and start from there, San," Dawson argued, "then you had better start getting yourself into the swing of things with some regular employment."

It was a crime not to work. People who didn't have an official job were not adjusted. San's thoughts screamed at her. Without a job, one was superfluous, not properly hiding in the rut provided. "I can't, Dawson," she said.

"Ah, San. Nothing to it." He was in his element now. "Make your way to the employment agencies, manpower; collect some unemployment insurance or even welfare while you're looking for what you want, and, once you've found a job, you'll be away. Busy and feeling some sense of self-fulfilment."

"Bureaucratic slots don't care about self-fulfilment."

Dawson stood up, expressing his impatience. "San, you've at least...."

"I have," San replied. "I was at the 'employment office' less than...two weeks ago."

"You were?" Surprised, Dawson sat down again.

"Eight-fifteen in the morning, I was there for an interview. The first requirement insisted upon, if one is seriously considering joining the work force, is the ability to show one's self out-and-about at any ridiculous hour requested."

"So? Continue. What happened?" Dawson asked.

"I waited."

"And?"

"Eventually, six or eight of us were gathered into a small room: five rows of, two chairs on each side of the aisle, a projector at the back of the room, a screen at the front." San sat in her chair and grimaced at the recollection. Dawson waited for her to continue. "We were met," she said, "by a timid young girl who had prepared notes to tell us exactly the right information."

"She was informing you of available jobs? I presume," said Dawson.

"No. She was informing us of our rights and obligations. That was to be the topic of the film which would be run before us." With a burst of frustration, San changed her tone. "I had even concealed my Symes and attached

the manufactured foot. But the little miss in her white dress looked depreciatingly at my running shoes anyway. In the film we were shown a man happily at work, falling trees. 'You have the right to work,' the film told us. 'You have an obligation to look for work, and must be able to prove to us that you have actively sought employment at least once a day all of the time you are out of work. You're not here to get something for nothing. You and your government are working together to help you find work.' They were worried that the possible recipients might spend the money enjoying themselves rather than surviving while looking for work. I didn't even expect to get any money, my contributions to the plan being so minimal, but it was all necessary in the 'getting back to work' process. Records must show one has exhausted all possible sources of income."

"And after the film?" Dawson asked.

"Just a minute," San objected, "the humiliations were barely started. The film continued: 'Back in the thirties' --I should have known they would try to impress us with how fortunate we were not to be in the thirties -- 'millions were unemployed.' Even Joe, the man in the film was out of work. Bad, bad to be out of work. Good, good to demand one's right to work. While the film proceeded with its reiterations, I looked at the people sitting two by two in the straight aluminum chairs. A good looking

group. "Everyone appearing capable, intelligent, well-dressed and more mature than the overseer who was telling us our 'rights'. Ten minutes later, the enforced viewing was over. The film ended with Joe getting off unemployment insurance and happily working once again."

"Not very entertaining," admitted Dawson. "Still, if it was only for ten minutes...."

"They weren't quite finished with us yet," said San. "The girl still had to make sure we all understood. 'Did you understand your rights and obligations?' she asked. No one spoke. 'Do you all understand English?' Everyone nodded their heads. 'Okay, then, I'll take you through this demonstration booklet to show you how to fill out your card properly. Remember you must be looking for work. These monies are not for holidays.'"

"Good of the employment office to take so much concern," said Dawson. Facetiously?

"Sure, sure," agreed San. "While the demo was going on, I realized that it must throw the proper sense of fear into some people; like the lady I overheard while waiting the half hour for the interview. 'I look for work everyday,' said the voice, high pitched and shaky, but full of conviction. 'It's been getting close. So close that for two weeks, I walked around with my apron and dusting cloth in my pocket; sure that today was going to be the day.' The fervor of incantation resounded. The holy job was

about to fall upon her. The poor interviewer had finally had enough, and tried to bring the testimony to a close by wishing her good luck. 'Good luck!' she scoffed. 'It's not good luck, no, no, not at all. I pray every night that I'll get a job the next day. Soon, I know, the Lord God Almighty will see fit....' Maybe it was just a routine that the woman had worked out, but it should have been worth keeping her in bread and butter. All the while, the explanation from the young girl was continuing. Telling us how we must report all monies we receive, how some monies were exempt, but it wasn't for us to decide -- we were to phone in and ask. Reporting monies unnecessarily would delay our cheques. Not reporting other monies was a punishable offense."

"Did the youth of the female employee distress you for some reason, San?" Dawson was seeking the "real" reason for her annoyance.

"Only," San responded, "in that she took her job so earnestly; they never could have found an older person who would say all that nonsense. She was watching me strangely during the last part of the interview, and I realized that my face must have expressed my despair with the whole situation; the little room, the indoctrination, the concealed threat, the idea that the government was giving a gift. Sitting there in my grey sweater, old brown corduroy pants, with my hair pulled severely back, I must have

made a sombre picture. 'Do you understand?' she asked again at the end of the interview. The pestle of crass information had left me too numb to be able to reassure her that she had done a 'good' job; as soon as the interview was over I escaped. But on arriving here, I crawled into bed and stayed there for the day's duration." Closing in her own space, by lying face to the wall.

For once, Dawson seemed to be without a ready "word of advice". Michael was again playing his flute. San turned her head to look again at the poster, and listened to the leaves as they accompanied Michael's melody.

The rifle, resting on the green khaki shirt containing the bullets, was lying on the poplar frame. Forgotten, it seemed, by everyone except San.

"This is the way to enjoy," said Clarence, leaning back and taking a sniff of his wine. He and Eleanor had prepared a luncheon which was now spread out on a card table on the roof. "Good food," he continued, "fine wine, and an excellent view." Eleanor must have had something to say about what was being eaten because instead of the ultracommercial and ultraprocessed items that Clarence survived on, the lunch contained living food. San's estimation of Eleanor changed direction; she couldn't be quite as synthetically oriented as she tried to appear.

Dawson had been continuing to press his point, not very subtly, concerning the advantages of picking up on one's family roots. "So, Eleanor," he said, "you must know San's children fairly well; they've been your neighbours for a couple of years now. Is that right?"

"Oh, yes," Eleanor replied. She took a sip of wine and glanced round to see who was watching -- avoiding, however, San's eyes. "But," Eleanor continued, "we saw her children fairly often before then, too. Shortly after San's marriage breakdown, Cig and Lyra started spending all of their summers in Akmor, and occasionally one or

both of them would remain till Christmas. San's very lucky to have such an obliging brother; of course, he and his wife only have the one child of their own and they seem to think it's socially beneficial for their son to grow up with other children. So with the children tucked away at her brother's place, he and his wife taking all the work and responsibility, San was doing what she called 'social development'; spending her time at the university, summers in Montreal, New York, and then all that time in Italy." Eleanor was seeming a trifle flushed and breathless; talking, taking sips of wine, and intermittently looking down at her lap. Clarence was sitting next to Eleanor, and leaning forward in his chair. Perhaps with a hand on her knee? Something was certainly distracting her. "It must be nice," Eleanor continued, "to be able to do all that traveling. It's not something one has time for when one has a regular job, you know. And how did you manage to make all those tours, San?" She made the question into a disapproving statement. "For my trip to England, I've been saving and planning for several years now; ever since Father passed on and Mother took ill." She turned to face Clarence directly. "But now is the time."

Clarence started to say something, but Eleanor pressed on. "And I must say I've waited for the proper time. I think for San to leave her children like that...must

have been the beginning of her problems. I'm sure no proper woman would abandon her children so heartlessly."

"It starts," San said in a conspiring tone to Eleanor, "when a woman abandons her parents. The seed of corruption begins to germinate all manner of moral degeneration."

Eleanor pushed her chair back from the table. "It's a perfectly good home, where Mother is now. No one can say I've abandoned her."

"Perhaps," San said as she picked up a bread roll from the table. "But you see how impossible it was for me to achieve moral rectitude by abandoning myself to altruistic service for another ten or fifteen years for my children -- it was already too late." San began to tear the roll in half. "Already I had morally and physically abandoned my parents by leaving Akmor. Such corruption," San mocked, "cannot be reversed; one break gives birth to another." She finished breaking the roll, as she glared mischievously at Eleanor.

Michael was standing at the table, stacking a roll with lettuce, tomato slices and samples of cheese. "Do you have any kids?" he asked Eleanor.

Looking relieved at the interruption, Eleanor blurted: "I've never married." She straightened the folds of her skirt. "However," she said as she looked at the men in the crowd, "it's something I believe will happen as soon as I meet the suitable father. It's all a question of

proper timing," she blushed, resting her gaze on Clarence.

"You should visit Montreal, yourself, Eleanor,"

Clarence diverted. "There's a European flair to it that you'd love. For a classy looking lady like you, love affairs could be had in a moment, and, if you wished, forgotten even sooner. A city of romance, cobbled streets and outdoor restaurants." Clarence moved to replenish the wine glasses.

San took a few sheaths of lettuce and used them as a dish for some tomato slices. "Thanks, Clarence," she said as he filled her wine glass.

Eleanor appeared to be trying to hold an insulted look. "I take these matters more deeply and seriously than some other people here might," she asserted. "I intend to form a more permanent relationship with the man I love."

Chewing her lettuce, San listened. She was enjoying the texture of its crisp veins, full of moisture. Patterned like a many fingered hand, webbed in, with the edges of the webb forming a red frill along the outside rim. A soft version of a sea shell.

"You never know," volunteered Clarence to Eleanor. Always ready to help. "You have a big, lonely house in Akmor? A regular job? Someone might be persuaded to follow you, anywhere."

Eleanor unfolded a small umbrella to shade herself from the sun. San was considering the lettuce in its entirety. Sheath after sheath, growing to encapsulate from whence it sprang. "Why," San asked Clarence, "apply 'romantic' to one city?" Even the lettuce could be considered romantic. Its leaves turning into dark red frills like the edge of the lips of a woman's vagina. Or the romantic frills of cirrocumulous clouds, red-edged with the last rays of the sun.

Clarence didn't answer, but Eleanor intercepted with a question of her own. "And was that your reason for going to Montreal, San? To have a taste of romance? A fling?"

San finished chewing the last of her lettuce. "No."

"How did you finance that, anyway, San? I know that you were barely able to support yourself, never mind traveling about the country."

Dawson cleared his throat. "You really shouldn't ask questions like that," he said. "Perhaps San doesn't want to reveal...."

"I went there to study French," San interjected.

"A government bursary paid for room, board and tuition. I applied and I got it. The only obstacle was the transportation, so I hitchhiked."

"Hitchhiked," said Eleanor, as she sniffed and lifted up her carefully sculptured eyebrows.

"I went there," San continued, ignoring Eleanor, "to get out of my English box. Get rid of all the burdensome, restricting morals and fears that had collected from sixteen years of growing up in an area where Akmor was the cultural center. And maybe to try to negate the negative feeling I had about myself after eight years of an exhaustive marriage." San stood up, finished her wine and pushed her chair close up to the table.

"What do you mean by 'English box'?" inquired Dawson.

San remained standing, her hands resting on the top bar of the back of the chair. "Language is a way of patterning one's anticipations and responses to the world. Words and grammar act as partitions, delineating and projecting the manner that the world is experienced. Say, Michael," San called over to him, "can't you just see life-in-a-box? A magician's box?" She stepped away from the chair and crouched down using one hand for balance. "With knives stabbing through the living space, forcing us into ever distorting shapes. But reaching out with a hand or a finger, I untie the strings. Ah-ha." San stood up, one hand still raised in the air demonstrating the untying. With a couple of turns, she was back at the table, where she picked up her glass of wine and a piece of Camembert.

"And then," laughed Dawson, "with one giant leap, you found yourself on the roof."

"Eons passed in between, Dawson," said San. Eleanor was looking up at her umbrella which she was twirling above her head. San continued talking. "The germinal thought was that a monolingual person might be insusceptible to some sensations, some forms of expression, some new modes of living in the world -- things which avoid conceptualization because of the absence of a form to materialize them, to bring them into being by vocal expression."

"You see somewhat skeptical about that idea, now," Dawson said as he stood up. "Have you changed your mind?"

"Just qualified my enthusiasm. The process of human existence is the same for all people. Different languages interpret that process in slightly different ways, but all languages have some adequate way to express the flow and rhythm of existence."

Eleanor was looking at the poster. She turned to address San: "And we're to believe you when you say you went to learn about the language and not about the men?"

"One," smiled San, "hardly precludes the other."

"This is too much," said Eleanor, walking around the table to stand beside Dawson and confront San. "All of this is a pretence to excuse your irresponsibility; you should have stayed contentedly at home raising your children. You were escaping your duties."

"I was escaping," agreed San. "Escaping from a daily hand-to-mouth survival situation to the hope of finding a means to intellectual freedom. Although I hadn't consciously thematized it, I was attempting to find out if one can have a flexibility of mental concepts without first spending one's life trying to accumulate the material advantages that are generally prerequisite.

Eleanor made a sound like a "humph" and turned her attention to Clarence who was making a show of opening a new bottle of wine.

Reaching into the bowl of fruit, San took a couple of apricots . Soft and fuzzy skinned. Skin, flesh and seed -- with a particular density, organization, time and size scale -- had yielded its own unique weave and result.

Dawson had moved to hold the wine bottle while Clarence pulled on the cork.

The sun on the black roof was becoming tremendously hot. Only the breeze made it bearable at all. San started towards the shack to wet her face and hair in an attempt to cool off. She looked at the casual party around her. Perhaps they were trying to lull her into docility.

She turned back, picked up the rifle and then continued on her way to the shack on the roof. A roof-shack with its own patio, with plumbing almost comparable to a penthouse. Odd, the ambivalent feelings that were initiated by the poster. As she walked by, she was tempted to

seize the top of it and tear it in half. She grasp the door frame instead, and continued into the penthouse. Inside, the air was cooler.

Thinking back to her explanation to Eleanor, San tried to focus on what was amiss. Her experiment, the attempt to skip over the years of material acquisition hadn't really worked; so many ideas and ideals with no territory to settle. What had thwarted her search for "mental flexibility?" Had it been a faulty intention? A mistaken idea, impossible from the beginning? Or had she just forgotten to account for the imperviousness of those shell-like protective ideas of other people?

San went out on the patio. Moving a chair against the parapet, she sat down, rifle in hand.

She had just begun to listen to the breeze in the poplars, when Clarence and Eleanor crowded the space in front of her.

"Hitchhiking," said Eleanor, as if expelling a hoarded tidbit. "That proves you don't care about your children. You could have been raped or murdered."

The irrelevance of Eleanor's fears almost made San laugh. "Eleanor, all people are not greedy animals trying to devour everything in sight. Maybe I was lucky, but I found that men are not willing to sacrifice their self-image by forcing themselves on an unknown female. Quite different with 'known' females, of course; once a man has marked you as his personal territory."

"But making yourself so available," Eleanor shuddered.
"It only takes one weirdo, you know."

"And you could meet him on your way to buy an orange. But what you said," San adjoined wearily, "is the threat that keeps women fearful. Admittedly, the offers were annoying. And tiresome. Steering the conversation away from lewd innuendos, refusing more bluntly those who persisted. Many people seem unable or unwilling to distinguish between soliciting a ride in a vehicle and soliciting sex. But the evil world where every male is waiting for the opportunity to attack some vulnerable female is a myth, designed to keep women enclosed and at the mercy of their current possessor. Women take risks when they go out to battle every morning, just like everyone else."

"Why did you refuse the offers, San?" Clarence grinned. "Weren't you trying to liberate yourself?"

"Don't be an idiot, Clarence," San retorted. "Liberation is never accomplished by allowing others to take liberties."

"What?" said Clarence, drawling it out, disbelievingly.

"Whether the subject under consideration is sex or politics, giving someone else the power to do as they please with one's body, ideas or vote is not the way to liberty; it's the way to servitude."

"Pete's alley! San. I wasn't asking for a universal explanation. I thought maybe you just didn't like the guys who picked you up."

"Nothing, Clarence," said San, grimly, "is ever quite that personal." The rifle was lying across the arms of her chair. San put one hand on the stock, the other on the barrel and leaned back. How could she have said that? She who found so much of what she thought and believed to be too personal to be understood by others? Yet what happened to her, happened to everyone else. At least some form of it did.

But her matter-of-fact statements were serving increasingly to hide the disorientation and contradiction she felt. Had "they" taken away her liberty by allowing no room for her ideas? By manipulating her interpretations? By demanding her time in return for her survival. Shooting would necessarily be "taking liberties" with those clams down below. But wouldn't it also be a way of breaking through that obtuse block that was oppressing her? Was it always the way that one person's liberty was another's servitude? Couldn't there be an undisruptive balance?

"My arm's getting tired," said Clarence. He was holding a drink for her.

Good old Clarence. If he were only not quite the same as he was, she could actually like him. "You were right, you know," she said, taking the drink.

"Sure, I'm right. About what, though?"

San groaned but continued: "About the intention to liberate. The trip to Montreal was the first time I had

been at liberty; outside the expectations of parents, husband or children. For the first time in my life, I thought I would be free from pre-established orientations. I could compose myself as I wished, without censorship. Rather naive, wasn't it, Dawson?"

Dawson was sitting on the poplar frame, looking up through the leaves at the mid-afternoon sun. "Not really, San," he said. He took out a handkerchief to wipe the sweat off his forehead. "Your method was to move out of a traditional role and see what sort of new setting you could create for yourself. Courageous, I'd say."

"I'd say she didn't do it," said Michael. Heads turned to where he was sitting on a mat by the parapet. Shirt off, his lean brown torso reminded San of their early morning tussle. While tying a large, wet, red and white handkerchief round his forehead, Michael explained his objection. "From what San's been saying about keeping her proper morals while she was hitching, it doesn't sound as if she was making any big changes in her life. It sounds like just the right behavior for the public of Akmor."

"So it was, Michael," replied San. "But it's not easy to disintegrate one's past values and old heavy morals, even if, or maybe especially when, one is breaking away deliberately. New situations help, but..." San's voice trailed off into silence.

Eleanor had been walking about in the shade of her umbrella, making the most of the breeze. She stopped to put in her opinion. "What is it about people who want to be things they're not?"

"Back to the old 'seed' philosophy," denounced San. "You are what you are ad infinitum. What's the purpose of being human -- having a conscious mind, being self-reflective -- if we have decided in our minds to stay exactly the way we are?" San lifted the rifle with both hands and held it above her head. "It's a rejection of the human distinction; opting to follow habits and propensities." Gripping the barrel of the rifle, she let the stock drop onto the roof.

"What are we talking about?" Clarence asked, as he arrived with a chair and sat down.

"San's criticizing life as it is lived in Akmor," said Eleanor. "Apparently, we've all been habituated to like it."

"Oh," said Clarence, placing his feet up on the poplar frame.

Eleanor stood in the loosely formed triangular space between Dawson, San and Clarence; she was looking at the unoccupied area of the poplar frame between Clarence's feet and Dawson.

"Here, let's fix it so you can sit down," suggested Dawson. Picking up San's khaki shirt, he said, "Maybe

we could...?" He looked at San, who shook her head in refusal and held out her hand for the shirt. Dawson glanced about. "How about if we use this other mat?"

Dawson and Eleanor spread the mat out over the poplar frame to protect Eleanor's clothes from the grass and dirt, and then they sat down.

"What we were talking about, Clarence," San resumed, "was the difficulties of shrugging off a quarter of a century of past values."

Michael interrupted, "But were you able to do that, San? Put aside old patterns of thought enough to create a new attitude? Given your anger this morning, I find it hard to believe you can shrug off anything. Maybe you just keep taking Akmor with you wherever you go."

"Ridiculous," Eleanor said, leaning closer to Clarence. "We were really talking about whether hitchhiking, and doing heavens knows what, did anything other than corrupt San's morals."

"Stop it!" San yelled. "Everyone is mixing up then and now. Then, I still had the orienting opinion that if I could change myself, I would be able to live a better kind of life. I was still stuck in the attitude that men were hunters and I was the prey they hunted. Then, I was living as if. As if the social molds that close in, manipulate and determine one's actions didn't exist. Now" San halted. "Now it's different."

"Pete's alley, you're doing it again," groaned Clarence. He reached out for a beer; his unbuttoned shirt revealed his protruding round belly and the four blond curly hairs on his chest.

"What do you mean by 'Pete's alley?', " asked Eleanor.

"It's the alley behind Pete's poolhall," Clarence explained. "Whenever one of us reporters is stuck for a 'human interest' story, he can always pick up an example from the debris, human or otherwise, that's gathered there. Pete's alley has one of everything."

"Terrible," said Eleanor, wrinkling her nose as if she could smell the dereliction. "I'm sorry I asked." She turned her attention to San. "And you were complaining about being too much wanted. Calling a sought-after woman the prey? Are you trying to tell us you don't enjoy being chased?"

San brought the rifle across the arms of the lawn chair. "It's a way to pass one's life," she said to Eleanor. "Getting ready, preparing the bait, coyly eluding capture, then choosing the times and places one hopes to be caught." San leaned forward, resting her forearms on the rifle. "Being chased was a cycle that I never purposely got on, but it was difficult avoiding, none the less. Men were the hunters; women, strangely enough, were competitors to become prey; and friends were nonexistent.

"But that's the way the world is, San," Eleanor smiled. She looked to Dawson and Clarence. "I mean, I wouldn't want it any other way; I like men." She looked back at San, her eyes casting patronizing sympathy.

San's hand skimmed over the rifle. There was really no purpose in elaborating on a social ill to someone who not only embodied the sickness, but felt sorry for others who didn't. "That cycle is a stupid game," San fired verbally. "It penetrates and disjoints all male-female situations as it centrifugally spews off into all areas of life: home, work, conversation, leisure, sex."

Eleanor leaped to her feet. "You! You, San. Sitting there with a rifle. You pasted on the wall over there. You don't have any right to think my life is... vulgar." She charged toward the door, attempting to pick up her umbrella and purse along the way.

Clarence, with a quantity of mollifying phrases, was right behind her.

With all the care and attention San imagined that Eleanor must put into her existence -- an hour a day in front of the mirror? leisure hours in the shopping centers? --no wonder she made such a personal inference. What would Eleanor do without that net of meaning she lived by? If she could be convinced of the brainless possibilities, the deteriorating effects of such a cycle, what would she replace it with? Even if she could? For that

matter, what had San herself found to replace all the "false hoods" she had eradicated from her existence?

Dawson brought the word "vulgar", still hanging in the air, down to the stream of conversation with a moderating question. "So, do you think," he began, "that moving to a new social and linguistic environment was enough to change your patterns of thought? Do you think it would work as a method?"

"I didn't have any method," San snapped. But then considering the question as it was offered, a break in the angry tempo, she relaxed back in her chair. "But sometimes I pretended, or experimented on myself, as I acted on my 'cloud theory'."

"Cloud theory?" said Clarence. He and Eleanor had returned. Eleanor was standing facing Dawson, and Clarence leaned over close to San. "Be a little nicer to her, will you, San?" Clarence whispered. "Eleanor's a valuable source of information for my story. I want her to stick around."

San glared at him. That's how he thought about all of this: his story. She wished they would all leave.

"Now, what's this about a cloud theory?" said Clarence, speaking aloud, as he looked up at the clear blue sky.

"Never heard of it."

"No, you wouldn't have," said San. "It's mine and I've never mentioned it."

"What is it?" asked Dawson.

Eleanor had once more taken a seat beside Dawson.

"All right," San divulged. "You know how theory generally works: you decide to look for something and then you gather observations to see if they prove or disprove the original idea."

"We'll allow that for now," said Dawson.

"And you know how it really can't work that way, because once you've decided something, all observations are chromatically related to the first decision." Clarence raised his eyebrows. "That is to say," San continued, "that the idea one is looking to verify becomes the reference point which automatically colors and creates the tone of what one encounters."

"Perhaps," said Dawson.

"With a cloud theory," San explained, "you gather and collect -- without personal preopinion interfering -- for as long as you can endure; then, hopefully, the cloud starts to rain."

"It rains," Dawson stated flatly, as if he thought San had really slipped off. In the background, San could hear Michael softly working out an improvisation on his flute.

"Sure," San persisted. "Just like moisture and dust collect unstructured into clouds which eventually yield visible, understandable rain, so meaning gathers and eventually needs articulation. With my cloud theory, one

experiences everything as fully as possible. Later, one comes to understand the meanings as they are worked out in one's own changed attitudes and thought."

Dawson protested, "Your theory seems to bypass all the ordering and directing faculties of the mind."

"It also bypasses," interpolated San, "one's prejudices, and I had long since grown to distrust those things that accomplished acceptance because of their familiarity."

San rose from her chair and went to look over the parapet. Difficult to think about what she should do, when she should shoot, and why. Difficult while all these people were sitting up here. Immovable. Immutable. Why didn't they leave her alone?

She returned to the group by the poplar trees. Determined to wait them out.

Dawson was wiping his forehead. "It was pretty risky," he said. "Having a theory like that while you were out on the road, hitching to Montreal. Years ago though it was, something might have happened to cause you to build a grudge against humanity. Something you're trying to act out now with this rifle business."

"Liberty is freedom and risk in correlation," said San wryly, as she sat down. "Some of my most fantasy-like days occurred on that trip."

"Good or bad fantasy?" asked Dawson.

"Both," San answered. "Mostly good."

"Like?" Dawson pressed.

"Like the ride in the Model A."

"Down the road?" asked Clarence.

"Where else?" San replied. Everyone sat waiting like farklebarries on the heath. "The air was hot and dry," San continued, "as it is here on the roof."

Eleanor adjusted her skirt which must have been sticking to her skin. Dawson took his handkerchief on another tour across his forehead.

San laid the rifle on the roof, sat back in her chair and continued to reminisce. "The non-feminine shirt I wore for hitching was adding to my discomfort, so I had changed into a polka dot halter top and was waiting for my next ride. An old car came into view. As it came over a hill, visible heat waves appeared to have suspended its motion. It was two men in a Model A traveling cross-continent at speeds approaching thirty-five miles and hour. All along the ride, people waved, honked their horns, and cheered as if we were a parade."

"Well?" Clarence jostled. "Don't stop there. What happened?"

"It was a nice ride," San said teasingly. "We stopped at a roadside store and picked up some fruit, meat and vegetables. Then we were back on the road: Erick playing the mouth organ; Humphrey lining the door on the driver's side; and myself, in the middle, driving the car. It had

a lever to set the fuel consumption, so no one had to keep a foot on the gas pedal. Eleanor, do you know what a small pleasure is?"

"I suppose there are a number...."

"A small pleasure," San cut in, "is like the pleasure that is felt when you move your leg and a tiny breeze coming from an open windshield reaches the side of your jeans that has grown wet with sweat from touching the person next to you."

Eleanor grimaced. She cast a pleading look at Clarence, who smiled reassuringly and slumped lower in his chair.

"It was a fantasy-like day," Dawson reminded.

"The dinner especially," San affirmed. "The meat was some roast beef that we had wrapped in tin foil and tied to the motor. Thirty miles an hour for two-and-a-half to three hours meant that we had to start looking for a place to eat sometime after seventy miles. Before the miles were up, however, we came to a lake. The roast got a rest while we stopped for a swim. There were a few families around, but sounds were widely dispersed and the effect was a surrealistic silence. After the swim, we traveled until the roast was ready."

"Sure is hot here on the roof," commented Dawson.

"We stopped at a picturesque dining area; high, blue ceiling, ventilation excellent, lots of room. Erick, the

chef, cut the roast. 'We know,' he said, 'that Humphrey likes his meat rare; how do you like yours, San?' Incredulous that there was to be a choice, I asked for medium rare. 'Beautiful,' Erick said, 'blue for you, Humphrey, medium rare for you, San, and I'll take the portion that was next to the engine; I prefer my meat to be well-done.' He was much complimented on his ability to satisfy individual tastes. With the salad, wine and hunks of bread, the banquet was complete."

San looked around her. Michael was lying on his sleeping bag, comfortable and relaxed. Not so for the three others who appeared hot and lethargic; seemingly lacking the energy to move. She continued her reminiscence. It was a pleasing memory to relive.

"That night, we arrived in Montreal. Sunday. If it had been like any place I had been before then, it would have been asleep. But there we were in the old section, in the middle of a party. Girls flashing their eyes with energy and excitement. Hoards of people milling about. We joined in for a while -- listening to the street musicians, looking at the art work displayed -- and then drove to a cabin in the country to spend the night. By noon the next day, the affair was over."

"Didn't you feel used?" asked Eleanor.

"I was disappointed. That Humphrey didn't come back to see me," San added. "But as far as I was concerned,

I was launched. I slipped into the new city's downtown life as if it were my private territory. Greeting the postman on my way to class in the mornings; exchanging pleasantries with the owners of the small shops on my return. Noon hours, up on the roof swimming in the pool. A pool much like this one, if it had been kept in repair."

"If you liked it so much, why did you leave?" asked Eleanor, as she lifted her hair off the nape of her neck.

"Plans," San answered. "Plans to put my new liberty and old situation together; maybe impossible plans." She stood up. "Why don't you people go away? Go away. Go away," she said, directing her gaze at each person as she repeated her plea.

"It's 4:30," stated Clarence.

"So?"

"You've got company coming."

"What are you doing this for, Clarence? Do you really want me to go berserk, just to...oh, hell."

"I want to see what you're like with some of your old playmates. Your lawyer friend, Jack Nelson. Remember him? There must have been something you liked about Jack, or you wouldn't have let him take you about as often as he did. And also that fellow you married. He's coming too. We need some trauma to blow this up into a moving story. When they arrive, why don't you scream and cry a lot? Maybe both?"

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San lowered herself back into her chair. When would these people leave? She had to practice loading and aiming the rifle. They wouldn't allow her to try all day once she got started.

San stood looking over the parapet at the traffic below. The bumper to bumper rush had filled the streets in the everyday crawl away from the center of the city. Behind her, she could hear the voices of Eleanor and Dawson, having a tete-a-tete under the poplar leaves. Michael, stretched out on his mat, seemed to be asleep. Downstairs, Clarence was awaiting his guests. Why did he insist on bringing in these relics from her past lives? After all these years, meeting her ex would be like seeing a species from another planet. And Jack Nelson. What possible reason could he have for re-entering her life?

It would be uncomfortably hot on the street this time of day. The pavement releasing the heat from the sun. Women in high, painful shoes carrying home bags of groceries. Breathing in the fumes from the cars. She looked around to see Jack and Clarence coming onto the roof, and returned her gaze to the cars.

"Greetings, sexy," Jack said. "Haven't heard a thing from you since you went to reconquer the shores of the Mediterranean. What cockeyed endeavour are you up to now?" He reached down and made a grab for the rifle that was leaning against the parapet.

San was faster. Her peg leg blocked the movement of the stock. Her hand clasped the barrel.

Jack didn't persist, but stood up and straightened his hair that had fallen forward. "Just checking to see if you were serious," he said grinning. "You're looking as vibrant as ever; your nostrils flaring like that gives you a sense of animalism."

He hadn't changed much since the days she had known him. A bit more grey in his dark hair. The skin around his eyes somewhat more wrinkled.

"Well, San," said Clarence, "aren't you going to say hello to Jack?"

"Clarence, I've got nothing to say to this man. He's not my guest. You invited him."

"No cooperation." Clarence shook his head. "All right. Jack, can I get you a drink?"

"A drink." Jack glanced around. "Let's leave that up to San. Should we have a drink here, San? Or should we go somewhere else?" Jack asked. He extended his arm to lean against the parapet, blocking San in. "It's been a tough day," he resumed. "A diversion would be welcome." As he took off his light colored suit jacket, he began voicing his itinerary. "San, why don't we go to your flat? You can put on that long, slinky, red dress I bought you and I'll take you out for a steak dinner, some wine...you can tell me what's troubling you, over the appetizer."

"I threw that dress out."

Jack laughed. "Then wear another. We'll go to Louis', listen to the music. Slither around the dance floor. Perhaps we can see how our rumba is doing."

"I don't dance anymore."

"In that case, we'll have to confine our 'rumba' to a bed, won't we?"

Clarence was listening, a gleeful grin on his face.

"Why don't you get Jack a drink, Clarence? I'm not going anywhere with him. Scotch and water. No ice."

"Good," Jack agreed. "That's promising. You remember my penchant for scotch. And you, San? What are you having?"

"Nothing."

Jack tossed his jacket on a chair and turned to Clarence. "Can you make her a stinger?" he suggested, ignoring San's refusal.

San thought of the aborted-eggnog-mint-ice-cream combination of yesterday and almost gagged. "No thanks," she insisted.

"Sure, bring her one," Jack asserted.

Clarence was already on his way out.

San had stopped being an intimate of Jack's at least two years before her accident, but he hadn't changed during the interval. He was still the same crass, presumptuous bulldozer he had always been. Pushing everything he encountered into shape. No recognition of other minds.

Perhaps if she simply refused to talk to him he would give up and go away.

Starting at the top of her head and moving downward, Jack looked her over. "And why are you up here on the roof?" he asked. Either refusing or not noticing her silence, he continued his spiel. "With your talents and the frontal set you carry, you don't need a rifle to knock people down. Your peg is a tremendous addition. Sitting down on one foot, and apparently counting heavily on their past familiarity, he lifted San's peg. "Fancy art work," he said, tracing his hand along the patterned shank. "It makes you even more of a novelty."

As she watched him pick up and release her peg leg, San withdrew mentally as far as she could. It was as if she had disowned it. When he let go, she turned and looked out over the parapet at the late afternoon beetles going home for dinner. Coming downtown for dinner.

Jack stood beside her, resting his elbows on the parapet. "I've missed you, you know that? You were always such an energized treat to be with at the end of a humdrum day. Wayne and Adrian are still asking about you. Wondering if I ever see you anymore. Adrian was saying how you were unlike my other girls; lacking their sense of de rigueur. But, God. A man's got to have his relaxation some time."

Without answering, San remained studying the circular motion below; putting her attention into its movement so that Jack's words were a string of sounds, irrelevant to herself.

"You're more fortunate than most people, San," Jack said. His voice took on a friendly, at ease, sound. He seemed to think it was heart-to-heart time. "You're shapely, intelligent; pleasing to be with. Just because others are not as fortunate as you, that's no reason to want to kill them off. You know, most of us have to work harder and harder just to retain our equilibrium." He was interpreting her silence as acquiescence. Worse than that, he was onto his favorite topic. "Let me fill you in on my latest exploits."

"Don't," San responded.

"You're not interested? Multi-thousands of dollars evaporated overnight."

"Am I supposed to feel sorry for you?"

"You could display a little economic curiosity. Especially, when near-disaster hits a close friend."

San remained silent.

Clarence returned with the drinks. "Should we sit down? Join the other people by the poplar trees?" he asked. Clarence was certainly tending towards obsequiousness lately. How important was all this to him?

"No, thanks, Clarence," said Jack. "I'll stay here, leaning up against the wall. San and I are watching all those unsuspecting victims."

"Not victims," contradicted San. "Casualties."

Clarence was still holding the drinks. San took hers and set it on the parapet, then slid it along the edge to push it farther away. She didn't want to be tempted to pick it up absentmindedly. Jack took a taste of his and nodded approvingly to Clarence.

"To San," proffered Clarence, "we're all casualties." Clarence didn't know where to stand as Jack had turned his attention to the street below. Clarence moved to the other side of San.

"Not yet, San," Jack said under his breath. "We're not all casualties yet. You can't get us all. Not like you've got me at any rate. You know, I've never been able to really settle with another female."

As Clarence drew nearer to be part of the conversation, he pushed her drink back in front of her.

"You should get over this nonsense," Jack said.

"What's that?" asked Clarence.

"I was saying to San," Jack raised his voice, "that she should get over this nonsense of becoming a professional student, a vagabond, or a sniper; or whatever she has in mind for herself next. She could come with me and be my personal entertainer. You should consider it, San."

Jack took a drink of his scotch. "With all the time and energy I'll have to spend recovering my recent losses, it will be nice to have a little snip like you to be handy when I have a free moment."

Words were not going to be enough to stop this onslaught. If it weren't for Clarence telling her to, she would stand there and scream. She was beginning to feel hemmed in. She grasp the rifle with the intention of jamming the stock into Jack's belly.

"Hold it. Hold it, honey," Jack said as he leaped back. "I didn't mean any offense. Just keep that rifle away, will you? If you're going to get hostile, I think I'll wander over and have a look at your friends over there."

"And you, Clarence," San challenged. "What are you standing there, grinning for? Whose side are you on?"

"No side, San. I'm simply getting the goods. I guess Jack didn't arose any tantalizing memories, eh?"

"He only makes me more convinced that something must be done. I must have been out of my mind to ever have admired him. Perhaps I didn't have a mind then. I was one of the collective proofs of his success. He used to saturate his ego by taking me out to dinners -- spending as much in one night as I spent for groceries for myself and the kids in a fortnight -- all the while being the beau gallant. If he were a real beetle down^o there, I

could step on him without even being revolted by the scrunching sound that the breaking shell makes."

"What were you like when you knew him?" Clarence persisted.

"I submitted. I let him do nice things for me; pulling back my chair at the restaurants, opening doors, ordering my drinks. I didn't suffer at all, so I thought. But I was fortunate to get out feeling alive."

She watched Jack talking to Dawson and Eleanor. It was a unanimous grouping of smug success.

"Is this where the party is?"

San's skin jumped. It was the first time she had heard that voice since her escape from Rick years before.

Clarence went to meet him. "Hello, there, you must be...."

"Rick Pals," Rick interrupted. "And you're Charlie? The reporter who woke me up in the middle of the night."

"You're a difficult man to get ahold of," Clarence explained. "Glad you found your way to the roof. My name is Clarence, though, not Charlie."

"Good enough," replied Rick. "Nice flesh stapled on the wall here. Must be San with that new peg leg you were telling me about."

"Right. Come and see her, she's over here," said Clarence, as he moved his arm in a welcoming gesture.

Rick glanced quickly at San, then shifted his attention back to Clarence. "You, ah, got anything to drink up here? Like a cold beer?"

"Sure thing," answered Clarence. They disappeared into the penthouse. Moments later they came out again, each with a beer.

"So you were San's first?" Clarence was saying when they were again within earshot.

"She was straight off the farm, when I met her," said Rick. "Didn't know zero from nothing." They stopped in front of San. Rick's eyes challenged her with a look that was both defensive and aggressive. Eyes that asked her if she wanted to fight, while telling her that he was tougher. He had always disclaimed the murderous, taunting glare of his eyes; denied also the implicit meanings in the tone of his voice. He said it was all in her distorted imagination. How could she have ever been young enough to think him exciting?

Rick shifted his feet and set the beer bottle on the wall. "Too bad about your leg, there," he said, decently enough.

Fear, anger, annoyance; confusion strangled her. She couldn't talk to him. Far worse than meeting Jack again. At least Jack was a countable number of steps back in her life.

"You should be wearing a long skirt," Rick suggested. "You'd be showing a bit of consideration for the rest of us."

She could only stand there and look at him. A Niagara of horrors overtaking her. His superior stature of 1.75 meters confronted her.

Reaching for his beer, Rick fixed his gaze on the rifle. "You planning on shooting that?"

She continued to stare at him.

"Crazy bitch," he opened. "So this is what you've come to with all your high falutin' ideas about living a better life." Like a volcanic eruption, the torrent began. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Can't you get a decent lay since you left your old man?" Rick turned toward Clarence. "I suppose," Rick said, "she's been telling you a lot of crap about what a miserable husband I was to her. But look at her now. She hasn't got a thing to say for herself."

San concentrated her attention on the skyline. Except for a few lettuce frills, the sky was going to be one yellow-orange cupola, gradually lightening in color until the sky above her would appear almost white.

"See how she stands there with her chin out and her stony silence?" Rick asked Clarence. "She'd never talk to me and tell me what in the hell was the matter with her. She'd clam up like this." Rick set his beer back on the wall and placed his hands in his rear pockets. "When we used to drive into the mountains, there was one cliff that looked like a face. An old hag." Rick laughed. "Ages of stony silence. The corners of the mouth sinkin' down, saggin' eyes. That's what San reminds me of in one of her miserable moods."

"You're sounding pretty bitter," said Clarence.

"Why shouldn't I be? I spent eight years of my life, working my ass off so she'd be happy. What'd I get for thanks? She's probably still blaspheming my name."

Returning to San, he said, "You hardly ever even made a decent meal. Always burning something while you played piano or read a book." He drew his lips together, shaking his head, addressed Clarence. "She seemed like life was some sort of amusement park, with me payin' the bills." Rick took another long drink.

"I guess you were pleased when she finally left?" offered Clarence.

"What?" Rick objected. "It wasn't my idea to break up our family. I came home after a hard week's work and she was gone. Took my two kids too. The boy, the youngest, had just got happily settled in grade one in school, but she whisked them both away without any thought for them at all." Rick slammed the empty beer bottle on the parapet. "Watching those two kids grow up was all I really cared about. But she didn't love them. She kept leaving them at her brother's. I was back West a couple years ago, and he wouldn't even let me be alone with my own two kids." He rubbed the palm of his hand against his chin. "Sorry you have to hear all this, Clarence, but every year, I get more angry about San ruining my life."

If she could just fix her mind on something else, she wouldn't have to listen. But it was too immediate for her to block out. Too present. And too much a part of her past life. Clarence, thankfully, diverted the subject.

"So what are you doing now, Rick?" Clarence asked.

"Making music." Rick gave an off-hand laugh. "I got my own band going again. Sure is a joy to watch everyone on the dance floor getting heated up."

"You and San must have been musicians together once."

"Us? God, no. She was always trying to horn in with that high operatic voice of her's. I don't know what she was trying to prove."

"Say, Clarence," called Jack, as he approached from the group by the poplar trees. "Is there someplace I can make a phone call?"

"In my apartment, Jack. Excuse me, people, I'll be right back."

San felt desolate. If this parade continued she would have to abandon her roof. Where for? To run and hide again? This roof had been a sanctuary. Protecting her from contaminating phenomena like Rick. Maybe one had eventually to stop and confront the tormentors. But she had come up here to attack, not to be attacked.

"Poor San," Rick mocked. He took advantage of Clarence's absence to release more venom. "So you can't find a man who's good enough for you, eh? Don't you like us mere humans?"

Eleanor and Dawson were walking towards them.

Rick continued, "Maybe, San, we should all have our heads among the Gods like you do. Thinking yourself so proud and incorruptible. Say something, damn it!"

San's hand grasped the barrel of the rifle. She looked fleetingly to see where she had left the bullets.

"You're a hard woman, San." Rick's voice cut through to her once again. "Your mother must have been getting rid of a vengeance when she had you."

Dawson interrupted by clearing his throat and said, "I don't know who you are, but I really don't think you should be talking like this to San. Obviously you're upsetting her. Right now she's in need of consideration. In need of friends."

"I don't know who you are either, buddy," Rick replied, "but I'll bet you're one of those prissy-assed intellectuals who can't do a woman any good. That's why you have time to read all those books, and time to nose into other people's business."

"See, here...." Dawson interrupted.

"It would serve San right," Rick continued, "if the cops hear about this and pick her off before she even gets to fire."

"Are you planning to bring them into this?" asked Dawson. "We really don't believe San is...."

Rick didn't let him finish. "I'm not going to have her on my conscience. Somebody will tip them off, but not me. I've got nothing to do with her now. As far as I'm concerned, I loved her." He turned to San. "And I would have kept you too. I never would have broken up a

family just because you had some faulty notions." Rick gave another laugh. "But with all your studying at the university, you never caught a sucker with money and a job there, did you? That's what she wanted," he said to Eleanor; "someone like this stuffed up fart here."

Dawson, red faced, moved between Rick and San. He seemed actually ready to forceably remove Rick.

"You're not thinking of doing something stupid are you, buddy?" Rick asked with a grin on his face.

"Hello," called Clarence from the door of the shack. "Is anyone ready for another beer?"

"Clarence," answered Dawson, "come and help me convince this man to retract his words or get off this roof."

But it was too late in the day for Clarence to involve himself in such an energy demanding task. He ambled toward them. "Why don't you come with me, Rick?" Clarence suggested. "We'll pick up a few things from the store, and I want to hear more about your band. We have an office party coming up."

They left together.

San felt as if someone had been driving nails into her. Pounding them in with a sledge hammer.

Eleanor looked at San with disbelief. "How did you meet such a fellow?"

"He was a 'local boy'. Don't you remember?"

Eleanor's expression denied the possibility that Rick could have been an export from Akmor.

Dawson, who was recovering his decorum, said, "You must have been a child when you married him."

"When I got pregnant, my baby fat went straight to the baby," San replied. Her laugh came out shakily.

"What I can't understand," said Eleanor, "is why you stayed with him so long."

"What?" San spoofed. "You're suggesting I should have violated the marriage rites even sooner? Until death or next Wednesday doth us part? With two small children, no confidence about how to deal with the world, and no decided personal direction, it takes a lot of misery to make the unknown inviting."

"You had your parents. And friends," Eleanor submitted.

"My parents had their own life to lead. On their little farm, eking out a living. I couldn't load a new generation of problems on them." San watched as Dawson ceased drumming his fingers on the top ledge of the parapet, and headed towards the shack.

"And friends?" Eleanor prompted.

"My 'friends' while I was married, were Rick's friends. And when I 'deserted' him, they remained his friends. The only offers of help I got from 'friends' was when the husbands wanted to console me. What's needed, of course, is some sort of half-way house for women coming out of marriages. Women who have never been independent them-

selves who suddenly find it necessary to support both themselves and their dependents."

"But that might encourage a lot of wives to leave their husbands," Eleanor said in a worried tone.

"Only the wives who should. Are you still not convinced that leaving is often necessary?"

"It seems to me," asserted Eleanor, "that they should be more careful in the beginning."

That advice was a great help. San remained silent.

"Here's Jack," announced Eleanor. "I really can't stay to talk any longer about this. Jack has asked me out to dinner, and I must rush along to my hotel room to get ready. I'll be staying in town for a few days, so I may drop back if you're still here."

Jack retrieved his jacket. "See you soon, San," he called out, and with a wave he and Eleanor left the roof. Michael was gone also.

Perhaps now, bombarded and demolished as she felt, she would be allowed some of the solitude she needed. She leaned against the parapet, her back to the wall, her elbows resting on the ledge, and surveyed the empty roof; the sleeping bags, the cardtable, the rubble from the afternoon luncheon. There was a painful throbbing in her head.

A wash and a change of clothes might help her revive her spirits. In Michael's pack, she found a light

shirt and a pair of cut-offs. Picking up the rifle she headed for the water in the penthouse.

The plug was in the sink and a half-dozen beer were being kept cold. She tripped over the toilet tank lid and moved back to turn on the light. What was the lid doing on the floor anyway? Grief. Clarence was using the tank for another beer cache. At least the shower was empty. She turned on the taps.

A weird day it had been. People and memories that she had disintegrated in her mind years ago, turning up in flesh and blood. Was her transitory life the result of simply not using her head? A severe case of irrational action? No. Not irrationality. Rather an example of "field-rationality". Reason, limited and determined by her restricted territory of experience. Circumstantially predictable.

She hung her clothes on the door knob and got into the shower.

Three years after leaving Rick she was sure that, except for the children, she had purged all trace of him from her life. She found out how wrong she was when she enrolled in that Gestalt therapy course. It wasn't enough to try to rid her memory of the thousand or so "ditties" that Rick used to sing. He was still stored in her muscles and their habits of responding; he was still stored in the connections of references to whole images in her mind leapt.

There was no soap. She got out of the shower and opened a beer. It would have to do for shampoo.

The theory behind the Gestalt exercise had been to get rid of past thoughts and hurts that were still adversely affecting one's life. The belief was that one could reown the past by bringing it to conscious awareness, then "finishing" with it by dealing with the emotions it evoked.

There were about twenty in the course as San remembered.

The pipes shuddered noisily.

The method of exorcism was to lie on the floor and think vividly about, and express, something awful that had happened. Everyone pretended to participate enthusiastically. Within minutes, they were twenty supine bodies, moaning lugubriously. For her "bad time", San had allowed herself to relive some past events with Rick.

San massaged her hair thoroughly, rinsing out the beer. She'd probably smell of beer for the night.

Rick. Shaking her, frustrated and angry because he never knew what was wrong with her. And she couldn't tell him. The answer, "Everything," wasn't an entity that could be dealt with. He would put his hands on her shoulders and shake her, trying to force her to tell him why she was depressed. In his fury, his hands would reach her throat. Encircling it ever more tightly. Musn't

scream. If he became more excited, he might squeeze too hard. So she play dead. Soundless. Limp. Relaxing completely until only his hands around her throat kept her from falling to the floor. It had worked before. It might work again. Frightened, he loosened his hold, and put her down on the bed.

She opened the cold water tap farther. "Eeeyah!" she yelled as the cold surprised her body.

The Gestalt game had unexpectedly become real that day. For San, at least. "Express the emotions," the instructor said. The moaning around her increased. Without a mediating thought, both her torso and her legs rose from their prone position, forcing the air out of her stomach in a terrible scream that had been delayed for three years.

She turned the shower off.

Her initial reaction had been to blame the therapist. He was the one who started the fool game. But afterwards, while the others had genuinely become jittery, unnerved by her scream, she had had a cathartic feeling. The hurt that had been trapped in the muscles of her body, in past unexpressed thoughts, had escaped and had left her a little freer.

Michael's towel from yesterday smelt musky. She considered going out on the roof as she was; she could dry without a towel. As she moved to turn off the light,

a bare bulb hanging from the ceiling, she saw a stack of three white folded towels in the room of the unfinished sauna. The ubiquitous Clarence. She took one labeled The Palace and began to dry.

She reconsidered her scream. One can only scream so much. San thought with derision. Repetitive usage neutralizes power. Really, it was nonsensical to get disturbed over one particular example of incorrigible manhood. She was long since immune; immutable to whatever he projected.

She had gotten rid of her great smile that year too. The automatic smile that arose, pending disaster. For five weeks she had gone around with the corners of her mouth pulling down so badly that her face hurt.

Smiling when terrified, or even mildly upset. What a ludicrous thing to do. Like incorporating "yes" and "no" to their inapposite conditions. Saying "yes" to avert the discomfort and fear of consequence that would result from a decided "no". But reserving the use of "no" until one is feeling desirous, confident and pleased with the world, enough to say "yes".

She wrapped the towel around her hair, turban style, and began to dress. Michael's shirt was without buttons. Rolling the ends of the shirt halfway up her back, she tied them close under her breasts. The cut-offs must have been taken from hipsters. The "waist" was three inches below her navel.

Back out on the roof. Good. No one was about. The roof was her territory again. She should have more control over her own space, rather than having people walking in and out of her life at their own volition; adding pleasantries or contaminating, whichever they wished.

Maybe she was really not a powerful virago at all, but too susceptible to be anything other than timid. Always feeling exterior pressure. Never exerting her own. Gathering bits and pieces of a life. Then, after a few years of habitation, disowning all connection with them. But she should be gathering things that were worth keeping. Worth amalgamating to her own image of self.

She walked to the parapet and leaned over to watch the cars, streams of light on the dark streets.

Creating associations that she ultimately had to reject. The trouble with that Gestalt course was that it only taught one how to dissolve the past in order to be properly in the present. It didn't suggest what one was supposed to keep to use while building new sentiments.

San laid the rifle on the ledge of the low wall, and hoisted herself up onto the parapet. Despite what she had said to Ivan yesterday, it was wide enough to sit on. She turned to look down at the street, keeping her peg leg on the roof side of the wall.

The crosswork of lights below gave the appearance of an all encompassing net. Lines of light. Everyone moving to keep in place. One shot down there. Two or three shots. What would they count? The net would continue undisturbed, unchanged. Her war was of such small dimensions.

"San, may I come in?"

Her own life certainly didn't proceed undisturbed. Thoughts broken by interruptions. Though it was the first time anyone had asked to enter. "Come on out, Dawson," she answered.

"I brought you a sandwich from the pub down the street. You won't fall from there, will you?" As he asked, he put something down on the cardtable and rushed to where she was sitting.

"No. I'm fine." But when she shifted her weight to bring her leg back around to roof-side, Dawson steadied her by putting his arm around her waist.

"Just to be safe," he said. "I was thinking that you might be feeling lonesome. I remembered you as willing and able to tackle anything, handling whatever crossed your path, but I think I'm starting to know you better after today." He handed her the sandwich. "You didn't decide to enrol in university. You fled to it hoping to find something better than what you had known."

It seemed one thing she couldn't handle was sympathy. She'd been cementing in her feelings all afternoon to be able to meet the torrent of bricks that had been hurled at her. Now the mortar was being melted away by a few nice words, and a stale roast beef sandwich. She coughed.

"Maybe, you should have something to wash it down," suggested Dawson. "Can I get you a drink?"

"There's a beer in the sink," said San as she coughed again. It wasn't the sandwich, dry as it was, as much as it was some strange reaction that had put her on the verge of tears. Twice in one day. As she hadn't been tearful since sometime before the night of the accident and amputation, this new surfeit was absurd. She took a sip of beer.

"Better?" Dawson asked.

"Much, thanks." She handed the drink back to Dawson, picked up the rifle and walked toward the poplars. The breeze had started again. It would be nice to listen to the sound of the leaves.

Dawson accompanied her, carrying the beer. "Yes, I believe you thought you would find a different world at the varsity, and we were a disappointment to you."

"It was the fault of my fantastic ideals," said San as she sat down on the poplar frame. "I thought I was going to escape from commerciality, from the business men and the entrepreneurs. I thought I would find people who were thinking reasonable people. Women who were their own women. Not concomitants. Not sweet listeners. I wanted to see people with their own personal dignity."

"And what do you think you found?"

"A refined version of 'more of the same'. In the bureaucracy I had found that people were possessive about the minuscule territory their job covered; but at the varsity, they were possessive about the words they used, the ideas they held. Instead of buying and collecting 'things', students bought and collected course numbers; shopped for from the yearly catalogue, and paid for on credit. And concomitance. Instead of belonging to employees, females and flunkies, it was the way of all things. Every discipline and every professor had a particular 'language' that had to be understood separately from everything else. Like little boxes of knowledge, each with its own relevant criteria."

"I don't see how it could be any different," said Dawson, as he sat down. "If you want to learn about a

particular field of study, you have to learn the words the field uses to define both itself and what it does."

"But what's knowledge if one can't cross faculties with it? Never mind taking it with one outside the varsity. It seems they're not interested in where, how and why they connect. Connect not only to each other but to the human species and to each individual person doing the research. They become more and more knowledgeable about their own box, while forgetting to even try to link it up to the global reality that we live in. But when students try to give some continuity to the courses by relating them to their personal experience in the world, they are accused of being participative with the new information rather than keeping their distance. Subjective emotionalism rather than objective detachment."

"Well," Dawson defended. "A professor gets a plethora of those kinds of personal examples. Extremely boring sometimes. And you must admit that some of your unusual topics gave you unlimited scope to express your own thoughts and opinions. Admittedly, manipulated to take on an academic stance, but at times, unprecedented."

"Why do you say that?"

"Consider this paper of yours I picked up from Clarence's flat." Dawson went to the cardtable for the paper. "He has quite a number of your works stacked up there."

"Ready to supplement his sensationalist coverage, no doubt."

"Look at this," he said as he peered at the words in the dusky light. "'A Study of the Word Fuck In An English Speaking Society.' I can understand your interest, after a marriage to a fellow like Rick. But for a university paper?"

"It was, in part, an attack on the way that academics think they can be 'objective' by using their methods on others and avoiding anything that might relate to their personal lives. There is, as you know, Dawson, a procedure that ethnographers use to study a culture and its language, but because the culture is generally foreign to themselves, their personal relationship with their own society remains undisturbed. Anyway, for that paper, we were to take an untranslated word from an ethnography, and by seeing how the word was used in context of the society described, extrapolate the word's realm of meaning. With permission, I took a word from our own society, that's all. I pedantically looked up some of our guesses as to its etymology, observed examples of how the word was used, and then speculated on what the symbol accomplished."

"It's a serious paper, then," said Dawson, "not a joke?"

"Sure, it was serious. And related to the world we live in. Say, here's Michael. Michael," San called out,

"when do you use the word 'fuck'?"

"It's not really among the words I use at all," he answered as he walked over to where they were sitting.

San took a drink of her beer.

Dawson, putting his voice in its most public pose, said, "According to this paper of San's here, 'fuck' is a popular word used to express a great number of things. It says here, and I quote, that 'it is a word in common use. In a casual stroll through a public place you may hear it several times. Some people yell it out of their car windows. Others write it on the walls. It is often used to express contempt, anger, pain, exuberance, and even boredom.' It's certainly getting dark, isn't it?"

"What's this paper about, anyway?" asked Michael.

"If it wasn't getting too dark, I could read it," said Dawson.

"I can get you a penlight from my pack," Michael offered.

"Good show."

San protested. "It's just an old paper I wrote."

"About fucking?" Michael asked.

"No, about words, meaning and culture."

"That doesn't explain it," said Dawson. "Listen to this," he said, as he took the penlight from Michael. "In the introduction, she wrote, 'In every culture, an ethnographer comes across words which he chooses not to translate due to the extensive or particular meaning that the

that the culture has attached to the word. Leaving the word in its original form, the ethnographer explains the usual and official definition; he also uses it in its many different contexts, and goes on to show how people tend to use the word. In the following paper I will apply this method, not to a word from a foreign culture, but instead to an often heard English word: 'fuck'."

"And what's the official definition?" said Michael, as he pulled a mat over.

Dawson scanned the lines with the little beam of light. "Let's see... 'The etymological Dictionary of...' classifies it as 'a vulgarism' because of associations.... shares the distinction along with cunt of being the only two words outside medical... and learned papers to be excluded from all general and etymological dictionaries since 1800.' That's the Eighteenth century. '...could not be printed in full anywhere within the British Commonwealth of Nations until late 1961.' The New Oxford Dictionary recognizes the word only in its most formal, clinical sense: 'to copulate, to copulate with, vulgar'."

"For a word suppressed with such vigor," said Michael, "it certainly remained popular."

"The definitions don't even broach reasons for its wide usage, and notoriety." Sam put her arms around her knees and leaned back toward the tree trunks.

"It's a political conspiracy," proffered Michael.
"Propagated in a deliberate act of malice to spite Queen Victoria and her pink domain."

"It was censored even before her days," said San.
"Besides, it's not just the sexual associations, but also the brutal, striking connotations that it carries."

"If you people would stop yabbering, I could read this to you." Dawson said, "According to this, 'it stems from the German Ficken -- to strike (not proven); Latin: Futuere -- to strike, and celtic -- to strike.'"

The rapist strikes again," said Michael. "But one doesn't have to believe those associations. I've always thought that the word 'fuck' derived from fornication. It has some connotations of a plowman furrowing virgin fields."

San smiled. "Poetic, Michael, but I don't think that explains its varied usage."

"It's a physically aggressive word," said Dawson.
"I'd be willing to believe it took some of its form from 'striking' words."

"I believe it too," said San. "Especially when you relate the notion of striking with male virility. What's the most primitive display of maleness? Fighting. Striking blows. To strike someone is to make a connection. When two men fight, they join in anger. They copulate. I'll bet you've seen it yourself; two men who fuse in

ange and when the fight is over they're the best of friends. But when a man strikes a female, it's not flattering to his maleness unless he strikes her sexually."

"Ah, San," groaned Michael. "Sex isn't an act of aggression."

"It's a terrible theory for a man who doesn't want to strike a woman," said Dawson. "Maybe the word should have stayed censored. It might have eventually died out, taking its concepts with it."

"Instead," added San, "it became a symbol that spilled into all other areas of life. Picking up more uses and meanings as it went along."

They were interrupted.

"Oh, Sann. Oh, Sann. Are you here? Here we are, Revo's up on the roof finding San."

San recognized Birdie among what looked like a crowd of people entering the roof.

"There you are, San," said Birdie as he approached. "Somebody phoned me about the mad gig you're on and I thought I'd bring the crew along to give you a hand."

"Is there a light anywhere, up here?" someone called out.

"By the door to the shack," San told Birdie. "Tell him it's right beside him."

Birdie went to help find the light switch.

A new voice yelled, "Christ's in his Church, look at this. Some chick's been posing naked with a crazy boot on."

"That's San," Birdie answered. "Come and meet her and her friends."

"Hey, man," yet another newcomer was addressing Dawson. "My name's Ace. You look like one of those ginks that San's going to shoot."

"I have been up here on the roof with San for two days now," said Dawson. His voice had the tone of usufructuary possession; Ace, Birdie and others being the intruders. "We were having a quiet discussion about one of San's papers."

"You've got it there in your hand?" asked Birdie.

"So I have," answered Dawson in his most formal, discouraging tone.

"Say, Revo's," yelled Birdie. "Come and put yourselves at home. This nice man is going to read us a paper." Birdie was making himself room on the mat. Michael was sitting on.

"We didn't come up here to listen to any paper. The paper speaks; what sort of action is that?" The resonant voice came from a figure with a top hat on. Still standing by the poster.

"Who's that, Birdie?" San asked.

"That, San, is our friendly Nemesis."

"What?"

"That's the name we call him by. Isn't he beautiful?"

Beautiful was hardly the word. He was dressed in a black tuxedo that looked as if it had been rented from a cenant shop. White dust reflected the light from the bare bulb above the door.

"Where did you pick him up?" San asked.

"He works with us," answered Birdie.

"You people work?" asked Dawson.

"Sure, we have our own company called 'Revo's Unlimited'. Monique works with us," said Bridie, as a girl sat down between him and Michael. "So does Lloyd. And Ace, of course. We've been speculating lately, though, as to whether the cost of working is really worth it."

"What do you do?" Dawson's interest in deviants was being sparked.

"We transform old buildings into old buildings with a difference."

"What is it, exactly, that you do to them?"

"Everything. Mostly we destroy and then try to put things back together again. San was thinking of coming to work with us, weren't you, San? Working with us is a real mind opener. Here's Lloyd."

"Hi, folks. Nice green you've got up here on this roof. We've never had any trees on the roofs that we've worked on."

"You do roofing?" asked Dawson, with his air of finding out what he wanted to know.

"Roofs are fun," said Lloyd. "Ripping and tearing old shingles and shakes. And when we get all the guck and dirt cleaned off, we stick more shingles on again."

"So, now I understand," concluded Dawson. "You run your own roofing company."

"Oh, we do more than roofs," Birdie protested. "We do basements. Or the walls in between."

"It's a liberating experience," Lloyd said, grinning with an absent look on his face. "We smash through old plastered walls, right through to the rotted slats. Lloyd's eyes were open about two centimeters more than they should have been."

"After you've cleared away the old, do you ever finish the repairs?" asked Dawson.

"Believe it," said Lloyd. "The last room we finished, the lady wanted it white. All white. Uninterrupted white. Rippling white ceiling. White walls. White filler in the joints. White caulking around the windows. By the time we finished, we were having white dreams."

"It's a great job," Birdie sighed. "But like I said, the cost of working, the cost of the equipment, sledge hammers and saws, and the cost of the morning coffee and lunch and a couple of beers to wash the plaster out of our throats after we finish work in the afternoon. We can hardly afford to work anymore. The gas to drive back and forth...the first week Monique was working for us,

we had to borrow money from her, just so we could meet our expenses."

Lloyd came up to San and began shaking her hand. "Good plan you have, San. Clearing away 'Conventionals' who like to harrass us." Lloyd exuded the feeling of wide open spaces; spaces between his thoughts; spaces between his images. Nothing would seem to be directly related. Maybe his thoughts hung there in space. Ready for association anywhere. He was still shaking her hand. "But you musn't shoot Katy," he said. San withdrew her hand. He looked at his hand suspended in the air, and grinned at San again.

"Who's Katy?" San asked. She found herself adopting his grin.

"Katy." Lloyd nodded his head. "Katy is this really nice lady that lives with her husband who works. She likes her cat. Sweeny. When we repaired her house, she used to give us 'boys and girls' sandwiches and coffee. Every night, her husband, Emil, comes home and watches television. And once a week, Katy walks past here as she goes to work at the Legion. Not for money, mind you. Katy is a nice lady who doesn't believe in working for money. She just likes to go out once in a while, that's all."

"What about that paper of yours, San? What's it about?" Monique asked.

"It's about the word 'fuck'."

"Did you hear that, Nemesis?" Birdie shouted. "San's paper is about fucking."

"No," San refuted. "It's not about fucking. It's a translation problem. Translating the use of a word, to find the meaning it expresses."

"I should hope," said Nemesis, as he walked over from the door, "that you were aware of the magnitude of significance to which your paper was addressed."

"Oh, I should hope so," San responded.

"How did you perpetrate such a paper?" he asked.

"One starts with an unknown..." San began.

"Like in mathematics," Lloyd said.

"In this case," said San, "we assumed that the meaning of the word 'fuck' was the unknown. The sound, structure and use of the word were the visibles that I could observe and collect. I accomplished the paper by gathering these visible and then presenting my propositions as to the meaning."

"Thus you avoided the action of such a penetrating word by concentrating on the word itself," Nemesis decreed.

"The word as a symbol has extended much too far to simply identify it with the sexual act it describes."

Nemesis, seeming to have satisfied his curiosity, turned his back and looked over the parapet.

"What were the 'visibles' you found?" asked Monique.

Dawson turned his penlight on again to scan the pages.

San said, "First there was the actual sound of the word. The fricative 'f' holds back the air, but the word terminates with a forceful push. The fricative builds an impetus which creates a force. Here, what is a property of the sound of the word, is also true of most of the acts it symbolizes. What it lacks in sensitivity and duration, it tries to accomplish with intensity."

"That's what we were considering before all this commotion started," said Dawson. There was an extra breathiness to his speech but darkness precluded seeing if his complexion had a redness of excitement. "We were just getting around to talking about the nature of symbols in society, and the nature of symbolic thinking. It says here that 'a unique potency becomes attributed to the substances used in or associated with ritual, in this case with the word itself. The ritualized symbols have a tendency to run wild, and in most cultures the potency implicit in the symbolic activity tends to flow over into the symbols themselves.'"

"Actions into words," San elucidated. "Spirit into icons, self-worth into things, intelligence into I.Q. scores."

"I liked the words," said Lloyd. "Potency, implicit flowing."

"But look at where they are flowing," San cried. "Into a hardened symbol. Frustration that cannot find release, thrown out into the world. The sound releases the anger." Like her own scream had. "But an angry sound dissipates as fast as any sound does." San unfolded her legs and placed them back on the roof. "Rather than potency, the sound expresses an impotence. For the people who yell 'fuck' out of their car windows. The university students who are without power in their own system. The Ricks who are unable to break through into fame and fortune, or even respectability. What can they do? They shout 'fuck!'" San stood up with the rifle in hand.

"Hear! hear!" shouted Ace.

"Blast away, San," encouraged Birdie.

She began to stride back and forth, using the rifle as a cane. "The symbol promising release runs wild. Now, it is not only related to the sexually frustrated; the symbol flows into areas of the socially and economically repressed as well. People who are unable to produce in a production oriented society. People who are unable to purchase cars or other signs of their power. They stand in a crowded bus and express their powerlessness, their impotence. The malignant symbol 'fuck' is ideal to express the ambivalent feelings of repulsion and attraction to all things which are considered needed but unavailable."

Dawson continued to scan the pages with his penlight.

"Is that in here?"

"In some form, yes," San affirmed. "Then there is an attempt to make the symbol more enduring. More real. Attempts to dispel the futile energy aggregated into the symbol. The scruff of the dissenters practice writing 'fuck' on the walls of bus shelters and washrooms, but that soon ceases to be satisfactory expression for even the smallest of minds. So how do the users of the symbol reactivate its promise of virility and power? By bringing it back to its original, basic meaning through assault and rape. Rather than attacking the oppressive structure that created the situation, they deny their powerlessness by attacking someone who has even less power."

"What about women?" challenged Monique. "Woman shout 'fuck' too, but they don't go out and rape anybody."

San walked back to the poplars and sat down on the frame. "You know as much about women as I do," San answered. "Maybe women say 'fuck' to show disrespect for the symbol itself. Maybe they find other ways to express their social, economic, and sexual powerlessness; like encouraging their husbands and sons, or practicing some form of self-effacement. Maybe they pick up a rifle. What do you do?"

"If you were a mother like Katy," Lloyd offered, "you wouldn't say that. Katy's happy because she's been a good mother, and her son's a member of the Legion."

"Lloyd," San said. "You don't get power by pushing your kids around. They're more powerless than the mothers."

"But, Katy's son is a member of the Legion."

San gave up. Exhausted. Her burst of energy dissolved.

"San's actually a part of 'Revo's unlimited', you know," Birdie said to Lloyd. "She wants to destroy all the rotting structure that surrounds us. Break it down. Leave it inert. Coverted to nothingness."

"No," San protested. "No, that's not what I'm doing this for. I just want to get through."

"I think we should help San," said Ace. "Do you think so, Nemesis?"

"What does she offer to construct in its place?" asked Michael.

"Nothing," said Monique.

"Nothing at all," agreed Ace.

"Just what we want," said Birdie.

"That's not so, not so," objected San. But the company seemed to be winding up. No one heard.

"It seems to be the time to act," said Nemesis, turning around and approaching San. He was as tall as the two-meter fisherman. "Give me the rifle, San."

This time she was not fast enough. He had taken possession of it before he had even finished asking.

Nemesis continued, "We need a guard, so no one interferes." So saying he began walking back and forth along the parapet.

It was a ludicrous spectacle. This tall blackly dressed figure, acting the part of a guard in a fortress. The light of the moon cut him out as a silhouette.

"What are you going to do, San?" Dawson whispered.

"Do you want me to stay around?"

San didn't answer. Someone could be heard coming up the stairs.

"Who goes there?" the sentry boomed,

"Great gods, it's me, Clarence. What's going on here?" he asked from the doorway of the shack.

"Stay where you are."

Clarence remained at the door.

"Who's Clarence?" Nemesis asked.

"He's all right," answered Birdie. "He's the one who phoned me up. He's San's buddy."

"He can be trusted?" Nemesis persisted.

"Sure, sure, let him out."

Clarence practically tiptoed over to San and Dawson.

"San, what's on here? Who is that creep and how did you let him have the rifle?"

"Listen," Dawson interrupted. "I have to leave now, San. Clarence, why don't you come with me down to your flat? I'll explain everything to you there."

"Pete's alley! A man can't leave and have a few hours of relaxation without everything changing control. I'd better stay here, and watch what happens."

"Don't worry, Clarence," said San. "If they start to get violent, I'll tell them to wait till you get back."

"Come downstairs and pour me a drink, Clarence,"

Dawson requested. "I want to wait a few minutes before I drive home. You don't want to come along with us, do you, San?"

"No, Dawson, go ahead. I'll be fine."

"Hello?"

"Here's Mrs. LaRose," said Clarence. "I should leave her to you, San."

"There are too many people up here," announced Mrs. LaRose. She stood under the light above the door looking into the blackness. Tiny pin curls covered her scalp.

"I want to know what's going on."

"I'll be back," Clarence said to San, as he and Dawson walked to the door. "We're leaving now, Gloria. Don't worry," he soothed. "Listen. See? It's all quiet now. We'll walk you to your flat, if you wish."

.10

True. It was quiet. Only the sounds of Nemesis' pacing regulated the stillness. The sentinel on duty.

Lloyd, Birdie and Company were sitting in a circle by the poplars. The smell of sweet grass stood in the air.

Michael pulled his sleeping bag over beside where San was lying on a mat, and sat down. "Is that what you want to do?"

"What's that?" responded San. "Smoke myself away in a quiet, more acceptable protest?"

"No. I don't mean that. I mean, do you want to bring everything to a stop? Destroy? Do you think everyone should get a gun and promote destructive chaos? Are you trying to stop all normal processes?"

"Not at all, Michael. I don't want to destroy. Just release. Release normal processes. Find a way to let people out of the prisons they've constructed for themselves, safe prisons that offer habits and routines where no disintegrating thoughts are permitted. When they realize they are no safer within their shells than when they are acting freely, maybe they'll decide to act on their own reflection. Maybe then they won't just wait and adjust to what's happening to them."

"People do what they believe they want to do, San. They do what they believe is best or necessary for their own lives."

"But how do they pick up what they believe? By a random gathering of what's meaningful to them, gained without the hindrance of thought challenging the inherent contradictions. Taking their cue to acquired beliefs from the available institutions that they have been soaked in from birth onward. Institutions that offer patterns of behavior. Ready-made images to organize their lives. A treadmill to participate with until death."

Nemesis called out, "Ten o'clock.. All's well."

A communal giggle rose from the circle.

Michael leaned back on his elbows. "What sort of institutions are you talking about, San?"

"Educational. Religious. The family. Our economic system. Sports."

"That seems to cover about everything. You want all this to break down?"

"A change of attitude would make a good start."

"We need to sometimes take a different point of view?"

"No, Michael: 'Point of view' is a spin-off from our present institutional way of thinking. It suggests a direct point to point consideration. Attitude is all encompassing. Like breathing. It infiltrates the whole system. Present institutions don't allow room to breathe,

but the whole world breathes. The problem is that so many people have such a perverted interest in keeping things the way they are."

"What's the way they are?" A friendly mocking grin appeared on Michael's face.

"Capsulized into smaller and smaller units. Units. What an isolating idea. The only things that attempt to exist in separate units are things of mental invention. Like tautologies and mathematical constructs. Everything within normal processes is interacting within an open system. Penetrating and being penetrated by other identities and types of existence."

! They were interrupted by Ace who was standing above them and looking down to where they were lying. "Do you guys want a joint?"

"No, thanks," San answered.

"Not now," Michael replied.

"Want a 'Gourmet's Delight'?" Ace extended a large bag of what looked like plastic shrimp towards them.

Michael and San shook their heads in refusal. Ace continued to stand there and gave a long belch. "Did you see the lightning?"

It didn't seem a night for lightning, but San and Michael looked up.

Ace guffawed at his deception. "I didn't see any either, but I heard the thunder."

San and Michael groaned.

"Sure you don't want any of this? Last chance," Ace said, as he offered the roach. On their refusal, he shrugged and ambled back to his circle.

Resting his weight on his elbow, Michael turned onto his side to face San. "I think that you're given to spilling fantasies, San. Anyone can see that separate things exist: a chair, a table, these mats we're lying on."

"A gross truth," San admitted. "But in actuality, everything mingles with everything else."

"Egad." Michael flopped himself down on his stomach.

"When I picture the stuff of existence," San said as she drew her mat closer to his, "I imagine something like an organic wine glass. Like a wine glass, everything is open to that which surrounds it, and yet, for some indefinite length of time, it manages to maintain its unique shape and use among the other things of the world."

San moved her hand lightly over Michael's back.

"Yes," she continued. "A wine glass with the properties of a magnet, in that it attracts some things and repels others. It would also have to have the capacity for collection, expulsion, and mutation that a womb is capable of. Patterns of collection, time and size scale, density, speed of activity...all these would be relative to the identity of the particular being considered, of course."

"Of course," Michael agreed. "I'll write you up a formula to make it official in the morning." He lifted his arm to give a wave. "Nothing to it...that feels good," he said, shifting his shoulder under San's hand.

"It's curious, though, the extent that patterns of collection extend from one type of identity to another. If you look at the pattern of a desmid, that's a type of algae, and a cross-section of an orange or a lemon, you'll see similar patterns. And then, also, all the examples of natural symmetry. But one wouldn't want to take sameness too far, and make the mistake that Leibniz made."

"What mistake was that?"

"All of his 'monads' were, as far as I can tell, exactly the same. Unit upon unit of repetition, monitored by a God. Units, identifiable only by their different location in space."

"And as for your 'organic wine glasses'...."

"The largest of which would be open to and surrounded by the rest of the unknown universe. While the smallest would bounce around in a ray of light for an infinitesimal amount of time."

"Hi, folks." Lloyd was standing above them, his grinning countenance as beatific as ever. "We've decided this isn't going to work. Move over."

San and Michael sat up to make room for Lloyd.

"This isn't any ordinary sniping," Lloyd said, shaking his head. "You're going to be here, fixed at one place. You see those other roofs around here? Don't worry if you can't, they're there. Someone could get up on one of those roofs and pick you off with no problem at all. You're exposed. Too exposed. Now we've talked it over, a lot. And we've decided."

"What did you decide?" asked Michael.

"It's going to be tough."

"So you're going to recommend that San postpone her sniping. Right?"

"No, no. No. What we have in mind. What we have in mind is a bunker. We've got the cement. And we can bring up some grey brick. We'll put a roof over top of it. You'll be snug...as can be," he finished.

"Lloyd. I don't want to be cemented into a bunker... what I want to do is...."

"No. Don't panic, San. We're going to fix this roof up. The Company is going to leave now, but we'll be back tomorrow. Just the same as any working day. We'll be here to build you a bunker," he said as he rose to his feet.

The rest of the crew were waiting.

Nemesis made a formal presentation of the rifle.

"Till tomorrow," he said.

"Bye, San," said Birdie.

Someone turned out the light.

"Bye bye, San," said Lloyd. "Don't forget. Tomorrow."

They all shuffled out. Leaving the roof to San and Michael.

The moon, now almost directly above them, lit up the roof. Lying on her back, it appeared to be crossing the sky at a great speed. Or, with a perceptual reversal, she could make it appear stopped, while the roof could be felt plummeting to the ground in a neverending arc.

"Are you falling asleep?" asked Michael.

"No."

"Want to talk?"

"Okay."

Silence.

"San, I can't understand, why you think some of these things you're interested in, are so important. I mean, what can all that we were talking about have to do with the lives of people?"

"People are part of the universe too, Michael. People feel the same pull towards and push against that which attracts and repels them as any other example of existence."

"Have you ever studied astrology, San?"

"No."

"If what you're saying about this universal motion were true, it would support astrological claims. Different positions of the planets would result in different magnetic fields that a person would operate within. Sometimes their physical being would be intensified, causing them to lash out. Temperament would change according to changes in the physical field."

"People aren't that sensitive, Michael. Not anymore. If they ever were. They're more dominated by the thoughts in their heads than physical influences that tenuous. The Dionysian man is benumbed by an overdose of sensory experience. Haven't you heard? Besides, unexplained influences are more generally attributed to the power of the Gods." San sat up, as she mused aloud. "But you're right, you know. There must have been a time when people actually felt their own participation in that universal process. They might not have realized it themselves -- as they would have been too involved with the motion to separate it from their own existence enough to cognize it -- but they certainly would have expressed it. As you know, anything the human feels is expressed in one way or another. It could be a reason why so many of our words have origins that express the global reality of going out, pulling or pushing inward, holding and driving out again."

"If something were true of language then, wouldn't it have to be true of language now?" .

"It could still be true, only obfuscated by a change of interest."

"How so?" asked Michael. He remained lying on his back.

"Whereas at one point in time, words expressed more of the participative 'driving-outward' and 'drawing-inward' process, now, the general philosophy of our age and the language it uses is more interested in cutting that motion into minute, precise and specific units of meaning. Like a pointillist's painting, a whole scene is portrayed, not in one sweeping movement, but in words as distinct signs that are surrounded by space and organized to display meaning. There's a different purpose in the approach."

Her head ringing with fatigue, San lay back on the mat. It was a nice feeling. Lying there. Watching the progress of the moon.

San took a deep breath. Filling her lungs and pushing her stomach outward.

"You'll get cold if you fall asleep like that," said Michael. "Do you want me to zip the sleeping bags together?"

For a moment, San was unable to interpret her own feelings. "No." She was tired and jumpy. And thinking too much. She forced herself to get up, pull her mat over by the poplars, and spread out her sleeping bag.

Keeping possession of the rifle, she visited the penthouse. The next towel had 'Port O' Call' written in blue letters. When she returned outside, she stopped to glance over the parapet. Only a few vagrant cars were about.

She looked a Michael, stretched out, so at ease and relaxed. This was just four days of pleasant diversion for him. Why should she provide him entertainment? The thought made her cold and resentful.

Alone, wrapped up in her cocoon.

Sleep fitful. Dreams black boxes. She felt herself extended to include all things, and then, chop. That's not part of her. It must be excluded. Chop. Until only little boxes of unknown content remained. Just movement left.

She awoke to find Clarence had been jostling her shoulder.

"Are you awake, San? Are you awake?"

"I'm awake. What do you want?"

"Sorry I was so late getting back. Dawson and I went out on the town awhile."

"That's nice, Clarence. Now will you let me go back to sleep?"

"I brought you something."

"Clarence. Please go away. I don't want what you brought."

"I brought you an orange."

San sat up. "Oh." She liked oranges. "Animal fruit."

"What?"

"The fruit of an orange is animal fruit."

"San, you really are sleepy. Oranges grow on trees. They are plant. Not animal."

"Look at it."

"It's too dark."

"Get Michael's pen-light," she said, as she began peeling the orange. "I think Dawson left it on the poplar frame."

"I don't know why you want me to look at an orange," Clarence muttered, as he felt the poplar frame for the small flashlight. "I know what an orange looks like." Unable to find the penlight on the frame, his hands were searching the grass and dirt. "I was the one who brought the god damned orange up to you. I even know what it feels like." Eventually he came up with the penlight. "Now, what am I supposed to look at?"

"See where I've bitten through the thin skin? See the bubbles of flesh and the blood that's been released, swirling about? What an alive thing an orange is to eat."

"Blood. That's juice."

"So is blood."

"Yuk."

"And there, you see? The tissue in between the fleshy bubbles? That's the orange's muscle. And this white tendony stuff in the center. So there it is. Animal fruit. The tree is just the supporting skeleton, or the petrified umbilical cord that feeds the orange, but is no longer part of it."

"This may be the last time I ever wake you -- when you've been sleeping. Are you sure that San isn't a nickname for sanguinary?"

"Sanguine, maybe," San giggled.

"Now what?"

"I just visualized what a human tree would look like if the umbilical cords weren't broken. Of course, they'd have to be a lot stronger to support the new growth. Or maybe the connection would hold if the weight were supported by water."

"I think I should let you go back to sleep. Sanguine, eh? Lusty and full of life? You know, I'll stay up here with you if you like. Or you could come downstairs with me?"

"I wasn't suggesting I felt lusty for you, Clarence."

"You never know," he said as he rose to his feet.

"I'll leave you to your dream then. I'm glad you liked your orange. I just hope I'll be able to eat one again without cooking it."

Early morning had gone when San awoke. The sun was already quite high in the cloudless blue. She lay motionless, watching the breeze move the leaves.

In the distance, sirens could be heard.

She lifted her head. Michael's sleeping bag and mat were still on the roof, but they appeared to have been deserted. The rifle was where she had left it: On the roof, between her and the poplar frame. The shirt wrapped around it. The two pieces of decorated shank on top of the shirt.

This was her third day on top of the roof. She lay back again.

From the muffled sounds coming from the street, the screech of tires reached her. She listened as the sirens grew louder, pinnacled, and then began to fade. She focused her gaze on the shapes outlined by the poplar leaves and emptied her mind of thought or sensation.

"So that's it. As I said, it's all over."

"You should be pleased instead of worried."

There were a number of voices coming from the stairwell. Who was it this time? Glad it didn't sound like the construction crew. They would be too much this hour of the morning.

"Cheers, San. Rise and shine, it's a glorious day. And we're celebrating." The speaker was Leona. San had known her since the days of the varsity.

Frankie and Nicole had arrived also. Their conversation continuing as they entered.

"Free as a bird?" Nicole said.

"After last night," replied Frankie. "That's it.

As I said. I'll be free as a bird."

"With your three little ne-nes? You've got to be joking."

Two of Frankie's "little ne-nes" came on the roof with her, along with a fourth woman that San had met once, about a month before, at Leona's.

Leona approached where San was lying. "Time to start your day, San." Stopping at the foot of the mat, she said, "Your 'friend across the hall' called me. He said you were in some sort of crisis." I mentioned it to Nicole and we thought we would bring some morning coffee and commiserate with you."

"I'm just waking up. Pass me that shirt, will you?"

"Here," said Leona, as she tossed Michael's shirt to San. "Don't rush. I'll go over and help Nicole set up the coffee. Frankie's having a fight with Hank, so it's 'oh, what'm I goin' t' do?' time anyway."

Nicole had placed a large thermos on the roof and was in the process of erecting the cardtable while listening to Frankie's tale of distress.

At the varsity, there had been a casual alliance between some half-dozen women. All were, for some reason or another, outside the usual run of things. Perhaps only because they were not part of the majority: the one-step-out-of-high-school students. Leona and Nicole were the only two that San had seen lately, although it was not uncommon that the interval between communication should extend to months or even years. Interests were such that conversation was generally picked up as easily as it had been left off.

And Frankie. Supposedly ultimately married. Yet attending night classes and finding her friends among the definitely-not married. Nicknamed after the Hawaiian ne-ne because of her "out of the water", silly goose, vegetarian habits. Beside Nicole, she looked like a pale blade of grass. Wispy.

San started to unwrap her rifle to take with her to the shack. But the coming event was obviously a coffee klatch. The rifle would be superfluous. Leaving it enveloped in the khaki shirt, she crossed the roof. Frankie's little ne-nes were swirling about, and Octavia, the youngest, darted in front of San, causing San to almost lose her balance. Without further incident, San passed the poster and entered the penthouse.

She transferred the bottled beer from the sink to the floor and commenced to groom herself for the day.

When San returned to the roof, ready for a morning coffee, six great plastic mugs were on the table. It appeared that Leona, Nicole and Sharon were taking the opportunity to divulge to Frankie their intimate knowledge of the lurking problems.

"But, it's not going to be difficult," argued Frankie. "For one thing, Hank has already agreed to send me four hundred a month to pay the mortgage, and I can get a job, or even some social assistance if need be."

"Don't be a goose, Frankie," said Nicole. "Living in a home like yours, with an income of four hundred a month, you won't be getting any outside assistance."

"And then there's the problem with other men," said Leona. "Do you really think your husband will continue to pay the mortgage on the house if you have someone else move in with you? 'Let him look after you,' that's what he'll say. Especially once he needs the four hundred to look after his new interests."

"But I'm not planning on living with anyone else," Frankie assured her audience. "I wouldn't want the children to be confused."

"Not now, maybe," Leona agreed. "But what about next month? Or next year? Are you planning on becoming a nun?"

There are only two alternatives," declared Sharon. "Either you bring it home or you go out for it."

"I can just see Frankie," smiled Leona. "Arranging furtive trysts with a lover. Getting out of bed at two in the morning to drive home and release the babysitter. Meeting for a quick flash of intimacy during lunch."

"Or bringing the man home and making sure he leaves in the morning," offered Sharon.

"I'm not saying," defended Frankie, "that I won't eventually get married again."

Nicole stepped over to the parapet. "Wanted," she shouted over the wall, "Man to take over mortgage, three children and wife. Usual benefits. Apply before despair."

"I don't know why you are all making fun of me," Frankie sulked. "You've all done something similar yourselves. Maybe, I'll just move out of his house. Get some sort of cash settlement. Apply for social assistance, and take courses at the university."

"That's not legal anymore," objected Nicole. "If you're on welfare you either have to be at home with the children or out looking for a job. Isn't that the case, San?"

"Content yourself with being part of the ignorant masses," San said as she finished a yawn. "Who made this coffee? It's worse than Clarence's."

"It's possible," said Frankie as she twirled a loose thread from her handbag around her little finger. "it's just possible that I might be able to find a good job."

"And a decent day care for the kids?" asked Nicole.

"A job doing what?" assailed Leona. "You've never even supported yourself."

"Stop telling me all the troubles I'm going to have," pleaded Frankie. "The decisions have been made. I'll just have to program the details."

San decided to offer her opinion. "Have you considered letting the kids stay with Hank? He has the job and the money. You could step out and find your way in the world."

"Oh, I couldn't do that," Frankie protested. "I don't even know if I would want to do that. The kids should be with their mother, I'm sure of that."

Undaunted, San said, "What we should have is a half-way house for women coming out of marriage. It would give them time to adjust to new situations."

"Like convicts coming out of prison," Nicole commented.

"You couldn't call it a halfway house," said Leona.

"Halfway between what and what? One man and another? One man and no men?"

San laughed. "How about, halfway between economic dependence and economic independence. Halfway between having no choice and making decisions that will affect one's life."

"But you mean a house where fellows aren't allowed?" asked Sharon.

"That would be self-defeating," interrupted Leona. "It's only through experiencing a number of men intimately, that women can get rid of old-hangups."

Frankie stopped twirling the loose thread, and said, "The problem with new men should wait. At least until the woman has everything else settled."

"Gad!" interjected Sharon. "How long do you think that that takes? I still don't have 'everything else settled'."

San tried to elucidate, "No one who helped set up a halfway house would want to be in the position of having to tell any of the occupants how to live. That's what the women would be there for: time and independence to decide for themselves. Perhaps a housing complex could be set up with private space for each woman, but with group facilities and group child-care arrangements."

"A matriarchal community?" scoffed Nicole. "And what of the men who dropped in for the available benefits? A haven with the work and organization done by the women?"

"Do you mean a halfway house for a few days, or weeks?" asked Frankie.

"What could anyone decide in that amount of time?" said Leona. "There should be an intermission of obligations for a number of years to give time to read, study and try out different life styles."

"I don't know about all this," said Frankie, looking at her children who were transforming the old tennis net into a hammock. "There would be a multitude of problems."

"So there might be, Frankie," agreed San. "But the goal of providing an advantageous situation for the children to grow up in, while not depriving a mother of her liberty, would be well worth it."

Sharon expressed her approval. "If the young tots all slept in the same vicinity, one wouldn't have to worry about hiring a sitter, or leaving them alone at nights."

"Or," said Nicole, "having them come home after school to an empty house."

"The psychological possibility," offered Leona, "might be that the children would acquire a sense of security, independent of their mother's liaisons."

"If a complex for single parent families were set up," San said, "there wouldn't have to be the present duplication of purchases. With the funds that would be saved by the cooperative factor, one could make sure that the children got the necessary 'extras' like swimming, music, golf. Maybe a French governess."

"Golf? A French governess?" said Frankie. "You surely have an unpractical idea about what a child should have just to not be disadvantaged."

"Golf is an ideal way to strengthen concentration. Centering the attention of the mind to such an extent that

the whole 'trained' body collaborates. And music...."

San was interrupted by the arrival of Mrs. LaRose.

"How nice," beamed Mrs. LaRose. "You've got some proper company. I'm Mrs. LaRose, the landlady," she said, oversmiling at everyone.

"Have a cup of coffee, Mrs. LaRose," offered Leona. "We even have a cup ready for you."

"Thank you," she said. "I've been so worried. I'm so glad you put that rifle away, San. I had decided I couldn't stand these goings-on a moment longer. I was determined to phone the owners."

"I'm surprised you didn't phone the cops," said Leona.

"Well," said Mrs. LaRose, shaking her head, "I hate to create a stir. But I was going to admit that I would have to call in those two owners, if I couldn't, right now, make San give up this rifle business. But I hate to call them you know," she said taking a sip of her coffee. "As long as they get their rent money, they pretty much leave us alone. And the first thing they would ask, if I called them up, would be, 'Why isn't Edward dealing with this?'"

"Who's Edward?" asked Sharon.

"Don't bother," said Leona to Sharon, "He's sixty-three, with a grey brush-cut. And his only passion is horse racing."

"Eddie is my husband," Mrs. LaRose was answering.

"Of course, he's the one who officially is the superintendent here. Now my Eddie is a good man. It's just that sometimes he's out of town on other business and isn't around. The owners really don't like that. I get so nervous about the goings-on of my tenants. If they get caught doing anything illegal, the first thing that will happen is those two owners will come down on Eddie and me. Saying we're not looking after this place properly. Now if Eddie had been around here, he could have either got San to give up this rifle business, or he would have called the police. But if I call the police and those two men find out that Eddie hasn't been around for...."

"How long has it been since you've seen him?" asked Nicole.

"Oh, he's very busy. He's been away a little more than two weeks, this time."

"Why don't you just let the owners know that you're the one who looks after the place?" asked Sharon.

"I do look after it, don't I," agreed Mrs. LaRose.

"I should tell them: 'Look here, I'm the superintendent.'"

San, the rats in her stomach -- long since in full effect -- thought of the missing plaster on the hall walls, and the broken door knob in her flat.

"But you know," said Mrs. LaRose, as if she were revealing a terrible secret, "they only hire couples. I'd

be out on the street with no place to live. I'm only hoping that Eddie will be back soon. You know this can't go on any longer, San. I hate to say this, but tomorrow your rent is due again, and I just can't risk telling the owners your flat is empty. What if they do a check and see that someone's there? They'd think I'd been holding back their money. San, why don't you talk to Clarence? I'm sure that nice young man could help you fix up something."

"Oh, he's helping me, Mrs. LaRose," responded San. "In exactly what direction, I'm not sure."

"Clarence?" said Frankie. "You mean that sweet blond fellow I saw you with at The Shamrock? I always make sure to read his articles in The World. They're always so full of depth. So tragic and human. And sensitive.

"How can you think that about Clarence?" asked San.

Mrs. LaRose broke in, "San, I don't think that you know to appreciate Clarence. You don't seem to recognize what a fine man he is."

Images of Clarence. His chest with its four hairs. On his hands and knees under the poplars last night. Making everything so available for her stay on the roof. Available for his story....

"He'll be a lucky catch for some girl," Mrs. LaRose affirmed.

"I, for one, don't believe in 'catches'," said Leona.

"Or marriages either. When two people become one, the question that stikes me is 'Who's dying?'."

"But it's not quite like that," San said. "More often two people who stay together have symbiotic personalities. The altruistic self-eraser finding union with the power hungry the sycophant with the egotist, the butterfly to the grey cement. Two by two they tumble together, into their boxes."

"Worst of all," stated Frankie, "is the weak husband who dominates his wife to increase his own image. But he really is weak, so the woman has to get stronger and more capable." Frankie's children were on either side of her, vying for her attention. As she talked she was rummaging through her capacious bag. "He needs her to be stronger, but he hates it too, because it makes him appear even weaker." She brought out a bag of cookies and gave them to Octavia and Bradly.

San wondered if Frankie knew she was talking about Hank. Mrs. LaRose was nodding her head sympathetically.

"One doesn't want to hurt him," Frankie continued, "but what else can one do, if nothing that one does is right? Nothing appreciated? Everything one does is wrong, even to buttering his toast."

"You can't change other people," advised Leona. "If it isn't going right, you have to leave."

"But I couldn't leave my Eddie," said Mrs. LaRose. "What would I do if I did?"

"You can't change other people," San said to Leona, "but it is within another person's power to change the light, or the receptive field, that complements a mate's neurosis. If someone is being too dominant, someone else is being too submissive. That sort of thing. The personality of anyone can be greatly influenced by the way that one sees oneself being seen."

"If you're so wise," asked Sharon, "how come you're not happily snuggled in with someone?"

"Ladies. Ladies."

Clarence announced his entrance.

"How delightful to see you gathered here. Fair and dark haired beauties. How have I survived away from you so long?"

"Hi, Clarence. I'm Leona."

"You were as good as your word," grinned Clarence.

"We've heard so much about you," said Nicole. "It's interesting to see you in person."

"We're talking about love and men," said Sharon, as she looked Clarence over. "Of course, some of us, like San, are too callous to ever fall in love again."

San objected to the charge. "Callousness can soften, Sharon. There have been at least one or two times when I thought everything was perfect."

"Really?" Frankie smiled. "What happened?"

"Nothing. It didn't assume enough importance to overcome other plans. Priorities interrupt."

"Yes. Yes. Priorities," said Mrs. LaRose. "I suppose there is something I should be doing now, rather than chatting away up here drinking coffee. Eddie could come home at any time, and what have I done today?"

"Such a shame you have to leave," protested Clarence.

"Yes. I really must go." Fluttering her hand in a wave, Mrs. LaRose moved toward the door. "You will remember, San? About the rent?"

As Mrs. LaRose went out, San started a sigh of relief. But Mrs. LaRose re-entered to say, "That poster. It is upsetting, isn't it? You will take it down, won't you Clarence?"

This time she did leave.

"I think there's enough coffee left," Nicole said as she swished the thermos. "Do you want a cup, Clarence?"

"I'll pass it up, for now, thanks. A bit of a hang-over this morning. While I sip quietly on this beer, why don't you girls tell me how you all came to know each other?"

"It's getting hot up here," said Sharon. "With that sun shining down like this, I could be improving my tan." Picking up her handbag, she left for the shack.

Leona was smiling. "When did I meet San? It was a huge class and the prof was talking about the biological differences between boys and girls, and the effect of

socialization. San popped up from her chair, and started reporting cases where sex was ambiguous. She went on to mention a horrible case where due to a 'slip of the scissors', it could be better arranged for the baby to live as a girl instead of a boy. In order for the sex change to be successful, the parents had to fully agree to carry out the socialization; that meant never to even think 'boy' in reference to the child. What struck me, however, regarding the ambiguous sex cases, was that in the middle of these hundreds of people, San was talking about examples of a clitoris that was too large for a girl, but too underdeveloped to be a penis. I thought that anyone who could talk about a clit in front of all these people must be a friend of mine I hadn't met yet. After that class, we ran into each other quite often."

Leona had a tendency to pick up acquaintances to see what she could learn, copy or use from them. Then, deciding the quality of the acquaintance was not what she, in her idolatry, had first conceived, she would move on to find another friend whose faults were unknown.

"San, you haven't told me all," said Clarence, his eyes glittering. "Maybe you and Leona shared some private information."

"Sure we did," answered Leona. "But I don't think it was the type you're thinking about."

San frowned. Clarence knew the spuriousness of what he was suggesting. It was San's opinion that, in the gay person's flight from members of the opposite sex, that person generally retained all the conflicts of male and female roles without the satisfaction of doing proper battle. And as for the ambiguous cases where people have to choose their own sex....what a lot of grief that would require.

Nicole reordered the conversation. "San used to teach my son, Cordell, piano lessons."

"Ah so," nodded Clarence.

Sharon returned. She was wearing a yellow bikini which would do little to impede her skin from getting an unmarred tan. The roundness of her figure was well revealed, despite the wrap-around skirt she was tying overtop. "Clarence," she asked, "would you like to apply the oil to my back?"

"Much obliged," grinned Clarence. "San, you never told me you used to teach piano."

"A source of income while I went to the varsity," San explained. "When I taught Cordell, he was a pudgy little four year old."

"Isn't that awfully young for piano lessons?" asked Frankie.

"The articulation of the body and its extentions is not compelled to wait for development at a given age. It can be taught, practiced and learned."

Frankie objected. "Why trouble to teach dexterity that will develop gradually and normally by itself?"

"If waiting were enough," responded San, "why do some children still have problems holding a pencil properly, years after they start school? Teaching isn't waiting. The development of the relationship between the mind and the fingers needs a certain amount of practice before it can come into full effect. Cordell, at four, approached the piano with his hand doubled up in a fist. For him to place his thumb and his index finger side by side on the keyboard took a conscious and serious effort."

"But, but," protested Frankie. "He would have been the same age as Octavia is now. Kids that age can't sit still for a moment."

San laughed. "At first it was about two or three minutes. But by the end of the first month he could concentrate for a quarter of an hour. He was very impressed with his accomplishment. By that time, he had also unwrapped his fingers and could play the keys separately, in sequence. He was even acquiring the ability to vary and alternate the order of play according to request."

"Surely at that age, he would be too young to read music," said Frankie. "What an effort."

"Even then, Cordell was able to discern patterns. I remember him saying some things 'were the same only different!'. . . By four years of age, children have already

learned to use sounds to express themselves in language. They're not too young to develop their ability to recognize musical sounds." San looked at Nicole who was sitting back, listening comfortably. "Music," San continued, "is a perfect example of how recognizable signs and sounds emerge from a chaotic, undistinguishable maze, and become an articulated series and presentation of identifiable meanings."

Sharon stood up ending the backrub Clarence was giving her. "I leave the house to get away from kids," she said. "Not to hear more about them. I noticed some beer in the washroom. Does anybody want one?"

"Why don't you bring a few out?" Clarence suggested. "I'm sure they won't go to waste." As Sharon left for the penthouse supply, Clarence looked around for something to clean the sun tan oil off his hand. "San, what's the difference between a pattern and the 'ruts' you dislike so much?"

"Unfortunately, they're often too similar. Patterns become comforting rituals. Even music patterns, iterated and reiterated form grates for the mind. Prisons of habit, both of thought and action." San's gaze sought the rifle. "Then patterns become just another way to lose consciousness, rather than a way of structuring it."

Bradly was tapping Clarence on the knee. "Can I have that bottle?"

"What for?" asked Bradley's mother.

"To carry some water."

"It's all right, Clarence," said Frankie. "You can let him have it."

Clarence finished the beer and handed the bottle to Bradley.

"San," queried Leona, "what sort of losing consciousness are you referring to?"

"By following patterns," San resumed. "Once people give their thought over to a form, there is no need to create patterns, nor even recognize new ones. Thought with its controlling influence over the body is given a treadmill to follow. One loses the value of self-reflexiveness."

"What you're doing," accused Leona, "is transferring what you know about one thing into a broad generalization. Mushrooming one item to encompass all things. How does learning music relate to all this?"

"Everytime a young student changes compositions, there is an adjustment of patterns. A new melody, a new sequence of notes, a new key signature."

"Does Cordell still play the piano?" asked Clarence.

"No," replied Nicole. "Now it's the flute."

Clarence raised his eyebrows. "And what's a key signature, San?"

"It's the sign of the key a composition is written in. Not only does a child have to read the key signature, he has to teach his fingers to remember that all the B's are flat or all the F's are sharp, and so forth. On the next work he might have to get rid of that. Dismember it, so to speak, while organizing another pattern of thought that controls the fingers in a different way. It's a process of continually creating and breaking apart."

"Gad," Sharon said as she returned with a beer. "I suppose if we were to set up that halfway house we were talking about, we would have to insist that all our kids submit to the middle class idea of music lessons."

"Middle class?" objected Frankie. "Upper middle class, I'd say. I certainly can't afford such luxuries."

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"In this case," said San, "it doesn't matter what class standards are motivating their intentions; the benefits are there all the same. Children, by learning to discern patterns, train the mind to see connections. They train themselves to hear sounds distinctions and -- most important -- they learn to listen while they are doing. Once people can listen to what they are saying, or to their own music, they become conscious enough to monitor their own actions thus making it possible for them to become their own subject."

"Do you think that people can't hear themselves?" glibed Sharon.

"Sure, they can hear their own sounds," answered San, "but as something so familiar that they can't make discriminating judgements. Even that dripping sarcasm can become a familiar, comforting sound to the speaker it belongs to."

"So what?" scoffed Sharon.

"Sarcasm cuts through the flesh, not only at whom it's directed, but also back to it's origins. Sound can't discriminate between the bodies it penetrates, so how can a speaker go unaffected by his or her own sounds? People don't monodirectionally act on their environment. Everything flexes back. Affecting the source, the people who have extended themselves through the use of sound."

"I'm going to leave and recline under the sun," said Sharon. "Time is well spent getting a beautiful tan, don't you agree, Clarence?" she said as she walked over to the mat by the poplar trees.

"Don't let Sharon irk you, San," counselled Leona.

"She's been having a rough time of it lately."

Frankie asked: San, do you really believe that music has all those implications you mentioned?"

Really believe? Did she really believe anything? She doubted it, but she answered otherwise.

"It might lead to an inner appreciation of variations and thus influence the affective being of the participants. It might make them less susceptible to the numbing beckon-

ing of the repetitive drone of the forever constant beat. And, inadvertantly, it will always affect the reversibility that we must deal with daily."

"Daily reversibility; oh, my God," said Clarence, taking a sip from his beer.

"Reversibility," San declared. "The exchange between the exterior sign that represents meaning and the meaning that the person involved gives to it." Clarence held up his hands in protest, but San persisted. "Of course, in music there are technicians who execute a work without adding much of their own existence, but I suspect their performance emerges too distanced from their music."

"Mind you," interrupted Nicole. "The sloppy sentimentalist contributes almost entirely from his own sensations."

"Using signs and instruments and sounds that belong to the public," San countered.

"I never had to put up with anything like this in Pete's alley," complained Clarence, shaking his head.

San knew she was carrying her own strand of thought too far into unreceptive territory. Stretching the ground of understanding too thinly. But if she were to remain silent while her ideas were urging to be spoken, remain silent in deference to the attitude of others, she might as well give up on the power of thought and ideas. Those two little ne-nes were having more success pushing dirt and water with their pretend bulldozer.

Give up and resort to the rifle. A more visible power. Terrorizing people out of their time-worn patterns. The possibility existed that Clarence was genuinely interested. Maybe he would mention her views in his story. But she didn't believe that would happen. What sorts of things would he say if he did? By what tone of interpretation would she be represented?

San took the last sip of her cold coffee and watched as Sharon returned to the cardtable. "Clarence?" Sharon called. "Don't you think we could come up with something better to talk about?"

"I'm sure we could," he answered, while giving San a wink.

"I should be pressing on too," said Frankie. "I'm sure Bradly and Tavia will be demanding their lunch soon."

It appeared that the party was in danger of breaking up. All those lovely females eluding Clarence's grasp.

"Listen, Frankie," said Clarence. "Why don't you remain here? It's still a while till lunch time. Sharon and I can slip down and pick up some hamburger. All right, Sharon? We can cook it on my barbeque. And have a case of beer. No sense in all of you disappearing. You might want to meet San's sociologist friend from the varsity. Dawson's coming back this afternoon. What do you say? Nicole? Leona?"

"All right," agreed Frankie. "I'm at rather loose ends today. I'll stay if you do, Nicole."

"Fine with me. Leona?"

Leana said, "If we're going to stay up here for a while longer, I may as well strip down and do some sunbathing too."

"In the nude?" asked Clarence, grinning more widely.

"No, sorry," said Leona. "I've come prepared with a suit."

"Well, don't run away, Are you ready, Sharon?"

Clarence and Sharon left the roof. Presumably to prepare for a barbeque.

Leona and Nicole were stretched out taking in the sun. San hoped Michael wouldn't object to her using his sleeping bag as a cushion to sit on. She had moved it close to the parapet to take advantage of the shade. Leaning against the wall, she watched Frankie appease her children. Octavia had fallen from the tennis net-cum-hammock and was sniffing unhappily. Frankie was helping them lower the net so that they could fall in and out without any "hurts". The children were presently preoccupied again and Frankie walked over to talk to San.

"Well?" asked Frankie. "Do you think I'm being wise or foolish?"

"They look cheerful enough," responded San.

"No, I mean about leaving Hank."

"Why are you leaving him?"

"Because I'm nothing there. He comes and goes. Lives, while I vegetate at home with the kids."

"Why don't you start doing what you want from where you are now?" San asked. "Changing residences may be dramatic but I almost doubt it will serve any real purpose."

"When we were talking about halfway houses, why did you think they'd be best for women with kids? Why not for two parent families?"

"Sheer numbers," answered San. "A household with one

adult living in it has a lot less chance of setting the atmosphere for the kids than a household with two adults."

"Hank's never home to help 'set the atmosphere', anyway."

"All right," San shrugged. "If it's intolerable to stay, why are you asking anyone whether you should or not? You don't have a choice, then, do you?"

Frankie avoided the challenge by saying, "A cooperative house like that would take a lot of money to set up. You'd probably have to get grants from the government. And why would they fund something like that?"

"Eventually they will have to consider some type of alternate family living that does not isolate mothers with their children, that doesn't require the space of suburbia, and that counteracts the impact of a nuclear family. Right now the government is spending more and more on education -- a separate box for the maturation of youngsters -- more money on child counseling, special schools and classrooms. At least what I was suggesting would consider the whole environment of the child. Do you know that for every year a mellowed pot smoker spends in jail the government could afford to support a university mother and two or three kids? In an atmosphere of culture, books, and plays for the same duration? I don't know why I'm going on like this. I've given up in disgust, long time ago."

"I still wonder what I'm going to do," said Frankie.

"You can always wait," offered San, wryly. "Wait ten years, until your children are older. Then you can do what you want. Ten years without acting on any of your own intentions. Without moving toward a more desirable situation. Put off the choices and drift passively."

Wait. Wait till next year. Next year, Leige, we'll have a crop like you've not seen since....

"If you do leave Hank to work and study, you can expect to run into a lot of ha-ha fences."

"A ha-ha fence?" Frankie pushed a strand of her ash blond hair out of her eyes, and looked doubtfully at San.

"Life is a ha-ha fence. You slip over a grassy knoll, and find yourself on a smooth downhill run. Ending with an insurmountable cliff." San was stopped by Frankie's puzzled stare. "You can expect," San said plainly, "a lot of problems."

"What specific problems are you going to warn me about?" grumbled Frankie.

"Ordinary problems of change. Change from one place to another. One role in society to another. Change from a position of slave to master."

"I'm no one's slave," objected Frankie. "And I don't plan on being anyone's master."

"By slave, I mean a person who finds worth through other's valuation; by master, I mean someone who has set up personal standards of action. If you are no longer

given value by the praise or depreciation of others; if you can no longer desire that sort of valuation, then you have to design your own measuring stick."

"Measuring stick?" questioned Frankie.

"Standards that you live by. If you change the community of people who surround you, you will find yourself in a different valuing system. In Akmor, grammatical speech, devoid of obscenities, is an anomaly. And only the most perverse refuse to participate in the local gossip."

Frankie objected, "I don't have any weird standards like that."

"Maybe not," responded San. "But you have others. Like how much time you should spend with your children; how clean you should keep your house. If you're going to keep those requisites you won't have any more leisure time to learn to appreciate books and music than you do now. You'll be too busy assuring yourself: there are no stains in your sink, the floor is polished, and your clothes are properly ironed and hung up. Your concern about an up to date appearance will also need a continued flow of interest, time and money. Maybe you'd better stay married. If you can convince Hank to agree."

"I don't know why I can't be divorced, live a home life with the proper standards you mentioned, and still have a career, and time for enjoyment."

San raised her eyes to the heavens to see if there were any other sightings of omnipotent beings. "Even if you could do all that," San said, "something would take priority. And whatever does is what you'll actually be doing. A measuring stick is only so long and it can only measure what exists within its own dimensions. If you continue to judge yourself by what a particular group of others want or expect and cherish, then you'll keep their judgements and their measuring stick."

"What happens if you turn those words on yourself, San?" Frankie attacked. "What do you find when you throw away everything that those around you hold most dear? How do you decide what is worth keeping?"

San looked away. Nicole and Leona were still basking in the sun, their bodies glistening with applied oil. The leaves of the poplar trees were barely moving.

What to keep, to hold for herself. Difficult to know what to gather, collect; which meanings to savour for herself; how to separate them from the familiar things that must be dissolved; eliminated from all power of influence.

"I can't say, Frankie. After getting rid of the habit of hanging on to every scrap of meaning, beneficial or harmful, I took the habit of tossing it all out. Nothing is meaningful unless we choose to make it so, and I didn't make those choices."

"But what about at University? There must have been things you learned there that you kept." Frankie's usual pallor had changed to a reddish flush. Like pale grass that had been overlaid by wood or a plate of iron; when the cover was lifted, the sudden exposure to the sun caused suffering rather than sustenance. "Wasn't there, San?" Frankie prodded.

"Most of what was studied was spread out onto exam papers to be tossed out with the notes of the course when the final mark was in. They can't teach you what you want to know; they can only teach what they know. And they're not so interested in letting students make their own connections; they want to broadcast the connections they've made. Their own particular ideas of what should be known. Amassing disciples. Giving out frameworks to determine how their flock should think. But the few who were not like that were so wishy-washy you couldn't tell what they supported. No. There was very little of that process that would transfer away from the course and the professor who taught it. Little to be kept."

"But I thought you liked those years you were studying?"

"Completely, at first. Totally involved. Believing I was learning 'what is'. Later I found that they all taught from tiny boxes. What one had learned from one box was heartily discouraged in another. The professor carried the facts, the language, the names and works of the

supporters of his views in his dispatch case; any student who was a good disciple could soon carry the same dispatches. Without transfer value, all cases were like isolated farm communities. Each having their own lingo."

"So you wouldn't advise me to attend in a serious manner?"

"Go ahead. Order up your courses and after you've consumed them try to decide whether it was worthwhile. It will give you a lot of chances to practice your discriminating ability. And by the time you have spent three or four years sampling...who knows? You might be drawn into something that captivates your interest. Here's Dawson. Why don't you talk to him about it? He's one of the professors here in the city."

"Good to see you chatting so comfortably, San," greeted Dawson.

"Hello, Dawson," returned San. "Have you met Frankie? She's considering attending the varsity."

But Frankie's two children were right behind Dawson, and they chose that moment to pester her about their hunger, and the scrape that Bradley had got on his knee. Two constant pestles ready to strike. Ready to thwart any movement their mother might make that was not directed toward them.

Clarence and Sharon were taking a long time to ready the barbeque. It had better not be much longer as far as

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Bradly and Octavia were concerned. Noticing Dawson's attention was drawn to the two sunbathers, Frankie, her two little ne-nes in tow, offered to make the introductions.

A great quantity of noise was coming up the stairwell.

"Heave."

"All together."

"Well done, lady and gentlemen."

Revo's Unlimited arrived at the door.

Lloyd announced: "San, the liberator of form and structure. We have brought you some cement." He bowed deeply. "Your bunker has begun."

A paint-splattered wheelbarrow filled with assorted bags and tools was pushed out from the shack. Birdie and Monique delivered it to the parapet. Nemesis brushed his hands together as if he had dirtied them by supervising.

"Horace," Nemesis commanded. "Take account of any salvageable bricks or hunks of cement in the excavation over there. Scraps of wood will be useful also."

Horace balked. Protestingly, he said, "You're supposed to call me 'Ace'."

Seeing the crew in the daylight only increased their oddities. Ace, wirey, short, crooked teeth and dark yellow hair, idled over to the dried pool.

Maneuvering toward Dawson and the sunbathers was Birdie who hailed, "Hi, prof. You're still here, eh?" Birdie adjusted his jeans, tucking in his shirt. "Are you going to introduce me to your gorgeous friends?"

Nemesis addressed San: "Where's your rifle?"

San motioned to the pile containing her sleeping bag, the khaki shirt, and the rifle.

"That's no place for it," Nemesis stated. "We need a sentinel while we work." He went to the heap and momentarily lifting each item in the air and tossing it to one side, uncovered the rifle and brought it to San. "Here. Place it on your knees."

He returned to the site of the bunker.

The roof was becoming crowded. San stood up and began to pace the unoccupied areas of the roof. The rifle stock hitting the roof in sequence with her steps. Shoe, stock, peg. Shoe, stock, peg. The waltz rhythm seemed grotesquely out of place. She halted at the parapet.

Below, the people on the street continued their rounds. More slowly now under the hot sun. In and out of the food store, sitting on the steps of that old church; lounging on the grass; sleeping on the park benches; leaning against the news boxes.

The sky was stark blue with a few white clouds finishing on imaginary lines.

Movements of the occupants of the roof seemed to be in another dimension.

San studied the others without feeling any sense of participation in their voices or the topics discussed. Lloyd was carrying water for the cement. Using the discarded

tomato tin. The little ne-nes with the beer bottles were delightedly joining in. Mònique was watching Nemesis. She must have been having her red days as there were four super-sixes sticking out of her back pocket. Spare cartridges.

San's gaze stopped at the poster. Challenging the world in her nakedness. Her fists still gripping the blue space. She entered the penthouse.

As she washed, cooling the back of her neck, lowering the temperature of the blood rushing through her wrists, and taking away beads of sweat, she grumbled silently about the North American neglect for a woman's needs. A continent's willful omission of the bidet. For the petals of a flower and its surrounding flesh, there was a shower, a bath, or nothing.

She went back on the roof.

Clarence and Sharon had returned. The aroma of barbecue fluid permeated the air.

San moved Michael's sleeping bag under the spotted shade of the poplar leaves and sat down to watch. Clarence was playing the gregarious host.

"Beer anyone?" Clarence offered as he accosted San. "I wondered where you had gone. A hell of a note; you disappearing just when everyone was being collected. Want this?"

"Sure," San said as she took the extended beer.

"Burgers will be ready shortly," Clarence said as he hustled back to the smoke and burning charcoal.

Sharon appeared to be doing the hostess routine. Busily moving about, taking food from the hamper, singing the chorus of one of those too popular songs that run on for years and years. Looking pleased with herself.

Ace was helping Sharon fix hamburgers as he eyed her generous figure. Just a homely day on the roof. Suburbia once again.

The corners of San's mouth were pulling heavily downwards. Why couldn't these people's senseless, tiresome chatter suck them all up into oblivion?

Ah, relief at last. Michael. Quiet, casual, effortless Michael was standing at the door to the shack. It would be peaceful to share a silent mood with him until the commotion subsided. No. Overload. He had brought more people with him. San recognized two of the four people with Michael. Professional philosophers.

The roof was teeming with people.

Handing the barbeque sauce to Dawson, Clarence was struggling out of his chef's apron. He detoured in his rush to meet his new guests and passed in front of San.

"Things are warmin' up. Some blow-out, eh?" He rubbed his hands together. "Did you see Ivan, yet? He should be here. I'm going to get a fantastic take from this. I hope you're getting ready. Don't be afraid to let them see a little hysteria. Screams, threats, you know?"

San did no more than give Clarence a look of impatience and disbelief. He continued on to meet the newcomers.

She watched the introductions begin made. Kevin Dohm was there. One hand jammed deeply into his sweater pocket, the other hanging aimlessly. And, horrors abound, James Best. A former prof of hers; his course had never left her. Its content, yes, but its delivery never. At first she had tried to interrupt, voice her dissent. Offer alternative views. But it was all interpreted as her not having the ability to understand. Seeing this, she had bottled up. Her voice jammed and ceased to exist in the class; her mind followed suit. At the end of the term, just before the Christmas break, she finished the course by writing what he wanted to hear -- the way he wanted to hear it -- but it made her fester to do so. Shortly after her return from Italy, she met him again at a ski resort. James was fascinated by the one-legged ski races. He even thought that having one leg might give some sort of speed advantage.

Michael left the group at the door and walked toward San. She looked at him accusingly.

"Sorry," said Michael. "But I woke up this morning thinking about that open reality you were talking about last night. I couldn't figure out whether it made any sense or not. So many things would need to be explained."

San remained silent.

Michael sat down on his heels to bring his face closer to San's. "Even the simple difference between animate and inanimate things takes on new connotations," he said frowning. "It might be that it's your own philosophy that's making your life more difficult. I mean, when we sort things out into different kinds or types, we make life simpler to deal with, you know? So the gist of all this is that I got up this morning to scout out a few people who could talk to you more knowledgeably about such things."

Michael stood up and returned to the group at the door.

Along with Kevin and James there were two people unknown to San. The woman had on a white linen suit. Her black hair was lifted up into a roll on the crown of her head. The man standing next to her was listening attentively. Bermuda shorts and a T-shirt. An outfit that would have made Clarence appear ridiculous. On this man, however, it served to show off his long, tanned and hairy legs.

As they approached, San heard Clarence give a warning: "There she is. She's decided that nothing is of value and she's going to start shooting anytime now."

Kevin answered, "Does she have to let everybody know?"

"That's the idea," grinned Clarence. "She believes she can make others aware of untenable problems."

"But surely... something better? Ah, hello San," said Kevin. "We have been talking about this escapade you've

started. Have you any idea why? Have you considered the consequences?"

San remained sitting and looked up at the surrounding six; a semi-circle of heads against the blue sky.

"That's what I'd like," San replied. "Some visible consequences. I'd like to break apart some established protective barriers that people use to confine their thoughts. Make a change in the way people think about things."

"But for yourself," interrupted Kevin. "The consequences for yourself."

"The future holds no threat for me. Unless it's the threat of a continuing present."

Kevin stepped back, slightly abashed. The group suffered a common trepidation.

"Wait, wait," jumped in Clarence. "Before we start any talking, we should get comfortable. Have you had lunch?"

All assured him that eating was not their present concern.

"Would you like a beer?" Clarence offered. "Hey, Birdie."

Birdie ambled over from the rising bunker, "Yah?"

"Why don't you take a collection and send someone down to pick up a few cases of liquid refreshment? I'll gather up a chair or two."

Birdie responded by holding out his hand for Clarence's contribution. Clarence obliged.

"Now," resumed Clarence. "Let me make a few introductions. San, you know James? David?"

David smiled. Dark and friendly eyes. He reached out a hand. Hand-shaking with women. So commonly done in some societies, yet never in others. Mmm. Not fawning. Not showy of strength. It was good to feel something of what a man's temperament was like. Before even the first conversation.

"This is Jessica Oufrey," Michael said. "She's the new chairwoman of the department, and the person I saw first this morning."

San noted that Jessica's matter-of-fact handshake was countered by her grey-green eyes which jumped disconcertedly when they met San's.

"When Michael and Jessica came to me," James said vauntingly, "I persuaded Jessica to invite Kevin and David and come along so we could all give you a bit of advice, San. Something to help you out a little."

"San, it would be unfortunate," said Kevin, "if people got the impression you were upset because of something you heard in our department. We realize that there are some people for whom philosophy is a disorienting study."

Beer was passed around while the group deployed their forces. David and James on the poplar frame. Jessica nearby, but as far from the smoking barbeque as the roof would allow. Kevin laid his sweater on the asphalt and sat down beside San.

Carrying hamburgers dripping with ketchup, Frankie's children joined the circle. Their deportment one of gravity and inclusion. They sat down between Kevin and Jessica. Kevin's gaze shifted from the ketchup to Jessica's suit and back to the ketchup. He turned his attention to San.

"As I was saying to you, San," said Kevin, "I was worried that we might have disturbed some of your beliefs. For some people, philosophy is an upsetting discipline."

"But," interrupted James, "she should have learned to be more objective." He turned his voice to speak jabbingly at San. "You're not supposed to take everything so subjectively. You're always thinking that everything in the world should be applicable to yourself."

San mocked: "You mean I'm not part of a universal process that includes all things? You mean I should separate my thought from its responsive flesh; detach mind from body; detach the factual observable actions of reality from the idiosyncratic fanciful mind and acquire proper distance?"

"Stop it," Kevin retorted. "Stop talking as if you're so damnable connected to everything. The things of the world, the structure of reality is all there. It was there before you. It will be there after you. First you must accept reality as it is. Adjust your thinking to accommodate reality as it exists instead of trying to create your own ideas and trying to adjust the world."

Distance. That was what he was saying. Acquire the proper distance from her actions. If she could do that, she could do anything.

Having finished his advisory firing at her, Kevin turned his head to attend to the movement beside him. Bradley had attached his sticky fingers to Kevin's beer. Kevin scanned the roof for a mother, but no one came to interfere. Frankie was still at the barbeque helping Dawson. Kevin gingerly took the bottle away from the child, while Bradley, of course, protested. In a long moment, Frankie was there to take him away.

"So," inquired San, "I should listen, and learn more about reality as defined by those in power? Those who have the prestige of multiple publications?"

"It's the same for the rest of us," answered James, butting in for Kevin. "Most of what we learn, maybe all of it, is based on authority. Only the skeptics disagree."

David intercepted: "And the solipsists, and the relativists: I think it may well be a good idea to leave name tags out of this."

"Your authorities," San said to Kevin, "have all curded into separate camps. Each spending its energies on justification of its own criteria. Like the mythical scorpion that turns its bite on itself; the results are delievered dead."

"It's true," agreed David. "We philosophers don't have just one view of the relationship between man and reality."

Smiling her consensus with David, Jessica added, "It's almost a question of picking one's possible world. The positive aspect of this is that with all these irreconcilable theories, each interested person must find the theory that seems most apt."

"Do you know what that means?" asked San. "It means that professional philosophers don't have anything to offer except circles of meaning. Inclusive and exclusive circles."

"Circles?" inquired Clarence as he pulled up the Pepsi box. Still munching on the last of his hamburger, he nevertheless took the opportunity to contribute. "What about daily reversible circles?"

San threw him a look of annoyance. "Circles of agreement," she said. "All philosophers need is the ability to convince, to conquer the direction and orientation of others and thus create their circle of acceptance."

"Come now, San," objected Kevin. "We do look for evidence in the empirical world."

San glanced around at the good intentions of the person who constructed the swimming pool, the loneliness of the misplaced Westerner who planted the poplars, and the erection of a cement bunker for a protective shell. Empirical evidence?

"And, can you see beyond what you are looking for?" San responded. "Or does what you look for determine what you find. Your circles aren't the result of objective knowledge

like you believe, they're the result of the situation and attitude of the people involved.

Kevin was shaking his head. "Circles or not, they still work."

"Work." San straightened her back, and pulled her crossed legs closer to her body. "Here's how philosophical circles work." She placed the rifle across her lap, and reached for a beer. "We can start with a man who wanted to talk about meaning." San tore a piece of paper from the beer label to represent the man's head. "Remember, this man wanted to be in the best of taste and detach anything he said from his own feelings and expressions of love, hate, attraction, repulsion and everything else that had meaning in his life. To commence, he began by trying to refute a half-truth that had a lot of misconceptions synthesized with it. He said, 'Meaning is not to be found in mental images but in words.' He had borrowed his idea from a more original thinker, and in borrowing it, the idea was distorted enough to make it seem original." To the paper head, San had added a stick body, and was in the process of adding two fragments of circles for arms. "As this man elaborated on this theme, he attracted the interest of an unemployed functionalist."

Jessica took out a cigarette, which Clarence made a great show of lighting for her.

San continued: "In order for the second man to gain entry into the field, he had to say something similar enough to be recognized as an asset to the potential circle, yet unique enough to be adding new material. 'Meaning,' he said to the first man, 'is in the word, like you say, but it's actually in the way the word is used.' With this added fragment, suitable to the theme, he joined hands with the first man."

Four pieces of beer label representing the arms of the men now formed a portion of a circle. Two heads touched at the center.

James glugged down his beer and reached for another.

The walls of the bunker grew steadily. Shouts of energy accompanied the placement of the bricks and cement as the construction proceeded.

To her picture of a circle, San tossed in a third head and some accompanying paper branches for arms and legs. "Once this much of a circle has become established, the rest is adjoined more quickly. A third fellow extended the circle by saying, 'If meaning is use, what is use?'"

"This is rather facetious of you, San," said David. "Hundreds of dedicated people have sacrificed years of their lives towards advancing this work."

"Isn't it terrible?" agreed San mockingly. "Such serious devotion for little more than naught. To these fragments was welcomed a man who was a computer technology fan."

A C.T.F. man. He had amassed a surplus of terms and was looking for a place to apply them. The C.T.F. man said, 'What is being talked about here is language, and language is a code.' The man spoke carefully to avoid a drunken slurring of his words. Unlike his computer, he was oversensitive to realities of his own creation which overwhelmed his private thought. Easily excitable. Prone to excess, he had formed a symbiotic relationship with his concise electronic machine."

San glanced around the group. Jessica had knitted her brow into a frown; David looked amused, while James' face was pulled into a tight smile, his cheeks bulging. San shifted the rifle, bringing it across her knees, causing the group new anxieties until the rifle settled into position with the stock facing the group.

"To the C.T.F. man," said San, cutting through the stir of apprehension, "each person is a separate unit. Exchange occurs on the interface. The C.T.F. joined the group saying, 'all units have input and output. If you've got a new unit, that's a child, you'll find its output is gibberish. It hasn't had its output put into code yet. You get a unit that's been around a while. You'll see how it has separated its sounds into distinct units of communication. Communication that's concise enough for my machine. Now our job for the future is to present the code in a precise enough manner that it will be accepted by our computers.'

Amazingly enough, large numbers of the listeners adopted the computer technology fan's terms."

Michael interrupted, "What's the difference between his 'input and output' and your 'drawing in and going outward'?"

"He believes that the code exists, maybe in absolute, in the seed of consciousness. People only perpetrate the code. Whereas, for me, the universal process of all things -- which for humans has the result of the emergence of sounds, words and language -- serves a purpose much more intrinsic to the human's total existence."

"What about your circles?" asked Clarence.

"I must say," muttered Kevin, "that if all these people were expounding the same theories, there would be no need for any new members."

"Of course," agreed San. "The first prerequisite for membership into circles is that you have something original to contribute. But this is based on the foundation that you share the same assumptions; otherwise argument regresses to dogmatic assertions of belief. Look at the superficial disagreement between the computer fan man and the stimulus response fellow, the behaviorist who joined philosophy when his discipline ran into disrepute. When the VG's, the various gratifications, ran out. Compromising with the C.T.F. man, the disguised behaviorist said: 'Often the output is only a response to the input. If we want meaning to be a uniquely human quality, then we must consider intent.'

To this another adds, 'Intent to do something.' A lonely pragmatist contributes, 'To do something with a mind to the consequences.' And so it goes. On and on until either the circle becomes too extensive to be contained and is thus dispersed; or the originals tighten the ranks and refuse to admit new members." San leaned over and scattered the pieces of beer label with a quick breath.

"I'm not going to listen to this cynic any longer," spouted James. "She's not only intending to snipe at people with her rifle, obviously she thinks we'll sit here while she snipes at our theories, too." James gave San a hard look, his brown eyes bristling with indignation. "It's obvious that you don't have the intricacies of mind to appreciate all of the subtleties that are involved here." He scraped a match against its cardboard holder to light his cigarette. "The trouble with you, San, is you've always considered language to be your own personal tool; there for your own emotive use."

San smiled at James' agitation. His words never sprang from his own subjective accumulative attitude. His cold analytic thought that he pretended to accomplish was never affected by residue of past experience. His body was an indifferent vehicle that carried him around. "Him" being this nut or seed of conscious God-given thought. What rot!

Jessica reasoned, "Supposing, San, your notions about the circulation of philosophical topics were true? Then what? What are you so annoyed at?"

"The pretence," spat San. She moved the rifle so the stock was on the roof, the barrel pointing upward. "Pretence of the philosophers or any thinking people who believe that their thoughts aren't enmeshed in their personal history." She cocked the rifle. "Pretence that serves as an escape hatch so they never have to deal directly with their own subjective selves." She let the hammer of the rifle snap back into place.

"Stupidity angers me," San said cocking the rifle again and letting it flip back. "Especially when it is found in the broadcasters of knowledge."

San cocked the rifle once more. "Timidity angers me," she said letting the hammer fly back. "If seekers of knowledge had any courage at all they would recognize that nothing humans know is distinct; separate from the human as subject. If their study commenced with the realization that they, as people, were intrinsically connected with everything they came in contact with, then we could talk. Talk about the process whereby we separate, differentiate, and so forth. We could consider the extent to which it is possible to know what is the human contribution. What is me and not me -- the quest that a baby starts in the crib -- what our scientists and philosophers haven't answered yet."

Putting both hands on the barrel, and shifting her weight onto her foot and peg, San rose to her feet. "When philosophers and scientists look 'objectively', the result is comparable to looking at a mirror and believing what they see will remain as described after they have left the room. They don't realize or want to admit that they, as subjects, contribute. Necessarily."

"Good heaven's San," cried Kevin. "Are you really that much of an idealist? Do you really doubt, to that extent, the existence of all that's out there? Are you going to shoot someone and then close your eyes? You can't believe that everything we see is just us seeing it? That it's all part of our heads?"

"In our heads," said Lloyd who had wandered into the philosopher's arena. "That's right, old man. Got to feed our heads. Can't give into the iron bars of facticity. Let your body circulate with the air around it, and see how your head interprets the liberty."

Kevin looked askance at this effusion.

"Kevin," San protested. "I'm not advocating nut-case idealism. I'm just saying that the first primitive must consider each person contributing subjectively to what is seen."

"There are such things as cold, bare facts, San." Kevin said, reasserting his theme. "You must face up to that."

San turned and stood looking out over the parapet.

Contributing to what one saw was not undesirable. But if she could withdraw her own participation with her surroundings, she would feel the emptiness of bare looking. Distance herself to the degree that interaction with the world of things, people and common emotions would disappear. Cold, calculating, deliberate and detached action would be the result. The meaning of words and action dematerialized from the heat of flesh.

Kevin misinterpreted San's silence, and pressed on with his point. "Even you must admit, San, that facts are more basic than the circles of theory you think you've exposed. More basic than metaphysical realms, or subjective fantasies."

San looked over at Nemesis and his flunky, Ace, as they played with the mortar, wood framing, water and cement; building a bunker on a roof. Was this a fact? She could see what they were doing. Frankie's two little ones were indefatigably helping. Even Leona and Sharon had got into the act, although they were splashing more water on themselves and their bikinis than they were getting to the bunker site. It couldn't really be fact. It was pure metaphysics -- the carrying out of a belief. What meanings, values, projection of ideas, or reasons for action were motivating them. They were not doing this to create a bunch of facts.

"Well," Kevin said as he breathed a sigh of relief. "I'm glad you're considering what I'm saying, San."

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Sharon chose that moment to flick some water at David and Kevin.

Nicole and Birdie arrived back with some cold refreshment, which they invited everyone to enjoy.

Kevin's misinterpretation was left unchallenged.

Moody, tired, San wished for the solace that the roof used to offer. She wanted to stretch her muscles, but there was scarcely any room to walk. The roof was splattered with lawnchairs, cigarette butts, beer, ketchup and mustard, the littered cardtable, the still smoking barbeque, and people. What were all these people up here for anyway? To stop her action? To watch? And what was she going to do?

Nothing had come together the way she had hoped; no clear concise pattern had arisen. No meaningful action had proposed itself. Should she just quietly gather up the bullets from her khaki jacket, load the rifle and shoot? Then, having expressed her non-acceptance of the forces that be, turn her life over to them? One brief moment of fire against the established formula.

Clarence seemed to have managed to activate his plan. People were everywhere. Questioning, prodding, drawing off words like blood; all according to his design. She was falling in too. Into Clarence's pattern of operation. Events seemed to continue without further help from anyone.

Perhaps this was just another stage of her desultory life. To be classified with temper tantrums of her thirteenth year. Or perhaps it was comparable to when she, pregnant, married to Rick -- musician-cum-fruit-picker --

answered a knock at the door of their shack to meet a kook minister who was determined to save her soul. Of course then she didn't have a gun in her hands; they were sticky with bread dough which she ultimately heaved, en mass, at the soul-saver.

But she was tired of going through stages, going through situations, roles. Battling her way into something only to find nothing worth assimilating. She looked at the poster and saw her flagrant shout against the world.

Lloyd called out, "How do you like your bunker?"

"You're building me a shell," San answered. Strange species should be enclosed, protected.

"They're building you a cement circle." James laughed at his witticism. A beer in one hand, a burger in the other, James' academia pressured him like a thumb on a balloon. "Is this better than a 'symbiotic relationship with a computer'?"

"Anything," retorted San, "is better than your Leibniz desk."

"What?"

"Your Leibniz desk. You know. Named after that poor philosopher that put in twenty-two hour days living at his desk, writing about monads."

"What's a monad?" interrupted Clarece.

"According to Leibniz," San replied, "the stuff of the world is multiples of monads; units of being, isolated,

monitored and operated by omnipotent God. Everything moves in response to divine gaze. Like a speck of dirt on your

James raised her eyebrows. Both perfectly arched already.

"In any case," said James, sounding disgruntled, "I don't have a Leibniz desk."

"They're not available on the market," said San. Two blood vessels protruded upwards from James' brow, a pulsing "V". "Anyone who forces himself to work, like you do, James, should have a Leibniz desk. You could order it specially made. Everything there. A pull-out board to set your meals on. Room for stacks of books. Papers spread out before you -- ready for your mental effusions. And an added feature, a chair with plumbing connections. One pull of the chain and you're rid of your physical effusions as well."

"Pete's alley!" Clarence yelled. "It might sell."

"Where's Pete's Alley?" said Lloyd, popping up from behind the bunker wall.

"A collector's paradise not far from here. It has one of everything, but I've never seen a sample of this desk."

"A Leibniz desk," derided James. "Very efficient. You'll need to add a belt, of course."

"Okay," agreed Clarence. "What for?"

"Because there are some people who would have to be strapped in before they would open a book."

Lloyd grinned over the wall. "Come off it, fellow. We all read here, don't we?"

Ignoring Lloyd, Clarence persisted in his quest. "And who was this Leibniz, San? Was he hard to swallow?"

"I didn't try. He was another of those philosophers who spent their time trying to find a logical reason which would enable the 'soul' to ascend to the heavens whilst the flesh lay rotting in the ground. Another perpetrator of our heritage of false ideas. The separate existence of the body and mind would never have been seriously considered if it weren't for the God-myth. It restricted us to the 'seed philosophy' -- consciousness popped into the see at the moment of conception by a Leibnizian God, and squeezed out again when the body is too tired, old, or shocked to confine it any longer."

"So!" heaved James, "you don't believe in God." He turned to address the others: Satisfaction puffing from his face. "Should I be offended if this skeptic didn't believe the truth as delivered by James Best? Even though I displayed, I proved, whatever I was saying was true?" James took another swig of beer. "Now you see the problem I had with her in class."

Jessica intercepted. "Really this is something we don't usually care to broach. Everyone is entitled to his

or her own beliefs; it's not up to us to criticize anyone's faith or lack of it."

"Pusillanimity. Cloaked by tolerance," chided San. "Some beliefs permeate and distort all thinking."

"It's not cowardice, San, but intelligence," said James. He placed his empty beer bottle on the wet cement bunker wall. As he faced San his knees were bent as if in a crouch, ready to fight. "We have detached philosophy from all bias. All emotional predilection has been purged." As he said "purged", he lifted his loins forward. How could he possibly be so unaware? "We deal in statements that cannot be refuted. Facts based on empirical evidence, and analytic, abstract reason. Truths based on laws of non-contradiction."

San's anger bubbled heatedly. "Stupidities. Lies. Empty form. Symbols divorced from meaningful realms. No significance."

David interceded, "If you're going to get rid of false ideas, San, you must do more than spit curses at them; more than shoot at their carriers."

"How can a philosophy be built on such blatantly wrong ideas?"

"We start simply," said David. "We start with things we know to be correct. An example, San. Try to find an example where the contradiction of something true is also true. It's like saying black is black and black is white."

"I'm not going to be lured into one of those philosophical arguments about whether some ashtray is red or not red. But move from banal superficialities. Then the contradiction, the opposite, is contained within the word. Within the event. Like we can see in perception."

"Do you mean the word 'perception', or the act?" mocked James.

"I mean the word as it describes the event." San's voice was coldly cutting.

"Perception is something we all know about," said Lloyd, lifting his ever-wide eyes over the still growing wall. "I can see, you can see."

Jessica butted her cigarette. Clarence snuffed out his laughter with a draft of beer.

"How does perception involve a contradiction, San?" queried David, adjoining San's two strands of thought.

"Before people can see, or perceive in any manner, they must be 'going outward'." Exhaust. Project. Magnetic attraction. "Perception reaches outward, but while stretching itself outward it touches back to its point of origin; a going out and a coming in simultaneously."

"Sounds like sex to me," said Clarence, grinning profusely.

"In San's philosophy," contributed Michael, "it's all variations of the same process; big universe, one theme."

"What do you mean by 'all'?" jeered James. "You mean sex, perception and maybe those trees over there are all the same thing?"

"There's a commonality," said San.

James, bouncing in anticipation, a boxer ready to throw a punch, laughed. "Get ready for his one folks, it's going to be another of San's chimeras. She used to present one or two a day in my classes."

San, annoyed and fatigued, broke away from the group gathered by the bunker. Rifle in hand, she strode to the edge of the roof, and looked down to the street. Clarence came up beside her.

"San?"

"No more, Clarence. I'm not going to deliver myself to them to be shredded. Attempting serious responses to facetious, hostile questions. The ground isn't receptive; it's hard, cracked and already taken up by all it can handle.

"Don't worry about what others say, San. You've got to present what you believe, just once, before you call it quits. Don't let the joshing get under your skin." Clarence moved to put his arm around San's shoulders, but she shrank away from his intention. His hand changed direction and pushed the hair back from his forehead. "Besides," he added, "I've got to hear what you have to say; your four things, remember? You've talked about having had to listen to these people. Now they're here. They'll listen to you. Come on."

San shook her head.

Clarence persisted. "It's a battle, San. Don't let them win so easily."

True. She had never quite worked out what she thought, or developed it for anyone -- even herself. "All right. Just give me a moment."

San returned to the group gathered around the bunker. The walls were up to three feet high, like the backs of chairs. If seats were added along the inside of the semi-circle she would have an exedra like the one she saw in Cumae. She could lean against the parapet and expose her theories, with all seriousness and dignity.

"Well, San," opened Kevin, obviously prompted by Clarence, and sounding a bit too earnest. "You were about to tell us what commonalities you found between such diverse things as perception and trees." He omitted sex; he who spent his life trying to separate from from content, fact from fiction, analytic from synthetic. He would need to reverse all his inclinations to start seeing commonalities. Necessary coalescence.

Reluctantly, San put aside her fear of ridicule.

"There is a commonality in all things that exist or ever will exist. All subjects are things that move outward and take in. Hold and cast out. The life span of the subject of this process may be too short or too long to ever be captured by human manipulations, but one could still call

it a type of existence. Sooner or later, the subject wears out, and instead of patterning what it draws in to add to itself, it exists at the mercy of what it attracts until it is dissolved and added to something else."

"Are you talking about humans or trees, San?" asked Clarence.

"Both. Everything."

James rolled his eyes. "Has anyone else ever thought such ludicrous things?" he marvelled.

"Spinoza did," San answered. "At least the way I interpret him. He was thinking the same thing when he talked about ideas and objects. The 'idea' being the pattern in which the process actualized itself; the 'object' being the subject of the process. His hierarchy of ideas would mean that a free flowing particle could be an idea of one order; a tree a collection of another type, and a human being or a universe, the process and subject on another scale."

"Wait a minute, San," said Clarence. "You're saying that I, me, Clarence, am no more unique than those leaves with the wind blowing through them? I don't think I'm special, but I do think you could credit the human with a little something extra."

"Sure, Clarence. Anyone can see there's more to you than that. In the first place, you can move from one situation to another. You can stretch your experience in

a way that a tree can't. One characteristic the human species has developed is that what we perceive in one situation remains with us as we move to the next. The coming, and going doesn't happen in disconnected moments. As you, Clarence, stretch yourself over your occupied time and space, your experience becomes part of the unique patterning of Clarence as a subject and object of events. With words and images, we acquire an increased ability to hold on to what we have experience. Thus we grasp, apprehend, and make connections."

"That's only if we want to," objected Lloyd. Standing up with his mortar in hand. "Lots of times I just watch what's running along in my mind. I don't bother to hang on to it at all. Just follow it along. Life's fun that way," he said, putting his whole expressive being into his white-rimmed eyes.

Kevin gave a nervous giggle. Maybe he had found that type of response too disorienting. Disconcerting.

Lloyd slapped a gob of the wet paste between an empty beer bottle and a hunk of solid cement -- borrowed from the defunct swimming pool -- thus making a further addition to the bunker. "This stuff you're talking about isn't something I can grasp with my hands, you know. Nothing you can push and shove into shape like this," Lloyd said as he encouraged more of the thickening grey matter between the bottle and the lump of cement.

"It's not so different," responded San. "All the words we use are, in some sense, symbols of that same pulling in and pushing away motion. Look at the single word 'come'. It can mean something you're pulling towards you, a demand for someone to come to you; or it can mean that the subject speaking wants to come along. The reference to poles -- what or who is coming where -- is both implicitly included yet requesting articulation."

"You're saying," protested James, "that there is no such thing as the abstract. Everything is 'concrete'."

"Language is just a verbalization of a process," responded San.

"In other words," suggested David, "you believe that language is metaphysical. A meta realm of the physical motion it emerges from."

A moment of limpidity permeated San. Misconnections alleviated. She smiled.

"Are you saying?" sputtered Kevin. "You're saying that subjects and objects are secondary in importance? Secondary to your basic movement? Which nobody even believes exists?"

"In the going outward and taking in of perception, that which gets in the way of the movement was called just that: an object! It took even longer to recognize that which is going out: i.e. the subject."

"What about the good old terms like 'consciousness?'" Clarence asked, laughing. "If you're a conscious human being, with a bit of intelligence, doesn't talking come naturally?"

"If it's like everything else," San answered, "then we do it first and understand it later."

"It seems to me, San," said Jessica, pausing to take out a cigarette, "one of your problems is becoming clear. All this indicates a very helpless conception of the role of the human being in the world. People do, you know, have a role in directing their own actions. All this about perception indicates a stimulus-response point of view. You pretend to disapprove of the behaviorist, but if you think people can only respond, adapt and hold on to what is perceived, this could account for your feelings of frustration."

"I hadn't finished." San was accustomed to people giving her advice from their own view about what she was thinking; nevertheless it annoyed her. "And neither was the contradiction about perception completed."

"Go on then, by all means," said Jessica.

Ignoring the tone, San did continue. "The important thing that keeps us out of the stimulus-response trap is that the words and images we use for holding and expressing our existence are also used to project and postulate our futures. Pre-posing in fantasy what we later become,

or do in fact." Once again, San visualized the breaking up and dispersal of shells as the bullets attacked. "So many things hinder projections from becoming determinations. Not the least being the anti-movement of the God-myth." Everything hardening. Words, images, cement.

James boomed out. Victory in his voice. "Ah-ha!". He'd been right all along and San was the raving idiot.

"What's this God-myth?" he challenged.

"Any teacher or God-speaker that proposes to define once and for all the structure of reality is bitterly pitted against the human possibility."

"Isn't that what you're pretending to do?" sneered James.

"I'm attempting to define the motion, not the way it is organized, not the structures that try to organize and then restrict its movement," defended San.

"Go ahead. Say it, Nemesis," said Ace.

Nemesis was standing motionless. Listening, from his position behind the semi-circle of the bunker.

San turned her attention back to James. "The human possibility," she said, "is the projection of ends that influence the actualization of the process. Once we become aware of ourselves as a subject, we can define and thus create our own reality. But the insidious contradiction is that everything hardens. An 'end' that one uses to orient one's action becomes an end in fact. A finished

thing that Gods and their disciples attempt to fix permanently. We must fight against the induration of all things, starting with the word and notion of 'holy'. Every religion is an attempt to cut up the territory that the human encompasses according to the religious rites inculcated. It must stop."

"I must speak." Nemesis set down his cement covered mortar, moved out from behind the bunker, and stood as if to make a formal address. He removed his top-hat, revealing the bald surface which crowned his long black hair. "You, San, have been the victim of a false interpretation of our holy bible. I will tell you in a few words the key to its meaning. Christ is a symbol. He never lived, although he lives everywhere."

Jessica groaned. She turned toward Clarence, who grinningly offered her a beer.

"Throughout the centuries," said Nemesis, "His symbol has been the fish. Just as the fish swims easily through the water, penetrating the seas, so Jesus flows in and out of all life. If you can't believe in Jesus, then believe in the fish; it is the same. The fish is the symbol, not of another symbolic being, but a symbol of the penis. The penis which at every eruption is the genesis of thousands of emissaries of new life. New souls. Seeking union, and thus perpetuation. One ejaculation from the mouth of the penis, and thousands of

fish are cast into the crowd. Sweet wine appears by magic to moisten the way for the fish."

"I think I'm going to be sick," cried Jessica. She leaped up from her chair and rushed to the penthouse.

"Hell is but the heat of the fire whence the fish and the wine spring. Heaven is but the sweet bliss when the coming in and the going out are unified in creation." Nemesis' resonant voice transformed the roof into a revival meeting. "As we know from our holy text, many emissaries of life will fall along the wayside; unwanted. Many will fall on unprepared ground."

"Many are called," drawled Monique, "but few are chosen."

Nemesis' oration continued. "There will, however, always be those who are prepared for the coming of penetrating life. The coming of the Lord. Symbolism, San. Symbolism. All secrets shall be penetrated, and thus there will be light. Christ, alias the fish, alias the penis, is the symbol of all penetration."

"Nemesis," interrupted Leona. "Why don't you find some poplar fuzz and stuff it up your nose. Then see if you can bear some new fruit."

"Withhold your skepticism. The bible says: Like unto like. Poplar-fuzz will serve poplar trees." Nemesis raised his voice a tone higher. "For all those who do not believe, there is no future life. Their bodies will not

perpetuate union. There will be no further growth to their line. Peace be unto them who do not give nor receive, for death and the darkness of unknowing belongs to them.

Birdie chanted. "Death to all shells that won't break; releasing new life, releasing new life."

"Now, San," Nemesis stated. "You will listen with new ears. Next time you hear religious services, you will hear what I have said repeated. Now that you have the key to the meaning you will hear different words, different stories, but all will have the same theme." Changing to a more normal manner of speech, Nemesis turned to the others. "Now you see why we've decided to help San. She believes in the penetration and destruction of all shells or crusts of belief that obstruct movement towards knowing." He slipped back into his grandiloquent voice. "You see, San, why the bible is not a factor of induration, but rather a perpetuator of fluidity. Gathering meanings and casting them out."

Kevin, his light eyebrows raised halfway to his receding hairline, his voice sounding rather thin, was trying to say something. "This...uh...means..... You're actually going to help San shoot. You're going to help her kill somebody?"

"No." A definitive answer.. Nemesis stood back and redonned his top-hat. "For we have our own knowledge of

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shells. A shell broken from the inside, because of the surging fire and life inside, demands new life. New growth. But a shell broken by outside forces has no life. It is like a kitchen egg. Ready to be scrambled. No. We will just help her do what she has to do." Nemesis picked up his mortar and prepared to continue work on the bunker.

The self-imposed delegation had formed a huddle. It appeared that their discussion was not going smoothly. Kevin, running his fingers through his hair; James, waving his arms. Dawson seemed to be doing most of the talking. David, Jessica, Michael, Leona and Lloyd were silent. Whether it was the silence of the unconvinced or the committed, it was hard to tell. Probably a lot of weeds were being spread about. Words, uncalled for, destructive, corrupting. Like stink weeds on the farm.

San and Nicole sat on the frame of the potted poplars eating some fruit that Nicole had purchased from the street vendors below. Their conversation was desultory, with long spaces of silence. Both knew each other well enough to avoid giving or accepting advice.

San finished her orange. "Over there," she said, "they're eating weeds." San looked at the weeds growing in captured dirt along the edge of the parapet. Fragile but powerful. Breaking cement. Nicole was finishing chewing some coconut. Weeds breaking rocks; if only cemented and hardened beliefs could be broken so easily.

"Not really?" Nicole responded, smiling.

"No, not really. They're really eating rotten PR. A couple of those altruistic time givers are probably giving me a bad public relations

"Does it matter?" asked Nicole.

"Being on the same roof with it is like following the cows home after they've been grazing in a field of stink-weed. It's all-pervasive, and unforgettable. You know what it's like? Coming into a room where everyone has been eating weeds? You can smell it. Your muscles alert, but there is nothing to fight. Nothing tangible. Everything has been digested and only the atmosphere remains."

"Some of us find that more paralyzing than others. A lot of native people would understand what you're saying. You can imagine the reply, though, if an Indian came into a community and told the people that they smell like they have been eating stinkweeds."

"The weeds would only be," continued San, "a word here and there, revealing an emotional bias, or an unresolved antagonism. Scattered randomly about, weeds disintegrate unbiased orientations and replace them with suspicion and anxiety."

"It could just be a case of paranoia." Nicole was not one to let a theory go too far.

The delegation moved to the refreshment table. "Ain't you got any ice?" called out James. Unpalatable weeds washed into the interior.

"For all you know," Nicole said, "they've been eating roses."

"Or listening to sexual forecasts and anticipating their actualization. Anyway, we'll see," said San as she peeled a litchi. The stem led to a seed that looked like a hard brown penis, rooted in a firm white skin surrounded by soft flesh. "They look like nuts don't they?"

"Well, San, you have to think a little kindly about them," Nicole answered. "Coming up here to talk to you and all."

Nicole must have been thinking San was referring to the approaching delegation. San let it pass.

James was speaking to Jessica. "I suppose you realize that it's getting on in the afternoon?"

"Yes, we can't stay up here much longer."

Your Leibniz desk is waiting, James.

It was Kevin, assurance regained, who spoke to San first. "We have decided that your 'philosophy' stems from your own physical and mental condition and has nothing to do with anything you have learned under our direction."

"We've also considered," volunteered James, "whether or not you should be incarcerated. For your own good and the good of others, but some people here seem to think you're not going to do anything. We stand convinced."

With your hands washed. Perhaps they were ready to leave. But James was charged up, and not about to let his anger fall away unspent.

"You believe," James spewed, "that we participate both physically and perceptually in our reality, right?"

"Yes," San answered.

"Do you know what your participative reality and your participative perception is all about? It's a theory to compensate for the fact that you're jealous. Jealous not of things, money, or even position, but jealous of life. You want to engulf and be part of everything you see. That 'global reality' that you mentioned to Michael? It's just a desire to really feel what others feel. Do what others do. But you can't do everything at once. No matter what you try, you're limited to one life, like the rest of us."

Blasted. And his finger was still jabbing in the air. Ready to try to poke another hole in her thoughts.

"Dawson was telling us some of your employment history," James said, scoffingly. "Chasing after new jobs, new merit points, new 'states of being' as you called them. You want everything at once. You do your hiking, skiing, piano playing and then you're jealous of those who have meaningful work. You put your study and travel in priority and then you're jealous when you see someone playing with their children. You want the enjoyment that they're having."

San leaned further and further back until her shoulders were jammed against the poplar trunks. Was there any truth to James' bile? It would have to be considered. Seeing that his words had touched her, James took the

attitude of triumph. His face became increasingly redder as his accusations were expelled.

"You hate to see others doing what you can't do," James said, jabbing his finger closer to San's face, "but you can't do everything at once. And all that stuff about shells. You only wish that you had something you wanted to do. Wanted so completely that you could be impervious to your surroundings."

"Enough," David interjected. At the same time, he moved his hand around San's back as if to keep her from shrinking into the trees. "You agreed, James, not to attack." Turning his attention back to San, he said, "We agreed to offer a few humble opinions." David's hand remained a moment on her back. Offering succor to her tense muscles.

"One last thing," said James. "A couple of centuries ago, a fellow called Descartes became famous because he separated subjectivity and objectivity. Now you want us to regress to a pre-Cartesican era and mesh the two realms together again." His hands on his hips, he nodded his head in satisfaction.

"Exactly! Perfect," said San leaning forward. "Why should separating the existence of subject and object be so important? Unless each generation is born so participative that distinguishing themselves as separate contributing subjects is a task that must be learned and learned

again by each 'new crop' of humans. A task which required the discovery power and genius of Descartes to articulate."

"Regardless," said Kevin, "we thought it would be a good thing for you, San, to try to forget your own subjectivity for a while and interest yourself in the things of the world. What you need are some clear ideas to guide your actions, and then, all will be straightforward, unchaotic, and direct." Kevin changed audience: "The foggy undetermined aspects of her mind are a direct result of an absence of discipline; an absence of a desire to conform and thus direct her own action according to what exists in the world."

"What you're saying," mimicked San, "is that I exhibit a lack of 'a priori' synthetic thinking: thoughts that guide human behavior in a manner that can be laid out and followed as truly as three connecting lines can make a triangle."

"Well, no," hedged Kevin. "I didn't say that. What I...."

Jessica translated, "What Kevin was saying is that your emphasis on the importance of subjectivity may be a bit overdone. I, myself, don't think it's necessary for you to put aside your philosophical outlook; only to adjust it. It might be helpful for you to conceptualize the different kinds of empathy as they have been worked out by a variety of psychologists." Jessica's voice was cool and matter of fact. "I wonder if someone could bring me

a glass of water?" Her eyes swept the spectators, falling on Ace, who leapt up.

"I'll bring you a beer, if you like?" he offered.

"No, thanks, Ace. Water will be fine. Now, San,"

Jessica continued, "what you call the 'participative self' is an example of primitive empathy: the feeling that everything around you is part of yourself. The effect is similar to the fright loud noises cause babies or nervous adults. There is an inability to disassociate the noise from those things that will affect them personally. This isn't real empathy because the person is unaware that the event is outside one's being. The anger, the noise, the tension of the moment may belong to others; you can sympathize with the emotions of others unless you first realize that it is their emotion." Jessica looked around for her water, but Ace was out of sight. "The distancing, the 'cutting off' that you're so adverse to, is a necessary process for individuating your own feelings and attitudes. Once you can...."

Jessica peered at the door to the penthouse once again. Her gaze was rewarded not by the sight of Ace, but by Mrs. LaRose, who had bustled in, already talking. Ace was close behind her.

"All of these people about. Eehah! What is that?" Mrs. LaRose's scream interrupted Jessica completely. "What's that pile of cement doing on the roof? Clarence?"

San? My, my, whatever is going to come of this?" Mrs. LaRose stopped and looked around. Seeing herself in the midst of all the people, her hand reached up to feel if her curls were in place.

Nemesis was the first to reach her. He took her hand in his and spoke deeply and reassuringly. "We are in tremulous time, my charming lady."

Mrs. LaRose didn't take her hand away, but pulled her head back, as if to see him better. "My goodness, well, thank you," she said, now slowly removing her hand. Her nervousness was certainly infectious. San could feel the panicking rates, looking for a corner. "I really must speak to San for a moment. San? San?" Mrs. LaRose's high voice called out with the confidence of distressed damsel tempting a bear out of its cave.

"I'm over here," San responded. Surely Mrs. LaRose could see that?

"Could you come here. Please? I'd like a private work with you." Mrs. LaRose smilingly excused herself from Nemesis' company and stood waiting by the door. When San arrived beside her, Mrs. LaRose started whispering quickly and excitedly. "My dear. I don't know what to think. What to do!" San wished she would hurry. All the similar moments of San's life were there in that instant of waiting. Waiting for someone to say something disastrous about what she had done. What she was respon-

sible for. Finally, Mrs. LaRose finished flustered long enough to say what she had come up to say. "Eddie will be home tonight. What will he say? Couldn't you get rid of all this commotion before he gets here?" She looked at the bunker. "No. I don't suppose you can. Are they really going to make a movie? Will my roof be famous? Oh, dear. I wish we had got permission from the owners."

"Mrs. LaRose," said San. "If your husband will be home tonight, why don't you wait to get his reaction then?"

Clarence, who had probably been delaying on purpose, joined San and Mrs. LaRose at the door.

"Oh, Clarence," began Mrs. LaRose. She continued to spout her confusion to him, as she had to San.

"Do come and join us, Gloria," Clarence said, as he placed his hands on her shoulders. "We're having a conference, and I'm sure you can make a valuable contribution."

"Gracious," said Mrs. LaRose. "I suppose if that's the case, I should come along." Patting her curls once more, she allowed Clarence to lead her to the philosophers and make the introductions. As all this was presumably for San's benefit, San thought she might as well join them.

Jessica resumed her advice. "Now where was I? Oh, yes, I was saying, San. Once you can conceptualize your own individual attitude, distinct from others, then true empathetic thought becomes a possibility. You should try to identify and even crystallize your personal emotions,

ideals, patterns of thought. In order to do this, a certain isolation and imperviousness to the wants, needs and demands of others is necessary. Only then can you become the origin of your own direction and emotion."

"False isolation," said San. "People forget that they're affected by their surroundings. They can't come back to that 'primitive' empathy. Insensitives. One goes out towards a lot of boxes and barred entities, impervious to everything. People have to know how receptive they are." San put her hand down to touch the rifle, laying on the poplar frame beside where she was sitting.

"Perhaps you're too sensitive," suggested Jessica.

"How can you say that?" James said, fuming at Jessica's soft approach. "San is considering shooting indiscriminately at unsuspecting people. It might be you or me down there."

"Things are often quite the opposite of how they appear," Jessica responded.

"How true," contributed Mrs. LaRose. "Why, how often it is that I've said to Eddie...."

Jessica continued, "San obviously feels the demands of others too intensely upon herself. She could counteract that by following her own direction more closely. As it is, she is incapable of acting according to her own thought-out principles."

"More likely," James said, lifting his cheeks into his squinting eyes, "she never developed any."

Mrs. LaRose was ready to offer another suggestion, "Now, I've always found San a most sympathetic listener."

"That's all very well, Mrs. LaRose," Jessica objected, "but...."

"San's always followed her own direction," countered Birdie. "She's one of those women who knows what she's about."

"Yah," she put in. "I don't know why you're all picking on this poor gal, with a peg and all."

San got up and, taking the rifle with her, walked to the penthouse, where she could avoid listening to her feeble defenders. She could see the validity of much of what Jessica said. To create ourselves as a separate origin of subjectivity is to detach ourselves from that which surrounds us. Thus we would be free to decide, to reason and then reassociate with our environment with a difference.

San looked at the poster as she went by. Attractive, challenging, but puzzling and irksome too.

But if that reassociation doesn't happen, if we can't reidentify with that which is around us, then the isolation, the distance, demolishes the surging feeling of life. Everything emptied of meaning. Dead shells.

San dried her hands on the portion of the Port o' Call towel that had been spared from ketchup and cement-mixing hands.

The lack of reassociation. By others. By herself. It would account for a lack of a feeling of extension through time and space. Looking coldly, everything would feel "out there".

On her way through the change room she again noticed the strips of light on the floor. She was glad she had had a few minutes to sort out Jessica's views. Primitive empathy -- identifying oneself with one's totality -- left one helpless. Moving at the whim and will of the surrounding attitudes. Suffering that which could not be suffered. The cutting, the isolation was necessary for individuation. It enabled unaffected looking.

But it stopped the life it analyzed. Penetrated only to dissect.

San walked back out on the roof. Clarence and the rest of the roof's occupants were still gathered by the poplar trees. Clarence, what should she do about him?

With or without empathy, she was still faced with the problem of interpretation. As she reseated herself on the poplar frame, the conversation of the others came to an awkward stop.

David attempted to cover the obvious break in topic. "How long were you in Italy, San?"

"A year and a half. I got back last January."

"An unfortunate time to return."

"We did have a cold winter here, didn't we?" sympathized Mrs. LaRose.

"I didn't have much choice," San said to David.

"Various pressures...money...pending decisions.... I went there to escape. I felt I was in hiding."

"You shouldn't call it an escape, San," suggested Nicole. "It was more of a recuperation."

"How'd it happen, San?" asked Ace. "What were you getting better from?"

San never talked about her accident, and usually preferred others didn't either. However, it was in the past. It shouldn't affect her so. Nicole looked over at San, offering to explain if San wanted. San nodded her permission.

"San was in a car accident," said Nicole. "It happened during her third year at the varsity. She was driving home from a New Year's party. Apparently, she did some circular patterns on the icy road and ran into one of the few solid telephone poles that are around anymore. Her foot was crushed."

Memory was still vivid. First the premeditated skill of controlled uncontrol. The gas pedal giving just the right amount of power. But the circles grew larger with each turn. Then the pole. And watching what happened as if she no longer belonged to the action. Then listening to the loud ringing in her head.

Mrs. LaRose shuddered. "Gracious. It's too terrible. When I think of all the people on the road...."

Then the recovery. The wheelchair. The limb store that smelled like a saddle shop. The molding of the shank so they could attach the foot.

"It's too bad," Clarence said shaking his head. "I was hoping.... Well, as you people know, I'm doing a write-up on San. A biography. She wanted San to say she had lost her leg in a more exotic manner. You know. Maybe while she was swimming into the grottos in Sicily. Sharks make their homes in grottos; it would have been a lot better for my story had she lost it by a shark's bite. More sensational. But closer to the way everyone wants to believe these things happen. After all, everyone drives home corked sometimes. If you don't mind, San, I might fix up that part of the story a little."

"Go ahead, Clarence. Change it for me." Maybe he would if he could. Not change it to a more gruesome way of happening, but change it so that it wouldn't have happened at all.

Everyone looked uncomfortable at the exposure of such bare facts. Mrs. LaRose was wringing her hands. "I must go back downstairs." She glanced round the circle, smiling fully at everybody. "Eddie will be home for dinner, and it will be so nice to.... Oh dear, I hope he drives carefully. Well, goodbye now." She almost tripped in her rush to get away.

"Good? good," said Clarence, pleased. "That's San's history right up to date. Put a line under it."

Clarence had a way of bringing an end to any extensions or continuance of sensation by the audience. But what amazed San was that a person's life could be stated so quickly, so easily wrapped up, especially by others. Nicole's accounting of the accident. The escape to a different place. It could all be said in a few words, but could anyone ever really be aware of the events that another person had lived? How could other people be more than shells?

Early evening. The third night on the roof was approaching. Decisions had to be made. If Clarence and Rick would leave, the roof would be quiet again.

Clarence called out. "Do you like the idea, San?"

"What idea?"

"Rick is bringing his band up. We'll give you a going away party. The bunker crew is coming back. So is Sharon, Nicole and the rest." Clarence continued to clear space for the band. Empty beer cases and the barbeque were put on the other side of the penthouse. Bottles and glasses pushed aside. San considered walking away. But she had done that so many times. Giving up what became too crowded; retreating from one place to another, until there was only the roof where she could think things out. Clarence stopped moving and stood in front of San. "Well?"

"No. Please don't. This party sounds more like a pre-wake. And it's not necessary in any case. I'm having mediating considerations."

"Second thoughts? What? Now? Have you decided to do something else?"

"Nothing yet. I haven't decided anything."

"Look, San. I don't mean to sound heartless or cruel, but we are ready. Ivan has a whole series of pictures.

I've collected a mass of material on you: the wandering female, unable to find anything of value. What rats money-hungry males have become, if we can't attend to looking after lovelies like you. What a statement against the women's libbers. Their accusations about male chauvinists are totally unbalanced. We gentlemen don't look after the ladies enough." Clarence paused, reached for a chair and sat down. "There are a number of directions this can go. I'm thinking about a serial documentary. Something that will get into the more respectable magazines. Perhaps, I'll write it up as an explanation of how a new philosophy can tear the mind of one of our young citizens. Lots of angles, you know."

San stood up and walked to the parapet. People going out to dinner, the theater, and into the pinball alleys. It was going to be a good night for a sunset.

Clarence was beside her and still talking. "It's not just for me. We have half the world ready to see what you're doing. The audience, girl, consider the audience. You've never before been on stage like this one that I've prepared for you. And all this was your idea. You're the one who had nothing more to do in life than live out your days struggling, fighting for your bread and butter. Disillusioned. What have you got happening now, on your own, that's going to change all that?"

"Nothing." Wanting to ward off his brutal words, San spun around on her peg. "Not a thing." Was he right?

"You may do all right on your own, now while you're still shapely. That patterned peg looks a bit kinky, but it's a nifty addition, nevertheless. But what about when you start putting on weight? You can't look twenty-two all your life. You've had an extra ten years as it is. Heavier, older, you won't be able to whirl around like that. Instead of spending your time pondering that abstract nonsense, you should be gathering some solid backing. Now, while you're a good-looking novelty. But, even as it is you're fortunate."

"Hey, Charlie," Rick yelled. "Can you find me an octopus connector? I've got lights and instruments that will need to be plugged in."

"Just a minute. I'll be there in a minute." Clarence waved Rick's question aside. "You're fortunate," he continued to San, "because you've got me. While you've been ruminating these unworldly problems, I've discovered I have power. The power of bringing news together. Creating it. Organizing it. Powers I never dreamed I had."

Attempting to avoid Clarence's onslaught, San searched through the beer cases for a full, forgotten bottle.

"San," appealed Clarence. "We spend our lives being little. Little fish. Most of us live and die without even making a splash. Doing the daily grind. Slipping

through the rut we have carved for ourselves, just like your said."

San's quest was rewarded. ~~She~~ proceeded to look for an opener.

Clarence moved in front of her, stopping her process. "Every day, I run around collecting stories for the newspaper, and at the end of the week, the papers are carried out to the trash. One has to make one's name all over again. Now, suddenly, I see the possibility of my name being known all over the globe. I'll build a reputation; The man with the inside story on what happens in the mind of a sniper."

San gave up trying to get past Clarence to reach the table; she placed a cap on an empty and used it to open her beer.

Clarence prolonged his eulogy. "I'll be known as the man who understands the mind of a murderer. The mind of someone who doesn't even care who she, she murders."

San took a sip of the beer and returned to the parapet. Clarence followed.

Resting his arms on the wall, looking out over the city, his voice became full of camaraderie. "Our lives are of trifling importance. You're the one who made that clear to me. This being true, why shouldn't I be allowed to live my life with a bit of style, an inside man? My reputation made, everything I write will be understood as

emitted from the man who penetrated the mysteries of the corrupt."

San looked at him in disbelief.

Clarence denied the look, "Oh, I'm not saying you're corrupt. What you're doing is a supreme sacrifice. You're expressing anger that a lot of people feel. It's not only you who feels superfluous. The city, high finance, big organizations need only a fraction of the workers available to operate their systems. They hire and fire at will. Everyone's expendable. No special place is put aside for anyone. No room for us, no room for you, San. And you're the one who is saying it for all of us."

"You've really got this worked out, haven't you, Clarence. And what do you have planned for me afterwards?"

"Go ahead with this, San, and you'll only get a couple of years in some asylum, to think things over; four days on the roof isn't enough. When you come out, you'll be immortal. Immortal because I will have kept the 'casualties' aware of you as their martyr. When you get out, you can come home and see me, and I'll show you the success I've made from this adventure."

"Charlie," Rick called out, "I'm going to need some help to set this up."

Sharon arrived, and approached Clarence and San. "How do you like this, lover?" Two wide straps covered her breasts. Showing off her dark, newly acquired tan.

"Gorgeous, sweeping," responded Clarence. "Say, Sharon, do you think you could see what Rick wants? I have to finish talking to San."

Sharon raised one side of her mouth in a slight sneer, and acquiesced sweetly.

Clarence turned to San. "So?"

"Clarence, it would be shooting a living, walking, feeling person. No matter how perverted their false thoughts had shaped them, it wouldn't really be simply breaking a shell."

"But, we'll probably only hit someone who is just like the drudges you described. Someone who would spend the rest of his life going back and forth to work, earning money to feed himself and his family. Senseless perpetuation of life. He works, pays the mortgage. That's the positive side. His job is probably painting billboards to clutter up the landscape. Advertising cigarettes to poison people and give them yellow fingers. And his wife will probably be better off without him. She'll be free to try out a few different lives, a few different fellows. Maybe she's a depressed female whose husband never allows her to go out into the world and experience living. You would be giving her life. Just by killing off her old man. If she missed him, she could always find another one and be more appreciative of the next, knowing what a prize she lost."

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"Damn it, Charlie, we're going to need some cooperation," Rick yelled.

"I have to go, Sam. Don't chicken out on us. You're the oil to this whole operation. I'll be back as soon as I can. Here's Sharon to keep you company."

"Ah, he's cute, isn't he?"

"Clarence. Cute?" San thought of his speech, moments before. "I wouldn't have thought he was your type, Sharon."

"He isn't really, but I've decided to change my style."

"How is Clarence?"

"Don't you know?"

"I've never tried him."

"Well," drawled Sharon, "never has one man done so much with so little. It will be a pleasure to take him in on a more regular basis."

"He'll probably want you to be a showpiece for his business prospects. Be attractive and quiet. And not look at another man because you'll damage his ego."

"That suits me fine," answered Sharon. "If his worst trait is his desire to turn me into a clothes horse, I'll enjoy. What a relief he'll be."

"He's not what you would call a liberated man." That's all I was saying." San moved over to the poplars and sat down on the frame.

"I've tried dozens of those liberated men," said Sharon as she leaned against the parapet. "They aren't possessive because they want to remain uninvolved with traditional neuroses. But actually, they don't want to spend their money on you. Or buy the groceries. They

avoid getting up with the kids, driving them to day-care, and scraping the peanut butter off the floor. They avoid all that by being there to give their love. So they stay in bed until you kick them out.... Now, Clarence, I'm pretty sure that I can get him hooked. I'll be the one that will have the nice set-up. He has a steady job, a regular paycheck. He'll be gone most of the day. That's lots of time for me to sunbathe, or have an affair or two if I get restless."

"You mean that instead of getting rid of the man you bring home, you're prepared to cook him a morning omlet."

"For a while," said Sharon as she lifted her leg to smooth back her stockings. "After, I can always find a way to get out of it."

"You'll be stuck out in the suburbs, perhaps."

"No sweat. I can always call in a dance instructor to amuse me in the afternoons."

San was starting to feel sorry for Clarence. "Don't you think it's a little unfair?"

"Nope. It's what's expected of a woman; I just intend to enjoy the role and add a little sweetening whenever necessary."

"You can break 'what's expected of you', if you refuse to act it out."

"Why should I?" responded Sharon. "And whose complaining? I'm not." She gave a little smile.... "And I'll make sure Clarence doesn't either."

"But it's still unfair. You wouldn't want it reversed would you? You working while he was at home keeping the nest warm?"

"Sure. I wouldn't mind. If I could make the easy money that Clarence does."

"Then what about all those liverated fellows you kicked out?"

"Them? They were deadweights, good for a night or so. But Clarence is an investment. Besides too many navel partners, and sex becomes boring. It's tiresome tripping into the doc's too. Checking to see if one of those hunks left me with a dose."

"So you plan on capturing Clarence?" SAN asked.

Sharon gave a smug nod.

"Are you two finished your talk?" Clarence was back. He gave Sharon's blonde hair a stroke. "Finish. That's the word. Remember, San, what we were talking about? Well, the world today is full of people who start something with grand ideals and never finish. That's your problem, San. You've got to finish this event. If you don't finish, it will be one more grandiose scheme you started and never finished. Lack of determination. Lack of discipline. That's one of your faults. You dilly here and dally there, and then do nothing. If you're going to set a proper example for others and for yourself in the future, you'll have to reconcile yourself -- and plan for the fact -- that whenever you start something you should finish it."

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"YEA," agreed Sharon. "YEA'VE RIGHT, CLARENCE. People SHOULD MAKE a plan and FOLLOW IT OUT. I do THAT myself."

RICK and two of his band APPROACHED.

"WE'RE all set up, Clarence," RICK said. "When IS the action going to start?"

"MOST of the people will be BACK shortly."

They did their introductions. GARRETT, the bass player. Black skin, DINK denim jeans. THICK of FOUR inches taller than RICK. DANNY, the percussive MASTER. Large BRAVE mustache on a pale white face, MARKED by brown, oval SHOWN sideburns.

DANNY'S mustache went up WITH ANGLE FROM the center, THEN down and curled around at the ENDS. Fuller than SAR'S. Maybe she could ask him what SORT of cream he used to MAKE it keep its shape. Then next TIME she lay in the bath, parting her pubic hair, shaping THE mustache over her HOLLOW lips, it would stay in place a little longer.

She decided not to talk to DANNY at all. He looked like the ONE who was RICK'S fly.

"WENDY and Melissa will be ALONG in a few minutes," GARRETT said. "Melissa does soul INSPIRING jazz on the electric keys. Wendy plays a RAJAZZ."

This GROUP looked like it WOULD suit RICK well. He ALWAYS did gather a crowd around HIM. Attracting them ALONG without MAKING extending himself FORWARD. There must be

species of plant like that. ~~It~~ in what they need.

"What sort of stuff do you ~~like~~?" Sharon asked the question, but Garrett answered ~~looking~~ intensely at Sam, supposedly peering deeply into her eyes.

"We'll play anything," Garrett answered. "Anything you want to hear. We do blues, jazz, country, and space-out-sounds. If you're still here in the early hours, so you're the lady who gave the young ~~man~~ Rick such a hard time. You should take pity on ~~us~~ poor males. Where'd you get the heavy-duty rifle, lady?"

"I borrowed it."

"Now where is whoever loaned it to you going to be sitting, if you use it to shoot someone? You should at least have got your own. Isn't ~~it~~ getting your friends in trouble."

"He doesn't exactly know he loaned it to me."

"So you lifted it?"

"Vic could say that," answered Sam. "But I've never really stolen anything. Making myself a criminal for a piece of property."

"A little trick like you shouldn't have any difficulty buying whatever you want," said ~~Garrett~~, his eyes doing a critical review over her figure.

Sam gave a bitter laugh. "It sounds like you think I should pick up some fellow on the street and make myself a commodity. Like a can of beans. Bought, ripped open,

and consumed. Then, tossed away, ~~that~~ adolescence. Never. Mind you, it's not because ~~there~~ aren't plenty of billboards around saying, 'eat me, drink me, consume me', like the billboard ~~that~~ advertises a delightful meal along with a mermaid." San realized her interpretations were no longer exactly ~~accidental~~. She changed the tone of her voice from ~~forcefully~~ joking to a tolerant shrug. "I suppose it's no different ~~than~~ a football player. Selling himself by the year...."

"Everyone has to sell themselves in some way or another," Garrett said. "I just wish ~~that~~ I could find some big football league that would be willing to buy me."

"Sharon's looking for a husband to buy her up."

"I don't have to listen to ~~that~~," said Sharon. "I'm going to join Clarence and Danny."

"Before we start workin' out, ~~can~~ I bring you a drink, San?" offered Garrett.

"Thanks, I'd like that," she answered. If the night went as she suspected, she'd be ~~needing~~ a few drinks to survive.

Garrett walked over to the bar ~~area~~. From a briefcase, he took two glasses and a ~~bottle~~ and proceeded to mix a couple of drinks.

The breeze had started to move ~~the~~ poplar leaves. San listened as she watched.

Garrett returned. "Straight ~~was~~ my special stash."

"Thanks."

"Now I can't figure is why you're mad at the world. I could understand, if you were hard and stony like Rick said you were, if you had bitter lines on your face because the world had given you a bad time. But look at you. You could do anything you want. You should relax. Take life easy. Have a good time. You don't have to suffer. Maybe you're just miserable because 'your time' is due. Meaning the annual blues."

"They were over a week ago," said Sam bluntly.

"Well, look at the wild colors of the sky. Tomorrow is going to be another warm sunny day. If you haven't got anything better to do than this, come fishing with me. Out of the city. No hassels..."

"What you suggesting, Gareth," smiled Sam. "that I drift unconsciously along into the water?"

"I could find some pleasure in your company," he said. "As for your drifting.... Maybe you don't know how good you look with that orange light on your face and your shapely figure. The leg doesn't bother me, you know. I never was one for foot fetishes anyway. You drive a man crazy just looking at you. And that shirt you're wearing doesn't hide much. I can see your nipples sticking out from here. Nice the way you have got the shirt tied up above your navel. Sexy."

"The next doesn't have any buttons."

Don't worry about it, Sam. Life isn't worth living for you, what do you think? One look at you and would want to take you home and hold you. That determined expression on your face all the time, defenseless and protectable. You're holding your chin so high and you don't have to worry at all about what you have to do to make a living. Gareth lifted his glass for a toast. "Hell, women just have an easier lot in life. I have two or three women begging for my body every day. Looking to cut me in. If women were half as much as men, I'd be sitting back rubbin' my sore balls. I'm a good looking dude myself, you know. Good build, a pound of fat. It's all tough muscle. Play a lot of rugby. Fine sport. It keeps a man in shape for better things. I'd never use my strength to hurt you, though. No one else did either."

Sam grimaced. "I thought we were just having a quiet conversation. Person to person. No bargaining."

"Person to person? You mean as if we were two men? You want to talk about rugby? You must be crazy. Lady, I can't look at you as if you were another man. I'd have to be an idiot. When I look at you, I see a woman. That's the plain blunt fact. And when I see a woman like you, my balls start to pull together. To say

anything different would be a plain blatant lie. Live with it lady, cause I ain't a bit different than every other man, except for those that are too much in love with their mothers, and they ain't doing you any good. I have to go now and start working the pass. But if you change your mind before the night is over, or anytime within the next few days, give me a call and we'll do those few days in the country and battle all this misfusion in your mind."

Garrett handed her a slip of paper with his name and phone number, written, perhaps in quantity, and made his way back to where the band was set up.

It was nice of Garrett to let her know that she, with her leg, was acceptable to him. She wouldn't have anything to do with a friend of Rick's if he appeared the epitome of all worthy attributes. But it was typical of male egocentricism. It reminded her of the men who say, "How can you leave me, when I love you?" Never acknowledging that a woman has a mind of her own. Her own intentions, or lack of them. Could a man really forget that their desire was not everyone's desire? That other people had other minds?

The party was in full rage. , Ivan, the photographer, was making his presence known by the flashing of his strobe light. The noise from Rick's band was frenzied. Compelling escape.

San stood alone, leaning on the parapet. The bright moon made a patchwork of the other rooves. Some appearing large, some smaller. Other spaces were in dark shadow. A few street lights added dots to the spaces.

"Hello, San." David was beside her.

"I'm surprised to see you back here again."

"After we left, Jessica and I thought that perhaps we hadn't been very helpful. I wasn't expecting to see all this."

"Clarence's idea."

"Not a very kind one, I think. I expect you used to do a lot of dancing."

"Some. I hated ritualistic slogging, but I liked to use my body to act out and express the sounds. It dispersed tension. And erased consciousness."

"I take it you didn't care for more formal dancing."

"But I did." San countered. "Except one had to know the patterns well enough to relax and innovate from them."

A louder, heartier voice interrupted them. "So there you are, San. I've been looking for you." Mr. LaRose had

returned. "You've been giving the Mrs. A scare, have you?" Eddie laughed. He must have won at the races. He told her she shouldn't worry. And look at you. All your friends up here giving you a summer party. Very nice. Very nice." He was looking dapper in his blue pinstrip. Even a carnation in his lapel. "Of course, you're planning to leave tomorrow. This not paying the rent." He shrugged. "Far be it from me to put you out, but if I have my job to do, and if I don't do it, they'll just get somebody else in to replace me. You know how it is. And this staying out on the roof. Wee! Some trouble you've given the Mrs.. Nice of your friends to throw the party. I'm sure one of them will be helping you out." He tossed a knowing wink.

San watched as he talked, but he had no need for any replies. Both he and his wife preferred talking to listening.

"I think," Eddie continued, "I'll have a look around. Rescue that young woman from Clarence over there. Take care, San, not to do anything foolish up here on my roof. It would get me in a lot of trouble for not calling the police in earlier. I told the Mrs. that you're playing a silly game. Women don't shoot rifles. Give them what they want and they're happy," he said to David as he started to move away. "Just a minute. Here, San. Why don't you put this in your hair?" He offered his carnation.

"No, please. I'd much rather you kept it."

"Okay. Have a good time, now, San," Eddie said as he moved to where Jessica was standing with Clarence and Dawson.

Michael was back on the roof too. Sitting in a circle with the bunker crew. Passing around some organic release. Breaking connections between established patterns. Tearing the mind loose from the body it ruled. Leona was nestled in the cup formed by Michael's crossed legs. His arms encircling her as he played the odd obbligato note with his flute.

Four days of his interest in San had been an over-estimation on her part.

Meaning accumulated; knowledge a collection of thought. It must be possible that love could collect and become more and more meaningful also. Instead of being a gradual accumulation of annoyances, it should extrapolate until mere thought of the other person would be warming. Bodies and thought coming together in tender intimacy. Why she should believe that she didn't know. Certainly, she had no empirical evidence.

"I'm sure I heard a sigh," said David.

San was startled. She had forgotten his presence.

"Perhaps, there is a viable alternative to your action with the rifle. You could resurrect your love of music. A good musical performance has both logic of technique and

and expression of human emotions; it might be the mixture of form and passion that you're looking for."

"So you'd advise me to enclose myself in a standard box. Invite a few students in to make a living, and attend the odd musical performance?"

"You make it sound horrible enough," laughed David. "But the shell-like imperviousness you see in others might disappear as you experience a common pathos with the music."

"I don't know," San responded. "I really don't know right now how I can continue anything."

"San," Lloyd said as he arrived beside them. "How do you like you bunker? Did you see the deep holes? We've got them all the way around."

"It's reminiscent," answered SAN. "Painfully and pleasantly so."

"Reminiscent! There's never been anything like it before," said Lloyd. "It's beautiful. See the bottles we worked into it?"

"In Sicily, instead of looking out into blue sky and city buildings, the bunker overlooked a lovely bay. The sand and rock of St. Vido di Capo. Scenic and peaceful with only a few tourists."

"You were in a real bunker?" asked Lloyd.

"Emptied out, of course. Just a few walls within walls. And the strategically placed spots for the guns."

.Dirt floor. Hidden in the bank. Quite unlike this one on the roof."

"I'm going to see if ours is getting dry yet."

"You might want to come back to the varsity," David suggested, when they were alone again. Surrounded only by the blast of sound from the band. "If you choose an interest, put yourself completely into it and devote your time and intelligence to it, you're still young enough to do whatever you decide. You're only half-old you know. You have half of your life in front of you. There. That's the last of my nagging, I promise."

San turned her attention to the variegated patterns as the moving figures blocked the light from the band. "She's certainly done well for herself, hasn't she?" San said as she motioned to where Jessica and Dawson were dancing.

"It's rather to be expected. Her family has several generations of scholars behind them. She's well connected."

"Jealous?"

"No."

"How old is she? Thirty-three? Fire? eight?"

"Thirty-five as far as we've guessed."

"Quite a difference compared to where I'm at."

"You must remember, San, that by the age you were in secondary school, she had a personal familiarity with much of the world."

Jessica. Living in places San had only read about. But even when she did read about them there was no real conceptualization about what life in those places was like. Imagination never filled out the words in a way that made those places exist. Such a difference between reading about Italy, and living there. Feeling the push and feverish activity of crossing a street in Naples. Cars and people so close together one could feel one's toes getting run over. Or seeing the petty entrepreneurs using traffic jams to capture consumers: "Hats, anyone? seat coolers? cigarettes?"

"San?"

Reading about the fact of modernity and the past, side by side wasn't the same thing as walking on stone slabs on a mountain-top village built in the thirteenth century. Listening to the Flintstones coming out of a window.

"San? Don't feel badly. We all have different starting places, and you have, yourself, traveled so far from where you started. Why don't you try to put all this talk aside and give your mind a rest? Listen, the music's quite nice now."

Michael was playing his flute with Garrett accompanying him. The rest of the band was taking a break.

"Dance with me?" asked David, taking her hand.

San flicked a surprised glance at him.

"We could stand in one place, and sway together."

With a look at the rifle leaning against the parapet, San stood close to David and let her head rest on his shoulder. It did feel blissful.

"I'll have to leave, soon," said David. "Jessica and I came in the same car, and I think she's making motions to the effect that she wants to go home. I'll come back later if you want."

San withdrew from his encirclement and turned to stand by the parapet. The lines of car lights were much thinner now. Some existing separately. Not as one massive rope.

Feeling desolate and tired, San picked up the rifle. She found her khaki shirt and a sleeping bag, and headed into the bunker.

San entered the bunker. A retreat to her own defensive shell. Concrete protection against acting on others, against being acted upon. Their responses to her tossing out of words and feelings couldn't damage her now. San straightened the sleeping bag beneath her. The top of the bunker was not yet closed in, so she was able to look out to the sky.

What had she heard on the roof the last three days? Bits of truth amalgamated with absurdities. The sorting would be difficult. But the easiest thing of all, for some people at least, seemed to be the acquisition of distance. The distance required to act on other people. She could remain locked into her personal image of who she was and what everyone else should be too, and thus justify any act she might accomplish. The learned self-image refusing to be altered.

Consideration of others need never interfere. It didn't interfere with James and his advice; Jessica with hers; or Dawson with his. All trying to proselytize the particular way they live in the world. Another thing certain. Her days of losing herself -- coming out ready to be shaped and distorted into the framework provided by the expectations of the people around her -- were over.

But what now? Remaining inside a shell of one's own thinking while those who had the power retained it? Deliberately or spontaneously, one must come out. Impelled to leave the shell, could she only snip out quickly and withdraw again?

Her action would await interpretation. What sort of elaboration would Clarence give to her lashing out? Her shots so full of meaning and protest. From his sensationalistic coverage, others would add their own interpretations. Distortion everywhere. It might even be too optimistic to assume others might think out her reasoning. More probably, they would believe Clarence: the authority on the minds of city-snipers.

The noise from Rick's band penetrated the bunker. Everyone on the roof was escaping into the sound and movement of the pulsating music. Casualties. No power. None over others and none over themselves. Finding ways and means to compensate for their superfluosity. Their impotence. Seeking escape inclusive enough to defy the idea of escaping. But while the evasion of decisions beckoned, other ideas would continue to determine lives; amoebae waiting to be shaped.

"San?"

Clarence stood at the entrance to the bunker.

"San, I've got to talk to you before you do anything."

"What now?"

Clarence crouched down and sat on his heels, "San, I'm still trying to figure out what those four things you know are. Where should I start? If you could list them for me before you shoot that would help a lot."

"I don't know four things."

"Look, you said that we perceive differently. Should I say that you have a world of your own that I can't see? Catastrophic. Everyone will really just believe you're mad. Isn't perception what you see when you open your eyes?"

"Go away, Clarence."

"Give me an example first. One that I can understand."

"If there were a God, Clarence, I'd set him on you. Cast Clarence into the fiery depths, I'd say."

"An example."

"All right. There's a conflict. A conflict between what we know because we live and what we know by observation. Sight is weak, dominated by experience."

"How do you know something like that? I need a better example."

"See the street?"

"I know what a street looks like."

"Then you can see how it looks as if it comes together only a few blocks away. But you know we could walk from one end of the city to the other and the buildings won't draw closer, and finally meet, from any one lived-spot."

Before 'perspective' became part of our spiritual heritage, painters represented the streets as they knew them to be from experience, not from what they saw in front of their eyes."

"That's your example?"

"Mmm." said San in assent.

"But everybody knows that."

San shrugged.

"I'll be back," said Clarence.

"Everybody knows," San quoted silently. Just like they know the names of different things so well that they become insensitive to the similarities. Spinners from the maple trees in the fall and reproduction chromosomes both with the shape of airplane propellers. Once the differences ~~in~~ scale could be imagined away, similarities were everywhere.

San remembered the day in spring when the leaves were not yet budding on the trees. At the end of one street, she saw a tree with its many branches leading out to even thicker clusters of smaller branches. The tree, however, took on the appearance -- and gave the sensations -- of a symmetrical dandelion. A dandelion after the yellow had turned into seed and the slightest puff of wind could disperse it to float into the air. The image of a tree as a heavy, rooted, solid existence was removed entirely.

"San, are you in here?" Frankie spoke timidly into the bunker. "San? I've come to a decision."

"Good," San said dryly.

"I'm going to stay with Hank and the kids, and work out from there. Do you think that's a good idea? I'll be able to start afresh."

"A fine idea," San said. But she couldn't resist adding a perverted postscript. "How far do you expect to go, while you're keeping your foot in the door? And what do you expect to see in your home, while you're looking away?"

"Ah, er, I don't know what you mean. Bye, San. Bye for now," Frankie said as she withdrew from the entrance.

Frankie would be a typical mother. No real avenue for her own outgoing, she would retard her children's growth by serving them too well. Her children would either submit or spend a lifetime axing the umbilical cord. Consuming themselves by trying to get free of her influence. Either way the about-face necessary to turn outward from their mother's attention was unlikely.

The sound of crying was not in San's imagination. Birdie, stoned, came crawling into the bunker. San shifted from her reclining position to make room for him.

Birdie was crying like a frightened child. "Tell me, San," he sniffed. "Tell me a story. Remember how you used to? Once? We were sitting in a circle and you made up a story. I feel pulled. My skin's running away."

San wondered if eternity was really one night on a roof. "Sit down in front of me, and I'll rub your back."

"And make up a story?"

"And make up a story," San conceded. The pounding of the music was still going on; there would be no quiet anyway until it stopped. She had Birdie sit in front of her, pulled her crossed legs close to her body, and began to rub his back as she talked.

"This is a story about the relentless driving power of the will. It begins, however, long before people knew where the power of the will belonged."

"Your voice sounds nice," said Birdie.

"In the earliest times of the Mayan people, there was a most unusual idol. Carved out of stone, her legs were crossed and her hands would have rested on her thighs, palms up, except that her stone arms ended at her wrists. Instead of stone, her hands were a living substance."

San moved her hands over the top of Birdie's shoulders.

"The people gave over all of their will to the Goddess and especially to her divine hands. When her hands turned upward, the feeling in the air was warm. Inviting, but not demanding. Everything went well with the world as they knew it. The will was untormented. Not skittish. All were filled with a sense of pacific joy. But when her hands began to move, the people were imbued with a dreadful anticipation. Trepidation. As if they were grapes being pushed, urged and agitated while transformed into something unknown. Everyone did know there was going to

be a change of attitude. A change in their feeling and orientation toward their surroundings. For when the hands closed and pointed downward their life was worse than if they had no guidance at all."

"Birdie?"

Someone outside the bunker was calling.

"Don't tell anyone I'm here, San. Don't okay?" Birdie pleaded. "What happened when her hands closed, San?"

"When the Goddess' hands closed downward, everyone's skin stretched tightly. Restricting their bodies, and causing a prickling sensation that could not be coped with. Hearts pounded frantically against the tightened skin. Muscles twitched to adjust to the new tension. Frantic dances pounded with ever increasing speed to attempt to alleviate the stressful state. Gentle and beautiful sensual greetings became the hard pounding of flesh against flesh."

"Show me the dances."

Using the edge of her hands, San precipitated soft quick blows in rapid succession against the muscles of Birdie's back. "Although these people were not aware of the source of the will, they had advanced to the stage where they didn't think entirely in terms of the present moment. Stories and events of one day were remembered and retold the next. Thus this strange change of activity accompanying the Goddess' hands was something they were

well accustomed to. They suffered it as if it were unavoidable. The uncontrollable fates were in charge. Alternating peace and turmoil was to be expected and lived through while everyone waited for the hands of the Goddess to take pity, and lift their spirits once again to a more peaceful level. But one day, animal terror ran through the city; as a wave runs through the ocean, or panic through a crowd. The idols' hands had disappeared. Stolen by enemies, or willful desertion by the Goddess herself, no one had time to consider. How could there be thought when all their guidance for thought was gone. With the loss of the Goddess' hands, they forgot who they were. Unknown, even to themselves, they ran frantically into the forests. Looking, perhaps, for the serenity, or at least the predictability, of what they had lost."

"Wow," said Birdie.

"Birdie? Is Birdie in here?" The voice belonged to Monique. "Come on Birdie, let's go home. Okay?"

"I'm all right. I'm fine now."

"Come on out of there, and we'll stretch out and watch the stars or something."

"Oh, sure," said Birdie as he crawled back out of the bunker. "Thanks for the story, San."

The music continued. A little louder than before, if that was possible.

San adjusted her position. Thoughts became images. And structure, a string threaded through a needle, was gathering up the amoebae. Forming them into colored bags. The strings grew tighter, letting less perturbation enter, less activity go out. Excitation within the bag decreased and the contents grew lumpy. But the converse was there also. Taking in too much, too quickly; bags exploded. Dispersed. And clung as limpets to passing objects.

Nemesis' head appeared over the wall of the bunker. "San. You have not yet understood the meaning of God!"

San groaned.

"Why?" Nemesis asked. "Why would you say to Clarence, 'if there were a God'? The love of God bursts forth all over the world, every minute of every day, since life began. 'As it was in the beginning, is now....' Fish pouring out. Love embracing the fish. 'Come unto me' says Love."

A shriek ejected from San.

Nemesis took the hint, and left.

She should load the rifle and start shooting. Into the crowd on the roof. Or into the black streets. Anywhere.

She could put her bile on the end of the bullets. Sending the poison back to the society that nurtured it.

Maybe she should go with Garrett. His black skin could accompany her inner being of black bile.

"San?"

Dawson stood at the entrance to the bunker.

"Not now, Dawson," begged San.

"Yes, now. I've got a few things to say. You're wrong. You're wrong about what happens at the varsity."

Prostrate in her shell, San remained silent.

"For one thing," said Dawson, firmly, "you can't expect to be given what you want if you don't know what you want yourself. Secondly, You're damn right that we have boxes of knowledge. And every professor tries to make the area of his knowledge, his field or 'box' as you call it, as concise and true as he possible can. It's up to you, it's your duty to make something out of those boxes. Use them like building blocks or stepping stones for whatever you wish." Dawson's voice boomed off the wall of the bunker. "And the third thing I think you should be made aware of is: if you're looking for some general understanding of the universe, the world and the minds and actions of the people in it, you've got to allow yourself more than three years of study. You've got to be prepared to continue reading, thinking, pondering, listening, and articulating for a lifetime. If you don't think you'll enjoy that, then you'd better stay in your shell. But if you're unwilling to spend you life thinking, don't bother sniping out at people for not doing what you're indisposed to do yourself. Did you hear all that, San?" he yelled.

"Yes. Yes, I heard."

"Good. Now I'm going to go and dance."

For a long while, San remained prone. Her eyes were open but she seemed void of sensation.

Jack and Eleanor craned their necks into the bunker. Jack explained to Eleanor: "This is what happens to those who leave their natural place in society. It's the danger offered to everyone who breaks all connections they have with their past."

"Isn't that so," replied Eleanor. "If only she would take an interest in herself, she would buy a new dress, go to church, go home and raise her children. Good heavens, that's more than enough of a task for a woman."

They pulled their heads out of the bunker and disappeared from view.

One rifle shot would not be enough. The shot would go virtually unnoticed. The proverbial drop in the bucket. But not the drop that would break through the tension of a ready-to-overflow surface. It would take more than a rifle shot. Defensive structures would only harden a trifle more; impervious to the shattering of other broken shells.

"San, what are you doing in here?"

"Mmm? Oh, hello, David," San greeted him sleepily.

"Everyone has left. Let me help you out of here.

You're all cramped up."

"I'm dreadfully hot," she said as she allowed him to help her up and out of the bunker, "so demolished."

"When I couldn't find you, I thought that perhaps you had already fired the rifle and been taken away. Or you had given up your plans and left. I didn't know whether to be glad or disappointed."

The rifle remained behind in the bunker, but San was too weary to go back for it.

San's clothes, damp and wrinkled, were clinging to her body. "Excuse me," she said, "I'll be back, soon." She stumbled into the penthouse, found the string for the light and walked into the shower stall. She turned on the taps and as the water poured over her undressed.

The cool water penetrated her thick hair and brought her back to life once again. The water pressure was up; all the other tenants must be in their beds.

She increased the force of the water until each bead struck her skin, causing her nipples to leap out to meet the attack. The flesh on her back, her buttocks and thighs tingled in excitation.

The pipes gave their usual clamor when she turned off the water. Reaching for the remaining towel in the stack, she looked to read where it was stolen from. Nothing. Disappointing.

She wrapped the towel around her torso. A twist of the material under her arm and the tension kept it in position. She stepped back out onto the roof, the white towel reflecting the moonlight.

For a moment, San thought she was alone again. But as her eyes grew accustomed to the dark she saw David standing by the poplar trees. The two mats and sleeping bags had been collected and neatly arranged.

"If you won't come off the roof tonight, at least you can be more comfortable."

"I'm hardly dressed for leaving, am I?" replied San.

David took hold of San's cool hand and raised it to his lips.

How was he feeling? What sentiment? Confident? Smug? Tender? Solicitous? No way of knowing. Did he know the fulgurous effect his actions were having on her? No longer feeling distanced, deadened, cut off or isolated from interaction.

"Lovely," he said tracing his fingers over the lines of her face. His hand moved from the bridge of her nose to the edge of her face. Then from beneath her

ear down to her chin. Following her features first on one side then on the other.

The falling towel was rescued to be tousled through San's wet hair.

No words. No asking, refusing, explaining. The moon caught the silhouette of his straight shoulders as he undressed. Then bodies together. No distance. No interference.

She laid down on top of the improvised bed. David's fingers parted her pubic hair, and San gave a quiet laugh to see him wearing her mustache. Then, her body became waves of warmth, swelling and subsiding. A dragon, entering the waves, flickered his tongue, sorting through San's nether lips and seeking the fuse to ignite her ferment.

No longer waves, San became a gathering burning brush of lightning fire. Rolling over the waves in a storm. San, an embodied St. Elmo's fire.

The burning brush swept the waves. Seeking the protrusion to assist the fire's release from the water that held it captive. "There," breathed San. St. Elmo's fire wrapped itself around the base of the ship. Tightening the fire ring around its base, it proceeded to burn the way to the top of the mast. Base to mast and back again, salacious flames engulfed the ship. Finally, the burning brush discharged. Released from the water, the fire effused into tingling molecules of light. Only the final

spasms of consummation as the fire ravished its final grip over the ship, remained.

The mast slowly sank away, until only soft ashes remained. Stillness. The moon, stars and the lamp over by the poster cast their light on the floating bodies.

"I'm overwhelmed," said David. "I guess it's too late to ask if you're on the pill?"

"I'm not."

San listened as David gave a silent run of curses.

"But it's all right," she said. "I had my tubes tied, years ago."

David breathed a sigh of relief. "Stupid of me, though, not to find out first."

San chuckled quietly. "Another myth exposed," she said, propping her head on her raised arm so she could look at David.

"What's that?"

"I was thinking about the possible circumstances that conjured up St. George and the dragon. The dragon's tongue unfurled, continually fired up young maidens; quite unseemly for the sedate, unaggressive virgins that were supposed to exist in unruffled ignorance."

"Could be so," David smiled. "I'd say that St. George would be finding traces of an incinerated garter, were he to arrive here now."

"And you're the seditious incendiary challenging the Christian's laws."

"Tsk. Tsk." David shook his head. "Those laws will all die a natural death through desuetude, San. Don't spend your time fretting on it."

"Their use replaced." By what? By the values of commercialism? Positivism? Patriotism? Egalitarianism? All peas in the same pot? It was all bunk. Empty.

San didn't want to get riled up again. Not while she could still luxuriate in the warmth and aroma of their so recent intercourse.

"Maybe you're right," she agreed lazily. "Maybe sex itself will kill off the old laws. Dragon triumphs."

When San awoke, David was sitting up, dressed. It was early dawn.

"I have to leave shortly," he said, quietly. "I'm teaching an intersession. Eight to ten every morning."

"That's fine," San Cavalier assured him: "go ahead. Nice knowing you."

"What are you going to do?"

"I haven't decide yet."

"You confuse me, San. A warmer more passionate woman, I've never met. You're by no means as cold, detached or imperious as you pretend. You seem to have scattered your interests over most of the common ills of our generation. Yet your determination, your brightness have pulled you out of the mire. Kept you trying. But your accumulated enmities and your desperate moves to destroy them are only going to harm you." His voice changed from expressing concern to emitting anger and frustration. "At least you could find something of more enduring interest than this nonsense with Clarence."

"What is it you're suggesting?" San spoke half in jest, half distressed by the anticipation of another offer like: 'a few days in the country'."

"Slow down a little. Form some good, constructive thoughts that you can live by and then quietly go about

doing them. Do some collecting, developing, extrapolation of things that interest you; things you enjoy. Stick with them and see what you can come up with. No one can do more." He stopped abruptly. "I must go. If you want, you know how to get in touch with me."

San watched as he walked across the roof, and disappeared into the shack. She continued to stare absentmindedly at the door where he had left. And the poster beside the door.

The morning sun had risen high enough to shine over the parapet, lighting up first the top of the poster, and then gradually all of it down to the tattooed peg. She had no illusions about finding an 'enduring interest' in another person. That would be the same thing as she had been doing all along. Involving herself, losing herself in other people, other events. One more way of encapsulating anger. No, she wouldn't call on David.

She began to roll up the sleeping bags.

Pursue one's interests. That's what David was saying. Resistance to all programmed responses geared to abstract meaning away from the person. Meaning, bringing things back to the basic physical movement. Resistance to that structure that makes all people casualties, superfluous, predictable. Personal meaning challenging established pre-given structures. That must indicate some sort of revolution. But who would get the interpretation? Clarence? She couldn't let that happen.

Bed made, she went to wash up.

Interpretation. No matter what, Clarence must not succeed in creating his inner secrets story. Sensationalism tempered with enough facts to be believable. Enough to heat up and sway the emotions of his readers while raising his influence to a higher, more respectable, level of authority.

Leaving Michael's cut-offs and shirt in the lavatory, San put on the canvas skirt and peach colored tank top that she had worn her first day on the roof.

Existence as a casualty was not something to be hidden; but neither did she want to be a symbol. Glossed over in platitudes. Emptied of personal meaning. A commercial wrapper for a tin of entertainment. Her life couldn't be summed up that way. People might take a lifetime to express something they believe; a theme they have created through the living of it.

San completed dressing and went back out on the roof. She looked again at the poster. Yes. There was one more thing she would have to do. Slowly, deliberately, yet aware of the obsessive urge to complete her thought, San walked over to her khaki shirt. In the front pocket were the half-dozen cartridges. Removing the magazine from the rifle, she placed the bullets the way Vic had shown her. Hammer back and clicked into place. Rifle loaded. One last instance of breaking up must be accomplished.

Rifle placed solidly to her shoulder, right leg braced behind her, she took aim. Away with the image. Crack! Even as the bullet struck the poster she winced. The noise was still ringing in her ears when she recocked the rifle. The hole in the poster from the first shot was just above her peg. She raised the scope.

Public symbols. She wouldn't be one. Crack! We can only think with symbols, but they must be continually broken and reground. Crack! Sand in your throat. Crack! San the Sanguine.

San sat down cross-legged on the roof, putting the rifle aside. Relief. How could she have been considering killing live, real, flesh and blood people? They weren't paper exteriors like the poster. They weren't symbols of anything. Horrors. It was bad enough seeing the poster. Wooden splinters sticking out of her head. Her shoulder. San rubbed her living shoulder; it hurt from the recoil of the gun. What had she done? What reason? But the San in the poster, proud of being a casualty, a martyr of bitterness was over.

"Pete's alley! San. Did you do it?" Clarence rushed on to the roof. "David woke me. Started giving me hell. Said I'd better damned well make you give up this foolishness." Clarence stormed to the parapet and peered over the edge. "I told him I'd never interfere with a lady's business...." Clarence broke off his yelling. His voice,

now astonished, continued. "San. Everyone's walking around down there as if nothing had happened. Didn't you aim? I'll go back downstairs. You'd better shoot again, soon though. Other people will have heard the shot and the cops will be on their way. I'll phone Ivan."

"I'm not going to shoot, Clarence."

"What do you mean? You did already, didn't you? I heard, as I was coming up the stairs. You can try again."

"No. I shot the plasticized image of me."

"You what?"

"There." San pointed. "Look."

Clarence stared. Dismayed. "Holy grief! Why did you do that?" He looked at San as if she had done something far worse than shoot someone on the street. "Look at the holes. Two inches in diameter. Went right through the wall." His voice took on a new tone of horror. "You know what's on the other side of this wall? The stairs. Had I been a minute sooner you would have killed me." He disappeared into the penthouse. A moment later he was back out. "Right through. Didn't stop till they dug themselves into the other wall."

"It's a shame, isn't it, Clarence?" said San, laughing.

"You'd better shoot down there now, San. If you don't, everyone will think this whole set up was some sort of sham. I can't print anything if it ends in this ridiculous manner. Everything is ready except for the final sequence."

The biography of a city-sniper is ready. All we need is one well aimed shot."

San leaned back on her hands, looked up at him and shook her head. Sun, sky, poplars waving in the breeze; it was going to be a good day for packing.

Clarence was in an excited rage. "Think of all the people I gathered up here to help you out. What will they say if they find out you never intended to do anything? A lot of people left their work; all gave up their time to cure you. What a farce if you don't, right now, shoot at someone. If you do, they'll know, we'll all know, that we've done our best for you. With my story, everything you wanted said to the world will be said. But your way. You want to let everything fizzle out, like a wet fire-cracker."

"Clarence, here's the rifle. It's loaded. Go ahead."

Clarence backed away. "Me?"

San stood up and walked towards him.

"Not me," Clarence said. "I write what happens to others. It's my job to bring this before the eyes of the people."

San pushed the rifle against his chest. "Here."

"No. You. You started this and now you're trying to fob us off. You're going to be one of those isolated dots down there. Just going on with your business; not attempting to enlighten people at all. I was wrong to think you could carry anything through."

San laid the rifle on the parapet. "You can take it, Clarence." She began packing the things she had used.

"Maybe it's because you're a woman. Women murder much less often than men. They're too soft, I guess. Just when they're about to shoot somebody they're bound to think of what it's like to be shot. Too sentimental. Another example of your sex's inability to stick to a task and complete it. You're nothing. You know that? You're a one-legged woman. You don't have a place in the world, and you aren't capable of making one. You've failed at the only decisive act you've ever attempted."

San finished gathering up Michael's things and put them in his pack. She took one sleeping bag to wrap the rifle. Might as well try to return it to Vic before he missed it. Then, drop off the sleeping bag at Michael's. And then, well, she'd see....

It was unfortunate that the bunker was now a permanent fixture on the roof. Another monument to intentions, like the poplar trees and the swimming pool.

She walked to the door.

"San," Clarence shouted. "These four days were a total loss for you. You know that? A total loss."

"A shame, Clarence. A lovely shame," San said as she walked through the door, taking one last look at the poster.

THE END

The Defense....

I return to the interrogation room. The three people are taking their positions behind the desk. The novel is on the chair. It is as if only moments had passed since I left this room the day before. I take the novel off the chair and sit down under the lamp.

--According to the introduction you gave us to your novel, You're a One-Legged Woman, you are interested in investigating the relationship between subject and object. Is this correct?

--Yes.

--We also assume that you intend to portray not only the idiosyncratic relationship of one subject to the objective world, but that you also hope to reveal some generalizable truths.

--Yes, that is so.

--Now, it is part of our tradition that to arrive at what is true, one must be as objective as possible. This means directing one's attention towards the exposition of general laws that are detached from personal, relativistic "truths"; truths meaningful and verifiable only to the individuals involved. Thus detached, these laws become available for public diffusion as the people integrate these general laws into their own manner of relating to

the world. As you have written your novel from a subjective stance, we may have to move along quite carefully to try to discern if you express any general truths which could be understood as laws of existence and consequently usable in educational theory and practice, or if it is the case that your heroine demonstrates the life-world experience of one person, in one particular situation. Do you concur with our purpose?

--I would think that the presentation of a particular subject would reveal general concepts.

--We will see if that is the case. But, first of all, I think it would be beneficial to declare the standard view of subject and object. As we are all aware of the pitfalls of a solipsistic viewpoint announcing subjectively the characteristics of the objective world, many of us aim at separating the subjective from the objective by reference to fact, and often by manner of presentation. We can, by agreement and method, confirm the qualities of an object, and what the object will do under varying circumstances. This view of objectivity extends to include empirical-analytic deductions, scientific hypotheses that have demonstrable predictability, and perhaps could even extend to include belief systems that, through traditional and historical use, have an objective existence. For our purposes now, it will suffice to say that the objective has a public quality, which does not depend upon the existence of any one particular subject.

For a subject, the situation is quite the reverse; my subjective consciousness depends upon my continuing to exist as a subject. Although a subject's behavior might be visible to the public, and that behavior is most often highly predictable, the workings of a subjective consciousness are private and individual. Various proponents of Rationalism and many of the contemporary Positivists give subjective consciousness a self-enclosed ontological status. Descartes in his Discourse on Method and Meditations compares the certain existence of "I" with the questionable reality of those objects upon which the "I" makes judgments.¹ In this view the cogito has an absolute existence which is shared with God, that is totally separate from the "things" of the world. In the Cartesian tradition, a subject's consciousness exists separately from the objects that exist around the subject. The mind is separate from the body, and separate also from the language it uses to express itself. Do you agree with the background to subject and object that I have thus far presented?

--Yes. I agree that this is the way subject and object have been represented.

--But, it seems that an obvious theme within your novel is the wish to attach the subject and the subjective realm of meaning to all the objects and events that occur on the roof. Nothing exists separately from the heroine, her thoughts and her relationship to the objects and dialogue

presented. For example: the bunker is a memory of a real bunker in Sicily, a wall of cement on a roof, a "metaphysical fact", an intention calling a construction crew into action, and the idea of a protective shell; the poplars are eventful and significant to a greater degree than many of the characters simply because of the import they carry for San. So are we correct in believing that quite conversely to detaching the subjective from the objective, your wish is to fuse them into one person-related flow of meaning?

--I didn't exactly wish to attach subject and object. Rather, it was my intention in the novel to display the primary way in which subject and object are as one. My interest lay in how these two facets of existence relate to each other; how this relationship affects the definition of consciousness; and lastly, how this relationship is expressed by language.

This view is not, however, generally accepted. Contemporary pedagogy and epistemology assumes the discreteness of subject and object. In many cases, the realization of the vital relationship of subject and object only led to an intensified quest for the thing-in-itself. This resulted in some of Husserl's students spending months trying to find the essence of a bridge or a mailbox.²

In San's words, the belief in the object standing by itself has led to the objective quality of all things and words

being "cut", "chopped" and "put into boxes" thus "isolating" the knowing subject from those things that the subject might know. What I intended to accomplish in the novel was to reveal a subject by use of an objective medium thus making her subjective inclusion of the objective world available to the public; and conversely, to show how objects that are available to the public such as a rifle, a bunker and two poplar trees are bare skeletons to the reality of subjective meaning.

-- To explicate your view further, you could give an example of what an object is without the contribution of a subject, and also consider the opposite perspective: what is the possibility of a subjective consciousness without resource to objects and objective means?

--One of my earlier contacts with this exchange between the subject and object was in a book of poetry by Wallace Stevens. In a poem, 'The Plain Sense of Things', he portrays the idea that to see plainly, to see the bare object, requires more imagination than ordinary looking with all its social and privately learned accompanying associations. However, if vast imagination is required to see plain objects, then we have little justification in saying we have abstracted the person-subject from the object.

"...the absence of imagination had itself to be imagined. The great pond
The plain sense of it, without reflections, leaves,
Mud, water like dirty glass, expressing a silence,

Of a sort..." 3

It is one of the premises of phenomenologists that the human being bestows meaning on all that is encountered.⁴ The total experience of an object, such as a pond in the woods, becomes an idea in the mind of the subject which in turn is understood as the attributes of the object.

Just as we give extra life to a pond, so do we give and withdraw life from words. In The Necessary Angel, Stevens refers to the "soul in a figure" that Plato speaks of in Phaedrus. Stevens says that the unreality or reality of the figure is immaterial to us, if we can yield to participation with the imagery. But when we can no longer yield, the imagery loses its vitality. Imagination, whether going out to objects or words conveying imagery, "has the strength of reality or not at all."⁵ Without subjective participation, we can still understand what the word means, however, words that have lost their power to move are inert objects, useless for the task for which they were created.

But, now I will, as you suggested, proceed to consider the possibility of a subjective consciousness without resource to objective means. In other words, instead of considering how objects and objective patterns of meaning are "taken in" by the subject to become ideas within the subjective consciousness, I will consider how it is that the subjective consciousness expresses itself objectively.

In the view I wish to substantiate, even for the subject who is trying to see herself, to reflect on her own being,

there is a necessity of a primary transformation into the objective. When San said that she expressed her emotions through the pieces she played on the piano, we must remember that the piano is a public system of sounds, and that the works she played were generally the compositions of others. Even during improvisation, intervals and sequences were common to the society's musical traditions. Thus these sounds, presented outside herself, were a long way from "pure" subjectivity. What did belong to her, however, was the power of self-interpretation created by the objective existence of the piano, and through her skill in manipulating the notes and sounds that were available to her.

Merleau-Ponty, in an essay "On the Phenomenology of Language", writes: "Spoken words teach me my thought." 6 Thoughts or emotions that a subject does not have the means to present objectively are elusive and changeable; they lack the actualization of linguistic or other objectifying means of interpretation. A particular skill is required to satisfactorily interpret the subjective into the objective; a scream soon becomes overused, as San discovered. When overused, any sound or word, loses its cathartic power. At various places in the novel, San felt so incapable of presenting herself in a manner that could be understood that she was willing to hand her power of interpretation over to Clarence.

In this relationship between the subject's experience in the world and the use of language, not only does the experience of the subject give significance to signs, as we saw in Stevens' consideration of the word "soul", but also signs give significance to experience as expressed in Merleau-Ponty's statement.

-- Are you aware that you are reversing the meaning of subject and object? Don't be alarmed, you may have justification for the reversal. First, you considered a subject's associations with a pond; the object, pond, became an idea in the mind of the subject; the pond itself, something the subject couldn't isolate. Then you went on to assert that the subject has a need to acquire public means to express his or her own existence for the purpose of clarification of the self for the self and for others. The result of this exchange would be that our experience of the objective and object world is individual and private, while expression requires that the subject has learned some means of public objectification.

-- What I wish to show by turning subject and object inside out in this manner is that it is the intimate relationship between the two that is essential. It is a dominant theme of my work that the ongoing activity that occurs between subject and object is the essence of consciousness.

--I believe that the two views of subject and object that have been presented could be summed up in this quote

from Gadamer. I'll read it out for you:

"When epistemological inquiry sought to answer the question of how the subject, filled with his own representations, knows the external world and can be certain of its reality, the phenomenological critique showed how pointless such a question is. It saw that consciousness is by no means a self-enclosed sphere with its representations locked up in their own inner world. On the contrary, consciousness is, according to its own essential structure, already with objects."?

Being "already with objects" it becomes the task of any individual subjective consciousness to acknowledge, or re-cognize, that which the subject wishes to identify with his or her own being. This is, according to your theory, done by the subject interpreting his or her existence by use of objective means.

-- I think it would be within your interests to continue by explaining how it is that consciousness is "with objects".

-- It is the underlying assumption of the novel that consciousness is the "motion", the activity, the experience if you wish, of "stretching" out towards something while taking it into awareness. Consciousness ejects on to that which obstructs the moving outward activity, i.e. an object, thus named to describe that which meets the activity of consciousness. What consciousness "comes out towards" is not, of course, restricted to objects one can grasp. As Lloyd says, everything that San talks about is not something that can be pushed or shoved into shape like wet cement. What consciousness comes out towards might be

physical sustenance or mental sustenance. San refers to Trent taking sustenance from an outpouring of himself. With Lloyd's reference to the white walls, white ceiling and the experience of white on white resulting in white dreams, we have an example of consciousness being deprived of the objects it needs to "come out towards".

--I think phenomenologists would refer to this "coming out" as the intentionality of consciousness. You can see, also, how given that consciousness requires objects to accomplish its own activity, objects might seem to attract the attention of consciousness. The intentionality towards objects persists even though the possibility of reaching the "thing-in-itself" is virtually non-existent; non-existent because a subject cannot perceive without the contribution of the subjective.

--The objectivity that the subject intends toward, need not, of course, be only objects. It could also include, as I mentioned before, scientific laws and belief systems.

--Yes, but also what the subject "comes out towards" is certainly instrumental in shaping the personality of the subject. Thus reiterating the theme that what one "holds" in one's consciousness, (i.e. attends to) is what one also acquires as part of one's own being. For example, San believes she is "coming out" against shell-like people. Yet, this image of others is not separate from the self-image she has created for herself. Twice she envisions herself

as a closed tin can. Something that Clarence and Ivan want to open, invade and observe. In conversation with Garrett, she interprets a vision of herself as a tin that can be bought, ripped open, consumed and tossed away. The poster became a commercial wrapper for the tin. During the course of events in the novel, she manages to disintegrate this image of her identity but whether she will manage to create a new orientation to the world, and a better self-image to act from, is quite unknown at the end of the novel. Other characters, of course, have other objectives that they "tend" toward, and consequently make part of their existence. Eleanor "moves outward" from her existence to personify the traditional values of her home town, while Trent directs his activity to the actualization of his religious beliefs. Clarence lists other goals that drive man out of himself: greed for the acquisition of things, desire for attention, desire to actualize the idea of one's self-image.

The interaction between San and the physical and social demands upon her existence is ever-present in the novel. From the first pages, the reader is familiarized with the heroine's sensitivity to the "pull" of the life and objects of the world upon her actions and thoughts. The world, for her, has not been conceived of as something which she can act upon, but rather, something that acts on her. Her invective against altruism, giving up one's life by acting for

others; her description of the attraction that the street has for potential suicides, and her appreciation of uninterrupted distance, all demonstrate the tension reality exerts on her existence.

--Aren't you afraid that this could all be construed as only attributable to the subjective attitude of the heroine? That this empirical evidence you offer in the novel is an example of a self-enclosed consciousness?

--There are several reasons why San's subjective consciousness may appear to be self-enclosed. One reason is that her self-image, the public set of ideas that she uses to project her actions, is not particularly positive, nor clearly defined; neither for herself nor for others. Also, the meaning of her words is not as public as their meanings generally are. Neither does she share values with any one of the particular societies that arrive on the roof; the norms of the groups she has been part of are too diverse to coagulate into one acceptable standard. And finally, her action on the world seems to her to be insignificant and separate from real events of the world. The objective aspects of meaning, values, norms, and action seem to be severed from her subjective existence. It is only in the violent intention with the rifle that she attempts to establish "meaningful" communication.

--If I were to sum up for you, I would say that in showing how the subject is with objects and objective

patterns of meaning and events, you wish to exhibit the "motion" of consciousness. You believe the most fundamental aspect of the structure of consciousness is the intending, the "coming out" towards all that is encountered by the subjective consciousness. This gives an infinite possibility to what consciousness can know; the scope of the objects that the subjective consciousness is "with" is undefined. What consciousness "knows", however, remains unknown to the subject until the person thematizes his or her own existence by transforming the subjective into some objective form.

--Yes, I agree, except that along with the basic intending, is the turning, taking and holding activities that complete the exchange between subject and object. There is an openness, and indecisive quality in the character of intentionality. The turning, holding and taking are not necessarily included in the concept of "going towards", yet they are all essential to consciousness.

--What evidence do you have to verify this activity, this "motion" of consciousness? First, we were asked to consider the intercourse between subject and object. Then, we were asked to consider this activity, which is not a physical activity at all in the usual sense, but which is the reversible activity of acquiring an idea of an object within the subjective consciousness and expressing the subjective through the use of objective means. From then

onward we were encouraged to consider this reciprocity between subject and object as a description of consciousness. Now, have you any actual evidence for your theory other than the empirical evidence you have created in the novel?

--As it is part of my thesis that the subject is compelled to objectify and thus express his or her subjective consciousness in some form or another, be it sounds, words, music or art, it would be humorous if there were no examples of this objectification. The second major theme of this work is that the activity of consciousness is given objective form in language. This may seem a truism: Wilhelm Dilthey at the end of the last century certainly believed that all language and art was an "expression of life";⁸ Merleau-Ponty quotes and builds on Scheler's theory that expression is a form of consciousness.⁹ Yet, other than these grand statements, they do not concentrate on exactly how this is so.

--It seems I should interrupt here to say that despite some evidence to the contrary, people are not always expressing consciousness through language; we are not always talking or listening. You could avert this potential flaw in your theory by saying that during sleep, unconsciousness, or some types of mental illness, consciousness -- rather than directing its attention towards objects in the world, or expressing itself in social language -- directs its

attention towards its own ideational objects. There are also times when the intending towards objects and the meaning of other people's expressions is suspended, such as when one is contemplating, or during meditation. Now that these other possibilities have been mentioned, I think you should continue with your elaboration of the instantiation of consciousness by language.

--If the activity of consciousness is considered as the intending toward an object, the holding of the attention of consciousness, the turning and the taking-in of the idea of objects and objective meanings, then we can see how these basic meanings, (i.e. basic because they are fundamental to the structure of consciousness) make up the bulk of our language. Answers to the questions: who? what? how many? when? is going where? to whom? in what manner? conjoin with the basic morphemes to become added inflections within one word or part of the grammar of a sentence.

--This seems to be a revision of Chomsky's theory of the "deep structure" that is fundamental to consciousness and language.¹⁰ You are saying that it is the activity of consciousness that forms the primary structure of language, and that the structure of grammar, and the inflections that accumulate on to the basic morphemes, come later as the result of a need to articulate the direction and effect of the activity.

--As this evidence for your theory would be the most "concrete" part of your view, perhaps while you are explicating, you could relate your ideas to the way it would affect the practice of education.

--All right. Suppose a teacher posed the leading idea, the problem, to a group of students: "How many words can you find which express your own personal experience?"

--You could be referring to P.R. Strawson's theory of person-predicates: all those types of experience such as "is smiling" that need reference to the person concerned.¹¹

--Yes, except I would intend that the scope be much larger, and that the words themselves would reveal a system that is a connective pattern which could be discovered by every student. For example, suppose one was to consider expressions of the activity of "taking".

--In a "brain-storming" session of such an action, you would probably get a Niagara of words like: grasping, pulling, eating, consuming, attracting, stealing, drawing, sucking, and seizing.

--After the initial examples, the researchers, with the use of a dictionary as a reference book, could further expand the vocabulary that expresses their personal experience of "taking" to all its many more subtle distinctions; thus enlarging the "family" of words connected with this fundamental activity.¹² Grasping is a physical activity, yet the word can be used to mean the act of comprehension. When consciousness "seizes" upon an object it is an

act of apprehension. The dictionary meanings of contemporary "taking" words would thus lead us to the "taking" words that we have inherited from other languages.

--It comes to my attention, that the contemporary words, such as "take", "hold" and "turn", are more concrete than the amalgams of words that have evolved from other languages. Consider the derivation of the word "accept". Evolving from the word capere, meaning "to take", the prefix adds the meaning, "to take to one's self". Adding the prefix meaning "with" we have the word "conception". "Conception" can still be a physical description, as it is when it refers to impregnation; yet, the mental, abstract meaning describes the "taking in" of general ideas. Reception, receptive, exceptions, susceptible, deceptions, perceptions, precepts and forcepts, are all "taking" words which describe different attitudes to "taking". It could be that your intent is to suggest that this transformation of words, from referring directly to observable actions to words representing abstract concepts, is indicative of the evolution or development of human consciousness. First using words to represent physical objects or visible actions and then using them to refer to abstract acts of consciousness.

--A point regarding education. What you are doing by getting the students to consider these words as part of their experience in the world is giving abstract concepts

concrete associations. Despite the probability that we now have more and better trained teachers in our schools than we have ever had before, there is an increasing problem of illiteracy. The possibility that teachers are working increasingly more diligently to achieve a negative correlation in results, strongly suggests that there is something basically wrong in what we are doing. It is also a well known opinion that English is one of the most abstract of languages. Perhaps as we attach language back to the activity of the individual speakers, our language can once again become a truly expressive force instead of a detached, often meaningless, accumulation of inert ideas.

--This is not unlike L. S. Vygotsky's theme in Thought and Language¹⁴. He describes the syncretic nature of early speech when the word is mixed with the associations of the subject and the physical events it describes. As less of the subject's personal associations come into play and more of the qualities of the objects and events are considered, syncretic speech is transformed into complex, then pseudo-conceptual speech and lastly conceptual type speech and thought. What you are saying is that more meaning would be acquired if -- rather than teaching and understanding language at the conceptual level -- each individual traced his or her language, back from conceptual speech to personal syncretic experience with the word; thus "grounding" the words in personal existence.

--The educative purpose of this would be to revitalize language. As words are traced back to their origins which relate to the basic activity of consciousness, and as individuals increase the ownership of their language, the result should be a feeling of liberation. This person-related approach to language takes the direction of moving from the "inside" subjective existence to the "outside" social public systems in the world. This is a revolution of the consideration of language as a system of reference. Language, considered as a system of reference, expresses the "outside" prior to the "inside". The direction thrusts inward, from the knowledge of the parent or teacher, not outward, from the subject to the world. This is much the way your heroine, San, felt the use of language. In other words, the imposition of language as a social structure foisted upon the new generations, would instead be re-cognized by the personal expression of the subject's own experience in the world. Even the foreign origins of words would become secondary to the personal relationship with the meaning of the word. Consider the many derivations of the basic meaning of "hold", as it has been expressed in the word "tenere". "Intentionality", itself, is only another way of saying one is "going towards holding". In the same family of words would be: attention, tension, pretend, subtend, distend, retention, tenacious, tenure, and no doubt multitudes more. Holding something has a shared meaning with enclosing it within our

hands or our attention. Thus the research could continue to the "close" words: include, exclude, conclude, preclude, and so on. All of this research would give the participants an increased ability to make distinctions within their relationship to their world.

--This all sounds very similar to the ideas expressed by Paulo Freire in Pedagogy of the Oppressed. You start with a "problem-posing" view of education: "How is your existence expressed in the world?"¹⁵ This work with language is aimed at the accomplishment of "authentic reflection" which focuses on people in their creative relations to the world.¹⁶ The oppressive factor of education -- the teacher telling the students how they live, and how their consciousness objectifies itself -- is absent. You are concerned not only with objects and objective knowledge, but also with consciousness becoming aware of itself: instead of the subject disappearing in the ever-enveloping sphere of what can be objectively known, your view is concerned with revealing the "emergence of consciousness" as it intervenes in reality.¹⁷ The stagnation of society that results from a concept of language as unchanging in its abstractness from personal events is revitalized as the words become incarnate with the activity of consciousness that finds expression in language. Thus one of the teacher's primary roles is to help the subject give, objective, communicable form to his or her subjectivity.

--We have really only elaborated on the "motion" words, making them more obviously related to tangible aspects of a human's existence. Thus in our enthusiasm to elaborate your theme, we have been dealing with the "subject" type words. What about "object" words?

--Reference words would be considered as the naming of objects that meet a person's "going outward"; a delineation of those things that obstruct one's gaze. These "object" words, however, become descriptive, as aspects of their properties are taken into subjective meaning. For example, in the novel there are several mentions of sirens. The public meaning of the word is available to all English language speakers, so there is an objective quality to the word. It is interesting, however, to look at the process of development from the simpler origins of the word. Legendary meaning refers to women who made sounds to lure men. Only in the word "siren" and in some oblique relationship to "sounding out", does the meaning correspond to the siren (object) that is situated on an ambulance or police car. When people refer to a siren, however, the reference is more directly to the sound than to the object. In addition, the sound can be given a great variety of meanings, depending upon the experience and situation of the people who hear the sound. San likens a distant siren to a phrase in music, with a crescendo and decrescendo. The siren thus has a lulling effect. Later, however, as she listens, she

associates it with the possibility of the events that will occur if the sirens are headed towards her roof. Thus the sound-object-effect of the word "siren" all combine to form the meaning of the word.

The theory that the associations made to the word form an ongoing meaning with the object word. Tying down a word to an object, such as some analytic philosophers try to do, prohibits an awareness of the transformation of word meaning from concrete to abstract. Just by looking up the origins of words, one can often find a visible event, or a named thing, from which a variety of meanings have flowed. An example of this would be the "family" of words recognized in the analysis of the word tribute, which in Webster's is said to originally have meant "tribe's gift".

Although I have no "facts" to support the following story, other than the meaning of the morphemes themselves, this speculative history of the "tribute" words seems to me to be an example of how the movement of events corresponds with the movement of language. We start with the visible action-object of something given. Perhaps the gift was given by a small tribe to a stronger tribe as a form of "protection money". As long as the stronger tribe remembered the gift, the weak tribe would be safe from plunder. But the stronger tribe may have had a feeble memory, so every few weeks, months or years, they would return to

receive new tributes. Sometimes many small tribes had to gather the tribute together to meet the demands of the larger tribe. Thus they contributed. As they contributed that which belonged to themselves, they gave from their attributes. Perhaps if enough of them gathered together they could discontinue their tributary action. If this mutinous change of tribute was not successful, however, the stronger tribe would extract retribution. Perhaps retribution took the form of dragging the defaulters through the fields, badly rubbing their skin; taking retribution out of their hides. Perhaps they gave them a "sound threshing" to beat the seeds out of them. Or threw them through the air. All of these manners of punishment added new meaning to the trials of paying tribute. No doubt, when the tribulators came around pressing for the surplus that the tribes didn't have, the absence of "tribute" was a source of much tribulation.

It might be assumed that the members of the stronger tribe spread the tribute around, distributing the goods. Perhaps the holder of the goods sat on a tribunal while he was judging who would have what. We know this type of distribution rarely happens to the satisfaction of the various members who, if too disgruntled, will seize the holder of the tribune, dispose him from the tribunal and redistribute the goods according to their own values or power structure.

And, of course, tribes are not the only givers of gifts for practical reasons. The meaning becomes extended. Mountain streams are small and thin in comparison to the rivers in the valley; each year the mountain streams give their gift of water, sending tributaries to the water below. We name things from our understanding of what they are; thus the naming of "tributaries" seems a reasonable transformation of meaning from one type of event to another. It seems to me that in all of these "tribute" words, there is really no distinction between "subject" type of words and "object" words.

With this method of researching the experience conceptualized in words, not only do words become more concrete, they also take on a fullness of meaning that is not available in a stricter, one to one, meaning-to-word, use of language. For the person, the method establishes (in regard to the word itself, the method re-establishes) a connection of meaning which was not available when words were attached to particular events or objects. This inquiry into the use of words and meanings as they relate to human existence should not only assist the "uneducated" to acquire more precise words for their meanings; it should also assist the "educated" to acquire more meaning to their words, thus bridging the gap between, say, the street kid and the academic.

--In the pedagogy most currently accepted, rather than commencing to teach from the consideration of the participation of the subject with the object and public systems of meaning, the educator has generally been content to lay out these objective systems and require the student to "take them in" in disconnection. By your own theory, this enlargement of the objective "ground" that consciousness is "with" would seem to be a positive influence. In order to become educated a student should have as many structures of objective knowledge to incorporate into his or her own being as possible. In this view your philosophy adds little to current practice in education.

--Yes, but the "taking in" is only "one side" of the activity of consciousness. The premise of the human as a meaning-bestowing being is suppressed. Objective meaning such as you initially referred to already has an existence that has no need for the student's contribution. San expressed how she felt about the one-sidedness of this imposition of objective knowledge when she tore alternate petals from the dandelion. "Not me, not me, not me," would have been her reaction to this concentration of objectivity. The traditional separation of subject and object, student from existing objective knowledge, surely must be part of the reason for student's feelings of alienation from the events of the world; or feeling themselves connected with the events of the world, they infer that it is the institutions of education that are isolated and "out of touch".

The more concentration that is applied towards isolating the existence of objects and objective meaning, the more insignificant the activity of the subject must become.

--Unless, of course, it is the subject, himself, or herself, who is organizing and objectifying the relevant issues.

--Ah, yes. However, most text books that students are required to study have the material organized and ready to be "taken in".

--As you have reiterated in your themes of the novel, there is a necessity of expression. Besides the "taking in" students must have the time and skills to express their subjective selves in an objective manner. What this means to me is the vital role that the arts play within the role of education. There has been a trend of late to cut down on the amount of time allowed for music, drama, painting and sculpture in the schools. These are seen as "extras" virtually unnecessary to the more important "core" subjects. If we prefer, as we must, that the students not express themselves by idle chatter, and petty acts of violence and vandalism, then their "power of interpretation" i.e. their objectification of their subjective consciousness, must be practiced in other ways. Education, from the perspective given in your thesis, could be said to be the acquisition of the means to fruitfully express and interpret one's own existence in the world. There is plenty of room here for

interpretations. At the beginning of the novel, San was portrayed as not having this ability of interpretation. And probably the most "fictional" part of the story is the amount of time and attention people were willing to give to allow her to work out her blocked expression that was intending to break through with a rifle. How many of us, upon meeting a young woman with a rifle, or perhaps a ranting teenager in class, would suspect the rich subjective store of unique meaning hidden behind the words they were shouting? If we can consider the fact that most students whether in grade school or in the universities are given virtually no "receptive ground" to give value to their words, than we can appreciate how fortunate we are that no more of them have taken to the roofs with a rifle to express their "out coming".

--Yes, yes; but. Students must be taught how to make their own "receptive field", in clay, music, paint, words, electronics, or whatever, thus intervening with the things of the world in a deliberate manner. It's a change of attitude that is required; attitude and method, not mushiness. Each person must develop his or her own skill of interpretation and objectification.

I mused that, whether or not they agreed with the philosophy and its educational implications, they were already immersed in its ideas. Their discussion on the

educational implications continued. At some time the lights had been turned up; the wall behind them was covered by shelves of books.

--Have you anything to add?

--I'm afraid that in your response, you've already said more than I had thought of.

--Well then, I shall also give a few concluding remarks. Behind every theory and all practice of education, there is a -- usually disguised -- philosophy of what it means to be human. I find it pleasing that what originated as a highly philosophical discussion of subject and object could evolve to a definition of consciousness which was not only given demonstrable evidence, but also a method of revelation which relates directly to the practice of education. We have moved carefully, and quite possibly have discovered general truths about human existence. I'm not sure if you realize it but, even though we started with the intention of revealing something about subjective existence, we have perhaps, found objective proof why this should be true in fact. If this can be further verified, then what you were calling the subjective expression of consciousness, would really be the objective process of consciousness. Do you understand? It would be the activity of consciousness that would be the universal, and the particular and individual would be the ways in which different publically ratified patterns of meaning were organized and interpreted by the

individual persons, and the society that is being lived.

Well done.

--Thank you. During this interview much has been clarified.

--And thanks to you for bringing this to our attention.

NOTES

1. Rene Descartes, Discourse on Method and Meditations, (New York: the Liberal Arts Press, Inc, 1960), p.109.
2. Hans-Georg Gadamer, "The Phenomenological Movement," Philosophical Hermeneutics, trans. David E. Linge (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p.131.
3. Wallace Stevens, The Palm at the End of the Mind, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. 1971), p.382.
4. Listed by B. Curtis, Phenomenology and Education, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1978) as one of the three distinguishing features of all phenomenologists, p.xiii.
5. Wallace Stevens, The Necessary Angel, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), p.3-5. "...or not at all" Imagination gives itself completely over to the objects it poses, whether these objects be things in the world, words, or ideational objects. If we cannot yield participation, then understanding is still possible, but the imaginative "force of reality" is withdrawn.
6. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Signs (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p.88.
7. Gadamer, p.133.
8. Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History, (ed) H.P. Richman, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1961) p.117.
9. Merleau-Ponty, Consciousness and the Acquisition of Language, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p.47. The reference to Scheler's work is more radical than "form of consciousness"; the particular paragraph I refer to is:

"Scheler's essential contribution is the notion of expression. There is no consciousness behind the manifestations. These manifestations are inherent in consciousness; they are consciousness.

What I have done, I believe, is to attempt to explain the basic nature of these manifestations, and also do this in such a way that I do not start with an "empty" idea of consciousness.

10. Noam Chomsky, Cartesian Linguistics, A Chapter in the History of Rationalist Thought. (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), p. 31-51.
11. P.F. Strawson, Individuals, (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd, 1959), p.104.
12. "...subtle distinctions...", "family" of words. I associate the ideas here with the work of J. L. Austin, particularly as his philosophy is revealed in the paper, "A Plea for Excuses", Classics of Analytic Philosophy, (ed) Ammerman, (New York: McGraw-Hill book Company, 1965). In the Austinian style of ordinary language philosophy, ordinary language is only the first word; research will reveal the multitude of fine distinctions that clarify what is really meant. The finding of the "family" of words that make up the distinctions is, he believes, fruitful and educational for its own sake. What his work and mine have in common is the use of words to make distinctions in the subject's approach to the world. I believe that my work, however, attempts to find the relationship between language and human existence and thus seeks a greater depth of understanding.
13. See Gadamer p. 124 & 134-137; and Freire: p.67. There is a difference between knowing the things which are

in the world of objects and knowing the actuality of consciousness. Perhaps, the "meta-action" of reflection, when consciousness looks at itself, occurs with the recognition of consciousness performing the same acts on itself as it does on the objects of the world. It seems to me a logical ordering of events that the words that objectify the seeing of visible events should precede the words that objectify consciousness considering consciousness.

14. Lev Semenovich Vygotsky, Thought and Language, (Cambridge, Mass: M.I.T. Press, 1975).
15. P. Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, trans, Myra Bergman Ramos, (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970) p.66.
16. *ibid.* p.69
17. *ibid.* p.68.

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the traditional acquisition of world facts, because if one is to interpret one's existence in the world, one needs to have an interest in what history, politics, attitudes and beliefs make up the state of the world in which the subject is a part. Plus, if one desires to make a unique interpretation of their own unique existence, one must know what has been said and done before; that which has already been bequeathed to objectified consciousness. The needs and interests that are required to express one's subjectivity in the world, will serve as the motivation to acquire knowledge about the objective world. Some things cannot be known until they are done. For example, as San mentioned in the novel, perspective is something that we all see and know of since it was objectified a few centuries ago. However, when any subject comes to the "drawing board" and places his idea of perspective on the paper, then he can see for himself how well defined and how articulate his conception of perspective really is.

--It would be the same situation for any person's objective presentation of opinion and thoughts. One might criticize an historian for having a biased view, however, if one collects a variety of facts, perhaps all that are available, one would still find the necessity for personal decisions which would express one's own interpretation. All people, through education, should at least acquire the ability of self-interpretation. They should also be aware that their interpretation may only be one of many possible