

Grace Before the Fall

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Geri Lipschultz

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This dissertation titled  
Grace Before the Fall

by  
GERI LIPSCHULTZ

has been approved for  
the Department of English  
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

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Zakes Mda

Professor of English

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Howard Dewald

Interim Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

### Abstract

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#### Grace Before the Fall

Director of Dissertation: Zakes Mda

*Grace Before the Fall* is an annotated novel that follows a flaneuse on her journey toward love and social activism. It is set in a pre-9/11 New York City, during a week in the summer of 1980.

Geri Lipschultz, in her critical introduction, confronts both the instability and the virtual death of a text (drawing on Robert Scholes and Gayatri Spivak), as well as its revival in the hands of a contemporary reader. Lipschultz positions herself as a new reader in her revision/revival/revitalization of an old text—whose title, contents, and structure have been altered from their original construction thirty years past. She documents her course of revision, which begins with a rupture, itself a consequence of her impulse to investigate the etymology of selected words. Part of her work is an interrogation of the nature of revision itself, which might boil down to the adage offered by Heraclitus: You cannot step into the same river twice.

Lipschultz observes that her novel's initial modernist influences, namely Joyce and Nabokov, have been decentered by the ethos of the postcolonial/postmodern novel, given her changing reading preferences. Her introduction invokes both a personal and a civic history. It introduces the reader not only to the text but also to a paratext that resembles storytelling at times, offering knowledge gleaned only after the fact—for example the way AIDS was ravaging New York without its having a name—and investigates how that retrospective knowledge positions itself for any reader. The

revisions within the text, she writes, have provided portal-like openings for character and setting, much as do architectural renovations. The paratext offers historiographic, geographic, and etymological asides—and memoir—whose purpose is to document the passage of time and the metamorphosis of a city. Lipschultz paints these changes with nostalgia and a sense of loss.

She argues that the annotations are not essential. They are there at the reader's discretion—placed as endnotes—as the novel, now situated within a magical realist context, articulates its theme of love and nature in conflict with the powers that be.

Approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Zakes Mda

Professor of English

**Dedication**

*In memory of my parents*

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There are many people to acknowledge in a book whose gestation is more than thirty years. I begin with my director, Professor Zakes Mda, whose patience, compassion, guidance truly directed the revisions. There would be no book without Professor Mda: I would be scrambling for eternity in the no-fly-zone of revision without ever finding a place to safely land. Another member of my committee, Professor Janis Butler Holm offered me a feminist reading of the book, along with the kind of support that kept me in life when graduate school seemed like a series of Herculean trials. For the latter, I have many others to thank, including Dominika Adamova, Marlene de la Cruz Guzman, Alison Stine, Lana Oweidat, and Libby Whitley, as well as my east coast contingent—Claudia Liu, Maryellen Rothberg, Janice Buckner, and Jacqueline R. Slater.

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## **Resurrecting *Grace Before the Fall*: Why Kiss the Corpse**

**“Once upon a time and a very good time it was...”<sup>1</sup>**

When I originally wrote the book that follows, I was aware that I was listening to voices. I was beset by voices. That’s how it goes. That’s how it went. A writer writes a novel. Like Shakespeare’s Gloucester, she sees it feelingly. She hears voices. Things occur to her. A plan arises, a strategy forms. All the while, she’s writing. She does what she must, most of which comes instinctively, because it’s there. Things snowball. She throws in her good friend, although this friend is so obviously morphed no one would know. It’s like fried rice—filled with leftovers and spiced for taste. It used to be that spices were used to extend the life of rotting meat, to cover up smells, to kill the bacteria, but now it’s for taste. The writer seasons the book to her taste. She’d already created the perfect man. She’s been doing that in every novel she’s ever written. Oh, if only she could find such a man! She finds herself laughing and crying—fool that she is. Well that’s how it was for me when I originally wrote this novel thirty years ago.

I lived to write this book, especially when it took off, for me, in the spring and summer of 1981. Like my character, Grace Rosinbloom, I had my own little studio in Greenwich Village. It wasn’t easy to secure an apartment in Manhattan, and I had to work hard to pay for it, as I tried to make a life there for myself. For a while, I worked part-time for the City, then for a bank, and I taught at a community college, as an adjunct lecturer. It was three years after I’d gotten my MFA from Iowa—two years since I’d left

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<sup>1</sup> So, as I speak here of origins, I’m invoking one of the two writers—Nabokov being the other—whose writing pulled me under, so to speak, whose currents are responsible for drawing me into the obsession/profession, the art and life of the writer. Of course everybody knows this is how James Joyce begins his iconic *Portrait of an Artist as a Young Man*. This is just to acknowledge him as close as possible to the beginning of this enterprise.

Iowa City, when I began working with a character, who was longing for love, who was struggling for agency. She was flaneuse-like in her search. My narrator hovered over her, capturing her every thought. The world of Manhattan floated through her, what she read of the newspapers, what she saw; voices that she heard on the radio would enter into her dreams, her thoughts, and she was a character who lived in her mind, very self aware. The problems of the world became her very own, and this drove her along, in her very rich life that thickened into complications as her thoughts turned into deeds. The plot became very complex, as I gave full rein to my obsession with language, and I let go, allowed the character to usurp the life I had in mind (the last five words became the title for my last [unpublished] novel) for her. Among the ideas she took to was this idea that I heard, probably over the radio, which I was addicted to, not having the funds to buy newspapers—about women being sought to be receptacles of the sperm of Nobel Prize winning scientists. That, in addition to my own longing, my office-mate's burgeoning pregnancy, and the following dream were the original inspirations for this book. It was a dream I had starring a very handsome TV repairman whose remedy for my broken TV was to throw it out the window, which he did. In the process, he left his genius worm, a golden centipede. In the dream, I took this worm to the Library of Congress. We were on a bus together, endlessly discussing the fate of mankind. I lost him in the library, and I panicked. I gave most of the dream over to Grace, and she flew with it.

I lived in the company of many artists—singers, dancers, painters, writers. I was always going to performances and coming home in the wee hours. I shared my work with no one, until I found first one, then a second agent, who represented the book. It failed to find a home, after eight times out, and my agent dropped me. I was awarded a New York

State fellowship for the first fifty pages of the manuscript, and I performed in a one-woman show that included excerpts from the novel, but the novel remained unpublished.

An unpublished novel takes up more space in a writer's body than it does in any closet. It doesn't merely sit there, but it grows roots and underwater sprouts. It has a life that embeds itself into the interior of a writer. Or at least it did for me. And it is a dark life. In my case, there was a self that became the shadow that covered up the expanse of heart, the journeys that inlaid themselves upon the writer when she was writing that book. Did that book ever truly rest? Was it ever a corpse in me? Probably not. It lived in me. It reminded me of dashed hopes. It reminded me of a dream that failed. It spoke to me, saying, "You will never be published, you will never be published, you will never be published," and when it stopped saying that, it said, "You are weird, your ideas are weird, there is no place in this world for you or your ideas." Just as I interiorized the failure coming from the non-publication, those voices, those roots kept growing from my interior to my exterior; the failure was complete—even if I never stopped writing, those roots were there; they grew, they were strangling me, and to defy them, I went and applied to graduate school. I uprooted my life. I tried to leave the roots in New York. I hoped they wouldn't follow. I hoped they would dry up, metamorphose into strings whose decay would fertilize. And I'd like to think they have. Defiance is the only way to cut off a root. What Grace does is an act of defiance. We have this in common, among the many things we have in common, along with the voices. A writer hears voices, and when she rewrites, she hears voices from the past, and there are many voices carried along a third person narrative. The narrative of *Grace Before the Fall* contains the voices of artists, intellectuals, voices of the law, voices of the medical world, and the world of

science and government—as well as the voices of what we call the inanimate world. This is the world of Grace, the world that inhabits her, the world that she inhabits.

There are several authorized voices, of which this is one, one that might be called metafictional, in that I'm speaking to you—as if you could answer back, and oh, reader, you shall, you shall. I will hear you. I will intuit you by your deeds, and I will interiorize you. In fact, I hear the voices of all my earlier readers, the voices that I am speaking back to—in defiance, to some extent. What does one do with voices? Grace hears them. They come into her dreams, they come from longing, from wish and fear, and they contain those tumors, with parts of teeth and hair and organ cells. Teratomas they are, and her voices are like those teratomas that grow outside the parameters of dreams into beings that permeate her pulsing world and compel her to act. We see them, those of us who read her book. We are asked to reckon with them, what they say what she does, because of what she sees, originating in words that compel her on a computer screen, words that turn into a voice in her head.

Notwithstanding how utterly alive this book has always been for me, how it enlivened me to write it, how it called itself into being before me, and how I sobbed when the call came to its end—its first in a series of endings; notwithstanding all this, I call this book a corpse, and I call this writing a kiss. That it was beastly—well that you can see if you can for a moment try to imagine how it feels to have a massive system of roots choking off one's life's blood. Imagine how it feels to have those roots growing buds, appearing outside one's being! Imagine seeing the text anew, after an original rupture, and a real revision orchestrated by way of a committee who read the book, offered instructive criticism, and a writer with a newfound ability to re-envision her own text,

where openings inserted themselves like pockets in advent calendars and dimensions revealed themselves. It was revived first by way of annotations, and then, after the initial criticism of my committee, when a genre was identified. I returned to the text with an opening in my own archaeology and began to formulate a point of view that gave greater flexibility. Attention to the conventions of genre allowed for greater liberty, and the world pulsed with possibility. Nor was I restricted only to the world as perceived solely by Grace. The widening of the point of view offered more latitude and literally opened doors to dimensions that were visual. More voices, more history, more vision. There was re-vision, more to be seen, more to be heard. Much more had to unfold, more words to capture, more detail, no constraints on what Grace made manifest, what other characters saw, how they saw, and one new character literally flew in from an open window. The revision itself was exhilarating. As Grace and her story became more vivid, more round, I saw that the text became more capable of commanding engagement. The revision repaired my connection with the book. I believe it also exorcised a demon—but time will tell. I journeyed once again with the flaneuse who walked her way into martyrdom. Am I released? That it might be the character calling the author into being, rather than the other way around is what Carl Jung suggests when he writes: “It is not Goethe who creates Faust, but Faust who creates Goethe” (170-1).

### **On Revision as Revival**

The opportunity to situate one’s own novel among the volumes of one’s own personal canon is both a dubious honor and a daunting challenge. It is an honor, shall we say, with much at stake. The fact that this novel came twice, or rather, that it has been substantially revised and reconfigured in a thirty-year period only exacerbates that fact.

How is it that one picks up and revises an old novel? Would it have been better to have started fresh? Let the corpse disintegrate? Why kiss the corpse? Why revive it? Is this the reason my mind keeps traveling its path back to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, with no small amount of shuddering, with no small degree of dread? The disparity between the signifier and the signified is perhaps no better illustrated than in that novel. The creature himself is in so many ways a misunderstood text. What Victor had in mind was not what the materials of his "workshop of filthy creation" or the *language*, had produced (Shelley 32). Of course, would that Victor would have been able to render his creature a corpse. Victor's "revision" would have been the antithesis of a revival. What makes this creature speak? What is it about him that commands power? Is it his brute strength? Is it the very fact of this misunderstanding?<sup>2</sup> Is it the very fact that he is unstable, that he cannot be tethered by language? At the end of a book whose phrase I'm reworking, *Bodies that Matter*, Judith Butler reminds us that one cannot own language, that "speaking is always in some ways the speaking of a stranger through and as oneself, the melancholic reiteration of a language that one never chose"(242). Although here Butler is talking about words, the way the medium shifts, how it may have betrayed her, one can relate this "melancholy" to which she refers to the "shudder" I spoke of above, and to the shame that visits Victor Frankenstein and that strikes the writer who revisits her old text—as if she should have gotten it right the first time. If language itself is a beast that a writer tames, it doesn't stay tame for long. It's as though Victor, unable—or unwilling—

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<sup>2</sup>There is an irony of course—that the beauty and nobility of his soul, as expressed by language that he has taken great pains to learn, is nullified by his body? In this way, he might speak for the feminine, for although neither body is inscribed in the Platonic ideal, both help to reify that ideal by serving as bodies that *don't matter*.

to revise his beast, left him there for us to remain in conversation with. All of this speaks to the supreme difficulty of tethering by language.

My beast, my book—the characters, the setting, the story—had also haunted me. In the world, it was a corpse, but it had a life in my mind. In the world, its haunting had come to an untimely end. There was no one to “bestow animation upon lifeless matter” (Shelley 32). Its re-emergence for me would come serendipitously.

I’ve enlisted, for the most part, writers writing about language to help me examine my revised novel as a work of literature in and among other works of literature, embedded in a history of writing. The very end of Butler’s book (*Bodies That Matter*) discusses the effect of performatives, namely language that promotes identity, promotes production. Mary Shelley wrote her story, and there is discrepancy about how much of a hand Percy Bysshe had in the revision, but there were at least two versions. In her day, the book was successful. A play that she attended was yet another reinscription of the story, and the fact that the book and its creature continue to “speak” may have much to do with others, reinscribers or revisers—most of them film-makers, and others, too, who reinscribe by way of theorizing or “introducing.”

At first, in the perpetual revisions of the introduction itself, I despaired as attempt after attempt, halted sometimes mid-sentence, for the suspicion of insufficient numbers of stones unturned, and each time, I had thought—this is it: this brilliant concoction distilled by a critic will justify what I, in my abject ignorance, determined to create in my fiction. Each attempt, and this one, too, I believe it now, even as I write, even as I force myself to punch in word after word, will fail—and I thought the reason was that each critic connects to an earlier critic, and each critic is followed by a still more brilliant critic. I

took notice as critic after critic became re-interpreted, under contention, disputed, undone, in an unending chain of links. The language of criticism morphing under their care like an anaesthetized patient, the language settled for that moment—but not for long. It would rise up and fling itself into hands of the next one. Then, it occurred to me that this in itself might be my point, or *the* point. This instability, the destabilization itself spoke. The dispute spoke, and instead of corpses, of dead, useless, sloughed off skins of an unapproachable beast, what I saw was perpetual metamorphosis, perpetual life. A “gloom” lifted, and instead something that approached “frivolity” took over. I thought, this feels familiar. It is what happened when I rewrote the novel itself; waves of gloom were followed by sparks of frivolity.

When Gayatri Spivak, in her preface to (her translation of) Jacques Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*, defines Hegel’s *Aufhebung* “as the relationship between two terms where the second at once annuls the first and lifts it up into a higher sphere of existence,” she is speaking of what a preface can do for the book it introduces (xi)<sup>3</sup>. Spivak speaks of the preface as being a “son or seed”—using Derrida’s “structural metaphor”—with the ability to re-engender or “recover” the “father (text or meaning)” (xi). These terms help to describe the process by which a reading might invigorate a text, especially when that reader must prescribe by writing. Although Spivak speaks specifically about the reinscribing by way of something prefatory, this process of reinscribing, of scribing

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3 Of course, if this were a paper focusing on *Frankenstein*, we could say that the creature’s reading of *Paradise Lost* and the other assorted masterpieces of western literature—including *The Sorrows of Young Werther*, which is what I read while originally writing my novel (the intertextuality, the reincarnation, this reading reviving, and one wonders to the extent that every book is a revision, a reinscription, with parts of texts from the “charnel house” [Shelley] of western literature)—and maybe this reading is what accounted for his nobility, his “lifting,” namely his “journey among masterpieces” (Anatole France).



anew, of son upon father (could we call it daughter upon mother?) speaks to what happens when a writer revisits her own work.

What especially strikes me is the image of the seed that breaks open the text through the text and remanifests the text, essentially by making fodder and history of the text. Through that fodder it grows a new text. This resembles very much what happened to me when I revisited my old text.

If we take the metaphor of son upon father and examine it, if the son is to lift up the father (or daughter to mother), the son must see the father outside of the relationship. A break must be made. It might be the piety that motivates the son to re-member the father, but it's the piety itself that will block any action, any clarity—for the piety itself is a code that must first be disrupted, then transcended for the son to reinscribe. This translates to the loyalty a writer might have to her text, with the false assumption that text itself could be stilled in time, as if the text were a stable thing. And the underbelly of loyalty is shame (gloom?)—when the writer cannot find her way to revision, it's as if the corpse is the culmination of loyalty—when loyalty becomes a brick wall that cannot be traversed.

A formidable intimacy exists between reader/reinscriber/seed/son and text/father. What makes it especially formidable is the knowledge that it must be betrayed for the good of all concerned, and the son/reinscriber goes forth with a set of knives, surgical instruments. A cutting ritual is at work, and steps must be taken, steps that must not be skipped. This would certainly be true for Spivak, the prodigal daughter of Derrida, and here his translator. Note that it's through Spivak that I read Derrida, and it's through me that Spivak speaks to you, my reader. Still, we have the number of texts as there are

people reading, plus one—or maybe not one? Or maybe no texts, just prefaces? Spivak writes, “It is inaccurate yet necessary to say that something called *De la grammatologie* is (was) the provisional origin of my preface. And even as I write, I project the moment, when you, reading, will find in my preface, the provisional origin of your reading of *Of Grammatology*” (xii). I envy her for her ability to be able to distinguish the text(s), to refer with separate title(s). So clearly they are not the same texts. One is in a different language than the other. Inaccurate, she says, but necessary. Inaccurate but necessary, because of instability, because “all conclusions are genuinely provisional and therefore inconclusive, that all origins are similarly unoriginal, that responsibility itself must cohabit with frivolity...” but all this must not be “cause for gloom” (xiii).

I have to applaud that small comment, because gloom is the first thing one feels, but writing through the gloom, one finds herself energized for being part of the rupture, rather than the simply the viewer or the consequence of rupture; one participates, called to action, and the gloom dissipates; it's like a mirror, if you laugh, if laughs back at you. It is a dark laughter, not innocent, not stable. The infant/toddler laughs, experts say, because there is something unfamiliar that sneaks in along with the familiar. Fear rises up first; fear cracks the loyalty and makes the daughter laugh.

Actually, I, too, changed the title of my book. And in a sense, I, too, translated it into a new language, from another language. I, like Spivak, knew both languages, but the writer of my first text, the one I revisited thirty years after it was originally written—that writer did not know the language of the second text, the language that was produced, language that I know now—even though that first writer has my name. The language I

speak now reflects many things, not the least of which, the large numbers of books I have read—especially in the last few years, as a doctoral student at Ohio University.

There is much here to help me tease out the occasion for my re-entrance into the text that I had left behind, the one that follows, that you will read, that this is preface to. But first, about two years ago it was, I took a knife to it. Not a real knife but mentally, with knives for eyes, I/daughter approached text/mother—so obviously, a reversal, so obviously the blood was mine—*was*, that is, inasmuch, by which I mean to say *only, as I remembered it*. Mother/daughter share a blood. The daughter now with the power to unravel the mother—the mother no longer bleeding, the child now with the seed, with the blood. The text did not speak. It was as though a corpse—dry, dead, crusty. No, I did not feel the pain, just dread and nausea, and fear that I could not break through the mother. Gloom, yes. I had been given an assignment. My assignment had been to theorize a text, not just any text, but my own text, my own work, and I was at a loss. The thought of analyzing one of my “failed” novels produced something that felt more pronounced than mere gloom. I considered both unfinished work and finished work; in the thirty-plus years I’d considered myself a writer, I’d completed a handful of plays, a few books of stories, and five novels. I decided to look at my first novel, which had had a measure of success but ultimately no takers. I started reading it and felt a stirring, but I didn’t know what to do about it. The assignment had come from my class in History of the English Language. I was fascinated by the idea of this common language, from which many languages had sprung, and as I was reading, it occurred to me to take a word and examine its root. I chose one, and then another, and then another. I looked up Indo-European roots, and I wrote down the word, letting the world of that word emerge. I started creating

footnotes around the scooped-up words that I'd isolated. Suddenly, opening happened, a disruption that would lead to a full-out dismantling that would sunder the text, split the text, by way of an investigation of its atoms, its molecules; I would add paratext. Numbers would appear to the right of these words in the text of the body, and below the line indicating separation there would be a number to the left of the annotation. The root words were in bold, often unintelligible words, not even words but grunts within which was a world of words, a history of words, a story of words, and probably a fictional history, an archaeology, a sign of life on earth; if fictive, it represented a rich and vast and living history. The words and their stories captivated me. I began with the number one, and by the end I was up to well over two-hundred. That number corresponded to the way the world wounds itself around the Indo-European root word, the puddle that formed around it. Puddles of description, of history. That information was like a small stone shattering a glass house. A tiny word. The first word I chose was "dream." But there was a curious disconnect; from "dream" came "deception" and "joy" and "music." These words, their histories, their connections that I would make, were outside of the text, creating another layer. But they were sufficient to disrupt and illuminate the text, with their mysterious connections, words speaking to each other and through the text, as if they were lights sparking each other, with the equivalent of prisms and rainbows.

Annotations were born, in that manner, and the book shared its space with a series of curious histories. Other ways of breaking open text occurred, once the spatial divide established itself between text and word family histories. As the space declared itself, more openings revealed themselves, more questions arose. At first it was what one might call a vertical space, the definitions, the sporadic connections that were actual nations,

international histories of words, where the I-E root had seeded itself, where it had disseminated. Isolating, focusing on these words, adding a new dimension to the text that was yet outside of the text, had the effect of reinscribing the text. One had to read differently. One had to be reminded of language in a book that was in part about language, in part about words, about words on a computer screen.

But it wasn't as if there was a separate narrative, just information, information meant to enliven the text. And then, as the text was splitting open, the mother losing her definition, the daughter without a plan but with an increasingly energizing mission to reinscribe, whose first step was simply to read the text. The text was speaking again. The corpse was no longer a corpse.

And, that is how it began, but it did not stop there. It did not stop until the entire book was ravaged by the daughter, by me.

### **Her/story with Literary Influences**

In the first section of this introduction, I located my current self as daughter, and my thirty-something year old text as mother, according to the Spivak/Derridian formula. I hope to have shown that in this case, the act of reading for the purpose of analysis became the occasion for a full-scale revision that began with the invocation, excavation, and investigation of selected words, one word at a time, which created a spiritual rupture and a material splitting of the mother. I wasn't removing words, just examining those that called out to me. One could call it questioning, but whether it was questioning the mother, it was surely redefining the text to produce root histories of words, to follow the inscriptions of their roots, the family trees. I recorded their stories which became paratexts located at the bottom of the page. Not too many pages after the first word,

“dream,” an idea to include historical and geographical and memoiristic as well as other asides began to insinuate itself. Exploring words as artifacts had generated a desire for other kinds of histories. I consulted sources ranging from trusted Internet sites to the recently published book about indigenous life on Manhattan Island, *Mannahatta*, and wrote out assorted footnotes in a generally neutral voice, one that was more plain than the language of the text, that had been heavily influenced by Joyce and Nabokov.

Along with the idea that the text changes under the gaze of the reader is the idea that reader herself undergoes a change. The individual who, by the performance of reading, has produced a text for herself, is not the same individual she was before that performance, before the words with their tails/tales have marched into her interior. If this is true, then it goes without saying that thirty years of reading has made me a different reader, a different writer—not to mention the fact that I’d produced a few children, lost a few parents, as well as a few towers in Manhattan, and decided to go back to graduate school and focus on postcolonial literature. It’s this last entry that is most meaningfully measurable for an introduction such as this whereby one’s literary influences, or the ideations of one’s own personal canon, that I mentioned out the very outset, come to bear upon her fiction. And as my own personal canon changed, so did this novel find itself newly inlaid, newly inscribed with a second set of literary influences that inserted themselves, and I suspect the reader of the newer version will find evidence of their absorption.

I’ve offered some sense of how this book began for me, sprouting from threads of dreams and waves of voices, with a smattering of paste from the leaky reactor of an emotional field. In terms of a reader, this book began in the summer of 1981, when a

literary agent “accepted” me and agreed to send a manuscript out to publishers. By March of 1982, however, when I received one of the coveted New York State fellowships for the first thirty-five pages of this book, the agent determined—after a handful of rejections from publishers—that my book (its title in those days was *The New Wave World*) would not sell: not, she said, “with Ronald Reagan in the White House.” She dropped me; she dropped that book and all other books I would write.

But the book that follows is not the same book, although there are threads, voices, and a little paste—one might, thinking of Derrida, call it “a trace”—that remain. I made a couple of attempts to rewrite the book—and I wrote four additional novels, as well—but it wasn’t until my second year in the doctoral program at Ohio University, which I’d begun in 2008, approximately twenty-seven years later, that I considered a full-out revision. Its success, if successful it is, is due to a variety of extremely solicitous suggestions and insightful critiques offered by my professors at Ohio University, to whom I could not be more grateful.

The first two chapters of the original book were awarded a prize from New York State—the Creative Artist Public Service (C.A.P.S) Award. It was a fellowship for which I had to do community service. A one-woman show proceeded from one of my readings. I was reviewed in the *New York Times*. Wonderful things happened, but the book was never published. I burned the rejection letters written by the editors who’d read the novel, along with few others written by old lovers. I remember one editor’s comments bemoaning the state of literature, how it had fallen, and “whatever happened to”—and here he had a list of writers. I remember only one name in that list—Dickens, and he ended the list with “... and the Russians.” It’s the last phrase that stays with me—the

lumping together of all the Russian writers. This editor did like parts of my book; I remember this, of course—that she or he (I believe it was male, actually) admired the small part of the paragraph where the (dream) machine in the second chapter spits out a description of Gracie’s attributes:

“... says here you have Ph.D. from a league of ivy; interdisciplinary humanities; thesis incomplete—subject: 'salvation of man in his technology suit'; floundering presently in civil service; desired position in life—revolutionary, comedian, saint, spy, ranger, courtesan; conflicts normal—seeks love, profuse pleasure, hope, lucid meaning; finds humor saving grace, in addition to fleeting glimpses of great Other, notably in Spring and Fall<sup>4</sup>, melting mountain gushes, dying spectral burst of maple leaves, horizons, a grain of sand and accompanying ocean break of shore, animal kingdom in flight and roar, rush of till light in the Milky Way, smell of rain, glisten of dew, all things of nature's divine and lovely ilk saves you”  
(Lipschultz 91)

This short selection from the text provides an insight into Grace’s character, revealing her to be dreamy and intellectual, to ally herself with nature, despite the fact that she lives in the great industrial capital of the world. There are three plots that converge in the novel: Grace’s dream wherein she experiences second-hand pregnancy and childbirth; Grace’s relationship with a lover; and Grace’s “fall” as an activist. The following paragraph I have used as a brief synopsis:

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<sup>4</sup> Here the nod of course is to the Hopkins poem, "Spring and Fall to a Young Child."



“Lunatic and comedic, a drama unfolds, set against the tense and cynical backdrop of New York City, the summer before Ronald Reagan will be elected, before American hostages in Tehran will be freed. Enter Grace Rosinbloom, with her own brand of social consciousness, a former scholar, a young woman of many charms and more than a few quirks of character. She frequents bars, seconds as an underground actress, but she has become disenchanted with NYC’s nightlife and is lonely. Nor does her day-job as a civil servant seem sufficient to satisfy her desire to make a difference in this world. She retreats to the lavish world of her recurring dream, which features Grace herself as an award winner of sorts: she is selected to be the “recipient” of Nobel Prize-winning sperm. This is a dream whose progression offers her both romance and meaning. But soon her real life begins to mirror the dream life when she meets a man who resembles the dream lover, and she finds herself privy to classified government documents. Moral and spiritual dilemmas arise. Grace finds it increasingly difficult to distinguish between actual and imagined events. She is faced with an opportunity to make her contribution, but it is fraught with grave consequences, the least of which might include a prison term.”

If that short synopsis—a bit of an elevator pitch, actually—succeeds in projecting a book-jacket-like iteration that would cover both versions of the book, it doesn’t quite live up to what might be considered subtext, which became much clearer for me in the revisions. I knew Grace was a martyr, I knew she was no ordinary saint. I never thought of her as a kind of liberated Eve, whereas now I do. The following succeeds, I think, in capturing the subtext of the novel as it stands now: Think *Cinderella* (the book) meets *Hamlet* (the play). Grace Rosinbloom not only finds her prince, whose name, by the way is Daniel Starlinsky—and note, she finds and seeks him, not the other way around—and

she finds herself. He doesn't change her life, but she changes his. She is a hero, a saint, and she has been labeled a Christ figure. She makes a correction in her world and in the process finds her voice. It's a story with the romance of *Cinderella* and the righting a wrong that we find in *Hamlet*. This wrong is not as personal as Hamlet's, but of course Hamlet is a prince, and for him the personal conflates with the national; Grace's cause is planetary, despite her status as a middle class young woman who happens to have a doctorate, despite the "unfinished thesis," indicated in dream mode, namely "salvation of man in his technology suit," suggesting she may have theorized on the subject. Like Hamlet's, her mission concerns the acquisition of knowledge, or what to *do* about what you *know*. Her decision, which quickly comes upon her, is to remove anything nuclear from the government file that she has, at first unwittingly, hacked into. Up until the moment she performs the deletions, much of what might be considered magical realism—conversations she has with a worm and a water-lily, the appearance of a fly with opinions, and the emergence of a toon-like fellow by the name of PreHistory—takes place primarily in her recurring dream. She not only meets her prince but discovers, or shall we say, creates her purpose in the world. And like Hamlet, there is a price to pay, a body to contend with. But because hers is a woman's body, there are some different roads, a different set of archetypes.

That Shelley, Shakespeare, Joyce, Nabokov, and Old Testament writings have already insinuated themselves in this discussion is telling. The last four were powerful influences on the first incarnation of this novel, although, as you will read in the annotations, the initial impulse for this novel came from one of my dreams. I happened to pick up Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther* as I was writing, during the spring and

summer of 1981, and like Werther, himself, I was in the throes of heartbreak. The tragic and romantic sensibility touched me, somehow soothed me, mesmerized me, and in some way released me from my own life. I'd read a passage, then force myself to stop and focus on the story of Grace Rosinbloom. Goethe's structure, his prose, the sensibility surely influenced, or reinforced the influence of Joyce. The structural and linguistic nuances that may or may not be obvious in my novel—the equivalent of planks and mortar—are products of my love affair with Joyce, Nabokov, Old Testament—these writers, their works. Traces of Joyce's epiphanic moments and stream of consciousness, along with Nabokov's pristine densely constructed, powerfully resonating phrases<sup>5</sup> are surely still evident in the text. Like the Old Testament curmudgeon Jonah, whose story locates him as some kind of wayward prophet, Grace hears words that she construes as those of a god. She takes on a mission given by a worm, a potential relative of the one—a messenger of this god—whose (the worm's, that is) sole purpose of existence, some scholars suggest, is to devour the stem that kept Jonah's gourd plant alive and well and providing a canopy while Jonah waited to see the destruction of Nineveh. This interlocking world, where worms and whales have agency in a human-centered universe, speaks to the text of both versions of *Grace Before the Fall*. In the second version, with

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<sup>5</sup>I'm not saying that I have succeeded in accomplishing anything remotely resembling the majesty and grandeur of Nabokov's prose, although one agent, in rejecting my manuscript likened me to him, but here's an example of one of these moments, from *Ada*, my favorite. The following is what's happening, when this line occurs. Lucette dives into dark waters—it's nighttime—with the intention of suicide, and this is the description by Nabokov's narrator, Van Veen, who is not only the narrator but also her sister's (incestuous) lover: "As she [Lucette] began losing track of herself, she thought it proper to inform a series of receding Lucettes—telling them to pass it on and on in a trick-crystal regression—that what *death amount to was only a more complete assortment of the infinite fractions of solitude*" (375). That last part (that I've italicized) after the second m-dash, is a line that has stayed with me for nearly forty years. Can anything of this power and muscled articulation be said to exist in my prose—probably not, but this language with what it compresses into being and its sheer beauty in phrasing is an example of what has influenced me.

the more sufficiently developed characters, there is clear evidence of parody that would undercut any didacticism that may have been created by the allegorical implications of the first version. Just as the action in *Ulysses* was divided into segments corresponding to the books of the *Odyssey*, my novel renders its story in seven days, each of which corresponds to the momentous days in Genesis. Grace's journey begins in twilight, on a Sunday evening, and culminates in her rising on the Sabbath, just as twilight falls.

Clearly, the intertextuality inspired by *Ulysses* was part of the equation in the first version, but any notion that Joyce might be postcolonial-like writing back to Homer, and that I might be writing back to Joyce was not something that I considered, even during the second go-round, although it comes up for me now. During the revision, I didn't exactly say to myself, "Oh, let's consider this a postcolonial *novel*. Let's see if I can de-territorialize...." It's only now that I see how the second wave of influences may have given me freedom, or shall we say, permission, to remove the constraints upon some of the constructs—upon my characters and the plot, and the narrative itself. Once I agreed that it might be possible to situate the world of this book in terms of a postcolonial, or even postmodern context, it was as if the knowledge, or this agreement, opened up the world, once again. It created a second rupture, a gash that would finish what the annotations started. I took it upon myself to swing among the conventions of one of the modes (magic[al]/marvelous realism) incorporated by some writers who might themselves be considered postcolonial or who are informed by postcolonialism or something "like" postcolonialism, something that among other qualities might be "writing back," or securing a marginalized voice or correcting the invisibility of a history, or otherwise engaged in the enterprise of making what was silenced speak.

It's really the theory around the second wave of influences that gives me the language to talk about the influences around the first wave. And according to my doctoral director and writer, Zakes Mda, this connection may be an explanation for the inability of my first version to find its way into publication: it did not speak in a language that was appropriate for any of the marketing slots; it sat in a liminal zone that was not quite realist, not quite magical realism; the mode known as magic(al) realism was reserved for "exotic" writers, both within and outside of the United States. These writers included such writers as himself, along with Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Salman Rushdie, Toni Morrison, and the like—writers who number among my influences for the second round. Nevertheless, I did revise the text. The insertion of footnotes was just the first step in the process of rebirthing *Grace Before the Fall*. If it still sits in a liminal zone, a deferred zone, it is not alone, as it is a territory that has been trod on and otherwise navigated and named and civilized (by way of de-naturalizing, de-familiarizing) by such writers as Morrison, Rushdie, and Garcia Marquez—and many more, including Gunter Grass, Leslie Marmon Silko, Maxine Hong Kingston, and to some extent Kafka. The liminality that I speak of is essentially a space outside of the realistic novel, outside of allegory, even though there are qualities that would seem real, that would seem allegorical. In fact the writers who have influenced my revision don't necessarily agree that their work falls under the rubric of "magic realism," and actually "magic realism" isn't actually a rubric at all but an unstable term theorized by critics among whom are Maggie Ann Bowers and Linda Hutcheon. It's Tzvetan Todorov, according to Bowers, who provides the "seminal definition of the fantastic as a piece of narrative in which there is a constant faltering between belief and non-belief in the supernatural or

extraordinary event presented”(25). Bowers says that according to Todorov, we can agree that all this work falls under the fantastic, which “relies upon the reader’s hesitation” regarding what is “natural” and what is “supernatural”(25). Prior to that, Bowers had written that “the ordinariness of magical realism’s magic relies on its accepted and unquestioned position in tangible and material reality” (24). So this hesitation, on the part of the reader, is not duplicated in the book itself—not for the characters. There is no excuse, no reason for the magic. It happens, and it’s accepted, without analysis, without privileging logos—and it’s that last part of the equation that speaks to such a book as *Grace Before the Fall*, among whose underlying themes is the interrogation of logic, as a weapon itself, that underpins the dominant power that privileges men and dedicates itself to its own financial gain, furthering the production of weapons, nuclear power, at the expense of everyone else and everything else on the planet—including the planet itself. To that extent, it may be seen as the transgressive aspect in such a mode that finds its own rules of discourse by subverting rule number one in western philosophy—logos, which in some ways is a handy tool to put the male principle in charge of creation, whose business takes place in a woman’s body.

According to Bowers, the theory as determined by Roberto Gonzaleez Echevarria in 1974, divides magical realism, essentially, into two categories: one, ontological, takes as its framework characteristics of a non dominant culture; and the other, epistemological, develops from a kind of system that is perhaps more scholarly, but that distinctly does *not* “coincide” with culture (91). Rushdie numbers both Garcia Marquez and Grass as among his influences (Bowers 47). Bowers writes that Rushdie’s magical realism “straddles both the surrealist tradition of magical realism as it developed in

Europe and the mythic tradition of magical realism as it developed in Latin America” (47). So, if someone like Rushdie is writing through Grass’s *The Tin Drum*, if he is speaking to that text, and Grass is considered an epistemological magic realist, this doesn’t confine Rushdie to that category, as Rushdie clearly speaks from a point both within and outside the plurality of cultures that comprise India in a book like *Midnight’s Children*. And even though Morrison, who decries the mode—can be seen to be speaking back to someone like Faulkner, when she gives voice to the unvoiced history, namely slavery from the point of view of the slave—one reading *Beloved* will easily see an amalgam consisting of both epistemological and ontological components. And then there is Garcia Marquez who, like Mda, writes from passed down stories, stories told by a grandmother, both clearly coming from that ontological source. It is interesting that Morrison quibbles with her work being pigeon-holed into a category that is largely associated with Garcia Marquez—because of the political and social agenda she has, as someone speaking for a people, giving voice to the unvoiced history. Although I don’t see how it taints Morrison’s agenda to be among the gathering of these disparate voices who are all using the same or a similar mode, I don’t quite see the necessity of the division between epistemological and ontological. I have my doubts whether a writer literary determines before-hand whether she will take the epistemological or ontological route; I suppose these categories are helpful for the theorist, for the reader. What is vitally important, however, is to honor the differences in location, the differences in the political and social agendas, just as it is important to see where there are similarities, where they intersect. I do see that someone like Garcia Marquez might bristle at the idea

that there's anything "unreal" about his stories, as a good case can be made for a multiplicity of ways of looking at the world.

The West has no monopoly on reality. It has, however, been a beastly bully—and these books are like the biblical Davids throwing one well-aimed stone at Goliath. I feel that I am, and this book, too, is throwing that stone, as well. Magical realism might at first seem like a style of throwing; its effect is subtle, a little like a land mine, actually. So, I guess it might rather be likened to something in the stone. The political social commentary is present in any book of magical realism, according to Bowers, who, quoting Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy B. Faris, writes, that "'magical realism is a mode suited to exploring...and transgressing...boundaries, whether the boundaries are ontological, political, geographical, or generic'"(4). If the societal comment doesn't come through loud and clear as does a more direct discourse, or even satire, it shines through in the deconstruction of the text. Political and social criticism, of course, is not reserved for magical realists alone—it runs rampant in literary texts. Probably any text is marked with its history, marked by its place and time. Although the myths, the Greek and Roman myths, cannot in Bowers's estimation, be construed as magical realism—mainly because they're myths and we know that they're myths—Ovid, in *The Metamorphosis*, still utilized his text and his depiction Jupiter in particular, to comment on Augustus, while in exile, and those in the know knew the hidden barb. In my view, it's the partly the power of cloaking that matters, whether it be in myth or some other fantastic concoction, it barely matters—what matters is whether it speaks. This division doesn't really inform my use of the mode, but clearly my novel speaks to that multiplicity, both in terms of the mode and in terms of giving voice. If I had to categorize the kind of magical realism



incorporated in my novel, it would have to be a mixture of the two, as there is a nod to the Jewish culture, although, finally I think it's irrelevant. Thematically, as well, I am in solidarity with regard to interrogating what has been associated with the West, namely imperialism, hegemony, and its catastrophic effects upon the planet.

If, as Bowers writes, both Rushdie and Garcia Marquez—and Grass, too, are using the magical realism, the mode, as a way to contend with “horrific violence” (63), I wonder this experience privileges the use of magical realism. I wonder if those of us for whom 9/11 is more real than an idea, those of us who lived within a fifty-mile radius, those of us who lost beloveds or whose beloveds survived the attack, those of us who were survivors or within that emotional, if not physical range of those attacks can also be said to have had first hand, the experience of what it might feel like to walk—at least for a very limited time—in the shoes of a postcolonial writer, or an indigenous writer, or one of the writers whom the publishing markets targets as being “exotic?” I wonder, as well, if—for having had that experience, I feel freer using it now than I did in 1981. I think, actually, I do.

The anti-imperialism that exists in these writers' works is present in *Grace Before the Fall*, as is the interrogation of what I suggest as a western monopoly on reality. One could say there is ecofeminism at the heart of a book that begins with an unmarried woman's sublimated desire to have a baby, so much so that she produces a pregnancy in her dreams—only to show how both she and her body and ultimately her dream-child are all subjects of a male-dominated state. Furthermore, it's from that position that Grace moves, at first in her dreams, and then in the waking world, to the matter of nuclear power, the fertilization and assertion of controls, measurements (the attempt to

circumscribe a body, perhaps the equivalent of Foucault's docile body) to the splitting of the atom on mother earth, constructing enormous phallic structures where atom-splitting will happen, for energy and for destruction, for docile bodies, with a risk that is incalculable when mother earth unpacks tsunami, an earthquake (in Fukushima, for example), a hurricane the size of Katrina, or the unthinkable happens: a high-tech error that is not somehow caught in time; a dirty bomb in the so-called "wrong" hands, as if an atom bomb could ever be in the right hands.

The transgressiveness of voice, structure and theme in the first version of my novel was in effect hiding behind the aesthetics—I see that now. Even now I see that I'm hiding to some extent behind the forms, behind the device, focusing on these aspects, as if the main and very specific theme is somehow of lesser import. Upon my re-entrance, I—the reader/ the daughter who ruptured the membranes of the first version/mother—gathered power from the positioning of other writers in books that were written at the same time, or after mine—many of them with the same influences. Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* was written around the same time as I wrote the first version of my novel. *Beloved* was written after that. I had read some of Garcia Marquez's work, and I had read Borges and Kafka, both considered by Bowers to be precursors to the mode. Looking back, I see that my novel had been written to some extent in a modernist-realist paradigm that had stifled the development of my characters and limited the flexibility of the setting, which functions as a character as well in a magical realist world. The modernist paradigm had all but imprisoned the world of the first version of the book inside a mosaic like structure that did not give, as if each word was beset with innuendo, as if it couldn't breathe, as if privileging the acrobatics of language rather than the story.

Revising felt like a liberation in terms of character and scene, and as I say, parody entered the arena when the characters fully expanded into personalities that became comic. They were freed from their dream cages, given full entrance into the world outside—what is called “textualization” in magic realist circles, so Professor Mda—a veteran practitioner of the elusive mode—advised me. Two new characters arose—one, PreHistory, fully blossomed from the dream; the other flew into the novel from *Cion*, Mda’s novel about an African professional mourner by the name of Toloki, who is relocated to southeastern Ohio. Actually, my fly, who stutters but remains nameless, is more likely the progeny of Massa Blue Fly, the peripatetic protector of two heroic runaway slaves whose history is recovered by Toloki. In Gracie’s recurring and progressive dream, PreHistory appears among hordes of men with their instruments and expertise huddled around the largely pregnant dream body of Gracie—and he is notable to her for his one liners, among which is a list of extinct animals to whom she will never give birth.<sup>6</sup> In the first version he remains corralled in the dream, but in the second, he crosses over, a phantom with properties and a player, rather than a mere symbol of the limits of logos. PreHistory becomes a guardian of Grace, who, along with the fly, loyally attend her, all the while conversing. These two, both of them bound by limits, lend levity to many serious moments. For example, when Grace is being chased by the Feds, and when she is captured and imprisoned, they become chorus-like, giving the reader a sense of what’s to come, as the fly who lives for spoils, can see into the future, and PreHistory can analyze what’s already there. If my stuttering fly came down from the heights of

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<sup>6</sup> Part of the statement went something like this, “...we make no bones about our guesses but many guesses about our bones” (Lipschultz 234).

*Cion* to alight on *Grace*..., a similar case could be made for PreHistory, as he, to some extent, represents the limits of logos, just as Rushdie's protagonist, Saleem, to some extent, represents India, as can be seen when Saleem writes, "I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the lot as well" (4). Of course PreHistory is not the protagonist of *Grace*... a minor player—but there is Grace, surrounded by limits, trying to elbow her way in, to find and assert her voice, her protest.

The revisions allowed for a greater representation of Grace, so that not only did she focalize but there were occasional insights into her motivations, her thoughts, as well as focalizations outside of Grace. I brought in history and back-stories, to help fully round the other characters. A consequence of this was the removal of any sense that the characters were merely puppets to pass on a message, even though they are still swimming in the themes, sometimes drowning in the themes. The latter of course refers to Grace and Starlinsky, whose very bodies absorb the consequences—when, for example Grace is incarcerated, and (spoiler alert) later, when she rises. In the first version, there was movement away from the very strict third person limited—but only towards the end when I wanted her consciousness to spread to her dream characters, as if they were all one voice. In the process, Grace's voice had virtually been lost, assimilated. I'd wanted to suggest that these dream characters had been the voice of the narrator all along. I'd followed the plot to a trial of Starlinsky-as-murderer-of Grace. But, I saw, thanks to the comments of one of my readers (Dr. Janis Butler Holm)—that it appeared as if Grace had in essence, lost her mind. In my revision, I tried to subvert this logo-centric interpretation of what had occurred. I excised that part which amounted to excessive plot, providing

rational sequences, the underpinnings of a realist text. Instead, I reworked the apotheosis of Grace to establish the ending.

### **On the Phantasm of Structures: Hybridity, Text, and Voice**

The extent to which this enterprise was informed by post-structuralist theory became known to me towards the end of my journey. I understood the footnotes to be a product of my re-entrance, my rites as a reader, as a privileged reader, a reader with agency, but I didn't quite understand the powers that be, the negotiations. Shifting, for a moment, from the mode to the language itself, I'd like to focus on voice, on language, the rudiments of voice—and how it configures power. Grace develops her voice, she speaks first through a devoicing, and then she brings herself to literally speak, to offer language, to speak directly to humans, to use words as the medium of exchange. She speaks even as she's dying, and she's speaking, as if she very well knows this, but still through all this, she feels herself rising. As she's experiencing loss, she experiences self, the glimmers of self that come with voice, with expression, with this kind of power. The power of the text in the example of *Grace Before the Fall*, the text that she erases that exists upon a micro-chip—that immediately sends my mind to the double tablets, the commandments, the golden calf, the sacrilege—but still is a text that is almost without dimension, call it one dimension, if it is that—is a tool, a weapon itself, it is that powerful. It is also in code, and bespeaks a religion of genocide, which—Jew that I am—is what the marching through Canaan was about, the killing of Canaanites; just as the Egyptians, having enslaved the Jews was about genocide—the disempowering of a people. As if to empower one people means the genocide of another. There is much about the biblical text that may be considered as speaking to the binaries, when one considers

that there are two tablets full of thou shalts and thou shalt nots—defining what is good by what is not good. In *Grace Before the Fall* there is an attempt to break binaries, to set free voices, reminiscent of Bakhtin’s carnival, of his polyphony. There is also disempowering going on in Grace’s dream, whereby she—with the gift and miracle of a child-to-be in her body—will not only give over the baby to Father Science (and don’t we all give up our babies), but she will also undergo the degrading experience of others, notably men examining her body and telling her what to do and what *not* to do with her body. The body of a woman with a baby within her (albeit a dream-body) is not much different from the bodies of Jews who are enslaved by Egyptians, not much different from the Canaanites up for slaughter by a people whose god wants them to have that land; it’s not that different from a body that borrows a portable computer and devoices what’s inside. Grace’s body is also a text, even in dream form, and the dream is a text, and all that springs from the dream—her characters, what they say, all that she sees, that we readers see—is of course text. There is little that is not text, and of course, it’s the reader who brings the text to life, as there is no text without a reader, and Robert Scholes asks us to consider the reader a reader/writer, and that is exactly what I am in this instance, as I am essentially a reader who has come to her old text, and in the reading is “fixing,” or re-creating the text, and all I write here is a preface to the text. Important to remember things done in the name of text, or as Judith Butler frames it, the “bind”-ing power of language—how it configures, plays out on bodies.

In the early part of his book, *Textual Power*, Scholes discusses literature and its role as “secular scripture,” as he interrogates the idea of “the loss of faith in the universality of human nature and a corresponding loss of faith in the universal wisdom of

the authors of literary texts” (13). He goes on to say that “if literature is not scripture, then it cannot be outside of human time” (13), and the whole idea of a universality behind literature falls apart, or must change. If literature is no longer this precious item, then we are relegated to texts that exist in time, and “historicizing” which Scholes says is “Fredric Jameson’s battle cry” (16) becomes the way to go; deconstruction becomes the way to go, and to a large extent, my footnotes are a way of historicizing the text, as this is a text that had its origins in a history that is long-gone—even though its trace is still with us; even though, as Butler says, it gets continually reified in language around us. We write to speak to it, to contest it. We use language to undo what has been wrought by language, although Butler is no Pollyanna when it comes to undoing what has been done by language.<sup>7</sup>

The footnotes are distinctly *not* the text. I think of them as extraneous and fun, but they offer a service, I shall suggest, just by providing a “perpetual supplementary activity,” a “deconstructing of language by means of more language,” which is what the revision was, as well, privileging the trace of a reader, revivifying the text (Scholes 113). The footnotes in one sense are a way of re-inscribing the text, there for the reader to do as she will. If the code was broken by magical realism and by the deviant way it might have been used, the code is twice broken just by the existence of footnotes, and this confers more power upon the reader. It removes one less crutch, one less code, and as such it creates an unstable text, throwing the power more greatly upon the reader. What Gerard Genette says is that this removal of doctrines, which in a sense have been removed many

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<sup>7</sup> “Language and materiality are not opposed, for language both is and refers to that which is material, and what is material never fully escapes from the process by which it is signified” (*Bodies that Matter* 68).

times, gives the reader an ability “to see ...with some degree of thoroughness...see it ‘transtextually’” which I take to mean through the text or texts (Scholes 133).

It is Jean-Francoise Lyotard who suggests that we “wage war on totality; let us be witnesses to the unrepresentable; let us activate the differences”(Hutcheon 81). And the plurality of codes, the breaking of conventions all have that effect, all “disrupt fixed categories of truth, reality and history...to create a space beyond authoritative discourse where the unrepresentable can be expressed” (81). And so, here we have the reason for the trouble, namely to make room for something that could not otherwise be expressed.

There is probably little that is not hybrid in this novel, and in some ways this is an exalted postmodern text in that the voice is dispersed graphically as well as textually, that is within the text. I’ve tried to honor the conventions of magical realism, but I’ve also contested them by beginning the book in what might seem to be a purely realist mode, signaling one code to the reader, then changing the code. I’ve gone from a worm that speaks to footnotes that embrace memoir and offer historical, geographical, etymological asides.

As I mentioned earlier, the footnotes established themselves as a way for me to re-enter an old manuscript, and as such they may in fact be vestigial parts of the entire enterprise. I’m willing to allow that. It’s entirely possible that the manuscript, the story, the novel floats without them. All I can say, as the proverbial daughter, the re-inscriber, is that they belong. They do not function in any obvious ways that footnotes have historically done, insofar as a piece of fiction doesn’t really need any verifying<sup>8</sup>. It needs

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<sup>8</sup> However, they do here, as Grafton writes in his *The Footnote*, “form a secondary story, which moves with but differs from the primary one” (23).



to entertain, to enlighten (if not instruct), and historically, footnotes have performed the aforementioned service of verifying data, of locating data, which is necessary when offering an historical account, according to Zerby and Grafton in their respective books. Although the footnotes offer data, their sources attached, it's not to make New York City, for example, more "real,"<sup>9</sup> or to verify research,<sup>10</sup> or to criticize, infuriate or dismiss a competition that can't talk back—the last two looming high in the annals of footnote lore. Taken as a collective production, they do not propose to rupture nor in any other way subvert, collide with, or run counterpoint to the story told in the body of the text, as utilized by a goodly number of fiction writers, such as Nabokov, in *Pale Fire*, or the twin, side-by-side narratives in Wayne Koestenbaum's *Hotel Theory*. Nor is any of this an experiment in minimalism, which is so wonderfully arranged by Nicholson Baker in *Mezzanine*, where the footnotes themselves intentionally threaten to overrun and overtake the text, or to take over where the text left off; Baker offers a series of digressions about commodities, the name dropping of quotidiania that drips with details and which is utterly delightful and whimsical, and generates an atmosphere of forthrightness, as if it's not a novel at all, but encourages a kind of frolicking voyeurism, a willing spill of intimate secrets, a love affair with mundane things. No, it's not that. It's not the prolific David Foster Wallace, his utter genius and vast knowledge spilling out of the corners, of every pore of his *Infinite Jest*. It's not Manuel Puig's *Kiss of the Spider Woman*, the powerful part flight, part documentary-like drama about two prisoners, their predicament, the stories of one, his homosexuality, and how the latter is theorized below the line of vision,

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9 Such as in the quotations that offer history of Bleecker Street, or in the various footnotes that identify areas of New York according to Sanderson's book *Mannahatta*, that came out in the last year or two.

10 Such as in footnotes offering a history of state of the art of one of the various modes of technology.

in footnotes, as if it were a government spy, the gaze, making voyeurs of readers, giving them an awareness of something between them and the text. No, it's not that, but it's *like* that. I think it's most similar to the way Puig is using the footnotes, because of that very last part—that awareness, the way it speaks to the reader. Well, at least, this is my hope.

First, I'd like to address the footnotes as being something more than a means for the writer to recover text. I don't know that I will succeed in convincing the reader who has already been asked to juggle a story that veers slightly from a magical realist course, especially when the reader might not find sufficient evidence for embracing the mode—although by now I hope the reader is willing to suspend her disbelief to that effect. Surely the ecofeminist trope offers a reason to utilize the subversive mode, and whether or not the text succeeds in this endeavor, it will soon be up to the reader to determine. Adding to this fiction, then—as paratext, that is a text that is subordinate to the body, to the story of Grace, the two-hundred-plus annotations that range, as I've indicated, from memoir to asides on everything from science to history, and include commentary on the story, in addition to a meta-fiction, namely the story of the story itself, where details about the writing and the attempts to publish this book are stored. Storage is one word that comes to mind here—the idea that there is a location where more story can be had, if one wants. The other analogy I have used to describe the way I'd like the reader to “perform” this part of the book is “grace notes,” as in music, where the annotations themselves are embellishments, that is, complementary, not supplementary. It is as if to say, “here, reader, now if you like this, there's more.”

But it would be disingenuous to stop there, because there are themes that exist in the production of the manuscript that are furthered by allowing the footnotes to remain in

the text, by having their presence made, by offering what they have to offer—not just the information, but also the performance that they ask of the reader. Otherwise, I would have disposed of them. The subversiveness of my theme that belies the play of dialogues with subhumans and phantoms, that transgresses the rules of logos, is furthered by a text that cuts into the seamlessness of the storytelling. Rimmon-Kenan speaks of gaps and delays<sup>11</sup> that fiction writers use to slow a reader down or to create suspense (126), and while the text already maneuvers itself around gaps itself, this special reinforcement further cuts into both time and materiality<sup>12</sup>, when the reader herself, may decide to blink and look down, or take a breath and flip to the back of the book. All of that is in the reader's hands, or in her fingers, quite literally, depending upon the location of the footnotes, if indeed they are endnotes.

The spacial and vocal shifts place the reader in the driver's seat. The reader is a player in this game. She is not simply a receptacle for the voice of the writer. The reader of this book is one recognized for making choices. The reader is one to decide whether or not she wants the asides, and if she does, there they are. The reader is the one to decide *when* she wants the asides and where to locate them. They are not necessary for the text, or I would have placed them within the main body of the text, I would have assimilated the information within the text proper. I would have insisted they sit below the body of the text. I want them separate. I want the reader to be able to subordinate the information, the so-called worldly reality, the so-called history, the so-called geography,

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<sup>11</sup> Rimmon-Kenan defines it as follows: “not imparting where it is ‘due’ in the text, but leaving it for a later stage” (126).

<sup>12</sup> “Here,” she writes, “storytime may go on, but the reader's comprehension of the narrated events is impeded by the omission, about the past or present” (126). She also says that the text is in a “double bind,” for example, if it “is understood too quickly, it would thereby come to an untimely end.” Thus, “it is in the text's interest to slow down the process of comprehension...to ensure its own survival” (123).

the so-called science, the so-called history of the science, the so-called history of the words. As for me, I'm content to have the reader read the notes later, or not at all, even though I've stored the equivalent of home-grown canned vegetables. They are indeed time-sensitive, an expression that probably didn't exist in 1981.

In a text whereby the postcolonial "writing back" is referenced, as has been done in previous sections, there is in a smattering of footnotes an obvious decentering of the voice, and that is also a cut into logos, into that single-voiced authority. To say the authority here is dispersed is an understatement. It's here in the annotations where the binaries of writer/reader and writer/text and reader/text are all broken. But what is most powerful, and constitutes the best reason for keeping the annotations is that division itself, that space for reflexivity, and I think this will be the most difficult to describe, but I think if I am able to put this into words, the reader will forgive me for including what Noel Coward is famous for having said, although I haven't found the exact source claiming to know when and where and in what context he said it: namely that footnotes are like having to go answer the door in the middle of making love" (Horowitz 39 ). Above, where I've repeated the words "so-called," I've done so to make it clear that there really is no authority that can't be contested. Essentially, I am an author trying show there is no authority, who is perhaps at risk for the affective fallacy, but I sincerely hope not.

The reader who reads the text of Gracie, I hope will identify with her, will respect her plight, if not empathize with her, will delight in her world, the richness of her visions and will imagine the possibilities—the life she would have lived with Starlinsky. If I've done my work, the reader will also register the loss. I want the reader to mourn Grace's loss as much as I want the reader to marvel at where Grace's vision has taken her.

Perhaps the reader of Grace's story will feel the the nature of the corruption in the powers that be, something of their limits, something of their effect upon the individual who is trying to help. Perhaps the reader who feels these things might be inspired to do something about it.

The reader who not only reads Grace's story but also deigns to read the footnotes will see impermanence at work, power at work, destiny at work, hidden information everywhere—that everywhere you look has the potential for story, for voice—well, that is my hope. The reader of footnotes will see something of the consequences of a decentered authority, or no one-voiced authority. The reader will see a relationship between power and language, how we interpret history, how vulnerable it is, this thing we call history, how subject it is to the framer. I would like the reader who reads both to take the story of Grace and bring it home. Many things have changed in the thirty years between the first and second versions of the stories, but the issue Grace protests, the nuclear issue, the terrible, destructive secrets kept by the powers that be—and their horrifically huge and corroded power—still remains, although this is not anything I've stated straight up. The reader will see something about the inscribing of anything, and the vagaries of time. Very specifically, the reader of the footnotes will have the story of the writing and the rewriting. She will see that the book proper is something revised, meant to conjure one week in the summer in 1980. She will see that the book is written in 1981, with the general point of view of how things were in New York City in 1980-81, which is decidedly before 9/11, before the advent of the cell phone, before the advent of the personal computer. The reader will see a questioning of authority, the decentering of authority, and possibly, the reader will see that there is no single authority, and the

consequences of there being no single authority—just many voices, many authorities. Yet, one could sense stirrings, stirrings of 9/11, stirrings of the instability of the Mideast, stirrings of an economic thin ice. So the reader will see the disparity between what one perceives as the reality when one is inside of the reality, as compared with what one sees in retrospect—which is what is contained in and among the footnotes, through a voice that is the voice of the implied author. It is my hope that there will be a moment when the distortion produced by competing voices is lifted, a silence which is signified by the graphic separation between text and paratext. There is a place in this text for the reader to reflect—that gap between the text and the so-called fragments of logos, facts, clusters or “thickets”<sup>13</sup> with more offspring than religious zealots, offering to ground a text that takes its protagonist up to the heavens.

If that space, that blank space equivalent to the silence of John Cage’s 4’33”<sup>14</sup> could speak—and really, I hope that blank space is speaking—it would be pure theory.

It is pure theory. It’s pure negative space that I hope will shout: “Look here—look at the difference between looking back and being in the middle of a time that is going to be shattered by a loss you cannot in your wildest dreams imagine!”

### **Meditation on a Kiss**

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<sup>13</sup> This is the word used by Clark in describing the voluminous footnotes celebrated by David Foster Wallace that, in Clark’s view, might be construed as “opportunities to escape the main text” and in Wallace’s case, are “always rendered at the bottoms of pages in thickets of tiny type” (Roy Peter Clark, *The Glamour of Grammar*. Little Brown, 2010). Baker, in his footnote-laden novel, *The Mezzanine*, also has a fine time describing them as “...the finer-suckered surfaces that allow tentacular paragraphs to hold fast to the wider reality of the library”(121).

<sup>14</sup> Pronounced, this composition is “Four minutes, thirty-three seconds,” and consists of, essentially silence, in an orchestral setting, where musicians are asked to refrain from playing.

Even if the act of writing sometimes feels like taking dictation when all is going well, the writer knows what flow there is comes from inside, from a practice, from a discipline. There's a language wheel that runs in the mind. After a while, it feels as if the wheel self-selects, then deposits the word or series of words in the writer's lap. This, of course, does not mean it's the last word. The writer will come back again and again and again, and that language wheel will get a good workout. It's partly a relationship with momentum, the law of inertia, the same thing that keeps the runner running. That it might camouflage itself into something that seems to be coming outside oneself is perhaps a necessary fiction for a relatively young writer. I have certainly experienced this phenomenon—the wonder of *where is all this coming from?* Thirty years ago, I mesmerized myself into writing by reading a few pages from Goethe's *Sorrows of Young Werther*, as I mentioned earlier. It really did feel sometimes as if I were in a trance. I was alone in my studio, a small room, with a few closets and a kitchen that was not much bigger than a closet, and a bathroom. I would write late into the night, sometimes into the morning. I discovered only a few years ago that full-out séances took place, also deep into the night, just two stories above my little studio. So, now I can amuse myself by fantasizing that the original draft was dictated to me or channeled by the spirit that hovered about my upstairs neighbor, the concert pianist<sup>15</sup> who, as it turns out, was both a world traveler and a medium.

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<sup>15</sup> His name was Van Zandt Ellis (1944-88), a breathtakingly handsome and disarmingly friendly man. I'd cross his path now and then in the elevator or climbing the stairs, and I attended one of his concerts, where he played an electrifying Prokofiev. I had an upright piano in my studio, and it just managed to squeeze into the elevator, with a fraction of an inch to spare. Van Zandt's grand piano, on the other hand, was hoisted up to the fifth floor outside the building with ropes and pulleys, then gingerly finessed into the room through the space provided by removing a window. Would that I'd been able to witness that, not to mention the séances! It was about twenty years later, when, a bunch of us—in Long Island—were

Thirty years ago, when I first finished this book, in the summer of 1981, I worked hard to create a fictional construct in my character, Grace Rosinbloom, whereas now I am working hard to construct something of its opposite, something that approaches truth, which of course is a dirty word, although Helene Cixous says that it's valid to use it<sup>16</sup>. It is ironic now, thirty years later, that here I am trying to tease out the text, deconstruct it, if you will. As far as I'd gone into fiction, to the extreme edge of the spectrum, where worms may talk and a woman will rise, I am now someone looking for fact, for patterns and contexts, for architecture, something to unearth, for evidence, for structure, for substantiation. As someone who has, albeit with sickle and scalpel and saw in hand, re-entered the old text, I am, in one sense, elucidating the machinations of this former self, a cloaked self, a frightened, lonely, but driven self. I file this record of sorts as a self less uneasy about revelation; it is a relatively greater sense of embodied self. I have a willingness to open rather than to conceal. I may bristle at the thought of it—the attempt to nail it all down, but I am more comfortable with this self. I have a sense of its history, and I could tell the world to take it or leave it, now. Not so, then. I am freer now with a voice that can stand for my own. Not only am I a writer with more experience of writing, but I have had thirty more years of reckoning with self. I look through this hybrid work of fiction cut with the nonfiction and occasional memoir, and I see there is a counter-self in that character. Looking back, through glares of memory altered by the fiction, I see

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comparing our old NYC haunts, and I said I lived on Seventh Avenue South, and someone asked where, and then began to tell stories about his close friend and mentor Van Zandt Ellis. Not only had he gone to India with Van Zandt, but he'd participated in a number of the séances. And it was then, so many years later, that I heard, also, about the pianist's death of the dread disease, AIDS.

16 "I hope you will forgive me if I use the word 'truth.' The moment I say 'truth' I expect people to ask: 'What is truth?' 'Does truth exist?' Let us imagine that it exists. The word exists therefore the feelings exists" (*Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* 36).



what I perhaps failed to see in the original creation—namely that Grace was torn from the fabric of me; she is a part of myself; she was constructed of my dream, in every sense of the word<sup>17</sup>. But I also see that I needed to get out of the dream to see her more clearly, to divest myself of her, to distance myself, to present her and re-present her and produce her for the reader.

I wrote this book first in the belly of Shakespeare, Joyce, Nabokov, and the Bible. My critical lens was merely Shakespeare's Kittredge, who might as well have been his mama, or his Talmudic scholar. All that mattered was the beauty and utility of the language—no interrogation. Great literature was like scripture (Scholes)—timeless and universal. Authors were gods, and their intention was the holy spirit. I shunned the likes of structuralism, and anything post. I thought critical theory was a scam. Signs and signifiers were as alien to me as sines and cosines and tangents. So, in order to move into the second version, I traveled through critical theory, up the ladder, all the way up to postcolonial and feminist theory.

It was a struggle to learn the language of literary criticism, but I see that it has given me tools. Audre Lorde said that you cannot dismantle “the master’s house” with the tools of the master, and to some extent that is true. I will say that the first doors of theory I walked through were her doors, when she wrote “Poetry is not a luxury.” Magical realism is so clearly a tool you won’t find in “the master’s toolbox.” But I had to learn how to use the tools, as did writers like Judith Butler and Helene Cixous in order to speak what I had to say. Audre Lorde’s mission was to empower “the master’s” victims,

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<sup>17</sup> “I don’t want to write the true book; it’s the one I want to write: I tear it from myself” (Cixous, *Three Steps on the Ladder of Writing* 32).

the out and out victims, those that the so-called “masters” were cannibalizing so that they could be “masters.” After all, both postcolonial theory and Butler’s theory show that you can’t have “masters” without slaves. Lorde was speaking to the least empowered of the victims, those whose ownership of land and access to education and financial equality, not to mention the so-called inalienable rights were compromised—and this history of the master was still and is still in the process of being enacted upon bodies of color, and on female bodies and on queer bodies. It is through Butler that I have any access at all of those tools. Otherwise, I don’t think I would have understood. It would seem as though the wand is passed, and both Lorde and Butler are speaking to each other, and through Lorde, I was able to understand Butler, and it’s Butler whose theory shows that the master’s tools will do the master in, as well. And that’s really the point that Grace Rosinbloom is trying to make. I wonder if I am using footnotes to approach the master, by an attempt to use his tools?

In the initial writing of the book, I was within the history. It was all around me. I was recording signs, traces of which still appear in the book, but they are enmeshed with that of a different sensibility that comes from thirty years passing, and retrospect, looking back. My urban voice, the biting humor and self-mockery of the years before writing *Grace*... was long gone, and so was the Alice-in-Wonderland, Peter-Pan, Frankenstein as well, wherein my heroine had become the stuff of angels and martyrs. I look back and see what that voice didn’t, namely that people would be dying of a plague in the very same streets that Grace—and I, too—had walked within a year or three; in fact they were dying then, while she walked, but they were in shadow; their shadows stuck to the

furniture they left, furniture that sat in her room, furniture that she'd leave, too. I don't mention what happens to that furniture, the furniture that survives us.

I have one piece of furniture that survived from my apartment on Seventh Avenue South, a small bench that someone put together then left on the street, that I picked up and painted. That piece is like synecdoche—the room looms up for me, the studio above which a man played a gorgeous Prokofiev on a full grand piano. I didn't know he would die of AIDS, just as I didn't know he was holding séances while I was writing the magical realism, the conjuring of voices that would become the last week in the life of a character named Grace. I was “taking dictation,” feeling Grace in the room; her worm was my worm, and I gave it to her, along with my room. I voiced it, and it became as real as the weapons she removed from the computer screen, their names that is. How they rose before her in the devoicing! How I'd love for them to disappear, and how I'd love for her to appear, to rise before me, my sleeping beauty, my daughter's mother—Grace, *Grace Before the Fall*.

With this pen, with this ink (these microchips, this light) —my kiss.

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"Can anybody find me somebody to love?"

Freddie Mercury, "Somebody to Love," *Queen*<sup>1</sup>

"We are such stuff as dreams<sup>2</sup> are made on..."

William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*

"A way a lone a last a loved..."

James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*

"And God prepared a worm<sup>3</sup>..."

Bk of Jonah

## Chapter 1

Evening, when Grace Rosinbloom is arisen from a summer afternoon's slumber and arrives, a flaneuse,<sup>4</sup> on the sidewalk of the vaporous world. She resembles her city in this regard, namely that she is consumed by and a consumer of vapors. Occasional flashes of steamy streetlight catch onto long stringy copperish hair. A flutter of eyelashes closing up and then opening around brown eyes with opal embers. Longing hides behind her every solid cell. Unlike the all-nurturing city of seven million, she is trying to be discriminating.

It is Sunday, the night that begins a new week, even as it seals up the old, and Manhattan breathes steam, exhales. Its automobiles have come home from their haunts in the suburbs, from their rural hangouts, from the beaches, from the mountains, from the lakes. Those like Grace—city dwellers lacking wherewithal to vacate to greener pastures, without the funds to summon up an air conditioner and pay for its usage—are walking. If they have porches, they are sitting on them. No porch for Grace. No thought for sitting, for waiting for the future to come. She is a walking dreamer, dreaming as she walks, conscious of her slick black pumps on pavement, their stickiness, the grime that seals her in does not do her in.

This is her town, what with its marble formations, stone upon which she treads, a tunnel of granite she is walking through, as if New York itself were a cave, the buildings stalactites, and Grace the miner looking for a gem, just one will do. But not just any one. Must be the right one. This, where she resides, is the village part of town, where stone rises are not so high as to deny sky, and there is plenty of sky in her mind tonight. A dream she has risen from, a man lodged in her mind. The longing lodged, too. Like a nut

from a tree, something edible if bitter. Palpable as an acorn, splayed open and bitten up after the business of a squirrel. Or even a worm, the smell of worms after rain, when worms are suddenly manifest, their dessicated bodies offered up on the street of her New Jersey childhood, poor worms, poor acorns. There must be a sign that she will recognize.

She is on a mission for love. She was always on missions, but in this particular dream—and so many others, as well, there was a man. She saw his face. These men—they don't look the same, but they *are* the same. It's dream logic. Something about a twinkle of the eye. She would know him when she saw him. Not by the color but by the light. Or would she not? And would he know her, as well? How would they know? Would it be mutual? Thirty years old she was. She should have found somebody by now, and she has come so close. The right man, the right somebody has eluded her, until now, until this series of dreams. But wasn't she offbeat to take seriously a dream? Why so fussy? Not always had that been true. This is what she is thinking as she walks. This man. Through dreams he is calling her. She is walking this thought as if it were a dog on a leash, as if it were walking her.

Not that anyone would know unless it was true, the thing Em had told her, namely that ninety percent of the time everyone between the age of eighteen and eighty was thinking about sex, and really she isn't exactly thinking about sex, is she? The in and out and release of it? The squeezing and gush and breath of it? No, not until now that the word "sex" came into her mind when the idea of touch and the sensation therein. Gracie is studiously focused on the carrier of cherishing, someone who will say here I am. This someone is not necessarily handsome but marked with character. But what besides a feeling will be sufficient to sting her into sudden recognition?



Oh, she can feel this urge, and urges themselves, the idea of them, how they come right out of her soul. These are things she is thinking about, these urges that come from dreams and from desire itself, and she desires something more than love this very moment. At this precise moment love and the lover in question are cresting in her thoughts, taking precedence over all other musings.

And one boyfriend, Andrew it was, once ate a worm—Andrew the boyfriend she always returned to, both in mind and body, when loneliness like this would overcome her. A phone call away he always was. But hadn't it been over a year that she actually called him? Ah, he with his worm, and she—she ate an acorn, she'd told him. And it was true, and they joked about acorns and worms the way couples do, their private histories, their private scorns. But Andrew was not the right somebody because all he wanted was babies at a time she wanted knowledge, and for what? He said she was crazy to think she could change the world, and now, now that she is thirty, she is confused—what does she want. Love, the right love, the right somebody, and the two of them will change this world, something of that kind of adventure, but was it a cliché—the desire for knowledge and its necessary action. Ambition for love and knowledge, something steaming in her.

And it was never that she didn't want babies, but she didn't want just babies. There had to be more, she told Andrew. And wasn't there more? Wasn't there more than having a nice house with nice kitchen cabinets and sofas and watching televisions till your eyelids cracked? Is this what knowledge brought you? A nice house with cracked eyelids? There had to be more. These thoughts, the old thoughts coming up again like perpetually stained clothing in a washing machine. No, she never wanted her own washing machine, never wanted to go shopping for kitchen cabinets. And so now the

acorn with its bitter yellow taste is dismissed from her mind by way of another thought that threatens to dislodge love, threatens to overtake the mind of Grace, political it is, the notion of a better world, her part therein.

Late night newspapers, she's caught their headlines while passing a newsstand, people standing there with cigarettes in hand to mouth, the smoking mixing with steam. "Hostages," it says. "Khomeini," it says. Should she hate him, the Ayatolla? There is his picture, his sad face draped in robes, his beard long. Is he a grandfather? Does he touch women? Someone should soften him up. Why so much hatred? He hates us. We hate him. We don't even know him, but we hate him. He has stolen U.S. citizens. The hostages are adults—he's kidnapped them. Can we trust that everyone is unharmed in the secret places where they are being held?

On the television, she has seen them paraded about, walking in a line. They do this to prove the hostages are alive and well. But do they have enough food and water? Don't they miss their beloveds? It is torture to think of them. Some released early, women and African Americans, but the rest—fifty-three of them. A failed attempt, eight people killed trying, helicopters, Grace remembers. But what about talking? No hope for dialogue—and why not? Why don't they use common sense? President Carter—she is convinced that he tells the truth, but people call him weak for it. Would they rather he lie?

She voted for him, and he won. That was a first. Hubert Humphrey didn't win. George McGovern didn't win. But Jimmy did, and she voted for him. But this holding of hostages for such a long time, over a year now—this is sickening, disastrous. How can it not be that a war will start in the Middle East and destroy the world. Will Khomeini start

it? Such an angry man, those photographs never show him smiling. Carter, his face so serious, his eyes hooded, dark with worry, closing up. These men making all the decisions for a planet. In their eyes a knowledge, something they know and won't tell. A shiver from the headlines every time she reads the word "hostages." It is the fear that has replaced the fear of "the Russians" that she grew up with. A fear, she wonders, but how real is it? Is it manufactured to fill a place?

She wonders about this, child of the sixties that she is, with a distrust of the government. A distrust that morphs into cynicism freezes into despair. Surely a war must follow this. This thought of war makes for longer strides. Hers are cross country legs, muscled, tight, and long, good for a track team, for the long haul, not for short spurts. She's gone in a large circle, walking west to the water, to the pier, where her heels risked getting stuck in the large, wooden, gray, weathered slabs, where she saw couples in various stages of love, where she wondered about the other half of her couple, the couple she aspired to be part of, and now she was going east again, east into the more commercial part of town where, if you go far enough, you will find the bars.

She passes her own building on Bleecker, and again the thought comes up about men as rulers, men as governing agents, and her eyes taking in the half light of evening, the sun not long gone. It was quite gone before she marched out there, and still there are etchings, remnants of pink strewn across the sky like jacks flung onto a sidewalk. Surely there is too much hatred in the world, and why do we hate? Can't we stop hating?

Such thoughts she ponders with a smile for the humans she passes, they, too with their own thoughts. The darkness of night begins to be something to reckon with. The sensations of color dripping back to a hush, but it remains hot, and the smells are

shouting, saturating the air with a violence itself sufficient to close off the nose. Skilled in this endeavor, Grace can and does breathe without taking in the odor of humanity. Talk, along with the steam, circles in the air. Words come from faces, from bodies that are tired, perpetually tired, but also perpetually alive, eyes following movement, zigzagging. Grace listens to the ticktockclickclock sound of her heels upon the sidewalk. She offers that smile, although she tries not to intrude, not to pierce with those brown opalescent eyes of hers. Those eyes are antennae for what is peripheral and what is before her, as well as what stains or provides texture upon the sidewalk, and the sidewalk itself, its cracks and crevices.

And now as she heads straight for the bars, her thoughts rumble like the train beneath her feet. They go something like this: "You wonder what became of poor Jonah after all the whale and post-whale travail, saving the dubious city from itself & afterwards regretting it. So the smart lord produces a great gourd, some big berry, just to show Jonah all about mercy, mercy, mercy<sup>5</sup>, can't have enough of it." Her eyes rest upon fruitstands, their gourds overflowing, though it is mid-summer. Somewhere in the world, she is thinking, summer is over, and gourds are harvested and sent to New York City, where they can overflow. Grapes fester in trashbins, while pomegranates sit vigil with the hybrid pears. The fellows sit vigil, as well. All kinds of husky languages form in the back of their minds and throats as Grace's smile passes. Which is to say that her lips—of the thick, petulant variety—are spread.

She keeps walking. Like a waterfall, her thoughts: "That one gourd with its inevitable crimson worm. So what happens is the changing of the gourd, and it's silence that's the way of our leader—both on land and in the sky. Well, there's gotta be a

president of a country that is no place to live in. Like the world - some great wormy gourd."

It is none other than Bleecker Street, the street that will take her from the west to the east. Bleecker is her homeland, the street that has adopted her, if even just for this moment in time, as there are no promises, for now it is hers and a hundred thousand others, her street, fickle as it is—the one upon which she lives, though further west, as she is headed east. She is passing the sad, closed up bakery, and the sad, closed up cheese store, and the happy, darkened church. She has crossed the wide Avenue and headed uptown, now north, in order to walk along Macdougall Street tonight. But first she turns east on West Third, turns her head to the opened door of Sound City, a musical cave where the sound is generally acoustic, but she walks on past the brick facades and the beckoning of Washington Square Park with its arch, that grand copy of the one in Paris, which itself was a copy of the one in Rome—there before Bob Dylan graced Sound City and gave it a branding, before she turns away to go south again. It pleases her to look up into the fire escapes where others like her are sitting, taking in the night with its crescent moon. Grace passes closed up jewelry shops, restaurants with spice and enticing oils and espresso shops, with odors escaping from windows and door jambs, with the tinny riffs of radio, and something live, as well, and then she turns the corner to go east once more. The desire for something liquid, for mellowing, for adventure, for what if the love she is looking for is harbored in one of the many bars sailing on Bleecker Street.

She stands, a silhouette of considerable height, before the huge door of Meows that appears cider-colored in the mix of moonlight and man's light. A muffled howl of humanity overcome by electric strings escapes through the old doorjamb, and for a

moment she pauses, prepares her ears for shattering. Her hands grip the vertical brass bar. Long fingers they are, with small, pink, trimmed but unpolished nails, fanned out like tiny clamshells. She pushes, steps in, aggressive with hunger for someone's undivided attention. Her eyes, those watery purveyors of ambiguity, walking now. They happen to be large and penetrating, a milk chocolate brown, as if you could see them. The steps she takes weave her through a measured darkness, from the brass and wood of the bar to a cushioned perching place. She negotiates, then imbibes quickly, enjoying, if just for a fraction of a second, the sensation on the tips of her lips. "These are cats and rats," she thinks," but where is my prize for the night?"

Desire does not cloud her discretion.

Arriving at the conclusion that this unnamable one she has sought is indeed nowhere to be found, she exits the very same door she had entered, thinking, among other things, that her reward is merely the liquid refreshment that stirs, burbles, and grumbles within.

When her thoughts become sufficiently mingled with liquor, she begins to articulate, her voice a mix of husk and spun candy. She continues her journey from one promising bar to the next, from Fruitstand to River ran<sup>6</sup>, and then Heartbreaks, all the time crying, sometimes softly, sometimes not: "But where and who are you?"

She thinks she sees flickers, and she sighs a great sigh, looking up into constellations not visible but surely there. Hearing no answer, she continues speaking, her voice sorrowful but strident, a dozen French horns filled with Mahler: "I gave you love of all kinds, and what did you give me, oh you old lord of all love? Just a shadow to cover my face."

She continues walking until the children's hour, when the smells of bread in the air mix with the pee on the sidewalks, and the fellows you meet are not likely to be knights in shining armor. Thanks to her monologue she eludes them, those knights. The words that come out of her mouth are not her own, she will say if asked about their source, but none other than those of the generous lord himself.

His answer, though long in forthcoming, is nonetheless a mouthful: "I gave you light<sup>7</sup> on the first day, light on the second day, light on the third, forever more. I watered your gardens, sunned your faces, and I ordered your day. Gave you washing machines, toasters, lobsters to win, octopus to wrong, and spiders to weave you out of Eden. I watched you pick your noses and scratch your crotches and open your eyes. I watched all your grace, all your scorn, all your loving, your groping, your begging, your praying for freedom, from toothaches, for toothpicks for eating the dirt off my feet. You greeted my wonders with laughter, with crying, with boredom, with jealousy steaming like barbs right out of your ears. You marveled for a minute, then bitched that your back ached. You screamed like a mongoose, then forgot. I gave you light, light, light of all kinds on the fourth day, forever more, waxing and waning, sun, moon, stars and light of your eyes. Gave you breath of life, oceans of love<sup>8</sup>, and the pot boils over—into kitchen, closets, hall, studio, bathroom, bedroom, out the window into the garden, down streets to the center of a town, past school, firehouse, next town, next world, and there you go, hungry, saturated, leaking, polluted, aloof: a spongy, stony mass of mind with yes/no blind sides and filling up ten million worlds with a holy mess."

The words emerging from her madwoman's well like flowers, like all that she had eaten and drunk within the past half a dozen hours would soon emerge. It continues, or

rather, *she* continues speaking: "So, what did I expect you wonder—appreciation, gratefulness, love for all kinds of creations, prizes or return envelopes of 'Thanks, pop, but it isn't enough?' What did I want I still ask myself, but whatever it was, you can believe I didn't get it, so boy did you hear about it, right?"

Finally, she touches upon the square of mixed sand, the block of cement, the very one that leads to her home base, her roots, when the outpouring stops. Does she think someone will recognize her, or does the oracle suddenly dry up on familiar ground. She will not think to ask that of herself later on. Somehow she manages to break through the misty, musty graylight, as she turns the brass knob with her right hand, opening the large glass door to her entryway. With the bulge of keys already in her left hand, she clicks that lock and runs up three flights to undo her own door. From the time she is able to bolt herself in to the time she falls into the depths of sleep, many things occur that may be imagined, having been largely implied.

With her body in that sloughed-off position assumed by most if not all sleeping homoerecti, twentieth century and otherwise, Grace now finds herself seated alone on an airplane enroute to California, with all the stewardesses waiting upon her. In her hands is an envelope that she has seen before in earlier versions of the dream<sup>9</sup>. Even the ride in the plane is something that feels redundant, and wait—is there a man sitting next to her? Is it him? For some reason, instead of looking at him, she is riveted to the message that was within the envelope. It reads, "Maybe YOU will bring the Nobel Peace Prize<sup>10</sup> Child to earth. Send away now." The word 'now' sticks in her mind, but the message continues, "Offer runs out soon." Now the word 'soon' takes on an echo. Upon desolate arrival, the stewardesses, very much in the nodding know, lead her to a bevy of silent



fellows in suits, with ties and briefcases, who take her to tea, then explain something about an obstacle course of testing. They invite her into a laboratory. Loud bells interrupt, and as her hand reaches out to twist a pink plastic knob on the pink plastic clock-radio, Grace sees colorful streams of transition, large faces of her mother, father, grandmother in fearful disapproval.

The next thing that greets her—her large ashen eyes now exposed to a room devoid of lovers, not a one—is the grand light of morning. She does very quickly what one must do to seize the day, in addition to what one who travels by bicycle must do, and there she is, bicycle and all, to be counted among the world at large, namely buses, trucks of all creeds, taxis and cars proper.

It is one crying heat wave down the Avenue, stopping here and turning there, and some offering pornographic fairy dust down Gracie's treacherous way of the bicycle. She negotiates patches of cobblestone and travels up textile<sup>11</sup> hill to the great chambers of City Hall, just short of Wall<sup>12</sup> and environs<sup>13</sup>. She passes an elevator operator, several idling chauffeurs, ten typing secretaries, fifteen filing clerks, swarms of mail-persons, and some administrators, solitary as dangling modifiers, all smoking and angry, the whole civil world governed by servants in polyester. She wheels her elephant-like bicycle to the small airless cubicle where it is fully accepted and lovingly housed—the Computer Terminal room for the City of New York. And yes, someone is indeed waiting for her, her partner of sorts, Breanda Liberfried, who is pretty, and to the point, pregnant as an octopus<sup>14</sup>. Going on nearly a year they have been together, with the ups and downs of the

Housing Office. Promises have been made, but Breanda does not require full-time work any longer. Grace, her aspirations unclear, is there for the salary, the lack of commitment, and the sheer fact of work. She is making up her mind, still. A degree unfinished. It should haunt her but it doesn't. Breanda is as clear as her body about her wants and needs. Between them more than four but less than five degrees. Breanda's in philosophy, Gracie's an amalgam of science, history and literature; Breanda's from city schools; Gracie's from a few in New England. No matter any of it, now. They are inputters or as they are called, "analysts." When she looks up, Breanda's large, glistening eyes see everything. Her coffee-stained lips part in smile, and so the day begins.

"You survived."

"Oh, I'm blooming." Grace, her voice nearly a third lower in pitch, as she offers a loving glance toward Breanda's enormous belly. "How's your immortality?"

"Kicking. How's yours?"

"A dry night on that score." Grace looks down, her eyes burning and glassy. Puffy and purple underneath. "Sad newspaper heads, I note," she says, hovering over her plump, serene fellow, forcing her eyes to focus on the offending tabloid, preferring that to the endless printout of work also straddling the desk. She is feeling wishy-washy over the issue of coffee.

While taking a sip of hers, Breanda mumbles something about the hostage crisis.

"Hostage<sup>15</sup> outrage," says Grace. "Getting used to adversity."

"Are you speaking of the weather?" Poor Breanda with her bubbles of sweat and fear of nutsmell, and her general aversion to the heat.

"I'm talking of everything, everything, everything--"

"Oh, here we go--"

"Proliferation of nuclear waste, pumping smokestacks, look at this—‘Grime Grips Husband’—‘Slays Lover’—‘Strangles Wife’—‘Poisons Children’—‘All Watch.’” Grace is pacing, now, and the blood is happy to find its way into her cheeks, to compensate for the concentric circles about her eyes, a face pale for the draining of its life-force.

Breanda is watching her now, her hair—a mass of blonde curls in a small ponytail high up on her head. Where Breanda’s is buttery smooth and moonlike in its fullness, Grace’s is an angled face, the sallow skin tight, except for where the lavender is shading the underparts of her eyes. She is perking herself up, she is gaining momentum, as she looks about drab walls, the windows too far away, and closed they are, the air—outside steamy, inside frigid—overflowing with ambition and ennui. “We are prey to subway slimeball purse robbers, chain snatchers, and, and, and, terrorists, smiling rapists. World leaders no better, conductors of world doom. No crumbs in their pockets. Just payoffs and jerkoff everything commercial to stuff our faces with—cancer deodorants, douche-bag mouthwashes—make you smell nice as you tick away. Animals and robots and sponges and stones. We oughtta revolt."

"Makes you sweat."

"Plus the dollar --"

"And bleed."

"Subway rates, interest rates—look at it!"

"Greed and stupidity."

"It's revolting. A fucking fifty cents for filthy coffee." <sup>16</sup>

It's the clue that Grace is ready to endure the percussion of words from fellows making eyes and sandwiches behind the counter.

Exhausted while walking back into the elevator, out the door, back into the heat, she tries to pull herself inward, to a listening.

"You want sugar?" They're all looking at her, five young men with white aprons and roaming eyes.

She nods.

"How sweet you're gonna be!" This fellow is making sandwiches as if it were a sculpture with waxed paper and salami and turkey and a few slabs of soap-white cheese.

"Too sweet for me," says another, his head bent next to a black telephone, his one hand holding a piece of paper while the other makes pencil slashes in a list, an endless series of things.

"Every chick is too sweet for you," says the first.

"Fuck you," says the telephone man.

"Perfect for me," says the guy putting the sugar in, and Grace watches each little particle make the slide down the spoon, watches him stir, watches him palm the plastic lid on the coffee cup, handing it to her, her fingers brushing against his, both of them hot but not as hot as the cup.

"Perfect for you," she's thinking, but instead of coming up with a profound return, she takes a simple look at the young man's smile, not so pernicious as all that—he's just having fun.

She takes the coffee, offers up her dollar, leaves the change.

"Hey, lady, you forgot..."

“Nope,” she says. “Didn’t forget. Have a cuppa coffee on me, kid,” she says. She tears out a tiny piece of plastic for her mouth, pockets the plastic. One sip, and it feels very good, a settling of the sediments, as she walks back. A simple peace for just a moment on a summer morning. Up the elevator in silence, and walking down that hall, feeling in her body a dance, a gratefulness for life. The maudlin tail of a hangover, she thinks, and laughs at herself. Soon as she sees Breanda, in their cubicle, her personality perks up. Merriment.

She sets the Styrofoam cup on the metal desk and watches the liquid bounce.

“How sweet you’re gonna be,” Breanda says. “Or did they tell you to just dip in your little finger and sweeten it up?”

“Yeah,” Grace says. “Not sweet enough.”

“Here,” says Breanda, and she grabs the coffee, pretends to make a swirl in the cut with her large, water-swollen pinkie. “Now it’s sweet. Ah, these guys have you trapped.” Suddenly they’re hysterical with laughter because it’s morning and already so damn hot, and Breanda is so damn pregnant, and Gracie is so damn hungover, and the office is so damn polyester, and the whole world is so damn stuck.

"Gracie, Gracia, or maybe just Grace," says Grace to Breanda, who is looking for a girl's name some of the time.

"Not bad." Breanda’s face puckers, then explodes.

All possibilities for joy come to an abrupt halt upon the entrance of the managerial occupants of the room, who happen to be carrying a tray of little plastic champagne glasses, filled up and bubbling, stem and all. The City has sold forty

tenements in Brooklyn. Walford and Tina, they are. Walford is from California, an expert on energy, and Tina, a master in computers, frankfurters, and Jesus.

Both girls refuse, for reasons variously biological and political. As they deliver combinations of hello and goodbye and no-thank-you, tall gangly Grace and squat Breanda—both cradling computer printouts and Grace coffee—negotiate their shift to the conference room. The room is their favorite, with its long wood table, plush synthetic carpet, green chalkboard, choice of chalk, sometimes a coffeemaker, and best of all, the row of windows with the lunch-hour trumpeter below. They can look across at the architects ogling with their binoculars, or they can look to the left and see the river, or to the right to see the hulking risen continent of Twin Towers.<sup>17</sup> They can look up for blue skies of perspective and, finally, look inward to business.

"I had that new dream again," says Grace quietly to Breanda. "The one about the new world of peace, and a baby was coming into the picture, and what is frightening is I am getting the idea that I am going to be pregnant like you!"

"Oh yeah?" There is a large book in front of Breanda. Not many people are permitted to cull through it, but these girls are among the chosen. It's known as the Landovitz List<sup>18</sup>, with its ten thousand confidential letters, numbers coagulated into addresses, monies paid and owed, names and dates, numbers of buildings for blocks, for units of dwelling, rooms, tenants, zones, boroughs, a code etched onto the mouth of fat folds for day, month, year of entry, on each page a place for initials, traces of past seekers, anal investigators, cullers, gleaners, nosy bodies and worry warts. From this treasure, Breanda wrests her blue-green tawny eyes, wherein a flicker of light plus water

evinces a change of focus, juxtaposition, perhaps humor, perhaps more. "God," says Breanda. "Tell me!"

Grace's fingers mark a smudgy spot that a pen will make historic, and she rubs the burning chemical ink<sup>19</sup> onto her blue cotton pants, rests her elbow on the stripy folded green and white computer paper, and then she tells the tale. "Sometime it starts with words on an envelope. Sometimes with a TV commercial saying the same thing, advertising the contest."

"Does it always pick up with those same words?" Breanda gets into her appear-to-be-working position, pencil poised 45 degrees, shoulders hunched, legs raised on upside down trashcan, face fixed.

"Not always, although certainly last night yes. Usually it's just getting into a thick of feelings, and suddenly I'm on this airplane, and I've got very little free will."

"So, you're scared."

"Precisely—it's like a nightmare, except sometimes when there's this nice fellow on board."

"Anyone I know, or should I say anyone I've heard about?"

"No," Grace says. She feels the burst of freshness, rekindling the sensation just by talking about, but a corruption, too. The face of this man. Just telling Breanda about the dream reminds her that he was there, sitting next to her on the airplane—but how could that be? He was in a suit as if it were a masquerade, and in the dream, she remembered, "Oh, I must take note to see how he looks." But soon as she attempted to catch the face, to study it, somehow knowing in the dream that she'd want the material for a time postdream, the man turned his head. "It's hard to say what he looks like exactly," she

says. "I can't say what it is that lets me know it's him. Something about the feeling. Something about a light that seems to come from his eyes that I can see without seeing his eyes. Does that make sense?"

"Why should it make sense?" Breanda says. "It's a dream. What happens when you land?"

"Things change. What it boils down to is they've gotta see if I'm a good specimen. You know, smart, rich, healthy, beautiful, but first I ask for the tour of the sperm bank—and Jesus Christ—it's like a goddam jewelry mine, a museum, a mint, with all these gems of sperm in test-tubes with short descriptions of donor above each creamy tube. Things like: complexion, eye color, stature, age at time of emission, profession, religion, invention, if applicable, field in which Nobel was won. They're extremely careful somehow to keep concealed the actual identity of the fellow—for his protection, their power, so as not to dispel the air of mystery. Everything is super-duper sterile frozen in celluloid glass cabinets, and the people are all in white white white. Very laboratory like. Probably they wash, rinse, trim, extract their knuckle hair. They probably vacuum clean their noses. No windows, just lots of mirrors and signs that say, 'Top Secret', 'Radioactive', 'Danger.'"

"What happens when you look in the mirrors?"

"They're two-way," Gracie whispers. She looks up, sensing a body at the closed doors that seems to depart. "I can see through the mirror to the other side where these jerk-off scientists are checking me out with pencils and bleep-talk equipment registering waves and recording every second thought. And I am just a pale ghostly thing like translucent film. But what's weird is I have the feeling of being in control, perfectly, as



though the whole thing were in my hands, and I know I can do anything. Like the way things are when you're three or four years old and you feel like you can make it rain or grow up to be your father or a mongoose, or you know, actually fly."

"So, tell me quickly what the testing is, and then we gotta—"

"I'm sorry."

"Please, just go—"

"OK—the testing is torture, sometimes sexy—" and then she stops, and the two of them pretend to gurgle at Walford, who is playing peek-a-boo, but checking up on them just the same.

Incased in computer chrysalis, they do their duty, ingesting pure unexpurgated knowledge, making endless charts of endless data, updating the world. They break for lunch and to relieve themselves but are otherwise cloistered in their favorite room till the close of day.

No, Breanda does not fathom this young woman, though they come from the same general tribe of Ashkenazis, and yet how entertaining Grace is, her office-buddy, not someone she would think to associate outside of the office domain.

"Is it that time?" Grace looks askance at the back of Breanda, who is looking out the window for something not there. "Looking for your chariot?"

"My husband."

"The progenitor of your rare uterine expansion?"

"My business partner."

"Whom you love, honor and obey?"

"My precious though too-small dildo."

"For whom you clean, cook and self-beautify?"

"My mirror?"

"That you live for, daily groveling, not hanging it all, slitting wrists, jumping cliffs, slurping hemlock pills, taking knife, gun, arrow, needle against thine own flesh?"

"My God," Breanda says, "is here." They quickly begin to fiddle with papers and pencils, rulers, dried up coffee cups, candy and sandwich wraps, gum wrappers, and then sign off. Their few goodbyes are issued rapidly, and they secure a spare elevator for four, including the child-to-be and the bicycle.

"What a joke," Breanda says, giggling, when she spots Richard, whom Gracie had once branded as "her mortal goosebuddy" from afar. He waves and grins though remains submerged in his dingy blue rusty Chevy.

"Ah," Gracie says. They pause amid the centripital forces spinning off the streets of New York City. "I wish I had one."

"You have twenty."

"Him that I want I can't have."

Off they go into separate worlds of the whirlwind of what is commonly called rush hour, when ten million paths cross in preparation for the great change when the sun presents, or in this case retrieves its light. Soon it will be night, Grace thinks, with its smell of home cooking, television glare and telephone ringing war and peace in the air, the thousand small convergences as news and booze and money trade hands and mouths.

"Kisses for some," she observes, riding her bike up the ramp to the West Side Drive<sup>20</sup>,

rotted out for cars, but good for the lovers on bikes and skates. Whatever else she sees, she passes quickly. One great sunset over Jersey's factory sky, the rusty Hudson snake water, barometer of winds and waste. Assess what you feel? Polluted, thinks Gracie, but with the living.

She rifles through her mail, raises up the bike like an ungainly set of dumbbells, and climbs the three sets of stairs—the mail bunched in her pants. Upon reaching the third floor, Grace takes her fist, collects the flopping envelopes and sends everything down the incinerator. "What I want is a kiss," she sighs, as she unlocks her door, opens it, squeezing her body between the door jamb and the bicycle, pushing it into the hallway, setting it against the wall, and then turning around and twisting the metal ring securely, locking the world out. Hungry and rattled, she switches her radio to "on" and pulls her shades down as she sheds clothes, letting them live on rungs of chairs, top of dresser, floor itself, and the bed, a futon on the floor. Then she settles under a flowered yellow sheet and allows her eyelids to close. A lively trio plays behind the scenes of Gracie's dream, where she finds herself adrift in a posh theater with linen carpets, champagne colored armchairs and walls with windows between each row of viewers. She is seeking a seat in a small, elegant S-shaped alcove just in time for dimming, a row nearly empty. Goldilocks-like, she tries on the first seat, a wooden swivel. Feeling jittery, she selects another, also uncomfortable, plus backless. Upon her return to swivel, she discovers the couple adjacent to her are toasting each other, high-stemmed glasses delicately pressed between their fingers. Grace considers the probability of her suitor making an entrance when the movie begins. There in the film of her dream is her friend Em walking frantically in love. Agony flashing in her long, wavy thick, dark hair, in her terribly thin

frame. What darkness is Em headed for? The image of the City is ice-water gray.

Suddenly there is an awful utterance from the woman sitting beside her, and big black bubbly letters replace the image on the screen, telling the classic tale of how a woman sought and found a love so great it failed. With a flourish of a Ravel crescendo, Gracie turns, gasping at the sight of her man—the same one who’d sat next to her on the airplane—his height impressing her now, but no particulars of the face—but there he is, making a feeble attempt to enter her row.

Then it is the radio station WNYC announcing itself, the time, the weather, the major horrors, the next lovely selection opera Richard Wagner, whereupon the sleeper rises and twists a ridged pink knob, which offers up a hasty if purely local silence.

And then she dials up this Em, a name derived from Muriel. They’d been close friends from a time dating back to college. Gracie, a child of working-class parents in mid-Jersey, was on scholarship, whereas Em, a Scarsdale girl, was from high-class, Westchester County folk. They’d both tried their hand at acting, but Grace gave it up early on, angling for a more academic career path. She’d dreamed of being a scientist, seduced first by the world of scientific theories, and then by literature, itself a world of fancy, and finally by the idea of something interdisciplinary. Grace figured herself for a career as an educator, but the teaching assistantships she had held during a large part of her graduate education cured her of that. Em, on the other hand, is still thick into the movie business and her longstanding relationship with the fellow who has “discovered” her, a man by the name of Bruce Steen—whom Grace deems of dubious character. Theirs is a friendship with baggage and shifts; there are the finances, such as when Em took Grace to France, and then asked for services, namely that Grace provide voice-overs

for a film, and this was fine with Grace, except that Bruce, himself, wanted favors. No, Grace has no soft spot for Bruce, although there had been some sharing of boyfriends way back when. This was when Grace was up for almost anything, before she headed off to graduate school in Boston, when she prepared to invest all her dreams in scholarship itself, before she lost faith in that, too. Grace was and is and shall be the sincerest of seekers. How she admired Em for talent and daring. It was to experience “the other” Em said. Her parents not only approved but encouraged it. As wild as Em was, her parents were behind her. This was also true for Grace, although her father was dead, and Grace liked to protect her mother from her own wayward life. Grace had sisters, conventional as she was not—whereas in Em’s family, there was just Em. Just Em and a lot of money, and Em’s parents supported all sorts of causes, from synagogues to hospitals to governments. In Grace’s eyes, Em was for the most part to be respected, for her complications and her secrecy. They knew how to respect each other’s privacy, both bent on preparing, discovering a “self.” So, in addition to what she imagined as her friend’s almost psychic disappearance into the auric folds of Bruce Steen, there was this second troubling thing, perhaps related to the first, namely this questioning of that self, which went like this: Grace says, “How is your self coming along?” Em answers, “Now that’s a good question.” Grace persists: “It’s just a very basic question, Em. Very basic. Where’s the trouble in such a question?” And Em says: “It’s because sometimes I think I have no self.” This explanation remains to haunt Grace, who ponders whether selfness is good or selflessness is good. Owning the self, both so abstract, and is there such a thing, anyway? Is there such a thing to relinquish? Grace the thinker, the theorist, and Em the do-er, the artist extraordinaire. Ironically, in college Grace was Honey to Em’s raging Martha in

Albee's ...*Virginia Woolf*. She was Ismene to Em's Antigone, as well as her Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*, and Grace was Iago's wife, Emilia, to Em's Desdemona. As if Grace was eternally to be Em's foil and bodyguard.

As for Em, she didn't think too hard about anything. Em wanted life. The more surfaces she could scratch, the better. Em wanted something to touch, something to have in her hands, something to play with and play with well.

If theirs is a dance of electrons, it isn't Em who will analyze it. But that doesn't mean she won't dance it.

Something more than habit, more than history keeps them calling for each other.

"I had a dream about you," Grace says. "You were in a movie."

"Oh yeah? I *was* in a movie."

"I know."

"Really. I mean for real."

"Was it classic?"

"Sort of. Classic junk."

"Not the same thing."

"So," Em says, stretching sound to fill up space. As far as sounds go, Em is to soprano what Grace is to contralto: where Grace has husk, Em has water; and where Grace has earth, Em has flame.

"What ya doing for dinner?"

"Nothing."

They meet at Riverran, where the girls are considered regulars, both individually and paired. Grace sampled their liquid goods the night before. Their more solid specialties are fin and claw, greens and scrumptiously disastrous creams.

Once near look-alikes, both tall gangles, with the golden wavy hair and pale deadpan face of the nineteen-sixties, they might now be mistaken for members of separate species, what with Em's new crewcut with the turquoise fringe, for which she paid a short visit to Bellevue<sup>21</sup>, compliments of Ma and Pa Lyons.

Marble-eyed, Grace says nothing but "what's new."

"Nothing." Em indicates this is an understatement. It's in the smile and the twinkle of blue eyes—eyes being their one genuine distinguishing feature.

"How was California?"

"The same."

They order eclectically, thoughts and smells that, with the help of underpaid workers, would imagine themselves into pulsing broccoli sprouts, creamy tangy beancurd, filet of fishies draped with moutarde sauce a la fromage.<sup>22</sup>

"I'm starved."

"Likewise. How's the job?" Em asks with the sallow dimpling concern on her cheeks and brow of one who has been through the ranks, tricks of the trade, you name it—babysitting, sandwich making, housecleaning, paperfiling, dog-walking, phone-answering, amateur salesladying, unskilled day job for night dream grandiose.

Em and Grace, both anomalous. Em taking those jobs for the sheer thrill of hunger, for seeing what she might be missing, and generous without measure, both. Em the sincerely complex masterpiece, and Grace the simpleton. At least this is what Grace

thinks when she thinks of herself. Those same jobs Em took to ease her curiosity, Grace used to gain the money to build a life, the need itself material, something more than spiritual, and now her spiritual hunger itself calling, the hunger that masks itself as if for just a man. Meaningful occupation, as well, her bywords. Whereas Em's hunger is insatiable.

"It's that I want to make a difference. Instead I'm adding to the garbage heap."

"Dance," says Em. "Just make it beautiful. Stop trying to make sense. Have a good time with it until you can, and when you can't, throw a tantrum. That's my philosophy."

"Too well do I know it," Grace says. "I know half the world is nonsensical, but I can give up sense. I can't give up meaning, although I would like to think that beauty is enough."

"You have complaints, my friend," Em says.

"I'll sing them to you," says Grace. "No, I'll see if I can say it in one breath," she says, "what this job is like. She takes a deep one and sings: "Land of cowards, home of the slaves, cotton picking rotted numbers of buildings, strange fruit taken over by City, most of which gutted, rat infested, cave-man hideouts. They're trying to organize into groups, categories of deterioration, labels for purposes of selling, demolition, dubious renovations, conservation. Everybody mean and sweet and make no waves. Go to one for help, cannot be done. Go to another, says go to one you went to. Go to building in one room, pull out long, intestinal unreadable printout 200 years old. Nothing updated, takes ten men, women, unisexes to find you a better one, only 100 years out of date. People screaming on telephones in poverty accents. Take one step up, the near managers,



paranoid, researchers, they call us. We are a scare force of women, Blacks, Latinos, the once unlikely Ph.D., now otherwise.” Ah, this breath has her gasping now for air, and she is winded, but her hands are up, as if to make sure that Em will not speak, and she says, “Wait, wait. Hear me out,” and then continues, after a second great breath: “Great fools qualified by an idiotic civil testing service exam that measures degree of masochism, quantity of waste, ability to swallow without impairing performance—or raising level of expectation, readiness to change facts that took years to research in order to prove the point they made prior to research. Peachy, peachy, peachy, like heaven and earth in the hands of worms, but hope hope hope, maybe not hope exactly, maybe just great laughter, greater tears as the greatest saddest spirit of creation looks on.”

Em was once the best listener Gracie ever had. "Is there an alternative?"

"To the trap door of work?" The two chuckle, and a waitress appears, setting down the platters before two honorable guests of the universe, who begin to chew, gnaw, slurp, swallow and further digest as much as possible the true, beautiful, and useful food.

"Mmmmmmmmmnnzzgoooooood," Em says, chomping, then taking a breather, and looking up to Grace, who smiles her chocolaty-brown eyes out, yet keeps going at her half-filled, one-hand clapping plate.

Em chooses cream pie, Gracie goes for ice cream; the former coffee, the latter tea, and as their last warmed breath emerges, they rise, pay check (Em), leave tip (Grace), and exit into the still hot streets.<sup>23</sup> They walk nowhere through the darkening air, sated, but still as always in tense, silent love as city step clops, glass shattering, tire-halting voices blast all noise into orchestral precision. Between Empire State and World Trade there glows an all neon summer night's peace, a thousand pictures worthy of a word.

"What ya thinking?"

"I'm not."

"No?"

"You?"

"Ten millions."

"Words?"

"Things of the air," Grace says, listening to their own clippety clops down Eight Street, making sirrah priestly gestures of forgiveness to ogling seventeen-year olds lined up in huddles under the marquee to see *A Clockwork Orange*.<sup>24</sup>

"Want to see a movie, not this?" Em stops on a crack, her face positioned to receive only acceptance.

"Well, yes," says she who knows. "The new one, what's it called?"

"*Spellweaver*," says Em, hailing a cab and directing it, more with forefinger than speech, to its destination north and east.

Em selects the keys to<sup>25</sup> a series of darkened doors and locks. They climb a sweeping stairwell with brass railing, high ceiling, Deco molding, thick hot maroon carpet, gold braided drapes, into a palace of the private screening room. She proceeds, having pushed up and down a snake of light switches, to set up the tick-tock whistle of her most recent film. Grace sits in row four, the second seat of the seven-row times three-abreast choice. She waits, watches, then says with a sudden flash, "This why you did your hair?"

"Not quite," Em says, her breast braced against the static projector, her arms willowy in extension, her fingers tapping flicks, checks that directly preceded showing.

"The hair's why we did the film."

"This Bruce's?"

"Yes."

"Still Bruce?"

"Still."

"Well. Then run it."

"Here goes nothing."

It begins with a cello playing something in a minor key, joined by a bright piano, listing credits, starring Muriel Lyons as "Spellweaver." Black lettering grayed against children who are made up to look like animals. They munch on chips, drink from straws stuck in soda cans, dip their fingers into brown dip and snarl. One child, namely Em, dressed sleekly in black and white, except for ostrich make-up and pink feathery hair, suddenly turns off a television, and the others make a fuss. As always, Em is mute. She proceeds in mime to silence all opposition, seducing each child, starting with the chubby pink and purple panda bear. Soon as the panda smiles, Em turns away, savage with disinterest. Humiliated, the panda howls and walks off, licking its fingers and wiping its tearful face. The camera looms up on texture of teardrops mixing with smear of pink paint. Next the bug, skinny, beady-eyed, persevering, defined by what appears to be antlers, crawls toward Em, when Em suddenly makes a strident gesture warning the bug to keep its distance. Steadily, Em brings her repulsion to love, sending the insect upon its back, its eyes closed, in anticipation of great pleasure. Then Em abruptly twists its

antennae, yanks them off, whereupon the bug screams a high-pitched scream, retrieves its feelers and scrams. The one kid left, dressed like a sprite, applauds out of fear. Em is gratified, her smile is pointed, her eyes glowing with heat, as the sprite cowers, saying, "I know you'll only hurt me." Like a moth, the sprite flits about the room's exterior.

"Would you like me to leave?" It lingers by the door, cannot bring itself to open it. Em begins to laugh, soothingly, encouragingly, sweetly. Then the camera focuses on Em, showing a beauty that exists only there on screen, the sharpness of her nose, the sparkling sky dart of her eyes, her small ear folds and her great angularity of structure, offset by full, trembling lips whose edges presently turn up out of purse to suggest simple joy, that grows to an unbearable peak, then, just as madly disappears. Her laughter turns savage, which blows the spirit out the door. Weeping angel now, she prays in her throttle voice to "Our Lady who art in heaven," as the film fades to blackout.

A ticker flap of plastic signals the end of tension. Not a long film, not more than an hour, but afterwards there is silence, which Grace breaks.

"You're always such a sweetie in the end."

They close many doors before the final door, when they greet the great outdoors, albeit nothing less than the wilds of extended family, parlor, bedroom, sometimes bathroom, walk-in kitchen, perpetual study-library of electric thoughts, underground sky-lit guest room of the castle, with its mote and never-ending driveway, the throbbing streets of New York.

"You know," Em says, her face down, looking at the colorless silt specks gathering on her sandaled toes. "Sometimes I make my stomach crawl."

They walk the charted path originally made by the taxi back to home territory, the aforementioned local fantasy outlet bar, Heartbreaks, on Bleecker, distinguished by the many performers, Muriel Lyons among them, who have groveled in its lowly dust on their way up to the star dust sky of Vegas.<sup>26</sup>

As they are not talking, Em looking down at her feet, those sandals, and in her mind a large thought or shall we say growing desire for Bruce, a thought of surrender, of disappearance, a self-punishment, or was it a world-punishment—she didn't know, this Em. This was the thought in her mind, and traces of it escaped. Sighs they are. Grace, there also with her longing, a disembodied one, though—a seeking. Sighs also coming from her, adding to the sounds of horns and occasional yelps, when Grace's thoughts bring her to the image of a bug preening its antennae, brought on by the film of a bug separated from its self, its feelings, its way of knowing the outside world. She little realizes that there is just such a bug, doing such a thing in her hair, a small bug at that, with little buds for antennae.

"First, I will send you the worm," it says.

"You will do what?" Grace says to Em.

"I said nothing, friend. Just sighs upon sighs."

"No worm?"

"Worm?"

"How I want a kiss, and you talk of worms and flies," Grace says.

"There is no reason for you not to have your kiss, my dearest," Em says and offers her a large one on her lips. They are at the door to Heartbreaks, where they will go their separate ways.

"Parting is such bitter joy," Grace says, following and losing Em past the door, making passage through the jungle of human backs, turning shoulders, hotheaded faces with eyes that are scorched red. Above all an invisible lord of mania presides, perhaps swinging in the medieval chandelier that hangs high, or stationed among the heads of elk and moose decorating the back of the bar, which the bartenders turn to face when they aren't facing the live animals. They pour the molten water, mix with a ping and tinkle, set down what they've made up, collect the bills, ring up the sales and return the change. Meanwhile ten hundred amplified odes to angst resound, human and metallic cries for possession, consummation, release.

"Oh for just a kiss," Grace thinks during the transaction of beer number one.

"Hello to Grace." It's Ben, the singer-songwriter friend of Bruce, the lover and director and tormentor of Em, the dearest, oldest best-friend, worst enemy and blood-sister to Grace once upon a time when all things were possible.

"Hi Benben." Gracie squeezes shoulders and buttocks, slinks down on a stool beside him. Her eyes survey the room for trouble, then shines her own true browns upon the curly-locked gentle beast, who hasn't taken his off hers for at least thirty seconds.

"Bruce was looking for Em."

"Think he found her."

Meanwhile there are several adult dramas hovering near the juke box. More than a handful arise at the small round tables in the room with the stage, and even some on the

steps where Em and Bruce stand in their long thin embrace. Is everybody oblivious to everybody, Grace thinks, directing her gaze back to Ben, the matter at hand, his juicy lips in deep dark drink.

As folks approach, some known, some not, exchange greetings, pleasantries and un, offer introductions when necessary, and generally chatter about weather, music, politics, love and career, Gracie is thinking yes no yes no yes no yes no yes no, regarding Ben and all possibilities of an interaction sublime. Having a history of having said and done both, Gracie declines in her mind, her decision riding upon the power of the dream man imprinted on her brain. She smiles now, seeing in her mind this dream man, as if he has suddenly materialized, as if she has to be true.

Ben responds to the way she is looking at him, little realizing that she has superimposed a very different face upon his face. She is staring—clearly, crudely, unconsciously staring—at this young man, imposing upon his the features of another. She cannot take her eyes off Ben.

“He is not the worm,” says the fly still preening its antennae.

“Would you repeat that,” she says to Ben.

“What?” he says, looking back at her, taking both her speech and her gaze for some kind of prelude to a proposition, and why not?

“You said something to me, about, a...”

Ben stops her mid sentence, when she is about to speak again about a worm, and he whispers, “Would you care to go to the Fruitstand?” Ben thinks good things might be about to happen, taking good note, not of the fly but of Grace's attention, her wide smile, and thinking fondly of the more private bar across the street.

"I don't know," Gracie says, upon beer number four, when the image of the other man becomes suddenly irretrievable. "It doesn't really matter where we go."

"Oh no?" Ben says, his own cloudy eyes amused.

"For the reason that I must depart," she says. "It's work tomorrow. Cheerio!"

"Why?" Ben shows nary a trace of disappointment, perhaps just another victim of the god of ambivalence.

"I'll turn back into a pumpkin and you a shoe!"

"Then, goodbye." He bestows a kiss upon her pulsing cheek.

"You have made my life tonight." She waves, imagines a handkerchief, some pansies, as she splashes out the door. Then in a flash, she is turning back, applying forearm and hip pressure upon the folding door, as she screams, "Goodnight Muriel Lyons & Company." She does not stay to hear the reverberating whispers of "Muriel Lyons, Muriel Lyons, Muriel Lyons," but she knows they will follow, sending the one in question a few drops of anguished pleasure in some dark corner.

No, she thinks, looking up upon a dimly lit sky, a sky that looks like a black hole into which all the bugs of the universe would fly, were it not for the slight suggestion of a thumbnail moon. Ben is not her man. But how nice to have a kiss.

It is bedtime, and she has danced back to her home. Her windows are wide open, and a bug does indeed fly up to that moon, a fly who will pick up its front legs as if in prayer upon arrival. Grace is looking out and up. She petitions that new moon whose borders are so clean against the sepia of the sky. These are southwestern skies pierced by spires and squares and all sorts of flying beasts. Just a little more than a thumbnail it is, the third night of it: "Oh moon, moon, moon, my own close non-luminous reflector,



shine of all light, sustainer when in balance, off kilter be my ruin, you houndstooth, thumbnail, crescent roll, sly silhouette, blossom into whatever you may." She feels herself grinning like some drunken maniac, proud in upheaval, like a city with its Thomas Edison lights all aglow, suffering the stars to silence. Still smiling that smile that began in the bar, she makes her way to the pillowland featherbed ball, with a near middle-age prince charming in her thoughts. Meanwhile, in the subaqueous layer of the invisible world of her mind, another reel—with data collected from every memory bank, wavelength, thought-form or presence in multidimensional spacetime—will before an audience of itself, doing the wond'rous work of dream.

**Chapter 2**

"Just Grace?"

"Yes."

"First name Grace?"

"Yes."

"Last name Grace?"

"Yes."

"Grace Grace?"

"No."

"Just Grace."

"Yes."

"What kind of a name is that?"

"Pardon?"

"What nationality are you?"

"American."

"Before that?"

"I can't swear on my former lives."

"Your parents?"

"Of Russian and Polish extraction—Jews."

"Are they alive?"

"My mother lives."

"Age?"

"Gee, I don't know my mother's—"

"Your age."

"Thirty."

"Sisters, brothers?"

"Yes."

"Aunts, uncles, grandparents, cousins, etc?"

"Naturally, some no longer in life."

"I'm sorry."

"They're not."

"Have you ever been married?"

"Not in this life."

"Do you engage in normal sexual play?"

"Normally."

"Presently?"

"Not at this precise moment."

"Do you engage in any of the deviations upon which if you'd like I shall be glad to elaborate?"

"No, I'm the only one in my block."

"Fine. With steady boyfriend?"

"Only in my mind."

A nondescript white-jacketed, panted, shirted, socked, shoed and hatted man in her dream. His face falls, and he says, "In this case we might consider sending you on to the fantasy expert promiscuity ward."

Grace asks, "Have I lost my chance?"

"Not entirely. Let's see. Another question, delicate."

"Fire."

"Have you ever experienced, ah --?"

"Orgasm? I have never not, sir."

"Wonderful." Glee dances in his little eyes, and beads of sweat hang over them.

"My dear, all is not yet lost."

"Terrific."

"I take it you've indulged in the art of self-manipulation?"

"I've mastered it." She cooperates with the ten-million appendages and tentacles of the vast monitoring machine with its electrode bud that flowers on her forehead, back of neck, tits, arms, wrists, hands, underarms, up her spine and down to some secret hiding places between her toes and lips.

"Now begins my recitation," continues the man in white, pointing to the sprawling metal and plastic humming mass. "You or Dickie-Doo will stop me if you have any 'Yes' responses. First I'll tell you since no doubt a thought looms in your mind, frames the question, 'how does my body know yes from no?' Suffice it to say, my dear girl, it does. It does, indeed it does, thank the Lord, though of my unprofessional gratitude you shall tell no one. You see I can swear you to secrecy in the presence of Dickie-Doo. I can confess my very own bizarre self. I like you Grace, just Grace. So now tell me true: do you hate Mom in thought, word or deed? Did you in mind or body sleep with Dad, sodomize with sis, castrate or in any way fondle or otherwise conjoin with brothers, dogs, tigers, pigs, sheep or other animal, vegetable, mineral. On the lighter dry side, have you, again, in meditation or action, performed the act of murder, theft, gross lying, cheating,

either malicious or benign, any and all counts, for reasons religious and temporal? Any leanings extreme, atheistic, anarchistic? Have you perchance seriously contemplated and/or attempted the foolish, cowardly sin, or shall we say act of suicide? Have you entertained the notion of, or actually attempted, engaged in the art of... drugs-- shot, snorted, swallowed, smoked -----Ah ha! Naturally, no one of your generation escapes. Let me guess, and we might let this go. Has your curiosity for marijuana exceeded the limits of experimentation? Fine. Your alcohol intake -- oh even before the question is asked. Do we have here a sixties alcoholic, Dickie-Doo? No. Wonderful, but you are advised to consider the matter. Return return return all bottles. Bottles? Ah, we are fading fading fading - ah chooo! Soon to recover and here I am again," says the man in white, whose face in sneeze has surely undergone a marked color change, from salmon to green to gray, to white, and now up he perks, back in the pink again. "OK," he resumes, picking up a scribbled page. "Just a few more routine considerations: says here you have Ph.D. from a league of ivy; interdisciplinary humanities; thesis incomplete—subject: 'salvation of man in his technology suit'; floundering presently in civil service; desired position in life—revolutionary, comedian, saint, spy, ranger, courtesan; conflicts normal—seeks love, profuse pleasure, hope, lucid meaning; finds humor saving grace, in addition to fleeting glimpses of great Other, notably in Spring and Fall,<sup>27</sup> melting mountain gushes, dying spectral burst of maple leaves, horizons, a grain of sand and accompanying ocean break of shore, animal kingdom in flight and roar, rush of still light in the Milky Way, smell of rain, glisten of dew, all things of nature's divine and lovely ilk saves you. Next."

Like an item on the factory line, she is dollied along. The next stage of her examination is entirely physical. Although de-frocked, she tries to remain poised, while prone as a mummy, with only a sheet between her fair, slim, supple self and the herd of men in white, who are in terrible juxtaposition, dressed to the gills. Only their eyeballs can be seen, much like the gals of the Muslim persuasion. Drugged with all kinds of wonders, she is, to provide her with a certain immobility and apparent numbness, actually a failure of the brain to discriminate between pleasure and pain. Grace, free to register sensation, sans physical judgment.

"A spanking beaut." One specialist gives a rapid pull of the sheet.

"I'd have to agree, Fred." A second specialist.

"Say, Charley,"—a third, "haven't seen one with such firm ones in the last hundred or so."

"I don't know, Bud." Fourth.

"You never do, Jooper." The fifth chuckes.

"Not too big, not too small." Fred.

"Nice 'n tight." Charley.

"Same down at this end." It is the one not identified, not named by his associates.

"Don't you agree, Joop?"

"Plenty of room as far as I'm concerned."

"Speaking of room," says Fred. "Do you think I could bring a few more friends tonight? It's at your house tonight, right Rog?"

"Yes." Rog's head within centimeters of Grace's poor vulva. "'Tis."

"Don't forget the gin." Joop.

"Who brings the chips?" Fred.

Rog raises his head, "Forgot to tell you. I've got all the equipment."

"How many decks?" Charley is worried about the cards.

Rog assures him he's got cards. "Just make sure you all bring the food and drink.

Bring as many friends as you'd like."

"Nice guy," says Bud. "You know, she's got a strange face."

It's Joop who comes to her defence. "I think she's sweet."

"Well, as I said to begin with," says Fred. "She's a fine specimen and one of the finest. I vote to call in the big guy."<sup>28</sup>

And within seconds of an obnoxious buzz, into the sterile room walks the big boss, just another long white robed beast, but his eyes, even behind the white mask, twinkle with a light that blasts poor Gracie's body into awaked mobility.

It is sunlight, morning confronting Grace Rosinbloom.

"God," Grace says, shrieking in the dream, but only a series of moans in the waking. She drags herself through many tidy preparations in order to face the new dawning day.

"Greetings, Hello, Hi, Morning, Good day, How're you, What's new, Howdeedoo, Hey!" Grace with plenty of words for the bewildered but for the most part reciprocal world at large, mirroring the mean between sheer stone silence and every innuendo under the sun.

"Hey yourself." The moody Breanda mumbling in the cubicle, her watchful ear attending the clicker ring of approaching bicycle spoke wheels and sneaker steps.

"Hello."

"You're late, Grace." Breanda's eyes knit, forming a wrinkly bulge, dividing her brow in two.

"Not only do I acknowledge, but I warmly welcome your existence. But you pronounce cruel, harsh judgment upon me—and on the basis of circumstantial evidence." Our hero parks the bike by way of the kickstand.

"I'm a first-hand witness." Breanda persists, the conflict sudden, producing the quality of humor, such that the smile in her eye relieves the pucker on her brow. "On the basis of fact, a thing we presently have in abundance." She eyes the ever increasing folds of printout as a terminal quacks silently away into anything but oblivion.

"OK, I'm game, lotsa work," says Grace. "But one day before I die, remind me to tell you what I think of fact."

"It's a fact that I'm pregnant, right?"

Grace, still puttering with her bike. "It's a long argument. It's like a geometric proof. It takes time."

"You don't agree?" Breanda patting her very big tummy.

"I'd say it was a fact you've got a bug up your butt."

"It must be contagious."

Grace joins her, as they sort out the coded data for computer entry. "I had a hard night last night."

"Me, too."

A fresh breeze brings in Walford in seersucker cotton and bearing gifts of coffee. He smiles with news that he and Tina will be moving their desks so that the windowless room might be reserved entirely for the team of researchers and terminals.



The two girls eye each other.

"Oh great." The words come from Breanda

"A place of our own." It's Grace, this time, for the benefit of Tina, standing two steps back from the door.

Tina's cue. "We hardly need you to help us move, so you girls can keep going updating the new building list."

"Oh, terrific." Breanda does not budge from her self-made lounge, complete with trashcan hassock and reclining swivel chair. "When is the eviction slated to take place?"

"Lunchtime," says Walford grinning, "so feel free to take a long one."

"Meanwhile, we're at meetings." Tina's eyes are the color of slate. "So have fun."

"I wonder," Breanda says. "Wonder what's up."

"Think I'll have a talk with Walpho after five," Grace says. "Definitely seems as though the regime has spoken. So, tell me why you had a bad night."

"Money, what else."

"What about big Richie big lawyer no big money?"

"Forget big money. We had a huge fight, and I know it's my fault. Just that baby is going to be reality in less than four months, and we don't have the bread."

"Wait a few weeks till we see what this regime's up to, and then we'll ask for raises, you know—substantial. Also, when I talk to Walpho—"

"Yeah, yeah, yeah," Breanda says, having finished dialing up for connection<sup>29</sup> and hearing the telephone siren indicating time to plug receiver into the terminal and jump into their favorite system.

"I will."

Breanda nods, and they began tapping and speaking. For a while it is Gracie who reads the changes and Breanda types them in, and then they reverse. Afterwards, during their break, they put the world on hold.

"So, did you dream the dream?"

"Yup."

"Summarize it if you can." Breanda takes a swift glance at her watch.

"Last night they tested my sexual, ethical and physical. Probably next is intellectual, maybe spiritual."

"How'd you fare?"

"I'm a perfect specimen. They said so."

"Don't forget who's doing the dreaming."

"Well, at least I've got a good self image."

"Wait till your belly starts growing." Breanda's chuckle that does not belie her earnestness.

"Anyway," Gracie continues. "I woke up screaming, some kind of torture, and man, these doctors with their powers. I mean everything was incredibly vivid, in such detail. Parts of it were funny, but parts of it were terrifying, when I think about it."

"I hesitated to say this at first," Breanda begins, "but maybe you should go tell this to a shrink."

"A shrink! Breanda, this is a message from the gods!"

"But really, if it's, you know, an obsession..."

"I mean it's something I should do in the world, you know! But, what can we do!"

"What exactly are you saying?"

"I mean should we just learn to cope with the horror and milk it for our own little ends, while the whole caboodle falls relentlessly down, down, down?"

"How do you go from the dream to an idea like this?"

"The dream spells hope for me, Breanda, don't you see. It's like my future!"

"But you can't live in a dream world."

"Better to live in the real nightmare?"

"But what can we do?"

"Our work."

After a time, the managers who have been strolling in and out of meetings appear at the doorway, their way of indicating lunch time.

"Take at least two hours," Tina offers. "Unless you want to help."

"Oh, is it that time?" Grace says with no apparent sarcasm. They begin to wind down, squaring off piles of pre- and post- input, and then they sign off.

"Oh, is it that time." Breanda mimics her, as they make their rounds, from the women's room to the elevator, exchanging grunts and groans and giggles, and finally silence as they reach the sweltering sidewalks already humming with passengers and vendors and those grabbing a bite en route to secret caves of pleasure. Like a magnet drawing out insensible filaments, a mournful trumpeter delivers up the blues, heralding that time when lunch hour strikes the southern tip of Manhattan Island. There they are, Grace and Breanda making a steady path through crowds, past beckoning storefronts displaying their gaudy wares, stuffs spun out of petroleum into orange food, purple clothing, and self activating gadgets. They walk by newspaper heads proclaiming

"Horror Story" slasher strikes again. Wafting through like invisible kites are smells of shish kabob and leather mixed with the rising stench of grime vapor, cigarette smoke from walkers, coffee breath, not morning yawning, but a breath already wakened into talk. The air is saturated with an orchestra of human burbling, an emotion garbled in adult fashion, for they are free, set free, a free for all, the great hour recess from work. Breanda bites her tongue on a certain desire to pause, the thing for which Gracie lacks all patience. With just a stop at Fulton Mart for health-food sandwich, juice and cookie, onward they walk, to their destination—the Pier.<sup>30</sup>

"It's going to be hot." Breanda grumbling again as her sandaled feet touch upon the wooden walk.

"I'm sure you're right."

"It's already hot."

"That's true."

"You think we'll get a seat?"

"I'll get you one." Grace makes a run to the very edge, by the milky river where there are actual rows of connected metal seats nailed to the wood, along with logs and a wooden platform, where people find a place to settle. Gracie turns toward the general expanse of the pier, her eye on Breanda plodding, making her way past a thousand daydreaming men in business suits who are consuming roast beef, or obsessively stirring their fruited yogurt, or just soaking up the sun, watching the sky, the water, each other. She turns once more, facing the East Riverbed of ships, cruisers, and row, motor, and tugboats making passing distinction between Breanda's Brooklyn and Gracie's Manhattan.

Chomping on tuna and egg-salad, while sitting on the log and chair respectively, Grace and Breanda gaze outward and inward. Perhaps their silent thoughts join those of all the other members of the financial district, hover at least fifty stories up like the gulls perched on masts of ancient boats.

Suddenly Breanda points out the famous couple, the mousy assistant commissioner Kreitz, and his gorgeous administrative assistant, Zabrina Roos, with her long dark glossy body and hair. Breanda notes that here is a woman unafraid to display in public what she can do in private. But it is apparent that Kreitz does not like to be seen clinging.

"Makes you just wonder," she says.

"I bet there's a way that floors and desks and swivel chairs can be pretty sexy."

"With whom is the question."

"Well," Grace says, with a nod at a lone fellow staring blankly into the waves.

"Take that young banker, certainly International creases, adorned in all cotton and leather, surely his breath is sweet and his armpits dry."

"No thank you," Breanda says, turning her mouth down.

"But, my dear, the pickings are so slim. Everyone who is anyone serves the city, money, or the sea. Now, we take this docile-appearing, though certainly corrupted random sample of humanity, and imagine his oh-so-strights quivering at the data base of his feet, flowing like cash over his investment shoes and stockings. His clean pressed white Carter's or pinstriped boxer shorts down at his shins, as his tiny dawning pink jack sprouts giant, greeting you in the middle of a computer run."

"Disgusting." Breanda is laughing so hard that the world can both see and smell the mayonnaise between her teeth.

"You don't like him?"

"You like him?"

"Who, my green pinkie?" Gracie says. "Actually I do," and she fixes her eyes into the distance at the blond banker<sup>31</sup> whose face seems abandoned to the water. "Sure, why not?"

"You know him?"

"I'm sure I've seen him here before. Shall I go ask him which way is Brooklyn?"

"Think he'd know?"

"Yup. I think he'd know every significant line of history, a renaissance man he'd be, with a way with words and nature, possessing knowledge of every sort of music, science or art. He chooses banking because of its innate goodness—power to feed and clothe the world, to heal the sick and make peace between nations. An economist, social reformer, just playing the game in order to be there when the world changes hands, when it's taken away from those who wish to destroy all beauty, spread hate and terror, control all information, making every little Tom, Dick and Harriet despise their rotten lives. Listen—this little mortal—you wait and see—we've gotta make this world safe for babies. So, what should I say? There must be a secret password between those of like minds, you know. Maybe it's, 'Do you know the way to Brooklyn?' I mean, why not?"

"Anything is possible."

"Precisely. Like the way we get into the computer, the secret nonsense password. Piece of pie. If I could just think of the perfect thing to say, I would approach anyone under the sun, you know?"

"I bet he would know the way to Brooklyn," Breanda says. "But the question is, would he know a city from a non-city building?"

"Even a rat knows that, speaking of which—" as one scurries out of sight. "Oh Lord," Grace exclaims. "What a world. So rich in life. Tell you what. If he passes, I'll say hello."

Which she does, as the passing gentleman smiles, walks.

"He has a twinkle in his eye."

"That's just the sun." Grace looks off into the gothic gateways of the Brooklyn Bridge.

"You mean he failed the test?"

"With flying colors."

"Why?"

"He didn't stop, did he?" They sigh, collect the remains, look for a garbage can.

"You want to go?" Breanda says. "It's too hot for me."

"Sure, why not."

"Seems like Kreitz and Zabrina left awfully fast."

"Maybe they were hot, too."

Upon their return to the department, the duo are directed to the conference room to code up some more changes for inputting, while Walford and Tina complete finishing touches on their new little home away from home across the hall.

Gracie stands at the windows shut to preserve the effect of the air conditioning. She opens a window and peers out in the various directions.

"What'cha looking at?"

"You know?" That pale glimmer of revelation on her face. "You can only jump out a window once."

"Astute."

"Maybe I should be a saint."

"You can't be a saint." By this time, Breanda is herself quite comfortable at work at the conference table, and, except for the look in her friend's eye, would—and rather disagreeably, at that—announce that she wants the window shut.

"Why not?" says Grace, with her full chest, neck and head extended out into Maiden Lane, so she can see the masts and sitting gulls and Brooklyn, too, not to mention the jerks with their binoculars in the building directly across.

"You always have to be thinking about other people," Breanda says. "It could be a drag."

"So, I don't mind. I could save them."

"Well," Breanda muses. "It could be nice..."

"I know."

"Because you could have visions."

"Yes," Gracie says, seeing a fly flitting about, seeing it grow into not a seagull but a crow, and then gone.

"And make miracles." Grace sights in a southern sky that very sliver of a moon she had prayed to turn into the smile of a man, and not just any man.



"True."

"Whose patron would you want to be?"

"I think the spots are all taken up." Grace is thinking of this man, and as she thinks, something in the sky itself forms into a moving vision, with the white filaments. She is mesmerized by this. So much that she can barely hear Breanda.

"Something modern."

"Yes."

"Like outer space?"

"Yes."

"You could be the patron saint of space."

"That's a great idea," Gracie says, closing all the windows, then with a meek look throwing her arms around Breanda for putting up with open window violation and everything else.

"Pretty funny you are."

"Actually," Grace says, now leafing through some coded sheets. "I'm not really the type that takes a leap from cliffs, bridges, window ledges, rooftops, treetops, steeples, ladders and all that."

"Sounds like you've given it some thought."

"I'm the type that goes down with the ship," says Grace, who has given most things more thought than they deserved.

"The rocket ship," Breanda snickers.

"Which are you?"

"I'm neither," Breanda says. "I'm the type that bitches a lot, but soon as a chance for martyrdom comes around, I put on my hat in order to leave."

"Hmmm," Grace reflects. "That's probably why we make such a great team," and she walks out the door toward the terminal room to input the new figures.

"I'm just going to sit here like an extension of this here terminal," Grace announces to Walford and Tina, who are frolicking like bees in a hive transfer. "Pay no attention to me."

And to be sure, they aren't.

With the door open to the room across the hall, Gracie observes Walford with his rolled up sleeves knee deep in Tina's computer packs, while Tina arranges little piles of pencils, clips of two sizes, a stapler, refills, a staple remover, pens of various colors, envelopes of several sizes. Something about Tina's possessions make Grace cringe. They are ugly in their usefulness, she thinks, mumbling a reminder about her work. Grace focuses on the gentle waves displayed on the poster of Tina's that is still tacked to the old plaster wall. She stares at the image of a sun with its not-so hidden symbol of Tina's religious affiliation. She reads the words at the bottom, written in slick italics, more often quoted, she thinks, than practiced: "Love is the work of mankind." The problem with that poster, she thinks, is juxtaposition—of ocean with crucifix<sup>32</sup>, and crucifix with love, and love with work, and work with Tina. Staring absently into the heart of instructions she has on principle refused to memorize, Grace dials up the mystery phone number and blindly completes the three-stepped process of getting into the system. She glances at the crucifix flashing of sunlight that reflects into the ripples of the ocean, and she sees Tina taking a letter opener to the thumbtack, prying loose the offending love-object. Tina

catches the tack in her fingertips and carries off the poster into her room across the hall, where she begins searching for a new spot to tack it back up.

Grace looks down at the sudden outpouring of data, and a startle blooms in her throat. "What? How?—Oh my God," she says quietly, looking back and forth at the instruction sheet that is so completely unfamiliar, that she must have so hastily followed that she hadn't even noticed. Aloud, she says, "Where is my mind?" Did she not see that the ink was red? How could she have not seen? She tears off the printout, which reads "Central Intelligence Agency Report of Loans by Country", and with trembling fingers, she flicks up the little sheet of instructions to find underneath, the set of familiar instructions dashed off in Breanda's quick manner. Upon hearing the voices of Tina and Wally growing nearer, Grace quickly switches the two sets, so that the one presently showing is not the set she followed which gave her the data that was burning her fingers and is now burning the seat of her pants.

"Oh Jesus," she says repeatedly to herself, stunned, yet trying to get the system moving, as both Walpho and Tina enter the room.

"How goes it?" Walpho says, in the middle of whose strawberry blond curly locks, Gracie now spots horns.

"Wonderful," Grace says. "Let's see, take off the forty Brooklyn buildings, plus those hundred marked for redemption, uh." Hoping all attempts prove futile, Grace spins around to witness both Tina and Walpho uncharacteristically sitting atop their completely emptied desks, as if assistance might possibly descend from the clouds.

"I hope you are deleting all forty with one command," Tina suggests, her polished lips in a superior smile.

"Naturally." Grace bites the insides of her cheeks. "Say, you look as though you're ready to move some desks."

"How did you guess?" Tina leaps off the desk, followed by Walpho, who adds, "Just let us know, soon as you can." And they are back in their new room.

With a newfound sense of curiosity, Gracie fiddles with the keys.

"WHAT?" is the computer's response to Grace's command of PRINT.

"NO SUCH COMMAND," prints the computer to her command of WRITE.

Then "CONSULT MANUAL, PAGE 379 lvz."

Immediately after the command of LIST, the pitter-pat of printing produces a series of loans in dollars and foreign currencies, from Abu-Dhabi, Afghanistan, Ajman, Albania, Al-Fujayrah, Algeria, and so on, with recent outstandings and a whole host of data in columns under abbreviated headings.<sup>33</sup>

"Sounds good," Tina hollers from the other side. "You think you can help us move the desks now?"

Failing in her desperate struggle to disengage the machine, using commands like END, FINAL, DETACH, Grace simply lifts the receiver, and the connection goes dead, just as Tina and Walpho come through the door. Grace tears off the printout.

"Be back in a jiff. Breanda really needs this." She turns back, remembering the printout she was sitting on, as well, makes a run for the conference room trailing the treasonous tails behind her.

"Breanda, Breanda, Breanda." Grace rolls up the heated sheets, begs her friend to hide them in her pocket book, instructs her not to look at it until she returns.

"What."

"I tell you this for your own protection."

"What?"

"Please, just wait till I come back. Pretend it's the deletion of the forty buildings if anyone asks. But don't show it to anyone. Promise you won't."

Grace takes several breaths to steady herself, then walk slowly back murmuring to herself, "I don't believe it," but she is ready to move a hundred steel trap desks if need be.

After some minutes of intense physical labor and some inconspicuous but nevertheless pointed scrutiny of the now exposed set of instructions, Gracie returns to the conference room.

"Did you look?"

Breanda's lips are in a serious pout.

"Well, did you?"

Breanda shakes her head.

"Good, I'll be back soon as I finish the inputting." When she returns this time, however, there is but one very familiar set of instructions, which she follows and whose dreary system she updates and signs off, tearing the page and hurling it off to Breanda in much the same manner as before, saying loudly, so that it could be distinctly heard in the room across the hall, "I think I've got it right now, Breanda."

"That was fast."

"I did all the deletions in one shot." Grace quickly removes the hot scrolls from Breanda's purse, folds them up into two sets of squares, stuffs them in her bra.

"Will you please tell me what the hell is going on?"

"Tomorrow I will.

"Tomorrow?"

"Please say nothing to anyone of all that you know."

"Not anyone?"

"No. Of course you can tell your own personal lawyer. In fact, tell Richie what you know, and tell me what he says."

"What do I know. I know nothing."

"Good."

"Just tell me—does it have anything to do with our getting raises?"

"I didn't think of that, but it just might, although not immediately."

"Have you said anything to Walpho?"

"God, no. And don't you."

"What could I say?"

It is, relatively speaking, an uneventful remainder of the working day. The mysterious subject is not further mentioned, and the two researchers part friendly ways. Grace rides a nervous bicycle home, removes the slick, crumpled rolls of paper from her breasts, pushes them into a drawer filled with tools, whereupon she flops down on her bed and sinks into sleep.

It is cocktail hour in the world of Gracie's dream. For the occasion, she is dressed quite smart and sassy, in flattering pastels that bleed into darker colors as they reach the very edge of the long dress and became black. She wears a flouncy white hat with

feathers, and her own thick, golden hair drapes down the back of the backless dress. She draws a part of her hair forward to cover the cleavage.

Before her, a kind pink-faced, grey-suited gentleman.

"Care for a drink?"

"What do you suggest?"

"A Tanqueray I always say."

"Fine -- and what is your name?"

"Best to think of me as an anthropologist." He returns within seconds, bearing two shots and a toast: "To peace -- and courage."

"Courage?" Gracie, nearly choking on the gin.

"Yes, my dear girl. I might just as well be quite blunt about the matter. Your brain scan and I.Q. have put you well into the 99th percentile. Indeed there are a number, well, maybe several, well perhaps another candidate of your caliber—but, in fact there is not, and so you have selected and been selected. And, I have chosen and been chosen, no matter the passive/active interchange, to be your escort, to escort you to the insemination<sup>34</sup> ball. Therefore 'courage' best sums up my grand, fatherly advice. Now the questions to which you will—or ought to, in my estimation—apply yourself, are those that require an intellectual maturity, a rootsystem of scope that encompasses even the most spiritual of realms—and please do not repeat this; I use spiritual for lack of a better word. It seems as though the world is now in your hands, my dear woman, and your courage must spread from the very core of your being to the call for action, which perhaps sounds pedantic, simplistic, or merely enigmatic. You will no doubt soon begin to understand. Soon all that has seemed merely excessive

supplementary goose-drippings, the stuff of mud-pie and frolic, the luxurious waste of a doomed civilization, all this and more will soon slowly, irrevocably unfold its mystery—a matter of light before your very eyes."

"I am ready."

"For what, my child."

"Another drink—this time a highball."

The kindly old man goes to and fro for drinks, while Grace contemplates her speech.

"To love!"

The toast consummated, the two join arms and walk down a long, double two-way mirrored hall behind which Grace spies the white and silvery crowd of laboratory experts, machines and humans measuring their every move.

"I have one question."

"Speak," says the gentleman of Anthropology.

"May I choose the sperm to be...?"

"My dear, to the extent that you can, you already have."

Further they walk down the straight-way to a closed door, whereupon the gentleman raises his hand. "Now I shall hand you over to nursemaids who will prepare you for the brave event, which I promise shall prove to be more than you dreamed, but in comparison to all that which is sure to follow, will seem wond'rous easy as pie. Such is the woe and joy of a first step."

"Shall we knock?" Gracie makes a fist.

"If you wish, although I should warn you that Impatience is unnatural."



"To whom?" She retracts her clenched paw.

"To all of nature, of course," explains the endearing fellow with a smile, and with his shiny shoe, gives the door a brush that pushes it open, revealing a glisteningly white arena with sparkles of chrome and kind blue and brown eyes, and several tables and test tubes galore, cabinets, refrigerators, machines for every occasion—a not altogether unfriendly atmosphere at all, thinks Gracie, as she turns her face toward Sir Anthro, his right soft, soft cheek in particular that she kisses in a gesture of sad gratitude and fond farewell.

As angel-nuns go, Grace thinks nursemaids seem pleasant enough hosts, as they remove her pastel sheathe and bathe her, wrapping her up in white, trimming nails and hair in all places. They douse her in a deep spell of alcohol.

They nod and gurgle like doves. One rather small young nursemaid holds up a mirror to her face, and another props up a pillow for her, though she is quite prone on the narrow wheeled table and talking a blue streak about a myriad of things, including her own reflection. "Well, I look rather like a nun myself," she says with a gurgle, "and this gauze tight against my face makes me rather dramatic looking, like some kind of ridiculous, sad movie star heroine about to be thrown to the coals."<sup>35</sup>

"Shhhhh," says a nurse with a calming voice. "Don't be frightened."

"The doctor is quite gentle," says another. They seem to nod to each other in secret agreement about rather something else, Grace decides.

"And handsome we all think," says the one with calm.

Now they want her to relax, so relax she does as they wheel her into the great auditorium of the laboratory. Grace begins to imagine her role in history, as muffled

voices speak in grand tones about all the prized inventions in fields of physics, chemistry, medicine, literature, great Peace, and the relatively new economics. She hears talk of the illustrious and noble contributions of humankind, ranging from making a sweet end to war to finding ways to blow up the family of subatomic parts. Around words she doesn't understand are enveloped phrases she does, such as the discoveries of Radium, Argon, radioactivity in general, hormones, vitamins, X and Gamma Rays, and theories galore. There is a quantum theory, a money, theory, an actual wireless, theories about allergies, nerves, enzymes, the great brain, cells, molecules, atoms and so on. There are theories consequential in lasers, computers, copy machines, bombs, light and human rights. Oh, she thinks, to rekindle, mother, nurture, the sperm of Einstein, Galileo, Socrates, Michelangelo, Leonardo, Bach, Beethoven, Rembrandt, Jesus, Buddha, Shakespeare—but even with her eyes closed, Gracie realizes there is no insurance. The sins and rewards of creation are not necessarily visited upon the daughters and sons of the gifted parent. She is about to abandon everything, when she hears a gentle voice speaking very close to her.

"It's time for you to open your eyes, Grace."

And open them she does, only to see the dream man, the light of his eyes piercing, this doctor, his eyes—their color hazel, a mix of everything—and so directly upon her as to melt all fear, to atomize ambivalence. So, once again, Gracie, cleaving to her destiny, smiles and says, "Who are you?"

"Just a person." The fellow points to the curtains that ripple as they open.

"Ohhhhhh."

"Not so loud. They have us greatly amplified."

"Ohhhhh."

"Nothing to be afraid of." He gestures toward the ten-tiered well of sterilized spectators--special guests, workers, residents, members, donors and sponsors of the bank. "We have the whole world watching us now."<sup>36</sup>

"I would rather this part were done in private," she whispers. "I don't mind about the delivery, but really, this could be embarrassing."

"HMMMMMMMM," says the doctor, celestial, his light, like that moon sparking clean borders. "Might be tricky, but we'll see what we can do." She watches his face, as he lifts the mask in order to speak, and that crescent moon, its smile, comes into her mind. She watches as he grasps the microphone that is attached to a wire suspended from the ceiling and hangs loosely above the lower third of Grace. The young shining doctor introduces Grace to the multitudes and dreamily rehashes the entire Nobel project, once again, beginning from the very beginning, with the invention of dynamite, and just how it came to be that this and no other specimen lay presently before them. He speaks of what else remains for Grace, the weekly checkups, her regimen of diet, exercise, study, and her need to keep abreast of all fields until the great, grand delivery, approximately nine months from this date, when they will all meet again. The doctor lifts a rod and points to the number-changing, ticking time machine. "You may mark that on your clock, wrists and calendars my dear sirs and madams, when the mating of Father Science with our choicest mother will bear such fruit as the first Nobel Child—with all due respect to Nature herself."

A trickle of applause prompts the doctor to pause.

"And so, on behalf of science, and with eternity as our guide, I thank you all for coming."

A great sound of clapping fills the hall as the doctor gestures for the curtains to be drawn.

"That was terrific," Grace says, as the curtain closes. "Do you think you'll get away with it?"

"Yes, although certainly not on paper," says the doctor. "But now I must be very quick, before they have second thoughts. Are you quite relaxed?"

"Oh yes." Grace watches the doctor as he makes his way with the bottles of this, and tubes of that, and the great glass syringe that sits atop the highest glistening shelf. He walks to the sink and nearly washes the pink flesh off his poor hands, and then he returns, stretching his fingers into plastic gloves. He retrieves the mask with which to cover his mouth.

"I have another request."

"Your wish is my command." Under his mask, the doctor is humming something that sounds, Grace thinks, like something that would pass as a melody from Mussorgsky's *Night on Bald Mountain*.

"Take off your mask for a second, please."

"Just for a second."

"I would like a kiss."

"Just a kiss?" He removes one glove and faintly touches the inside of her wrist with unearthly soft fingers not feeling for pulse. Their lips meet with more than a slight charge, and so transpires in the grand, sterile compartment of the Nobel auditorium a

monumental act of coupling. Gracie's gauze headress unrolls and unrolls and unrolls, following her from the table to the floor to the toilet to the sink, where she receives the noble sperm of her dream, along with a terrific ringing of light throughout her entire body. And from the whirlwind of her unconscious, Gracie's arm reaches for the telephone, at which point the ringing stops.

### Chapter 3

"Hello--."

"Hey, honey." It is a low, feathery masculine voice. "Did I wake you?"

"Who is this?"

"You don't know?"

"No, I really haven't the slightest."

"Take a guess."

"Go sit on an umbrella, asshole."

Her heart pounds madly, a bouncing ball in her ribcage. A cresting river at her back. An explosion of dandelion seedlings. A spindle full of anguish for her bedraggled psyche. She is swimming with her eyes closed.

The phone rings again, and she groans. She picks up the receiver and exhales like a grizzly bear.

"Gracie?" It is the voice of Em.

"'Tis none other."

"What ails thee?"

"I am in shock."

"Par for the course. And do you hunger?"

"Assuredly."

"For what, my dear."

"For peace."

"A piece of what?"

"Yellow," says Grace. "Soothing starlight, pine needles, wands of onion grass perking up meadow, moon, frog blurps on lily pond, waterfalls. Oh, even the evening dew would do."

"I'll be there directly. Wait for me."

"OK."

"Here I am." And there Em is, on the outside of her building, and then, having been buzzed in, at the threshold of Grace's door. It was already opened.

Grace peers deeply into the dull well of Em's eyes, as her own eyes filled up with water.

"What?"

"Just oh."

"Sounds exciting." Em, nonchalant, takes a seat on the couch that is also a bed. She rests her head on her elbow, crosses her legs, and all the little joints relax as her body collapses like a collection of spare parts—a gesture dependable for reversing the direction of almost everything. Em watches her friend fall into a spell of laughter, bending over double and then somersaulting into all of the valuable debris on the floor. Em pretends to give the doggie a bone if she does what she is told. "Speak," Em says.

"I can't—I must be cautious," Grace says, half to herself.

"With me?" Em says, her eyes wide with incredulity.

"You forget."

"What."

"The sensory apparatus of inanimate objects," says Grace, eyeing the walls, furniture, windows, telephone, fixtures.

"Oh, I get it," says Em. "You want to sublet my room at Bellevue?"

"I don't want to implicate you."

"I'm innocent," Em says.

"Right. And I don't want you to lose that property."

"Thanks, pal."

"Anyway, maybe it's nothing."

"In which case..."

"I'll tell you when I'm sure."

"It's a deal. Meanwhile, do you have eating plans?"

It's as if something in her mood has just turned a corner, and suddenly Grace is in motion, gathering herself, and says, "What I have..." and then she snatches up from the tower of clothes on her bed a shirt, and then a pair of jeans, marching to the bathroom sink, splashing some water on her face. "What I have....," she repeats the phrase, peeling off the one pair and slapping on the retrieved pair of pants, and then doing the same with the shirts. "What I have..." she roars now, returning to her beloved main room, adding the crumpled up clothing to the collection on the floor, which is somewhere underneath the indistinguishable pools of clean and dirty, paper and material, items and furniture. It is—all of it, in total disarray, a chaotic chamber if there ever was one, and she fishes in the cottony waters of the chaos for something solid, pulls up the octagonal bottle of her favorite spray. She perfumes her upper and lower centers, and offers a squirt to Em, who raises up her thin, well-scarred wrists. They are standing in the hallway of the room, when Grace hugs Em, says, "What we have..." then slips on her sandals. Grace repeats, "What *we* have.....," as she locks the door behind them. They hurl themselves down the



steps and are on the road headed to the nearest bar. Grace feels in herself the great lightness in her toes of someone having relieved herself of a gallon of water on the salty brain. "What we have are drinking plans."

"To love -----." Em clicks her glass into Gracie's.

"Peace."

"Dignity."

"Courage. To the death."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Bear with me, friend," Grace says. "I will tell you strange things."

"You are a tease, angel."

"To our friendship. Let's drink." And they do.

"So, how's work?"

"Jesus Christmas."

"I know what you need."

"What."

"Some naughty interaction."

"Out of the question."

"Not with Ben?"

Grace shakes her troubled head.

"Nor Raymond nor Zack? Not Marcus, Simon, Mr. Henneley? Your old Economics professor? Not with that cousin of your sister's husband? Not that poet-

comedian? Never again with that cabbie in Jersey? The cop in the Midwest? That Greek? Not with the mounted police of the dying swan or the unknown stud on the white charger?"

"No."

"Not with that mechanic you lived with for three years, what's his name, Angelo? Not with Angelo?"

"Not with Angelo."

"Not with the one who deflowered you?"

"You don't forget, do you?"

"What was his name..."

"Andrew he was," Grace says, "and...no."

"Nothing pleases you madam," Em says, with the reserved and offended air of a lady waiting upon her queen who one by one has introduced and been refused hats, dresses, creampuffs, tarts and soda-pop.

"Oh silly, it's not that. Of course they please me."

"So you want them all at once, then. I wouldn't have a one."

"It's true, they're all too bland and nice, next to Bruce --"

"Bruce has blood."

"But apparently not as much as he needs," Grace says. "Why don't you join me in celibacy, Muriel Lyons?"

"I probably could for the week that it is going to last."

"You'll see," Gracie says, with the fire in her eyes of strong feeling mixed with strong drink. "Let's never again except in love."

"I'd be surprised if we last the night."

"Oh Em," Grace says, eyeing the elders, stooped men, who've limped to the neighborhood bar, hung their work hats on sweet hooks, and now sit, so thinks Grace, as though umbilically wrapped up in the extended news program blasts. Some Mesmer physician of the world giving his prognosis of the tensions, from the totalitarians vs the barbarians in the next hemisphere to the clash in our very own backyard.

"All this loneliness," she says aloud. "And such little time left for all our selfish pain."

"Oh no. I disagree," Em says. "There's always time for pain."

"You think so?" Grace rising to pay the bartender a tipsy bill. They stumble out the door into a fresh hot slimy green night. The baked buildings steaming, puncturing the air with their mute cries. The two walk in silence, the sound of sandals gently abrasive against sidewalks, their eyes have grown accustomed to the sights. A young fellow holds a tight fist around the neck of a lean tree, an older fellow thumbs through a garbage can overflowing with rot. A still older man whose face is a pink blossom, the drink shouting through him, So much heartache and despair and still so early, with a long nightlife ahead in this part of the world.

They open the door to Sound City where friends of Bruce, the producer, play swooning electrical tunes. They call themselves *Whores of Waterfall* but are advertised simply as *Waterfall*. In the mind of Grace, they are the closest thing to Nature's way in New York of moving the element from a high place to a low one. But because it keeps the world going round and not stagnant, because in its own right contains truth and beauty, it captures the light of an audience that presently frolics in speech and drink and

song. Here there are tingles of human hope for love, which, Grace thinks no one seems to think one has but which is really in abundance, really all around in the invisible lines of sight. The five men on stage are glowing, shining light upon hungry listeners, whose eyes are pinned on their eyes, hips, arms and fingers that caress metal strings. Their very souls enter the catatonia of the lovely drummer, the riveting lips of the vocalist who croons a violent lullaby to some nameless woman whom he loves and hates, and so reconciles his ambivalence by sundering:

Sleep love sleep  
 The world is tumbling down  
 & I have broken my crown  
 That by your side I did keep  
 Goodnight and sweet dreams oh  
 Love leave me or let me go.

This verse is rather peaceful, Grace decides, with its rippling passionate chords of love, followed by a refrain that switches ironically to the tune of "Ain't she sweet":

Now I ask you very confidentially  
 Ain't this -----sick?

and

Now. . .  
 Doesn't this suck?

upon which the lights flash on dark satin and glittered T-shirts of the performers. Their expressions show not only teeth, but tonsils, nostril hair, as well as the whites both above

and underneath their pupils. Gracie turns to the bartending woman with a dark thrill in her own eyes and orders her fifth mix of sweetened Tequila.

"I think they're great," Em says.

"Do you?"

"Yes," Em says. "They make me feel alive and kicking, and my heart beating like a fetus. I want to shout 'Yes yes yes yes. I'm here, Ma.'"

"They make me numb."

"Why?" asks the woman tending bar who, in her unassuming way, will oversee everything. "Why numb?"

"Operated upon," Grace says, smiles. "I forget..."

"Loo," she says.

Grace introduces herself and Em.

"I actually know you two quite well," Loo says, going off to an anxious customer down at the other end of the black marble counter.

"But not with less than ten shots swimming in our bloodstreams."

"And I hardly know myself," Em says, that unearthly gray look of distance in her eyes now, as she smiles at a private non-existent onlooker, who approves.

"They're celebrating death," Grace says.

"They're reflecting our lives," Em says.

"They're hopeless, offering no hope at all," Grace says.

"Hopeless is the way to go," Em says.

"It doesn't have to be this way," Grace says.

"It is this way, Grace. Don't you see?"

“These camps are done, let them go.”

“Humans are addicted to slaughter,” Em says. “It’s the drug of choice.”

On and on the music continues, the sound seeming to sour with its driving beat and tonal dissonance. As if something were colliding without meeting, like a mathematical equation, Grace thinks. Something postmodern, something postmortem, something that jumps into the gulf of the unknown, something that dares to break all the rules because why not, when nothing holds. But it is clearly self-adoring in its adulation of pain, its embrace of terror. The milk of destruction, she thinks, and she can feel it swimming in her, a substance almost palpable, but horrible. She feels herself reject it, spit it out. She suddenly sees it on everyone’s face. This disgust sobers her as the *Whores of Waterfall* repeat the last verse, the verse about the camps.

Sleep love sleep

They go on without us

Hear the jungle noise clash in the night

Steel against steel

Of automobile

Now I ask very confidentially...

Don't I suck

Imagine someday me and you

Our blood will pump up worms oh

Sleep love sleep

Just kiss me once before your lipstick dries

And we say goodbye

Now I ask you very confidentially...

Doesn't this suck

Oh Hiroshima Nagasaki<sup>37</sup>

Glorious Auschwitz<sup>38</sup>

Fanciful Dachau

All possibilities if you stay with me

Just imagine World War Three

Instead sleep love sleep

Now I ask you very confidentially

Aint this sick sick sick

Grace whispering to Em: "This makes me cold, and you make me sick for liking it."

"You're missing something, Grace," Em says, her eyes almost closing, her voice fading.

"Are you okay?"

"I'm fading, Grace. I'm almost used up, but Grace," Em says, "they have a right to sing this. I have a right to like it. Anyway, I'm only trying to see the softest of demons dancing before me."

Grace knows this signal. It will not be the first time she's taken her to Bellevue just for an overnight stay. She sees it coming, although maybe not. "There's logic in your thoughts, Em," she says, "but they're hard to swallow. Hard to live by. Hard for me."

"Not for them, Gracie-pie," Em says. "Take a look."

The audience cries for more, abundant applause filling the air, while the fellows in the band bow graciously, begin something entirely instrumental, their sounds like snakes. Meanwhile, Bruce approaches Gracie with a furtive look of something up his sleeve.

"Hi doll." He is dressed in jeans, a silk shirt, and his eyes are dark crystals pointing at her, his elbow grazes the bar, his tall slim figure at a slightly crouched angle. Their eyes meet directly despite the dimness of the light, and he slices through the gleam, gives her a soft kiss on the lips.

"You here on business or pleasure?"

"Both." He turns toward Em, only one seat but worlds away, her head in her hands, her focus somewhere in an internal labyrinth behind the closed door of her thoughts.

"What is your pleasure?"

"Want to perform?"

"Gee, I thought I said 'pleasure.'"

"Tonight, here, now."



Gracie is good natured with her show of laughter, but then she roughly seizes Bruce's elbow, drags him out, beyond the swinging doors, where she feels free to ask him if he is out of his mind.

"This is for Em," he says, "not for me."

"I don't know. What about that audience..."

"Leave the audience to me."

"Which piece?"

"What about 'The Respirator'?"

Grace slides her finger on the dusty sweaty body of a parked car, while the drone of metal music leaks out into the night. "Beats listening to that."

"It's been a while. You sure you can do it?"

"What's to it? All I have to do is think with a microphone." She rubs the sooty finger on her jeans and goes through the doorway. She walks directly to Muriel Lyons and whispers in her ear, whereupon the pink and blue-haired mime star pops right up, muttering, "OK." Em stares into the mirror across the bar, winks at Grace, then turns to face her.

"Are you ready for catharsis, Muriel Lyons?"

"If you think you can get it for me," Em says. They scurry down to the cellar where they preen before the larger mirror. Em stretches her legs, and Grace clears her throat. Upstairs, Bruce Steen sets up the first part of the show, a silent film. He makes the introductions with a silver glow in his eye and polished tongue. He steadies the audience which demurs like an oversized puppy. How easy it is to convince them to

attend the play of light flashing upon the back wall with its holes and what-not, crying out for spackle, inadvertently providing the surreal effect of three dimensions.

*The Respirator* opens with a girl (Em) confiding to a blank wall as if it were a father figure. She mimes a wish for true love, and there flashes a couple kissing in a valentine. For the first time Bruce is in one of his sequences, the camera shooting his prone body as a still. Em mouths the sweet-nothings he had once said, and she points to their implication, a white veil with flowing brown hair, outlined by her watery fingers, her soft face responding to the redolence of flowers, and her legs abandoned to the gaiety of near flight. Images appear of calendar pages flipping backwards, newspaper headlines going out of date, photographs of a time gone by, then a flash of the pulsing couple locked in heart of a deadly embrace. The screen then floods with seasonal changes upon a natural landscape, icebergs crackling on the shores, trees stricken with barrenness, and the great soil gone from lush brown to grey, the color of Em's eyes, which becomes the focus of the camera's eye. Cut to Em watching the back of Bruce as he recedes into the distance. In that one facial statement, Em conjures the magnitude of her longing, the curse of poor Eve recognizable on any woman. As she walks, Em imagines herself injected into a large needle that is shot into her lover like a serum.

So powerful is the mime that both chuckles and gasps can be heard from the very attentive audience. Suddenly, so it seems, as a result of this manipulation, he turns back, and together they walk through a graveyard, past brushfires and a charred church. The sound of steps is audible against shots of pink morning haze, a windy rain, sprouts of grungy green grass in sidewalk cracks, a sweet smelling garbage bin stacked with sticky soda cans and apple cores, above which hovers a family of bees, and in the background

Central Park. Gradually lifting the focus, the camera finds pigeons perched everywhere, and finally pans the plain blue sky. There is the sound of inhale/exhale and a cut to the face of closed-eye Bruce, who is yet prone. A last flash to Em down on her knees, as the film end, followed by a moment of darkness, while Em and Gracie scrambled onto the stage in their street clothes. Em stands still in the center, while Grace, seated on the floor far right, begins her narration.

"THE RESPIRATOR, Part 2," says Grace. "A living epilogue."

With most profound concentration and in the fashion of a superb mime, boxing herself in with hands, feet torso, neck, Em creates a multi-shaped form that she put into motion. For a while, as her gestures indicate, the thing remains in this motion, but gradually, it slows down, seems to stop entirely and even begins to shrink.

"How to keep things alive," Grace says. "There are rules."

Em began to press the thing into being once more.

"First rule is dedication."

However, Em now seems to have lost her touch. The thing begins to shrink further, and she panics.

"But a rule is not necessarily a guarantee. Rule Two is knowledge and conviction of purpose."

Em, in the manner of a young soldier, collects herself but betrays a worried eye at the further demise of her thing.

"Third, perfect action."

Constricted by the notion of "perfect," Em's movements, very natural and flowing at the outset, become mechanical and abrupt. A certain faltering, a quivering, is

detectable, despite the absolute clarity of her form. The thing exists, but it does not accept motion, and for this reason, Em despairs.

"Fourth, perfect timing."

Em's actions become more clocklike and rhythmical, yet she is unable to conceal her dismay at the thing's inability to take off on its own momentum.

"Fifth is Constancy, resignation to one's role in the above relationship forever."

While maintaining the thing with her arm and one leg, Em manages to make a gesture indicating that she is disturbed by that last statement.

"Or be responsible for its death."

Em looks lovingly at the thing she is nurturing.

"Which may not be such a terrible thing."

Soon Em begins to show signs of weariness.

"Hey! No sleeping on the job."

Boredom and ennui suddenly strike poor Em, who looks resentfully at the thing she is all the while maintaining.

"Remember this is your life," says Gracie to Em, who instantly lets the thing go and watches it flit around the room like a balloon losing all its air. She giggles, which was a sign for the audience to breathe. Then Grace giggles, and they both giggle and join hands and bow to a cheering, howling audience. They giggle all the way down the stairs.

"You liked this one?"

Em giggles more.

"You were great."

Em is too giddy to speak. Then she suddenly changes, as her face turns suddenly serious, suddenly angry. Eyes wide open, the blues cold and glaring, she says to Grace, "You're telling my story." She is screaming. "That talk about keeping me alive. You are one hell of a manipulator, friend. You think I'll die if you let me go? You think I'll die without you?"

Grace is nodding. "I wasn't talking about you, Em. I was talking about life—my life, anyone's life. I thought it was properly depressing. I thought this crowd would just love it."

Em starts giggling again, her cupped over her mouth in an attempt to stop herself from laughing. They are going down the stairs now, and when Em reaches the bottom of the never-ending flight of cement steps, still laughing, she falls softly in a slow, forward motion against the cinderblock. She flaps her hands flat against the wall, while Gracie sits on the steps, both of them steeped in clouds of inexpressible feeling. Em's malleable body, never losing its contact with the wall, turns, and she slides down in a heave, trying to look up. Now tears are falling in her lap. The sound issuing from her depths is nothing funny, Grace thinks.

"It is so funny." Em's eyes filled up with tears again, her face large, swollen and red.

"You look like you're drowning, Em. It's not funny at all."

Suddenly, the electrons in Grace's brain jump into emergency room gear.

"Oh yes!" Em moans, now, holding her face in her hands, as if it were a cut flower that has been disengaged from its stem. Still laughing, Em slaps the back of her head violently against the bricks, and Grace screams.

Meanwhile the cellar door opens, revealing Bruce, who stands there without looking, his mouth open. "They're still clapping," he says, his voice trailing, as he swallows the sight. "Oh shit. I'll be back in a minute." Upstairs, Bruce shifts his manner to pacifying, and the audience begins to gurgle in its disappointment. Even as he coos to them, he wonders how—with the least amount of splash and splatter—to effect the delicate transition, from cellar to cab without exposing the lovely cheering sinless crowd to the shocking pink spectacle of his lover-mime and her antediluvian cry.

It is always Gracie to the rescue, which—to the audience—appears to be the encore, after all. With a slightly reddening towel around Em's head, Gracie holds the laughing girl pieta style, dragging her right past Bruce and his three-ring circus mind, and all heads veer in the direction of the last act. Gracie feigns her own hysteria. "Alas," she cries, "the deaf must lead the blind. Else, who will? Brucie, baby," she continues. "Tell them the story about the woman who swallowed too many hyenas. Sleep tight, friends, and don't let the dream bugs bite." She throws a kiss to Loo as her biceps and triceps and quadriceps blossom and roar with the relative lightweight of Em in her luminous distress. Soon as the beast of two heads arrives on the street, there appears the cab Loo has called. It heads far east and less than a mile north to the stately if fallen empire of Bellevue Hospital and environs.

"Hi. Oh, my." They are friendly pink and white and bronze and golden faces of all ages, bearing wheelchairs and walking in a brisk manner. They relieve Gracie of her responsibility, and she kisses Em goodbye on the lips.

A world is exchanged in that glance.

"Gracie, it is funny."

"You mean ultimately?"

"I mean catharsis. It's painful and funny."

"True, true."

"Gracie, I haven't forgotten about your strange secret."

"Nor have I."

"Do us both a favor?"

"What's that?"

"Fuck Bruce for me tonight."

"Fat chance."

"Oh."

"Sorry, baby." Grace throws one last kiss to Em and waves good bye, as the nurses wheel around the chair, and off goes Em. Grace turns on her heels only to face, and in near collision, to meet up with a fellow, who by pierce of eye resembles a man in her dreams. He is all in white, from head to toe, a sensational sight that Gracie ingests in passing, especially the message on the little pin. She smothers her gasps, yelps and sighs, for what was he—some kind of pornographic material? By the time she braves the turning back, the sweet name inscribed on the pin—D. STARLINSKY—now forming on her lips, the fellow has vanished, and the hall is bereft of both Starlinsky and Lyons and all other human activity as well.

"Excuse me," she yells anyway, but there is only echo for answer.

Somehow it is now 4 A.M. on the black and white hospital clocks, a very grey hour for the City of New York, although in a little over an hour, the sky will show the pastel signs of morning. Meanwhile, it feels like no-woman's land, as Grace loiters on First Avenue waiting for a cab to take her back to the west side of Manhattan Island, her own little spot of turf that is three flights into the air. A number of yellow cabs spin by going north, and soon enough comes one with its starry blinker that stops and unloads a passenger, namely trim Bruce Steen with his golf hat, bow tie and arrow eyes.

"Hello Grace."

"Goodbye."

Bruce holds the taxi door open for Gracie and then follows her in.

"I thought you were getting out."

"I was being a gentleman."

"If you really want to be a gentleman, I'm rather hungry and you could take me out to dinner."

"Now?"

Grace nods.

"I hope you don't have healthfood or anything exotic in mind."

"Take me to the fanciest place you know."

Bruce leans over and whispers to the cabbie. Within a few minutes they arrive at the gold and crimson palace of the sesame bun and patty of ground cow.

"I'd say we are a brutish species."



"Look at it this way. We're just a bad idea. Nothing to go hang yourself for. Anyway, the sky's the limit. Have any and as many burgers as you wish. I'll have two quarter-pounders."

The expressionless gal sprouts nonchalant out of her brown-striped uniform.

"And that and that and that." He points to French fries and milkshake and coffee. His face creases with humor, as he watches Gracie consider her options.

"I wish I could eat the smell and be done with it."

"Give yourself a few incarnations. I thought you were hungry."

"I'll take five cheeseburgers. And ten large coffees. Four apple turnovers. Two French fries. One fish sandwich. Cole slaw. Three chocolate milkshakes with extra preservative. I guess that's it. Oh, ten glasses of water and wait a minute." She turns to the one lady and handful of gentlemen gathered together, making their momentary home in the eating parlor that did not hide its unguent delicacies, with cigarette smoke, sour liquor, stale coffee, unctuous beef and onions, not to mention ketchupmustardmayo or cleaning fluid for smells. And as for sounds, they were grunt, groan, cry of chair-leg on floor, and occasional flow of words erupting from one stone, tired face to another, sometimes a yawn breaking through. "Poor old humanity," Grace mutters, not quite under her breath. With nine heads, the entire flock facing her, she asks, "Anybody hungry? I guess that's it."

The waitress is waiting, and as each head turns back to its own wonder, Bruce pays up.

Some moments later, when Bruce and Grace are knee-deep in conversation regarding Em and art and politics and money, a fellow appears at their table. He merely

shows up, stands there like some phenomenon of existence, with his red gristly beard, earthen and bloodied face, street slept-in rags of terrific weight and odor, and a brilliance in his eyes bespeaking the great humor in his soul.

"I'm hungry, and I've been given to understand that you might have some extras?"

"Help yourself." Grace gestures at the remaining cheeseburgers, coffees, turnovers and shakes.

"Thanks doll. Bless you, baby." He takes a share and departs out the door.

"She's running herself dry." Bruce, allowing a moment of silence for transition.

"Why did you think doing this little gig would help?"

"She needs the contact." He bites into his second burger, dangling the fries and opening wide for milkshake. Then he rises, wending his way to the room for all things that come to pass.

Grace meanwhile, nurses water number eight, nibbles alternately at burger and turnover, the red beard still in her mind and smile. She soaks in the time—ticking minutes after 6 A.M., witnessing the blue fold enveloping then releasing the sunrise, bringing on the new/old day of Wednesday, and sits there, while Bruce returns, eats and speaks.

His cheek bulges and his brow wavers, but his eyes are unchanging. "Was a great show, anyway. Juxtaposition, I mean. I wrote it down. The things you said. Too bad you're working today. I'd like to check it out with you."

"I don't remember a word."

"Oh, you would when I started bringing it all back again. You'll see, maybe I should take—"

"Forget it Bruce." Grace, rising. "It's time to --"

"You know you told me to sit on an umbrella this afternoon."

"You should have taken my advice."

"Gracie, can I come with --"

"No."

"We don't have to --"

"No."

"No one would know."

"No."

"Who'd know?"

"Everyone would know. God and Buddha. An angel would know."

"Never heard of 'em."

"Friends of mine. Good night, Brucie." She gives him a neat little kiss on his scratch face. "I'll find my way home from here alone. I mean, good morning, sweet Bruce." It's that giggle, again, and then she is off, with great adroit and lanky legs covering the twenty-block distance in no time flat, her adrenaline making her heart squeeze out lumps. But no matter, she can survive that, though into bed she slides, then rises again, to pee, set the music alarm, and then to bed, where she gathers all her precious belongings. Some might consider them material, but for Grace, they are her thoughts, namely: ocean, sky, sun, breeze, great smell, peace to Em, peace to everyone, soon work, computer sheets, whatever work, the thing to be done, tomorrow work, don't think about it now, need courage, courage and sleep, and love, oh STARLINSKY—and and then she lets go.

## Chapter 4

It is a fly that maneuvers its flight in spirals returning from a visit to a thumbnail moon, a fly that once played in the filaments of Gracie's hair before its spiraling flight to the prayer mounds upon the moon—that fly returning to carry Gracie upon its back. She is indeed riding upon the back of this fly, returning in what rare ether form, in what fabulous timeless manner of flight, to Bellevue. Her carriage takes right through marble walls, through planes of plaster and glass, into and out of the chambers of many a sleeping sufferer, and she lands, releasing herself from the frame of the glorious insect only to find herself in a room where Em stands draped in a salmon translucent negligee, one milky white breast falling out, the other thinly veiled, her face pink, vacant and yet radiant, her eyes blue with morning light. The fly itself recedes into a darkness, careful to elude the webs of spiders and then takes off. Gracie is moved to embrace her half-angel friend and foe. Wordlessly they wrestle until some overwhelming feeling of repulsion or awe overtakes poor Gracie. She looks through a large hospital window to where a huge spire stands alone, beyond which lies a full landscape of castle ruins and grey boulders nestled in rolling greens, with shimmering animals grazing freely. There are zebras, lions, snakes, turtles, as well as cats, dogs, eagles, and dinotheriums, too—all striped, winged, spotted, plain and hairy four-footed ones—and the footless reptile, as well—with and sans trunk, horns, tail and cry: one grand whispering hush of beauty.

"Where in heaven's name am I?"

In response, a four-lane highway suddenly appears, filled with two and four-wheeled vehicles.

"Must be twentieth century."

But alas, and without a flash, the scene changes, much like the picture on the television, with its myriad of visions offered simultaneously.

Grace is standing in her apartment when she hears the voice of a man. "I am here to fix your tube," says the grey-eyed TV repairman<sup>39</sup>, whom she lets in, opening the door to him. The man is dressed in grey-green overalls with matching cap. He carries a strangely shaped tool-box that he sets down upon a carpet. The tools themselves are metal and wood, probers and pryers and pummelers. And he *does* bear a certain resemblance to Starlinsky, who bears a certain resemblance to the dream doctor, who bears likeness to a dream pilot, and who in fact has made countless appearances in the world of Gracie's dreams.

"You are a famous man," she manages to say, watching him at work. She is otherwise paralyzed until she notices his companion—a worm. Rather small and inconspicuous, the worm is nevertheless golden, comprised of a series of balls, centipede-like, about the size of an infant's forefinger curled slightly. It sits by the man's side and tells him what to do.

"Cerebrum's connected to the contrast<sup>40</sup>. The contrast's connected to the eyeball. The eyeball's connected to the brightness. The brightness is connected to the finger. The finger's connected to the nostril. The nostril's connected to the vertical. The vertical's connected to the otological. The ear is connected to the volume. The volume's connected to your sense of taste. Now take the Phillip's<sup>41</sup> and turn three times to your right and leave the screw by your side. And then, unplug the television and take it up to your roof and dump it."

"That will be \$640.00," says the man with the cap to Gracie—however, in the voice of the worm.

"It's too much," she cries. "I hadn't anticipated that."

"That's okay," says the man, who in departing has left the worm. "You can pay me later."

"I'm yours." It's the worm (who resembles a golden centipede) with the same voice as the man's. Gracie takes the worm into her hands, examines his golden balls.

"What a wonderful worm you are!"

She finds herself on a bus to the Library of Congress where the worm has apparently been requisitioned for inspection by the authorities.

Telepathically, they discuss truth, beauty, philosophy and what-not.

"I understand that you're concerned about the self."

"Yes," she says. "I'm not sure whether this is a good thing, whether it is better to develop yourself or to lose yourself."

"In a certain sense," implies the worm. "You create yourself. But in the larger sense, you are pure creation with the seed within. The trick is multiplying by dividing." Gracie envisions amebas with unearthly colors, themselves long-lost cousins in the ocean, springing from the same source. Arriving at the Library of Congress, they marvel at the sheer numbers of books. It's very formal, with people in suits and long dresses making speeches, but the worm continues his teaching: "Multiplying by dividing," he says. "It's just making distinctions. There are levels and there are levels. But everything matters. You must love everything. You'll see."

And then the worm is as if vaporized—gone. Gracie fears he’s been dissected by the powers that be, attempts to find him among the stacks. She crawls, her hands and feet on the floor, among the shoes and stockings of great men and women. She climbs the ladders suspended from the ceiling, ladders with little wheels, frantic in her search; she rifles through periodicals, reference, fiction, poetry, science, art, philosophy—but finds nothing. It is while standing tiptoe on a ladder, reaching for tall thin books, the annals of local history, that Gracie has a macro-epiphany: namely, that the worm has chosen not to be found. In her mind, she hears a distinctly male voice, saying: “You will not save the worm, but perhaps the worm will save you.”

"GOD," she announces, upon waking, lolling in her bed and extending all her little and great appendages, not excluding her tongue and glotti, whereupon her major toe collides with a desk-drawer. She hooks her toe onto its rung, pulls gently, extracting one printout and then the other from the inside, and by complimentary action of toe two and toe one, as well as fingers one, two and three, she hands them over for perusal by eyes and otherwise.

"HMMMMMMAhOhh," are the sounds issuing from Gracie's dry, malodorous mouth, as she holds up the waxy thermal paper to the window light to read through blacked-out secret codes to see the delicate three- tiered password that had got her onto the system. She flashes on tier one: "Cornflaker?"

Mumbling, still trying to focus, squinting no less, due to her eyes' unreadiness to see the light, she agrees with herself. "Cornflaker, that's it."

The second comes to her memory letter by letter. They are letters she speaks aloud to the non-entities who are nevertheless, listening: "G..R..I..P..S. Yes." A thrill

runs through her. "What's the last, oh yes," she says, somehow recalling the superimposed cue, "GALERIES. Leave it to the government to disguise by misspelling. Or are they being French?" It becomes her spoken mantra<sup>42</sup> as she pees, brushes teeth, runs shower, applies soap, scrubs, purges pores. "CORNFLAKER<sup>43</sup> GRIPS GALERIES," she says, emerging drippingly with towel, which she flings to the floor, as the music alarm sends sounds of golden threads, the double cellos of Schubert's glorious Quintet. Grace is now galloping through dresses, skirts, pants, and shirts, attacked by the what-to-wear syndrome. Finally she selects—this time from her closet, a sleeveless dress, black and white checkered, with a full dirndl skirt. No socks, nor stockings, but sandals alone will do. She manages to look at a banana, but further than that, alas, she cannot, will not go.

She saddles her steadfast cycle, bunching the excesses of the skirt up under her seat. She squirms, what with the delicate juncture of clustered cotton lumps against her privates, and she makes her winding way through a gaggle of trucks, a pod of buses, a few litters of vans, an exaltation of cars, all breathers under one heaven mother, she thinks, all of them doing a tamp, tamp, tamp on asphalt earth. All making their way to work, today no different from all other days. Just more tired, so harder to resist the gravitational pull. Resist, she thinks, we all do. She creates such a fine friction that she is at the City offices in no time, on time, with time to spare. Early she is, riding alone on the elevator, saying Hello to none, admitting her bike and self into the room with terminal, closing the door, parking the bike, sitting her seat in the swivel, dialing the line to GE, hearing the pierce, rooting the receiver into the well and turning the terminal on ON.



"egup gu tximkur," says the computer for no reason<sup>44</sup>.

"CORNFLAKER GRIPS GALLERIES," Gracie types.

"Validation Error #1," replies the computer.

"CORNFLAKER GRIP GALLERIES," Gracie types.

"Validation Error #2," responds the computer to muttering typist (expletive deleted).

"CORNFLAKER GRIPS GALERIES," she types, smiling, remembering with satisfaction the French.

"ID:," demands the computer.

"TW," suggests Gracie.

"Good morning, Tina Wand," writes the computer.

"List All," requests Grace.

"What?" inquires the computer.

"Print," orders Grace.

"Invalid Command," contests the computer.

"Print, shithead," retorts Miss Grace.

"No such file," proposes the computer.

"Print All," commands Grace.

"Ready," the computer indicates.

"Top Secrets," says Grace out of the blue.

"No such file," says the computer.

On they bicker for an hour until Grace lands on some profound goods, and out pours a bundle of Dangerous People listed in four columns in order of alphabet, danger,

age, social security number, respectively. Gracie scans the list for a familiar face, so to speak. Among the masses of names, Grace observes a smattering of heroes but then pushes the interrupt button, honoring the developments taking place in her third ear, namely the slow step-plops of her favorite octopus mother in sneakers. Breanda's gasps become presences as the door opens and she exudes with penitence many apologies for her extreme tardiness, all the while nosing in on the printout that is trying to make its graceful exit.

"Really sorry about it," Breanda says.

"It's excusably inexcusable, so do have a seat," Grace says, after that had become a thing done, with the quality of being actual, indeed a thing of existence and presented as having objective reality—namely a fact<sup>45</sup>.

"I won't ask what you're doing." Breanda is finding the limits of her neck.

"Tiddily, click, clack, smack a talaposhtitatatapooo," sounds the computer signing off, whereupon Gracie makes a flourishing attempt to shred the paper, stuffing its remains in her little bicycle pouch.

"But I won't stay mum for long." Breanda's tone is threatening.

"Do you think they'd let me take the portable terminal home for a day or so?"

"Sounds like espionage." Breanda giggles, a nervous giggle. "Or are you trying to print up false checks?"

"What, me a crook?"

"Yeah, Saint Crook, sounds catchy. The patron saint of thieves."

"Let's go get a cup of coffee."

"They're all here, you know," Breanda says. "I mean it isn't like they wouldn't notice our disappearance."

"Hell," Grace says. "We'll skip lunch. Who needs to be escorted by ten million mobs of bankers, city workers, stockbrokers and secretaries anyway? Just say it's an early lunch."

"A late breakfast?"

"I'll take care of it. They owe me a favor. I moved great loads for them yesterday. So it's settled." Grace trundles off to the office of her superiors, and Breanda nods in that sort of all-encompassing manner perceived by the outside world as prescient glow.

"So." Grace announces herself, her arrival in the new icy room of Tina and Walph, whose backs face each other with desks against opposite walls. But theirs are windows with southern exposure, and Grace can't help but to look out, mesmerized<sup>46</sup> by the tiny licking threads, tongues of light, moving and zooming and zapping, filaments of the firmament shooting in from above and through cracks in buildings behind buildings and bouncing off every conceivable reflector in the history of encounters.

"Good morning Grace!" Tina's mouth barely moves, with her pulled-tight smile and matching suit, under which a shiny print bodice prevails. "Did you mention anything to the girls, Walford?"

"Uh, no," Walford, too, is smiling, what with his excellent breeding, while awaiting his turn to speak.

"Walpho," Grace says. "Tell me on the way to the water fountain. I'm absolutely parched."

"Uh, okay." Rising, it would seem that Walford is consciously sending blood to his flanks as they extend, so tall he is, a near seven foot blonde rugged specimen of an androgen mixture of the most upright species. He makes his way through corridors with an extreme Grace to the peaceful waterhole of porcelain humanity in order to gurgle and swallow and let it flow.

"I know what it is Walpho, and it's just as well." Grace begins in a voice that is just for Walpho's ears as they wend their way, "Since I was going to ask you. I mean both Breanda and I have worked for nearly a year here, and you must admit we're geniuses of a sort and cooperative at least, and certainly upstanding contributors to the business and affairs of the City. We've manned the computers and conserved energy and trampled through the field, surveyed the inner and outer sore spots<sup>47</sup> owned by the City, and we emerged sweet without corruption. We've shaken hands with slime-and-bile politicians and pacified the outraged poor. We've kept track of rents and fees, and we've mastered the mountains of files upon files. And we've kept our mouths closed to the press regarding dirty laundry, so I quite agree it's about time we got a raise."

"A raise?" Walpho is near spitting. His mouth, by this time has filled with water in addition to the pre-existing oxygen, and now it is all splattered down and around his chin into the stainless steel but surprisingly rusty drain. But Walpho collects himself, puts hand to nose and mouth and eyelids, rises from his humbly hunched pose and says, "One moment please," lowering his head to imbibe once more.

"I mean even if it could come in time for the baby," Grace says, in an attempt to be toneless and tenuous, more slight but with innuendo to spare.

"The baby?" Walpho's glance is in the direction of Gracie's flat tummy.

"Breanda's." Gracie, reddening, nearly stutters, as they move to change places.

"Right," Walpho says. "When's Breanda's baby due?"

"You'd better ask her, but certainly within the year, anyway." Grace is stooping, drinking with an unquenchable thirst, requiring streams and streams of transported mountain gurgle.

"Welp. A, uh, raise isn't exactly what I was going to talk to you about, no indeed, not exactly a raise at all, but in fact --"

"Are you looking to demote us?"

"Nor that." Walpho manages a smile, beating water out of his stone face.

They are nearing the terminal room door. "Out with it, Walpho."

"Just a matter of putting in extra time."

"Overtime?" Breanda has risen to open the door and let them in. "You mean with extra pay, twice or time and a half? That sort of overtime?"

"That might be arranged." Walpho is now in the room, seating himself in Gracie's swivel, noting the vast change his ex-room has truly undergone, sending a wave, no doubt, down deep in his biosphere with its ocean and umbilical mass of memory and desire.

"On project new or old?" Grace is curious.

"New. Well, new to all of us." Walpho speaks with something that amounts to excitement, a spark igniting in his fine blue eyes.

"Something creative?"

"Of a sort, Grace. We have been given the okay to start tearing down buildings, and we've got to determine which ones will stay and which ones will go."

"And what about the people?"

"And what's to be done with the people," Walph continues, nodding to them both.

"In other words, we shall decide which shall go and which shall stay and where we shall relocate the tenants."

"Bus the homeless?" Grace, again and again.

"We have to determine which buildings can accommodate the extra load, and you see there's lots and lots to do. We're thinking of hiring a new researcher, maybe a temp, unless you want to work overtime."

"Can some of this be done at home?"

"I don't see why not. So long as you're organized and we all know what's going on."

"When do you need this information?"

"We want to start sealing up for demolition by the weekend."

"Why suddenly?"

"Orders from Kreitz and higher than that."

"But why?"

"A few elections coming up," Breanda mutters.

"That's neither here nor there."

"Nor is anything else," Grace says, "but--"

"We'll do it," Breanda says. "Right?" She and Grace, both nodding.

"So long as we can have an early lunch," Grace says, quickly, sighting a telling smile on her friend's face, more stiff than soft.

"Shake." Walph holds out a large hand, large fingers, all with a slight quiver, the sign of someone not to trust.

"And an eventual raise." Grace observes the sudden stillness of Breanda's head, her lips drawn together, a small sigh escaping.

"Shake." Walph, his hand out there, with no takers, but then they do shake, the ghostly trio.

"Has everything been arranged?" There is a shadow just outside the partially closed door.

"Looks good, Tina," Walph says. "I think we'll start this afternoon, okay mates?"

A chorus of "fine," as both Breanda and Grace grab their respective pocketbooks and pouches and tramp out through the Vatican-like series of halls and doors to sweet morning sun.

"So you going to tell me?"

"What I'm going to tell you," Grace says, "is. That. This. What I'm doing. Going to do. I don't know. But. No matter. I will. It's. I think—honestly, it's treason<sup>48</sup>."

"You mean lying, cheating, stealing, spying, dishonoring—killing??? Gracie???"

"Might," Grace says. "Don't know."

"God," Breanda says. "Didn't think you had it in you."

"So, that's all I want to say."

"I wish you hadn't."

"Sorry."

"It's okay. I'll get over it."

"Good."

"I thought I was incapable of being shocked."

"So you learned something."

"So how's the Peace Mother?" Breanda says as she settles on her breakfast of choice.

"Last night I dreamed about a worm." Gracie runs her fingers down the black and red lettered plastic menu seeing nothing but grease<sup>49</sup>.

"HMMMMMMMM."

A white smocked, black hair-netted, stockinged, high-heeled, cheeky, orange-lipped, blue-lidded female arrives with pen and green pad in hand, ready to capture their orders. They change their voices for ordering, and Breanda requests the special with bacon, and Gracie follows suit.

"And you?" Grace finds a far-away place for the menu, which the waitress neglects to remove. "Any news with you?"

"Just the same old monetary squeeze pleas. Bicker, bicker, bicker. It's a good thing we're already married and not trying to impress each other with kindness. He can be such a pig, and really I'm no better. Sometimes I hardly recognize myself."

"The earth must break a little to make room for sprouting seeds."

"Yeah. It's reaching the breaking point, what with heartburn, hemorrhoids, backaches, nausea, peeing every other minute and the great spread of nose. According to his mother, that means it's a girl.

"Ah ha - a girl?" Gracie says. "Grace, Gracie or Gracia?"

"I'm beginning to think I'll name her Tina."



"Please, not while we are eating."

Meanwhile the waitress has intervened with steaming dishware, and one by sets down eggs, bacon, juice, toast, coffee and a rack of jams. She bids them joyful eating and continues her rounds.

Breanda applies grape jelly to her eggs. "I have inordinate cravings, which also means girl—and she can't sit still."

"Guess it gets pretty tight in there."

"Yeah. I feel like a water balloon<sup>50</sup>."

"A gyroscope?"

"A hippo."

"With octuplets?"

"Please. One is plenty."

"So, whatta ya think about this extra work."

"Not on our time, please."

"Right."

"Did you go out last night?"

"Yes, but I came home quite alone."

"Too bad."

"Actually, I'm beginning to think it might be my saving grace, for a change."

"That *is* a change," Breanda says as they gobble up eggs and things, breathing and making eye contact, while the waitress clears the table and refills the half-filled coffee cups.

Breanda pushes away her three-quarters finished egg plate and turns her head in the direction of the bathroom.

"You done?"

"Yes." Breanda rises and disappears.

Gracie ponders the fries on Breanda's plate, snatches a few, then motions to the obliging waitress.

"Check, love?"

Grace looks into the waitress's shiny dark eyes. She is thinking about that idea, the idea of love. Loving *everything*. Thinking about the worm, how much love she has for the worm. Amazing, it is.

"Check, love?"

"Please," Grace says.

Still smiling, the waitress places the already completed account of the now partially digested goods into Gracie's hand, then sidles past Breanda, which is no mean feat.

"So I guess it's a hard thing to do," Grace says as they scramble to split the check and tip and fumble between tables and chairs and out the door to face the full blossom of summer heat.

"What's a hard thing to do?" Breanda says, walking slowly but slightly ahead of Grace.

"Well, it's certainly an admirable thing."

"What's hard, what's admirable?"

"Love everything."

They stroll along, catching the glares of truckers in bandanas unloading their wares to delis and bookstores. Approaching the great Maiden Lane<sup>51</sup>, they pause to allow a few galloping mail trucks and semi's to pass. And so they cross the street, the respective beauties of grace and motherhood.

Before entering the buildings run by the brothers Klang, something just out of Kafka, Grace takes one last peek of the sky. "Must mean to incorporate everything," she says.

"Incorporate what, pray tell?"

"Everything, although love is an anathema<sup>52</sup> to certain things, one would think."

"Anathema, now that would be a nice name."

"Except that it largely means a curse."

"So what would love be an anathema to?"

*Work of course* is what Grace is thinking.

As the elevator lets them out, and the door opens to the third floor, Grace says slightly under her breath but loud enough for Breanda to hear, "Welcome, anathema." Grace leads, as they proceed marching to their destination past the posts of fellow employees to the teeming terminal room itself. "Here we go. Right into the thick of all the registers. Give me books of buildings rated A, B, C, and D for demolition."

To the computer she goes, taking first the thick list of all current "D" buildings that have yet to achieve their fates. These are buildings in the South Bronx, predominantly, but some in Brooklyn, Queens, Manhattan and Staten Island. The Landovitz list it has been called, somewhere along the line. This one contains the collection of soon-to-be-extinct beasts, dinosaurs, shrines of another era inhabited by the

conquering race of rats and hungry beings of the human species. They are marked, so it reads, by bugs, bombed out furnaces, missing windows, cracked beams, no running water, and the criteria continue. They are noted by great four to six-digit numbers of streets named Clinton, Rivington, Bergen, Grand Concourse. Dark caves, they are, hideouts for the poor whose names range from Argez to Zigowski, and include Gotzcha, Loxquisto, Qarrator, Slomber, Tetracottio, and whose landlords sport first names like Rosa Sue, Jemima, Roy Louis, Francesca. Some are inhabited by squatters, others sealed-up and running wild with rats, cats, raccoons, lizards and droppings of all kinds, not to mention, Grace imagines, the thorny greeny milkweed and other such summerish intruders as dandelions and purple crab grass and sunshine itself.

"What are the criteria for demolition, anyway?"

"Let's take every 50th one," Breanda shouts, as it's all so arbitrary.

"Let's tear down Wall Street," Grace says.

"Not owned by the City," Breanda says.

"Who in hell is it owned by?"

"Trustees of the gods."

"Who owns the World Trade Center?"

"Same!"

"Twin Towers of Babel," Grace says. "Tear it all down."<sup>53</sup>

"And replace it with??"

"Igloos?"

"Tipis?"

"Treehouses!"

"Wombs!" Breanda says.

"Light. Just light!" Grace says.

Breanda stands up next to seated Grace, as both watched the printout zingle and zam, slapping down its thermal ink of letters and numbers from its secret storage of darkness. "Anybody watching us would think we are-----"

"What we are!"

"Nuts."

"Fruits."

"Crackpots."

"Weirdos."

"Gooffoffs."

"But not squares."

"Not clones."

"Spacey, it's true," Grace says.

"Cool, hip, neat, groovy, far-out," Breanda says.

"Not nice. We're not nice."

"Who'd wanta be nice?"

"No one wants to be--"

"Walph probably does--" .

"You'd probably want to be nice too if you shared a room with Tina Meana."

"True—nice and scared."

"So," Grace says, tearing off the sheet. "Here 'tis. Now what."

"Take it to our leader!" With exaggerated cheerfulness, they carry off their achievements to the terribly bright room across the hall.

"Wonderful!" Tina's arm reaches out to cradle the goods, as she and Walph and the two girls confer at her blotter over the randomly chosen list of the doomed.

"Ok, bye bye." Grace and Breanda whisper these words in departing, and they track down the terminal in order to start step two, namely listing out each selection in terms of occupants, apartments, all pertinent criteria for determining the buildings most accessible, those at the tippy-top of the list for demolition.

Puttering around, slave to the manipulations of Breanda's spongy fingers, the computer offers up its horde. Grace watches as it tuts its tats and frizzles its dazzles and produces its clusters of historical facts, its names, dates, places, at any given point in time to be shifted or obliterated at the whim of an operator, or by some erring forefinger and thumb unaware of its own treachery<sup>54</sup>.

Arbitrary it seems. Unreal city<sup>55</sup>. Against this backdrop, this Landovitz list of impossible data, how easy it is to forget that names came paired with human beings, even for the humanists in the very room, who are, truth be told, *more than* witnesses. How unusual it is, in such a milieu as this for Grace to spot the surname "Starlinsky" dancing before her eyes. The shriek that comes from her mouth startles her fellow perpetrator.

"What in hell are you wailing about?" Breanda's lips are jarred out of a working purse.

Grace cries, "Jesus." Her adrenal glands are surely aglow. "You would not believe this."

"Oh, try me!" Breanda's expression, so heartfully simple.

"You remember writing these ridiculous proposals—you know buildings to be destroyed, those with no occupants except rodents and insects? Well, we have selected for demolition one that's inhabited by a star. Just look, won't you?"

"What do you mean, my pretty?"

"I wish I could tell you!"

"Do tell. Do tell."

"Where to begin?"

"In the beginning was..."

"Yes," Grace says. "What exactly was in the beginning?"

"I do not know."

"Why not? Weren't you there?"

"I do not think so."

"Then where were you?"

"Who knows?"

"You know."

"I know?"

"Yes."

"Well," Breanda said, sighing, her good nature beginning to ebb. "Where were you?"

"I was there, of course."

"So what happened?"

"You would not believe it."

"You are not to be believed!" Breanda rises up and waddles out the door, presumably to pee.

With a quick lift and twist of her wrists, Grace flips up the terminal lid and tears yet another toxic document, scanning the list for Starlinsky. When she finds the name, she stares for a moment, then makes a few copies of the document upon which is emblazoned the address of Starlinsky's Lower East Side loft. She scribbles a "delete" symbol next to this entry, and places one of the copies in her bicycle pouch. When Breanda appears, teetering on the horizon, Grace sees her own exhaustion mirrored on her colleague's face.

Breanda mumbles something of her discontent and stretches high up in the swivel chair frowning at the face of the upturned watch that sits on the terminal—her very own piece of frill. "Three more hours," she says, taking a tissue to burst her bubbles of perspiration.

"So what we gonna do? Madam You-Know-Who wants us to kill ourselves for the sake of this fair city," Grace says, fretting and sweating as well.

"You have my permission to leave."

"Yes, I have only to finish my work. That is all they ask of any civil slave."

"You do mean servant," Breanda says, a little current of correction in her voice.

"And, may I leave forever?"

"As you wish, my servant."

"Shall I just leave my neck at the door before I go."

"Sounds great."



"Just what I always wanted—chopped brains. I say we resign or start a revolution."

"But what can we do really?"

"Our work."

In this room, it is an unlikely thing for the telephone to actually ring with a call from the outside world. And when it rings at all, it is usually Richard, and Breanda typically picks up the receiver. So Breanda is understandably jarred when it turns out that the abrasive female party on the other end of the flashing dial requests to speak with Grace.

"Hi Grace, pal, friend for all seasons of laughter and tears." It is the chirp of the watery Muriel Lyons.

Breanda watches the familiar face of her dear friend warp into an expression she has never seen.

"Grace, Grace, Grace!" These words are gongs coming from the receiver.

"Hello Em, my dearest, saddest cheerio. What soup is on? What wonder attends you? How can I be of service?"

"It sounds, my friend," Breanda says quietly to the room at large, "as if you are speaking a different language."

Grace pulls the receiver about a foot away from her ear. "This friend of mine—her voice is magnified, gratis her illness."

"Oh, what is not new," Em says, "is that I must stay here till the clock drips stop. Who knows when that will be? Some brilliance attends me, but still I cannot cope with

sweet life. Pea soup today, pumpkin tomorrow and pie in the face, right? Storybook, right?"

"Right, my Em gem. You will soon find a great wonder to give you peace of heart, okay?"

"I knew Gracie would be a treat for the right trick. Thanks. Now I'll be off. Come soon to say hi. Bye!"

And then Grace hears the click of the receiver. She notes the sour expression on Breanda's face. "She is not in good shape, my friend Em, but for all I know, you could be in worse shape and I wonder what shape I, myself am in? All of us so desperately sad, drowning in a melancholy borne of frustration. Yet we all still breathe. But what else can be done? We lack gills!"

"I believe you've got some nutso friends," Breanda says, and then, noting the quizzical, virtually unreadable expression on Grace's face, she falls silent. They work for a time, until Breanda pulls out what appears to be a whitish-greyish hair from her purse and is about to show it to Grace, when it lands out of her hands. She dumps her pocketbook on the desk but cannot not recover the hair. She lowers her voluminous self to the floor but can locate nothing more than lone dust balls dancing in the cracks of the cream-colored linoleum.

"I found a grey hair when I was in the bathroom," Breanda confesses tearfully. "I wanted to show it to you. I feel like a mammoth monster."

"A mammoth monster of heaven you are!" Grace says this in the sweetest of tones, as she helps Breanda up off the floor.

And when the time to depart finally approaches, Grace helps herself to an extra load of cargo, namely the pretty portable that she manages to balance on her handlebars, in addition to a great roll of thermal paper that she deposits in her pouch. She delivers one of the dabbled-with copies to the commander in charge and gives one to her trusty, but unwitting squire.

"I don't like you sometimes, Grace. You have too many secrets."

"I'll tell you one day, when I'm free, but for now, let's take the world home."

Leaving her buddy disgruntled, Grace rides her bike home. In her thoughts, the dream of sleep. She pumps up Sixth Avenue to avoid luring weirdos to her terminal, shirt-tailing the breeze of truck and bus exhaust. Obligated to carry both bicycle and terminal up the three flights, she lands before her very own door, beyond which lay her favorite country. When she has finished the business of opening and closing the door, retrieving the mail, delivering it down the disposal, setting down the terminal and parking the bike, she drops fully dressed upon her mattress, kicking off her sandals and falling instantly into slumberland<sup>56</sup> where she need speak and transport any more.

Grace now picks up the dialogue of her wond'rous worm-friend whom she thought had deserted her for another woman. Indicating by precious thought rather than gruesome speech, the worm informs her that he will never be without her, although he might lack the present body of his identity.

"Is it possible for you to appear to me in the body of Starlinsky?" This is Grace's thought that exists and translates to the worm without utterance<sup>57</sup>, without the giveaway sound.

"Not only possible, but definitive," the worm answers in his own inimitable fashion.

"So why don't you appear so presently," smug Grace thinks.

"That's a very particular point you just made," says, for lack of a better word, the worm.

"Now you are teasing me, I hope you know."

"You are taking matters extremely personal."

"Sometimes that happens."

"So I'll tell you that you have some say<sup>58</sup>, so to speak, in the matter."

"That's news<sup>59</sup> to me."

"Well, please be open to some superior prospects, if I may be the first to say so myself. There is something new on the Rialto."

"What, Romeo and Juliet?"

"No, Grace, the Prince of Peace."

"Sounds outlandish."

"That's your problem."

"I thought I was going to bear a girlchild."

"That's a thought for pretty minds."

"Yes, and you know I was selected and found suitable, but really the truth is that I've been seeded by Prince Starlinsky himself. This is my confession to you, most noble worm. I've been had, but I'm not complaining."

"Why not?"

"Because it was precisely what I wished for, with no extenuating circumstances, if you know what I mean."

"That is pretty par for princes." The worm serenely brushes off one of his shimmering balls.

"The wonder is, Herr Worm, laboratory atoms have been sent up the garden gate for the sake of my baby."

"I believe you will further all stuff of science, pretty maid, so please don't faint when you hear that there was a worm around during that fallout. The truth is people run from most truths, which causes the spread of lies, naturally. To be sure the live lie is the fastest and healthiest growing thing. Gracie, my precious darling bunny, why not invite Mr. Starlinsky ---"

"*Doctor*, my worthy worm."

"Dr. Starlinsky, then, to my place, tonight at eight for dinner and drinks."

"Well." Grace is stammering, even in her thoughts, without implying a thing.

"Grace, Grace, please prove true to me." The worm cries, with sound, with actual human speech, a vibration not entirely superior to silence, but distinct in the matter of its residue, namely the echo, which can be reverberating upon the drum of an ear for almost an eternity. With just that and no address left by the aside, the worm takes his leave, and Grace is free to wonder what she might. But not for long, for the fact of a ringing, which

proves too violent a tremor, due perhaps to the distresses felt by the party on the other end of the still raging phone.

## Chapter 5

Having experienced such recent initiation into the sublime and preferred communication of the spheres, Gracie now thinks the telephone a clumsy invention. Nevertheless, she extends her one hand and brain out to whomever.

"Hello," she gleeps.

"You don't know me," the strange male glops, "from a great piece of excrement, but I have been watching you for many moons and I would like to rope you into a good time. So what say ye?"

"From my point of view," she shouts, "you have found yourself the perfect end to the story, so please eat it, Bruce." With that piece of creamy advice, she places the hook back on the receiver. She is steaming when she sinks back into her still warm musty old sheets, thinking of a suitable greeting if Bruce should try again. "You don't know me, fuckears, but I would love to rend<sup>60</sup> you to pieces" is the one that finally satisfies her. Lying on her right, she picks up a hand-mirror about the size of a giant's fist to peruse her billboard to the world<sup>61</sup>. With only the slant light of a setting sun, she surveys the shadowed geography of her face, which is now less billboard than roadmap to her soul, with its minor and major roadways, lesser and greater landings, oil spills<sup>62</sup>, craters from small meteors, bits of stardust. Ah, tears they are. She examines locations for energies gone dry, wonders what else might be fading from her briar-patch<sup>63</sup>. What she cannot see<sup>64</sup> that is nevertheless germinating is bravery, not the most translatable quality, but among most troublesome.

The phone rings again, and into the receiver she shrieks, "Suck <sup>65</sup>, rat." Her voice, a contralto if there ever was one, is also marked by an occasional predilection for taut

consonants, which generally prick up the ears of those who might not necessarily be taken by what she has to offer visually. In this case, the plosives themselves release a bit of a poison dart. With a fury some reserve for their walls, or a punching bag, or their enemies or God help us all, their mates, Grace rises to disconnect the telephone. Then she blows her nose and prancing into the alcove that calls itself her kitchen, she begins to attack the vegetables in the refrigerator. "Only carrots?" She removes two, selects some grapes and a pear, pours herself some orange juice, puts all the above on a tray, and grabs the plastic-wrapped leftovers, cold and miniscule as they are, including: chicken dumplings, ragout stew from Grandma Gristedes, rennet custard from Santa Sloans, Ma Daitch's cheesecake, Pa KMart's<sup>66</sup> chips, and more—all piled high, now. She teeters back to bed, preparing for a picnic. "Be it ever so humble." She is singing now. "There's no place like bed." In fact, she is grazing as she re-connects herself to the world, and within seconds, the phone rings, and she gingerly slides off the bed, girds up her loins and greets the caller with her own encompassing roar of all colors.

"Grace Rosinbloom—for Godssakes, what happened to you? Well, was thinking about you anyway, and where have you been for seven years—in the loony-bin? You'd never believe who called me, you friend Em. Said you were missin' me, and Gracie I'm always missin' you. Just let me know, Gracie. Just let me know. I mean, really, how the hell are you? Do you know who this is?"

"Hi Angelo. Can you call me back? I'm sorry, but I've got to get some sleep."

"Sure, toots. It's only natural you'd be sleeping at dinnertime. I'll try ya later.

Take care of yourself—dig?"



Now, without any rancor, she disconnects, anticipating the continuation of her heady excursion and the mitigating comfort of sleep itself. Having completed her nibbling, she stuffs her face into the pillow, wraps her arm around the collected contents of her refrigerator. She meditates, suspended in the down and polyester<sup>67</sup> mix, eyes closed, by-passing the proposition that this is the very bed she had once shared with Angelo when life was supposed to be all roses. Yes, of course she knows that all sentient beings must abide by principles of realism, that it is ill-advised to become virtually possessed by a dream-world, but in truth, she is exhausted plus devastated by the loss of her worm. How to focus her thoughts, to summon him once again. Could it be that he is jealous of Starlinsky? Should she urge him to remember that that Starlinsky was just a dream? For this is a worm she could talk to, well, not exactly *talk*. Communicate, then, and how she needs his communication! She lies there, her fingernails clicking on the tray upon which sit remnants of her repast, little carrot turds, a salty odor of chicken still hovering above her face, and in the distance the last few wisps of a setting sun. Her eyes closed, she breathes, releasing herself, body-part by body-part, catching sight of the murky dark circle of indigo bobbing behind the lid of her eyes. Ah, the blue light, her sign that some kind of healing is at hand. Before she knows it, she has slipped back, returned seamlessly, so it would seem, to that unseemly state of sleep, beyond all boundaries, and she is in fact greeting a frowning worm who does not say or in any other way indicate "hello."

"How can you ignore me, friend, when we have locked horns, so to speak. Rise rare adder<sup>68</sup> that you are and be bright grail<sup>69</sup>." You are just where reason is concerned,

but when it boils down to your heart, you lose it all, righteous<sup>70</sup> though you may be.

Why round up your baskets on just one egg?"

She tries other, softer, more sensual methods of rousing the worm, but once again he has disappeared from view.

"Look up," a voice in her mind commands. What does she behold but some kind of tower of Babel, in the grim outreaches of what she, in her own provincial way, determines must be New York State. Oh, it is a behemoth<sup>71</sup>, a huge stem of silver rising up like an elephant's trunk, like Jack's beanstalk, and oh, shall she be instructed to climb? "Ah," she thinks. "Can this be what a nuclear reactor looks like?"<sup>72</sup> Fumes of smoke snarl about this almost iridescent test-tube of mammoth proportions. How slippery, how hot, and the smell, how putrid. Yet, somehow, because this is *her* dream, she takes hold of one step, and another, touching now upon an instantly appearing spiraling stairway. She trods<sup>73</sup> on, a tiny path it is, for feet the size of Cinderella's alone. And there she is at the top. Now, another voice, an anthem of voices: "Look down." A grown girl, she is, yet she is in Alice's shoes<sup>74</sup>. She looks and then slides, wondering which bug is the sound coming from? Ah, are they all dead, then?<sup>75</sup>

She selects one little dry body that sits quite still in the cradle of her open palm. "Hello bug," she whispers, but the bug does not in any way respond. She gropes like a fisherman at the ground, grappling with scorched carcasses of grasshoppers and gills of grouper, rose of the shore.<sup>76</sup> Grace sets her eyes upon what she thinks are mountains but instead are masses of wildlife rotting at the horizon's edge. Vast landscapes of death before her: skeletons and exoskeletons, crumbled and crumpled up beasts, not landforms at all, and what are they waiting for? Is resurrection possible, even in a dream? Her

worm all but forgotten, she begins to cry, "Why, when there's this great crystalline sunlight right here all along?"

It is not the phone that awakens her this time, nor the clock, but a vibration, a wave just the same, namely a profound sense of sadness, wetness on her cheeks, and it must be reported that other waters need to flow. Upsetting the precarious balance of her mattress, she stands, having the net effect of tumbling foodstuffs and a crash. Oh, she is upset with the contents of her dream. True tears they are, she observes in the bathroom mirror. She wonders about that Nobel baby, *her* baby, with its miraculous start. No longer in her dreams, then? Gone? At this thought fresh trickles spring from her eyes, sorrows for a world brought to an ordinary death. Once seated, she whispers an incantation for instant salvation, whether by way of angelic hosts or honorable aliens, both for self and world, and then she releases all of the hazardous waste from her body. Removing what has not yet been removed of her clothing, she enters the shower to draw out what meanness has remained upon her skin.

She returns to her room proper, dripping dew drops<sup>77</sup> all over, and begins to sort out the teeming world of clothes and food not to mention tomes that have more than peppered the plain wood floor. It would not be an exaggeration to suggest that she is a young woman of extremes, Grace Rosinbloom, who stands there not unlike Aphrodite herself, with her hair in similar strings, though not so long as to take the place of a fig leaf. Her own little patch the color of Aphrodite's tresses but her actual mane more auburn than red. Naked she stands, ankle deep in perhaps three weeks' worth of possessions, a boundless endless world of things. Little nuisances, copulating with each other, are they? In her mind, she sees, remembers for just how long this very floor was

bare. Time and things, words that must be examined for connections, creation and time, the things of the world in six days, Rome not built in a day. These thoughts, she entertains, thinks. Thoughts without connection to time. Thoughts themselves, the creator of time, perhaps then, and not just the creation of time? <sup>78</sup> She stretches her toes; they are long and thin, as are her feet and almost every other appendage jutting out from her torso<sup>79</sup>, which itself is slender, attenuated, pulsing with a longing, something insatiable that she can barely name. And now, she is trying to feel the sensation of the wood, and somehow this provokes her to clean, to make order. She takes to the act like a racehorse, organizing, shuttling shoes, clothing, trinkets, foodstuffs, books, all off to their destinations—passionately, now, as though with sudden blinders. After all, she does love this floor that she herself had sanded. Oh, this room, a studio with a history, with her history, the history of Grace Rosinbloom in this room. Like a cloistered nun, she'd written her dissertation in this very room, with little but the small desk she'd sprung for, thanks to a scholarship. For a year, she slept in a sleeping bag. And one day, it was a day in the summer, when the pristine quality of her space was shattered. It was as if civilization had discovered Gracie Rosinbloom. The furnishings and even the bulk of the books themselves—oh, she now had books galore—were, in effect gifts, gratis of the super, a man named Frank, whom she kept putting off. Prior to that, she was the library's best friend. "Listen lassie," he said. "If you wait any longer, I'll be dead." Every week or so, he'd just show up at her door. Finally, he just grabbed her by the elbow, like a child, and kept pulling. He'd held the elevator for her. A frail man with rheumy eyes, he was all bone and opinion. "Just come on, now," he said. "You're a stubborn one." Once he pinned her in the small elevator, he just stared ahead, giving

nothing away. Together they rode down to the very basement, where he'd stored the contents of more than one apartment. "Abandoned," he said. What he didn't say, and what she'd found out later, was that these were the belongings of men who died mysteriously. Single men, they were, and well educated. So many books! "Whatever you don't take is going to the dumps tomorrow," he said. She hauled them upstairs. Again, he held the elevator for her. He begged her to consider shelves, bureaus, the couch, coffee table, bed-frames, even their beds. "You can't live in a room with nothing but a sleeping bag!"

She took it all, gratefully so, except for the beds. When it was all loaded into her small room, she motioned for him to wait, snapped open a small change purse, where she kept a wad of bills. She was struggling, trying to pull them out, but he put her off. "Don't be stupid. Just seeing you settled finally is all I need. Now get yourself a bed," he said. "And someday I want to see you with a boyfriend." He let himself out, and she could hear his laughter echoing in the hallway. He died soon after that, her angel—she thinks. It's four years with one bed and too many boyfriends later, a dissertation complete. She'd made use of the books, too, the psychology especially, and the art books—there were hundreds of them (stacks of them now, opened and to the beloved pages of Caravaggio, Botticelli, Picasso, Vermeer, those men, real men, and where were the real men of this world, certainly not on her floor but in her dreams), and she certainly took more than her share. Yes, there are angels about her. If they could just manifest for her a certain man.

And now, having resorted to law and order, she may appreciate the bureau, all oak, with its alabaster knobs, and the oak shelving. Her clothes, a combination of gifts,

close-out sales, and thrift-store finds, neatly folded or hanging, and the few dresses stationed in her closet. The three tiny chambers—bath, closets, kitchen—all set on one side of the long hallway that opens with an arch into her main room. She had—in a rare stroke of decorating—hoisted a flimsy, lacey hanging on a few hooks, woven a gold brocade around to keep from striking her head. She thinks of it as something like a promontory, or clouds. The bed itself, brass poles and all, was a gift from Angelo, who preferred springs to the unfriendly, non-reciprocity of a floor—the futon mattress, the compromise. Now, she removes the food from this gift, piling the remains on the aluminum tray and returning the collection to the refrigerator, even though she suspects the nutritional value is by this time negligible.

This vision of order pleases her, the oyster goddess<sup>80</sup> who is just looking out, oblivious of who or what might be looking in. She reconnects herself with the wond'rous world of lurid phone calls, praying for peace, however, from this very world—at least for the moment—and she is granted her wish. She follows her regimen for dressing, examining coats, hats, rainwear, skirts, jackets, dresses, and determines to waltz naked as a needle<sup>81</sup>, that is nude from both thighs and elbows down. She dons<sup>82</sup> some new undies<sup>83</sup> happily possessing their sheer nothingness, puts on some musical earrings, a ring to adorn her middle finger and a trestle<sup>84</sup> to brace her wrist. She jingles into short green shorts and a skimpy blue top and salutes the portable terminal<sup>85</sup> quacking in the air under her coffee table. She removes its clumsy plastic robe and inserts its prong into the outlet nearest her formica<sup>86</sup>-topped roast-beef colored desk. She lifts the body of Cornflake, her affectionate nickname for the terminal, places it on the desktop and roams back to phone land, grabbing for that body, as well. She introduces the phone to Cornflaker and dials

the exchange for its home. By now the clandestine code has become familiar as butter. She hears the overly anxious buzz, feeling a bit of glee laced with two bits of fear, and she promptly mates the phone hook to Cornflaker's soft, hot receiver.

As the terminal spits out its percussive banter, Gracie dances, meringue to the beat, encouraging sound from the tips of her fingers, she snaps and claps to the bells dangling from her ears. She progresses from humming to selecting words, filching from her subconscious, from street sounds, her own mother's tongue, dribs and drabs from here and there, a method to escape the solemnity of the occasion. Any peeping tom<sup>87</sup> or eavesdropper<sup>88</sup> would witness a solo dance, or duet of sorts, with a drummer-singer-snapper-rapper-tapper-scatter-dancer frail<sup>89</sup> who is scolding and moaning and cheerleading and wailing something that goes like this: "Brrtickatatatatattoo Rootatoottoot Rootatoottoot. We are the girls of the institute.<sup>90</sup> Ratatattat Ratatattat. You are the boys of the paddington flat. Pap smear secretary nurse poor maid dancing girl mama princess get laid. Warrior lawyer doctor smith poor manny retire and pensioner ditch digger command." At the end of Cornflaker's tut-tut-tut, Grace curtsies, then bows, anything to put off the inevitable confrontation of woman and machine. "I wonder," she says, her voice trailing off, and then, at long last, she sits down. Upon the first glimpse of the printout<sup>91</sup>, she becomes one with it, having but a dim sense of what she might gain, and no sense at all of what she is about to lose.

And then Grace begins to type in commands.

Innocence comes in many shapes and sizes, although it's not generally affiliated with any other species trotting about this planet. Humans are said to have lost it with an apple<sup>92</sup>, but somehow each generation has the opportunity to surrender it again, endlessly.

Most only realize it *after the fact*. Awareness itself is only the beginning. Not being responsible for what it is one has suddenly become aware of creates a certain complicity in most humans, certainly those of us above the age of reason, which sadly, cannot be given a number<sup>93</sup>. Shrouded in this moment, which she herself has created, Grace now enters the world of an alien system, having signed no affidavits, given no oaths of obedience, uttered not one promise of fidelity. She peers into the tunnel of a barely two dimensional reality of paper, not to mention its virtual source. She starts punching keys to get into the jewelbox of the US government.

Namely, their intelligence, or so she likes to think of, the CIA, that is, as the Cavern of Inspired Articulations, under which is listed what she presumes is its “Taxonomy of Treasures.” Grace allows herself to be taken into this world, which is very black and white and gray, and bleak, too, lacking eye-pleasers or ear pleasers, that is without icons and iTunes, nor anything to entice the nose. Yet how greedy for information she has suddenly become, scanning the list. “But, where to begin? Why not at the beginning<sup>94</sup>? See where it takes me.” Her fingers direct her down the list, starting with “A”, under which are categories such as “Abortions<sup>95</sup>,” next to which the researcher is advised to “see also, ‘illegitimate infants,’” and under which is an alphabetized list including the following: “...of babyboomers<sup>96</sup>,” “...of Democrats,” “...of the famous and rich,” “...of nuns,” and of course “practitioners.” That list rambles on for pages, and the next category, oddly enough, reads, “Abraham, Foreskin Of,” followed by “Aliens” – next to which are in parenthesis, “See also, Space Populations,” and under which are just three subcategories, namely “Allies” and “Axis of Evil,” and “Pre-Human Influences” namely: evolution, Darwin, problematic nature thereof-.” Grace directs herself to the list



of categories under “B”, which include “Banks” and “Bordellos” and “Bribery”--methods of, and for “C”, Grace spots, among other categories, “Color Studies, Control of ...,” directing viewers to negotiate further, specifying populations Indian, Latin, Negro, Oriental, and under Oriental are listed Middle-East, Near-East, Far-East. Following “Color Studies, Control of,” there are pages and pages on “Communism,” followed by pages for “Confessions,” and twice as many for “Dangerous People”—the section she had previously inspected—and a rather copious entry on “Einstein,” with subcategories ranging from “Brain of” to “Socialism, Tendencies toward.” Grace hops around, noting “Frankenstein,” with its hundreds of subcategories, and “Gandhi, Enema, Bag of,” along with “Jesus, Robe of,” and “Peter Pan, Shadow of.” On and on, she reads, and what seems most puzzling are those *not* listed. Nothing under “technology;” nothing under “weaponry;” nothing, even, under “guns.” Still, Grace finds herself amused beyond anything she might have anticipated. And how could the CIA possibly guess that *Frankenstein* was undoubtedly her very most favorite novel of all time, indeed the source she most quoted in her thesis, having done the traditional amounts of research on the subject of man’s hubris, that is documenting the over-civilization of the human race, using literature as a testament. Of course, she’d covered many of the actual inventions, but more than the ideas themselves, her thesis had been about invention in a theoretical sense, its very idea and the accompanying arrogance, therein, the notions of alchemy and the mixture of spirituality with science, how spirituality infused both art and science. She considered but then glossed over how spirituality became appropriated by government, how it lingered there, in the writings, in the legal documents, in the money. But she herself did not linger there. Having never dared to consider data from the virtual world of

government, Grace decides now to investigate the category she had, in her haste, passed over. How synergistically perfect is the appearance of *Frankenstein* in this list?<sup>97</sup> How can she not at least take some time out to take a peek!

Could it be that *Frankenstein* is the code name for all that she has missed? Cornflaker begins crackling out goods under this category, including endless lists from cloning to renewable resources and everything in the way of nuclear energy that she could ever want to know—or remain ignorant of.

Grace looks up. Up and away she looks. It's then that a disparity strikes her, and she finds herself gazing back at the outpouring, containing more information than a person can take in, much less stomach. It is poison, is it not? What has she done? What is she doing? What is this thing called government? Isn't it just the very grandest institution of hubris there is? CIA in particular. Does she really want to know? And now, at this juncture she feels herself becoming instantly aware of the slightest shift of her energies.

“Once I take this in,” she says aloud, her eyes shut tight but her fingertips quivering at the edges of the thermal paper, as it inches out slowly, inevitably, moving from its cylinder into the plane created by her two hands. “I will be part of it.”

It is a shuddering revelation.

And so with eyes open and but a modicum of choice Grace enters the deep cavern of an organization whose origins might precede those of the human race. This thought occurs to her, begins to overcome her, how problematic a thing is the concept of killing for reasons that do not remotely concern the primal hunger for food. How far away power is from food, how far away the idea of tomorrow is from today, and do animals

kill for tomorrow? Grace ponders the perfectly horrible decision to brand that file with the label of Frankenstein, that it should hold everything most to be feared, namely war and the instruments of war, the theory of war, the possibilities for Armageddon, all so cleverly arranged that Grace figures a novelist might have been consulted. “Or a frustrated novelist,” she says aloud, “someone who oughtta be writing. Just as Hitler was a frustrated artist.”<sup>98</sup> She wonders if they are all in a kind of reincarnational cahoots, the frustrated artists of the millennia, with the governments of all time, and maybe there are aliens in on it to boot? But with luck, there is not a worm. At least not *her* worm.

"You did precede the humans," she says, knowing he must be listening. "I know you are here somewhere. I know you are always here somewhere. You always are, and you always were. And things must change. The world must change, and I must be a part of it. Just as you are a part of it."

With an involuntary twitch, she greets the CIA in a bit of a delirium, finding the system of nuclear reactions, their homes, their castles, their lords and manors and their great gripping galleries of weapons. She greets the subsystems, arsenal after arsenal, a fully outfitted underground world of missiles.

"Fuck the fucks," she cries, horror struck but still plying, punching, pummeling to get a command to probe<sup>99</sup> at least one of the lovely potential energies of war to end all wars. She makes ground, finding reactors in her own hometown, in addition to a list of addresses and names of persons with such knowledge as to blow up and pop the balloons of a world. She probes possible sights of reactors multifarious and brand spanking new<sup>100</sup>. She discovers armies all over and plenty of guns on the moon. It begins to resemble that song about greasy grimy gopher meat, mutilated monkey's feet<sup>101</sup>—grisly

as can be. She finds worms used for testing the possible damage of waste, leakage, storage, potential routes for invasion. Prices there are next to these possibilities. And how, she wonders, will they gather such a wond'rous world of money? Ah ha, she laughs, realizing that all they need do is to print it. Credit that to the Cornflakers of the world.

She catches herself laughing, but at what? How can she laugh? Is she losing her marbles?<sup>102</sup> Is this going crazy?<sup>103</sup> Not a healthy kind of laughter, oh no, though she is still without any inkling, without any solid notion of how far away from reality this little endeavor is leading her, until she catches sight of a letter she had written to her mom a week ago. It sits there, this letter, on the desk occupying space and this moment of her time. She glances at the letter typed in a sloppy manner. It reads: "Dear Mother - How's Florida? Hope the heat has not rotted your looks of fine wrinkles, your groups of group picnics, your giant garden of growing gourds<sup>104</sup>. Your slapdash<sup>105</sup> daughter is sleeping soundly, eating heartily, dressing smartly, meeting fine young handsome doctors everywhere. And what more can you ask? Love and kisses, Gracie Pie."<sup>106</sup>

"Oh, to be in *that* state of mind again," she says.

As well as the façade she was creating, she recalls the feeling she was trying to cover up when she wrote that letter. "Oh," she had wondered. "When will Mom be happy with me? God knows, I could find myself the perfect husband, and she'd still be on my case until I had a kid, and then I'd have to have another and then another, and then what? What would make her stop worrying? Death. It's the only thing she wouldn't have to worry about. Thank goodness for the others." She is grateful her sisters had provided her mom with husbands and grandchildren, that kind of distraction. She wonders if she ever will, and on the other hand, she is relieved that she doesn't have to worry about such

things for herself. Love, of course love she wants. A husband? That she doesn't know. Children? In truth the world is not the proper place for children. She had wanted to change the world. That was what she had wanted, and that is what her mother worries about, and she does not like to face this thing. Not to mention the world that she now wants to change.

Nevertheless, she can spot the innocence there, in that letter, and a part of her wants to go back to that time. The feeling is barely recognizable, yet it is not even a week before. Well, that is the way of New York City. Transform or die. New Yorkers oughtta have it engraved on their foreheads. Maybe it's there in invisible ink. New Hampshire's actually is "Live Free or Die," she thinks, right there on their license plates. She remembers the sign crossing into Iowa, plain as day, posted there high up, for everyone to see: "The Place to Grow." As if halfway across that large suspension you would suddenly sprout new brain cells. Clearly New York City has its own, separate from its large namesake whose constituents spurn the great Apple<sup>107</sup>, kick it around without thinking, the way a kid will punt and keep punting a rock down the street. But they also take pride in it, love it even as they hate it because it doesn't die<sup>108</sup>. The place to shed your skins, the place to do nine lives in one, the place to be, that is New York, Grace thinks. If you want to stay the way you are, you don't stay here. Yet, she still feels queasy looking at that letter. Ah, she sighs, it was a skin ago.

Meanwhile Cornflaker maintains its rattatattat, and Grace attends to her own part in the trap. She tries to finagle the data, to massage its back<sup>109</sup>, just for the oily thoughts that it draws from the mine. She witnesses such smut<sup>110</sup> as would make a pimp smell fresh:

\* BLACK MOUNTAIN GROUP—tries to starve reactor of plutonium<sup>111</sup>

\* NEW JERSEY CLERKS—ride out to plant to pound the pavement<sup>112</sup>.

Workers demand less hazardous environment.

\* SHOREHAM FACILITY—groups of thousands cheer the closing of the reactor.

\* PADDINGTON, ENGLAND—schoolchildren pry themselves from classroom creating nuisance before reactor's<sup>113</sup> entrance. Townspeople join in. Mass panic<sup>114</sup>.

All dated and arranged chronologically, these thousands of listings. A naming of names follows each entry, and following each name are three sets of numbers. More tears as more incidents pour forth from the mouth of the barking Cornflaker harmlessly doing his chores. Clearly, not a night for the bars, compelled as she is by some veritable cliché of a higher power to witness the updating of the plutonium world. The paradox strikes her—creation is long; destruction short. And the clean up, longer yet. Not so simple to remove nuclear waste. Sober now, she cries out to that old lord of all love. She imagines God's tears which sends her running to the fridge. As she grabs an apple of the sour green variety that retains its crunch, the one that comes from that part of the world that is so far west it's east, she thinks about the reptile and his fruity knowledge.

Cornflaker keeps popping his kernels of truth. As if it were suddenly too much information, Grace withdraws. Is there a serpent<sup>115</sup> in this machine? Is she doomed<sup>116</sup>? Should she turn it off? Should she just--? She stubs her toe in the rising action of her semi-epiphany, and her fall jostles the terminal's wire. More like a familiar than a machine, Cornflaker roars himself to a finishing thud. Without a second second-thought, Grace tightens the organ's prongs, re-inserts the plug into the outlet, and re-runs the

commands<sup>117</sup>. Before long Cornflaker is back in the lovely business of stockpiling bad goods. Grace waits for such military secrets, as the Vatican dilly-dallying (Nero fiddle-faddling) while Rome burns—as Paris rusting the Eiffel Tower, or London growing a row of flowers under the bridge, or Athens pricing ruins, or Warsaw raging at rejoicing Moscow. "What about we the people! Scapegoats<sup>118</sup> of the world unite!" Grace—in the throes of multiple revelations now, her voice in full throttle—is perhaps oblivious to the others in this apartment complex, this microcosm of Manhattan, who feel the splashing of molecules colliding with their auras. Grace mistakes the wall-taps and ceiling blasts and the bits and pieces of voices for a poltergeist of divine ilk: Himself she imagines roaming about her room as the sharp cogs<sup>119</sup> of Cornflaker's wheels urge themselves toward each other in a rather gnashing motion. Once again, the machine pauses, and then, with a deep, dark gasp, Cornflaker begins his assault upon the weepingly weaponous world. Grace returns her gaze to the mountain of information spinning off the runway of Cornflaker's flat tummy. Pondering the army and navy, their new toys and the fun, she soon grows weary, and nearly seasick thinking: about the future of the ocean rocking with giant torpedos, drone and man within; about the onslaught of helicopters and ships alike (as there are airships and seaships); about sonar and radar; about cluster bombs, bomblets and land mines, gunpowder and atomic power whirring from off the coast of Jersey to the hills of North Viet Nam<sup>120</sup>. Grace, a goodly spirit, but divinely mortal, pushes the interrupt button, suddenly inspired to raise some hellkite, herself. She sits on a yellow stool, incapable of reflecting upon anything at all.

A break may be just what she needs—a decision like a sprite that sits there at her bony feet, that bids her sign off and reinstate the telephone to permanent connection at

long last. She runs a comb through her sultry tresses, sees to it that there is a book for Em in her other hand (namely *The Tempest*<sup>121</sup>), and she slips on those sandals, heads east, once out the door. She walks until she can walk no longer and arrives at the far east-side of just-lower-than-mid-Manhattan Island where the mansion of Bellevue can still be found. Grace frets and struts and strolls down corridors, up elevators, around rooms on the left bank of the reception area to the temporary housing of Muriel Lyons.

"Hi Em gem." Grace sings in her best contralto, whereupon Em turns her head from the whiteness of moonlight to the darkness of the door. Grace trembles at the lackluster of her friend's great eyes, a fact which disturbs her more than the small patch of gauze on the back of her head. Through the wall of silent, invisible sirens, her own, no less—Em smiles.

"Grace! Grace!" Em's voice resplendent now, a true singer she is, vibrato of brass with range of piccolo.

"Em, girl. We've gotta get you outta here!" Grace wraps up the belongings of Em, such fine fun rags of many colors, delivered by Em's rorschocked parents in the morning, afternoon, and evening.

"Stop for your life. I'm staying. It's my wish."

"But Em, they, we, you, I --"

"At least for just another day."

Grace regains her thread of thought, while tossing the clothes back into their former heap. A knowledge haunts her, namely the fact of limits. Just so many times you can negotiate your comings and goings. As if she could somehow impart this by saying "Em" with a tone. As if a tone could remind her friend how it feels when you relinquish



altogether the power of self-determination. "What if the doctor said you were too sick to ever leave?"

"We think we might for once have a doctor who was worth his salt."

"What if this doctor salts you right out of space for once and for all!"

"We are very happy here."

"Em," Grace says. "I want you to be happier."

"All night we slept so soundly we remember nothing at all."

"How do you know you were sleeping at all?"

"What in the world else could I be doing? Oh Grace, I'm so sick of sorrow!" She weeps, and Grace sets down her most favorite comedic, romantic, un-tragic, little drama upon the metal and formica eating table and embraces Em. Around her arms, Em.

Grace coos to Em. "It's okay Emmi, my Em gem, what sorrow is in your heart that's breaking you up to bits? What is it that makes such a place as this unbearably empty room seem like immeasurable bliss? What is it that allows you no rest?"

"Grace, we are just sad bunnies that seek refuge from the top hat and rat."

"Em, I can certainly sympathize--."

"Starlinsky ---"

"What did you say?"

"My doctor."

"Your doctor?"

"My very own and nobody else's. My sweet heel."

"Oh Em." Grace, can it be said, is torn. Between her beloved friend whose short blue hair she caresses, whose bruised head is in her arms. And the sparking of her

closeted thoughts. "You can't stay in this room for love of your doctor. Where is he now, this heal---". She stops mid-sentence, mid-word, mid-body, heart, soul, mid-mind over matter.

Standing before them is none other than the man in white himself, Dr. Daniel Starlinsky, of average height (six feet), weight (a hundred-and-eighty-pounds), hair color (sandy brown), eye color (hazel). For his complexion, an artist would mix yellow with red, and dot with white and even a bit of blue, to conceivably suggest sleep deprivation. Caucasian, with perhaps a little Mongol and certainly African in his distant genes that are otherwise saturated with Eastern European DNA, in part tainted by the monolithic threads of Judaic heritage.

That last bit, regarding the ancestry, is something they all have in common, from Breanda to Bruce, and including Grace and Em. Were they in prewar Europe, they'd all be wearing stars. But here in America, Starlinsky, below and to the left of his quizzical smile, sports his simple name tag, surname preceded by an initial and title, all in non-serif type, underneath a somewhat dulled rectangular plastic plane—which Gracie had indeed spotted the night before. Nor can anyone fail to notice the moment of silence observed as Grace and Starlinsky lock eyes.

"Hello, girls," says the very party in question, as Grace releases her crestfallen charge to the rescuer in white.

"She is okay." Starlinsky with both femmes fatally nestled in his rainbow-hued eyes.

"I'm glad to hear it." Grace, her body language saying "preparing to leave."

"What's your friend's name, Muriel?"

"Grace, just Grace." Em's is a voice void of all feeling. "Rosinbloom she is they say."

"Oh." Sitting at her bedside, the man of the hour. "They do, do they?"

"Yes." Answering for herself is Grace, situated by the window where an East River tinged with moonlight can be seen. "We do." She follows her body's impulse, making her way to the door. She smiles both for Em and the great doctor, when the latter suddenly stands up blocking her passage.

"You know," Starlinsky says, halting, then speaking, then faltering again, "visiting hours are, have been, uh, were over, finished, slightly, just a few minutes, some seconds, ago, and we have, must, to remind, all visitors, to leave, because why—I don't know."

Grace sprints at the first syllable of his admonishment.

Em's voice is piercing. "Why, Dr. Starlinsky, your stutter is without precedent!"

But Grace, halfway down the hall by now, is missing his blush, though she herself is shivering. She blows a kiss to Em and waves farewells to all who live in the ward Em has known so well. Too many thoughts mashing in her brain. She tries to sort them, even as they sprout fresh. Obviously is a lot here that is new and changing. Maybe it is right for Em to stay. How strange she has become. And, that man Starlinsky. Definitely the man of her dreams. How can it be? Now, the latest horror, isn't it just this—that they are both in love with the same man? She will have to put a halt to her dreaming, now. Can she live with that? She will have to, won't she? She stops suddenly at the open door of a room of a very young child, whose large tearful eyes have turned toward her. She walks forward, her own large mud eyes filling with tears, and she freezes without the

heart to move. It is then she hears a soft male voice gently murmuring, an uncanny replica of the nasal high-soprano, the honeyed tone, the sing-song manner of Em, "Rosinbloom she is they say. Grace, just Grace."

Grace turns to see Starlinsky behind the door, as if coming out of hiding. With one hand, he grabs Grace, and with the other, he comforts the child, and then he is off, dragging Grace behind him.

"There's a room," he says, leading her down the hallway. "We can be very much alone. If you'd like."

"I'd like."

Reaching his destination, he lets go of her hand.

"We don't have much time," he says, sitting across from her at a small card-like table in the windowless room with a handful of cots for staff to fall asleep upon or otherwise relax while on call.

"Do you think she'll be all right?"

"I'm not talking about Em," he says.

"The poor child--?" She watches him shake his beautiful head. "Me?"

"Yes, you."

"I'm fine, really."

"I know." He picks up her hand. "Cold hands."

"I'm just--." Grace finds herself unable to form another word.

"I know."

She would like to ask him how he knows and what he knows. Is there some way he could know? Has she told anyone? She doesn't remember telling anyone. A feeling—

what is it, euphoria?—steams up her arm from the spot on her palm where his fingers has brushed. Is she dreaming? Maybe Breanda is correct. Maybe she is crazier than she thinks? Crazier than Em? Finally, the words come through. "My hand is warm."

"I know."

She asks him: "What do you know?"

"Just what I feel," he says.

He knows just what he feels. Oh, how his logic resembles the foolishness of her dreams! Yet, how can she bring herself to ask him what it is that he feels, hearing the unmistakable answer coming from her own heart. She smiles, wondering many unspeakable things. She is about to give it all up for what she sees looking deeply into his eyes, knowing without a doubt she has seen these eyes before. Still ---

"Can I ask you a question?"

"You can ask me anything."

"Is this something to do with—Em, uh, Em or anything?"

"No."

"Can you just explain something?"

"I hope so."

"I mean, is this the kind of seduction you practice every day? "

"You mean, am I a serial lover—is that what you are asking?"

"Yes, I think that's precisely what I mean. *Are* you a serial lover?"

"I suppose I could be for all you know. But no, I'm not, although I can certainly understand a question like that, under the circumstances. And certainly, you might still believe it's true, because that could be true no matter what I say because --."

“Yes, that’s just it,” Grace says, suddenly feeling the unlocking. “We’re not swearing on stacks of bibles.”

“And even if we swore on stacks of bibles, we could be perjuring ourselves or simply be atheists.”

“You could, but somehow I know you’re not, because you see, I had this, uh, dream, ---“

“You *dreamed* I was a serial lover?”

“No. Oh no. Not at all.”

“An atheist?”

“Oh, no. Not that I know of, at least.”

“Did I perhaps perjure myself?”

“Nor that, Dr. Starlinsky.”

“You may if you wish call me Daniel.”

“Oh, but I love Starlinsky!”

“I’m certainly glad of that. So, you did dream about someone like me.”

“Yes,” she says. “Someone who looks precisely the way you look.”

“That’s very interesting,” he says. “Because ---“

“If you’re going to say that you dreamed about me---. Is that what you’re going to say?”

“Oh, Grace,” he says, suddenly, for the reason that they are inching closer, each of them, and now they are kissing. Hot kisses they are, as if the kiss itself were a small torch.

“But, is this some newfangled method of psychiatry?” She asks this despite the sudden dance of electrons. Little glass beads of cold flames marching up and down her spine, about to make their way to the interior.

“No,” he says, pulling back from her. “Although, it’s extremely unprofessional of me, Grace. Extremely so.”

“Yes,” she whispers. “That would make sense.”

"I don't like to play with words, Grace," he says. "Your place or mine?"

"When?"

"Whenever. The sooner the better."

"You're kidding--"

"You don't know me."

"We sure do," she is thinking, "know each other more than we think." But no words come out of her mouth. It is her eyes again producing a watery commentary that falls in little puddles on the card table. She makes the childlike attempt to wipe them up with her fingers. "Please don't misinterpret these things," she tries to say as the two become so spacially close that the things to which she refers are the only things between them. "They---"

"Please, let me." Starlinsky manages to speak and dry her tears—with his tongue—at the same time. "I'm addicted to the stuff."

Grace responds to Starlinsky's hot tongue with a tongue of her own, and after a while they are walking, she trailing him, as he introduces her to the padded room for the severely disordered, whose door he takes care to lock. What they do in that room is probably best described by fantasists and pornographers. A tasteful attempt follows, but

it is interesting to note what they do *not* do. They do not discuss propriety, sanitary matters, or their respective histories of love—the who, what, where, and when of it. No precautions other than the practice of so-called rhythm are deemed necessary. It's true that once upon a time AIDS did not exist—but this is not such a time. Oh so quietly the giant's footsteps are heard. So hush-hush it is—this sickness-unto-death that is haunting the community of homosexual men. It is before the naming, before the baptism of AIDS, just one of the many mysteries underfoot, in the Eden that is New York. A paradise, sexual and otherwise, so fleeting that even its bitter end becomes obvious only when it is too late to appreciate that fact. So, may it be said that Grace opens all stops and gives herself completely over to him, the man of her dreams. She crawls over and above and under his fair moist mortal self with her own real reddening form, and were her russet bush a rosepatch, Starlinsky might be said to be pricked. Who can count how many times, how many arrangements, and configurations before they finally lie in silence both knowing the world will now go on *with* them.

"We must see each other again soon," Starlinsky says.

"Tomorrow?" Grace snuggles and spoons against the lulled red body beside her, both of them dancing with sweat and imagined moonlight.

"Tonight? You can stay here. I'm on till late morning."

"I must go, though." She tries to tell him about the machine to which she must return.

"That sounds reasonable," he says as they touch extremities like puppies.

"Well, it's a long, true, oh it's a terrible story. Maybe I'll tell you someday."

"When you do, it will be a day I will be very happy to listen."



"Starlinsky." She loves his name on her lips.

"Grace. Grace," is all.

And so they say their first goodbyes, trying to make light of a moment whose magnetism is fading. Something subtle as the smell of a lemon lingers in the air, and then it dissipates, is gone altogether, leaving Grace wondering if it might have all been a dream. She finds herself sitting absently in a cab, as she had done the night before, but she is quite alone, now. Her soul flutters with the memory of union. Once again she is awake, aloose in those wee hours before the sun will declare itself. She returns to Cornflaker, reconnects him to the world, sets him up to print out all the secrets of hell, and she falls upon her bed into the deep, deep, deep<sup>122</sup>.

## Chapter 6

"Grace, Grace, Grace," whispers a proud, repentant worm from a small roadway in the sky.

"Be what you are," Grace says to the freak fellow. "A worm with a paramecium<sup>123</sup> for a father and a human being as a son."

"Grace," says the magical gentle beast that he is. "Grace, wrest from me my ancestry and heir and see me for what I really am—a worm with an advanced case of prototypitis. That's it for me."

"Please, see yourself as you wish to be seen."

"Grace," he says, "that worked for all the other girls, but somehow when one discovers one's truest love, it rebecomes—Grace, Grace, Grace, Grace. How difficult to *be* when you want to *have*, Grace."

"But you have grace."

"Grace is all I want." The worm is gloating as he speaks.

"So look now and just stop complaining. We have a baby to grow you know."

"Grace, you have really lost something down below."

"Pardon, Herr Worm. Are you speaking of my cherry<sup>124</sup>, sir?"

"Presumably, it would have been so were it not already several times removed."

"Yes, it's true. The pit remains."

"Please, Grace, be mine."

"Upon my honor, sir."

"Sir, my own sir, sweet maid."

"Maid, my ass. Take a look at this, if you will." Grace reveals the slight swell of her lower abdomen.

"Well done, I must admit."

"You know the father."

"It is so."

"Now then. Let's talk about matters consequential."

"Fine."

"How will the world react to one more child."

"Grace, so well as we know, we can hardly predict the future of the species. The world is special for all concerned, but we are not permitted to tell things mortals are not ready to hear. They might take the wrong matters into their right hands. We must wait until they have taken the right matters to task."

"Withholding again, dearest worm, and why suddenly this business of wrong and right and all in the middle of the night." Her anger sends the worm off in a huff of disgrace.

She dreams Starlinsky in the padded cell, such stuff that is better imagined than spelled out. But just in time for the imagined song of the lark, the alarm ringing Handel's Messiah fills the air, and Grace alights upon her earthly bed feeling as if her head might split. Poor Cornflaker has suffered the night but not in silence. He has his own little nightmare and does not take his punishment without sounding off.

"A pile of shite<sup>125</sup>," Grace says, nakedly leafing through the roll of Cornflaker's uproar. She hunts for familiar names and places—just a quick peek—and then enters the hot shower to waken Rosinbloom from her multi-level stupor<sup>126</sup>.

"Mirror, mirror on the plaster," she says to her own reflection as the mirror clears. "What I really want to know is—who asked ya?" She feels positively gleeful in spite of her preoccupation with what Cornflaker has to say. So she thinks, until she opens the door, and the steam vaporizes, revealing the great confusion standing before her, namely what to do about what she knows. The machine sits quietly. It is innocent, an infinitely docile matter of weight in the process of decomposing at its own pace. Like that garbage can in Bruce's film, Grace thinks, Cornflaker resembles a trashed young hunk of metal littering the way, but little do we know what its past might have been or what its future holds in store for him. She takes a second glance at motionless Cornflaker and sighs, drawing her shades up to let in the morning sun.

She packs her bicycle pouch full of the fruit that has remained uneaten in the deluge of the night before, and she puts on a light pale yellow dress and assorted undies. For the sake of the bicycle ride, she puts on a pair of running shorts. She tries on a shawl, but tosses it off, deciding that the weather does not exactly call for shawls. She rides out a tad wetheaded but clear as the day is not. She pushes up and down pedals and pulls up on brakes, amid travelers of all sizes, but for the most part larger than not. Upon arrival at the work in question, the dubious workhorse colliding with the nettled elevator operator who seems to have swallowed a thistle.

"How many times we gotta tell you not to bring your bicycle in Schlang's elevator?"

She is prepared with a comment, but instead she uses the energy for carrying her bike up one flight, then proceeds to call for the elevator at the second floor landing. She pushes the button and waits until only a partially filled elevator opens its door, which

happened to be the very next one and was carrying the one and only Breanda Liberfried and the who-knows-how-many-or-what-gender, the no-name, all-possibility that resides in her kangaroo pouch.

"Hey, you all," Grace says.

"Hello Gracie," Breanda says.

"It appears as if the day has already declared itself to misery in your eyes. What ails thee today?" Pointed, though softly, Grace has spoken, as they make their obvious way through the stuffed up void to their cubicle-like room.

"Hot as blazes, humid as my nose, my brain feels like toilet tissue, my poor wasted soul is tired of one body, no less two bodies in one."

"I guess it's tough," Grace say, parking her bike with a sigh and slipping off her shorts, folding them into a neat pattern and stuffing them into her pouch.. "I guess I have no idea, but my guess is you'll get over it by the end of --"

"My life." Breanda's comment busts up them both. The success of her timing gives her the temerity to keep on going. "We are such nuts. You're great for sticking by me. I don't know why you do it. Maybe it's because I'm the only one who listens to your dreams."

Shame —for dreaming—and humiliation—for telling—overcome Gracie who lowers her head. "Gee, Breanda, I never would have expected you to hound me about this."

"Gracie, girl, cool down. I was only joking. You take these things so personally."

"Breanda, tell me, what could be more personal than a dream?"

Breanda exhales with a gusto that speaks.

"Back to the old one-two," Grace says, and it is upon this note that the womangirls of New York City Housing's Terminal Room resume their work. Grace tracks rent receipts, and Breanda lists demolition candidates. Everything proceeds without further incident until a cry comes out of Gracie: "Oh, let me look at that sheet," and Breanda reaches over to hand her the list. Seeing to it that Starlinsky's home has remained unscathed, she is about to return the document until another familiar name catches her eye. It is the very Angelo Palermo in Brooklyn chosen for demolition. A reaction worms its way up her spine.

"Not this one," she says.

"Why not? I spent a few hours last night picking out the selections. It's a horrid building. The wonder of it is that it hasn't fallen down on its own accord."

"Probably you're right." Grace is overwhelmed by the gross coincidence, by the twisting of people's lives, the gatherings—an orchestra it is, or a dance. What if it were some long lost relation of the Angelo Palermo Brothers and Sons that lived in Jersey where she grew up and out? And didn't Angelo call her yesterday, or was that a dream? "What if," she says, then stops, thinking about that joke her family tells relative to *what if*. "If Grandma had balls, she'd be Grandpa." Lost its juice, according to her father, without the Yiddish. Maybe the English "balls"<sup>127</sup> did not do justice to the Yiddish word for testicles. *Az di bobbe volt gehat beytsim volt zi geven mayn zeyde*, it went. Maybe it was the rhythms. If Grandma had balls, she'd be Grandpa. Whatever it was, it didn't translate. There is the Yiddish she knows that all New Yorkers know—*oy vei*, and *kina hurra* and *shayna punum* and adding the little endearment, *la*, after the names of people, especially children, whom you love. For years she thought "spatula" was a Yiddish

word. As it is, she cannot remember the word for testicles. All she can hear is the rhythm. Of course it is *Bubbie* and *Zeydah*. And the connecting tissue, the *if*, and the *then*. No, she doesn't remember those words at all. But she remembers the way her parents would blush and joke, how their faces would swell and crease until there were tears, and she and her sisters would laugh, never comprehending what it was that was making their parents laugh, but it wouldn't matter that if Grandma had balls, she'd be Grampa. Because they were all in paroxysms of hysteria. And her father is dead, her mother in Florida, the world of that past gone. But—this is the question: does she possess the spice and gusto to render its humor properly? Sufficient to bring even one tiny paroxysm of hysteria to Breanda's stiff jaw? She decides not to fight that fight. She prays that the generations of Angelo Palermo will somehow survive, if they are meant to, and that if she were meant to be the appointed savior of that clan, she will be forgiven. She lets this balloon go, drops the subject.

Already Breanda is back to her work. Grace reaches for the key to the storage closet. She removes a box of paper for the terminal with the wide, wide mouth. She proceeds to get on this high-speed, machine that is nailed to the bedrock, and she traces all the houses or apartments that have energy leaks, then tests them. Today in this little room, it is a full house of work, she thinks. She whistles as the hushed duck quacks away. It is a loud, attention-seeking sound Breanda's terminal makes, a serious sound, not casual and cheery like Cornflaker's. As Breanda lists and tackles her items, the printout soars, reeling its way up from the floor into its little collection box. Grace finally turns to Breanda and smiles.

"You haven't asked me any questions for at least two hours. Is there something the matter?"

"I'm just keeping my distance, because you seem to be keeping yours." Breanda looks back at her printout that is temporarily halted.

"Looks like it's thinking about something," Grace says.

"Grace," Breanda says, patting her belly. "Will we ever be free?"

"Poor mama! Your day is not far off, that is certain. What day is it again?"

"Any day, Gracie."

"Any day?"

"Yes. It could be today?"

"Today?"

"Primigravidas, they say, are generally late."

"So, you could have a solstice baby?"

"A cool thought, except that...I'm not ready."

"You're ready."

"I'll know when I drop."

"Drop?"

Breanda stands up, her hands around the wide girth of her belly. "When this," she says, her fingertips barely meeting, "becomes this!" She signals the lowering with her arms and hands, and then waddles a bit.

"You're going to be a great mama," Grace says, "and I'm going to watch to see this dropping, because I can't wait to spoil the little wonder."



"You and everyone else. Both sides of the family—Richard's parents and my parents and the aunts and uncles and great-grandparents to be. Both sides can hardly keep from reminding us how long it's been since there's been a baby in the family. Can you imagine how spoiled this kid is going to be?"

It is clear to Grace that Breanda feels something akin to pride, or perhaps it is just some healthy premonition of satisfaction, and it seems to Grace that the entire room is aglow, as if a song has been sung.

Such is life in the terminal room, and Grace returns to her business of checking receipts and receiving checks from righteous tenants. She suffers away without complaining, just humdrumming right along with a short drift between spaces to the land of partial memory. She begins to think and ponder, and her heart swells, her spirits lift, as she contemplates that one moment. Barely twelve hours ago, it was, she thinks, doomed now to reminiscence. Still, there is power in the aftermath of paradise. A smile registers upon her goldy locks framed, fair face, which shifts further the atmosphere of the windowless room.

This shift does not escape Breanda. "Grace? You, Grace. Grace there. Hey. Grace, remember me?"

"Partially--"

"Anything you want to talk about?"

"What is most amazing is that it doesn't matter whether I talk about it at all. But here it is. The love of my life appeared last night, and I'm not sure whether it was real or unreal."

"Please tell me all." Breanda believes there is a line to be drawn and crossed and even erased at times, only to be elsewhere drawn again.

"Well, I can't really say too much yet because there are so many complications that you would not know where to go from here."

Breanda accepts the gobbledygook in silence, debating to be or not to be questioned.

Submitting to her friend's unspoken plea, Grace relents. "Okay. His name is Daniel, and he's about six foot two, eyes of hmmm hazel, better say, and he has fair skin and hair. He's not thin or fat or whatever. Some muscle, some skin. He's very beautiful...." Her voice trails, and some salted watery drops there are.

Moved to no speech, Breanda gives Grace a squeeze of the hand.

"I found out that I'm not a candidate for sainthood, after all. Please annul my application, return my credentials. Please rescind all prizes." She begins to tear up, due as much to a lack of sleep as to a preponderance of thoughts. She rushes off to the ladies room with its suffocating stench of amorphous waste.

Sobbing a new wave of tears, she closes the green, metallic door to her own little booth and perches her bottom on the edges of the open bowl with her bare feet flat upon the bowl as well. She leans her back against the white oval lid, and in this unlikely but secure position, she is able to fall asleep. At some point, Breanda comes in, asking if she is all right, and Grace manages to indicate she will be fine but wishes to be alone, and Breanda makes a fast exit. Now Grace enters her strange but true land, albeit in a smelly old bathroom in New York, where she receives the calling of an unlikely protozoan<sup>128</sup>.

"Hi<sup>129</sup> there," she says. The worm is afloat in a paradise whose color is more teal than the android apple green of the latrine. He looks like a little yogi experimenting with his body, performing feats of shapes, and his own golden color taking on the sheen of silver, then emerald, then crimson.

"I was in the neighborhood being selected for some bait<sup>130</sup>. I decided to split in my best manner of escape." The worm shifts into a pose that looks rather like someone lying down with a bent elbow and palm under his head.

"This sounds familiar," Grace says. "When I dream, what are you doing?" Now the worm has himself in the shape of a question mark.

"Fine first question," the worm says. "What do you think?" This shape is a worm in shrug, where he looks rather like the letter "M."

"I hardly know what I'm doing when I dream, how could I presume to know what the dream does?"

"Such things, my dear human being, that only live under the sun."

"Be serious, worm. What cannot live under the sun dies. What else can be said?"

"Plenty. Just think, what if we lived forever?"

"Life would be a dream."

"There you have it," the worm says.

"Worm, I have a big problem if you want to know the truth."

"Always. It's my thing." The worm smiles with a jerk to his tail. And then his mouth widens in such a way as to take over his entire body.

"I think I have something to be done, and I'm frightened. Reason number one is—if you'll be so kind to wait until I'm finished..."

"My pleasure, only no unkind thoughts directed to where they should not stay."

"Number one: what if I tamper with some secret records of the national interest, well, I mean *in* the national interest. Number two: what if they catch me? Will they shoot me or hang me or dump in some well? Number three: will they listen if I do it in the legal way - write a letter of simple true facts of reason? Number four: is there some subtle art to catch the eye of the tiger? And, number five: what exact treacherous treasonous deed must I do to stop this way --". And she stops, suddenly with nothing more to say.

"What things have you found lurking in the monster's brain might I ask?" The worm is now vertical, a bit of an "S" shape, as if he were positioned in the pose of Rodin's thinker.

"Such things, oh worm, as not even you could imagine. Horror and war and even peace treaties and some awful inventions. We will barely survive if we stub our toe and get a reaction."

"Well, do you think possibly you are over-reacting a tad?"

"Not on your life."

"In that case," he says. "I might want to introduce you to my girlfriend."

"You have - oh, of course. Oh worm, please excuse my surprise, but I would be honored to, love to meet her—what is she called—or rather, what is she? Like you, a worm?"

A swirl of greenness that was until now just a bit of a raft for the sake of the worm's flotation device begins to be available to Grace. Feathers of colors from chartreuse to cadmium begin to approach Grace from a point on the perimeter of her

vision, and with it a fugue-like orchestral chorus. Whether it is human or insect, Grace cannot discern, only that the sound is percussive and melodic at once, deeply comforting. From this swirling verdure, it becomes obvious that it is a woman emerging. She is dark and pleasing to behold. Lights like the aurora borealis surround her. While she is the only human, she's certainly not the only being in the emergence. The verdure around her deconstructs itself, distinguishing the ivy vine from the trumpet vine, and the grape vine from the wisteria vine. Several members of the hummingbird nation fly out, along with the blue Heron and a multiplicity of winged beasts, from the fly to the goose that are all shrouded in this green swirl. A thousand eyes—moving and alternately opening, then hooded—surround Grace. The fly distinguishes himself from the others and cycles about her, and then the others follow. A terrific organization becomes apparent in this motion, and Grace is transfixed by the beauty. The woman seems to be walking toward Grace, but never arriving, enveloped in the vines and flowers and clinging animals, until she makes one fluid motion, dancelike, which is the signal to release. She shakes them off, her focus on Grace all this time.

“How familiar you look,” Grace tries to say but is unable, having been made utterly senseless by the sheer spectacle.

The woman opens her hand, a palm with lines, and a golden worm, *her* worm.

The worm performs his introductions, simply: “Grace, meet Zeldele. You can call her Zelda.”

“I am in awe,” Grace finally manages to say.

“The pleasure is mine,” she puts out her other hand, and they shake, the two womanly hands, the contrast is there, in black and white. They are both in western

clothes, but Zeldele's wearing a pink bikini, and her hair wildly curls out to two feet from her face that is as if lavished with make-up and cream.

"Yes, you can call me Zelda," Zeldele says, her voice a mixture of breeze and moan. "I can call you Gracie, right? So, the proto has told me some pretty funny things about you. Are they true?"

"Perhaps. Not necessarily. But surely he doesn't lie to you."

"No, we have one of those rare relationships. All I have to do is think it, and it's all over or begun."

"I guess that has its good and bad points." Grace smiles at Zelda, who dances for her, or for the world, her hair like the vines, and her body, too like the vines, with absolute abandon but slow-moving, with the form of a fish under water. Grace determines they become instant friends. "Is it possible we have met before?"

"Who, you and me? Why not? We are happy to meet each other. That should be sign enough. My advice to you, if you were to ask it, is to invest yourself in the eternal."

"Why yes, of course," Grace says.

"All that nonsense about the self, my dear girl—is just that, nonsense."

As if brought on by a master stage-hand who remains unseen, a set or a large prop appears—once again moving from the horizon to center stage. It is a selection of potted roses that are in various stages of blossoming, so hues of yellow and orange and pinks appear with a spray of bees and dragonflies, one in particular, with black stripes on its lace-like wings. Grace stares, loses her focus, for that moment, watches a fly rub its short antenna buds. But then she is jarred back, that very action catapulting her back to her concern at hand.

"So you see," Zelda says.

"Yes, I see, but..."

"But what? What but?" Laughter and music—that anthem of insects sounds, which Grace takes as insult, suddenly.

"Zelda, please tell me whether the worm has filled you in about my most real and unreal problem to date."

"You mean saving the world. You want to save the world? So save the world if you can find anything worth saving, although you can be sure that anything worth saving will surely be saved." Again, there is that sound, gorgeous but mocking.

"That sounds meaningful," Grace says. "Are you in favor of apathy and absurdity, then?"

"You completely missed the drift, and you must be snowed under, madam.<sup>131</sup> What we are asking is this: what is your true motive?" The first part of this is voiced by someone other than Zeldele. It would seem to come from the stage hand himself, but it is a woman's voice, low and guttural with an inflection.

"What should it be?"

"Just love is all there is we say." Zelda and the worm, together now, and he snuggles his tail around her pinkie fingernail. But then it becomes song, and theirs is a duo. Behind them a world chorus gathered from indigenous populations, the voice of nature, and then it's just a dream of voices, a matter of voices in her head, and all visuals fading as if releasing themselves back into the ethers, leaving just their soundwaves.

"You do say that a lot, don't you, and I guess it's true, but where is the love in a nuclear reaction, is my question?"

There is at first a silence, and Grace says, "You are still there, aren't you?"

"Good question," the worm says. "Don't you agree, doll?"

"Yes, are we still here—this is a good question."

"And the next?" This is said by the worm.

"The question is," this is Zel, "what shall Gracie do with the love in question."

"That's another thing I want to know," Grace says

"Well, it's a matter of judging opinion over fact, and once you know that ---"

"I know for a fact that --"

"A fact----"

"My opinion of fact ---"

"The fact of your opinion ---"

"Makes no difference--," Grace says.

"Why not, dear?"

"Because, I believe ---"

"Ah, now we have a horse of many colors. So, what makes you believe?"

"Why are you teasing, plaguing, tricking me. I just want to help, so please be straight with me. Oh worm, this is sheer torment."

Grace opens her eyes to the room and booth she presently inhabits, finds herself still seated, with grooves marked on her thighs and behind. She rises, pulls up her sundries, opens the booth door, washes her face, waters her fingers, soaps and scrubs her hands, looks unforgivingly, then forgivingly into the mirror and departs.



“Sorry, Charlie,” says a voice with the lilt and cadence and gruffness of Breanda’s.

“Breanda?” Grace is walking down the hall, a tired woman in yellow dress, girlishly confused. She looks to her side and even behind her, while walking forward in a hall with many doors opened, each with its own collection of people sitting at desks saddled with telephones and hungry machines, in colors ranging from off-white to shades of gray—all of them hungry for blood.

Returning to her very own cubicle, she finds a note from Breanda, saying, "Dear Grace—What is going on with you. I went to lunch, and I will return soon. Bye, B."

Grace sits at the terminal, lights off, elbows resting on the lacquered wood. She question how has she gotten herself in such a stew with dream-men, babies, and worms with girlfriends talking nonsense, and printouts of disgust, not to mention mad girlfriends with madder boyfriends. But was there ever a time she didn't have crazy friends and crazy dreams. Not in a yogic pose of meditation but rather engrossed in the flood of thoughts between her hands, she considers in that crude but still contemplative manner what the worm's girlfriend has to say regarding the love motive. How can she question the stubbornness of her own unreasoned belief that the news on the printout is not very good, and how can she run away from this opportunity to take some steps to make a change. Meanwhile, as the terminal room is dark, she determines to turn on a few switches. "This will put some mediocre light on the world," she murmurs and begins working at the grumbling quacker. She writes up commands to release the information she had recently put in, namely rent checks, and she absently examines and re-examines her work, wondering why these rents are even collected if the whole world is just going

to blow up. Aloud she says, "Shut up or else you deserve to blow up. Or maybe it's the other way around. Maybe it's Shut up *and* blow up. You silent voices are the reason we shall be no more." She struggles back and forth. What should she do? Whom can she turn to for advice? No proper supervisor for such work, she laments. Whatever happened to the idea of proper rule? The sun by day, and the moon by night, when the stars shine their light—as if to keep the moon company, whereas, who keeps the sun? Grace's wonderings bring her to the version of the golden rule that she was taught: do not to do to others, what you would not have them do to you.

"Such good advice, no?" This is that voice again, that sounds almost but not quite like Breanda. And where is Breanda?

"Whatever," she says. "I'll take and consider myself free. Now I must seek the perfect way."

Breanda meanwhile arrives with the excess part of a tunafish salad, an unburnt offering for Grace, as if to apologize for the guilt of being a catalyst. All this, Grace brushes aside, and she accepts the food.

"Oh, thank you sweet Breanda." Grace takes the plastic fork and chomps immediately. Then she remembers the fruit she'd stored in her pouch and offers some to Breanda, who uncharacteristically refuses.

"Breanda—whatever is wrong?"

"Funny, I was just about to ask you the very same question. Grace – what is going on with you?" Breanda flops down on the chair of her choice.

"I'm having a spiritual crisis," Grace says. "What else is new?"

"Anything I can do or undo?"

"Breanda, this is no problem for you to worry about. Be happy. I am just a lunatic with a good imagination."

"Putty is what you think of me."

"No, no. Actually, I was thinking angelic thoughts about you. What advice you give."

"Advice?"

"The best, Breanda. Just say 'you're welcome, Grace, because Breanda, I'm thanking you. Don't be angry with me. You react as though I specifically projected my right to speak into your ears.'"

"Well, didn't you?"

"No, I just said the most perfect collection of words I could think of to match the torment in my heart."

"My heart blushes for insult," Breanda says.

"No, it doesn't," Grace says. "Your heart might pity me, and you might want to express your pity, but then you might feel unable to help me, so you might project your helplessness onto me and turn my comments into reflections."

"I get it. We are one mess of a species."

"You got it."

"You can have it."

"You can take it."

"No you—you had it first."

Breanda wincing, Grace smiles at her friend and gives her shoulders a squeeze. "I think you are the greatest. "Don't worry about me so much. My mother worries enough for ten gods and goddesses."

"Never thought of the deities as worriers. More like generals. Well, such esoteric thoughts don't work terminals." Breanda prepares to barge in on a machine doing its thing. "You going out?"

"Nah. I'll just stay here forever."

They return to their work—rent checks and demolition selections—in solid silence that is suddenly broken by Walph and his cheerful twittering counterpart.

Grace says, "Watch out for the tan pair of geese."

"Good afternoon, folks," they say in unison. "Have you any news to break?"

"Nothing yet."

"Just a list."

"You've got it then all done?"

"No, almost. We'll let you know."

"Well, do let us know soon." This is Tina.

"Great," Walpho says. "Now where's the other stuff."

"Peachy," Grace says. "The City is only losing one half of its rent these days. Maybe they ought to reconsider the process of redemption and charge the landlords future rents instead of back taxes."

"Grace, you are always peeking into the affairs of this city. You retain the most impossible trivia. Working for the CIA, are you? Such strange things you say!" They

walk out, but Grace feels as if the blues of Tina's eyes have a new edge into her shoulder blades

"Ewwww," Grace says. "That hurts."

"What CIA on the moon?" Breanda says. "What unkind words from the furnace face. What strange looks she gave you. Maybe she's got her period."

"Oh Breanda. What should I do to that poor woman wonder of a window washer, mind and soul. Just smudge, smudge, smudge it? Or do I try to reason her out of her suspicions, or do I quit on the spot, thereby putting stock in her soup?"

"She was just teasing you—and look how far she got?"

"What if I said she was right?"

"I'd be fearless, well almost. Certainly less paranoid about the CIA and a lot of things. Oh, come on, Grace. What's with you. Do you have your period, too?"

"We are all in the flow," Grace says, "even when we don't." She and Breanda turn away from each other to return to the meaningless machine that sits before them waiting to be fed.

They work until the day's whistle sounds, resembling the sneeze of an enormous beast, whereby the city releases its captives, and the elevator is like the big fish that delivers up a hapless Jonah. If you had x-ray vision you would see the tall brown-to-golden-haired girl in the pale yellow dress beside her bike, and just in front of her, huddled in the elevator, the shorter pregnant girl with her flaring, blue patterned bodice. And if you screwed your eyes a bit with that supersonic sight, you might see a baby slowly swimming itself into position. Simultaneously, the door slides open, and they venture out the double doors of the building, into the dispersed yellow light of the utterly

endless day. For a moment their eyes meet, and then they separate—the shorter one hugging her pocketbook, high under arm, a little tighter, as she waits for her husband, and the girl with the bike is saddled. Off goes Grace, into a modern-day Nineveh.

She barely keeps her balance for riding so slowly down Maiden Lane. Her eyes alert for pedestrians slipping onto roadways, her wheels squeezed between the curb and the civilian tanks beside her, Gracie makes the silent observation that nobody missed Cornflake. And then up the hills and down the streets she sails, returning to her own one-room castle with its runes and satyrs, receivers and transmitters, and her beloved bed. Having dumped the mail, parked the bike, grabbed a glass of New York's singularly delicious free drink, she busies herself beside the terminal, seeking better hold of its spilled-forth contents.

She tears off a sheet sized to read, and how it wants to roll its waxy self up again, like a little Torah scroll. She carries it a choice ten steps, sinful girl that she is, into that most private of chambers, where young Jewish males are forbidden to pray or even permit themselves to ponder the wholly energetic One, blessed be S/He. But, lacking circumspection or circumcision or even verbal warning, Gracie, it might be remembered, has in fact dreamed and pondered on that throne. Her mind presently meanders upon her dearest father, Moses Rosinbloom, who did, indeed, as her dream-self told her dream-interlocutor, descend from Russian and Polish Jews, a perhaps simplified way of referring to Vilnius, once a thriving Babylon of cities, torn to shreds by more than one demagogue and now claimed as the capital city of Lithuania. But, even for Moses, the old country was twice removed. He knew it by the stories his father told him, who knew it by the stories of his father, who was on the boat, who survived the crossing with a brother who

doffed his religion into the Atlantic. It took a few generations for the doffing to come to Grace. Moses Rosinbloom was raised with *tallis* and *tzitsis*<sup>132</sup>, and given not to mix *fleshic* and *milkie* and presumably to resist the crustaceans and uncloven, non cud-chewing beasts as *traife*<sup>133</sup>—but these are laws by which Grace does not abide. Nor does Marnie, her mother, continue the laws of *kashrut*. And only God knows whatever her father was thinking when he, the only male in a house of women, took his thick fold of newsprint into the bathroom with him on Sundays, and the little house in the Jersey prairie vibrated with great feminine storms for what seemed like hours. How she loved her dad. An engineer, he was more concerned about the greenhouse effect than the disasters of nuclear power. Nor did they see eye to eye about such things as the dropping of the atom bomb, which he insisted she ought to be grateful for. According to him, it was the sole reason she was alive. He'd been stationed in Europe in 1945, due to be sent to Japan, where he would have surely died, and what would she have been without his noble contribution? And all those of her generation, all of them with the blood of innocent Japanese civilians on their sleeves. Ironical it is that when she was a tot, she played war-games, with sticks for guns, and of course nobody wanted to be the villains, namely the Japanese, along with the Germans<sup>134</sup>. And now who is the villain? Could it be that it was us—all along, she thinks again? Yes, this is the initial trigger of the thought, as she reads, but how quickly she looks up, requiring immediate distraction, which she spies beyond the window framed with peeling white lead paint, where a trapezoidal blue sky shines, interrupted by thick, geometric patterns of gritty steel and brick.

Grace thinks upon her dear departed father with bittersweet thoughts that soon lose all sweetness and become much more than bitter, as she reads down a list of atrocities where poisonous weapons lurk and leak into fields and homes and communities of the uninformed. She seeks the list of chemicals ready to spring into action upon the great agricultural fields of this earth. She considers the root of the system—contamination by contamination by fear and greed, and she studies some concoctions of war machines, delineating underground routes that are patterned after the ant colony, on-the-ground routes plotted by the tiger where trees are worn to stumps. There are others routed after the hawk and crow in the air, after the shark and platypus in the water, and after the grace of God goes Grace, taking care of her derriere and environs. She retrieves the now wrinkled but still curling scroll, a soft cylinder, whose circled end she'd placed for a moment on the bathroom floor before her, and she returns to the main room prepared to snuggle up with some cool pillows and to work her way to sleep, always ready and willing, if able to enter the land of dream.

Grace breathes in sweet rhythms, resting easily before an abstract presentation of colors and shapes, when Zelda, in her electric blue brassiere and emerald-tinted panties, comes tip-toeing in on her, breaking the spell of darkness. Grace says, "Oh, it's you again."

"Oh, it's you, you, you," Zelda says. "Welcome, my dearest angel. Where have you been? To see the Queen?"

"What queen?"

"The queen bee<sup>135</sup>, of course. There's no queen on earth her peer."

"Really?"



"Yes—take a look for yourself."

Zeldele has not abandoned her verdant swirl. If the past instance is any example, it's there, wherever she is, there at her calling—and vice-versa. "Come see the bee in what your scientists like to claim as her natural habitat with a horde of drones buzzing at her every whim, and some of those buzzing, my dear girl, are women." Adorned with black and golden velvet bands, the queen is bejeweled with jaws of amber, eyes of sapphire and darkly glowing crown with black opal beaded up her antennae<sup>136</sup>. At her posterior swings her tail of hot ruby—a real stinging work of wonder.

"What can we do for you," the queen bee, whose name is Beatrice<sup>137</sup>, asks. That voice, so familiar, the not-Breanda voice, but so reminiscent as to surely be a compatriot, a member of the extended family.

"Nothing I know of," Grace says. "But perhaps we'll see what it is soon as it comes to be."

"Sounds reasonable." The bee gives a kick to one of her stick-like legs for some drones to lick.

"So, Bea. Tell me what do you think."

"Looks bright and short," the bee says to all her fans, and the drones buzz their delight, while mumbling to each other their own secret wishes to be fulfilled.

"What does?" Grace, confused, ignores the masses for a moment.

"The solution."

"Ah, you mean to the problem of --"

"The world, of course."

"Short???"

"Bright...."

"But how short."

"Short as you know is relative to long, so lanolin is for example long, whereas a sheep is short. So what is the matter you look so glum?"

"How can you reduce a thing to its by-product?"

"Easy," the queen says. "Remember who you're talking to---"

"Yeah, a buzzer loved only for its honey—otherwise scorned."

"You do forget our other function."

"Oh yes, how could I forget. You are the fecundators of the world. Forgive me."

"Precisely," says the bee. "So what is important remains."

"Such wisdom! Do you think this way all the time, or just upon the hour I happen to ask about my dilemma?" Grace starts pacing, walking without destination, in a large meadow. She is going on and on, imagining the bee is following her, expounding in some detail and gesticulating. Finally she turns and finds herself facing a brick wall. "I have been talking to myself all this time," she says, about to slam her own head into the wall.

"I wouldn't if I were you," she hears, that voice again, but now she knows, even if she doesn't see her. Grace watches as the brick wall undergoes massive shape shifting, metamorphosing into a black cloud and then a swirling miasma of brick. The large swarm of honeybees—sixty thousand, no less—becomes a mass of buzzing that envelops Grace, silencing her, finally.

"Turn around, dahlings," says the bee. "I'm in front of you!"

"You have many followers," Grace says.

"So will you, my precious," the bee says. "I must tell you that a problem like yours is for the ears of my greatest admirer."

"So, you are passing the buck, Beatrice?"

"It would seem so, wouldn't it," she says. "There is a water lily<sup>138</sup> who is quite anonymous, but she will try her hardest to tell you what you need to know."

"She can speak?" Poor, incredulous Gracie, begins to feel the sense of being badly tricked.

"We are just fooling you? Isn't that what you're thinking?"

"Unless I'm capable of fooling myself, but --"

"Yes, well, of course that is the only way."

"The way of the fool."

"Yes, that is the way....Down the road to the brook, and follow to the pond, where one flower will shout, 'Hey, Grace!'"

It is a perfect loveliness Grace finds herself in, and she follows a lush greenery and the silvery blue of a thick and thinning brook to said mudpond with its lap of floating pods and lilting petals. The lilies are closed for the evening, all but one—to which Grace wades. Once again Grace tries to speak very carefully of her life—how this strangest of circumstance came to be, and with exquisite precision, she tells of the disease that has overcome the little world she grew up to be thirty in, and how now it feels like being in the sandbox with machines instead of a thumb-sucking friend.

With the fragrance of clear expression, the flower responds: "Now listen, and listen well, because this is not going to happen twice. The problem you have is so serious, and yet at the same time, it is very light. What you must do, you must know, and

before you know, you must think, and before you think, you must believe. Otherwise, all is reaction to reaction to reaction. The difference between reaction and action is monumental? Imagine the worst, and that will always be reaction. No questions, please--." The waterlily, easily one thousand steps ahead of Gracie's impulses.

"Let me say that reaction is not instinctive, unless the species is in a hurry to be extinct. Why is the fecundating bee not a reactor to the pollen in the tree, when perhaps it lacks choice of the human kind? Precisely because of its predilection for the blossom, it mates it to its other with no strings intended. Nature is its own law, and you humans must learn to obey."

Once again Grace is about to interrupt, with a question, but the water lily raises her voice just enough to curtail the thirty-year old child. "Grace, please be free, and you will drift to the perfect decision. Please love all, because there is no creation unworthy of creation."

"Not even the nuke---?"

"Not even the nuke. What is the problem is man and not the nuclear reaction. If man did not tamper in his ignorance, perhaps you and I would be in Eden this day. Perhaps if man had waited until he knew we would not have to re-new the knowledge today."

Grace says, "What are we going to do?"

"There is always something and nothing to be done. Just try whatever comes to you and see how it goes."

"But we have gotten into this very fix in that very manner!" Grace finds herself arguing in the middle of her reveling, splashing water on her face and sniffing in the earthen odor of swamp and blossom.

A mass of trembling, the graceful flower, in her outermost ripple braces against the rustling breeze. "To some extent, what you say is true, but most it is not the greater truth, for there is hope of love always in the widest way of life." She pulls in her slender petals, closing up. "Farewell, my little one."

"Fare well," Grace says. "More like, oh well." She walks to the edge of the pond and positions herself on a boulder meditating on beauty—its simplicity, its complexity, its vastness. Her gaze is drawn outward, extended far, her soul absorbed yet taking over like the breeze having its way with the pond and trees.

## Chapter 7

She angles out of her bed and performs multiple rites to prepare both mind and body for earthly night fantastic, greeting a ringing phone with the gratitude of one granted the right to arise on one's own volition.

"Hello," she whispers with husk in her not yet jaded voice.

"Guess whom?"

"Without asking, I must depart, Bruce. Be well, but distant." She returns the phone to its receiver.

Regarding the subject of her obsession, Grace begins to feel the advent of an idea, as if it were marching from the very back of her mind to the place right before her eyes, namely the tip of her nose. It is as if it just fell from the third eye, dropped there, an egg falling out of a nest. A *corvus brachyrhynchos*<sup>139</sup> flopping down on the ground while still a nestling—dangerous on any account, the kind of thing that forbids you from tracing your steps. "Yes," she says. "What if I just erase it all? What harm could that be, and then—well, we can figure out the next step when we get to it. How sublime, how easy!" She is still cheerleading for herself when the phone reissues its ring<sup>140</sup>.

Less fragmented, Gracie now holds onto her reserve and says, "Hello caller. Please indicate your name, age and serial number, or else to be kind as to hang up."

"Starlinsky, aged somewhere between birth and senility. My cereal is Total, and its number is Infinity, which would be the name of my car—if I had one."

Gracie greets this caller without a peep.

"Grace, if as I think you are Grace, is this some exotic method of weeding out suitors?"

"Suitors? Not suitors. Are you wearing a suit or suing for peace?"

"A piece. What say you?"

"What else but when—when when when when when?"

"Say now as many times as you said when, and you will be really close," he says with a click<sup>141</sup>, and within the time it takes to walk one-half block, approximately seventy seconds if the clip were fast, Starlinsky can be seen buzzing the buzzer to Gracie's mansion<sup>142</sup>.

Wearing nothing underneath a flimsy robe she'd quickly grabbed off a hook in the bathroom, Grace manages to answer her door without revealing herself. It would appear to the one entering that the door were opening itself.

"Well, well?"

She closes the door with her foot and then wraps that foot, along with her ankle, calf, and thigh around him.

Starlinsky moves quickly upon her face with his lips and tongue and receives an identical welcoming. They remain awkwardly kissing at the door until the action behind Starlinsky's zipper moves into play, and in slow motion, they fall upon the hallway floor where they sink organs into organisms. Their breathing sets off a hundred stereos, radios and televisions within a radius of a few thousand feet.

"Would you like to stay for dinner? I'll give you a tour of the house?" An understatement, as they sample each room in the bustle of moving from hallway to bathroom, against wall, on kitchen floor and to bed, where they lie like one long snake.

"Might, although I had a great meal about a minute ago."

"You're making me blush, you know."

"Well, if you're calling that a blush, rather than a flush," Starlinsky says, "then you're making me blush, as well."

"I'm afraid I've got some very rotten things swimming in my mind, remember? Are you still willing to listen when I'm ready to tell?"

"Yes, but prepare for the end of my flushblush, my darling."

Starlinsky rises suddenly, sits up on her desk chair naked as a defrocked and defeathered goose, but his face is upon her. "I'm all ears and eyes, although I will permit my fingers the freedom to roam."

"To tell the truth--" is all she can say for a few minutes. Will he think she's crazy? She feels herself fumbling but follows the impulse to gaze into his eyes and speak. She tells him about the first time the mistaken information came, how it appeared before her eyes, almost like magic, and then disappeared, but she had remembered it. What endless mess followed, and how now she is dreaming of worms and lilies offering geometrical equations of advice, and her very latest idea—the process of eliminating on paper what cannot be eliminated so easily in reality.

"What do you think?" Grace finds her way upon Starlinsky's soft, furry lap, where she apologizes to him for burdening him with this information that he must hold in his mind and never tell.

"I'm a professional secret keeper," he says. But then his eyes turn away. "It's not very pretty. Not pretty in the least, and we will certainly not find any lies on tape--." His eyes look far, far off to a place she can't find although she sits there staring as if a god lurks there. "So you say, hmmm. Things look bleak. They think or they say they think the energy is drying up, and we must barter our secret knowledge for access to their



endless well. Then we wonder why they come up with a bomb test in the middle of the Indian Ocean. All because we are afraid we might have to endure life without television and water picks, roasters and toasters up our asses, wedding bells on timers and such. So we want heat for winter and air for summer—a great chemo-surgical solution to the disease, I'd say."

"Oh you see it perfectly, Dr. Starlinsky. Now tell me what exactly should be done? I will surely try anything."

Thinking that action is not exactly the prescribed remedy, Starlinsky says nothing, just rises with a stretch and a screech, and Gracie, too rises to go and brush her teeth. He wraps his legs in the whites he'd entered with and had scattered, and he bundles up his underwear, with the question of where to put the dirty clothes?

"Everywhere," Grace says. "Be creative."

"I'm the type that likes to bump up against a structure."

"Put them up your anus!"

"So rich a place would only spoil them," he says, having joining her in the powder room, and gives a serious pinch to her right cheek.

"Ouch, you creep. Stick them here," she says, pointing between her legs to a menagerie below the sink.

"Thanks, my darling dumpling."

The pair of storybook lovers retires to the bed once again, until the hunger bird crows, and they rise once again, this time certain of parting, yet pretending nothing unusual exists in their post coital blues. Grace reaches for her flimsy robe, as Starlinsky for the second time in less than an hour pulls up his pants, as they try to resist touching

each other, both sensing the tug of goodbye in the air. Suddenly, Grace says, "You have no underwear. Do you want to stay for dinner?"

"Why, I thought you'd never ask!"

"I had asked already."

"That was an hour before my hunger returned."

"Please, how would you like carrot juice cocktails, soy cakes and rice ice cream?"

"I'm sure I could survive it," he says.

"Such nice manners, to be willing to risk death for my honor."

"I'm allergic to health food, starry eye. Roach legs, pocked apple pie, roast hamster, bristle of oxtail and squirrel tongue are good enough for me."

"Surely you write yourself short by saying 'good enough', when in fact you are talking of the esoteric gourmet." Grace tears into her bureau, quickly slapping on some blue jeans and a faded pink top, and makes for the door, with the thought to run to the nearest supermarket. "Stay right here, Daniel, dear. I shall return in less than the time it takes you to holler."

"Do not move," he says anchoring her forearm with his hand. "I want to take you out to the Waldorf or Plaza, or never eat again."

"Well, since I am a humanist at heart, I should give in."

"Gracie Rosinbloom, who are you, where were you, tell me all you ever wanted to do in your life and why have I missed you all these forty-five years of my living dying wonderful terrible existence?" It is as close to formal proposition that Gracie has ever had. She feels his gaze upon her, that feeling, as he stands before her, holding both her hands—they stand about a foot apart—as she watches him watching her, taking in the full

frame her—the woman who he believes is his. He looks down at her face. It is a 45 degree angle, as he stands about one-half foot above her. She looks up, both of them oblivious of the light reflecting from their eyes that has accelerated to an immeasurable speed.

“Starlinsky, I have been here always, dreaming dreams of you.”

“How do you know? How do you know it was me?”

“From the way that I feel,” she says.

“Just that?”

“That’s a lot,” she says, “but no, not just that. And you?”

Starlinsky, his eyes intent on her, says, “There was a series of dreams. Some were daydreams, some not. When I saw you the very first time, when you were leaving the hospital at some ungodly hour, after delivering Muriel, I’m guessing—I knew I’d seen you before. I knew, and then when it happened again that I saw you, with Muriel, I couldn’t let you go—well, I could, but, no, I couldn’t. I could not.”

“How did you know it was me?” she asks—the very question he’d asked her.

“How will we ever know whether you conjured me, or I betwitched you?”

A stinging piercing sound comes from Starlinsky's shoe. So small a sound, yet terrifying it is, a signal that he must leave immediately. He curses, leaps to grab his sneakers. Leather, they are, and large as toy canoes, painted a designer shade of white. Within no time at all, he’s gathered the remainder of his belongings—shirt, tie, jacket, laced up the sneakers, and of course shut off the beeper<sup>143</sup>. Once again he stands before her, this time fully clothed. "Oh," he says. "By the way, will you be mine forever?"

"You don't know what you're getting yourself into." Her warning between kisses.

"Naturally, how else would I know you were perfect for me, and so quickly what say you - Yay or Nay to my declaration of dependence?"

"I do."

"More - come on, say 'love,' ..."

"You say it."

"I implied it."

"I showed it."

"I felt it."

"I knew it."

"We've done it."

"So believe it."

In that singular voice of which there are only musicians but no writers, no words to describe its very earthy but still celestial sound, Starlinsky says: "I do love you, Grace."

"I too love you, Daniel."

"Goodbye."

"Goobye."

"Bye."

"Bye."

" ."

So goes Starlinsky sans underwear and dinner to his hospital, and so goes Gracie to her thinking chair and refrigerator door to edibly ponder a myriad of things.

"Oh." Grace is now speaking to the jam and butter rack. "I didn't even say Hello to Em today. What shall I do? Call her at this hour? Sure."

To the phone she goes, bringing the third part of the invention, she figures: food, thought and now action. "Em, is it you—too late to talk? How are you?"

"I'm jealous of you, Gracie pie. What should I do? Wait it out till one of us dies naturally, or send Brucie to do the job on you?"

"God, Em—what have I done to you? Maybe it's time to get you released. You sound so strange!"

"Oh Grace, if you haven't done anything, then why does it seem as though you've stolen all the love I ever needed. That's why I feel so bad now."

"Stolen love? Oh, you worry me, Emmi. What's happened to you? We've gotta get you out of there—now!"

"No! Nooo. Not now—here he is. Here he comes. Here is Starlinsky...." And she hangs up the phone.

"Maybe I'd better go there." Grace is now thinking aloud. And then, "on second thought," she further thinks, "maybe I'd better NOT go there. Oh, these doctors, I hope they know what they're doing. Oh Starlinsky—whoever you are, be true to yourself and I'll be true to you." And with that if/then vow, Gracie returns to her munching, making a prayer proper over her peanut butter: "Oh God, you strange commander of energy matters, please keep Em in the pink, and Bruce out of the black and blue, and keep Starlinsky true, Breanda happy, along with you, Mom and all your clan, and keep me here, please, oh you heaven dream.

"And, by the way, please tell me what to do about this... your.. .my... world.

Ahmenandwomen."

So on to the work of sleep goes Grace, after nibbling a bit of the dinner she'd offered to Starlinsky, and with a nightcap of vitamins, she toasts herself to sleep. But it is insomnia that greets her, and her eyes stiffly remain open and dry and non-blinking. She considers her many-layered problem of how to save the world without losing her skin. "I'll just think about it tomorrow," she snickers in the manner of the oft quoted hero of fallen women, but this wishful resolution does not dissipate the insomnia in the slightest. Whether she lacks the southern etiquette or she possesses just the necessary amount of the western work ethic, the illusion that what *is* is, *is* does, she is forced to come to a more active conclusion, in order to be in the ultimate pastime of passivity. "I'll just delete all the horror and that's that," she says suddenly, and she is up pacing like a general contemplating the battle that he (she) will be remembered by but that might kill all his(her) soldiers and perhaps himself(herself), as well. "Just let them try to document their weapons, consult their absent information booth, receive no worthy updates of this weeping and weaponed planet worth dating. Ah, welcome definite decision," she sighs, now within a second of being in possession of the penultimate escape. "Goodnight all," she says, drifting away from the nothing of the all.

As if what she were breathing were not oxygen from the great tank of the earthly atmosphere, but instead a gigantic balloon of helium surrendering its expansive to her terribly enlivened but now equally drained body, Grace grows up to a bulbous belly blossom in her dream. She sits like a bodhisattva beside the muddy waters, restoring herself to grace.

"Beatrice," Grace says. "You around?"

"Bzzzzzz," sounds a bustle—definitely not a bisssel<sup>144</sup>—of bees hovering above her head.

"Oh you silly old men, where is Beatrice?"

"Here I am," Beatrice says, appearing upon a carriage of the two ushering heads.

"Welcome Beatrice."

"Such a nice way you say my name," the Queen says. "Such a ring<sup>145</sup>."

"Speaking of rings," Grace says. "Do you think I may be a bit too late for one?"

Like a toddler, she extends her waist out for all to see.

"Well, what do you know," Beatrice says buzzing a buzz of her own. "You need a man, for the way you look is impossible without one."

Grace says, "No wonder you were crowned. You have a way with the obvious."

"Thanks dear, but keep your cracks for the worm. You don't want us to use our tail for advice."

"Beatrice! I'm sensitive about this issue, like all new mothers. You can understand."

"Be quiet and just let it happen. So what if it takes a few months, or whatever you call it when you want it to come and you wait. Patience and diligence don't always come in the same package, but when they do—when they do---when they do? Watch out world".

"Bea, will you tell me what my mother would say?"

"Don't ask."

"The worm says it is going to be great."

"So, worms have their share of knowledge, just like the rest of us." While speaking, she manages a twist of her neck and a thrust of tail into the folds of a yellow rose.

"I never knew..."

"That queens did it, too?" Beatrice returns to light on Gracie's belly button.

"That's what I mean!"

"So now you know. What can you do?"

"Something that I thought of on my very own. What do you think of this?"

"What I know is you might have a baby by the time you go."

Grace says, "I will do what little I can when the world comes to call on me, but really, Beatrice, shall I tell you my plan?"

Beatrice buzzes up to Grace's ear. "My dear, you needn't say anything, for this is no news to me."

"You mean you heard me tell myself when I did this morning, afternoon and evening, and were you listening as I pondered mercilessly the whole livelong day?"

"We never say how we happen to know the things we know."

"That is probably the only way, but it is extremely unscientific, you know."

"Science, schmience," Beatrice's words in departing.

Gracie meanwhile sees her tummy growing fast as a mountain would seem to grow if there were a speedometer next to its side. She wonders whether she might also be graying and blueing up the back of her legs and blushing up her cheeks and sallowing below the eyes and lightening in the brain and darkening in the eyes, but then she floats to the world of a laboratory, where she has come for examination.



"Hello," says Geology, a man who so worships the earth he's part of it, his hands and face grounded to Grace's body like that of a cow or sheep or pig to the land, munching, munching.

"Hello Geo. What can I do for you? Some pulse? A temp? You want some blood? Private measurements? Take my clothes off or what? Can you imagine the fetus inside, or must you pull it out to see if it's growing?"

"Sure. We can pull it out and put it right back in these days."

"Please leave it the hell alone, doctor." Her clothes are off, folded so neatly on a wooden chair, and she lies there, as present and docile and vulnerable as a grassy knoll in the mid-day sun. Meanwhile, his hands are gripping pelvis, his monitors are impressed upon fundus, his face so close to her nether parts she considers to let fly a fart but desists.

"You must eat," the man manages to say.

"Something I never would have thought of myself."

"You must get off your feet!"

"My pleasure," she says, rising up, dressing. She feels a kind of reversal taking place, as she moves from woman-as-victim to the great and terrible mother-to-be. While hooting in the poor man's face, she suddenly stops and asks to speak with the expert on bearing with the blues of the postpartum kind.

"The blues man—uh no, now wouldn't this be premature?"

"Please," she says. "Will you send in Prehistory?"

Geology, at this juncture, succeeds in leaving.

Prehistory enters, an impeccably dressed, short, squat man, with mackintosh and vest, a passel of old, worn books on the shelf of his belly, lenses on chains attached to a

pocket. He opens a book with a myriad of illustrations, pen and ink, extraordinarily detailed, of extinct animals. He lets go of the latest lens and speaks slowly and softly, a man of much thought, much perspicacity and little tolerance for even the slightest of falsification. His lips are thin, and it seems as if they do not enjoy moving. And no, he will not look her in the eye. "Just stuff in retrospect is all I'm basically good for. You will have been lucky, for example, not to have given birth to a gila monster, a saber tooth tiger, a woolly mammoth, or many kinds of apes. They will say you nearly came from the planet Mars. But what do they know? It will take them thousands of years to discover that the earth is flatter than a planaria<sup>146</sup> in retrospective, respective, relative fact."

"This makes some of the best sense I've ever had to swallow," Grace says.

"Where did you find that—not in a pre-history book."

"Never in a medium that came after the message. Why, if we started believing in pre-history books, we might have to accept diplodocus as a scribe or tyrannosaurus a pope and the brontosaur a lay-dinosaur, so we make no bones about our guesses but many guesses about our bones."

"I will make sure to remember that. Goodbye, Sir." Grace calls after him as he twaddles down a hall, but it appears as though he cannot hear, so she waits. Soon enough, she is back down, prone and naked as a jaybird, again, for the mass of experts. A barrage of interns arrives, including nascent geniuses in Sociology, Physiology, Anatomy, Psychology, Graphology, Ontology, Logarithms, Biorhythms, Curiology, and more of the latest of scientific fields that have yet to be invented. Fingernailolgy, wartology, loveology are waiting in the wings in order to be nearby in the event of an emergency.

Inside, Grace can barely see what with the white cloud of analysis hovering overhead. "Please go away. We need no more of this. Please remove your stethoscope from my underwear. Try that speculum on your wives. Get out, you beasts. I'm getting up." She rises to a sitting position on the table and thinks if she were a man she could pee all over them, but because she is a woman, she will have to use her mouth. She curses them out with the curses of many tongues, many colors, and one by one—because, after all, this is her dream<sup>147</sup>—they disperse.

She next finds herself on a hill, a faithful witness of the sunrise. She looks to the western sky for a falling morning star. In its fall, the star releases a fly that cycles in series of negative swirls, then drops upon Gracie's nose, creating a slight knot of buzzing that bids her hands to move. Rubbing her eyes, Gracie yawns catlike, extending those lanky limbs of hers. She stands up slowly, walking toward some very gritty windowpanes, her fingers upon them, with their odd ribbony treatments, her face jutting out like masthead into the city air. She imagines herself a sailing ship, with a morning prayer to that effect, rather than a plank aloft a stormy sea<sup>148</sup>. The fly moves on its appointed rounds, as Grace gratefully sucks at the grimy stream of oxygen and marvels at the gush of pastels flooding the eastern morning sky.

She is pumping up her adrenalin while fingering her make-up case, figuring to adorn her face in sunrise, her routine at a fast gate, when suddenly the phone startles her, and she leaps to the ring, with a few twigs of make-up applicators in her mouth.

She wonders if "Hello" is too naïve a thing to say.

"Well? Well? Assuming this is Gracie Rosinbloom, I have been trying you for days. Where have you been? What are you doing at odd hours on odd days? With

whom are you cavorting? Are you sleeping? Are you eating? Are you smoking—what are you smoking? Are you snowing me when you say you have given up men, or have you taken up women? Grace, Grace, Grace. My child, how are you? Will you speak to your mother who misses you like a doting bird?"

"Oh, hi Ma," Grace says, removing the instruments from her mouth, placing them in the finger webs of her left hand as she drags phone to mirror. Listening, she paints, powders, brushes, coats, punches earrings through lobes—a full Friday face of embellishments, ornaments, grace notes. So many things she wants to say, but her mother on the other end is chock full of questions and comments, not really requiring the answers. Just bursts of consoling sound, Grace offers, which range from a soprano's "yes" to a tenor's "no," and including a few staccatos of "sometimes" and triplets of "oh really" and "you're kidding" and "are you sure." It's the stuff of lamb to sheep or roe to flounder, Grace disengaging the fine probes of a mother's words.

"Grace, will you please talk, or do you have cotton in your head?"

"Oh Mom, what's new with me is just a bunch of new, same old different stuff. The job is boring, Em is sick with a head-cold, and I am dating a middle-age..."

"Middle-age!"

"Ma, I'm nearly middle-age."

"Don't remind me."

"Doctor."

"A docta?"

"A physician."

"Very nice—so what's his name?"

"Like I said, it's hot up here."

"Same down here—what do you expect. It's summer north of the equator, I hear. Give it another month, it will be fall. So this physician, has he got a name?"

Grace groans. "Ma. I love you. How are you?"

"I just told you—weren't you listening? Gracie, Gracie, Grace, your head is full of space, but your mother loves you. Now get up and go to work like a good girl. Goodbye."

"Bye."

And off she goes, just like a good girl, making sure to leave the portable home for the work she plans to finish up on the weekend.

Fridays are the worst for your average bicyclist, so on this day, she decides to treat herself to a sixty-cent ride on New York's luxury underground<sup>149</sup>. She passes through the few dozen thresholds and lands before her terminal room door, deciding at just that very moment to take a U-turn, to start the day with a joyful smile. She writes and deposits on the terminal a short note to Breanda: "Meet me, you-know-where, for today is tea-day. Love, Grace." Her plan is to go back out the doors she has just entered, when halfway down, in the elevator, she realizes that today might be Breanda's day to go to the doctor. Ah, she is stuck in an elevator that is unable to accommodate her fickle mind until it reaches the top, or in this case, the bottom.

## Chapter 8

On the landing of the first floor of the infamous building, the great marble and limestone cave run by the Klang brothers, but owned by the City of New York, Gracie encounters Walpho and Tina. Having no hat to tip, she bows her head, wishing to pass in nonplussed silence. But Tina can no more allow the young woman to pass without speaking than the heavens can part the earth without breaking. It rather looks like a bad case of gout in the area, Grace thinks, what with the bulge of the lid and brow of her superior, and there seem to be eyelashes unleashed, as well.

"Hi Walpho, Tina—what can I do for you?"

"It's what you have done that I want to know!" Tina's face turns a bright shade of pale. "What am I going to do with you, girl. Where you have gone with that lousy stinking portable? Have you ditched it somewhere or unloaded it on some mafia chief, and what's the idea of taking it home without asking, when we never knew where you were taking it, and how---"

This is all too straightforward for Walford's sensibilities, and he asks Tina to "hush, for christssakes."

"Relax, Walpho," Grace says. "The thing is home doing homework overtime." What else did you think, you brute, slob, stinking, CIA narc creep, jeepface, is the unsaid thought.

"Good to know. I was terrified someone might have stolen it from you, poor dear, on the subway, or even—oh well.... Let's go, Walpho."

As they waltz out together, Grace follows the old familiar linoleum hallway, whose morning echoes ring sinister in her ears. She keeps step, then veers off as they

head directly to their offices. In her demeanor there is no change as Grace directs herself at that same controlled pace but heading straight like a rat from a sinking ship to the stairwell and down, down, down. Upon closing the door, she dances down ten floors of steps, so claustrophobic yet prismlike it seems, zigzagging down. She feels herself a skier, and with the opening of the door to the lobby, a feeling of destiny strikes her as she breezes out of the double doors, grateful to be on her feet. She is a woman all made up, a woman on the run from the brothers Klang. With propelling speed, not just any walker in the city, Grace finds herself making split-second decisions where to place this foot, that, the sandals themselves, more laces than shoes, the cement and the earth, bedrock below it, laden with at least a few thousand years of feet, human and horse, dog and rat...maybe woolly mammoth and bugs of all sorts, birds, a dodo perhaps. She is overwhelmed with that feeling of being pressed-upon. The feeling of being on a timer, as if her very body were a time bomb whose fuse has been lit. Her heart is aflutter with epinephrine making a course through her tiny capillaries, arteries and veins, roadways of sorts, begun a few hours before, the release of adrenaline opening up her vessels so she can skitter and perambulate. So she can percolate thoughts, can think clearly. So she can move forward, one would hope, although that kind of quality crucial in defining direction is often something best determined in retrospect. At any rate, she does tear out, and while sprinting in those dicey, lacy, sweaty sandals with toes burning, hot breaths and gasps, not to mention sweats elsewhere where skin rubs against skin itching for hairs, she elects to cater her tea party for one at home, instead of having it at the nameless luncheonette. Home is where she is headed. Her pace now slackened, she watches other walkers whose strategies have them taking the bus up Sixth, the street wide as God's smile, this Avenue

of the Americas, more cars and trucks than not this Friday morn. This is a bus that stops near enough to her domain on the hill of the island on the Atlantic inlet off the coast of Jersey situated in the U. S. of A. on top of the sinking, spinning earthen planet, the watery egg<sup>150</sup> of God and His heavenwench, or the Goddess and Her stud<sup>151</sup>, in the one universe with its myriad of galaxies and whatever else the discoveries of the future will tell. Feeling so small, so terribly insignificant, if terribly vulnerable, Grace is thinking big. She's trying to create a frame of reference for location, as she seems to be failing to do so for life. And now, for reasons unknown (but time will tell)<sup>152</sup>, it's the subway she heads to.

Grace, on her short, relative to a universe<sup>153</sup>, way, happens by sheer accident, however coincidental it might appear, and if one were to question such an event, the answer would be simply because it could not be otherwise, which, of course would not hold up in a court of law, or even a house of justice. All this aside, however, it must be said that Grace, it is true, meets up with Starlinsky at a candy store entrance of a Chamber Street subway, where the latter is buying a Post for the morning<sup>154</sup>.

Grace is about to chide him, thinking she is the one who has experienced the first recognition. Instead she gives him a pinch on the behind and a more inconspicuous tickle somewhere else.

"I saw you a block ago coming out of that cave on Maiden Lane."

"Oh, you mean you passed me, without even stopping to acknowledge our divorce?"

"Yes."



"Well," Grace says. "See you in court." She dives down the stairs into whatever subway station, she doesn't care, and on her face, the colors flow in greens and blues, the powder coagulates, softens, liquefies, and the mascara, too. All that was flaked and matted, pressed and patted, rolled and glossed is now in streams, stripes, and puddles. She doesn't care that all the hot, spicy tears of the god she pondered two nights ago are now in her eyes and dripping onto the subway floor next to a spot of urine with its rising heat. She is a polluted reservoir of anger melting into pure sorrow, and soon, because, if nothing else he is a good sniffer of suffering, Starlinsky arrives. He comforts her in his specially trained subway bedside manner, and she rides in his arms to her home on the planet. He is sorry, and she is sorry, too. Their fashion of forgiveness is not much different from their mode of celebration last night or the preliminaries the night before. A distinguishing feature now is the phone, its ring. Gracie reaches for it.

"Hello," she says, trying to control her breath.

"What has happened," Breanda says, neglecting to identify herself. "You aren't at tea, then, are you? You get food poisoned?"

"Close," Grace says. "May I call you right back?"

"Bye," Breanda says. There is a double click.

"Who was that?" Starlinsky says.

"Work."

"I never did ask you why you came running out of there like a bird on a live wire."

"I'm afraid it's a long story, and I might have to go back, but I have a lot of work to do here. I'm apathetic."

"Apathetic? You are about as apathetic as an infant sitting in ---"

"I'm actually just a little anxious."

"You must tell me."

"No need," she says. "Please just love me and don't test me anymore."

"Testing, testing," she hears, then sees Pre-History shaking his head.

"No more of that," she says to them both.

"No need? Please, you just love me and don't test me," Starlinsky says.

"Oh, so that's what p---"

"Tell me quickly. We've both gotta go." They both begin to dress, listening to the phone deliver its one song.

"Hello."

"Grace, you must get back here."

"I know."

"Bring the portable."

"It's been stolen."

"Why?"

"Why? Ask the robbers."

"I am."

"Breanda, I have not stolen."

Starlinsky watches Grace return the receiver to the phone and then quickly reaches for it. "Please hand me the phone, Gracie."

Gracie marks the resonance in Starlinsky's voice. She remembers hearing that tone of his in Em's room. There is both danger and safety in his cadence, which she finds

simultaneously ticklish and frightening. Absolutely, she is frightened. She stands back, after handing him the phone, the both of them only partially clothed.

Pre-history is still standing there, his hands upon his books, his books upon his belly. Lenses hanging from the mackintosh pocket. There is a fly that has come in from the open window. "Hello," Pre-history says to the fly. "Regarding yourself and the worm," he says to the fly, "if you could, what would you place your money on? This is a decent question." He then turns to Grace, but his eyes are focused on the other two creatures, although the worm is not in attendance.

Neither Grace nor the fly provides an answer, but the fly makes himself scarce.

"Hello," he says after dialing. "Starlinsky here. Will not be in today. Why, yes. My mother-in-law has just been robbed. Yes...yesterday, as a matter of fact. Justice of the Peace, yes. A very precious jewel."

Meanwhile Gracie reminds herself of her favorite watch, once her grandmother's, that Grace never wore but always set. She always set it, and it always stopped a few minutes after she set it. It is ticking on the bureau, and time with it. The word "escape" comes to her. The way the word "run"<sup>155</sup> had come to her a few hours before. Starts to plan it, her escape with Cornflaker. "Where shall we go," she says to the machine, which now sits tucked away in its box. "And what is the best way to travel incognito?"

"Traveling incognito—fascinating idea," Prehistory says. "Yes, some of us here have been traveling incognito for years. Years and years, and no one the wiser. And what have we gained? That is another good question. Raising questions, my dear Grace, represents the beginning of the answer." With that sound piece of advice, he imitates the fly, leaving his books to scatter but holding onto his lenses.

"OK, Grace Rosinbloom," Starlinsky says. "You had better tell me everything, from the beginning."

"Starlinsky," she says, her hands and face upon him, hugging and caressing his scratch neck and face, hairs of salt and pepper and all shades of brown reaching to hatch into wool. "I will, I promise, but first please help me pack up some things, and we should get out of here very quickly okay, love, love, love?"

With Grace taking grand charge, they unsnap the metal fasteners of small, worn leather suitcase and quickly toss in or otherwise place the aforementioned watch, a scissors, some make-up, all her money (seventy-five dollars and thirty-nine cents), a pair of sunglasses, one large cowboy hat, a scarf, a belt, and two days worth of clothes. On the way out, Grace whispers a goodbye to the house<sup>156</sup>. "Who knows how long it will be until we see each other again." Those with hearts on sleeves and ears for such things might hear a slight heave of brick, a still softer crack.

Grace and Starlinsky are off to a loft on the Lower East Side by way of the underground. Their words are few. It is just a host of touch and go, as if they are relying on the radiance of fire to light their way and a cloud of smoke to cover their tracks. Upon arrival at Starlinsky's ale-house-like space, Gracie barely hold in her excitement. "This loft is so lofty. I can almost hear my own echo."

"And is its beauty beautiful?" Starlinsky stands there looking at his space with the eyes of his beloved in mind. What does she see here, he wonders, and then asks.

"Light," she says. "Lots of it."

"I'm a spare kind of guy," he says.

"Whatever you are, that is my kind," she says.

But there is no time for a discussion about his taste in furniture, or the story of his gathering of this piece and that one, or even of the others who may have sampled its goods. Those stories exist, of course, but Grace expresses little hunger for them, little hunger for a past, having a sprawling present and a dwindling future in her thoughts. Nor does he wish to fill up her mind with more accessories, so they remain untold—at least for now, and to be honest, all that he sees when he looks out over the field of his loft is really its newfound queen.

What she sees is simply the antithesis of coziness, but a wonderful, newly built, or at least newly sanded oak floor with a light stain, and an array of brown couches and small tables that are made of some kind of wood, as well as a few standing lamps, and a sprinkling of rugs.

And there is more light than stuff here, which is what she says, in answer to its suggestion of beauty, along with: “I love it. You mind me?” She sets up the small valise on a wooden table and opens it up next to Cornflaker, rummaging through her things and looking around to see just how to make herself and Cornflaker, especially, comfortable.

"No, but now tell me. Sit down and begin with the end."

"I stole this portable terminal, and now you are my accomplice."

"Okay, that's not so bad."

"I have access to CIA files, remember? I plan to erase all I can. But if I don't do it quickly, I may lose access, or they might catch me, and it will be a complete failure for which I would suffer needlessly."

"*Oy vei,*" <sup>157</sup> Starlinsky says, reverting to the Yiddish.

PreHistory zipping up his fly—has also arrived. “You can say that again,” he says and then does.

"You speak it like a pro."

"I am a pro, you little *meshugannuh* <sup>158</sup>. So what kind of a nut are you," he says with his tongue close enough to her tongue to find out.

"I'm only half of this nut, sweet love." She fishes for the scissors in her bag with her free hand, and then hands them over to Starlinsky.

"You want me to ease your burden?" He places the closed utensil at her throat.

"No, jerk-off. Cut off my hair like a star surgeon."

"No."

"Then cut my throat. It will be academic, if you don't cut my hair."

"Okay," he says. "But only if I can cut your toenails while I'm at it. They require it, if I may be so indiscreet."

Starlinsky leaves about two inches of the two and twenty, giving Gracie a surgical do, though not so short as to arouse the attention of onlookers. She sweats as he takes the scissors to her toes, sprawled out on his wood floor and thinking of nothing but hunger.

"I am starved," she says. "Whatcha got in your fridge?"

"Toenails galore," he says. "Stay right here," and he walks quickly to the distant area of the kitchen with its utensils and appliances and what-have-you. He presents her with a carrot that is about as large and brown as an oak branch, as well as a freezer-burned smelling container of tomato sauce. "Here, sink your teeth into this," he says, referring to the root. "You can use your tongue on the ice cream."

"Mercy, mercy," she says, laughing. "What, no knife?"

He returns, carrying a fork and spoon.

Grace tries her hand at the ice cream, but realizes that it's frozen spaghetti sauce.

"How very wise thou art. It's all the food I've got," he says with a bite on the bottom of her foot. "I'm hungry too, Toots."

"Well, thanks anyway for the two-ton carrot<sup>159</sup>. Or is it a gourd."

PreHistory is there to supply an answer to such a question, but it's the fly who sees where this is going. In conference they are, he and the fly, who actually even less prone than the scholar to use his voice, speaks: "It's nuh nuh nuh not for nothing that my longevity is sealed, man. I'm not a voyoyoyoy -yeur, nor am I very greedy, but I'll be ba- ba- baback for the spoils. Define yourself, Gra-a-a-acie, and know that when you need us mo-mo-most, we will not desert you."

"What is it really, Sir Lancelot?"

"I thought there was a fly on your buttocks."

"Do not kill it," Grace says.

"Wait for me," says the squat and persnickety old soul to the fly. "We'll be waiting in the wings of history, Grace," he cries as he runs off stage, his mackintosh rising up almost to the tip of his tweed trousers that have fallen for the loss of a belt, showing the beginnings of his own cracked behind.

"I don't have the mettle for killing," says Sir Lancelot, who finds himself with a conquest on his hands, and Grace rolls the carrot away from them, speaking no more of hunger.

Only after the very air is saturated with their sounds and words and waters of love, do they rest, albeit on the floor itself, pretending to sleep in each other's arms. So

complete is the stillness of their union that someone watching might think they have both somehow expired, but now, at the same time, they breathe, bound together like one large sacrificial beast. Their breaths are the only sounds that can be heard within the large, sparsely furnished loft. On the other side of Starlinsky's walls, however, the Lower East Side carries on its incessant noon hour dance.

It is not only the twitterings of the outside world find their way into Gracie's ears, but the buzzing of a fly, and she jostles, ever so slightly, whereupon Starlinsky withdraws from her, and the two make motions to rise and put on some clothes. Unable to resist, Gracie begins gnawing at the carrot, making sure not to ingest the fly, and Starlinsky begs her to let him take her out.

"Remember, I promised. The Plaza. Really, we deserve it," he says, roughing up her two inch coiffe.

"Why must we go outside at all? I'm reluctant to leave until nighttime unless it's to cross the state line. But I'm not sure if I have to be exactly that paranoid. I mean I wonder how far should I take this thing?"

"Grace, we should eat before we decide anything. We are safe in a city of seven million. This is a place where they really leave you alone. I'll take the responsibility—okay?"

"No," she says, with the same finality in her voice that she had when she'd refused Breanda.

"I'll go get some bagels and lox and herring and all the stuff of celebration. Pretend someone got bar mitzvaed."

"*Bat* mitzvah, if you don't mind," she says, "and I already did."



"But I didn't."

"Okay, go get yourself one," she says, then adds, "Some day I'd love to go to the Plaza for the bar mitzvah of Starlinsky."

He heads out to the Jewish markets, taking no notice of PreHistory who is absent-mindedly pulling up his trousers, as he walks down the street, tickled by the changes upon that part of the Island, namely the sprouting of art galleries and fine dining, where there were once warehouses, where people who'd just arrived on boats en masse, once released from Ellis, would find their way to sweat shops. PreHistory imagines the fields of daisies that preceded the fields planted by the Dutch and English. He remembers the foraging and harmony—much of it unrecorded, this kind of harmony. "Perhaps the best," he says to the fly at his side, "is when there is no record."

The fly, notably sparing of his words, nevertheless responds: "The be-be-be-best, PreHistory---and the worst, I'm a-a-a-a-fraid."

"Me, too," she says. "I'm afraid. But I take a deep breath, and I do what I must, right?"

"Right," PreHistory says. "Right."

Determined to do what she must, Grace snoops only inasmuch as to investigate the outlets for Cornflaker. She finds one near a table-top, with a window view of three bridges and a bright blue sea and the tips and middles and some bases of buildings and a sidewalk with walkers standing in the way of the world.

PreHistory has returned to where Gracie putters about, where she is prepping but also taking stock, looking around at her things mixed within the very spare domain of Starlinsky. In a moment of weakness, she looks at her grandmother's watch, fingers it,

feeling the bumps where the marcasite is, looking at the time stilled on it, 1:31 exactly, wondering whether it's the true time, the past time, what exactly happened at that exact time and what exactly transpired when its time-keeping ceased, then places it in her closed fists, one hand around the other. She looks at her fingers, brings them to her eyes, for a moment, rubs away some tears with the double fist. How frightened she is. She closes her eyes just for another moment, with her hands still around the watch, and asks her grandmother for strength, for direction, for courage. The fly has found entrance through the window facing Cornflaker that is not entirely sealed. He is carefully smoothing his wings past the coat of paint upon the otherwise rotting windowsill. PreHistory, on the other hand, walks right through the brick and plaster, situating himself against the wall next to that very window, as though pressed up against it into barely what would be defined as the first dimension, when in fact he exists in such an elevated dimension that it has yet to have been assigned a number<sup>160</sup>.

"I don't know how you deal with this," PreHistory says to the fly that has managed to fly up to the ten-foot-high ceiling and is there, just hanging. "They don't see me, they do see me—it doesn't matter. I don't have much they seem to need. Their lives are so manic. They are without a center. They are without grounding. All their knowledge, all that they unearthed, all their fabulous civilizations doomed for their frenetic forging ahead, their unwillingness to examine what they've done. Their lives are a conveyor belt, a screen of motion, an event, a dispersed focus—all that Grace must turn away from to do her part."

"You duh duh duh don't want to know how I see it," the fly says. "I tell you, you duh duh duh don't want to know."

"Excuse me guys," says Grace, as she sets down the watch and sets up shop, and soon Cornflaker is humdoodling away. She begins the deletions just as Starlinsky lands at the palace door, making knick-knock sounds of five locks snapping. Finally, the door kicks open revealing a veritable carriage horse unburdening itself of its bounty, handing one bitten-into garlic bagel to Grace.

"Or take one that hasn't been tampered with," he says, with his stuffed and masticating mouth. In his arms three large brown paper bags filled to the brim, leaning Towers of Pisa.

"Thanks, dearest. I love tampered-with things. Have you forgotten so soon?" She takes a big bite, then says, "The deletions are going to work. Then we can really celebrate with lobster Thermodor, filet minion. More appropriately, we should just have garbanzo beans or potatoes, some mutton and humble pie."

"What have you deleted, honey," Starlinsky says from the kitchen. "Have you gotten rid of Indian Point? Oh, maybe they've closed that down, already, but for how long—and what about Seabrook?"

"Give me time. I'm getting rid of obsolete weapons, first of all."

"You mean submarines."

"Some."

"Torpedos?"

"There are ten millions kinds of torpedos. I got rid of the ones in helicopters run by men."

"Drones?"

"Yeah."

"Great. Those things have killed more seaweed and whales than the enemy."

"The enemy is their creator."

"Now why do you say that, sweet thing?"

"Gee Willickers<sup>161</sup>, I don't know. Somebody must have programmed me wrong."

"That's an understatement. What is your mama like?"

"Marnie is just a Marnie of a Mommy. Thank goodness she called me today. She would have called the cops, my own mother, if she tried a few more days and didn't get an answer."

"So your mother's a worrier?"

"So yours isn't?"

"You wouldn't believe my mother," Starlinsky says. He feels Grace's thin arms coming from behind.

"This talking of mothers," she says. "How can I resist?"

"I don't see her very often," Starlinsky says, his face softening as if tenderized. "She's the type of person who's always got herself tied up, always helping people she barely knows, always marching for causes, writing letters. I can't wait for you two to meet. She's a very strong woman. There's nothing she couldn't do."

Grace leans on him, holds him tight.

"We're the only ones left in our family," Starlinsky says, still chopping, still gathering, proving himself quite the man in the kitchen.

"What happened to the others?"

Starlinsky pauses while slicing some onions and looks at the sun in the window, his eyes read the skyline like a line in a book, and he slowly tells her what he says must

for the moment be just the shortest of stories about how the two of them came from Russia when he was an infant. There were letters that stopped coming, and he grew up in Pennsylvania with a secret life, until he came to New York for college, medical school.

“And now you,” he says.

Gracie looks to his hazel eyes that really are oceans she can and will be and is just now diving into.

"My mother's name is Sonia," Starlinsky says. "She will adore you. Soon you will meet her."

"In Pennsylvania?"

"We'll visit someday."

"Maybe sooner than you think?"

"Why not now?"

"Now," she says to him, "I am swimming in your eyes." She kisses him but releases him, realizing how madly she'd been studying him, allowing herself until this very minute to be taking a break before her return. "Swimming in Starlinsky's eyes," she says to him. "But now, if you don't mind, I must work to save the world."

"Please be a little more humble, Gracie-kiwi. We have yet to see the might of the pen over the sword."

"Ah, Starlinsky. You are so remarkable." She returns to her thwirpping, cheeping portable, and she watches the deletions of weapons of all colors and sizes.

"Food's on, so get your bottom off."

Grace leaves her misanthropic business for the salty delights of Starlinsky's platter. They munch on foot-long sandwiches, the stuff of liquids and solids of all hues

splattering out the sides. Their laughter makes a trio of the great loud Bach mass playing, gratis of WNYC, also his station of choice. It is among the most glorious of times when the phone rings, and both sets of eyes glitter with fright.

"I'll get it. I must."

"Oh."

"Hello. Yah. Oh. Hi. No. Oh. Okay. When? Okay. Bye."

Grace is certain that so short and insubstantial a conversation means she may forgo the fear.

"It's nothing," Starlinsky says, reading her eyes wherein a tinge still lingers. "But we'd better get to bed fast. I've got to get to work in an hour at the latest, or we might lose Em."

"Lose Em?" Gracie is incredulous, the fear entering, frantic she is, in tone and cadence, her heart racing with its sudden knowledge. The heart in vain forewarning the brain. "But how can this be? I had thought that all we needed to save Em from was herself? Why do you keep her there?"

"How do I tell you this, Grace?" Starlinsky sits down again, extending his hand to hers then releasing it upon feeling her pull to withdraw. "She's more dangerous now than ever, and not only to herself. She says you molested her and tried to kill her. She says that her parents want to marry her off to some fruit, and that her producer tries to make her sleep with every act in town. But now she's swallowed a ton of other patients' medication. Apparently everything is under control. She's sleeping, but if I'm not there when she awakens, it will not be so good."

"Are you sure you don't need to leave this very minute?" Grace says, putting down the impossible sandwich.

"I won't leave you until I must," he says, taking her hand again, leading her to his big water bed, which rules the vast room. "We're both so tired. We rarely sleep when we're together. Come fall asleep with me." When she does, and when he sees that she is deep into sleep, he rises up very quietly and dresses, preparing himself for a few intense hours with Muriel Lyons.

PreHistory, with his flying companion, slips in as Starlinsky flies out the door. PreHistory shakes himself out of sleep mode. "As you were saying," he says. "I remember you were about to open up to me, so I want to let you know I'm listening."

"Yes, as I was say say say-ying, you didn't want to see how I see, and that's because I see many multiple poi poi poi points of view simultaneously," says the fly. "This leaves me to anti-ti-ti-ticipate the future by way of anima-a-a-a-a-ating the past. I am neither a -sa-sa-sa-savage nor nor nor nor a sa-sa-sa-sa-savory character."

"But," says PreHistory. "You are a survivor."

"Because I sub-subsist on fi-fi-filth, and humans are monument-men-mental deliverers of what I need to sur-sur-survive? We are symbi-uh-uh-uh-otic partners. Cast your vuh-uh-uh-vote for me and not the proto." He's speaking not only to PreHistory but to Zelda, whom his antennae pick up. This is the reason for the slight lifting of his stutter, his response to the filaments of the lime green swirl coming from a far place that only he can see. But soon it becomes clearly apparent that Zeldele with her full entourage are in the finishing stages of their dramatic entrance. A fine green mist begins to envelop

the entire apartment. From all corners of all the rooms, and from the ceiling and floors, as well, the green dream of Zelda's world arrives.

"What have we here?" PreHistory addresses the fly, who has made himself scarce. "The opposition? The enemy?"

"The enemy is you, I'm afraid," Zelda herself says. "Not 'us'—let's get that straight." She's looking at the fly, who, of course has split. "As if I don't know where you are, my little renegade," she says, more than a little flirtatiously. She can barely be seen in the mass of greenness, but her voice is unmistakable. "As if you are not part of us, little darling." Emerging from her green fold, she approaches PreHistory, who pulls out his lens, backing up from her, step by step, as she begins to make moves onto him. Just a hug or a kiss, a short embrace will do. She is absolutely naked now, and PreHistory is floored, that is on the floor. "And even you, Mr. Mackintosh, are part of us." She stands there, her eyes fixed, light pouring out, the female gaze—an expression more of pity than disdain.

Eventually, PreHistory gets his act together, stands up and bows to her. "Much obliged," he says. "Well, what are we to do?"

"We're growing a baby," she says. "And we obviously need your help."

"Obviously. I'm here, Madam, at your service." He salutes as his pants fall, and he is grateful that Grace has been ignoring him all this time.

While Starlinsky contends with the wilds of a New York afternoon, Gracie dreams of her friend and protozoan, a most highly developed humble<sup>162</sup> being.

"Oh, hi, worm. What's new?"



"Worlds, since we last spoke, Grace. Animals and insects and birds and fish, and all with the seed within, that grows and blossoms, and suddenly—one day the fruit appears with its share of the seed within. Amazing wonder, perpetual motion—an idea for which no man has received the prize. What a great invention."

"What's that," says pregnant, lest we forget to mention, Grace.

"The seed within."

"That is for sure. I'm working on this notion that probably I told you about."

"Oh yeah, the salvation bit. We didn't really, no offense, of course, take you seriously, so have no fear. Now, what about Starlinskiy-----?"

"Worm, I've done it—well, almost, I'm---"

"Stop. It's not important. What you must remember is that we will continue no matter what. We have the seed within, and can't you just see it grow!"

"Great joke, worm. I feel it, and you simply have no idea. But worm, are you telling me I'm wasting my time with this life? Please!"

"Grace, Grace. You are doing what you are doing. This is fine with us."

"What this 'us'—you and Zelda engaged or something?"

"Yes, how did you guess?"

"I saw you wrapped like a ring around her finger—it didn't take much."

"Well, you've a good eye, we'll say that much for you. My only warning as a former reactor, is to keep free of all reactions to your work—or you might find a reaction when it's least expected."

"Oh worm - who - what - where? Tell me!"

"We can only say that you should be careful with Starlinsky."

"Worm, you give me horrible words to ponder. We are as one."

"Not yet, my dear Grace. Where is he now?"

"With poor Em."

"Precisely."

"Worm, I shall not react to you!" Grace is screaming as he vanishes, but she when her eyes open, she finds she is no longer screaming. Her mouth is comfortably at rest, and even Cornflaker is quiet. When she tries to plug in the phone, she sees a note slipped into the dial. She takes the crisp paper—from his pad of prescriptions it is—the note reads: "To Gracie. Starlinsky will never, never leave you. He is here in his heart, and his body will be back soon. Marry me."

Elsewhere, a fly is smiling, inasmuch as a fly can smile, his black tongue moving almost imperceptibly upon some dishes of herring and lox left in the sink. But a short, plump, well-attired gentleman—albeit beltless, is shaking his head. His study offers him little hope for a future. He is pondering the separate rooms of this planet, where tasers are being readied for a market so dark, rooms where there are computations being made, rooms where coal mines have been hollowed out, where gas-lines amid water lines investigated, and were it for love or even the common good, perhaps he could exact hope.

"Look there," Zelda says to him. "Look there." She, not yet accessible to Grace, can find the love anywhere, and where there is love, there is hope, she would say if asked.

Grace, in her glory, smiling broadly, her fingers on the small prescription. How small he writes, yet elegant is his script, balanced, in the vertical—a European sensibility, then? Oh, who is this man? She cannot resist reading.

## The Grace Poem

She moans with the grater  
They spit on her shoes  
She lends pitterpatter to the neighborhood meows.  
They sup till dawn  
And she is up for the man in the moon

Where are the many she freed from the ground?  
Why, they were the worthiest suitors the world had known.  
So proper a maiden she searched for a home  
Never a woman born had proven so bold  
And bolder as older she grows  
Till one day there shows  
A bundle all of her own.

Gracie reads with some blush of embarrassment and the quizzical expression of glee on her cheeks and brow as she takes in the last verse of what she thinks of as a perverse thing:

She guides by no star but her stars bring truth  
Who wounds her must wound himself, too  
But 'round where you are she rounds up the light  
Of glorious love from morning till end of night.

As Gracie reads the last few lines, little rivulets spill from the rims of her eyes:

Grace is the word but no word is in place

Till the graces of the world take up the law of Grace.

Grace responds to his poem with a poem of her own. It too is spilling from her. She finds the pen and the very pad he used, Dr. Daniel F. Starlinsky, MD, with his special number, his room number, his association with Bellevue, more initials there—and what they signify remains beyond her. Just before she is about to put pen to the pad, she hears a moan. She looks around, almost fails to notice the ever so slight green light settled in the corners of the room—was it there before? The moaning, a lovely moan—she imagines lovers in the not too distant horizons. But there are words coming through that moan. Zelda's? "Write small, my angel," and "think big, but write small!" Looking up, she sees the green recede, registers the moan gone, and as she writes, she herself intones. Words sing out into the air to be held there in that space. And anyone who sets foot with ears to hear will hear. The words, the manifestation, the inspiration filtering, weaving itself like antennae hairs, like the foot hairs of the fly, impossible to see but not to feel. Her poem like his, a prescription. "Listen!" Zelda's voice is a command directed at PreHistory, who doesn't answer. "Does the man have ears," she asks.

"Good que-que-que-stion," says the voice of the fly in the kitchen, still, his tongue hard at work.<sup>163</sup>

"It is once again, my runt, a rhetorical question. What he lacks in ears, he must grow in heart."

"Listen," Zelda says, as Grace writes, keeps writing, keeps speaking, her poem.

A Star in the Sky

Starlinsky rock of my grace

Which star in the sky does he replace?

Starlinsky broke the wishbone of my breast.

He brought my pulse to the moon and my blood to the sun.

He befriended the rest of my parts just for some fun.

Daniel will you be mine?

There might only be the end of time

For me to be in your arms once more.

My gravest<sup>164</sup> wish will be the wonderful wond'rous wonder of them all.

“OK,” Zelda says to all of them. “You watch her now, my girl. Watch her now.”

“My girl, too,” says the worm.

“Aw-aw-aw-all of ours,” the fly says.

PreHistory is quiet, but he’s listening.

And then, Grace takes a deep breath, closing her eyes, sees a picture in her mind of the best of all possible worlds, and then, ready or not there goes Grace to quacking Cornflaker like a troop of sheriffs from the cow pasture, and sooner than later, the reactors begin, at least on paper, to vanish into atmospheric pressure, to rise innocuously like tactful atoms. She can nearly see them disappear now, all of them, from the redwood forests to the gulf-stream waters, of the land that is made for you and me. She removes them from Russia<sup>165</sup>, too, and from all of Europe and Asia and places in between and to the south, but she can only infiltrate those places that are publicly secret, and not those

barred from even this partially confidential tape, which cannot tell what it does not know.<sup>166</sup> But wherever they exist, it is where they depart from, and "Wherefore ever do they exist," she cries, "Oh lord of lords. Wherefore are thou God?"

"Now this," PreHistory whispers, so as not to disturb. "Now this is a rhetorical question, as well."

"Not exactly, PreH," Zelda moans. "Not exactly at all. There is an answer to that last one, and you won't find it in a book."<sup>167</sup>

"What is in a man," Grace further thinks, as she watches one, then another and another, twaddle in his breezy colors and stone clenched face down the avenue before her sight in the window. "That he can build and build and hire and fire and stick it in the middle of a patch of greeny sunned pasture? For the sake of his children, he thinks. And for the sake of his children, he buys stocks in Canberra, in Sperry Rand, in Bergdama<sup>168</sup>, in Navy and Army, in General Electric and Consolidated Electric and the greater industrial power."<sup>169</sup> She is thinking out loud, now. "And the fool's gold sun that cannot bring forth its refinery falls down for the sake of their children. They kill wildlife for the sake of their children. They poison the underground, overground, on-the-ground streams. For the sake of their children, they fill up the atmosphere with Ozone, Carbon, Uric and Sulfuric Acid, Iodine, Fluorine for the sake of their children. They build bombs to protect their children from the other children."<sup>170</sup>

In her fury to delete the masses of information, Grace establishes her own ritual, call it methodology, and a calm surrounds her. Much the way a rower propels the boat ahead, by means of simple repetitive gestures, Gracie types commands, finds files, lists data and eliminates items, or partial items. Onward she traffics, through the satin and

lace files of the Central Intelligence Agency of the U.S. of A, or, as she will have it, the Copious Intrusions of Assault, discovering so much to distract, if not blind the eye. How little there is for a heart to comprehend, even less for the soul to stomach. She deletes strangely systematic ratings of such things as suspicious television programs, films, art objects, books, records, scientific and practical inventions, wonder and non-wonderful drugs, their true side-effects, their false beneficence. She witnesses the disparaging of great academic giants of all fields, their suspect philosophies contracted down to a phrase, and given absurd ratings that reflect the degree of danger posed by their ideas.

"You can't even *believe* in peace and not be considered a threat."

It isn't as if she is deciding to take a break, but in the middle of deletions, the terminal suddenly goes dead.<sup>171</sup> Thinking nothing of it, she figures to take advantage of the situation and give Starlinsky a call, but in the process of trying to engage the receiver and obtain a dial tone, she discovers that the phone is inoperable. Very quickly it occurs to her that danger might be near, a revelation that is made more intense when she spots a patrol car just outside the window.

"Now," Grace says. "It begins now. And now there's no time to think but act."

Nevertheless, she takes a moment to collect her thoughts, which is to say, she freezes for a second or two, blank as the stump of a tree. Then she snaps-to, dons a cowboy hat and some shades, breathes in deeply, and pulls on some tight jeans, reddens her cheeks and lips to cover her pale, pale face, tears off the printout, grabs a bagel, and prepares to walk out the door. But there is a touch of Lot's wife in all those classified as "XX," and she turns back, hoping to see what it is that she failed to remember. She is not looking at the presence of green filaments, but they are there, nonetheless, and the fact

that she is not looking, doesn't exactly means that she does not see, does not feel the presence of Zelda and company. It is her little note to Starlinsky that catches her eye, which she swiftly removes from the top of the table and folds into the heart of the telephone, right behind the dial. Then she kisses Cornflaker, salutes the copcar that remains in the window, and looks for a window that might open into the fire escape. But a patrol car is visible from that view as well. The only remaining window leads to a very narrow airshaft that faces another window, which happens to be ajar. It is one storey down, she observes, so she will have to be careful not to fall. In a matter of seconds, she opens Starlinsky's window, climbs in—hat, bag and all—and successfully—with the aid of a cushion of sorts, or shall we say, a net of great green invisibles—negotiates the two-foot across, storey-deep cliff, landing in a small kitchen with its dour but sweet and almost comforting smell of rancid oil. Oblivious of PreHistory's soothing explanations, a frightened and shrieking partially-dressed elderly woman emerges with two kitchen pots understandably flying in all directions. "Thanks but no thanks," Gracie says to PreHistory who stands there helplessly, his words falling on deaf ears, which is nothing new to him. Gracie tries to calm the woman down, crying, "I love you. I won't hurt you," but the woman disappears with small, fast steps into another room, and quickly reappears with a printed cotton robe covering her and tossing to Grace an old, disheveled wallet, still with smell of leather in its body.

"Out, out, junkie," the woman cries, then saunters back to the other room.

"I don't want your money!" Grace follows the woman in search of the exit.

Meanwhile PreHistory is fascinated by the building itself. Gracie, seeing the woman grappling on the floor to secure herself under the bed, whispers, "I love you," and sends



the wallet skidding back. PreHistory gives it an extra push, but then runs to help Grace with the door. She presses about forty years of locks, walks down several short flights and opens the door to a hot, muggy, humid world. She smiles with a newfound feeling of satisfaction when she spies a handful of officially dressed fellows first politely, then brutishly tackling the door to Starlinsky's building. "Fools," PreHistory mutters, walking by her side. Minutes later, she hears bullets grinding into steel. Walking away, she thinks, "Ah, if only there were time, I would take my hat off to you, young men. I would catch the bullets in my hat. I would turn them into hair bonnets. I would turn them into flowers. I would turn them into rings and bells and buttons and bows. I would render them invisible. I would take the words for them right out of the world. Their very names would not exist."

"You would, would you?" PreHistory says.

"Yes, sir," Grace says, "I would, and I have. So there."

"I for-for-for-for one," says the fly, "am im-im-impressed."

"Oh, there you are," says PreHistory. "Still licking your chops on the herring and the lox?"

"Riot squa squa squa squads," says the fly, "are not my cuppa tuh-tuh-tuh tea."

Remembering Starlinsky's prophecy not even an hour ago, Grace decides she is safe in a city of seven million.

"I'm limited," PreHistory says, "which is to say that I accept my limitations, but I'll do what I can."

There is a roar of applause from the universe, and PreHistory takes his bows.

Gracie is not exactly oblivious of her companions, at least no more so than she is of the other sights that greet her in this infinite universe. She walks for an extended stretch in a kind of mourning for a terminal left behind to fend for itself. In her hands, she is clutching the stash of deleted outpour that she has yet to destroy. A feeling of blankness comes and goes. It's a palpable feeling that sports the color green. Years ago, months ago, even yesterday, she might have spent some moments questioning the propriety of each action she has taken, but now such an occupation is beyond her.

The sun is yet present in the sky. Behind her it is, the feeling of protection. She walks but slowly, the Bleecker Street of yesterday studiously *not* calling to her—Sound City, Heartbreaks, Riverrun, Fruitstand, Meows, are all things of the past. They are so distant as to be in Paris or Budapest, or Johannesburg, or Tithonia City<sup>172</sup>. Grace is drawn to a park, as if there were filaments of green doing its work, the slow beginnings of a cocoon being built around her.

A buoyancy there, that she enters, people talking, sitting on benches, or standing, throwing a ball, a frisbe, offering a little weedhashpills. She smiles at the ruddy, soiled, numb, and ageless ones with their lived-in clothing. Their eyes take her in as one of them, in spite of or because of her hat, which is seen as sun protection. Her dearth of hair—the bulk of it in Starlinsky's possession—gives her an androgynous look. She escapes no one's gaze, not the males, not the females, not the young, not the old. So nondescript she is, all the world can relate. It is what is called "Alphabet City" this turf, and she is new to them, but they have a place for her, the homeless, as one of their own. So many smiles, ah such wonderful society, Grace thinks, and laughing, she takes part in the back and forth, and she rummages into her bag and hands over whatever falls into her fingers. And

when there is nothing left but a brush, a non-ticking watch, a much diminished cache of quarters, and the printout, she carefully rips the computer paper into swatches, with promises that they will someday be worth something.

"Thanks, lady," and "thank you, miss," and "kindest person" are the comments she receives, which thrill her. She reaches up to scratch her head and realizes that somewhere she has surrendered her cowboy hat. She yawns, with that feeling of lightness brought on by utter exhaustion and insufficient food, and sits herself down on a bench near a phone booth on Broadway, figuring to give her love the possibility of a second chance, fingering the stash of quarters in her sturdy pocket. Many times she dials up the hospital and asks for Starlinsky. Although he is paged countless times, he never comes to take the call, so Gracie phones Em, who for whatever reason does not pick up the phone. She leaves a still ringing phone, when she hears sirens that she knows are for her, and she goes running down a small side street where an alleyway proves most cozy. She lifts her head to the beacon of the barely blue sky that is not dark enough for a star, not even on the easternmost horizon, but knowing that it's there, she makes the only wish she feels she has left.

## Chapter 9

Sabbath<sup>173</sup> it almost is; sundown it's not yet. If Grace had eggs to set on their apexes, they would surely salute her today. Little does she know how more easily the world turns, how much brighter the sun shines, how much longer it holds on because of her, because of what she has done. Another luminary is up, and its lone inhabitant has returned from his waxy crescent more than once today. The stars of course refrain from revealing themselves, but they are there, just as many things unseen, some of which sport filaments of green. And where did she leave that hat, Grace wonders. The brick<sup>174</sup> she leans against creates a smarting sensation on the back of her head—and where is that bee now, Grace thinks. She looks up at the sky, its color shifting, some impenetrable shade of blue, bordering on gray, wisps of clouds, the particles reflecting or dispersing the trillions of rays of city light. Friday night, then, time to reflect back, she thinks, but what a week it was, she cannot bear to ponder. Not exactly hungry, she says to herself, and anyway, she thinks, the sky is a feast of clouds. Now there are no sirens to break the cadences of the early nightlife. Just voices, shouts, cars breaking, subways shuttling, horns blasting, the friction of one thing against another—all of it a music unto itself. She looks for another place to sit down. How tired she is, and suddenly things turn, a buoyancy depleted in an instant. The earth turning. The sun setting. Whatever the explanation, Grace feels the light receding. She takes small steps toward a direction where there seems to be more of it. Now out in the open on Fifth, now in the Mews, standing there on cobbled stone. She walks further in, imagines herself in some European town, a stranger at home. For this whole wide world is hers—she tells herself this, or someone reminds her. The voice comes to her, and it feels like her own. She feels

the coolness of the stone, lets herself down. Sits. Waits. Her back against brick, a less ancient brick. Still prickly on the back of her head. Gentrified this street is with its flowers cascading down window boxes, its gaslights. Sirens, now. They might as well be located in the pit of her stomach, in the core of her middle ear—that's how they rouse her. It isn't as if she has told herself she is done with running. She is not giving up. But she is tired. Her eyes flutter. She tries to keep them open. How horrid it is, she thinks again, this concept of home returning to her, the spiral of loss, what a conceit this idea of home<sup>175</sup>, she says, and now she has resorted to speaking to herself, and are her eyes closing or what. Is it a place or a state of mind? Is it something only had when lost or in retrospect? Surely, no place can be home to someone on the run. But there is a planet, she says, once again, aloud. This is my home. Or am I brainwashed to think this? Am I fooling myself. She is fighting the urge to pull an Em, to slam her head into the brick, this is how low she is when she hears the voice, a voice so familiar. Is it Breanda? What would Breanda be doing here? Where is she?

“Poppcock! Preposterous! Balls! Absurd!” There is a bee in front of her, and the brick wall behind her suddenly crumbles, and she falls backward. What was once a wall is now a mass of dancing bees.

“I’m falling, falling,” Gracie cries. There she is flat on her back, with Beatrice spinning around her, trying to revive her, and there is the voice of Zelda as well. They are a chorus, and as they sing, the brick wall undergoes transubstantiation of sorts. It’s a shattering, a smattering, a clattering that turns into metamorphosing, a buzzing and hissing and sneezing and spinning throng of swirling bees. This block of bees that has been called a black cloud manages to wall out the sirens that have, it seems, managed to

minimize their circle, to follow their lead, to narrow down the search to a certain square footage within the central village, where east meets west. For now they are stalled, as no one will contest the territorial rights of the bees, and they know as the sun sets the bees will slow down to a near halt, their cold blooded selves needing the warmth to keep them moving. Rather like the hummingbird, such thoroughbreds they are. But for now, there is a show taking place in the vicinity of Washington Square Park. It is under the Arch that Gracie travels to watch the singing duo around the stinging mass. Although, for some the swarm is also a song, high pitched notes they are, and they are singing for their lives, for Grace, for you and me. “For your ears only,” Zelda says to her.

Grace can barely speak.

“I shall speak for you, Gracie. You have without a doubt fallen. The falling is undeniable. You feel it, and Beatrice has affirmed. The bees themselves have certified it, have surrounded you and hidden you. This is in fact in spite of the darkening hour, and my dearest, it is your darkest hour.”

Beatrice takes center stage. “In the world of your reality,” she says. “There are many opportunities to fall down.”

Zelda takes up her cue. “Why one may slip up, smack into, stumble upon, or just plain collide—with person, place, thing.”

PreHistory decides to be a cameo: “There are steps, ladders, slides.”

“There are cliffs, ditches, wells,” Beatrice.

“There’s folly,” says PreHistory, “and melancholy.”

“There’s duh-du-drowning and ca-ca-ca-crashing,” says the fly.

“There’s falling in the eyes of someone else,” Zelda says.

“And,” says the worm, who’s nestled there around Zelda’s finger, “there’s falling in love.”

PreHistory steps up again, puts his lens on and almost mimes this: “They say the higher you go, the lower you can fall.”

“But,” says Beatrice. “If you’ve not falling asleep or turned into falling stone, what a thrill it is, before you fall.”

Beatrice snaps a little, and the swarm creates a protective barrier resembling a golden igloo around Gracie.

“Unheard of,” PreHistory says.

“They caw-caw-caw-call it a swarm,” says the fly. “I’d steer clear of them.”

The cops are steering clear of them as well, at least for the moment, that slow motion receding of the last light of the sun is certainly a saving grace. Grace herself is in that state that renders a human utterly helpless, that takes the air from the self and leaves the body at the door. The sensation of an uncontrollable setting causes the beasts of her own private Bardo to loom up right into her face and then back off, and these are none other than Walpho, with his glasses and his desk and his hands shaking papers. Standing beside him is Tina, who has situated herself on a large gold cross, blood trickling down from her hands and feet, and Walpho is saying, “Look what you’ve done, what you’ve done, what you’ve done!” Grace sees the bees circling them and swarming onto the cross making themselves at home and lifting the cross back into the skies and allowing Tina to drop from it, drying up her blood, and Grace sees Walpho catching her in his arms, and he’s holding her pieta-like, crossing a desert. “You are next,” Walpho says to Grace, his words echoing as if under a marble dome. The cross is spiraling up to the heavens back

into the moon, and Grace is waving goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. Or perhaps it's she that is falling, whereas it appears that the cross is rising. The bees return in one gorgeous line that curls into a script, spelling out "Love is all there is," in the sky. They then surround her in that one line, then cycle, building a cone around her, which is penetrated by the green filaments heralding Zelda and then Zelda herself.

"You've done nothing wrong, Grace, but everything right."

"And I've a baby to grow," she sobs.

"We haven't forgotten about that baby," Zelda says. "Your baby is my baby. It cannot be otherwise.

"You realize," the worm says, "you were summoned."

A few bees fly off, leaving room for the entrance of the fly. "Yes," he says. "You you you," his body, its flight indicating first Grace, then the worm, and then Zelda—accusingly. "You three three three asked for this."

"None of this matters, guys," Zelda says. "What matters is what Gracie knows—we have a baby to grow."

"About the baby," PreHistory says, taking advantage of what he presumes to be the breaking up of the hive.

"What about the baby," Zelda says. Zelda herself is growing. She can make anything grow, and she can grow herself, as well. Soon, she is bigger than a bear, and even though the sheer largeness of her form has completely dispersed the bees, the police car that has been circling the block keeps its distance. "If we are to have a stand-off," she says to PreHistory, "you realize I will win. You are nothing without me—on every level there is--"



“OK,” Grace says. “Wait. Let’s get this straight, folks. This is about me, now.”

And now they, too, are for the most part, dispersed, as a cloud of tear gas mushrooms from one end of the park to the other.

A trail of words in Gracie’s ears that seem to have the ring of the worm: “I think she’s got it. By god, I think she’s got it.”

And then, are they gone? The skies now dark, and that star there, the one she was waiting for, and she once again makes a wish, and a thought bubbles up during this wishing, namely that Starlinsky is indeed on his way, and she is waiting for Starlinsky. The sirens sound again, and now, she knows it is just a matter of time. Either they are here now, or they will come for her. But so will Starlinsky. She merely responds to a compunction to wait, and soon her eyes clear up for a smattering of sight, having been blinded by a swirl of tear gas that found its way to her, and she looks out to the large street, the ocean that is Fifth Avenue, from her little stream, that is Washington Mews. She can plainly see that there are some men in uniform approaching. With those men sailing in the hazy, wavy wake of her eyes, she remains seated. It is as if they are ripping pages out of a storybook, entering such a pristine scene. She listens to the sounds of their dark heavy shoes upon the stone. She watches them, their fingers, their hands, the glistening silver on their uniforms. They do not raise guns to her, although they slap some great handcuffs around her elegant wrists. Though saddened by the weight of the shackles, she does not put up any kind of a fight.

"The Federal Government will take you from the precinct," says a pasty cheeked, large-faced cop, whose tone is almost apologetic. He has a dimple that appears in the middle of his left cheek when he says certain words<sup>176</sup>.

"I don't know," the second cop says—a smaller, grayer fellow, who is doing the driving. "They might actually do the questioning right there."

"How's that?" the first says, dimple-less.

"Friday night late - you know. She might stay over till early morning."

"True," the first says. "At any rate [dimple], we'll[dimple] probably have [dimple] you all night, so don't worry. We'll[dimple] treat[dimple] you like a lady[dimple]." His smile more than advertises, actually broadcasts his dimple.

Gracie smiles back. "I'm most grateful for that."

The cops stop their innocuous bickering when they arrive at the precinct where Grace will indeed stay for the night. A woman introducing herself as Sarah Thower escorts Grace to her cell.

"Where will they question me?"

"In a small room in the precinct that we use for conference with prisoners."

Though not more than ten years Gracie's senior Sarah Thower has a distinctly maternal manner. Grace spots it sitting there in her golden eyes and in the indelible cut of her strong, cleanly set jaw.

"Shall I be safe until then, here in my own little cell?"

"Yes, honey." Sarah Thower pores gently through Grace's things, leaving her with Starlinsky's poem and the half eaten bagel, in addition to her hair brush and her watch, and whatever else she has somehow neglected to give away. The watch, in particular, she holds like an amulet, although she—in her adult life—has always expressed contempt for the idea of a watch, the idea of time and surveillance, for the watch<sup>177</sup> itself is a thing of surveillance, abstract in theory, concrete in actuality. It, like any thing, is a thing with

strings. Even without its tick, it makes a statement. She looks at its slender pointers saddled on Roman numerals—the day, the time, the moment of now. What is it saying to her now? But cannot she have a say? Let it sit with its share of history, but let the future be in her hands. She places the watch that feels rather like an urchin into the pocket of her jeans and takes the poem Starlinsky wrote to her, first flattening the tiny document in the two palms of her hands, and recites it to herself.

If the star Grace has wished upon<sup>178</sup> were itself outfitted with eyes, and were Regulus not only all-seeing, but also an all-knowing thing, a super quadruple-Cyclops, if you will, with the ability to see past prison cells and through layers of ozone and the brick of a city-owned building, he would see both Starlinsky and Grace reading poetry. Following this, the bright star of the Leo constellation would see Grace mesmerized unto sleep—or at least it would appear that way to the star, brilliant as it is and with the ability to shed enormous light around a soul. Regulus can shine a light on Starlinsky on the run. Regulus can even peer inside the window and catch a glimpse of Starlinsky, upon his return to the loft, aghast at the condition of his home, groaning, and at the same time shrieking for Grace. But even Regulus cannot, what with all his brilliance, he can't get inside a soul, not without that soul's permission—at least not in this book.

Such a one who can is the one who as she reads his poem to herself, finds herself lifted into Starlinsky's life, merging with him in a very different manner than ever before. Seeing what she sees, hearing what she hears. It is as if she is back in his space, his loft that has been torn, unrecognizably so. The fly along with some renegade bees—both with their miraculous eyes—have also made it their business to be there upon Starlinsky's arrival, thinking they'd take turns keeping track of what was happening—and then

reporting back to Grace, in whose cell PreHistory has decided to remain. Now, even if the star itself could not penetrate the interior of Starlinsky's household, and even if Gracie were not somehow witnessing the terror of her beloved, we can count on the fly and a few bees for reportage. So, what they saw, and what she is seeing now is a frantic Starlinsky, having found no sign of her, except for the little suitcase he helped her pack, which contained her choicest possessions, Starlinsky was about to leave almost immediately, which was just a moment after arriving. It was with the suitcase in his hands that Starlinsky looked back, another Lot's wife, and remembered he'd wanted to make a phone call. In that way, he discovered the poem harbored in the telephone itself, where it could not be seen except by one for whom the deadness of a phone might signal the immediate local problem of the instrument itself.

It is then that he stopped to read the poem, but he was too harried, too distraught to take in the sentiment. This is the moment Grace wishes to still. She is not only seeing and feeling Starlinsky, but she is trying to exert some control, which, of course, is forbidden.

"Stop," Gracie cries. "I'm here, I'm here, I'm here. Can you feel me, Starlinsky, darling? Why can't you see me?"

Understandably, Starlinsky is seized by the need to make something happen. She sees him, in her mind's eye with that poem stuffed in the pants pocket of his whites, watches as the fair, grey-eyed man takes to the streets. Galloping from one hotspot to the next but finding no trace of Grace, he takes out the poem again. "Yes," she says. "Focus on me, and I will bring you to me!" But he cannot focus on the words. She can even see the image of her he has in his mind—outdated, to say the least. "I'm not wearing the

cowboy hat, darling,” she says. “Come to me,” she says in her mind. “Here I am, I’m on a small cot in a room with a window and lots of bars. Think police, my dearest one. Bars. Cinderblock. Picture me in jeans and a pale yellow shirt. See my eyes, gather yourself into their wake, their trail of tears. I’m waiting for you. I smell of desire, Starlinsky. Desire and growing power, for I am going to grow a baby, they say. And if I’m going to grow a baby, Starlinsky, it’s *your* baby.” She says all this in her current locale, the cell, namely, and so softly, almost under her breath, as she is surrounded, not only by others, but others like herself, if in different rooms. Still, she is as if lifted from her place, as if a fraction of an inch off the ground. There is a fly returned to her giving her a bit of a debriefing, telling her to ca-ca-ca-ca close her eyes. What a guh-gift eyelids really are, you you you know.

“No closing eyes for you, fly?”

“No,” he says.

“But you must sometimes get tired.”

“Yeh-yes,” he says.

“Well, I personally give you permission to take a break.”<sup>179</sup>

“Ri-ri-ri-right,” the fly says, having some foreknowledge of what awaits them.

“You, tuh tuh too, now, Grace.”

Grateful for her eyelids, that she can close, but still see, and contemplating the paradox of the fly who, without the gift of eyelids, may still turn off the world and sleep, she closes her eyes. There she goes into a place where she might be able to have Starlinsky in her sight again. Grace will simply watch him, and she will visualize, praying as she watches. Projecting, trying to project, with what energy she has, and there

is PreHistory—whom she is desperate to tune out—pacing, pacing, back and forth like an expectant father.

“Don’t worry so much,” she says to him.

“Right,” PreHistory says. “But if you knew the past like I know the past.”

“There is a future to build, PreHistory, and it’s in my hands. I’m meant to remember that,” she says, her eyes closed, speaking really both to him and to herself.

“Help me project good things, PreHistory, please help me! Your worries are getting in my way.”

“Okay,” he says, scrunching his face, shrugging his shoulders, and now lying down on the floor next to her cot, after using his hand to move out some of the dust.

“He’s trying to find you, you know.”

“I know that, PreHistory,” Grace says, her words slurring, as she descends deeper into meditation and sees her beloved.

As if onto her scent, Starlinsky places a coin in the rusty, disgusting old slot of the very telephone Grace, herself, had used trying to contact him.

“This is one of a number of coincidences that will seem to go unnoticed by the collectors and detectors and trackers of facts,” Prehistory says.

“Yes, that would be you, PreHistory,” she says, as he decides to lie next to her, remain close to her, of course platonic as ever.

PreHistory indicates to anyone who will listen that very little escapes the fact trackers. It just gets to them a little late.

“Oh, hush, PreH,” she says. “Listen.”

“What I hear,” PreHistory says, “are the night sounds, just part of a distant orchestra, something percussive with occasional strings. Lots of sporadic brass—a little wind coming through. It was a warm day, and it’s a warmer night, the heat settling into all the old flat tar roofs of Manhattan Island.”

“Hush,” Grace says. “I’m listening, and I can hear his voice.”

"Starlinsky - any calls for me?" he says to the receptionist in Bellevue in charge of the page.

"Dr. Starlinsky, to be honest, we have no record of your pages. We must have misplaced them, but I do remember calling your name sometime around the hour of ten."

Grace not only hears but feels the edge in Starlinsky’s voice which cuts into his throat—and her throat, too. “Please tell me who—do you know? Please, what did she say?"

“I said ‘come to me,’” Grace whispers.

"Pardon?" This is the voice of a distracted receptionist that Grace can hear, but luckily not feel, as well. “She? Why, I can't even say that it was—hold on, please, I have---."

Grace smiles, witness to a barrage of curses slipping from the mouth of her beloved forty-five year old brainy specialist in depression and fear, who fears he might himself, and for good reason, despair into thin air. Instead, he asks to speak with Muriel Lyons.

“Oh, Em,” Grace says. “Em, my trusty old friend?"

“Don’t get me started on her,” PreHistory says.

The receptionist is clearly annoyed—that much Grace hears in the voice: "Muriel Lyons has checked out. I believe she was here just few minutes ago with her parents and..."

"Oh," Grace says. "Em is free?"

She sees Starlinsky dropping the telephone, which to this day it might still be seen hanging on Broadway.

"Oh Grace," he cries. "Where are you?"

"How is it that I hear him," Grace says. "How is it that I see him?" She extends her arms, and says, "If only my arms were long enough to grab you!"

Bereft of father and lover, Starlinsky calls up his mother from a phone on a side street that can now also be known by the phone that still hangs. Grace hears the wail.

"Grace, Grace, Grace!"

"I'm here, I'm here, I'm here," she cries back.

PreHistory tries to calm her down but she has turned him off, can barely see him.

What she does see is her beloved standing under a street lamp, she cannot help but to survey him, scan him, top to bottom, and in the middle of trying to see if she can penetrate his whites, she spies a police car driving up to him, its window open and a crackled voice pouring out. Grace cheers but then sees it's all for naught.

"Buddy," says the cop. "You got a dumb look on your face. What a sweet little overnight bag you have. Wonder where you found that? Get in."

Starlinsky offers the cop a peek at his license.

"Sorry, Doc. We thought you were a bum on our beat. Be happy you're not, and, uh, try keeping your voice down."



Gracie cries now, unbearable for PreHistory. Even the fly starts buzzing around again, and the fly takes it upon himself after some prayers, some cleaning, his tiny legs brushing against each other, to go on a seek and find mission.

“Pain in the ass,” Starlinsky says, losing himself in a mass of slaps.

“Just you tra tra try and swat me,” says the fly, making himself such a pest that keeps Starlinsky running in the direction of the precinct nearest his home. By the murmuring of his heart, he knows this is where she will be.

“You, fly,”<sup>180</sup> he says. “Thanks!”

The fly spirals up to a waxing moon that sits there hanging on its own threads, more in darkness than in light.

Grace, too, drawn to the moonlight, rises up out of her incessant envisioning to look out the window. Through the bars, she sees the fly, watching him cruise upward into the vast, steamy sky. Through clouds that part for the passing whim of a breeze. “Now,” he says to herself. “There’s a journey. I wonder,” she says, drifting on the thought of a soul—*that* journey—one that leaves a body, one that enters a body, where it comes from, what kind of a flight or sail or is it an out and out journey. How long, how arduous, what hurdles? The journeying soul, does it peek inside windows of houses? Does it hear clocks ticking and see people sleeping? Does it take one last look? Does it retrace every step it ever took. Does it hover just above the foreheads of its beloveds? A must to ask permission. Otherwise voyeurism, even for a soul. Is it free from passion and retribution

and obedience? Does it grow viciously smart in the absence of a body? Does it relinquish desire? Desire—this is what it's come to, she thinks. My desire.

Grace looks out, makes an executive decision to let go, and she watches as if her worries could wave goodbye with their little hands, as they sail out of her harbor. Or maybe they are spazzing out, flitting about, a balloon losing its air or floating off to another galaxy, one that feeds on human pain. All of it, everything from the fear of her punishment to the desire for Starlinsky. She leaves it in the hands of the moon—the darkness of the moon.

“I appeal to you, darkness,” she says aloud. “There is a world in darkness. A breeding world. A world that prepares for light—a world that germinates seeds. Once again, I appeal to you.”

Having done with that, she flops again onto the cot, ready to sleep, with a plan to pull open the white sheet and pale blue cotton blanket upon which she had lain down. She stands, then sits on the bed and slips off her pants, folds them neatly at the foot of the little bed. It's just the moonlight shining through, casting a soft glimmer onto her legs. She takes a long look at her legs, marveling at the sheer existence of them, the heft and fact of texture, both smooth and soft, a little fuzzy, yet imperially strong—that paradox, and the fact that it's hers. She pats her right thigh, as she would the flank of a horse, grateful for a body, her body. She pulls the sheet back, the little envelope and she the letter, and slips herself in, with a sigh.

Almost as if that sigh is a signal for its emergence, the tentacles begin swaying. Green they are, filaments and vestments and garments and embellishments of the green swirling mass, unseen, unnoticed, except for the nocturnal beasts, the ones gifted with a

dearth of eyelids but instead sport a compoundedness of eye or eyes in multiples or no eyes at all, but sight—that swirl with its cilia-like follicles, each split into a sea of hair, furry meadow grasses that have been in abeyance for a time that is unclockable at best. It arrives building its cathedral of light and within the simple groundswell envelops the entire building, like the ultraviolet, there but undetected<sup>181</sup>. That the swirl remains unmentioned in the annals of history is among its saving graces. Nameless, it will linger, will outlast the human catastrophe.

Into the rectangular vessel that is the legacy of penitentiary experts, both Zeldele and her minions are slated to arrive, but first a profound silence envelops Grace, a little death. So full of emptiness is this moment. It resembles the preambing sunshine and clarity before hurricanes, or the room where a thousand people sit awaiting the inhale of a conductor before the baton rises at the premier of a symphony. And not just any symphony, but the one that plays to an outraged audience, scandalous reviews, one that provokes the emperor to kill the composer. It not only survives audience, reviewer, conductor, emperor, and composer, but sits eternally on the lips and ears of a billion people, who take it with them wherever they go—into the parlors, their bedrooms, and into the forests and mountains and seas where they will drown themselves with this melody on their lips.

Terrified, Gracie is. No sword of peace to slice up the terror like Errol Flynn, like Zorro, deflecting the enemies and fools alike. She sits there just waiting as the terrifying moment expands until it encounters resistance in the sprouts of green that pierce through the nothingness of the terror. Grace imagines a wave or two of Atlantic variety, not fifty miles to the southeast of her. “If I could hear the sea,” she says to herself, “which I

cannot, but knowing that it's there, perhaps I can coax my mind into imagining it." Soon enough, the swirl envelops her, and Grace finds her rotund self enmeshed in as pastoral a setting as one can imagine. A world more like rainforest than city superimposes itself upon stone edifice, blacking it out, exposing it as artifice, displacing it. Grace watches as the walls of brick and cinderblock and steel melt under Zelda's green swirl, and now Grace steps into conference with the full cast of characters she has met by virtue of the worm. It is the operation of childbirth that presently consumes her. Starlinsky himself is in the neighborhood, as is the fly, who, like Starlinsky, feels himself summoned and is trying to give Grace a head's up, but he cannot find his entrance where the worm, blind as he is, is center stage.

If Grace has pulled herself inward to the laboring chamber, PreHistory has strayed, pushing himself to the periphery of the swirl. He catches a glimpse of another fringe member, namely Starlinsky.

"Starlinsky is the great father." Grace issues this announcement to Zelda, whose ruby-painted lips one must imagine shimmering.

"Who does not know that is unworthy of knowing anything."

"Just thought I'd mention it in case he doesn't show."

"Fancy meeting you here," PreHistory says to the fly who, like himself, has easily made it past the guards and warden. The same thing cannot be said of Starlinsky.

"Stuh-stuh-stuh still another hoo-hoo-hoo-hoop to jump thuh-thuh-thuh-through," says the fly. "I saw-saw-saw- it a coming."

"I think I can talk to this guy," PreHistory says, referring to the fellow seated behind a desk, whose face betrays nothing of his thought, listening to Starlinsky, who is

doing the equivalent of a filibuster. Starlinsky has managed, with his impressive talk and handy documents to learn what he suspected is true, but further than that, he has not yet gone. The person in question, dressed more simply is a man who in his body-type and his predilections resembles PreHistory—an old fellow at a slightly younger desk upon which is placed a metal sign that identifies him as Roger Warren. It is to Mr. Warren that Starlinsky has so far unsuccessfully appealed, using rhetoric gathered from his field. The doctor intended to continue speaking until he got his way, although he had now reached the limit of his command of the language: “Sir, we cannot but have you put under treatment for your dependency on the hyperdermic syndrome of the polio-politico. Your progress is impeded by waiting for a precedent. Please, open the door before my young hoodlum sleeps herself to death.”

It would not take an experienced face-reader to surmise the thoughts of Roger Warren.

Grace herself is adrift in a bit of a paradise, even as her body sports the ungainly position of a crouch, with her feet on water lily pads, her hands holding the branches of a hanging myrtle stem, steering the way to delivery.

"Starlinsky, I must say, O ye goddesses of Nature, that, that, that --" Having managed her breathing quite well until now, Grace gasps upon seeing—or shall we say, detecting—in the distance the very one whose name she has uttered present before her, in the thick, awkward body of a father-in-waiting.

There he stands, Starlinsky, stilled in the process of becoming. Try as he might, it isn't until his reasoning becomes informed by the ventriloquism of PreHistory that a shift occurs in his status. A few degrees outside of where precedents fall is he. This, because

of the very precedents he began coming up with, that suddenly filled his brain which gained the interest of Roger Warren, which sent his already arched eyebrows further up his forehead so that they almost touched what was once his hairline. Having heard many pleas in his location behind the desk, Roger Warren is the kind of man who adheres to his own methodology, namely the doctrine of silence. His is a fine face that exudes patience and impenetrability. PreHistory had sized him up at once as a man who listened to reason, with the sensibilities of such as one as himself. The seeming immutability of his silence, however, did not suggest anything remotely resembling a block to PreHistory. How similar they are, PreHistory realizes. It was just that Roger Warren has heard it all. Or, at least he thinks he has. And so now that shift begins to show itself, having begun somewhere in the darkness, sending its blood into a series of muscles, first in his large seemingly at-rest body, and secondly, in the shudder that seems to awaken his fingers and hand, and then a quivering of his cheeks and chin, as well as a few blinks of what now seem to be much softer than reptilian eyes. Sound emerges from his opening lips.

"Doctor, please do not repeat what you just said, or you will lose what you have already gained. I can see by your eyes what is in your heart. And, as I have a son and a daughter as well as a wife that I love, no matter what terrible trick she has up her sleeve, I shall let you in for the moment. Please, do not say another thing, until I ask you to leave, when I shall expect a word with you." Mr. Warren rises and takes from Starlinsky the little suitcase that he will hand over to Sarah Thower in the morning.

Starlinsky's mouth opens in amazement, but not a word comes forth.

Thus is Starlinsky led into the cell of his sleeping heart, and he cannot help but wonder at her short-haired unmade-up face of beauty. Beast that he is, nor can he help

but touch. So it is that she awakes, the look on her face inexpressible. She showers him with kisses, and moans of love break through the iron bars of the precinct, but the old man at the desk has fallen deaf to such sounds.

It must said that Grace's angels, namely PreHistory and the fly—stutter and all—talk a very good game.

Great moments exist when a person who is but a witness is called upon to ponder an event in which he has no part or purpose but which promises to disturb him just the same. It is just this kind of moment with Grace and Starlinsky at love in the jail that seems to catch Roger Warren off guard. Even though he is kind enough to leave them in peace, he finds himself troubled. He is not a newcomer to this business. Nor is this a first. He's seen mothers and children, children and fathers, and lovers of all persuasions. No, he is not an idealist, but cynical is perhaps too harsh a term to describe his stance. Such a man is he that he believes the renegade a parasite, a perpetually hungry thing that feed off the state. So why should he tremble at such a time as this. Has he ever seen such a pair of geese? Certain he is that the good doctor belongs *within* the ward, rather than without, head resident or not. Does that likewise mean that he, himself, would be better off in jail, and the small, thin womanchild set free? These are the ponderings of Roger Warren, as he strolls over to the cell where lovers lay in chains of the freest country of the freest land.

Starlinsky opens his eyes and wrests himself from Gracie Rosinbloom with a soft kiss on her lips, forehead, each cheek, and upon the whiteness of her breast. Sensing the presence of the officer, Starlinsky covers himself, making sure Grace is cosseted under the sheets, then he pulls on his whites, having utterly forgotten that he'd removed them.

He walks to the men's room, and then, because the old man has bargained for a word or two, Starlinsky leaves him with some: "Grace to be you." And then Starlinsky keeps walking home to his empty loft, having left a bit of his soul, his immortality—the part of it that weighs less than an ounce, and kisses—whose mass and weight not even Einstein could calculate.

"Grace be to me?" Roger Warren locks up, as he is alone for the night, having sent away the others before Starlinsky had arrived. The old officer of the law returns to his desk to think on his wrinkled life of time and love some more.

"Grace," he says to himself, the name again, the vision of her in his very core, stuck there, as if she bestowed upon him a piece of herself. Somewhere in his body, he'd swallowed it, could not rid himself of it, the image, as if it were a masterpiece of a painting, her breast, the repentant madonna<sup>182</sup>. Of course he could not resist looking. No, not a painting, a pulsing breast of a woman, just the barest glimpse, no sheet and blanket could conceal. Once seen, it would stay with him, as would her voice, the whisper that he heard, "...love you."

"Grace!" She hears her name as if ringing from the rafters of a sky that can only be seen by those standing in the Prado in front of one of those hundreds of paintings that depicts the verticality of sky, its chaotic assemblage of illuminated bodies. How full of people and angels is Gracie's sky! The world is up there for Grace. Through those bars, after all, is sky, and where sky is, there's flight. Just as Roger Warren cannot dispel this image of Grace, nor can Grace dispel this world of hers, its green light drawing lines, stems to a common ground, and a blue light as well, anchoring itself to the heavens. A thousand people in flight. "Grace," she hears her name again. It is surely Starlinsky,



materializing from the small fraction of the DNA that he left behind, rising from the few drops he left on her and within her, both doctor and father, the dream of a man, Starlinsky, the deliverer of the most noble peace child, who stands equipped for nothing but love. His hands, gloved in gardenia petals, upon her belly, his eyes that are now gray, now hazel, on hers that are brown, and his shoeless feet wading in the waters. His baffled heart is ready to spring, but it is his business to manufacture calm, so he does. "Grace. We are all ready, so let's have a baby."

She feels herself gaining strength from him by just looking into his eyes, while around this group trees are trembling, their lush limbs aquiver in rainbow trim, and the pond ripples crest silver with light. The insects and dragonflies, arachnids and bees of all castes are abuzz, and birds whistling, whirring, aroused in their nests. Gardens of hipatica, bluebells, bloodroot, and lavender open as if waiting, and the roots of every lovely blossom with a pulse. There is trillium, sweet william, a thousand lilies their petals spread in anticipation, while a worm snuggles in the earth, feeling happier than a lark<sup>183</sup> but proud as a cock.

Grace, a whale herself, is presently in the round belly of a whale. How like a placenta the very green swirl of Zelda. How very like a whale, the room wherein she begins the journey of miraculous birthing. How like an ocean, her sky. Accompanying her on the lily pond birthing chair is none-other than her dream man, Starlinsky<sup>184</sup>. Second hand childbirth is not without its enthusiasts, and surely every mother-to-be would stand in line for forty days and forty nights if it were possible to have pain-free

childbirth without strings attached. It's essentially virtual childbirth that Gracie<sup>185</sup> begins to experience, the marvel sans the suffering. Without a clock's run of rhythmically irregular spasms, without the mathematics of a few sets of intervals closing in on seeming regularity, without cramps, without jabs, without any sensation of contraction and expansion, without a hair or quark or lepton or even a string of the electronic torture monitors, without even a trail of crimson, Grace senses a swimmer in her birth canal, but oh, she's doing the back stroke, slipping into breach position. Without the assistance of well-positioned mirrors, Grace senses her infant's bottom appearing and then disappearing at the opening of her own body, her earth body at its finest hour. So it seems to Grace that the pond itself without her is also within, and she is at one with that great sopping gush of a gulfstream, as the baby pushes herself out, out, out, brief candle. An essential element highly underestimated in the pecking order of collectibles, namely the uterus, makes quick work of dispelling her, and like a tadpole, she wiggles slipperish and swimmingly parts the waters of the very pond itself. Starlinsky lurches tenderly for a wet flipping limb or two. Not one false move do either of them, father or mother, and now child, make, first one foot and then other at womb's end. The little wonder stops kicking and from her grand leap into her father's hands and forearms, she—such a dream baby—is placed by the dreamy doctor into the hands and on the breast the dreaming mother. And then Starlinsky snaps the pulsing red and white and fleshtone cord. Grace nurses the baby, calling for some help from the birds to gather the wisteria vines for a mat. She calls the bees for some honey, and she seeks flowers for the canopy, and she whispers to Starlinsky of her desires for food and comfort. The dream father then steps back to give Grace some privacy with her baby. She coos in the face of this impossible dream of peace

as the infant nurses greedily, knowing somehow just what to do, when suddenly from out of nowhere a nurse appears with an injection to dry up the mother's milk and a bottle to stick into the mouth of the child.

"Hellkite, you hellkite. Get out of here!" Grace protests wildly. "Please give me what is mine. You thief, you horror, you traitor, you, you, you."

In an attempt to calm her down, a nurse plunges a syringe into Grace's breast, ironically making a rattling sound.

Exasperated, the nurse cries out, "Grace Rosinbloom, Ms. Rosinbloom. You? Grace? Rosinbloom?"

Grace is jarred out of the swirling phantoms of green, the beautiful blue ball of her swirling planet into the stilled stone drama of a prison cell, and she tries to remember what she cannot forget, namely that there is no baby in her arms, on her breast, of her flesh; its eyes not opened, not closed—no baby in her body, no baby at all<sup>186</sup>.

"You cannot deny," says PreHistory.

"Nah, nah, no you can not not not," says the fly, both of them there, a salute to past and future, and permitting the worm and Zelda's hordes to be present.

"What cannot I deny," Grace says, her eyes still closed, full of tears, sniffing.

"You cannot deny," PreHistory says, feeling a little righteous, because he, too is learning, he too would have never noticed this thing he's about to report. "What you cannot deny is---"

"Suh-suh-suh spit it out, PreH," says the fly.

"A stirring, Madam. This you cannot deny. One cannot call what you have stirring a baby, but—"

“He’s emb-emb-barrass-assed,” says the fly.

“But what?”

“May I be the first to tell you that there is a zygote now stirring, oh, so desperate to cleave to you, a little world growing into mulberry, or rather a potential morula, blastula, and embryonic masterpiece—indisputable, if I can be so indelicate to suggest, on the order of seventy-three hours, twenty-seven minutes and fourteen seconds of age.”

“The worm told me not to trust him,” she says.

“Forgive the buh-buh-blind one,” says the fly. “Suh suh suh sometimes you need to cuh cuh cuh close, buh-buht, now yuh-yuh-yuh-you need to oh oh open your eyes to suh-suh-suh-see what I see.”

A big breath, a sigh, and several stretches later, Grace opens her eyes, only to see the older woman smiling down upon her. “Good, what is it morning, Sarah?”

“Very much so, Miss Rosinbloom. Has your watch stopped?” Sarah Thower is visibly scanning Grace's almost insect-like thin, sallow body for the watch, which she spots on the floor in the heap of shed clothes. “Will you come with me, after you put on your clothes?”

Gracie feels a slight feeling of shame, for having shown the jail her person, place, and thing. She puts on her jeans from the day before, which are not nearly so tight, and the pale pink shell. It's not hard to stuff her watch into the right front pocket, as she brushes what is left of her hair, slaps her face with some water, and then joins Sarah Thower walking down the gray-green cinderblock corridor. It is a small room she is led to, with a large, rectangular shaped table, around which several men in gray and blue uniforms and some plainclothesmen are seated.

"Hello, Grace," one of the plainclothesman says. "Please sit down and make yourself comfortable. We shall try to make this pleasant as possible."

Grace does sit down on one of the old fashioned wooden folding chairs and quietly collects herself with fingers grasping the palms of her hands, and her toes flexing in sandals that occasionally tap the linoleum. She glances at Sarah Thower, who stands just outside the closed door. Trooper that she is, Grace does nothing but smile in the face of men who to her resemble pulseless poles of flesh. She focuses on something she suspects that no one else in that room can see. These would be several constellations of charged light, substance-less particles, the kind she used to see as a child, the stuff of dreams, flashbacks, hallucinations. Her mother had found them impossibly more than she could handle, more than a dozen imaginary friends<sup>187</sup> that came in both animal and human form. But her grandmother had found them charming, and in her own way, the grandmother had kept them going longer than they otherwise would have. Soon Gracie lost the charm in the way that children do, but she remembers something about them, enough, apparently to recognize what is happening to her now.

"Grace Rosinbloom--." This is the first man, the plainclothesman who seated himself directly across from her. "We have come to ask you -er, some questions about -er, your supposed criminal act, which we define as treason of the highest count against the Government of the United States, as well as the relatively minor, -er, but still criminally inexcusable act of robbery. Are you aware of these crimes that you have allegedly committed? Or have you been unmindful of the severity of the punishment that accompanies these crimes against the state and local and especially federal governments of your own legal and moral and beautiful, -er of your own country of the red, white and

blue. Or are you yet protesting the Vietnam War, silly girl? Please try to explain your alleged criminal acts, or if you choose to -er lie or deny what you have been hereby accused to have done."

Grace observes that he has stopped speaking, but she has lost track of what he was saying in the middle of his speech. She wishes he might repeat all that double talk, or is it triple and quadruple? And mightn't she at least have a lawyer present? Instead, she tries to state her own impossible case. "My dear sirs—and why are there no ladies? To be sure, not a public matter of the state when mixed company is excluded from meetings of such fine purpose and intent." She stops for a moment, stung that she has lost all their attention. Not a one has remained alert enough to actually listen. She raises her voice: "Gentlemen, please be attentive. Our lives are at stake!" The men appear to rouse themselves, as she continues. "Please lend me your ears. We shall soon come to burial, if you do not listen to my well chosen words--." Grace stops to summon her wits, as if her entire life were a runway for this particular flight. "Gentlemen, what we have before us is a case of very foolish thinking. It is a cancer on our lives. In order to live, we must fight the cancer, or we shall lose the body to an ugly rotten stinking, smelly place of death. How do we fight death?" Grace stops and plucks her watch from her jean pocket. The others also glance at their watches. "Well, is there time?"

"Go on, miss. We will stop when we stop."

Rather than a display of temper, she is overcome by a feeling of formality that is as surreal but sweet as a blackberry blossom. "I want to have an idea of my time, please kind sirs."

"We have as long as it takes, so please continue and try to stick to the facts."

"Now, sirs, we cannot fight death in the manner we fight an ordinary opponent. For death is the one and only one predestined for winning. We obliquely concern ourselves with death, when we should only concern ourselves with life, friends and ---"

"Madam, -er Miss Rosenberg --"

"Bloom—that is Bee, Ell, Oh, Oh, Em—for the record."

At the mention of "M," the letter "M," and its coincidental homonym, namely Em, the name of her best friend, Grace finds herself refocusing, seeing through the stone, through time, through space, this very same Em. She is watching her in the street.

"Em," Grace shouts. Grace sees her there, the tall, elegant Muriel Lyons her hair electric blue, her fingers twirling it up in a bun, the book in her hand—Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. "Em," Grace shouts. Em is not terribly far from where Gracie is, walking down the avenue, picking up pieces of paper, inserting them into the book, and walking on. "Em," Grace says, once more.

"I see you, Gracie," Em says. "I know you're here with me somewhere. I see you and I feel you, and I'm angry as hell with you." Gracie sees Em turning about, looking around, looking up at a sky that is more lapis than ice, more the color of her hair than not, more condemning than serene, and Em is now looking for a place to sit, having almost twenty swatches of paper, computer paper, in her hands, stuffed into the book with a distressed ship on the cover. A wind overcomes Em, and she is suddenly out of Grace's focus. "Em," she cries again.

"Rosinbloom, it is," says a new fed, shifting Grace back to a room where instead of bullets they are words, and she is the target. "Okay, Miss Rosinbloom," he repeats, with a voice that is crass and gruff, just as is his body, otherwise void of distinguishing features, except for the discoloration of his shirt around his neck. "We must remind you to engage yourself on the specific issue of your crime--." He stops just short of the word "perpetration."

With his pause, Grace looks down, for having seen Em back up to a building, brick, to steady her, and then seeing her bend down to pick up a piece of paper, another piece. She watches Em reading, moving her mouth, and then Grace looks up, feeling something like a breeze in the room she is sitting in. She hears the sound of wings flapping and looks up, catching sight of the eagle that is perched atop the head of this new fed. She tries to refrain from reacting to these things, realizing that this fellow must be suffering from the rooting of those large talons, those claws so sharp, the spectacular color of the tearing of the man's flesh. She sees blood trickling down his shoulders, joining the sweat gathered at his neck.

Grace looks at this, a disturbing sight, and then shifts her focus to the window, thinking to catch a better glimpse of Em, but she feels her own energy waning and looks down again, fumbles with her fingers. She takes a breath in, a whiff of mold and bodily oils, a trace of tobacco smoke, and a million metals that PreHistory begins to name, but she is blotting him out, ignoring the buzzing fly and the slow gathering of Zelda's menagerie, tendrils of green edging in from the windows and the corners of the ceiling and from the linoleum. "So," she says, finally, feeling also the encroaching wall of anticipation hungrily escaping her interlocutors, about to attack her. "You want to know



what I have done to jeopardize this home of the brave yesmen? So what I have done, you will perhaps never learn until you understand why I was forced by the highest government in the land to do what I did. What prompted me, as you may gather from my previous statements, is loyalty and conscientiousness for the sake of this government. What inspired me was the love of my people and of my God, and the only crime I plead guilty of is this. I committed the crime of the borrower. I took a peaceful instrument that I was free to borrow, so long as I returned it, which I had planned to do. Gentlemen, we have come to celebrate the murder of our future children, and which one of you would not raise a finger to save a child, even though it might mean having to listen to and possibly even having to obey the harsh words of a harsher boss?"

"Ms. Rosinbloom, please tell us how exactly--," The young plainclothesman speaking, suddenly stops. It's a little swallow flying over this particular fellow, who has a gleam of truth in his deep chestnut eyes. "How do, did, would, could, will, uh er - please." The young man is coughing, groping for words that will disguise what he actually feels. "Please excuse me," he says, standing up, for to leave would not do. So he sits back down and tries once again. "How shall you save us, Grace?" His face is awash with wonder.

Grace looks at him directly. "I shall not save you, sir, but you shall save me if we manage to stop this way of killing with our thoughts. It begins with our thoughts, Gentlemen. It begins with determining what the word enemy means, and if there is such a thing as an enemy, how we should deal with it, and once we determine the correct manner of determining what it is that qualifies as enemy, only then can we begin our

dialogue. Yes, that is the beginning—before we even attempt to have dialogue, we must examine our thoughts.”

Another fed—the one Grace sees as both burdened and suspended by an eagle—makes an attempt to quickly stand as his blood pressure rises. "Now you must be more grounded, or we cannot even talk." He lets himself back down, shaking his head, but there is more than one man here who feels it his own personal misfortune for having begun this confrontation.

"You shall see, Sir. I shall explain!" Grace says, suddenly seeing the worm curled in the palm of her hands, with a smile wide as that of the Cheshire cat. The worm has words for Grace, as do the others of his ilk<sup>188</sup>.

"So here we are again, Grace, where have we been, but here all along. Now we can really make use of our silent speaking mechanism known by your mortals as thinking. Sock it to them<sup>189</sup>, Gracie. You are a real pro, by now. You can be the princess of my heart."

"Oh worm," she responds in her thought. "No one wants to be your princess. Keep your heart on Zelda. Starlinsky and I are one, and anyway, where is Zelda." Grace winks at the worm, but the chestnut-eyed officer takes it as a sign for him, and he watches anxiously to see the reactions of the non-observant others.

"Worm—hold off one moment, but stay with me as long as you can."

The worm smiles and curls up tight, into a golden ball, as Gracie begins to speak again. "So what can be more grounded than a nuclear reactor?" She is watching eyes that can only pierce but cannot be penetrated, the feeling of loss upon her, a minimal

drain, as by the entrance of an IV drip, but she senses it just the same. Still, she marches on in her mind. "And what can be less grounded than its reaction?"

"Yes," the man with the gruff voice, says. "Continue."

"And with that I rest my case." Grace finds the energy to give a wink this time ostensibly for the chestnut-eyed fellow, which the worm this time mistakes.

The leading officer of the federal government calls for break, and Gracie is escorted by Sarah Thower to the ladies room, and then to the cell, where she is given some victuals of sour coffee and some fried burnt crisps of bacon bits scattered about a plate of eggs over easy, with white toast where butter never melts, but a plastic container of purple jam stands by its side. Gracie returns to the bathroom directly, releasing whatever it is she might have taken.

She is stunned looking at herself. It's the first time it registers, the years of hair cut off, gone. "Oh hellkite!" She ruffles up the fur with her fingers, smoothing down. "And I'm so hungry I could die! My cheeks are a sunken ship. My eyes look jaundiced. Mirror, mirror on the plaster---" She turns away from her own pale frame of a face with no solution of its own.

Grace returns to the woman cop with the news of her sick stomach, and Ms. Thower tries to keep a look of pity from decorating her own face, as she thinks, "If only you had thought before you acted," but says, "what food can I bring you?"

"Something alive," she says. Before her eyes, she sees orchards of fruit, vines hanging as if in the Italian hills, olive groves—even the teal color of the Adriatic comes up before her as if in supplication, as if to say, "Help" and "Thank you" at once.

"Help," says Grace. "Thank you?"

“Take our energy,” Grace hears these words. “We owe everything to you.”

“OK,” says Grace. “I will tell you what I love to eat, and you can tell me what you think. So, what I would eat right this minute would be fruit—say, cherries, grapes, peaches, plums, and cheeses of all kinds, and a glass of wine, and maybe some pumpernickel bread. Oh, olives! What do you think of that? Please don't go out of your way, but I would feel like a prisoner of a million if you could buy any of those things for me. But, ah, it suddenly occurs to me, Ms Thower, that I don't know when I can pay you back.” Grace turns away, her eyes having filled with more tears than they can hold.

Sarah Thower's eyes are reddening now. “Consider it done, honey. I'll send my granddaughter to the store, and we will collect you when you are finished. Now, doesn't that look like something to be happy about?” They are walking down the corridor again, almost at the door, when Ms. Thower speaks in a hushed tone. “Now, don't be fresh to them sonabitches, because someone told me they can bite worse than they bark. And their bark is bad. Sends shivers up my spine, it does. Be good, Gracie girl, and we'll see you when they're through.” With that, the door is closed to the public, Sarah Thower included.

Seated, as before, Grace takes in the view, intent on picking up the thoughts of the only blood and guts and soulful human being in the room, namely the young African American man with his glistening chestnut eyes, and she gazes at this fellow, digging into his eyes until he smiles at her, upon which she smiles, too. Of course the worm has been waiting there for her, and she returns to him and his wormy way of worming himself in to this most intimate of meetings where a barrage of questions will be aimed and fired and

shot and still miss the point of Gracie's heart, one of those lovely encounters that will have to be seen to be believed.

"Just sit tight, Gracie," Zel says.

"This part makes me sick," the worms says, hissing.

"Well, keep your thoughts to yourself," Zel says. "And we will let Grace show us her stuff of silence."

"Be silent yourself, woman," the worm says.

"Shhhh. No more bickering, you guys." Grace is concentrating on the flower sitting center stage, whose species is wisdom, whose genus is poverty and whose phylum is God, whose kingdom is come.

"What made you think you could mess with confidential files-----"

"Who told you there were reactors that ---"

"How many written names of the dangerous people did you see and del ---"

"Who gave you the right-----"

"Why did you lie to your bosses, who wanted to give you work for overtime, with extra ----"

"Why must you sleep on the john ---"

"Who is Starlinsky and why was he here last night?"

"Why do you like to eat tomato paste --"

"What is the nature of your companionship with Muriel Lyons, alias 'Em', and when was the last time you saw her undress -----"

"What caused your father's death in ---"

"What is the origin of the name Breanda ---"

"Grace. What kind of name is Grace?"

"She is not answering. Why do we keep asking these terrible questions?" This is the only question coming from the chestnut-eyed fellow whose beautiful face is practically disfigured by anguish.

"Shut up," the gruff one grumbles. "We must have answers," he says to Grace.

"Please try to stick with the facts."

Grace finds herself looking up. "Facts," she thinks, allowing the word to form, to fly out like a bubble. Only that word, though. The rest of it, she considers, whether they are for consumption or for self, and she settles on the latter and decides to contain herself. Facts are outside this room, she thinks. Those eyes, those brown opals settling on a window that is open, bars dividing up the facts, she thinks. A slice of sky like blue pie out there but cut up so thin, this sky, this slice. Em about, Bruce, too, no doubt. A silence creeps upon her. Exhaustion its cause, and now, she cannot will herself to speak. Has she had a stroke? Has she died. She is wondering whether these might be facts. Unable, she is, to summon words, to form sentences, no words to exit her lips. No, I'm quite alive, she decides. She smiles. At least she thinks she is smiling. Is the smile on her lips? She can barely lift her hands to touch those lips. I'm tired, she says, this thought, to herself. I see men moving their mouths in here. There's a silliness. That's a fact. I hear words coming at me. I see my dolls—my queen, my worm, his earth. They're here, flitting about. And where they are, I am okay. I see myself looking out the window. Somewhere the city people are doing everything imaginable, and most of them, she's thinking, are sleeping. It's important to breathe, Grace says to herself and takes a breath. That's a fact. She imagines one of those apartments, not like her own, which is only five

stories high, but one that is thirty stories or more. She imagines the structure gone, vanished suddenly, all gone except for the people. Thirty stories of people. She puts wings on them, imagines them fluttering like butterflies—no not really butterflies, but fairies or angelic things. Thirty stories of people with wings. Wings curled up over them, if they are supine, she thinks. Wings surrounding those making love or cast in dreams; they are afloat. Nothing to be frightened of, she thinks. This isn't exactly a crazy thing to think, she reminds herself. Michelangelo painted people with wings. Lots of painters did. Just because we don't see them doesn't mean they aren't there. Where is the fact in that? A persistent vision this is, it keeps growing on her. Those thirty stories become one hundred stories. All the skyscrapers around, every building that she sees and doesn't see suddenly disappears, and what comes upon her is this image of people, like the bees that comprised the brick wall. "It's people who are holding this city together," she says suddenly. "It's not the walls. That's a fact." Did she just say that? She thinks she did. Has she become deaf, suddenly? Has she fallen asleep? Perhaps, she thinks. Perhaps this is a dream. But nevertheless, she says to herself now, her energy returning, it's my dream. It's my vision. I will honor it. This is a good thing because the vision is not ready to disintegrate until it blossoms, and these angelic people that Gracie sees are also under the ground, which is to say, in the bedrock. For her, the whole globe is an anthill of people, people coming and going, flying upward, going in circles. They are laughing together, on the telephone together, making love together, making babies, having babies, feeding babies, and people are robbing, killing each other, and they are all lifted with wings into the air.

She stands up for a moment, and she feels herself rising. Uncanny it is. An inch off the ground she is.

“Gentlemen,” she says, or she thinks she says. “There is more to life than facts.” Gracie motions to the vision that she had seen outside the windows, first cut into slices—that vision. She invites them in, the ten thousand—or are they ten billion angelic humans with wings—ghostly visions, even there on a Saturday morning when many New Yorkers are still asleep, but they come in, those New Yorkers, joggers with wings, heart attack victims with tubes coming from every orifice in their body are floating, their wings intact; there are lovers with their wings violently fluttering, and there are babies, with little nubs for wings. Hordes of people, flying up from the floor now in shrouds, and wings on them, as well, that are veiny and mouldering. And for a moment, it’s as if there are no walls at all, just one vast amphitheatre, with the feds in the ring.

“Stop this,” says the fed with the eagle, although the eagle is now large and looming, his wings flapping, the sound deafening. That eagle is chasing out the others. “This silence will not help you, young lady.” As the eagle flies off him, he is up and on Grace.

He tries to shake her into responding to them, but the chestnut-eyed officer comes to her rescue. “Please, sir. You must keep your hands off her.”

“She must spank.”

“Spank?”

“Speak,” I mean. “Speak.”

The two men are at each other’s throats, and the others are also up, pulling them off each other.



“Order. Order.” There is commotion about, that’s a fact.

Grace looks down at her feet, those sandals, her toes, the nails so short, and she remembers Starlinsky.

Order manages to be restored in the room, and the questioning resumes.

“The fact is,” Grace says, sitting down. These are words that come out of her mouth as she is holding herself down, her hands under the table, the manacles against the wood tabletop. That is how it feels to her. “I am very tired.”

Grace returns to her silence, as if in conference with her worm and his earth and its queen and their king. She keeps her dream world intact, as they examine her with terms that to her seem more fleeting than dreams, a world that for her seems like a ticking clock, and what time is it, she wonders.

"No matter the time, Grace," Queen Beatrice says. "You are now outside of time, but such a situation makes a mother sick. So just tell them to stick it. But better you should just be healthy and let them fight among themselves." Grace sees Beatrice flying in spirit above the speaker, who feels a sudden buzzing in his ear. Next she travels to the gruff one, into his great region of the lower stomach and gives him a buzzing in his belly. Finally, she turns herself into a three-dimensional living, stinging wonder, and she flies in, makes her entrance by way of a soda can in the garbage of the street, above which is the open window of the conference room. She gives the sting of a lifetime to the generally silent fellow, who had earlier undertaken to question the grounds upon which Grace had stood.

"Ooooooh. Help." The fellow, with his hands covering his crotch over his pants, howls and charges out the door.

"Close the goddam window," the speaker says to chestnut eyes. "We shall not stop for a bee-sting."

Grace in her oblique manner thanks Beatrice upon her return, and Beatrice curtsies. "The pleasure was mine."

Grace begins to wish the questioning would end in the way that night falls or flowers open or trees dismiss their leaves, or the way that the moon's light waxes and wanes according to the movements of clouds and planet, as if nature's actors know how to take turns, when to bow, where to exit. But, like the automobile or a wretched tenement, the interrogators began to crumble and rage and fall madly to pieces. It is most unfortunate, she would like to say. She would like to remain impassive. When the wounded man re-enters, she finds she can no longer hold in her tears.

"Why are you crying?" the speaker asks.

"She feels guilty."

"She's sorry."

"What a silly, horrid thing this is," Gracie cries to the water lily, who has for the duration greeted no one as she sits spiritually harbored in the ashtray in the center of the oblong wood table.

"Why Gracie, you have just lifted the shadow. Be happy. The world may long note, but little will it remember what you say here. But you will never forget what you learned here. So be ready. We must now leave you, but you shall see us again." With that, she slips away with the air.

"Grace Rosinbloom," the speaker announces, rising, and the others slowly follow.

"We shall meet you in the district court in some moments, where you shall be arraigned

and charged with, we are sorry to say, the charge of high treason and a low count of theft." These are the final words of the speaker, but it's the word "high" that resounds in Grace's mind. Echoes of "high" transport her to a place of height. She finds herself rather high and looking down. Again, she wonders about the state of her body. She is quite aware that her body is locked, as it were, in a room where a bee—single handedly, as it were—has managed to upset a roomful of government officials, there to serve an elusive order of correction, correctiveness. She is well aware that there are penalties for her own erasures—but even as she looks down (oh, her mind is now ten-thousand feet above the city and looking down)—even as she sees a very well-ordered people-colony whirling themselves about a well-ordered maze, she—monstrous as she is, and truly she feels monstrous at the moment—has done nothing wrong.

"High," she manages to say.

"Hi," chestnut eyes says back to her, smiling. He cannot take his eyes off of her. Grace notices this, and she has also taken note that he's caught on to the other matter of her concern, besides the penalties, that is—namely her difficulty staying grounded, literally grounded. She looks at him, brings her hands to her mouth, a forefinger attempting to touch her lips. How heavy those manacles are! With that finger approaching her terribly dry lips, she hopes to suggest the idea of "shhh" and then a wink to secure it, and then with one last glance, she tries to stand up, but this time gravity wins.

"Goodbye, gentlemen," she says, proceeding to collapse into the arms of Sarah Thower, who has a surprise in store for Grace.

Starlinsky, namely.

## Chapter 10

Starlinsky has indeed arrived with such a stock of frolic and condiments that Gracie's cell has virtually become a marketplace, extravagantly decorated with the shades of the summer season. Smells of mango and Limburger revive her, and she imagines wending her way through young apple orchards and hills with vineyards where flocks of sheep and stray cows graze, and country kitchens where biscuits are baking, and finally to the Plaza<sup>190</sup>. Between Sarah Thower and Daniel Starlinsky the veritable world has been transported to her little cell, and together the lovers sift through sumptuous dishes of lobster and minon and rack of lamb. Ms. Thower standing just outside is munching, as well.

"You are prince, king, god, oh, a worm of a man ---" Grace exclaims—thinking, more than anything else, that this food will sustain her, give her weight, keep her grounded.

"Worm?" Starlinsky is taken by surprise. "For what reason do you procure for me that label of worm?"

"Oh Starlinsky! I am in love with a worm, and you are he. Be not offended. My worm is magic wonder of all. Be happy, someday you will see. So, let's eat this meal fit for a water lily."

"A water lily, as I recall from my semester in Botany, chews sunlight, digests our hazardous air waste. And, perhaps a little nitrogen and anything else she can glean from the water."

"You don't know the water lily I'm referring to, sweet love. But she is going to be the next God of the world. Wait and you will see what I mean."

"Grace, Grace." Starlinsky's arms carefully gather her up almost as if she's in pieces, as if she could break into parts. "You are my heart." He whispers this, his breath will make her whole.

"Starlinsky, what we will do for our love of you is not to be believed."

"Oh Grace!" Starlinsky is trying to hide the dismay of one who prides himself in being able to recognize a delusion when he hears one and who does not at all like to hear from *the royal we* when not in Bellevue. "I can only --" Then he stops, his voice is breaking, his own eyes filling and filming with the stuff of his addiction.

Grace attempts to lick up a tear or two, and as he turns his head to wipe them, she says, "Please, let me. I'm addicted to the stuff."

Piteously, he turns back to her, crying helplessly. They embrace, almost melding into one, while the gorgeous food waits and the little cot crinkles, and they creak their bones to just short of breaking.

They speak again in great whispers, and the wonder of it was they are never alone. Watching them are the guards and the cops and Ms. Thower and the feds and the sun in the window that faces a building that is plastered with windows, where there are necks outstretched, and the entire sky stands above them, and more than can be imagined is watching.

"You think I'm crazy."

"No," he says, having paused too long.

"I know you think I'm crazy," she says. "I'm deeply stressed. I'm incredibly tired. I'm hungrier than I've ever been in my life. I knew this might happen, Daniel. You know, I told you, but I think I had to do this. It feels just exactly like the thing I thought

I'd have to do. But I'm scared, remember that. Although I'm going to put up the best front I know."

"I love you. You know I'll never leave you." He says this between sobs. "But must you ---"

"Pretend I'm a cow," she says. "Give me a big pasture. You'll see what I mean, if you're meant to." She is pulling these words from somewhere so deep in her mind, she doesn't even know how they came. "Someday you'll understand. That, I know." Her eyes are like arcs of light in his eyes. She stares at him seeing the blue light behind the gray light and the green light behind the blue. His eyes are glowing like the celestials. She wipes his eyes with her lips. "We shall have such a great life, a great life. Won't you stop crying now?" Grace sees the water lily above Starlinsky's head opening like a crown, and this brings a tear to her own cheeks, as well.

Encroaching upon them are sounds that form into words, passages, certificates of sound. Sounds they are that begin to grow into things like stones, like pitchforks, like knives, little cluster bombs that permeate their space like fumes.

"Well, do they live together?"

"Maybe they are secretly married."

"No, they are just off the street, can't you tell by their ---"

"Wonder if she even has a mother, who---"

In her half clothed state of undress and her equally fractionated state of being, Grace rises and speaks. "My mother is actually the most beautiful soul in the world, and you had not better say another word about her."

She drapes a blanket around her to hide not only body parts but the fraction of an inch between her feet and the linoleum.

All Starlinsky can do is repeatedly declare his love for her, and that is what he does again and again in a hundred million ways, in every language he has ever been taught, including pig Latin. If he doesn't understand, which he certainly doesn't, he still knows what he loves, and he knows he cannot betray his own heart.

While they both try to ignore the picture takers and the newscasters and ambulance chasers and question askers and catastrophe addicts anonymous, it seems the delicate balance of the world itself would be upset without up-to-the minute information of their doings and undoing. Before her are representatives of the Federal Government, with a document, a slip of black and white. Her cell door has been opened, and she has taken a few sliding steps outside of her domain. Her focus drawn to the few windows, the few open doors, where she can see out, where her eyes detect light, she deduces that the crowd that has formed is not exclusively a crowd of heckling and hectoring. Wherever there is an opening to the outside, Grace detects people. But right before her, not two feet away are guns, glisteningly silver, flanking the thighs of three men standing there in uniform, who are waiting for her signature to the affidavit<sup>191</sup> which accuses her of willingly, unlawfully, and knowingly<sup>192</sup> creating the disturbance of high treason in addition to the piss-stain of a troublesome theft.

What Grace feels like signing is the affidavit of her love for Starlinsky, as she reads the indictment of her crime against the law of the government of her land. She reads aloud: "Starlinsky, I, Grace Rosinbloom, by power of the virtue vested in me, do hereby declare that I love you unlawfully, but certainly knowingly, and most willingly."

She holds the paper tightly in her fingers as the uneasy fed watches her twist its contents. The crowd that is gathered has hushed, and he decides to wait and see if she will sign it anyway. He coughs to get her attention, then hands her the pen.

"Starlinsky," she says, slipping the pen above her ear. "Will you be mine till life does us part, till death joins us forever, till life gives us unto death, till death, which grants us life? Starlinsky, I am yours as the two become one. When we part, we part nothing but strings. Our bond shall steel you to me, and likewise, shall it arm me, for you are my man, and I am all your Grace."

There are not a few tears in her presence, although her own face is dry and radiant. She signs her name on the record of accusation and delivers a plea of "not guilty." When she is finished writing, she looks up, and somehow she feels a presence of solidarity. She senses a feeling of sympathy within the people beyond those officials, people who have surrounded the building, people who are listening to radios and television sets that are broadcasting what is happening to her. She recites her plea to the people standing there, who she knows are stilled, practically to paralysis. What she doesn't know is that part of that stillness is coming from her, from the light of her own eyes.

"It's their wings," Grace whispers to Starlinsky. "They are frozen."



Starlinsky remains silent, barely a tic in response, as the notion of wings rather eludes him. He does take note of the peculiar stillness, however, which he attributes to their desire to hear every word, every breath. The light is unmistakable. It's coming from her—that much he can see.

Grace is looking around for its source, figuring the luminescence to be something that comes when the filters are present and well placed, when the atmosphere contains the perfect balance and degree of vapor allowing transmission, with properties like those of a prism which permit clarity and definition, thereby distinguishing the various waves, the invisibles.<sup>193</sup> The vastness of the natural world in this location speaks to her, the light coming in not only from the window in her lonely cell, but from all of the windows of the precinct, as if each leaf on each tree, now in its penultimate growth is turning to her. In this part of the world, they are ginkgos and acanthus, and maples and some old oaks, white and red, are thinking of her, their jagged leaves just floating. She's thinking of them, how grateful she is, and how strange it is to be thinking of a convocation of leaves at a time like this. But she is, and she's also grateful for the people who have gathered about her, the certain knowledge that they are there in solidarity with her, the light being her signal of their presence. Also, she feels their warmth, it's that palpable, like the magnetic charge of love. And if their wings can catch the air, Gracie reasons, why then, they will be able to fly. This is also her explanation for her newfound ability to rise. She cannot see them, but she feels them, those wings—her wings. The proof is in the fraction of an inch between her and the linoleum. It's a matter of control, right now, she thinks—control to hide this fact and to urge it along, to master it. She is hoping for time to explore.

She recalls in the insane, unstoppable series of visions she'd had earlier—how taken she was by the beauty. No, they are not in flight any more, she thinks. She cannot take her eyes from the windows, from where she might catch a glance of her people. Are they carrying signs? Starlinsky sees them, too, which she can deduce by the way he looks at her, and he reads them out very quietly to her, asking her if she can see those signs. "We love you, Grace Rosinbloom." "Saving Grace," another reads. More people seem to be walking from the side streets. A blue fence made from saw-horses is in the process of being constructed. More police, sirens, and yet there's that incredible sunlight. It shines down on all of them, slivers of light making little wingfolds on their shoulders. Folded up they are, maybe sewn tight. She can see that, not the threads, but the crease, the sign of wings that haven't been used. She knows hers are growing. She feels this incredible pain in her back that she attributes to wings. It's an insane thing—she knows that, too. It's something she mustn't speak of. But her people, they are grounded, so terribly grounded, and she finds herself taking pity on them. And at the same time, she is so grateful for them. They are there for her. She feels that. She'd like to speak to them, but the time is not right.

It takes a few moments for the fed to gain both their and Grace's attention. Finally, he informs the world that Grace Rosinbloom still has the opportunity to change this plea in several hours, at the hour of her arraignment, just down the road apiece. At that time, he adds, she will have a lawyer by her side.

It is be difficult to describe the kind of glance the fed gives Dr. Starlinsky before he marches off with his fellow officers, but it is not a complimentary look. He also has some words for the crowd that is hastily snatched up by the obsequious press, who he

hopes will have the decency to disband after the federal gentlemen make their exit, as once the press has left, the patrolmen of the precinct will have no trouble dispersing the crowd. No doubt they—or others to take their places—will reappear at the arraignment a few hours hence.

Her cell door is once again locked. After a time, Starlinsky is allowed back in.

Starlinsky and Grace, meanwhile, have fallen asleep in each others' arms.

Grace pulls herself back from Starlinsky, an image of themselves suddenly appearing to her in black and white, photograph-like, very still, with a caption below and above in big block letters, she sees *The Post*. Looking around in the distance outside of her cell, she sees that a new batch of newspapers has been delivered.

“I believe we are famous, my dearest,” she says, “but I wonder whether that’s going to be something we might regret.”

“I remember when you were just—,” Starlinsky says, then stops, closes his eyes, his arms, his body cradling her.

“I believe I see us on the front page,” she says, pointing at a pile of newspapers on Sarah Thower’s desk. “In black and white. How many copies of the two of us can you imagine. We will be a story, Starlinsky. Mothers will read our story to their children. ‘Once upon a time,’ they will say.”

“Once upon a time,” Starlinsky says, “there was a girl named Grace.”

“And that is all she was because Grace was she,” Grace says.

“The first time Gracie ever became my love was the first time I saw Grace—and how wonderful she was--”

“Was?” Grace says. “*Was?*”

“Is,” says Starlinsky.

“Once upon a time was the world.”

“And then what happened was the rest of it,” Starlinsky says. “But how did it really begin?”

“It began with light,” Grace says.

“And with this light came much that would later be brought to light,” Starlinsky says.

“Once upon a time,” Grace says, “there was a worm.”

“And that was me,” says Starlinsky. “And a worm is all I am next to Grace.”

“Not *all*,” she says. “Not as if there’s not more to you. Not as if there’s nothing to being a worm,” she says. “Worms have their share of knowledge, too.”

They are both asleep and intertwined with just their heads visible when Grace happens to opens her eyes, only to see Bruce Steen looming like a pirate ship on her great horizon.

"Oh hellkite," she says, quietly. She pretends to ignore him but for the corners of her eyes, which keep tabs on the very tall, thin fellow standing in front of Sarah Thower's desk with his head down, his foot tapping, his fingers rapping soundlessly against his blue jeans. He's there in her mind, eyes open or eyes closed, rapping and tapping and zapping. She watches him speak, his lips moving, his hands gesticulating, long arms, they are. He's all limbs, a small trunk with something moving on his shoulders. Starlinsky jerks awake, jarred by Grace's sudden change of position. Grace looks at creases on the

two sides of Starlinsky's already sunken cheeks, and he becomes aware that she's looking at him, and he pulls her completely under the covers for a kiss. Escorted by Sarah Thower, Bruce adds a throat-clearing sound to the tapping and rapping to make his presence known, although the sensation she had already experienced as a "zapping" is enough to quicken her, and Gracie pulls herself out of the bed into standing position. Starlinsky, too, rises up out of the bed.

"Well, well," Bruce says.

Grace puts out her hand for him to shake, but Bruce tugs at her hand and kisses the back of her palm first, and then each finger.

Grace makes a faint-hearted attempt to retrieve her hand but too late. She looks at him, shakes her head, produces a chirp that is more like a giggle than a cry.

"Meh," he says. "This poor thumb for my flawed attempt to win your heart. Forefinger—for the way you pointed me to your best friend Em. This one, the long one, the one I kiss for your release, and the ring finger, for betrothal, my pet. The pinky—for the communist doctor, of course."

Grace pulls her hand back, while Starlinsky's smile indicates nothing of the ire he experiences as he wonders what law there is that allows this maniac audience with Grace.

"How nice to see you, Dr. Starlinsky," Bruce begins, stressing the last syllable of the name and deliberately mispronouncing it, making the "y" a long "I" sound rather than a short one. "Yes, I've gotten to know you quite well in my recent travels, as you are holding my Em hostage."

Now it is Starlinsky's opportunity to clear his throat, so unpleasant is the term. "I believe she's turned the key and found her exit, Mr. Steen."

"Bruce, Doctor."

"Bruce," Starlinsky says.

"Yes, Yes," Bruce says. "I have actually come to speak with Grace, and Grace alone, if that might be arranged."

No one actually responds to this, but Grace steps back toward the bed where Starlinsky is. She feels the sudden presence of PreHistory, who says, "Past events compel me to speak. Take care here, Grace. This fellow is of dubious character—I believe you've noted this, as well."

The fly, too, is making a pest of himself, as Bruce battles him, raving about the stink and filth of the jail. Then Bruce moves from trying and failing to swat the fly to inserting his arms in the cell proper to see if he can break the trance-like quality of Grace's staring. This of course is in violation of the rules, and within seconds Sarah Thower is beside him, and then in front of him, threatening him with immediate expulsion. He asks, rather than demands, to see Grace in private.

"I hope I have made it perfectly clear," Sarah Thower says, her chin jutting out so far as to practically touch Bruce's face, which is completely veiled, by an expressionless mouth, his lips thin and half inside his mouth, and his eyes hidden by dark glasses. "No one but the doctor is permitted in the cell with the prisoner, but you may speak with her in private, if the doctor and Grace both agree to it."

Grace nods but her eyes follow Starlinsky, as he walks through the cell door that Sarah Thower has unlocked. He avoids glancing at Bruce and simply heads to where the desk is and sits in a dark wooden chair and picks up the newspaper.

Bruce bows when Starlinsky passes.

On closer inspection, Grace sees a jungle cat atop the face of Bruce, its claws like a comb secured in his scalp, with dark hair on either side of the cut. There are teeth sinking into Bruce's neck, and a muscled neck curled up, like the body of a snake but thicker, if shorter. The cat was what she'd seen on his shoulders, but it's now staring at her, its yellow eyes more curious than ensnaring. It's not until Starlinsky is out of the vicinity—and Sarah Thower, as well, that Bruce begins to speak. He flips his head back and forth, almost comically. "What the hell are you looking at like that, Gracie sweetie?"

"I should think you'd be with Em. What brings you to my side, and not hers?"

"Grace, if just once you would understand. I could do such things!" Bruce's gestures are subtle, what with his exceedingly long arms, long fingers, and when he removes his sunglasses, Grace can see both the electricity and trouble in his eyes, his attempt to mesmerize failing, but so clear to her is his intent to trap. "I've come to serve you, to save you. Can't you see how much I love you, still love you, have always loved you. Would do and have always done and will still do anything for you. Come closer. I need to tell you something that is for your ears alone, darling." It is a menacing plea, and she rests her head upon the bars in such a way that the only place his sound can travel is into her right ear. Bruce whispers with the distinctly sour breath and narrowness of focus such that it could fit into a buttercup, but with threat of venom, the promise of sting. "I

have all the ammunition we need to blow this place to kingdom come." He nods, then dramatically returns his glasses to his face.

Grace moves quickly away from the edge, as if a bomb has been dropped there.

"No ammunition. All that I've done, my life would I give for the eradication of weaponry."

"Even for your own salvation?"

"My salvation is never to be gained by way of a weapon," Grace says.

"Good God, Grace!" Bruce removes the glasses again, looks at her, his eyes wild, frenzied, his hands flailing with the glasses, but luckily for him, the fly is in a more dormant state of being. "What has gone wrong with you? Your head is so loo loo, where spunk and sass and scorn did dwell. And why do you look so frail?"

"It's just the best of me you see. I've thrown off my skin."

"You are not kidding----"

"Bruce, why aren't you with Em? Please go find her. I think she's walking the streets. She needs you dearly. Oh, spot that love on your face. Bruce, go to her. You know we shall always be friends. And where? Oh, there is Starlinsky." She sees him speaking to Ms. Thower in the distance. "Be well, Brucie, my friend. Say hi to Em. Tell her I've got a new idea up my sleeve."

"A new one?"

"Yes. Instead of spellweaving or praises about falling, it's about rising."

"Rising?"



“Tell her to think about rising. Imagine all of us rising up out of this mess? Instead of World War III, tell her. Imagine we grow wings. All the antennae in the world are useless without wings—tell her that. We ascend!”

“A little resurrection in the midst of all this.”

“It’s about world changing. It can be done, Bruce.”

“Don’t I know it, Gracie baby,” he says trying to get to her lips between the bars, but she turns her cheek to him. “Be good yourself, Gracie.”

That voice, such a smooth tenor quality, Grace thinks. And yes, she further thinks, there is a stink here, namely the one he brought with him. It’s got a smell, she is thinking—something almost smoky to it. His words and the tone of his voice hang in the air. A stale air it is, still holding the smells of food and oils, and this hint of smoke, too, despite the window open to the west. A window open into sky and a park, but Grace is not looking or thinking out the window. Her focus still on Bruce, his back, where the yellow spotted cat has slithered down and curled up as if embedded into him.

In leaving, Bruce passes the doctor with words very pointed and for Starlinsky’s ears only, although there are significant others who also have access to the information. “You blew it royally with the last one,” Bruce says, “but you’d better be fucking good to my girl, or I’ll fucking kill you.

PreHistory takes this moment to signal to Grace, a quick wave of his short hands. “See me, see me?” His voice is small but distinct. He stands in a corner. What PreHistory has seen—does he tell? He just stands there holding his knowledge, weighing it—knowledge, not a heavy commodity, less dense than diamonds or gold, but massive it

is, not literally, of course, and he says as much to Grace, imparts that knowledge. The knowledge about the stats, facts, and limits of knowledge.

But Grace is missing both the information and the concepts of the parameters of knowledge, at least the parameters of preference. Currently, she is more focused on “sound” than fact. For instance, how would she describe the sound of PreHistory’s voice? It isn’t that she isn’t that she isn’t hearing him. Or is this hearing a feeling, nothing to do with ears at all. Is it more rather like the hairs on her body are feeling. Has she adopted the policy of her insect friend? As she had been bombarded by visions, it is now sound that overcomes her. Sounds of the scurrying of people in the jail, the sounds of traffic and horns and sirens. To her it seems that the sounds of the seven million are flooding her ears. How to shut them out! A dissonant and hurtful sound, a sound of skyscrapers scraping the sky. And against this column of sound, the golden string waving its long peaceful notes—that is PreHistory’s voice.

“The worm speaks in thoughts,” she says to PreHistory, “but your sound and the sound of the fly—a different dimension altogether. I am at a loss to describe.”

“Interesting,” PreHistory says, “that you are talking about sound at a time like this—when I have knowledge to discuss.”

“Yes,” Grace says, her eyes in the corner of the room where he stands, as if backed up against the painted cinderblock. “I’m still thinking about sound,” she says. “It is like knowledge you know.”

“This is information that I might want to share with you,” PreHistory says. It might be valuable.”

“I’m guessing it came by way of a sound or an image—or”—and she stops with a shudder. “Or, if you were your newly found friend, the fly, it could come by way of a taste or a smell.”

“This knowledge,” he says to her. “It came by way of a sound.”

“Feeling,” she says, that feeling of foreboding again, this time much stronger. “Knowledge for me, but not for you, PreHistory, may also come by way of feeling—of sensation, of touch, of physical suffering, say, for example, by way of a bullet, or by way of a kiss.”

“Grace,” PreHistory says to her. “I want to tell you how much I despise your friend Bruce.”

Grace nods, but she is still unable to leave this concept of instrumentation, this sound of massive orchestration doggedly upon her, the sounds of a city there before her, juxtaposed against the serene sound of PreHistory’s voice, her remembrance of the jagged sound of the fly, his stuttering, a woody essence there. And she is thinking about the infinite world of sound, how it exists, how it has come to be that the receptors are the ones granted the power to discern. How the speakers themselves could talk endlessly, but without a receptor, without a receiver—it’s as if nonexistent. “But oh, PreHistory,” she says. “This is about knowledge. It is! Because if I see you—you must see me! Or else it is pointless, like voyeurism—you said that, right? And yet I could talk until I’m blue in the face, and my message could still remain unheard.”

“I’m listening, Grace,”- PreHistory says, as he welcomes Starlinsky who is pondering Bruce’s threat, the very thing PreHistory has been referring to, this knowledge

that came to him by way of a sound—which is a knowledge he decides, finally, to spare Grace.

Grace also welcomes Starlinsky, the only welcome Starlinsky has acknowledged.

“My darling,” she says. “May I speak with you?”

“Always,” he says.

“Things are happening to me,” she says.

“I’ll say,” he says. “That’s an understatement.”

“No,” she says. “Other things. Things you perhaps can’t see.”

“It’s only natural, dearest,” he says.

“Yes,” she says. They are as close as can be, even with PreHistory there, although, PreHistory, nothing if not sensitive to their need for privacy, has once again made himself scarce.

“Yes, we are so close, aren’t we?” She says this knowing that she cannot speak, cannot share it, these sensations, these ideas. But, she thinks, one more try. One more try. She says, “Starlinsky. I feel as if I’m a radio antenna.”

“Radio antenna?”

“I’m being bombarded by signals,” she says.

“Signals?”

“We are signals to each other, Starlinsky.”<sup>194</sup>

“Yes,” he says.

“I hear things,” she says. “And I see things.”

Starlinsky, a man of words, ponders her words and Bruce’s words.

Some hint of Starlinsky's agony reaches Grace as she sits on her cot in a kind of repose—Statuesque, her pose bears resemblance to that of an Egyptian cat, languorous but focused. "I see Em," she says. Those words cutting into a silence that is thick, if warm, and sad, if very localized. Which is to say, the inhabitants of the precinct are generally scurrying about, newspapers in their hands, while they converse with each other, albeit in hushed tones, the drama of the day on either side of the present—more there is to come, and they move like people who know it. In the space defined by bars and cinderblock, however, the silence is screaming. Grace breaks it once again. "I do see her, Starlinsky. She's walking around, retracing my steps. She is like some kind of proselyte or some kind of spy. I can't figure which god she's serving."

"What an unusual way of putting that," he says, standing beside her, his hands on her face, his eyes thick into hers. Although he's well aware of how frail, how thin she seems to be, Starlinsky does not think to question her sudden resistance to gravity, her floatability. The slackness of her jeans hides the fraction of an inch between Grace's body and the bed. "She told me many things that I of course am not at liberty to share—"

"Then don't, Starlinsky," Grace says, leaning into him. "The last thing you need is to jeopardize her trust."

"Her trust," he says. He's sitting down now, his hands unable to resist her body, so close, so redolent of pollen, so ever-ready, ever responsive to him. He can feel it. She is on fire.

"Yes," she says. They are face to face now, side by side, and no longer sitting. "You were saying."

"I was. Saying," he says. "That's true. I was saying."

“Her trust is questionable, and she says she’s allergic to life.”

“Yes—how did you know,” he says. It is a moan.

“I heard you say it. I heard her say it to you.”

“When? When did you hear this?”

“Just now,” Grace says. Her lips are resting against his, their breaths close, hot and sweet, two grapes on a vine. “If I focus on specific voices,” she says, “then I am not bombarded by the most horribly huge of sounds. Starlinsky, it’s like the entire city is screaming in my ears!”

Starlinsky is silent. “Surely my lips were otherwise engaged,” he says, then.

“Surely I heard it, my darling. She has the book I gave her.”

“My favorite,” he says.

“Who’s your favorite character?”

“The much maligned Caliban,” he says.

“Mine is Sycorax,” she says. “Em’s too. We put together a prequel to *The Tempest* in college together. It was a monologue spoken by Sycorax, where she essentially predicted the coming of Prospero. She thought Prospero would fall in love with her, but---“

“So it was a tragedy?”

“How could it not be? It was a monologue, kind of like a voice-over. I read it, and Em mimed it.”

“Sorry I missed that one,” he says. “Next time you do it, hire me to play Prospero, on the condition you do the miming.”

“Em’s amazing.”

“You think I don’t know that? I don’t think there was a minute she wasn’t performing for me.”

“And now she’s finding my printout—all over the city. She’s collecting. Reading what I’ve managed to delete. I hear it, as if it were an announcement at a sporting event.”

But he’s fallen asleep, now, and she stops talking, for a moment, watching his face, the scruff face, providing it with kisses, little baby kisses. He is otherwise not awake. His slight smile, more a trembling than a widening of lips. It is all there is. Exhausted man that he is, he makes no other move to suggest consciousness. His eyelids so still, so too those brownish, blondish, grayish lashes. She kisses them. She holds him, her body fastening itself to his at the edges, as if she were a parachute, her finger tips under his back, thinking it will hold her down. Against his chest, the rhythmic breathing, and the warmth, she rests her head. But she hears what she hears just the same, and she sees what she sees whether her eyes are opened or closed.

A fly has joined them, and PreHistory, too has returned.

“Buh buh buh been a luh luh luh long tttttime.”

“I’d say,” Grace says to the fly. “You missed all the action. I’m kinda dead meat.”

“Thuh thuh that’s wa wa why I’m huh huh here.”

“Great, great,” she says. “I guess you’re not the one to go to for hope.”

“On the contrary,” says PreH, “if I may be so rude as to intrude. From what we have managed to find, in terms of research—I have not done this alone, mind you. My future-oriented wise fly—has helped me. We have even consulted with your, uh, worm. It looks as if you will have some options with respect to bail.”

“Gi-gi-gi-nor-mous,” says the fly.

“It’s not going to be cheap,” PreHistory says.

“Would be nice,” Grace says, “if I could get my body to do what my mind is doing.”

“Some transformation is in order,” says PreHistory.

“You-you-you’ve g-g-g-got the choice,” says the fly.

“Right,” says Grace, snickering. “Between being a bug and being—hmmm, I don’t even know what to call you guys.”

“What do you mean,” PreHistory says. “I, my dear, am one of a kind. And he’s rather an unusual sort, as well. Besides, we belong to you.”

“I remember Breanda telling me I could be the patron saint of Space about a week ago. Whouldda thought?” But then her face clouds over. “Wait,” she says. “You belong to me? Does that mean you don’t exist outside of me?”

“The-the-the-that’s,” says the fly. “Ah v-v-v-v-very gggood question.”

“We are classified information,” PreH says.

“The-the-the-that’s uh-uh-uh-a fact,” the fly says.

“Right,” Grace says, thinking the matter might best be let be, at least for now.

“Well, right now, I’m glad you’re in my world, because if the feds saw you guys, they’d probably nail you for testing, isolate you in some underground window-less pressure



cooker, and attach electrodes and wires and tubes to you, and, and, and, they'd probably kill you--." It's a thought that sends her bawling her fool head off, waking up Starlinsky, just for a moment, and how he cuddles her, and she recovers, tearfully, and hiccupping but still talking, still with the intense desire to know where she stands, to make sense of what's happening. "Without you guys, and Starlinsky—wow, I'd really lose my mind, but anyway, I'm really curious about Em. She's gathering the other bits of classified information. I am not sure I want to know everything she's doing. I'm not sure I want to know any of this at all, frankly, guys."

She forgets to ask about this 'rising' thing—that feeling of weightlessness.

As it is, what Gracie sees is rather more than she wishes to see. "I mean, it's not on television, is it—all that I deleted? She's not selling me out, is she? I mean what would possess her? Why would she do a thing like that?"

PreHistory stands there literally twiddling his thumbs. The fly takes off to where Em is walking, getting first-hand knowledge, although Grace's antennae, invisible as they are, are nonetheless profound.

"Well, lookie here," Em says to no one in particular. She picks up a rather large piece of printout. "DANGEROUS PEOPLE DELETE: BRUCE STEEN, FIREARMS, HOLD ARST. UNTIL CASE OF UND.FILM.GIRLFRIEND MURIEL LYONS GOES TO CT."

Not thickly rooted in Em's memory is the event referred to in the printout, but it happens that Muriel Lyons is already past her case in court, having sued the inquiring folly of a gossip column for libel. This is not the first time scandal proved lucrative for Bruce Steen, and possibly the powers that be, since they never came to collect Bruce.

"Now they see fit to delete him," Em thinks. "Wonder what he's got on them, now, my Brucie," she smiles. She carefully places this piece in her little book and proceeds on her way.

"You see that," she says to PreHistory.

"I know it," he says. The two of them are sitting on the cot, and his hands are flat on his belly, the tweed suit riding up where his oxford shoes rest solidly on the linoleum, which is more than one can say of Gracie—not her sandals, but her bare feet, an inch or so, dangling.

PreHistory's head is on his hands. He is resting.

"Well, there's more, PreHistory," Grace says. "A lot more where that came from."

"They will not make it to television," PreHistory says. "Don't worry your head over that."

"How can you be sure?"

"And yet another," Em says to herself. "Will you get a load of that: 'DELETED: PEOPLE PROTESTING V. N. WAR: MURIEL LYONS, GRACE ROSINBLOOM, BRUCE STEEN, BREANDA LIBERFRIED NEE FREEMAN, RICHARD LIBERFRIED, MARNIE ROSINBLOOM' (and a whole kitten caboodle of additional Rosinblooms) 'DANIEL STARLINSKY, SONIA STARLINSKY....'"

"There are many more, a great many more names of people," Grace says.

PreHistory says, "Your friend doesn't consider them significant."

"My, my, my!" Em shakes her head, groping for a word to match the surprise so well mimed on her face, anyone could read it. In another time and place, she could be

arrested for such a look alone. "Grace and Bruce and Starlinsky and Em all deleted together," she says in the most childlike of voices. "We wonder where will she be, that Grace of my heart. Well, we're not on the dangerous list anymore, now are we?" She finds an unoccupied space in her book for this swatch and continues merrily and prettily along.

"There he is," Grace says, "Bruce."

"Yes," PreHistory says. "That well dressed fellow in a limo. He's spotted her."

"Greetings, fair pink and blue disaster," Bruce says.

Grace recognizes these are words of love to Muriel Lyons. "I'm turning it off," Grace says. "I'm not sure exactly what's going on with her, but I'm looking the other way. Please let me know—you and the fly—please tell me if there's anything I need to know. Right now, I'm beginning to feel like a voyeur. Not my thing, PreHistory."

"Voyeurism, it is, when what you see doesn't see you," he says.

"Right," Grace says. "A thought to chew on."

"I do what I must to recover what must be magnified and glorified for the purposes of deciphering for the sake of the appendix or some such vestigial item. Purposeless, my existence. Voyeurism it is at best, my dear. But, do not fear—between the fly and me, we've got your back."

"Not to mention the worm and Zelda."

PreHistory follows, as does the fly, who winces at the singing.

"Somebody loves you/ I wonder who it can be..." It's Bruce, his tenor, which by the way is on key, coming from the limo, blasting the tympanal membrane of the fly's ear—not his music, not the song of a cricket, that's for sure.

"Who me?" Em says this looking around, and she is also dancing, making herself ready for the lap dance that will follow.

"Hop in and don't say no to me." "No" is the last thing Muriel Lyons would ever say to Bruce Steen, a.k.a. Frederick Wurre, a.k.a. Lucien Sorrell, a.k.a. Dave Gwemble, a.k.a. Zeek Flounder. So, PreHistory, if not the fly, gives them some privacy for their meeting and mating in the lounging back seat of the large car with its velvety blue interior, where Em will have the best black and blue time of her life. So sorry she is to have been so long away from him, during her four-day long hospital stay. She clings like a mosquito to him, as he tries to unhinge. Finally, he succeeds in removing her.

"All I want is to be held," she says. "I wonder will it ever happen?"

"Come on, Em. Take a whiff," he says, offering her a line of cocaine that he has already prepared, ready for the two of them. They take turns, the little mirror shaking in each of their hands. "Come on, Em." He teases her, and she sulks. It's all in fun, until it isn't, but there's a barrier between the driver and them. Afterwards, Bruce happens to spot some familiar words on one of the masses of bookmarks he's poring through in Em's book. "What's this book? Oh yes, I remember this sissy play." Bruce opens the velvet curtains for some light in the back of the limo, his portable home, which in this case has opened from a living room to a bedroom, when the inhaling moved into lap dancing that metamorphosed into cloud dancing and then morphed into claw-dancing before the lovers re-aligned themselves and their clothing, a mass of black and white if a little stained, and the bodies themselves reddened with finger prints and nail sketches. The imprint of Bruce's piece, that he leaves strapped onto his calf, can be seen on Em's thigh, and the prongs of her wristlet on his.

"Nothing sissy about it in my version of it, baby."

"You have a version of it?"

"Yes, darling, I am the star. I am Sycorax with the power to destroy Prospero."

"Must not be the same play," Bruce says. "Prospero is my man."

"He destroys her. She loves him. He kills her. In our version, she's a prophet.

She's a sage, and he's an imperialist."

"Our?"

"Grace and mine."

"I like it. Let's do it, after we do Grace's rising?"

"Rising?"

"She says she's got a new idea in the works."

"She's got a new Prospero in the works," Em says.

"He'd better watch his step," Bruce says. "What the fuck are these?" He is pulling at the filthy, waxy bookmarks, and then quickly scanning them and surmising the rest. "Lordy, will you look at that!" Bruce's is a devilishly high laugh. "Some angel has deleted our bad records. We can give it all up and be like new - whattaya think of that, Emmie?"

"Do you think? Do you think we can start all over again?" Em says, pushing her face up to his, her fingers on his face, manipulating it into masks that she first creates on her own face—without thumbs or fingers, and then tries to mimic on his. "Such sweet face," she says, inching up the edges of his lips and eyes. "Oh, danger here," she says, with a tug.

"Stop it," he says. "You scare me with those faces."

“No such thing possible,” she says.

“Nice idea to start over, though,” he says.

“Where would you begin,” she says.

“Interesting thought,” he says, “to start all over again. I’d probably play most of it the same way.”

“Most?” Em says.

“Most,” he says, imagining himself cloud dancing with Grace.

“To begin again,” Em says. “I’d have to die first. You’d have to kill me, darling.”

“Not as if I haven’t thought about it,” he says.

“Would be good for your films,” she says. “You could film it, Bruce, my immortality right there. I don’t see the point of life. I’ve never seen the point.”

“Right,” he says. “I’m almost there with you on that one.” The important word is “almost,” and the vision of immortality is not Em but Grace; a vision of Grace rising, he sees, her face an angelic countenance, a renaissance painting with a halo. Joan of Arc: Grace of Jersey.

“What grim thoughts are you thinking?” Em asks.

“No more,” he says, pushing her away. “But I do have some real sad weird fucking nuts news to give you. Gracie is in large trouble. I don’t know what will happen to her.”

“These are too many feelings to sort,” Em says, pulling up her thong, trying to see if he’s still watching, which he isn’t, and cursing the fly, who is. “Hey, fuck you,” she says to the fly, who finds a way out through the curtains to the driver’s seat and out the window to get a breath of fresh air.

"Grace is being charged on two counts of treason," he says, pulling on his slacks, buttoning up his shirt, grabbing a beer from the small refrigerator.

"What, our Gracie?"

"What exactly she has done is known only to Grace. Apparently she has not told a soul. But she is strangely happy. I mean I've never seen her so happy. But what with that crazy doctor of yours ---"

"You mean Starlinsky—Daniel Starlinsky—that doctor?"

"Yeah. Starlinsky."

"Oh, no wonder."

PreHistory now makes himself comfortable sitting next to the driver, inspecting him, a man happy to keep track of what's happening out the window, read the newspaper, look at his watch, and listen to the Yankees on the radio, all at the same time—and to hoot when Spencer opens the game with a home-run in the first inning. PreH assumes he's got strict orders not to listen to the news and is probably happy with those instructions, by the way he figures it<sup>195</sup>.

PreHistory hears Bruce feed Em a few bites of what's happened to Grace, avoiding mention of the *Post*'s front page spread.

"Incidentally, how did you hear about this, Brucie, baby?"

Self-educated in the school of lies, Bruce carries on. "There is a man by the name of Mr. Starlinsky. Yes, a certain William Starlinsky—happens to be no relation to the doctor, but happens to be the first candidate the CIA felt likely to be indicted for murdering a cop. Now," he says, watching her eyes, hoping that these are not the eyes of disbelief but incredulity. "You know a lot of these cops are my buddies, and so this is a

long story, but finally the CIA fucked up and let William in on the doctor's case. Well, we recently got ahold of William to give him some punches and blows of a revengeful nature—as is our way with cop murderers of our own. So this William fellow, once in our hands, told us all he could think of about everything, and Starlinsky, Rosinbloom just sort of stuck in old Brucie's head, so I called up some coplike buddies and so --"

It's in the spine-tingling detail that Em moves from disbelief to incredulity. "You are the kindest brute. So, was this Mr. Starlinsky indicted??"

"Well, he will not have to be indicted, my dear one, and let's leave it at that."

"Grisly thoughts, but what can we do for Gracie?"

"Nothing until she's arraigned because she is being as passive as a worm."

"Oh." Em pulls the murdering savior back down to be with her again.

PreHistory has seen enough. The fly as well. Nor does Grace require them. They are free to wine and dine and define themselves for a while until their presence makes itself known to the one into whose world they have made their appearances. If they have spun themselves from the orbiting planet that is Grace, it will be the planet itself that calls them back, the world she has generated, the world that generated her. To the extent that they are the same, that is the extent to which they are dissimilar. Em as such is a character in Grace's world, and Grace is a character in Em's world. PreHistory and the fly, as well as the species that rides among the green swirl of Zelda have emerged onto a playing field like that of Yankee Stadium, and the worm is up at bat. We can only hope that he, like Jim Spencer can hit a home run early on and bring PreHistory and the fly home.



As for the two couples—their distance is about that between two large city trees, from which a small bird might fly back and forth in the space of a few minutes. One of the differences between the two couples is that a crowd is still gathering about the duo behind bars. The other couple has the privacy offered by opaque windows. Another difference is the matter of their chosen nets. One of the couples has been caught in something legal. The other couple is in a less tangible net. Both will come to the same end, although one will reach that end slightly earlier than the other, thanks in part to the entrapment felt by the other couple whose net is not made of steel, or even nylon, or anything the unassisted eye can see.

Both couples have come to that impasse when words will no longer do. There are perhaps different reasons for this impasse, although there are perhaps some similarities. It becomes increasingly difficult to put both the terribly ineffable and ineffably terrible into words.

Time is running out for the couple behind bars, so they have to find a way to negotiate such an impasse. Starlinsky sees a muddled look darken Gracie's face, and he asks her if there is anything he can say to lighten her mind.

"Oh, Starlinsk. Tell me that my mother shall have no fear, and that I can explain it all to her."

"When did you last speak with her?"

"Yesterday—seems like a lifetime ago."

Starlinsky suggests that she might consider trying to call her now.

Nodding in agreement she sees the anguish in his face. "You, Daniel, are being torn apart here. I hereby invite you to take a vacation. Why don't you go home and

freshen up, and I'll call my mother, then take a nap until --" Neither of them likes to use the word "arraignment." Starlinsky agrees to leave, and both keep the promise of no tearful goodbyes. Sarah Thower responds quickly to the request to unlock the door, and Starlinsky is gone. He does not look back, and Grace does not watch his back. Instead her eyes cast themselves upon a worm sitting on the small window sill smiling with an ace of spades in his mouth. It is at this point she wishes she could rescind the invitation.

But PreHistory and the fly are already on the case.

Each step Starlinsky takes away from Grace's cell feels to him like a step closer to freedom. A feeling of anger rises up from his footsteps, although when he reaches his loft and opens the door and fall heavily onto his bed, he is able to be more precise; rather than anger, it's an amalgam of self contempt and utter helplessness that he feels. And with those lovely energies ensnaring his soul, Starlinsky falls asleep.

Grace, on the other hand, has broken her promise. She, who has plenty to sob<sup>196</sup> about, has been unable to prevent the inevitable. What she is sobbing over has nothing to do, however, with the thought of her mother or even about the unspeakable "arraignment". It's the longing<sup>197</sup> for Starlinsky that overcomes her. She fears he will not return, and what makes her so bitter<sup>198</sup> is that she had practically ordered him to leave. Why did she do it? Is she crazy? In her hysteria<sup>199</sup> she sees Zelda sitting beside her. What is Zel saying to her? Maybe she should stop listening to these voices. Turning her back on Zelda and the hordes who are at the part of her cell which borders the door, Grace wonders, is it possible to control one's thought? Is it possible to deny

entrance to what exists as a presence within one? Where should she go? Where is there to go when agony plants itself all around one. Grace feels herself searching for comfort, but there is no source, no inkling of delight. She stands on the cot looking out, fearful to close her eyes, to look inward, for fear of the uncontrollable sound, the enveloping world of imagery that seems to attend her. Her bare feet upon a bed that is already losing the feeling of Starlinsky. Perhaps he will never return, she thinks. Looking down at her feet, she realizes that they are not exactly touching the covers. How strange, how passing strange<sup>200</sup>, she thinks. And how alone she really is, how utterly separate from this world. The abundance of sound now gone, a relief it should be, but it's not. Looking out she feels so distant from sky, from the cricket sounds, from the sliding of tires down streets, the wheezes of the buses as if they were headed down a runway, and the trickling steps of walkers. The breeze comes through, warm it is, and if she had to give it a color, it would be pale green, the color of sea water, and of a pale green dress she remembers buying with her mother when she was not even ten years old. She was going to take a sewing class, and she needed material to make a dress. How very long it took to select the right material—that she remembers. But there is no memory of wearing the dress—only of the material itself and her battle with it and with the sewing machine. What she's thinking about is the touch of that fabric still in her fingers, as well as the great hope she had in her mind for that color.

Zelda has patience. She begins her sentence between the spaces of Gracie's thoughts. She starts from the beginning each time. So, for Zelda, it goes something like this: "Men...Men have the....Men have the problem...Men have the problem that women... Men have the problem that women haven't, which is just...Men have the problem that

women haven't, which is just the problem... Men have the problem that women haven't, which is just the problem of breaking when the heart... Men have the problem that women haven't, which is just the problem of breaking, when the heart is only aching."

"Zelda?" A sudden enlightenment strikes Grace. "You are something else. How can I thank you? Where did you get so much patience and understanding?"

"I've been around. A long time," she says, with a grand smile. "And, you don't get understanding without patience, do you? Now listen to me, and don't worry, Gracie. Starlinsky and the worm are one, so we know he will learn."

"I bet you taught that worm everything he knows."

"Can you keep a secret?"

"I think so," Grace says.

"That worm, that bee, and even that water lily would not exist without me."

"You're kidding."

"Just keep it to yourself," Zelda says. "I do what I have to do. I let them take the titles, but I'd be a fool if I didn't stand my ground. Now, remember that, lady."

Grace smiles, and with that smile, Zelda takes her leave. She just walks through the wall back into the bedrock of this earth but leaves her swirl, that abundance of green.

Grace is left with the words "stand my ground," and looking down, she realizes that she is not, no, not at all feeling the coolness of the linoleum on her feet, and for good reason.

Grace signals to Sarah Thower, and the guard approaches with the little suitcase Starlinsky carried to the precinct. "Look," Sarah says. "We have your wardrobe here. I think I could arrange a shower for you—would you like that?"

Grace nods then asks permission to make a phone call to her mother. "Is such a thing permitted?"

"And if it weren't, I'd call her myself and sneak you in, being a mother and a mother of mothers myself."

"You, too, are something else," Grace says, and then steps into the shower. Ms. Thower, while she keeps her eyes averted, can't help but thinking how sickly the young woman looks. How she would like to fatten her up, as if she were one of her own. How that face stays in her mind, how she cannot dispel it, Sarah Thower thinks, with a shudder. Has this happened before, she wonders. Must have.

Grace climbs into a white cotton sundress that looks more angelic than sexy, but most important for the mothers of this world, it is clean and neat. She also puts her grandmother's watch around her wrist. "You would be pleased, Marnie Rosinbloom," Grace says half to herself, "if only you could see me now." Sure—by the sheer number of concerned reporters—that the news is out, Grace finds herself thinking how grateful she is that her mother lives in Florida and not in New York.

"Hi, Ma," Grace says into the telephone, while the world of the precinct listens in.

"What's the matter?" her mother says in recognizably lilting tones. "I had a funny feeling you were in some trouble. Do you need money? Do you need food, a doctor—no, that you have. So, why are you calling? Have you lost your head? Are you going out of your mind? Drugs, Grace? What is wrong with my girl?"

"Oh, not so much, Mom. What's new is just the sad reality of my arrest."

"Your what???"

"I have been arrested on account of doing my duty to my country."

"What duty did you do?"

"Treason I did, they say."

"Treason? Gracie?"

"Mom! Not treason by my standards. You taught me to always to do what was right, right?"

"Always. And did you do what you thought was right?"

"Oh, yes." Grace tries to give her mother a vague idea of what had happened.

"So you tampered with the status quo, my darling, and now you must pay the price. Was this the reason you called?"

"Yes, but Starlinsky --"

"What is Starlinsky?"

"My love and my new husband to be."

"Wonderful - you are not tampering with the law of childbirth, I hope."

"Not that I know about, Mom."

"When is the wedding?"

"We haven't set a date, yet."

"What can I do for you, my darling. Shall I fly up to visit you now, or should I wait until you have been ---"

"I've been indicted, and in a few minutes, they will take me to the arraignment, so it looks like there's no rush."

"I will be in touch, Gracie. You sound just fine. Be brave. You are my bravest one, and you will be found innocent, for you are innocent. I will be thinking of you, sweetie pie, and I'll be up in a few days. Soon as I can make the arrangements."

"Bye, Mom. I love you."

"Be a good girl, my Grace."

After speaking with her mother, Grace asks and receives permission to make one last phone call. Then the criminal is escorted once again to the bathroom, where she might be able to throw some fairy dust<sup>201</sup> upon her face.

Water is what it is, splashing upon her face, mixing with tears, with that liquid essence of eye that gives her sight, access into the material world, and into the mirror she swims seeing the other fish in that sea, namely Sarah Thower and others watching her from the other side.

It isn't that she means to be a voyeur. In fact neither she nor Sarah Thower mean to be spying, but both are, one for the reason of her job requirement, and the other for no reason at all. No reason under the sun would explain Grace's newfound ability to see what she sees in the bathroom mirror.

Was this here all along, she wonders? Has she been moving toward a point of invisibility or indivisibility? Or is she just cracking?

"Am I cracking?" She asks herself this. Presumably to herself, Sarah Thower is thinking. It is Ms. Thower's paid duty to look, to watch, to ensure the safety of Grace. It's no wonder that Sarah Thower is haunted by the ever present face of Grace Rosinbloom, a face that seems to be growing more and more pale, and her eyes more and more luminescent, the browns separating in yellows and golds and grays and silvers.

“I see you, Sarah Thower,” Grace says. “I don’t know why you need to look at me in this tawdry manner!”

Still, neither of them can take their eyes away from the mirror. What Sarah Thower takes in is really bombardment of the very face she is having a hard time erasing from her mind. It began moments before Grace arrived the night before. It was as if she manifested the woman. Or was it the phenomenon of *déjà vu*, Sarah Thower wonders, that only *seems* to have been seen before, because the mind apprehends the sight seconds before the consciousness of it happens. Perhaps it’s the repeated glance creates a feeling of familiarity. And isn’t that face watching her? That look of innocence yet accusation, something ethereal about it, something light-filled, those eyes that are so brown turning a dark liquid gold.

What Grace sees in the mirror is a world outside of the prison cell. She sees into Sarah Thower and out of Sarah Thower. It’s perhaps why her face takes a different cast, the fact that she is being given a series of visions. Or she is moving through them, leaving her body as if ushered by a light, as if riding on a light, as if the light itself were a stallion out of control, and Grace were on its back. Galloping. Where to gallop, she asks herself. Where do I wish to gallop? Why of course, into the world of my beloved, into his dreams, if I might, and there she goes, not as a voyeur but as an actor, one who acts, one capable of motion, given to life or at least the performance of life.

And so she slips in. It feels a bit like a cartwheel, and there they are, he in a pale blue and gray striped summer suit, and there she is, all dressed in white. They stand under the heavenly canopy. They travel—a honeymoon?—into the sun, with a world of children following. Up there, as in one of those Renaissance paintings filling up the



impossibly high halls in the Prado, a series of lightning bolts and thunderous clouds create a flashing, pulsating light, and all but Grace survive. She sees him alone in a field, and Starlinsky cries in his sleep, "Please stay with me, Grace. I cannot live without you," and he wakes up.

"But I am with you," she says. It's a whisper that Sarah Thower thinks is for her, and with reddened face, she looks away.

"She is there with me," Sarah Thower says. She says it over and over again, as she leaves the spying room, and begins to knock on the bathroom door.

"Momentarily," Grace says. She is trying to force the recognition upon Starlinsky as she watches him shower and dress. "How handsome thou art," she says, somehow not feeling any pangs of guilt as she spies on him jaybird naked, pulling up shorts and a three-piece affair that is blue and gray striped. A summer suit it is with a white shirt, and now he snaps on a black bowtie. Ah, clothed, he loses her interest, and there is the pounding on the door.

Life is a dance with many partners, Grace decides, arm in arm with Sarah Thower. "No," the guard says. "I will let no one hurt you." And there are hundreds of people it seems to Grace. She placards held up with her picture and her face, the short hair, the words "Free Grace," on many of them. "She has freed us, now we must free her," she sees that. Outside she walks now, and then into a car with Sarah Thower.

"Is this a parade day?" Grace asks. The police car takes her to New York City's version of the Parthenon, its version of Athens, the buildings limestone, marble, brick,

copper, bronze, a gilded-gold, and good old concrete, with centuries of justice steaming from its crusted sands. Still hot it is, and sunny, as well. Grace's attention is on the people that have gathered. It's as if they descended from the sky—that vision of floating humanity. They've landed there, Grace is thinking. She asks, "Is it a holiday?"

"No," Sarah Thower says. "Honey—this is for you. They're all there for you."

"Where are we going now?"

"Foley Square<sup>202</sup>. We're about there."

As the door opens for her, and she's following Sarah Thower, Grace's eyes naturally roam to where Starlinsky, too, is stepping out of a car, this one a taxi. She sees him exchanging money with the cabbie, their hands in that God birthing Adam position, and Starlinsky is wearing the striped suit.

"You are the guest of honor here," Sarah Thower says, as she hands her off to a fed and to Richard Liberfried, whom Grace notified prior to leaving, the recipient of her phone call. This of course is the one and only Richard Liberfried, who was expecting such a call by the sounds coming from Breanda all night. Of course those sounds became increasingly louder, volcano-like, and lava and more came erupting out of Breanda, namely the now few-hours old girlchild they have not yet named, but this is another story indeed, one that he is withholding from her, namely that he's now legitimately a father, although he's hoping this little red-faced bellow, drinker, shitter, and weeper won't follow in her namesake's footsteps. Breanda wants to name her Grace, of course Grace, if not Gracia. And now, he's looking at her, the lawyer, his eyes burning, the sunglasses over them, and he is waiting for the right moment, the desperately right moment, as they climb cement steps, and Grace is counting them, looking down at her feet, at those

sandals, at her toes, and then they are walking into the large room. Walking forward now, going from cement to marble, to something soft, carpet, Grace asks to stop, for a minute, and she looks back. Starlinsky walks in just as Grace turns to see what sudden worm is buzzing like a bee, but smelling like a lily, with its feet on the ground.

"Oh," she says, with a swoon, and instinctively, Starlinsky rushes to work his craft, that he knows well, and she revives, which is essential if she is to be sworn in.

The silver-haired, friendly-eyed Judge Dupente smiles, for he, too, knows his craft well, and the presence of someone swooning is nothing new to him. When Grace, Richard, and the indispensable fed arrive at the bench, Judge Dupente speaks: "Ms. Grace Rosinbloom, please step up to the bar and swear upon your honor to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God."

And with these words, Gracie swears, and with her swears<sup>203</sup>, she once again swoons, and with her swoons comes Starlinsky to the rescue. Once again, she is to swear, so the feds can read off their accusations and she may register her plea of not guilty to the counts of treason under the law of the government of the United States of America.

Starlinsky is instructed to remain near with his invisible bag of tricks.

"Sirs," Grace says, suddenly. "I have nothing to say at this time."

"We will ask only that you say a word or two, Ms. Rosinbloom," the Judge says, who cannot help but feel the exhaustion in her eyes and pity the thirty-year old aging child, as he pities almost every person he sees standing in her position.

"They are two words, that I have to say, your Honor. Not guilty. So there is no more to be said, but will you set me a date and grant me a bail?"

Still smiling, the Judge says, "Wait, my friend, till we have sworn in your friends."

"Friends?" Grace says. "My friends have nothing to swear but swear itself. Please don't involve my friends. I acted alone, and this isn't even the time—and what time is it?" This is a question for her wrists which informs her that the clock has nearly struck five. "Well, it looks like the time of rest is approaching. What is the next step, oh judge of my heart," she asks the the Judge of the land.

"Please calm down, Grace, or you shall faint again and again," her trusty lawyer says, who then goes to her side and speaks to his client at length, his voice so soft that even she finds it difficult to hear.

"Grace Rosinbloom," the Judge says. "We have, you will be glad, of a sort, to know, set bail at five hundred, that is five hundred thousand dollars. You understand the first would be for the theft alone, but the second, well the act of high treason is a hard act to follow. You shall have the date of December ninth, nineteen hundred and ninety-nine...." Or so Grace hears. The truth is actually some eighteen years before that—a sum total of less than six months. "That is when you shall next appear before the United States court, under an impartial jury with your standing council."

"Thank you, Judge Dupente," Richard says, and then Gracie turns to Richard and says, "See ya in the can," as she promptly falls upon the floor. Richard carries her to a small room off the side at whose door stands Sarah Thower. On the other side of the door are two feds, but it is Starlinsky who ministers to her, wishing he had some tools at his disposal. To him her signs do not look very fine. Standing outside, but well beyond where the feds are hovering are the so-called friends of Grace and the council, who has

just been dismissed by the very judicious judge, who feels more than a twinge of grief in his own heart.

Only the one dream man show can help Grace now, and he is, under the circumstances, doing his best. "Gracie," Starlinsky whispers. "You must listen to me and look at me. You will have no chance to escape." He grasps her face, locking her eyes into his own. "You are going to be strong, and that is that. Think of your fiery blood, how it flows to and from your heart, which I touch, that I am yours and you are mine. You must breathe all that sweet, good air into your good soul. Or else you will be giving me a breach of promise. Let's see you do that."

Within moments, her face gains color, and she stands, ready to go.

Their small group walks toward the first door, outside of which a large crowd has gathered and is not very silently waiting.

Soon as the door opens, the questions come like spears:

"Gracie, will you please say what kind of terminal you ---"

"Ms. Rosinbloom, what is your education .Did you ever finish your dissertation on --"

"Were you a crook by choice?"

"Are your theories based on Marx or Lenin?"

"What did you--"

"How are you --"

"Why were you--"

"Who told you--"

"Will you get the crap out of her way," Richard shouts, as they walk down the corridor to the stairs for a private exit through the revolving door and then into the air of the outside world. Upon the steps a throng, a collage, a chamber orchestra backed by a horde of participants whose business it is to look. Familiar some of them would be to Grace had she eyes for them, Breanda's face not among them, but Bruce's and Em's there are. Faces too of those who know hers from handouts she's given or from the news coverage on screen and paper; or they know that husk voice from what the radio has managed to proclaim, even WNYC; even Steve Post has dropped her name in between his jokes and his classical offerings. Those who have seen her atop or beside her bicycle in Klang's palace are there as well as those whose buildings have been set for demolition. She, the notorious woman in white, the focus of so many eyes, sees only a worm in his glory standing in the distance like an Empire<sup>204</sup> State and with a light that glows heavily in his heart.

"Worm," Gracie thinks. "I want to die because I hate this place, and they hate me. Whoever thought they would do this to me. I used to work in this neighborhood just yesterday. And where are those clouts who did me in—those freaks of a feather, those butts of asses, those horrors of humanity. Why am I going to jail? Worm, I have done only good!"

"Gracie, we can only say we sympathize," the worm says. "We cannot say we understand...."

"Oh my God," Starlinsky murmurs.

"What," Grace says. "What."

"Worm," Starlinsky says.

"Worm," she repeats.

"I mean gigantic, iridescent worm-like blob right there," he says, pointing high to the needle-like structure at the tip of the Empire State Building. Its shine a little pink for the reason of a setting sun.

"And you," Gracie continues. "You worm, you tease, you crackpot. What makes you so smart—you frigging hermaphrodite."

"Oh Gracie," cries the worm in thought. "We feel so sad for you. Please try to see the other side of the ---"

Gracie's attention to the worm is interrupted by a reporter holding the dull silver microphone like a popsicle to his lips, forcibly instigating a reply from Richard, "for the sake of the viewers at home."

"Okay, now," Richard says, the boy born and bred in Brooklyn, his "r's" and "g's" buried in the caverns of his mouth, not a drop of drama school, not a drop of attention seeking in between the lines. "We are walking to the Women's Correctional Center, where Gracie will wait until the bail is raised or until the trial is tried."

Then it is Grace, implacable with something to say to the television crew, and no matter how powerfully Richard protests, she manages to hold the microphone in her hands: "I have some words to say before they take my mouth away.... You people of this land will die faster than a swatted fly, if you don't listen to my voice. STOP THINKING AND START BELIEVING."

Almost at the same time, the worm in her mind harps with ideas of his own. "How can you expect them to listen to you when you are not listening to you. You probably

thought you'd never have to listen to me again, poor girl. I'm yours till the end of time.

How about I talk, and then you repeat after me. Okay?"

"Okay," she says. "But no tricks."

Her entire demeanor changes as she listens to the worm. She does not repeat all that he says, but she listens, and that word "listen" seems to take command of her. The word illumines her. "Listen, all who have come to listen," he says. "And listen you who know only that you wish to live forever, because this one is going to die for you, and she is going to live for you, and you are going to die for no reason at all, but just for the hell of it. All you must listen if you can listen." He has words to give her. His thoughts are coming in words. And Grace is hearing them, and some are slipping through her.

Although Richard has done and is doing all he can to prevent it, the press is in its glory as she speaks, gathering her words like money, shifting the cameras to catch nuance and glance, admonitions and sighs. Grace sprouts words as she walks, the pronouns changing as she catches sight of the crowd, individuals melding for her into one large beast of wit with a vacuum in its hands, journalists and photographers and onlookers. They are bedecked in a coat of many colors, she thinks. She listens as the worm—majestic as the king of kings he is, was and will forever be, (so she thinks)—continues at his own game. To be caught in the midst of the throng is his only fear. She is watching the trees in their weighty summer coats like a canopy over their heads, and she can feel the unmistakable feeling of Starlinsky nearby her handcuffed sides.

Pity it is she cannot exactly look into or even see his eyes that move from sheer horror, when he glimpses the Empire State Building in the distance, to something akin to rapture when he looks back at her, at the light that seems to emanate from her heart. The



color of the light seems to be so pink he thinks it might actually be the sunset. It expands and grows more intense, the further away he is from her, and it seems to actually cover the crowd, like the firmament, the way he always imagined it.

The more Gracie listens to the worm, the calmer she becomes. As she speaks, her voice intones a sound that provokes balance and emanates a peace that seems to descend from the sky. Her voice now devoid of anger, has become clear, almost as serene as the voice of a water lily might be, although when Grace hears the words, they have morphed in their deliverance from something that originated as thought-forms of a most extraordinary worm.

Profoundly moved but stumbling in the attempt to pass along such a message, Grace finds herself choked. But the sight of so many people, the swaying of trees and a feeling for the life forms that came before, that are still present in metamorphic places, she simply brings a voice right up from the bell of her throat and sings out the words she hopes will adequately render the thought.

"Be brave, you girls and boys, and be true you fathers and sons, and be strong you mothers and daughters, and be happy, young and old, lovers and friends, and be free, all."

There is applause and cheering coming up from the crowd. It is as if they are waiting for an encore, or at least another word from Grace. And perhaps because they wish for a word, she feels obliged to give them one. But first they give her leave to embrace Starlinsky, and they applaud after that, as well. But then, he steps back, and as she enters the prison doorway, leaving behind everyone but Sarah Thower, she turns to the crowd, which becomes absolutely quiet, when she speaks. It is a word of farewell, she wants to leave them with, and with this word of her own making, she will part the

chaff of the wheat and the wheat of its seed and the seed of its egg and the egg of its youth, and the youth of its age, and the age of its death, and of death, its parting.

"Bye," she says with a smile.

## Chapter 11

Inside the Women's Correctional Center—a tall, ungainly modern brick building—Grace is part of a trio waltzing through the corridors, a sculpture in the elevators, and now solo in a room of her own, with a view. She stands and pulls herself up, how easy it is, to the window, and looks out. Her feet, ballerina-like, barely touched as she walked, although there had been a settling down. She noticed that. Perhaps it was something about the concrete. Something about limestone or brick that must ground her. Perhaps it was the people on each side of her, the handcuffs, the darkness of windowlessness. Grace looks up at the sky and down at the city and its green spaces.

Outside the Women's Correctional Center, where Grace is not, but where her shadow still lingers, how large it is, and how full of greenery. At least this is what concerns the man in the blue and gray striped summer suit. Of course Starlinsky's not the only one in a three piece suit, as PreHistory is there as well—along with the fly, all three of them rather despondent.

“Not what I had in mind,” PreHistory says.

“Cer-cer-cer certainly it is,” the fly says.

“No,” he says. “I knew what would happen, but I didn't know that I would feel so bad.”

“It's not-not-not oh-oh-ohver,” the fly says.

A bench. A waterfall. Masses of beautiful people of beautiful people with their lovers, with their children, with their signs. A gorgeous day, in terms of weather,

sunlight. They could just stay there and bathe in the sunlight. Lie down bask in the setting sun. It's that long of a day. Some are already doing it.

Inside she is sitting on a bed. The view of a golden woman, her hand raised. A clock tower. She doesn't see the sun setting, just its effects. She'll see the rising sun, makes a point to either stay up all night or get up very early and greet it. Now, it's well after six. Her mind is dancing through one idea after another. Do I look at the time? Do I ignore the time? My life? What is to become of me, the essential me. What is it that I boil down to? What are my lasting ingredients, besides bones. Why am I thinking about my bones? She now speaks her thoughts. Not all of her thoughts, just some that feel speakable. Is she waiting for an answer? There is none. "I've been abandoned by all," she says. "Well, then. That's why I'm thinking about my bones." It's true she starts decomposing herself. She starts thinking about what she is.

"Bones," she says. "I'm bones and a beating heart, but when this heart beats no more, I will leave bones." It is not a startling fact, she thinks. But it is a fact. Ah, this is what a fact is, then, she thinks. Bones are facts. Facts are bones. What I am is more, or less than bones, she thinks. "Bones I am" is not a fact, she decides, but still she is thinking about them. Ideas are something that I am, she thinks. My ideas, she thinks. Can they exist without me. Now, that's a question. If they can exist without me, then "Ideas I am" is not a fact. Unless "I" am not a fact. This is a line of thinking, she thinks, that started a long time ago. Bones again comes up. Her mother's bones, her grandmother's bones. She has had dreams about her grandmother's bones. Dreams where

she is actually in their presence, down in some vault. It was dark. It was underground, and there were people there in robes, skirts down to their feet. They didn't wear shoes. There were voices, echoes. Other languages, they spoke, the caretakers of the bones. Distressing it was when she awoke from those dreams. She had them more than once. Well, who will dream of her bones, she wonders. Eventually bones decompose, she thinks. But they last a long time before they do that. Unless of course one is cremated. And then, gosh, you'd better have a lot of ideas, or a lot of children. You'd better know your grandchildren. Dire thoughts I am having, she thinks. Where will this end? Will she stop thinking in this manner? She wonders about that. She wonders why she cannot steer her mind off the subject of her demise, even though she suspects it's because of this immense confinement, a confinement that might never end.

"I'll put off thinking about it, then," she says this aloud. "I'll have lots of time to contend with this line of thinking."

But then what do I think about? She sits on the bed and looks out and thinks about what to think about.

As for Starlinsky, he begins to see great fireworks coming from the north, in the direction of the Empire State Building around which a great worm appears to be coiled and all aglow.

"What are you so happy about?" Starlinsky says to whom he thinks is himself.

No, Grace hears none of this. She is putting on the striped pajamas that have been neatly folded, sealed in a plastic bag. She wonders who might have worn these last, and whether she might retain her very own undies. She will need more, as for a vacation. No, no more tears. She says this to herself. No more. Else she would flood the place like Eloise flooded the Plaza. It would be Alice in Prisonland. No. Just dress. Dress and breathe, and then lie down. Relax. Try, because exhausted. Should, could, would, she write? A letter? A love letter? A love letter to Starlinsky? To New York City? Is there a pad somewhere? Lying there, she rummages in her mind to construct a list of her things. Her suitcase. What remains in her suitcase. What she has placed into the bureau. What sits with her on the cot. In addition to all these are a carpet, few hooks, a window. She becomes distracted by the window. So high up, she feels like queen of New York, like that gilded statue upon the limestone trove of offices. It must be so pleasant, she thinks, to be living in a building that is all in white, all stone. Limestone is metamorphic. She remembers that. Stone that comes from sea animals. Ancient. What will come of her? Different from what will be-come of her. The limestone building is not the one she is in, as the one she is in is made of brick, which is made of sand, which perhaps has the detritus of once living, breathing beings. But now she's looking at the limestone, the white one, the building that is like a galaxy itself, the one she has a view of, that and the sky, and with its gold lady up there. And why is there a sudden peaceful feeling. No, she is not fretting any longer. It is a feeling that has come over her. Yes, there are bars, and yes, she will gladly wear these disgustingly ugly striped pajamas. No, they're not pajamas? Pajamas for a long sleep, no, they're not? No, Grace does not feel like talking. She feels like sleeping. Pajamas are perfect—but will Starlinsky come to visit? Surely,

she knows he will. Ah, what more can she ask for? Starlinsky and sleep. She has done only good. Sleep will be a wonderful thing. She thinks these things. Steps, she thinks. I'm still taking steps.

"Will you get a load of that?" Now that is distinctly a woman's voice Starlinsky hears, but there is no woman to be seen. In fact that crowd has instantly dispersed, and it is just Starlinsky—alone now, sitting on the blood red stone steps with his head in his hands, gravely sad, his eyes thick with tears.

However, even in the midst of the greatest tragedies humankind has known, the kind that resists articulation—even in these, there has always been a place for distraction. Maybe it's to point the way of survival, but perhaps not. Maybe the mind is a snake coiling and uncoiling, taking its time to swallow the burden of an impossible truth. Strangle the truth first, then take it in.

Which is just to say that Starlinsky looks up for only one reason. He wants to see if that worm is still straddling the Empire State Building.

"Yup he is," Zelda says, introducing herself to the fellow who has just beheld the sexiest version of the Empire State Building known to man.

Starlinsky turns himself around so he is now facing the door of the Correctional Center, but then, like a frightened child, he cannot not resist taking one more look at the very thing he wants to deny. He notices the vision is fading, but he hears that same unmistakable sexy voice, "Don't worry, honey. He'll come 'round."

He turns back to his viciously painful thoughts. Why hadn't he married her first, that thought, for example. If he were her husband, maybe he could visit more often. Well, that would be one of the first things he'd arrange, but *what is wrong with him*. What has happened to his sense of responsibility? *Why didn't he think?* He tortures himself imagining her signing her address and name. Those should have been his. He feels as if he's abandoned her, and he hates himself for this. It is this last thought that has made itself into words sitting like a crowbar in his throat, when he is approached, tapped on the back by some more democratic entities.

"Hi there Doctor Daniel, my savior," Em says, wearing her shades and bonnet and her squort of all red and her bodice in black with some beads hanging down from her neck, her pasty face dry of all color. "Thanks for setting me free."

"You, as I heard from my secretary," Starlinsky says, "have found your own freedom, by which you shall be free to be yourself, Muriel. Congratulations."

"Hello, Starlinsky," Bruce says, offering his nail bitten, ever so clean hand.

"My regards to you, Bruce." Starlinsky agrees to shake.

"What do you think?" Bruce says.

"Not much to say," Starlinsky says. "When there's that kind of a bail, you wonder whether we have a case of treason in the robbery of the people by the state." Starlinsky buries his head, trying to bury all thoughts of grand larceny, while hundreds of banks stand nakedly before him.

"Oh," Bruce is off-handed. "Bail's no problem. You don't think they really intend to let her be bailed out, do you?"

"Bail's no problem?" Starlinsky laughed. "Tell me another one."



"The question is how do we go in there with half a million and worry when it looks like she just wants to go back? I mean, do you get the picture Starlinsky. We got the solution, but what is the real problem with Gracie. We don't really know. But when you give us the -uh - okay, that she's uh - ready, ---"

"Stop, already!" Starlinsky's voice is a command. "Why didn't you say so back in that court? But the banks are closed now, anyway."

"Hey, man." Bruce puts his arm around the smartly dressed doctor. "Cool down. We GOT it, get it?"

Like a child who has witnessed enough violence to recognize its introductory dance steps, Em senses where this is leading, and very slowly, she begins to slink into the shadows. Instinctively Bruce catches her by the arm. "Where you going, honey. Don't want to be around for some action?"

In the bed now, propped up against the wall gratis of a pillow with an antiseptic smell, with a pad and pencil in her hands, Grace is trying to find something worthy of being written. "There's not much profundity available to me currently," she writes on this pad that has a line drawing of her new home with its name and address on top. She peers out the bars of the window, her eyes widening at the sky. She is a tenth of a mile up. The sky is cerulean, an eastern sky. The last window, the tiny jailhouse window, also, with bars of course, faced the west, and the window on Bleecker Street faced south. North—the windows of her childhood bedroom in Jersey, where she'd see Saturn and stars, falling stars. "Remember stars," she writes. She remembers seeing the rings of

Saturn once, too, when she was in college taking an astronomy class, and how excited the Grad Assistant became when he knew they'd all see the rings. Rings, palpable. Not just an idea. "Palpable as Saturn's rings," she writes. "Not just an idea." Her body in a deep state of relaxation, she notes that: "Very, very sleepy," she writes. "My body relaxed as if I were in a cocoon of light." PreHistory climbs through the window, followed by the fly, who squeezes through a small break in one of the squares produced by the weaving of the screen, one little wire cut off from the rest. The fly rather gingerly steers himself away from the rogue metal thread.

"Trouble," PreHistory says. "I knew it."

"Who, hoo-hoo didn't?" says the fly zooming around now.

PreHistory says, "You did nothing."

"Sometimes truh-truh- trouble is uh uh uhnvoy-voy-voydable."

PreHistory says, "Unavoidable? Unavoidable? Unavoidable?" PreHistory is as close as he's ever come to a splitting atom, in danger of exploding. "You don't want me to explode," he says. "I'm pretty messy when I am all fired up. Because at this point, even I can predict the future, and my prediction is not very pleasant."

"You mean you HAVE the money?" Starlinsky says. "God, I hope it's not too late."

"You are not kidding," Bruce says. "Gracie seems nuttier than an Em-cake." He stops, suddenly, as his eyes catch sight of Em about a block away. He screams loudly, "No offence, sugar pie."

"Not too late to get her out tonight, you lout<sup>205</sup>," Starlinsky says, raising his own voice, not thinking that perhaps crossing Bruce is not the wisest thing to do in the world. So, Starlinsky is not exactly prepared for the fist that makes sudden impact upon his face. Nor do either of them see Em run for it. "Hey you punk rock idiot," Starlinsky cries, grabbing his face. "We are on the same side!" Bruce once again raises his fist to the doctor, but this time, Starlinsky is ready to prove himself quite the capable fighter. But when Bruce pulls a blade from his shoes, Starlinsky knows he cannot unhand him, and instead screams, "What the hell's the matter with you? Will you put that goddam knife away? For God's sake, aren't we on the same side?"

"We were, man," Bruce says, "before you went and called me a louse<sup>206</sup>."

Not ready to relinquish his knife, Bruce tries to taunt Starlinsky, who simply backs up from him, but keeps speaking<sup>207</sup>. "Listen, I'm sorry I insulted you, but I'm not your enemy. I want to get her out as much as you do. Look, don't worry she's not crazy, she's had a bit of a trauma. She'll get over it. She's fine. I'm fine, you're fine; even old Em is fine, but Gracie's in prison. I want to get her out, and you want to get her out. So, let's do it together. It's the only thing that makes sense, right? You need me and I need you, right? I know I can't do it without you, and I get the impression you think you can't do it without me. Am I right? I'm right, no?" Starlinsky sees the look finally change in the way Bruce holds his mouth<sup>208</sup>. It softens as the creases on his cheeks loosen. He can't see the eyes behind the shades, but he takes his chance. He puts his hand out to Bruce, and says, "Now, doesn't that make us on the same team?"

"If we're on the same team, Doctor, I'd advise you to stop calling me names," Bruce says, folding up.

"Forgive me, Bruce." Starlinsky is still with his hand in the air. "I don't know what's got into my head. Now, please, don't make me look like a fool. Shake my hand."

Finally Bruce does just that, but at the same time Starlinsky feels something very cold and hard, though not particularly sharp, at his back.

A stillness there is, like that of something immured in glass, and that something is Grace. Still lying down, the covers helping her to stay down. Still with the writing. Still hosting a couple of swells in her room. Suddenly, a small feeling of panic erupts from within her. It comes like something stinging but localized and very tiny, and she pushes back the sheet and light blanket and stands up quickly.

PreHistory asks, "What is it?"

"I'm frightened," she says.

PreHistory says, "I hope it wasn't something I said."

"You are ab-sur-sur-surd, man," the fly says.

"It's just a feeling that I have," Grace says.

"Sometimes that's all you can ask for," the fly says.

"What is?" Grace asks.

"The fact that your antennae are working. Sometimes that's all there is."

"Your stutter is gone," PreHistory says.

"Happens," the fly says. "I came out of my shell. Like that. I feel as if I'm on my way. Can't explain it and not gonna try." He sits on the sill and watches.

Were someone watching all this from on high, say from the Empire State Building or from the spot of space that once shared itself with the flat apex of the World Trade Center, or a cloud in the sky, or from the highest point of a rogue planet, or much lower down, say from a windowsill of the Women's Correctional Center, this someone might see a few guys traipsing<sup>209</sup> toward a black limousine. One of the guys, the darker haired guy with the shades would be opening the trunk and handing one of the suitcases to the other guy, the guy with the fair hair and suit. But that someone, unless he or she were terribly far-sighted, might not see the gun in the hand of the guy with the shades pointed in the back of the more formally dressed guy. Nor would that someone hear the one-sided conversation that begins with, "This is one thing we're going to do *my* way, doctor." It might well appear to someone looking from a distance that the doctor willingly takes a seat next to the driver, in front, while the filmmaker sits in the back. And it might also appear that he willingly takes a pistol<sup>210</sup> into his healing hands. It would be hard to estimate how much the doctor is noticing as they drive around Chinatown, so Bruce, or as he is now called, "Gwemble," can see what is happening. They make a few stops, and the driver, who is also wearing shaded glasses, steps out, and within a few moments he is back again. Starlinsky does not say much; nor, in truth, are his thoughts in great quantity. He merely holds the gun that was placed in his hand and stares at it.

When Starlinsky thinks at all, it is rather like a re-playing in his mind of the last little bit of conversation he just overheard.

"Will they take the bail at all?" Bruce had said over the CB radio.

"Not a chance, Gwemble," the voice had answered back. "Not tonight, not tomorrow, not ever. She's lucky if she gets out of there alive."

"Thanks. We'll be there pronto. All hands on deck. Over and out, Gwemble here." Gwemble had clicked the CB to its off position, and under his breath, he said, "Ah, what the hell do you know anyway."

That's the part - the "what-the-hell-do-you-know-anyway"—that Starlinsky keeps thinking about, playing again and again in his mind, even as the limousine pulls around the back entrance of the Women's Correctional Center and stops.

Now, supposing there exists some God or alien, some omniscient being with the apparatus to both see and evaluate every last little action. And supposing this god-like one or thing were gazing down at the spectacle of nighttime in New York City, after the sun had set and all the shining ornaments glowed electric, endless waves spiraling from never-never-never-never-never-land. Supposing the one or thing with its (his, her) inestimable powers of insight, happened to spot this group, with its fair share of guns and money and drugs and high hopes. And supposing the one who planned only to use his high hopes looked up—and saw the one looking down. If all that had actually happened, as the one with high hopes had imagined, it would, in a way change nothing; but it would, in a way, change everything.

For Starlinsky, the one riding on high hopes, everything changes when he steps out of the front seat of the limo, looks up at the sky and happens to see first one, then a second, then all—the full cast of Gracie's dream characters hovering like Macy's Thanksgiving Day balloons over the massive building. For that moment, he forgets that

he has a suitcase of a couple of hundred thousand dollars in one hand and a gun in the other.

As he closes the car door, Gwemble sees the smile on Starlinsky's face. "So you decided not to be so morose, after all," he says to Starlinsky, patting his back. "Good for you, Starlinsky. You know, you're pretty smart for a doctor."

"You think so?" Starlinsky says, still looking up.

"You'd better hope so, Starlinsky," Bruce says. "You'd better hope so."

"I guess I'm meant to see what you mean," Starlinsky says, still smiling.

"I guess you are," Bruce says.

But Starlinsky is referring to Grace, and this time he is indeed smart enough to let Bruce remain in the dark about what he might have meant.

Meanwhile, except for one moment of panic, Grace has carried the unshakeable faith of a zealot about her. But something convinced her that so long as her antennae were working, all would be well. It's the best you can hope for to be able to feel your way forward and to go there. What was she fighting for, anyway, but to know what it was she had to do and then do it. Or be it, or sing it, or just see it, and go there. In a way, that's all there is, and she is grateful she's got it, and so be it. Both the guards who escorted her to and fro, and the other inmates, have taken note of the radiance upon this newcomer's cheeks. And how could they have known how stark white those cheeks had been, as pale as a shroud, Sarah Thower had said to herself. But if she has visions, the joy of which is evident on her face, her lips are sealed. Grace has nothing to say to

anyone. And here, there are both male and female, for these are federal offenders, and here is where they will stay until their trials. If it were just the offense of the theft, Grace would have been off to Riker's and housed dormitory style with a houseful of other women, and there were nurseries, too. But this alleged act of treason makes her dangerous, and here she is given a room of her own, which she takes for just another reason to be joyful.

Now her ecstasy is not exactly religious in nature, unless love itself were the religion and Starlinsky the god. She knows, somehow, that Starlinsky will come to be with her, with the full flower of belief that the rest is in God's hands, in whom she does trust, as it is written in so many government rooms.

So when the two of them arrive, namely Bruce Steen, although in his alias Gwemble, and her Starlinsk, alias Starlinsky, Grace is only partially honored, but she is more than startled by the fact that with them she may now leave.

"You have raised the bail?" Grace says with the ultraviolet ray of blue coming out of her eyes and the beginnings of a halo about the crown of her head, although this can only be detected by the one recently indoctrinated into a new wave world or two. Grace hugs first Bruce, and then her Starlinsk, where she lingers a bit too long, in the eyes of Bruce, who then requests a second hug, which Grace refuses.

They walk down the hall, an awkward trio, as Bruce drops off the keys to a guard, who looks the other way, trying to forget the same thing that Starlinsky is trying to forget, although they were inspired differently.

For it is one thing to have the bail, and it is another thing to have it accepted. The latter proved to be as costly as the former, and when the bribes did not properly



circumvent whatever reservations an officer might have had about accepting the bail, a friendly clobbering became the preferred method of persuasion. At least one guard who Starlinsky happened to observe, was the recipient of that formula. Starlinsky quashed any temptation he might have had to protest, when he saw the friends of Bruce—at least five thugs, there were—dragging the guard away, without a word from anyone.

In the elevator, more corridors, and there are still no words coming from any member of the unlikely trio; these are people with three very different sets of thoughts, yet a momentary feeling of wellbeing might be said to have existed in each one.

Once outside, they walk slowly, aimlessly, even with the sounds of sirens beginning to fill up the air. This is a sound that makes Gwemble uneasy. He is thinking of himself in alias, now, but he is concerned that a certain Muriel Lyons is out on her own—not worried, but concerned. The sirens sound again, although it is relatively empty of people on a Saturday night in that part of town. Rather than streets and sidewalks, Bruce leads them to the park where there the remnants of the crowd gathered to protest Grace's incarceration, some cleaning up picnics, others walking away, signs lowered in their hands, some with children.

"I'll catch up with you two later," Bruce says, as he falls behind, with the urge to empty his bladder and fill up his nose, not particularly in that order.

As for Grace and Starlinsky, they are down on the ground soon as they can find a sweet nesting spot. Between kisses they whisper about such things as worms and water lilies and children and wedding dates and how to fix up the loft. Then Grace looks with up her great starry eyes and asks Starlinsky how long he is willing to wait for her. He says softly that he's given it all a great deal of thought, and perhaps the cleverest thing

she can do is to plead not guilty by reason of insanity, and on that peachy thought, all whispering and kissing and embracing and lovemaking comes to a halt.

"Not you, Starlinsky," she cries. "Not you, too!"

"What do you mean, me too?"

"You think I did something wrong."

"No," he whispers. "I think you did nothing wrong."

"Then how can you expect me to lie like that?"

"We'll talk about it later," he says. "Just kiss me. I love you. I love you so much," he says. "Too much."

"I love you too," she says. "Enough to lie if you really want me to. It's just that I wasn't expect--"

"I'm so scared, darling, of losing you," he says. "I've never been so scared in my life."

"And I've never been so calm in all my life," Grace says. "Not a worry in the world."

And then there are no words, but there are sounds that could be terribly misinterpreted.

"Wait," Grace cries, more than a whisper, less than a shout, but audible enough to rouse someone in a stupor, someone already irritated with Starlinsky, someone suspicious of his intentions, and most significant, someone with a gun who is not afraid to pull the trigger.

A bullet comes out of nowhere grazing Starlinsky's finger, and instinctively he throws himself over Grace to shield her, when he hears Bruce growl, "Can't wait, can you, big boy?"

Starlinsky freezes, but Bruce continues, "Get up, pig, and get out of here. I haven't shot you to death, but I will if you aren't gone by the count of five." And Bruce begins to count, while Grace, thinking only of his life, gives Starlinsky a rather violent kick in the groin. The doctor groans, but he will not move.

"Get off me, please, Starlinsky," she says quietly, and then continues, seeing he will not be convinced. "I'm hurt. Please do as he wishes."

Starlinsky will not budge, even as Bruce reaches the end of the countdown, when Grace and Starlinsky begin to wrestle like animals in the attempt to protect each other from the bullet that has left its nest. And as luck, or destiny, or shall we say chance would have it, the bullet, aimed for Starlinsky's back, is delivered into the left breast of Gracie, leaving both men stunned, when Gracie cries, "Okay - STOP."

And for a moment, the world does just that. It stops. Once again, a profound silence comes upon Grace, and she looks around. She takes this moment to focus on what is outside of her so that she can just understand where she fits in. There they are, the masses of points, fuzzy they are, the stars that have always been there but are just now making themselves known, and then, she looks into the crowd. For a moment, there is a hush. It's as if New York City has seen the conductor of the world lift her baton, and Gracie does raise her hand, just as the gilded woman does who stands at the top of the

gloriously huge limestone building. Grace lowers her hand to her left breast and retrieves the bullet. It is slippery and warm. She rubs her fingers and it against the shirt tails of her gray uniform that is somehow still hanging from her shoulders. “Anybody else feel like taking a shot at me?” She speaks with the distinct tone of a small bell. Her words echo from the walls of stone, ring through the trees. She holds the bullet up. The people who are gathered there, in the fringes of the park, are those who for some reason could not leave, were still waiting for a glance at her, even through a window. There are many gathered, and many more are walking in, people still with their signs, people with their children, people who somehow felt pulled to the plight of Grace Rosinbloom. “Please,” she says. “I’d like to ask you to remain still. I’d like nobody to move—not you, my dearest,” she looks toward Starlinsky. “Or you,” she looks at Bruce, “my would-be killer. And not you,” she looks to Em with whom Bruce is holding hands, both of them, their eyes bright with tears, and Richard is there too, and his shades are off, too. Tears there, too. She sees a few cigars there in his pocket, and that registers. Life goes on, she’s thinking. Life goes on. And oh, life must go on. “Please be still,” she says to those who are in the gathering throng, “my faithful friends. Even you, all of you, my companions on this planet—my protectors, my jailers, my bosses, my executioners.”

Her voice is loud, her projection of her voice great. “Ok, it’s my turn. I understand. But, let’s get this straight. This entire planet is a land mine. Weapons. Where are there not weapons? Is that all that’s left for us to do here? To kill as many as we can? We can maim or kill ourselves with our weapons! We can destroy the planet—or at least make it unlivable, unlivable for us, that is.

“Look here,” she says. “See this!” Grace extends her hand now, a small rivulet of blood falling down from her breast, inching down like a baby slug, this dark line going down her body, down where the pants, so long, so baggy, are touching the grass. The blood from her body begins to pool where she stands, but Grace keeps speaking. “See this piece of lead. It weighs a little more than a three-month old fetus. It’s got a name and a number and a history. It’s got a price on it, and its price is your life.” She holds her hand out to Roger Warren, who stands there in a daze. “And your life,” she says to Judge Dupente, who is also in attendance. And she continues to point out individuals, and add them to the list of lives who will pay the price of the bullet. Once again, she raises her voice, as the park fills up with more people, and her voice projects over the sirens, but there is not much else in the way of noise.

“This bullet,” she says. “This particular bullet has my name on it, but the others—the others, the stepchildren of this bullet, the adopted cousins and second cousins and the fragmented nieces and grand nephews of this bullet—have the names of posterity on them—bombs, nuclear, thermonuclear—all the pretty names they want to bestow upon these savage, vile inventions that have the names of your posterity on it. Your posterity, and even the posterity that is not yours. I myself have no other posterity but yours. You are my baby, and your babies are my babies—if you will have them and make the world safe for them.

“Your posterity’s inheritance, then. The placenta—the planet itself is doomed for this bullet, for the sake of power? US power? Money? US money?

“That’s just what will be left—the money and the power.

“I erased words,” she says.

“I erased words,” she says it again.

“The weapons will erase the world.”

“But lucky for me I won’t be around to see it happen, because, if you can just leave me alone for another few minutes,” she says, and she looks down to see if it’s true, and it really does appear to be true. She cannot hide it anymore, and she can see in the eyes of Starlinsky, it’s been sighted. Tearing her eyes away from his eyes the most difficult thing yet, each infinitesimal fraction of turning hurts, as if she were tearing fabric, tearing the skin around each other’s eyes, and tears stream down, and she feels the pain of each small hair of attachment as it’s cut, as she cuts it, and they are still staring at each other, as if each of them were on either end of a river bank. And yet she is rising, and she sees that he sees this. She cannot get away with hiding this anymore, the fact that she is more than a fraction of an inch above the ground, that nasty puddle of her blood where the bottom of the trousers were just sitting in and soaked with and now are dripping from. And it’s because she’s rising, goddam it, more than an inch now, and now more than a foot. It’s going faster, and up she goes, and she’s not alone, mind you, she sees them all up there with her, but oh, she’s never seen the worm so quiet and smiling, and the green swirl is going just so far, and then it’s returning to the earth with all its entourage, Zelda’s entourage, and Zelda is waving with her beautiful hands, and the worm is waving with his golden tail, and PreHistory is there with her, and the fly is going up there just as far as he can, but maybe he, too, will turn back. She can see PreHistory fading back into thin air, and his clothes are going up, rising up with her. Maybe she should hang on to his mackintosh, or that vest? Buttons exploding off them like tiny fireworks, a light show, not falling but rising stars. Oh, she thinks, this is the stuff of

celebration! But Starlinsky is down there, and she can feel him pleading with her to come back. It goes something like this, “I love you. I don’t want to live without you. Consider this, Grace. Consider life. What are you running away from?”

“I’m not running,” she says to him. “I’m rising. I’m okay, Starlinsky. I’ll see you. I promise.”

“What about our babies?”

“They’re here,” she says. “All our babies are here. I have the feeling that even Breanda’s baby is here by now. All babies are our babies. Don’t you see? Take care of them for me, Starlinsky!”

“Alone?”

“I’m wherever you are,” she says. “Just like you are wherever I am. It’s always been thus.” She is looking up now. Irresistible it is, this journey. It’s nothing she can fight.

She is about the height of a traffic light when she decides there might be something more she must say to those below, to her flock.

“Like I said,” she says, “I’m hoping you won’t try to shoot me down now, but just let me inch my way out and I promise I’ll watch you from above, if you can just, Starlinsky, keep out of trouble...watch out for wayward women who’ve been dreaming dreams of you.” She’s looking down now, and rising, dancing on the tops of trees, she is—and how she loved to climb a tree just to look down at the world and sideways, too, and just breathe there, at the top of a tree in New Jersey. For God’s sake, you could see the George Washington Bridge on a good day, and you could imagine whales<sup>211</sup>

swimming in all the gullies if the polar ice caps would melt and let the ocean take over  
and deliver us from all this evil.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The words and the energy of this legendary song haunt the perennially penultimate journey of the petitioner, the writer/reviser (painter, set-designer, seamstress) who seeks entrance into the world of her character. It is partly because of the message of the song, the expression of insatiable longing, partly due to the production of the song itself. Sometimes the writer/weaver feels a self-weaving thread in her fingers, attuned to a field of emotion rather than a law of form. It is perhaps a conceit to think it approaches the performance of layering, of laying down harmony, even counterpart, as if the words that comprise the melody already exist, but something in the texturing is insufficient. Or maybe it's something in the performance itself that requires one or more lines out, not to the fish, not to catch and kill, but to seduce, to entice, to ask the reader to participate in this process of creating text. In that sense, the writer/reviser is like the reader. The writer/reviser may fill up the space but must never forget to leave room for a reader—not too little, not too much. Just the right amount of room. How does one know? How does the writer know? And of course, each small act of revision is penetration into the body and the auric field of the character, in this case, Grace: Grace and *her characters*, those who grew, it seemed, through her—out of one, the many. In the revision, I would like the reader to consider herself as part of an “identificatory” matrix, an idea attributed to Helene Cixous, by her reader, Susan Rubin Suleiman. This concept provides that the locus of attention be distributed among author, character, and reader—creating a trio, a *pas de trois* rather than a *pas de deux*. There is in this revision an invitation to the reader, whereas when originally written, the text drew its lens and *raison d'être* from its location, a point on outer rim of a consciousness—the consciousness of the leading character, Grace Rosinbloom. You could almost say that it—using annotations—is breaking the binary, is placing another voice that almost mediates between the text and the reader. It also mediates between the writer and the text. The act of annotating itself is like adding spectacle, an aspect of spectacle, to a piece of fiction. It is like an illustration in that it expands the locus. It adds another voice and offers the possibility of broadening the journey of the reader. It gives the writer a kind of authenticity, and of course risks losing it for the sheer grandiosity of the gesture. It risks the pastiche of postmodernism. By dividing its focus into two disparate spaces, two disparate planes, prism-like, it risks a defusing of sorts. But if there is honesty and unity, if there is an interlocking majesty, all will be well. Looking at the composition (“song” does not suffice to describe this work) “Somebody to Love,” and its presentation by Freddie Mercury and *Queen*, and even that of George Michaels, in the tribute concert, one responds to the provocation, to the supplication. This is a song that invites the listener to be a part of itself. How it grows, how it opens its doors to the world, to stadiums with over a hundred thousand people who cannot help but to clap their hands. Even at the beginning, when Freddie Mercury introduces the song, he invokes the audience. He says, “Are you ready?” And then after the rhetorical question, he shouts, “Let’s do it!” The audience is part of the “do”-ing—the noun “song” has become verb. The “o” in the word is squeezed into action, into to an “i”—a 1. It’s a unity of individuals, of “I”’s. And they are hungry I’s, hungry for love, hungry for unity. In their their hunger, they are joined. They are one massive beloved, the lover of a trillion arms, the lover of god-like libido. Freddie Mercury is playing to them—and with them. *Queen* is enlivened by them. In the recording, the vocals are layered to effect the sound of a gospel choir, and when George Michaels appears in the tribute version, there actually is on stage a gospel choir. In absentia, his body gone—ravaged by AIDS, destroyed by bronchial pneumonia—even the location of his ashes unknown, Freddie Mercury becomes alive again. You could almost call it a re-voicing, by way of a de-singing, because anyone watching this version—even on youtube.com, so many years and moments removed—*feels* Freddie Mercury. George Michaels’s singing is distinctly *not* Freddie. And his *not*, *his* negative (think Derrida here) somehow looms up as a frame for Freddie in absentia. The performance of Freddie Mercury appears in the mind’s eye—like a shadow, like a jack’n box. It’s magic in the indigenous sense of the word. Freddie is there, he is conjured—all that he is/was—the profound absence of him is conjured, that is, and what looms up (his theatrics, his sudden and swift transformations, his intense longing and his dialogue between his selves and the others of the band) actually morphs into the fulfillment of him, of his terrific desire. Freddie Mercury has been quoted as saying that he wanted *Queen* to be the “Cecil B. DeMille of rock and roll” music, and it is that and more. It is almost Greek theatre, with the gospel choir as the Greek chorus. Once again, what this might have to do with *Grace Before the Fall* is two-fold: one is that Grace

herself is the bearer of a message, like the message of the song, that is not just for her but for everyone. This invitation to the reader is really a supplication, requesting the reader to identify with the character. In the case of the singer, we are being asked to identify with the desiring that takes place in the song—in the words, in the notes, in the insistence and the crescendo and decrescendo. In the process of revision, I hope to be pulling in a thread that will in itself invite the reader in in such a way that the reader is part of the book, not just as spectator, which will in effect make the book more reflexive than it has been prior to the revision. I am trying to make Grace more sympathetic by offering more of her and of her world. In a sense, the annotations themselves are like the visuals, even though they are less enticing by way of their digressiveness, even in their location. But like the visuals, they add information. They are an added attraction (even if they do not “attract” but in fact repel, creating repulsion. One could say that some of the antics of the performers, or even the special effects themselves, are repellant or at least risk repulsion). Perhaps the song itself is enough just as the novel without the annotations would be enough. But the visuals enhance the song as they offer more information to weave among the musical offering. Art like this is an offering; the bonds that connect the singer to the audience, or in this case the writer to the reader, are like something ceremonial. The Queen presentation offers something different to the narrative of the song that clearly theatricalizes the experience. My annotations add a dimension that will invoke time, something along the vertical axis, whereas Queen’s antics provide something horizontal as well as textural. They are lines reaching out into the bodies of the spectators, through their eyes. And they reach beyond. It was his intention to reach beyond, in every sense of the word. They reach out into the future. How it all comes together is an experience in itself. Bakhtin also has a word for something that happens when the reader is positioned in the same place as the writer—and the character herself. Although it’s slightly different, in the situation with this novel, Bakhtin’s word is “polyphonic” and it means that the character would seem to have choice—and the reader, as well—such that all three—the author, the character, and the reader—are in a sense in the same place in the reading/writing/being-ness of the novel, all of them in the act of creation/discovery. This way of seeing places the serendipitous and spontaneous and elusive aspects of the writing process at the forefront of the reader’s experience. Something about the text itself makes clear to the reader that what appears to be a finely orchestrated completely finished entity is actually arrived at quite tenuously, quite serendipitously—reminding the reader even at the time of the reading. The writer is really an explorer, a discoverer, and the character—the discovered—is always in the process of declaring herself. The product is enlivened by the reader, who re-creates the writer’s experience of the character unfolding. Or we might say that the reader re-experiences the character’s awakening, discovering. Bakhtin notes that this is evident, this polyphonism is clear to the reader. Not all writers engage in this activity; some writers make preparations before the writing—outlines, that kind of thing. According to Bakhtin, Dostoyevsky wrote in a polyphonic manner, but Tolstoy did not. I’m not sure whether Dostoyevsky did in fact confess to this. It’s not something many writers like to acknowledge, as it almost borders on “automatic writing”, but this certainly was true for me when I first wrote *Grace Before the Fall*. I had my suspicions about where it was going for Grace, but I did not know for sure until it happened, until it became a thing done in the text. Now that I know (of course the world is always subject to change), I am reading with an eye to include the reader, and how I do that depends upon a number of things that would seem to be governed by chance, such as my sudden obsession with this song, in addition to the recorded objections or notes offered by my dissertation committee members. I suspect this long note about the layers of the metafiction, itself a metafiction, will merely be a nod to what I have foregrounded in my critical intro and shall proceed to merely say that everything about this song “Somebody to Love” and its singer and even his team, *Queen*, speaks to the state of mind that possesses Grace as we meet her in the first chapters. At the time I conceived Grace, when I first wrote her story, this song was surely in the air waves, but somehow it escaped my ears during the initial writing of the novel. Somewhere between now and then, I added it to my list of epigraphs. Now, however, at this precise moment, the summer solstice of 2011, roughly midway through the revising-revisioning process that I can more or less locate as beginning in April of 2010 during the summer solstice of 2011, I can safely say—hoping that it does not seem as banal to the reader as does to me right now—that “obsession” might be said to accurately describe my relationship with both the song and its creator. Like any writer worth her salt (John Irving, my very first teacher in fiction, in Hotel New Hampshire, has his wrestling coach say to his team, that the secret is “to get obsessed and stay obsessed”), I now transfer my

obsession to Grace, to *Grace Before the Fall*.

<sup>2</sup> The I-E root for dreams is **dhreugh-**. It means "To deceive, DREAM, from Old English *dream*, joy, music (modern senses from Old Norse *draumr*, vision, dream) (Watkins 20). That "joy" and "deception" are bedfellows is perhaps nothing new, but it is still hard to swallow.

<sup>3</sup> The I-E word wherein "worm" is found is **wer-3**. It is the last variation, root word *\*wrmi-* that comes from Old English *wyrm*, ...from the German *\*wurmiz* (Watkins 99). "Vermin" also comes from this word. Other words that are associated with this version of the root include "to turn" and "worth" as well as from the Germanic *\*werthan* "to become." From the zero-grade version of *\*wrt* is weird, from Old English *wyrd*, or fate and destiny, "that which befalls one" (Watkins 99) which is pertinent to this, as probably every novel. In Hebrew, the word for worm is *Tola*: . It is a general term for "insect larvae & worms": providing for the "maggot" in the manna that arrives for the migration in Exodus (Holladay 388) when the people lose their faith. Of course, like so many representatives of the animal and vegetable kingdom in the Hebrew Bible, the worm is a divine messenger with a mission similar in import to that of the great fish in *Jonah*, although the worm would seem to have lesser billing, so to speak. Anyone familiar with the book of *Jonah* remembers the great fish, or whale, but few recall the worm, which in this context, the context of the book of *Jonah*, according to the lexicon, is a worm coming from within the plant (that is a worm associated with this particular plant, which is directly translated as a "gourd plant" but appears in contradistinction in the editor's notes as a castor-oil plant). This worm, whether it craves gourd or castor oil, is responsible for dismantling the fast-growing shade-tree that offers the hapless prophet some peace from the hot sun. In the book of *Jonah*, the worm is the betrayer, whereas the great fish that seems to be a betrayer actually performs the role of Jonah's savior. (I have found the Shakespeare reference to "the worm turns" that spins off what an Internet source quotes as the claim by James Rogers in his *Dictionary of Cliches* [New York:Ballantine, 1985], namely that it is "an evolution of the old proverb, 'Tread on a worm and it will turn.' The meaning was that even the most humble creature tries to counteract rough treatment. Shakespeare picked up the thought in *Henry VI, Part 3*, where Lord Clifford urges the king against 'lenity and harmful pity, saying:

To whom do lions cast their gentle looks?

Not to the beast that would usurp their den.

The smallest worm will turn, being trodden

on"[([http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin\\_board/22/messages/97.html](http://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/22/messages/97.html))]

<sup>4</sup> The feminine form of flaneur.

<sup>5</sup> Mercy, grace, and kindness are all configured within the Hebrew word *Chesed*, which is one of the qualities (there are ten altogether) of the *Sefirot* or attributes of the Hebrew God, according to the Kaballah, one of the books of Jewish mysticism. That attribute, like all but one of the others, is masculine.

<sup>6</sup> Looking up into the sky, when I was rather young, about three years of age, I was mesmerized by the tops of the apartment buildings where we lived in West Englewood, New Jersey. I imagined myself sailing as I lay there upon a knoll of thick chilled grass. What massive structures! They compelled me into thinking they were great ships, their chimneys masts of some sort. They have this in common, houses and boats: they are vessels; they contain what must be contained, that which otherwise would be lost or at peril. At a later point in my life, I saw myself as substance without form, and I looked to find a man to serve as my vessel. How odd it is that it turns out to be rather otherwise, the metaphor. Perhaps some of measure our lives not with coffee spoons, Mr. Eliot, but by domains, vessels wherein we and not the coffee are contained, within which we are fixed for a time, or fed, or where we lay our bodies down and, before we put on our kerchiefs in order to depart (a phrase I thought came from Kazantzakis's *Report to Greco*, but I can't find it), take our exits by way of varying degrees of intoxication and exhaustion. This name, "River ran," comes of course from the very first and the last word in *Finnegans Wake*, the formidable tome which about sixteen of us "read" under the tutelage of Vance Bourjaily, in a class at Iowa. We called it "the workshop," as if it were the only one; in 1974, when I received my acceptance letter (and jumped at least once while riding the elevator up to my eighth floor apartment on the west side of NYC), Iowa was one of just a handful of MFA programs. I happened to find in my tattered volume a mimeographed copy of Vance's syllabus, penned with his characteristic melody and whimsy and modesty, tempered with a percussive precision that makes me think of typewriters, and all was well in the Bourjaily household when

that percussion sounded. It meant Vance was perking. It meant the breadwinner would come home with bread. Vance and Tina opened their doors to both my housemate and me when we were students. Not only us, but our dogs as well, the culprits responsible for getting us evicted from our home in Riverside, Iowa—but this turn of events was absolutely unfathomed at the time I sat like a timid mouse in his class, the terribly unassuming syllabus of which went, partly, like this: “The instructor will conscientiously avoid instructing, being thoroughly unqualified to attempt it, but will attend as an auditor, an arithmetician in charge of adjusting assignments.” Nor did I know a restaurant would rise up and then vanish in TriBeCa (itself so recently coined [early 70s], now part of the culture), whose name referenced *FW*, more appropriately called *Riverrun*, located on Franklin Street. One of the bars was actually named for a bar on Bleecker Street, the *Banana Stand*. *Meows* and later *Heartbreaks* are both variants of *Kenny’s Castaways*, still in existence, as of this writing.

<sup>7</sup> Probably more jeremiad than diatribe, the latter, having its origins in the Latin “diatriba” which translates to “learned discussion,” from the Greek which means, in Plato, “employment, study,” according to etymonline.com. The negative cast onto the word comes later on, from the French, etymonline.com further suggests. Here there is an attempt to evoke the orality of the Old Testament by utilizing and then breaking the “collocational convention[s]” (Crystal 163).

<sup>8</sup> This was the way my grandmother (1894-1971) signed all her letters to me: “Oceans of love...”

<sup>9</sup> As a child, I experienced a recurring and progressive dream, whose form I stole for Grace. My dream constructed itself around a child’s understanding of the Holocaust. I had a close friend in undergraduate school who had something similar. Hers was symbolic, spare; there was a stairwell at the top of which was a door, and her beloved ones would disappear beyond that door. Mine, too was symbolic, but if one likens hers to a poem, mine was a fairy tale—a dark one, of course—with a mote, an island, a grandmother with a rifle, a dog; there was also barbed wire and a store, secret codes, secret symbols, passageways. For neither my friend nor me, was there solace at the end. I stopped having the dream not when I managed to find a sickle and cut a spiral through the wall of a candy store, but when we ran—my grandmother, the dog, and I—through field after field surrounded by barbed wire, and finally, the realization that there was no escape.

<sup>10</sup> This references what, in 1981, when I was writing the first draft of what would become *Grace before the Fall*, I suspected to be an urban legend—the idea of a sperm bank with Nobel-Prize winning sperm. Gracie dreams up a version of this that is very different from the frightening reality of a eugenics-based project orchestrated by a fellow by the name of Graham, who solicited sperm donors from MENSA-qualifying white men, and then sold the frozen sperm to women who wanted brilliant children. A book about the project came out in 2005: *The Genius Factory: The Curious History of the Nobel Prize Sperm Bank*, by David Plots.

<sup>11</sup> **Teks-** is the I-E word for “to weave; also to fabricate, especially with an ax; also to make wicker or wattle fabric for....Suffixed form *\*teks-la*. **A.** Tiller, toil, from Latin *tela*, web, net, warp of a fabric, also weaver’s beam(to which the warp threads are tied);...architect (from Greek carpenter, builder)...(Watkins 89). The bicyclist feels the hill, and here is the residual map of New York, a little world of words, a map of products, colonization at its finest, where textiles and architecture combined to form a location where those who sought fabric would know where to go. Eric W. Sanderson states in his book, *Mannahatta* (the name of the island prior to the European invasion and its five-hundred year occupation), that the island was comprised of nothing less than 573 hills (59). According to Sanderson, the name, given by the Lenape Indians, means “island of many hills” (10); “Lenape” itself means “Ancient Ones” (10). Sanderson also states that the Lenape were in residence on Mannahatta for 10,000 years prior to the invasion, but in his book the portrait is of a Pennsylvania sachem, as there exists no “image of the Lenape from Mannahatta” (15).

<sup>12</sup> Arriving on the streets of lower Manhattan, eventually hunkering down in the relatively diminutive spot by the name of Zucotti Park, the Occupy Wall Street protests began on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011. This book in the final stretch of revisions, my writing felt in solidarity with the large, unwavering crowd that a number of new protests, links, each with the word “occupy”—which is essentially exercising the muscles of a truly representative democracy. OWS has been touted as a leaderless collective of like-minded citizens with a number of causes that generally concern the far-ranging effects of government neglect. These include the audacity of a government that offers a bailout to ailing banks but doesn’t fuel a health-care for all; the

numbers of protesters range from hundreds to thousands. An essentially non-violent demonstration, they have occupied Zuccotti Park, which is private; there have been instances of police brutality (more than one incident with pepper spraying), for which the police themselves will be brought to court; one has her fingers crossed that the powers that be are listening.

<sup>13</sup>With luck, the reader will not think this too cheesy a reference to *Finnegans Wake* ("Howth Castle and Environs").

<sup>14</sup>Nearly thirty years later, a cleverly dubbed and controversial "octo-mom" succeeded in bearing octuplets, a result of in vitro fertilization. Outside of Jesus, the first reported successful case of human artificial insemination according to *Time Magazine* ([www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,792012,00.html#ixzz1Zr2XzFZs](http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,792012,00.html#ixzz1Zr2XzFZs)) occurred in England in 1790, when "Dr. John Hunter, consulted by a 'linen draper in the Strand' suffering from a deformity of the urethra, decided to inject the draper's wife with semen by means of a syringe." An unsuccessful attempt to produce offspring—possibly for reasons of his sterility—"an endocrinopathy causing the uro-andrological problems of the Monarch"—is rumored to have been in Spain, when Juana, wife of King Henry IV (1454-74), tried to take matters into her own hands (Arch Esp Urol. 2003 Apr;56(3):245-54. Spanish; PubMed 12768985). According to IVF history it was in the 1890s, when "Walter Heape a professor and physician at the University of Cambridge, England, who had been conducting research on reproduction in a number of animal species, reported the first known case of embryo transplantation in rabbits, long before the applications to human fertility were even suggested" ([www.ivf-worldwide.com/ivf-history.html](http://www.ivf-worldwide.com/ivf-history.html)).

<sup>15</sup>This novel takes place during one week in June 1980 as the hostage crisis in Iran lingered. Fifty-three Americans would be held for 444 days. There were daily and even hourly updates. We could watch; we could be entertained; but we could not change the news. It ended shortly after the inauguration of Ronald Reagan, but in the summer of June 1980, no one knew when it would end, how it would end or whether it would end, and Ayatollah Khomeini terrorized the US with threats that seemed like promises.

<sup>16</sup>That same cup of coffee in 2010 was, at the least, double the price. The subway fare that went from fifty to sixty cents in 1980 was \$2.25 in 2010, and the pack of cigarettes, in 2010 verging on fifteen dollars, cost less than a dollar.

<sup>17</sup>As this fiction takes place twenty years before the felling of the towers, it is, in a sense, meant to be a love-letter to NYC.

<sup>18</sup>There really is, or at least there was such a list, with this very name, documenting the inventory of buildings owned by NYC.

<sup>19</sup>This ink is carbon-like, smudges easily, and the technology reflects state-of-the-art as it existed in 1981.

<sup>20</sup>The old West Side Drive on the, obviously, west side of NYC, where the Hudson flows, was elevated above the newer road used by cars to navigate north and south. Whether it was a flaw in its construction or in the maintenance, the road closed in 1973 after both a truck and car fell through. For years afterwards, it functioned as a make-shift park, commandeered by cyclists, joggers and skaters, until it was taken down in the late 80s. To some extent it anticipated the High Line that opened to the north whose origins are railroad structures.

<sup>21</sup>This hospital, linked with psychiatric disorders, its name itself a conjurer of madness, is actually the oldest hospital in the country. Located on the east side of NYC, Bellevue is also the scene of many medical breakthroughs.

<sup>22</sup>Fusion dates from "1550s, from M.Fr. fusion, from L. fusionem (nom. fusio) 'an outpouring, effusion,' noun of action from fusus, pp. of fundere 'pour, melt'. In nuclear physics sense, first recorded 1947; in jazz sense, by 1972"(etymonline.net). Although there were mixed Cuban and Chinese restaurants in the early 80s, it is unlikely this kind of fare was presented anywhere, and if it was, it was not yet considered "fusion" dining.

<sup>23</sup>A vestigial reference, where your narrator has chosen to leave in the stylistic nod to Joyce that must still pervade this manuscript, although most impulses have been revised out of existence. This alludes to a section in *Ulysses* when Leopold Bloom is walking home with Stephen Dedalus.

<sup>24</sup>During my relatively short time, three years, in Iowa City, I had the opportunity to meet a number of literary lights, not to mention the flickers that would in the passing decades turn into suns, moons, and stars. Some of my most memorable moments in Iowa occurred when Anthony Burgess came to town. A

formidable scholar, Burgess was obviously both the author of the book from which the movie *A Clockwork Orange* was made (as well as a good many other books), and a Joycean scholar (he also played a mean piano). I remember him sitting on the couch in a chilly schoolhouse at Red Bird Farm, Vance and Tina Bourjaily's many-acred paradise, when he read us passages from the Molly Bloom soliloquy and gave us tremendous insight into the *Wake*. Burgess was also a guest lecturer for Sherman Paul's class in Twentieth Century British and American Literature, where he'd begin with a kind of cultural IQ test, and ask questions that ranged from art history to music history, conjuring the salient cultural landmarks of western civilization. We were to grade ourselves, and if I didn't have any sense of my place on the long ladder of intellectual ascension, I knew then just where I stood. I saw Burgess outside of class milieus as well, because I worked for Paul Engle, director of the International Writers' Workshop. I'd taken part in translations with Burgess's fellow Brit, the poet/ translator Peter Jay, who invited me to join them at various gatherings. I was hesitant to speak for fear of saying something foolish before Burgess, who was regularly accompanied by the equally intimidating cigar-smoking scholar/ beauty, Gayatri Spivak. A few years later, having graduated from the workshop, I moved into in a studio not too different from the one I designed for Grace, and Peter—upon his occasional trip to New York, from London—would take me to visit his friend Joseph Brodsky, who lived a few streets away from me. I listened to them, mainly Joseph, dissect a fair number of writers I admired—while I was overcome by that same muteness I had at Iowa. Finally, I came up with what I thought might be an appropriate thing to say, and I asked him for some recommendations, and he rattled off a list of Spanish novelists.

Brodsky, Burgess, Bourjaily, Engle, and so many others, including Borges, and Kurt Vonnegut too I met in Iowa—all of them gone, now. If I wanted to, I could go on, with a list of names, writers of no small degree of vision and mettle passing through Iowa, on their way to their Maker.

<sup>25</sup> A syntactical reference to the last few lines of the *Wake*. As for the film studio, it is based on what is a very real inner chamber among the vast numbers of New York spaces, where I once went to hear the folk-rock trio, *The Roches* practice for a recording session. They were singing "Mr. Sellack," and they invited me to listen. I recall a stairway, carpeting that was peach colored to match the walls. The fixtures were elegant, with panels for numerous light switches, and there was a mass of keys to this locale where they practiced in the night-time hours—all of this otherwise hidden from the ordinary New Yorker. The sound of their harmonies in that venue—gloriously lovely.

<sup>26</sup> The words, "the star dust sky of Vegas," come from a song created by the painter Philip Allen. Not every babyboomer of the sixties had gone from idealism to materialism in the eighties. There were a number of extremely powerful visionaries I happened to meet when I lived in the West Village, many of whom were singer-songwriters, but there were actors and dancers and visual artists, as well, in the mix. Inspiration was in the air, and myth was in the making.

<sup>27</sup> Here the nod of course is to the Hopkins poem, "Spring and Fall to a Young Child."

<sup>28</sup> The idea that a card game could be going on during such an examination came from a true story told to me by a co-worker who overheard such a conversation while under anesthesia, having surgery, circa 1980.

<sup>29</sup> No wireless, no Ethernet, no other connection besides the one whereby the bell of the telephone is attached into the body of the computer, or later on, when Grace will take the portable home, when the home phone receiver is buried into the bowels of portable. Early 80s, the technology was still walking on all fours—not slithering, but not quite in the ethers.

<sup>30</sup> This is the Fulton Street Market as it existed in the early 1980s before the extreme make-over with residual signs of its function as a harbor still intact, namely before the multi-nationals came to roost.

<sup>31</sup> The I-E word that contains the meaning of BANK is *bheg*, which also means bench—a "money-changer's table," as well as "breaking" and "pounding" and may refer to a riverbank or a sandbank. (Watkins 8). It is interesting to think of a banker (one who breaks and pounds?) who works for a bank that houses money, and compare the idea of this kind of bank with that of a sperm bank, a bank that houses semen, or, as is stored in the I-E word itself (see FN #35), seed. Lest we forget that they are working in the department of Housing for the City of New York, and they have recently been asked to select buildings for demolition—buildings that are not vacant. These buildings are housing people. Still, Breanda and Grace will make these decisions based on information on the Landovits list, and presumably the criteria will be clear. Their part is merely technical. It's a done deal. Sticks and stones may break your bones but words may render a person

homeless.

<sup>32</sup> For someone who is raised outside of the Christian tradition, the crucifix—the symbol of the dying man on a cross—can take on a horrific form. For this reason, it is slightly ironic that one of the readers at the agency that represented a very early version of this book for about six months in 1982 considered Grace comparable to a female Christ.

<sup>33</sup> I worked part-time as an "in-putter" for one of the international banks in the early 80s, and among my jobs was updating the numbers on lists such as these. My bosses were young men, who would travel to the various banks around the world, from China to Dubai, as well as to Europe and South America. People in my office would line up to speak with the fellow who was our manager (we were mainly women), and he would compare himself to a gynecologist. I found out—about fifteen years after the fact—that he was an addict, and our head secretary was selling cocaine to a number of people at the bank.

<sup>34</sup> Although this is not the first reference to insemination, it's about time to identify the I-E root to which it might connect, namely *se-*, which means "To sow. (Contracted from earlier *\*see*") ... 1. Sow, from Old English *sawan*, to sow, from Germanic *\*sean*. **a.** SEED, from Old English *saed*. 2. Suffixed form *\*saet* and Middle German *saed*, seed. **b.** COLZA, from Middle Dutch *saet* and Middle Low German *sat*, seed. Both **a** and **b** from Germanic *\*sediz*. Seed. **3.** Reduplicated zero-grade form *\*si-s(e)-*. Season, from Latin *serere*, to sow, and derived noun *satio* (< *\*se-tio*), sowing. **4.** Suffixed form *\*se-men-*, seed, seme, semen, seminary; disseminate, inseminate, sinsemilla, from Latin *semen*, seed." (Watkins 73).

<sup>35</sup> Grace dreams up this dream for herself as the most honored recipient. Until the very last moment, she has been rendered passive. Even in her dreams, hers is a colonized body—but this passivity will end, at great cost, and it will be instigated by one simple request, the kiss that she's been longing for since the opening pages. She likens her insemination preparation to preparation for cremation. The private becomes public, and she is prepared for ultimate male gaze of science.

<sup>36</sup> This hall can be no other than the Royal Academy, located in the UK, an honorable institution, whose illustrious history is condensed in the statement on their website: "On November 30th 1660 a dozen men gathered to hear the young Christopher Wren give a lecture on astronomy. In the discussion that followed they decided to form a society for the study of the new and still controversial Experimental Philosophy. Two years later Charles II made it his Royal Society and in the 350 years since it was founded, its Fellows have given us gravity, evolution, the electron, the double helix, the internet and a large part of the modern world. In 2010 we celebrate 350 years of scientific brilliance and fearless doubt" (royalsociety.org).

<sup>37</sup> Names, cities, sacred land, contaminations. Hiroshima and Nagasaki are obviously the two cities where "Little Boy" and "Fat Man" fell, were dropped, that is, on August 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> 1945. Just two bombs: ten feet by two feet and ten feet by five feet, respectively. At 8 in the morning "Little Boy" and at 11 in the morning, "Fat Man." Just as battles and military expeditions have names, weapons have names. Even the airplanes from which they were expelled have names (Enola Gay and Bockscar, respectively). The West's biblical forefather, Adam, so it goes, was given the privilege of naming. He got to name the natural world, and now we get to give names to the things we create to destroy it. So it is that the bombs have names, and you can see pictures of them, replicas of them if you look in the Internet. How small they are. How containable. But their devastation beyond comprehension. Serial killers, ground despoilers, plagues. Inconceivable is the damage resulting from the ejaculations of these "males." One wonders whether posterity will ever forgive the US for this double act of war, whether the human civilization can allow it to serve as a cautionary tale, both the first and last of its kind.

<sup>38</sup> The names of the death camps themselves, which of course are names of towns where land is, where the earth is, contaminated (although not nearly as badly as it is in the aforementioned cities in Japan where the US dropped their bombs or where, on US soil but Indian land, where they practiced), where the words themselves hold the hazardous waste, acid destruction in the words themselves. This is how such words are for those with knowledge—on both sides of the equation—the victim and the perpetrator, as well as the children and grandchildren of either—and the knowledge can come from the body, from the memory or the story, which gets stored in the body, such that the body reacts to the words themselves. As a child, I smelled words, and certain words came with smells; the word nausea came with a smell, a gas, something like ether. I had ether when I had my tonsils out. I remember that smell. And so these words, the name of the death camps, named by their locations, exacerbates this nausea to the point of shame. Many pictures

and smells come together with these words. For me, the feeling of suffocation, as well. The darkness of stripping, layers down to the bone, to the grinding of bones. A terror muted from the sheer turning of it into words. And yet the terror and shame spills into the words themselves. For some of us, these words cannot be easily spoken, cannot be among the vocabulary that touches one's lips. How terrible it is that one cannot form one's mouth around these words: Auschwitz, Dachau. There are words like that on everyone's palette, words that touch the depths of the horror of one's short existence on the planet.

<sup>39</sup> This came from a dream I actually had, where I called in a television repair man to fix my tv (even though I was not then, at the time of the dream, nor am I now, a connoisseur of the television). After charging me an obscene amount of money for telling me to dump the television, he left me with a worm, and this worm functioned like a genii of the book of knowledge. I did take the worm by bus, in the dream, to the Library of Congress, as he'd requested, and I did lose him among the stacks. This dream became the impetus for the book.

<sup>40</sup> This bit was inspired by a catchy greeting one heard on the telephone message of actor/singer/songwriter George Gerdes; George's percussive monologue came from a gorgeous piece of prose belonging to Jack Kerouac in his *Visions of Cody* where he does this riff on "The Three Stooges"—it's of course a leap inspired by the song "Dem Bones" which sings of connections that Kerouac takes to spiritual heights, with his mention of an "angel-bone" and a "god-bone." In the early 80s, telephone messaging was one of the new frontiers.

<sup>41</sup> Henry F. Phillips received a U.S. Patent on July 7, 1936 for this "means for uniting a screw with a driver," that he describes as "new and improved" and with an "inwardly tapering recess extending into its upper face along its longitudinal axis" (patent # 2,046,837).

<sup>42</sup> The word "mantra," I'm guessing, became part of the quotidian language of Americans around the time that "karma" did, in the late sixties, early seventies, when Transcendental Meditation came in and swept the college campuses, after the protests of the Viet Nam war. Just sayin'.

<sup>43</sup> A worm by the name of "Cornficker" has been around since 2008. So powerfully destructive and insidious it is that Microsoft is offering a large reward for anyone who can destroy it. How oddly close it is in name to Grace's pet name for her portable, christened "Cornflaker" in 1981 and kept hidden in the annals of an unpublished fantasy.

<sup>44</sup> Just a reminder that these are the days without computer screens but where the computer writes back, with the same *sang froid* or shall we say "abruptness" or the linguistically challenged etiquette one currently (circa 2010) suffers with automated messages, say, from telephone or utility billing operations. In some ways the automated practices are parallel to weaponry; as such one might consider the current systems similar to cluster bombs. The relief one has speaking with a human being, then, is similar to the idea of say, George W. Bush having had a sudden death with Osama bin Laden, whether pistols or swords. Of course this was never to happen.

<sup>45</sup> Dictionary.com says its origin comes from the Latin, *factum*, meaning "something done, deed," a noun it is, neutral gender, "*factus* done, ptp of *facere* to do"—based on Random House Dictionary's definition. So, here we have a Latinate word, and remembering that the laws of the secular world of the West are based on the Greco-Roman culture, what is interesting to note here is that the idea of fact (not in this instance but in other instances, for example declarations of so-called logic) has gone from something concrete, that is something done, to an idea—from doing to being, taking time out of the equation, taking history out of the equation, making something eternal that, having been stripped of its concreteness, robs the word of its grounding, and with that comes the potential of losing all substance.

<sup>46</sup> In the creation of linguistic materials, it is not without its thrill to recall that there was a human being whose name was Mesmer and is the origin of the word—and what word did we use, what verb sufficed to say the way a sheepdog locked eyes with the sheep in order to secure control, not to mention the impassioned eyes of lovers or murderers or the spell of a mother and child? Was there nothing mesmerizing before Anton Mesmer (1734-1815) whose associations ranged from Mozart (who used Mesmer's magnets to cure one of his characters in *Così fan tutte*) to Ben Franklin? And is it true that though credited with this, he did *not* invent hypnosis?

<sup>47</sup> Ah, the very opposite of eye-candy but with regard to buildings, not women.

<sup>48</sup> "Treason"—word root, "early 13<sup>th</sup> century, from Anglo-French *treson*, from O.Fr. *trahison*" perhaps from



the French *trair*—betray, according to etymonline.com. We think of Benedict Arnold, traitors, betrayers; it's a crime of an individual against the state. "In old English law," according to etymonline.com, "*high treason* is violation by a subject of his allegiance to his sovereign or to the state; distinguished from *petit treason*, treason against a subject, such as murder of a master by his servant." Subversion, treachery, disloyalty, criminality—all come to bear on this word. There will be a distinction ("high" as opposed to "low" or, as "*petite*" [small]) as well, in the case against Grace.

<sup>49</sup> Grease, such a word chosen unconsciously, I suspect, for its sound.

<sup>50</sup> According to the Online Etymology Dictionary, the noun "balloon" in the 1570s was "a game played with a large inflated leather ball," from Italian *pallone* "large ball;" and from the Indo European *bhel*—"to blow or swell", as well as the suffix, *one*, indicating great size.... "As a child's toy, from 1848" and "outline containing words in a comic engraving" dating from 1844.

<sup>51</sup> According to the website *ephemeralnewyork.wordpress.com*, Maiden Lane was "one of the first streets laid out by 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch colonists" and "it may have started out as a lover's lane." They quote a 1911 *Times* article as saying "girls of early Dutch days were wont to stroll by the little stream along what was known first as Maagde Paatje." Also, according to Gerard R. Wolfe in his *Guide to the Metropolis*, there was a "freshwater stream where young maidens did their laundry." It was also, *ephemeralnewyork* says, home to Thomas Jefferson and was the 19<sup>th</sup> century location for NYC's jewelry district. What cannot be denied is that Grace and Breanda are ladies and lovers who like to do some strolling, although the stream is long gone. A comment suggests that perhaps it was merely a damp street.

<sup>52</sup> Indo-European root meaning "to put up" or "to put" or even "to hang up"—OED "a thing devoted"—passed into Greek. According to etymonline.com, it went from "a thing devoted" to "a thing accursed"—which rightly fits in with the way words like "hot" and "cool" both mean something similar, or how "bad" means essentially "good."

<sup>53</sup> Little does Grace—nor did Lipschultz imagine how prophetic and sinister this dialogue would read twenty years after the original transmission, from the unconscious playfield of the mind to the glorious commons of our reality.

<sup>54</sup> Surely every writer can spot a time/place in her novel where it feels as if the characters start making their own decisions, and right here is the place where that happened to me, with this line. Along with my job as a part-time inputter for Chemical Bank, I free-lanced for Frederick Fell Publishers. Among the books I proofread or copy-edited were *Catch Me If You Can* and a book on hypnosis. We—the editor, the writer, and I—had gone out to lunch, and the writer of the hypnosis book told me there were ways to write faster, as writing this novel was a slow, painstaking affair. It was sometime after that meeting, when I began to apply some of her suggestions, that the pace began to pick up.

<sup>55</sup> Yes, a nod to T.S. Eliot, whose poem about London (circa 1922, that is pre-blitz) was not far from my mind as I wrote this book, my love-letter to New York, both cities surreal, and surreal it was in NYC, during those days that were pre 9/11.

<sup>56</sup> The idea that there might be a meeting place in one's dreams was, for me—a young, impressionable child—instigated by my father; when putting me to sleep (he would sing to me, as well), he promised me one dance at the "feather-bed ball." In the morning, he would ask, "Did you see me there?" And I would ask, "Where?" And he would answer, "At the feather-bed ball." Not a terribly original suggestion, that much I know—but what I do know, or what I suspect, is its relative obsolescence, as there are less than ten "hits" on this expression, when I approach google with it: a person similarly memorializing her grandmother, born in the first decade of the twentieth century (half a generation before my father's birth); only a few people retiring to bed, using that expression; American Girl Doll, the company that has found in this phrase a marketing tool.

<sup>57</sup> Utterance, one wonders how it differs from speak or talk, how onomatopoeic it is! The Old English, by spelling it with just the one "t" **utera**, suggests linkage not only with "outer" but also with "uterus," the organ of immortality that one might liken to the feminine body's other end (think of Bakhtin's "material bodily lower stratum") with its vocal chords, similarly shaped, and its orifice of deliverance, the mouth—those words of immortality, speech itself that delivers sound waves, that, according to that same father who promised me a dance in my dreams, are eternal; all we must do is gather them (those waves), and we can hear all the words ever uttered. Of course as an adjective, "utter" means beyond compare, or absolute. Lest

we forget, there is a lovely mammal with its long worm-like body of the family *Mustelidae*, known as otter.<sup>58</sup> “Speak” and “talk” and “say” and “utter”—so many synonyms for the one human commodity that is as free and problematic as the air; the linguistic urge, the layering of text, the creation of meaning; it is one thing to name, but it a horse of another color to assign or deduce or intuit meaning...and to go from the sublime to the mundane, one wonders if there is any relation between udder and uterus.

<sup>59</sup> The idea of “new” and “news”, the origin of the “news”—so “new” is rendered Old English *neowe*, and PIE *\*newos*, Hittite *newash*, Rus. *Novy* (Etymonline.com), and “news” (plural) “after Fr. *Nouvelles*, used in Bible translations to render ML *nova*.... ‘news,’ lit. ‘new things.’ Sometimes still regarded as plural...Meaning ‘tidings’ is early 15<sup>th</sup> century”(Etymonline.com).

<sup>60</sup> Old English-- *rendan*; Middle English-- *renden* (Dictionary.com), dates back to 950. This is a strong word defined as follows: “to separate into parts with force or violence”(Dictionary.com—based on Random House Dictionary c 2010).

<sup>61</sup> The first time I heard this phrase was not in 1981, during the first phase of writing, but some fifteen years later, when I was teaching creative writing at Usdan Center for the Creative and Performing Arts. One of my students, a strong writer of high school age, physically disabled with CP, introduced the phrase to me. I have not heard it since, except that upon looking it up, I see that it currently litters the Internet. I suspect it was limited to psychiatric circles in the mid-nineties. “Your face,” this young woman said, “is your billboard to the world, so prepare it accordingly.” I guess what she meant by that was if you walked around looking like a sad-sack, that’s what the world would reflect back to you. She credited that phrase to her therapist. She also made it clear that she despised the use of drugs because she had no brain cells to spare: “I need every brain cell I’ve got,” she said. Regarding the word itself, gratis the Online Etymology Dictionary (c 2010 Douglas Harper), “billboard” is an Americanism/ or Amer.Eng, originating in 1851, “from bill...+ board.” According to Harper, a self-styled, college-educated historian and wordsmith, a billboard is, “any sort of board where bills were meant to be posted.” About this, Ogden Nash in his poem “Song of the Open Road,” wrote: “I think that I shall never see a billboard lovely as a tree” (etymonline.com) cited from the Columbia World of Quotations c 1996, Columbia University Press.

<sup>62</sup> Ah, oil spills. The writing of this particular annotation (August 2010), coincides with that of an oil spill branded as the largest of them all, the so-called arresting of it, that has contaminated (a word slightly less noxious than “murdered”) the life within and around the Gulf of Mexico. The common term, the one twittered and facebooked for months, was the BP Oil Spill, but the company was Deepwater Horizon, and one cannot help but be in mourning for the loss of large numbers of Creations created between Days 3-5, as recorded in Genesis, two of which had survived a serious forty-day-long surplus of water in the earlier millennia, seed-beasts, if you will. On a related note, namely climate control (previously labeled “global warming”) as the last in a series of revisions has me now, April 20, 2012, with an image in my mind of a planet whose inhabitants and solid ground are submerged, having only in the past few days viewed a time-line that charts the next eight hundred years, showing the gradual drowning of major cities, where they stand. After eight hundred years, we’re all underwater. I can only hope we can reignite the candles that grow us back our gills. I’m thinking tails, as well, could be useful.

<sup>63</sup> While seeking the earliest use of this phrase, I happened to discover, in the virtual library at one’s fingertips, the local “urban dictionary” and its offerings for current uses: they include 1. “region of long, thick hair above the ass crack on the lower back....more commonly seen on men...”; 2. “a term used for setting or location where females, usually over friendly..., go to find someone to sleep with; and 3. “the name given to the ugliest boys in the bunch....the raddish [sic] out of all the apples and plums.” “Wiktionary” defines it “literally” as “ground made impassible by the impenetrable overgrowth of prickly vegetation” with a footnote crediting Webster’s New Millennium Dictionary of English c 2003-2009, so we’ll consider it usable here. A second, “figurative” definition therein reads as follows: “An intellectual or philosophical issue abounding with seemingly unresolvable problems; a theoretical quandary or impasse.” Answers.com informs that “patch” comes from the Middle English “*pacche*, perhaps alteration of *pece*, *pieche*, piece.” A second definition for patch (Answers.com) is “a fool or clown; a dolt: that they suggest is possibly from the Old “Italian dialectal *paccio*.” As for “briar”—according to Merriam-Webster Online dictionary, it dates back to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Middle English *brere* and from the Old English *brer*—meaning “a plant” with thorns.

<sup>64</sup> That is, of course, to “see” within oneself.

<sup>65</sup> Ah, “suck,” a word that my children, eleven years apart, think originated in their own generations, but has been around as an off-color (do we still use this expression?) remark at least since 1965, as I remember hearing of the unconscionable outbursts (that at the time I thought were lol funny) of the word in the science class my fellow students took turns disrupting, with the utterance of this word that has possibly now in 2010 lost its close proximity to fellatio? Yes? No? Ask my kids. No, ask Online Etymology Dictionary: “O.E. *sucan*, from PIE root *\*sug* (as well as a host of others, including: *suk/sugan/suga/sughen/zuigen/saugen*. Also, the Latin *sugere*). To suck, “...meaning ‘do fellatio’ is first recorded 1928.” The “slang sense of ‘be contemptible’ first attested [in] 1971” —that is six years after the above-mentioned reference—“(the underlying notion is of fellatio). *Suck eggs* is from 1906. *Suck hind tit* ‘be inferior’ is Amer. Eng. Slang first recorded 1940.” If Grace is saying this to a caller, then, she is safely nestled in that time after 1971, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary. So, without sexual overtones, and rather than saying, “You contemptible dolt,” or some such thing, Grace accomplishes this insult in one cutting syllable, by cutting out the voice of the plosive “g,” that is spitting out the sound (from the orifice of the mouth), rather than swallowing it (down the tunnel of the throat).

<sup>66</sup> According to the Online Etymological Dictionary, “grocery” comes from the idea of things being bought en masse—for the purposes of reselling? Capitalism in the mid-thirteenth century?—and a grocer is: “one who buys and sells in gross,” which is “from Anglo-Fr. *grossier*.” All these (Gristedes, Sloans, Daitch, Kmart) are names of stores more or less thriving in New York City circa 1980.

<sup>67</sup> Good old polyester, the thing, came about in laboratories, American and British, beginning in the 20s, when the first actual fiber—nylon—was produced. If, according to Answers.com, it was America who discovered nylon, it was the Brits who—in 1939-41—created polyester. Certainly, I remember stories of nylons that my father brought back from Europe, where he was stationed during World War II, for his mother, and for his sweethearts to be. Defined by “any of numerous synthetic resins; ... a complex ester used for making fibers or resins or plastics” (worldnetweb.princeton.edu/perl/webwn). Looking at the word itself, it’s as if Poly(mer) and ester married, multiplied by joining, very different from humans, the creations of humans. Poly means “many.” Harpur, cited above, suggests, that “poly” (from the Greek, plural is *polloi*, “cognate with L. *plus*, from PIE base “\*ple- (Sanskrit *purvi* “much” ...) is probably related to base *\*pele* “to spread” (Online Etymology Dictionary). “Ester,” according to Answers.com, is “a basic organic compound.” One might consider the relationship between electric and electronic in the same way one might consider the relationship between cotton and polyester—the magic of mother-nature as compared with the magic of the human mind, and how our languaging reflects all this. Our language and our clothing. Our language and our shelter. Our language and our food. Our language and our ability to love.

<sup>68</sup> Grace uses the word “adder” when she speaks to the worm. The Old English for snake, from which adder derives, is *naeddre*, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary, “from PIE base *\*netr*.... *Nedder* is still a northern English dialect form.... The adder is said to stop up its ears to avoid hearing the snake charmer called in to drive it away,” Harper records here.

<sup>69</sup> The legendary Holy Grail is the vessel or cup that was said to hold the last few drops of Jesus Christ’s blood. Among other things, the worm is for Grace a place-holder of sorts.

<sup>70</sup> Righteousness is another of the Sephiroth, the qualities—according to the mystical writings, the Kabbalah—of the Hebraic God, along with Mercy, Loving Kindness, Justice, and Peace. Of these qualities, one wonders what is the highest? According to one of the rabbis, I have studied with, Rabbi Arthur Schwartz, chasing after peace is more important than chasing after justice. I spent many years teaching poetry in the schools, and one year, I collected over a thousand peace poems written by children; very well do I remember the palpable feeling of hope that gathered in my own mind in elementary classrooms where children chased after Peace.

<sup>71</sup> “Behemoth” comes from the Hebrew, a word for the large beast mentioned in the Book of Job. To think of it as a hippopotamus or crocodile somehow makes it seem containable, something less fearful, somewhat less exotic. However, if, like the people within a radius of a hundred or so miles of Zanesville, Ohio (“Ohio farm owner killed himself after letting animals loose. Police say the owner of a wild animal preserve set wolves, bears, and lions free before dying from a self-inflicted wound...” Associated Press

guardian.co.uk, Wednesday 19 October 2011 11.22 EDT) you were to see one in your back yard, the word “behemoth” might be among the first words that come to your mouth.

<sup>72</sup> If New Yorkers (people living in New York City, that is) were spared the sight of a reactor, the crisis in March 1979 at Three Mile Island was still in the minds of many of us.

<sup>73</sup> The word “trod,” past-tense of “tread” is listed as originating before the twelfth century, in some cases with the meaning “to copulate with—used of a male bird”(Merriam-Webster.com). Middle English *treden*, Old English *tredan*. Just as speak and talk, we have step and walk, the many different kinds of movement, bodily movement, rather than movement of the mind and mouth, and this is a book about movement, both physical and mental, and intellectual, as well. I’d like it to be a kind of awakening, a movement from one place to another, a perambulation, and in the end in will be about a significant spiritual movement, the spiritual movement that comes from a movement in consciousness and action.

<sup>74</sup> Moving between the archetypes of Cinderella and Alice, Grace is forging a new path, where she must act rather than re-act, as do both these girlwomen. Here she is perhaps in the investigative stage that one might associate with Alice or a curious cat. At the moment, Grace is pre-heroic, at best. Alice is not known for her shoes or feet, but rather for her bodily proportions that, unlike those of Cinderella, are unsuitable for her journey. Cinderella’s quest, however, with her perfect proportions, is one that must happen in time. Alice’s journey, too, is bound by time. And so it is that Grace’s quest will find itself a race against time.

<sup>75</sup> In the world of Wonderland, all that is dead (inanimate) comes to life, but in this world, deconstructed or not, all of the living come to death.

<sup>76</sup> Regarding the plethora of “g’s” ....Those who have undertaken the rare journey through *the (Finnegans) Wake* know that the frequency of certain consonance in a passage of the prose signals or prefigures the presence of a character whose initials contain those consonants. How dare I be so crude and so presumptuous with my voiced plosives as to invoke one of the masters of the English language? In this case, there’s a labial involved as well, a growling girl, not too happy here: “grrr” as my daughter would write in a (cell phone) text.

<sup>77</sup> A rush of “d’s” suggesting a certain Daniel on the horizon?

<sup>78</sup> It is interesting that “time” and “tide” have a relationship according to the OED, both utilizing the idea of an interval, as the proto Indo European(PIE) root *\*diti* means division of time, and the proto Germanic *\*tidiz* means “division of time”. Sanscrit *dati* means “cuts, divides” (Etymonline.com). The words and concepts of time, thought, and thing, then, have a similarity in the fact that they are defined by boundaries, even though two of the three are absolutely substanceless, and the other (thing) is of substance but there is an inherent indeterminability to this substance. And this makes it terribly similar in property to the other two. “Time” would not exist without the “thought” of it, and “thing-ifying” both “thought” and “time” saves these entities (things) from being sheer abstractions, lost in the void of the ethers (no-thingness).

<sup>79</sup>“Torso” you’ll be happy to know comes from the Italian *torso* meaning “trunk of a statue,” originally “stalk, stump,” from V.L. *\*turses* or Latin *thyrsus* or the Greek *thyrsus* “stalk, stem”...(According to etymonline.com, a “thyrsus” is a “staff or spear tipped with an ornament like a pine cone...wreathed in ivy or vine branches, borne by Dionysus...” and it is a “non-Greek word of unknown origin”). I am certainly happy to learn this, something I did not know when I named Grace Rosinbloom, namely that her torso was in fact a stalk or stem.

<sup>80</sup> Oyster, as in our Botticelli Aphrodite, is a mid fourteenth century word from the O. Fr *huitre* and the Latin *ostrea*, the Greek *ostreon*, and from the PIE *\*ost-* referring to bone. This information is gleaned, once again, from Etymonline.com, which quotes Shakespeare’s: “Why then the world’s mine oyster, which I, with sword will open,” *Merry Wives of Windsor*, II.ii.2. But, the one who does just a minimal amount of research will discover that Aphrodite’s shell is more likely a scallop, which is another bivalve, and it happens that the scallop is a symbol of pilgrimage to Compostela—and pilgrimage in general. It is also the state shell of New York. Clams and scallops have eight legs, whereas oysters have six. According to Answers.com, one of the longest living animals on Earth is a certain kind of clam. And after sailing the seas of the Internet, and having landed on a vegan forum, I’ve come to see that octopi (octopuses, or octopodes) who are cousins of clams, mussels, oysters and scallops, are considered the most intelligent of all the invertebrates.

<sup>81</sup> According to Etymonline.com, one of the earliest “comparatives”—late 14<sup>th</sup> century, for the word naked,

which derives from the Old English *nacod*, whereas “nude” comes from the Latin *nudus*.

<sup>82</sup> From *do on*—a contraction (Etymonline.com)

<sup>83</sup> According to Etymonline.com, “undies” as a diminutive for “underwear” (women’s), beginning in 1902. Note the presence of “d’s” once more.

<sup>84</sup> A trestle—from the Old French *trestle*—meaning “a crossbeam” from the 12th century, means a “support for a bridge,” according to Etymonline.com. Grace thinks of her bracelet as if it were some kind of bridge, her body the road, or the earth-body, the cliffs upon which man/humans tread, leaving his/ their adornments, their marks of passage, their embellishments, their necklaces, their rings, their bracelets, their symbols of passage, their flags, their records, their history with dates and names, their designs, their stamps and brandings, their signs of ownership.

<sup>85</sup> Interesting that the word “terminal” comes from an a Middle English word *terminus* which means “boundary.” In this case, the terminal stores data, whereas the bus terminal in NYC stores buses. In the former, it’s where data is entered and received, whereas in the latter, humans enter or exit from buses, themselves entering and exiting and being stored. In both cases, there is a kind of transportation; in one case, an idea or information is transported, and in the other case, it’s the people themselves who are moving from place to place, albeit within moving objects. In both cases, trails are made. There are ends and means, and the terminal houses both, the house that travels and those housed within. Insects, too, make trails that can be read and interpreted. .

<sup>86</sup> The name, according to the Online Etymology Dictionary c 2010 Douglas Harper, came from the “original manufacturer “Formica Insulation Company of Cincinnati, OH.”—in 1922 (proprietary name, 1946 the other name?). Collins English Dictionary defines it as a noun, “*trademark* of any various laminated plastic sheets, containing melamine, used especially for heat-resistant surfaces that can easily be cleaned.”

<sup>87</sup> The notion of a “peeping tom” came about, according to several sources, when a fellow by the name of Tom was known to have been the only one observing not Lady Gaga, but Lady Godiva, who, sometime in 1040 to 1080, rode down the streets of France disrobing. The rest of the neighbors kept their shutters closed.

<sup>88</sup> An *yfesyndrype*—or eavesdrop (from Old English) was “placed around a house where the rainwater drips off the roof.” Or “someone who stands at walls or windows to overhear what’s going on inside.” (Etymonline.com)

<sup>89</sup> Even though what Grace is doing rather resembles a cheer, something very wholesome for an American girl to be doing, there is also an element of starlet in her, mainly projected onto Em, but Grace is a woman with mission, a woman singing of something bigger than herself, and little does she know that it is big enough to break her. The obvious meaning of “frail” comes from “*frele*” or morally weak, from O. Fr. *fragilis*) Also from Latin which means “easily broken.” So the word is essentially an adjective, although in the song “Birth of the Blues” I remember asking my mother what it meant in the lines, “And from a jail came the wail/ Of a down-hearted frail.” It was the only time I’d ever heard the word used as a noun—obviously, meaning a girl (as if a boy could not so easily be broken?) who was down and out and vulnerable. The music was written by Ray Henderson, lyrics by Buddy G. DeSylva and Lew Brown, published first in 1926; it was sung by Bing Crosby in a movie of the same name that was released in 1941, a decade before I was born.

<sup>90</sup> Some of this came from a cheer I heard often enough chanted by my mother (1925-1998), while we did dishes.

<sup>91</sup> This word is recorded by the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary as having come into the language in 1953.

<sup>92</sup> Apples of course have this embedded meaning, symbolizing everything from sin to the apple-of-my-eye love, and including the beloved New York City of this book. In Christianity, and in the hands of the messiah, the apple may symbolize salvation. Suffice to say, it runs the gamut. I once had a writing teacher who said that all good writing boils down to two subjects—not sex and violence, but food and travel.

<sup>93</sup> Although it has become common knowledge in 2010 that the brain is not fully grown until humans have passed the age of twenty-five, when the frontal part of the brain has come into its own, and Grace, who is thirty, should now be in possession of this full frontal knowledge.

<sup>94</sup> Old English: *beginnan*, whereas the word “start” which we use interchangeably with “begin” actually derives from the Old English *\*steortian* which carries the notion of leaping or moving suddenly.

<sup>95</sup> This word comes from the Latin, by the way, used for miscarriages, both intentional and un.

<sup>96</sup> According to Online Etymology Dictionary, this word was coined, or at least the idea of a “baby boom” was, in 1941. It was first recorded in 1974. I had used the title “Babyboomers in the Promised Land,” for this book, although the very first title was “The New Wave World.” My dissertation director, the South African novelist, Zakes Mda, a magical realist and writer of fabulism himself, informed me that *Grace Before the Fall* is actually in the style of “new wave fabulism,” a term, he said, that didn’t come into existence until a dozen or so years after the original impulse and first draft of this book.

<sup>97</sup> While writing this book, I was reading Goethe’s *Sorrows of Young Werther*, a book that the creature in *Frankenstein* actually reads. I hadn’t quite yet read *Frankenstein*, but I was about to, for the first time. I had never seen any of the films because of my own fear. As a child, I’d listened to—against my will—a radio version of *Frankenstein*. It may have been the old 30s version of the story, but it frightened me terribly. When I finally got around to reading the original, I was pleasantly surprised—as are many of my students—by the compassion evident in the character of the monster.

<sup>98</sup> I confess that it was here, somewhere in the middle of this book that I decided to make the shift from being a part-time inputter and sometime free-lance writer—to becoming a teacher of freshman composition. It began with what happened to me late one night, when I was experimenting with a technique suggested by the writer of a book on hypnosis. I had a revelation right here, right around now, around this page, that I could change the world by teaching. I came to think that writing—while it was admittedly a wrestling with words (much like Jacob wrestling with the Angel)—was something anyone could do, that it was an attainable thing if you thought of it simply as saying what you think, of representing yourself, and really it was like a sudden revelation that if people could express themselves, they would not have to commit acts of violence to represent themselves. It was on this note that I began to think I could actually teach writing. My now-over thirty-year gig of part-time teaching was thus begun. And yet, here is this book, still in the wilderness, still wand’ring in the desert.

<sup>99</sup> Thinking that although it’s suggested that probe is derived from prove, there must be some connection to the elephant’s trunk which is rather not a prover but a prober. It’s from the Latin and Pliny that proboscis/kis (Greek) comes to us: “means for taking food,” writes the author of Etymonline.com. Whereas “probe” is from “probare.” Neighboring words relate to trial and worthiness, all coming from “prove”....

<sup>100</sup> Our local maven, the rectangular device staring at me all lit up with “The Phrase Finder” indicates that this expression is not entirely new. I am reminded that the word “brand” comes to us from the “hot burned wooden stake” with which one may seal one’s “mark of ownership” and that the “earliest citation of ‘brand new’ is in John Foxe’s *Sermons*, 1570” ([www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/brand-spanking-new.html](http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/brand-spanking-new.html)). Spick-and-span: is an expression that those of us who grew up in the sixties will remember from television commercials of a detergent of that name, but as this website tells us, this catch phrase may have been “coined around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century...” and clearly there is some connection to the above-mentioned phrase, although the very first time the phrase found itself in print, according to this source, was in 1890, in *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*.

<sup>101</sup> Old childhood ditty.

<sup>102</sup> According to my phrases.com source, whose first citation is the *Caine Mutiny* (where Humphrey Bogart “linked insanity with marbles when he showed his character, the demented Lt. Cmdr. Queeg, restlessly jiggling a set of metal balls when under stress in court”), “losing one’s marbles” is an American phrase that came to be used in the late eighteen hundreds. To “pick up one’s marbles,” according to them, meant to win prizes, in the 1920s, but that by the time 1927 came along, “An edition of *American Speech* defined the term” in a way that most resembles the way it’s used today when they printed... “There goes a man who doesn’t have all his marbles.”

<sup>103</sup> Interesting that “crazy” is something you don’t “do” or “be” but rather it’s a place you go, a destination. If Grace had said she were “going batty”—we’d have to say that “bats in the belfry” is another way of saying “going crazy” but that “going batty” refers to a certain William Battie who was a psychiatrist in the 18<sup>th</sup> century who is among the early practitioners who built asylums to remove from society; “discipline and

punish” Michel Foucault would later pronounce, as he in his own archeological approach examined this increasingly popular compunction and presented his not-so-pretty findings. As for the word “crazy,” several sources have noted that it comes from a word that means “to shatter,” which makes it sound like going off to war or something, as it has the same or similar effect, and Foucault had similar things to say about soldiers, the way western society prepared soldiers to make them killing machines. Of course the main difference between the self-shatterers and the killing machines is that one imploded while the other both imploded and exploded. This book is about shattering of both kinds, the way Foucault discusses the self’s ability to take on the self-punishing so that the mad don’t actually need to be institutionalized too long to identify themselves as mad, and that soldiers too will deny themselves in order to discipline the outside world, discipline being a kinder, if more deceptive, word than *destroy*.

<sup>104</sup> More g’s in profusion, as Grace is growing into herself, as opposed to the Jonah, who did not, although Grace will have her opportunity to run.

<sup>105</sup> I have had my work as an inputter criticized as being “slapdash,” and this is my revenge. According to Etymonline.com, it was Dryden who first used this word in 1679.

<sup>106</sup> “Pie” as an endearment is comparable to the Yiddish “-la” my mother would add onto (suffix to) our names as children.

<sup>107</sup> Ahh, there are apples and there are Apples but there is no place like NY, no place like home...a sentiment whose expression comes down from the 1800s, a song *Home Sweet Home* (that a certain online website [Scorpio Tales] suggests “bear[s] a striking resemblance to lines by the American J.K. Paulding” written earlier: “However homely, still there’s naught like home”) and a subsequent saying that L. Frank Baum used for the magical words at the end of one of his Oz fantasies.

<sup>108</sup> The strength of New York is in its people. New Yorkers bounce daily, minute-ly...and as this sentiment was written pre-9/11, one must remember that even as that day is still being played out in the PTS of each survivor, NYC goes on.

<sup>109</sup> Obviously, “massaging the data” is one of those computer terms that simply means to evaluate or predict or process the information. I hope I got that right.

<sup>110</sup> A word that sounds delightfully dirty.

<sup>111</sup> Plutonium, by way of Anne Marie Helmenstine, Ph.D., an About.com guide, “was the second transuranium actinide to be discovered. Pu-238 was produced by Seaborg, McMillan, Kennedy, and Wahl in 1940 by deuteron bombardment of uranium. Plutonium may be found in trace amount in natural uranium ores. This plutonium is formed by irradiation of natural uranium by the neutrons which are present, plutonium metal can be prepared by reduction of its trifluoride with alkaline earth metals.” More than you want to know, surely. What particularly tickles me is that its Element Classification as an actinide makes it “Radioactive Rare Earth.”

<sup>112</sup> An Internet source, Easton’s 1897 Bible Dictionary, connects the reference to pavement with Pilate’s “seat of judgment” which was “to be set down in a place called ‘the Pavement’ (John 19:13). It is an idiom to “pound the pavement” which is a purposeful walking toward some goal.

<sup>113</sup> The idea of “reacting” rather than “acting” has become something of a mantra for the worm. The idea of a simulacra, of something that is nothing in itself but a copy of a copy, comes to bear, as well as the idea of the terrible damage of the extent of the re-action itself.

<sup>114</sup> Apparently panic is nothing new in the world. The word “panic” descends from the mischievous Greek demigod of the forests—Pan.

<sup>115</sup> In the case of this word, you are what you do, as “serpent” comes from the Latin “serpere”—to creep. How babies are like snakes: according to a comment on the podictionary.com site, (JP Maher), this Latin word does not come “by way of the Greek but rather straight from the Indo-European, to Italic.... The Greek cognate is herpon...referring to creeping things, even to human babies.”

<sup>116</sup> Doom itself comes from the PIE root *\*dhe-* that literally means “set, put” but is used to mean judgment or decree. The contemporary idea of doom as fate or ruin comes from 1600s, the one associated with Judgment Day, and as a verb its use comes into being in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century (Etymonline.com).

<sup>117</sup> Pretty interesting to think the term “commands” comes into being as a word that humans appropriate to machines that have the power of the Western God, especially considering that when this God is not revenging Himself upon the naughty humans, He’s commanding them to do this, that, and otherwise. I

wonder if our machines will one day do likewise.

<sup>118</sup> In Hebrew, the word for scapegoat is “Azazel” sometimes referred to as “a goat that departs” (this is part of the Jewish custom of Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the Jewish year, when a goat is symbolically sent out into the wilderness to represent the sins of the people, as they purge and wrestle with themselves during the day of repentance) but also connected to the name of a demon in Jewish mythology (according to Harper). I suppose it is the idea that prefigures a messianic drive to place sins on an entity and then banish that entity. I am not Christian, but it is common knowledge that part of the appeal of the Christian divinity is that Christ removes sins of sinners, and I can’t imagine that I’m the only one who sees the messianic idea as one that is like that of the scapegoat. Of course this was in other societies a way to ostracize some of the ugliest people in the community and at the same time “honor” them, according to the Britannica, by way of brutalizing them and banishing them, and in this way “purifying” their group.

<sup>119</sup> Surely the computer is a machine without cogs, which are teeth, coming from the Norwegian *kugg* (according to Etymology.com) in the 1200s. The equivalent to cogs? I don’t know, but you, my dear reader, probably do. That we are all connected, through space, through time, comes to me again, at this moment, in the most random of ways, one might say, but as valid as any other seed tossed on this planet, I would like to suggest. In my search for some knowledge, attending the rectangular light-tree beside me, I have stumbled upon “The Planetary Society Blog” written by an Emily Lakdawalla, and within one article by another David Seal, titled “Canto IV: A Cog in the Wheel, A New Star in the Sky,” there is an epigraph from Dante, the ending of the third cantica, where Dante and Virgil are back in the world, surviving another hellish circle, and looking up “to see once more the stars.” More than this, we have an obituary of a space scientist who was lost in Turkey, in a balloon accident, a man by the name of Kevin Buerle, but the connection between Kevin and Cassini [a NASA mission to Saturn upon which he worked on the imaging of Saturn’s moons], and Dante and Galileo (some, according to Seal, have said that Dante’s poetry inspired Galileo, that Galileo “lectured on the *Inferno*”) strikes me as being significant in and of itself, but it connects, as well, as you will see if you keep reading.

<sup>120</sup> So recently that this ink, were I to be printing, would be still fresh, there has come to be a treaty in force banning the use of cluster bombs, for the reason of collateral damage, although the US has not signed this treaty. The advance of weaponry, and protection from the weaponry of others, has only blossomed, and although the weapons are becoming smarter (there are smart bombs), humans remain remarkably prone to error. While we now have precision-guided weapons (the older bombs have been given a variety of names, ranging from “dumb bombs” to “gravity bombs”), the decision to use them is still in the hands of a human being. Helen Caldicott, the Australian doctor and professor, has both written and spoken about the five thousand hydrogen bombs shared by the US and Russia. She referred to the danger of mistakes made with the early warning alert systems, saying that there was an actual near miss (the triggering of an “accidental nuclear war”) about fifteen years ago when Yeltzin almost “pressed the button” ([peacearchive.org/caldicott2.htm](http://peacearchive.org/caldicott2.htm)).

<sup>121</sup> The truth is, Grace lusts after Prospero. She said that once. I made her say it. I’ve tried to remove that sentiment, as it has become unspeakably clear to me in my recent studies in Postcolonialism that he—my former crush, my most favorite of all Shakespeare’s men, even in my (relative) youth—is despicable, in sooth, that not only is he a control freak but a racist and imperialist and finger of the colonialist. It would never do to have my heroine allied with this Master-man. Postcolonial master, control freak, it’s the sacrifice that draws her, namely the fear of Sycorax. In another incarnation, she will not be so afraid...but fear not, Starlinsky resembles Ferdinand more than the wizard. Ah, yes, there’s a part of me that still loves Prospero, for the reason that I once loved him and his creator.

<sup>122</sup> “Deep” is deceptive. An adjective, from the Old English *deop* it means “profound, awful, mysterious,” and from the PIE *\*dheub-* it means “deep, hollow” (etymonline.com). I add this to show that the “deep” of dreams is not something reflecting measured space alone but some other thing that is immeasurable and almost defies defining. It’s ancient and identified with that product of the second day of creation, although it became further defined on Day 3, when it was separated from the dry land. When Jonah, that troublesome prophet, was delivered into the depths of what must be the Mediterranean Sea (1500 meters deep, less than half as deep as the Atlantic and Pacific [and the Pacific is slightly deeper than the Atlantic]), he experienced “deep.” When one of my students told me something I said was “deep,” I wondered for a



long time what it might mean, thinking that she was dismissing what I'd said, when in fact, calling it "deep" was a kind of compliment, she later informed me. I think in the sixties, we called it "heavy," but maybe not. Worlds are contained within simple words, or in this case (in the case of "deep"), oceans.

<sup>123</sup> Paramecium is the protozoa from which our worm might have descended. "A large unicellular protozoan covered with vibrating cilia...found in stagnant warm freshwater," is part of the description offered by the website [metamicrobe.com/paramecium](http://metamicrobe.com/paramecium). According to [microbewiki.kenyon.edu](http://microbewiki.kenyon.edu), they are useful in genetics research.

<sup>124</sup> Cherry as a term representing the maidenhead or hymen is American slang, considered vulgar, coming into the language in the late 1800s, according to [Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com). Cherry as maidenhead doesn't appear in the O.E.D, in its three columns of information, among which is the statement with which botanists and linguists agree, have come to the same conclusion through different means, namely that it was unlikely that the cherry tree was indigenous to England or western Europe.

<sup>125</sup> "A colloquial modern alternative spelling of" what you think it means, according to [Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com). Later on, Harper writes that it's "a jocular or slightly euphemistic variant...reflects the vowel in the O.E. verb" for which the German is *scheissen*. The PIE route is *\*skheid-* and it means "split, divide, separate. Related to *shed* (v) on the notion of 'separation' from the body (cf. L. *excrementum*...)" he further writes in his [Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com).

<sup>126</sup> Stupor, according to [dictionary.com](http://dictionary.com), is derived from the Middle English *stup* which translates to astonishment or insensibility. [Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com) indicates a relationship to the Latin *stupor*, and would seem to have a connection to the Latin *stupere* meaning "to be stunned, amazed confounded." [Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com) also connects this to the PIE root *\*(s)tupe-* meaning "hit." My father forbade us to use the word "stupid," punishable in the same way speaking "fresh" to our mother was, namely soap in the mouth. My father, it must be said, was not above hitting us for using the word "stupid," although as a rule, he reserved the spankings for more hateful misbehavior, such as talking back. Usually it was for something said rather than something done. You may notice that Grace is not above cursing. My daughter, at twelve, was not above cursing. A few months ago, for a class in History of the English Language, I did a study, with a friend, on "women's language." I learned that females are taught to use disempowering language, so that they might say "Oh, my," or *a la* Shirley Temple, "Oh, my goodness." I understand the idea of there being power in cursing, in exercising one's freedom with the language. Armed with this knowledge, I permit my daughter to curse in my presence. I expect I will regret this at some later point, but I will never resort to corporal punishment, which I believe is abusive and *stupid*.

<sup>127</sup> The meaning of "testicle" dates from the 14<sup>th</sup> century, according to [etymonline.com](http://etymonline.com).

<sup>128</sup> Of course by now it's all so clear and obvious, the worm as proto: he's a first, a prototype, and the word "proto" comes from the Greek *protos* meaning first, along with *zoia* (think "zoo"), which means "animal."

<sup>129</sup> "Hi" is American English, a greeting (1862, according to [Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com)), "probably a variant of Middle English *hy* or *hey*."

<sup>130</sup> "Bait" is a word that comes from Old Norse, *beita* or food, and Old English, *bat*, which means "food" or literally "to cause to bite" ([Etymonline.com](http://Etymonline.com)). One must remember that Gracie's in that part of town so very near to the Fulton Fish Market, the fishing capital of the US at one point in time. Considering this, it's understandable that the worm might be feel a tad insecure.

<sup>131</sup> This must be an old saying. It was explained to me in 1971 or thereabouts by a certain Mrs. Kelly who lived below us in an large old Victorian house on Elm Street in Northampton, Massachusetts that still stands. Driving past it thirty plus years later, I stopped to take photos of a proper painted lady: very brightly colored, the massive structure itself—her large body—covered in canary yellow, with purple, green, and blue for the embellishments. Mine had been a very small room with eight sides and a turret. I lived with three other girls—all of us students at the University of Massachusetts, in Amherst. I shared the small room with one of the girls. We called it the octagon room. The other two shared a room that had a chalet-like ceiling. We'd go down to Mrs. Kelly's apartment when she wanted company. We'd have tea and cookies, and we'd gossip. Often, we'd see her sitting on the porch with her housedress, her hair piled up, or similarly dressed but looking out of her second story window, as we came back from school, hitchhiking back on route 9. "Did you get the drift?" Mrs. Kelly would say. "Or were you snowed under?" It took me a while to get "the drift." She never quite took to me, and I always thought it was because my roommates

didn't approve of my always going off to participate in theatre, didn't stay around to socialize. I became paranoid when one of them accused me of stealing her money and her toothbrush. But what nailed my unpopularity with Mrs. Kelly, I'm guessing, was an incident that she could not have missed. One afternoon while I was baking cookies, two plainclothesmen had come to my door on the third floor landing. Mrs. Kelly lived on the second floor. That they'd actually come to her first, getting directions from her was something I'd find out much later. I was the only one home that afternoon, as it happened. My housemates were in class, I'm guessing. I heard the knock and pulled the door open. There they were. One of them held a suitcase. He flipped open the top of a brown leather briefcase right there in the hall and pulled out a manila folder, from which he retrieved an unopened letter. I recognized the letter as one I'd written to an old friend from high school. It was addressed in my handwriting. I'd wondered why she'd never responded to my letter. The year was 1971. I was in my third year of college. I'd been among those striking in my first year. Like many of my generation, I had strong feelings about politics. The war in Vietnam had not ended. At this time, there was renewed fighting (North Vietnam had launched "The Easter Offensive"), and rather than withdrawing completely from Vietnam, Nixon escalated. He increased the fighting up to the 18<sup>th</sup> Parallel. I was upset. I'd written about this to my friend. On a whim, not thinking I might stamp my own self with the etchings of an activist—rather than an artist—in government records, I took my pen and blackened Eisenhower's one eye on the stamp. I gave him a pirate hat, and on the back of the envelope, I wrote, "If God exists, he surely is a f---er." The man holding the envelope asked if I'd sent the letter. "Yes," I said. "Are you this person?" he said, pointing to my name on the back. "Did you deface the stamp?" he said. "Yes," I said, as the word "deface" bounced, something sinister, in my mind. "Did you know that it is illegal to do that?" he said. "No," I said. Then he pointed to the offending word and asked if I had written "that word." "Yes," I said. "Did you know that it is illegal to write profanities on public property?" I didn't know that my letter had become public property, I said—something like that. In the end, he opened the letter, gave me the contents, and he kept the envelope. Somewhere in Washington there is a drawer where my envelope molders. At the time, I was less worried about Washington than Mrs. Kelly. How obvious it soon became that she had seen and heard all of it, every last word. For the rest of my time in that house, I had a criminal's status.

<sup>132</sup> These words, for those not in the know, refer to items donned by observant males of the Jewish faith. My father once told me that he wore them as a child, and that when he was a child, almost all Jews were orthodox. My mother disagreed, as she was not—they ate shrimp and lobster in restaurants—although in her house, they strictly obeyed the laws of *kashrut* (the word *kosher* comes from this word). For me, "Orthodox" was always defined as the stringently observant sect of Judaism, and those who are Orthodox respect not just the "spirit" of the law, but the "letter" of it as well, and these letters come laden with meaning and innuendo and histories of their own. The *tallis*, or prayer shawl, was worn during prayer, and *tsit-tsit* are fringed strings worn around the waist of orthodox males almost the way a cross might be worn, reminders, I imagine, but *tsit-tsit* are something more for the finger than the eye: faith weaving itself into your soul by way of your body.

<sup>133</sup> Obvious, most of these words are, as Yiddish itself is more modern in its scavenging as a language, maybe is more apparent than others a scavenger language, but I wonder whether all languages are scavengers of sorts, all of us scavenging for the available word or phrase to match the ineffable ribbon or fragment of a thing inside or outside of our minds.

<sup>134</sup> This comes straight out of the land of nonfiction, as my father was stationed in Germany and France, and when I complained about the dropping of the bombs, he tried to mollify me with the argument that I wouldn't exist if those bombs hadn't been deployed, as he was slated to ship out to Japan in the weeks before the bombs fell. In the untrammelled woods within a block of our houses, we played many games of war, my friends and I, with scenes that were straight out of the movies, although we used sticks for guns. The setting for our scenes of attack would itself be under a siege of sorts when the woods were sold to be the site of an elementary school. Prior to that, the children of the town would all be going to the same old school that had once served the outlying towns, as well.

<sup>135</sup> Looking up the word root for "queen," I find a variety of words, from *cwaen* to the (voiced plosive) PIE root *\*gwen-* with the meaning of "woman" and not any woman but a wife of a king. I hadn't known that Gwen was connected to queen, not consciously, at least, but recently, that is—in the last few months—I

had undergone hypnosis to see if I might recall any past lives, and I came up with a life where I'd been named Gwendolyn—the name “Gwen” came quickly to my lips when I was asked. The time was the 1600s, the place Gloucester. I was wearing black. There was a baby, naked, not mine. There was a dark city, a clearing, woods, a stake. I didn't want to go any further. I skipped over and found myself in a cave with healers, themselves hooded, a candle for light. Strangeness of memory, of fantasy, where they collide. Suffice to say, this word suggests a woman apart, and it is also a bee apart, as the queen, according to the OED is “a fully-developed female bee,” and she has a “queen-cage” to transport her, much like the old Empresses did, a cage that kept them in, and well, our Beatrice is no such queen. She belongs to the world of matriarchs. The word “bee” by the way, comes from the Old English *beo*, and “perhaps”—the Oxford Universal Dictionary (of my youth) writes—the root *bi* from the Teutonic, as well, suggesting a possible meaning of “to fear” in the sense of quivering or buzzing” (162). According to several Internet sources, today's apiaries feel it's best to rear one's own queen bee, which is done by feeding heavy doses to the bee selected by the apiarist to be the royal mother. Although the queen wasp's stinger is doubly barbed (one to secure the sting, the other to dispel the venom

[commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sting\_ofQueen\_Wasp.jpg]), the queen honey bee's stinger, unbarbed as it is, may be used more than once, as stinging does not signal the end of the queen's life. By the way, honey bees, are not native to the US but were introduced by Europeans.

<sup>136</sup> Ezra Pound in his *ABC of Reading* wrote: “Artists are the antennae of the human race, but the bullet-headed many will never learn to trust the great artists.”

<sup>137</sup> Ironically, perhaps, for the name of a stinger, Beatrice, the name, means bringer-of-happiness (rather than bringer-of-stings). While we're at it, Zelda is a name that might descend from Griselda, or Salda, or Selig. It can mean anything from luck to blessedly happy, and it can also signal the long suffering patient Griselda of Chaucer's tales, from the Boccaccio *Decameron*. I had none of this in mind. I selected it for the “Z” and the “D”, for the earthy sound of a very grounded name. Zeldele is merely a result of adding the suffix indicating endearment.

<sup>138</sup> In the event that you are like I once was and do not know that there is difference between the lotus and the water lily, I'd like to make it clear that I am deliberately being ambiguous. This flower is a lotus. She is exotic, she grows from slime, produces a thing of beauty. Something more pedestrian about the water lily that makes me want to give this lotus her name. Both these flowers are touchy. Both require still waters, no creeks, but the lotus cannot handle cold water. The lotus rises up to the height of a fourth grader, whereas the lily sits down on the water itself. The lotus, too, can sit in the water, so long as she's born in the soil at the bottom of the pond or lake. In the end, it's best to consider this character a hybrid, a mongrel, a postcolonial survivor.

<sup>139</sup> Crows are examples of Passeriformes Order, or “perching birds,” which include swallows, wrens, mockingbirds, robins, warblers, flycatchers, finches, starlings, and jays (www.fcps.edu/islandcreeks/ecology/birds.htm). Shortly before 9/11, there were a number of strange events that took place among my groups of friends, occurrences that seemed to presage the tragedy when, like Lot's wife, we women looked back. There seemed to have been too many dogs dying suddenly, too many cats being hit by cars, and then there was this crow-baby that fell from one of my trees, and my cats somehow did not register the fall. I could not figure a way to re-position this one on the tree; another nestling had fallen and lay there unmoving, dead. I was attuned to the chirp, could barely sleep that one night, felt the life of the nestling crow was on my watch. I called the local humane society but they would not come, and in a panic I called my friend, the one with bird-magic. She came, captured the bird, fed her cat food with chopsticks and rescued her, took her upstate, back to her home, and raised her for 9 years, built a large, extravagant aviary, got to know her caws, and named her Buzzy. Buzzy had a murder of friends who'd come and go, visit, and she ate well, loved well, and sadly died; whether before or after her time, it's hard to guess, because surely her days were numbered on the grassy floor of our yard. She'd been only a few days old, we found out. In a sense her short life was a bit of a miracle.

<sup>140</sup> The ring of a standard telephone in 1980 was pedestrian, resembling a buzzer or a bell, something that simulated “ding-a-ling.” “Ring” is among those words that take up lots of space in the OED—eighteen columns on the one I'm using, with its 1971 copyright and its rectangular “reading glass”—my husband's gift from his brothers for his entrance into graduate school some four years after the copyright. It's not until

the tenth column that the definition and derivation of “ring” as the thing a bell does, but it’s still a noun, defined thusly: “A set or peal of (church) bells,” and then the second definition uses the word “ringing”: “A ringing sound or noise” (2551). I am confused, because prior to this, all nine columns referred to the circular band in its kaleidoscopic applications, mainly something that was a thing, visual, rather than abstract or sonar. Is “ring” the sound of a circular band? No, although one wonders if the shape connoted by the word characterizes the sound. In the thirteenth column, under “Signification,” “ring” is defined more intricately: “to give out the clear or resonant sound characteristic of certain hard metals when struck with, or striking upon, something hard...” (2552). There will be no definition of “ring tones” in this edition of the OED.

<sup>141</sup> Once upon a time New York City offered its pedestrians pay phones on street corners, well, not on the corner exactly, but somewhere in the middle or near the corner of most of its streets, certainly in Greenwich Village, where Grace lives. In the near thirty years that have transpired since the initial writing, laying down the bones of this book, telephone protocol, at least in terms of the devices themselves, has changed. I remember when I was in the sixth grade, my boyfriend gave me a walkie-talkie. He lived about a quarter of a mile away from me, much less than that, if you were a bird or a radio wave, and so one night I was in bed with the walkie-talkie (we’re talking the early sixties) and my father started yelling, telling my mother, “It isn’t right. She’s talking to a boy in bed!” I had to relinquish the walkie-talkie, give it back to my friend. So it happens that a few nights ago, I walk into my daughter’s room, and there she is, a near fourteen-year old young lady sprawled on her bed multi-tasking with her laptop open, doing homework and skyping with ...a boy. Hmmm, I say to myself. Hmmm. In this way, one can see that technology helps to dictate the mores and not the other way around. While Starlinsky certainly did not have a cell phone at his disposal, he did—as a doctor—have access to beepers and pagers, as did most professionals (and anyone else willing to pay for the service).

<sup>142</sup> Hard to resist punning on Gracie Mansion, the home of New York’s mayor, located on 88<sup>th</sup> and East End Avenue in Manhattan. It was built, by Archibald Gracie, in 1799 on the same site that George Washington resided, although that building was destroyed by the British in the Revolutionary War. Gracie’s home, a mouse hole of sorts, comparatively speaking, is located as before mentioned on a street I’m calling Bleecker in the West Village.

<sup>143</sup> Starlinsky has a beeper, yes he does.

<sup>144</sup> In Yiddish a *bissel* (or *bisl*) means “a little bit.”

<sup>145</sup> Yes, there will be several “rings” with their flock of meanings.

<sup>146</sup> Planaria are flatworms: “the common name for several of the free-living (turbellarian) flatworms belonging to the order Tricladida, a name that derives from their digestive cavities. They are hermaphroditic, yet they reproduce sexually... while the back half of the worm is anchored, the front half moves forward until the worm snaps in half. Each half regenerates the missing parts. Such planarians can also regenerate parts that are cut from the body” (education.yahoo.com/reference/enclopediaentry/planaria). Thinking of the earth with this capacity perhaps changes the way we might look at evolution or even creationism. Meek or not, with a capacity like this, surely the planaria will inherit the earth.

<sup>147</sup> Her dream—and my novel. Metafiction this is—a series of takes and re-takes, a layering, an interruptus,—all dedicated to the task of seducing a reader, taking in a reader, then shaking up a reader—how demanding on all of us! Postmodernism this is, folks, and we are multi-tasking, retrieving fragments of the exploding universe. Really, we need the many arms of Shiva-Kali. We should be aware, we should be conscious. All in service of this novel it is, the message that is a leak from contemporary society coming back to show its face. A cautionary tale this is—given to a society that knows all, corrupted by a history and perhaps an aberrant impulse inherent in the species, an impulse toward self-destruction that masks as destruction of the other.

<sup>148</sup> This is a reference to something Albert Einstein wrote in a letter of a condolence to a man and wife who had lost a child. The man was a doctor who’d helped German refugees in Nazi Germany. Einstein’s letter shows a side of him that is on speaking terms with inexpressible suffering: “For the most part we humans live with a false impression of security and a feeling of being at home in a seemingly familiar and trustworthy physical and human environment. But when the expected course of everyday life is interrupted, we realize that we are like shipwrecked people trying to keep their balance on a miserable

plank in the open sea, having forgotten where they came from and not knowing wither they are drifting. But once we fully accept this, life becomes easier and there is no longer any disappointment”(Albert Einstein: *The Human Side* [1981] edited by Helen Dukas and Banesh Hoffman).

<sup>149</sup> As compared with the current fare of \$2.25, some twenty years later.

<sup>150</sup> Ah, now it’s an egg, whereas before it was a planaria, this earth that we get to invent century by century, our placenta, after all.

<sup>151</sup> Would like to think this is short for “student,” but that would never do, although one could imagine a certain amount of studying, enjoyable though it may be, to get and keep this job. No, there are two roots here, and neither of them have a whit to do with the study necessary for such a position: one from the PIE *\*stu-* “variant of base *\*sta-* to ‘stand’” and related to *stet* (, such as “studded,” the verb, defined in the 1500s was “as though sprinkled with nails with conspicuous heads”); the other, also from original PIE base, transformed into “*stod*, herd of horses, places where horses are kept for breeding,” moving into “sense of ‘male horse kept for breeding’ . . . first recorded 1803; meaning ‘man who is highly active and proficient sexually’ is attested from 1895; that of ‘any young man’ is from 1929” (Etymonline.com). Oh well, proficient he must be, and whether he gets that way from study or gift, might well be immaterial.

<sup>152</sup> Although he did not invent this phrase (“for reasons unknown [but time will tell]”), Samuel Beckett, the writer and amanuensis for the increasingly blind James Joyce, used it swimmingly (because juxtaposed against the second clause and a host of other reasons, as well ), in the mouth and heart and head of his un-Lucky character, and it is for this reason that I use it—as I am unable to think of this phrase—even the first part of it, the first three words—without its calling up (as if the second part were contained within the first, or a dim echo of the first, because what is unknown will eventually be known, that every secret will out in time) this reference in *Waiting for Godot*. A rare book for a ninth grade class, I say, as someone who’s spent the better part of her life teaching English at various levels. However, I, along with twenty or so others, became well acquainted with this book and its message ( of love despite meaninglessness) early on in our careers in just such a class in our small New Jersey town; this was slightly before the advent of AP classes (which is to say that it was a time when the College Board was not getting as significant revenue as it would later get, and from a short history on the subject promoted by the College Board itself, it seems as if the late 60s was when glimmers of it began). We read the book again as seniors, along with Hesse’s *Siddhartha* and Camus’ *The Stranger*. We were well versed in existentialism by the time we were released from that high school and its rebellious English department whose branding has informed my life ever since. I spent many a college moment—usually in the wee hours—recalling that inane conversation between Didi and Gogo. (The latter was the name I gave to the first dog ever that I committed myself to—really very difficult to think of owning, as if one could or should possess another living thing. I gave Gogo absolute freedom in my undergraduate years. I remember once passing him going the other way, as I walked down from my dorm at UMass. An un-neutered dog, he met his tragic end in the territory of my graduate school, in Solon, Iowa, where I lived with dear friends, poets and fiction writers, they were. We spent many a frigid day, looking for Georgia—Louie Skipper’s dog, and Gogo, who’d gone missing. We put up signs and followed leads, and eventually adopted puppies, new ones, that were two years old when we found out—by way of a phone call a week before I was leaving Iowa for good—that they’d been shot by neighbors, for roaming, for being garbage hounds. Until then, Gogo was known for humping the thighs of my suitors and for eating—as a puppy—the very first and last ounce of marijuana I ever bought. ) As well, it became a conversation we taught to the first child born child among all of my various groups of friends—my closest friend, she is, and her darling son is himself now approaching forty with a career in high end literary magazines. We would recite the repeating anthem-like banter, as if it were a nursery rhyme, and he would join in, every other line: “Let’s go./ We can’t./ Why not? /We’re waiting for Godot./ Oh.”

<sup>153</sup> One could spend a book on this word. It is used with the almost redundant “one” in the previous paragraph, considering that the “uni” in universe means “one.” The one one, defined by *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* 2010, as the sum total of everything in existence—it does not take someone with a degree in logic to see there cannot be more than one of such a thing.. “Verse” by the way, coming from “vorsum, versum” is “a noun made from the perfect passive participle of *vertere*, meaning ‘something rotated, rolled, changed’”( Oxford University Press’s *A Latin Dictionary*, Lewis and Short, pp1933).

Clearly the earth is not really “flatter than a planaria,” as the worm asserts, but according to NASA, the universe is “spacially flat with only a 2% margin of error” (W, *Shape of the Universe*, [NASA website]). As our language reflects our knowledge and then creates its own set of new knowledge for which we will invariably need new language—the way language begets is similar to the way the one-universe begets. This is because, of course, there is the universe that we know, and the universe we have yet to discover, which complicates everything—and it makes all the begetting in the Old Testament look like tiddlywinks.

<sup>154</sup> Synchronicity and randomness, opposites that converge as I write this, as I approach the old coals of this work, trying to infuse them with new life. It is/was Sunday, August 1, 2010, a year short of thirty years to the day the original manuscript with Grace’s story was scripted, sent out soon thereafter by an agent who said I was the female Philip Roth. And months later, when I brought her my next manuscript, she told me I would never be published with Ronald Reagan in the White House. Ah, what to do with either of these pronouncements? How grateful I am for the hope she placed in me, however misguided it might have been. Amused I was at how the information had made a home in my brain, such that when it became obvious that Bill Clinton would win the democratic nomination, and how much of a winning candidate he seemed to be, that the thought placed itself before me: “Oh, maybe I’ll be published soon!” On August 1, 2010, what had spoken to me about randomness, about synchronicity, how it plays out in bodies, was a headline and video about a married couple deployed to separate locations immediately after the wedding. They were reunited in midair, in Afghanistan, during a refueling. One Navy, the other Air Force, an all-business rendezvous in the dark. Newlyweds spotting each other in their respective cockpits. Risky, is it not? Weapons and tankers and fuel, oh my! So, it is not totally out of the realm of the possible for my two lovers to meet “not really by chance.” Once, I admit, this happened to me, when I was walking down the big hill that was the other side of my street, and my lover happened to be walking up.

<sup>155</sup> The word “run” may be a merging of two words, according to Harper—*rinnan* from *runnen*, and *renwanan*, from the German *rinnen*, “to flow, run”—both from PIE *\*ri-ne-a*—to flow or run (think of Rhine)(Etymonline.com). Interesting it is that Rhine comes up, as “run” is a word that connotes “a small stream” (Etymonline.com) in England and America. And of course there’s the idea of a run-in, as well (Etymonline.com). For Grace, when the word came to her, she made like a river, and ran. Now, the word “escape” which is the second “word” that comes with the sound of a clock, has the added warning with the added syllable and the sound that closes the mouth, seals up the air. The word means what it says, namely “get out of one’s cape, leave the pursuer with just one’s cape” (Etymonline.com).

<sup>156</sup> The word “house” is not “home,” and it’s “house” here, as opposed to the word “home” that sits just on the left corner of my computer, as it does on most websites. “Hus” is Old English, meaning shelter. It is not “home,” which etymonline.com employs “Buck’s” example to qualify itself: OE “ham is ‘dwelling, house, estate, village’ from P.Gmc. \*haimaz (cf.O.Fris. hem ‘home, village,’” and then “‘Home’ in the full range and feeling of [Modern English] home is a conception that belongs distinctively to the word home and some of its Gmc. cognates and is not covered by any single word in most of the IE languages. [Buck].” It was not less than thirty years ago, a friend asked me a few questions, and later, she told me the meaning of my answers. The first question had to do with one’s house. If I had my choice of houses, where would it be. I said my house would be in the woods somewhere. She asked what would it look like—and I said, lots of windows, lots of light—that’s all that mattered. I didn’t care what it looked like, but it had to have lots of air. Then she told me I would see a vase, and I should describe it. I told her the vase would have water in it, and I would drink. She later told me the house represented the self, and the vase represented art. There was another part of this exercise which is now lost to me. The reason I’ve gone on is that in some way, when Grace says goodbye to this house, she is saying goodbye to a self. It’s probably obvious. Some people say one discovers a new self upon each move, each new house, each new domicile, each new place one sets foot, one sheds a skin. It’s Annatefka of *Fiddler on the Roof*. But it’s not reserved to shelter, alone. Our identities are like tentacles wrapping selves around a multidimensional world. In some ways we are anything we love. Music, art, language, a tree—the more we love, the more we are. For a while, it was the *Dr. Kildare* theme (because I loved Richard Chamberlain), or the theme of *Lawrence of Arabia* (because I loved Peter O’Toole). It was *Bonnie and Clyde* and *The Sting*. It’s rap to some, classical to others, and when it’s gone for long enough, and one looks back, one turns into a block of salt, if one’s a woman. And if a man looks back, he becomes a woman, and the second time he looks back, he’s salt. It’s both tragic and

romantic, and it must haunt like a gift that will be taken away. It lifts you then stabs you. And for me, now it's music alone of all the arts that makes this unmistakably clear. And if I could, I would do whatever it takes for the reader to imagine that music right now: Mahler, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms. And, yet, when Grace gives up this home, she is still part, if not a greater part of the larger home, the inescapable home, the one we all live in. Eric Sanderson reminds us that the Greek word for home is nothing resembling house. Its concept is large, larger than any kind of individual self—more like the self yogis talk about as being a drop of water in the sea. It's as if that skin one sheds, that illusion, becomes compost—the best we can be is compost. The Greek word is "oikos, and the word ecology derives from this (Sanderson 182). When we think of ecology as the study of home, it is like the idea of a large interconnecting maze we live in. This idea, he says, is a "cornerstone of conservation thinking" and Sanderson asks us to consider seeing through the lens of California naturalist John Muir: "When we try to pick out anything by itself we find that it is bound fast by a thousand invisible cords that cannot be broken, to everything in the universe" (Sanderson 192).

<sup>157</sup> Just in case you've never felt like slapping your head in disgust, this is a Yiddish expression of horror, fear, disgust (think "Oh, no!") with a comedic ring (that word again).

<sup>158</sup> Another Yiddish expression, meaning something like lunatic, crazy-girl...a little comedic.

<sup>159</sup> It's hard to pass up the carrot, whose indo-European word is "ker" meaning horn, especially when one considers all the hoopla about Moses and his *keren*, the word in Hebrew for horn, which has been considered elsewhere, when we think of horns as being what grows upon a cuckold, and of course the carrot becomes an obvious phallic symbol, and of course Moses had the Phallus (the terribly male God of the Old Testament spoke only to him and made Himself visible to Moses), but to think he wore a double set on his head—the symbolism is laden. The gourd of course refers to Jonah's plant that rises up and is then destroyed by the worm—all at the command of the God of the Old Testament. But the carrot originally came from Iran, and it was from Iran that it traveled to Holland. It's not always orange in color but ranges from purple to white and includes pink and red in its variation, colors one might happen to find inhabiting the human phallus. Every once in about fifteen years, my younger sister reminds me of my unique method of deterring her from early experimentation. We were all girls, no brothers. I was just out of college, she was finishing up high school, dating a fellow I thought was unworthy of her. I was suffering heartbreak; my long-term relationship was caput. I was perhaps bitter. Apparently my tactic worked, she told me years later. "Whatever you do," I had told her. (I do believe this was the kind of thing that would have slipped entirely out of my memory, had she not recently reminded me.) "Just don't look at it, because it's all green and purple and red—the ugliest thing you ever saw in your life."

<sup>160</sup> When I was no more than sixteen years old, I had a job as a swim counselor at the town pool. I taught young children. I remember one little girl—she was, perhaps four years old, and her mother had recently given birth. I was teaching her how to blow bubbles into the water, and there she was gripping onto the side of the municipal pool, her face all shivering with the chill and excitement. To calm her down, I asked her about her new baby sister. I said, "So how old she now?" "Oh," the little girl said, her lips cold and so red, her face with its down and softness, such a serious look her eyes. "She's too young to have a number."

<sup>161</sup> For Brits, this seemingly innocuous expression is a "Minced Oath" which, according to "The Phrase Finder" is "a sub-group of euphemisms used to avoiding swearing when expressing surprise or annoyance" such as Shakespeare did when he wrote "gadzooks" "(God's hooks—referring to the nails in the cross)" ...so, "to mince" is to protect the ears of those who might be offended ([phrases.org.uk/meanings/minced-oath.html](http://phrases.org.uk/meanings/minced-oath.html)). A recent example occurred for me when my daughter came home with the story about her friend who said, "son of a pickle," on the bus. "Gee Willickers" is of course, the mincing of Jesus, as is "Gee Whizz." It's also quite possible that "Willi" might be slang for penis ([answers.com](http://answers.com)). In grad school, I had an English professor, a Texan teaching Sidney, Spenser and Shakespeare at Iowa, his drawl, really drawing out those iambs, telling us that "Will" indeed was just that: "Whoever hath her wish, thou hast thy Will/ And Will to boot, and Will in over-plus." Shakespeare a mincer? He minced but not in over-plus.

<sup>162</sup> Humility and hubris opposing ideas, *humus* and *humilis* are Latin, meaning humble and low as dirt; hubris is from the Greek *hybris* "wanton violence, insolence, outrage," originally "presumption of the gods," and of unknown origin, according to Harper of Etymonline.com. Surely one does not think less of a worm for being close to the earth. It's true however that one of the consequences of the mishap in the

Garden of Eden was the serpent's loss of his legs, so perhaps there might indeed be something that make a serpent bristle about his closeness with the earth. Of course the word "human" also relates to the "humus" that is rendered of the earth. The world knows the Old Testament progenitor, Adam, which is the Hebrew word for "man" and which is a transliteration of the word for earth, although the earth is feminine, with the feminine ending: *adamah*. Harper suspects "human" must be a mix of "homo" (*homo* in Greek *homos*—means "one and the same"; it is the Latin word for "man") and "humus." And so now I must consult the Old Testament, the one that is mine, that I bought in Jerusalem some years before I began to write this book. I had studied Hebrew as a language in grad school, after taking a semester of Aramaic. A year after I got my MFA from Iowa, having saved enough money to travel throughout Europe and Israel, I spent months in Jerusalem studying Hebrew—both the ancient and the modern-day, as I went both to Ulpan and a woman's Yeshiva. It seems that the very first mention in Genesis, that is after all the other creations have come and gone, right after God decides to give the animals the ability to fill the skies and seas and multiply themselves upon the land, that gift of self-reproduction, after He sees that it's "good," God decides—makes a kind of announcement/pronouncement—that he will make "man"—the term is "*adam*" "in our image, after our likeness..." And He said he would give dominion to *adam*.—to the man. Certainly anyone looking at the face of Adam in Michelangelo's most famous rendering of him will see humility in the eyes of the man looking at his Creator, but his behavior in the Garden, at the behest of Eve and her wormserpent, perhaps suggests the insolence of hubris. Maybe that gift of dominion has something to do with the hubris?

<sup>163</sup> Although this is fiction, I am mixing a good amount of fact, and I would like to point out that there are some flies whose hearing is connected to their antennae, but there are also some that have ears located on their thorax and use their hearing to locate their prey. This fly is a composite. In the mix is also a very specific fly who makes his debut in the novel *Cion* by the South African novelist Zakes Mda, who is also my dissertation director.

<sup>164</sup> From the same root come the words "grace," "grave," and "gravid," and although I was completely in the dark about that, this book—in a very literal way—is the journey of a woman through these words.

<sup>165</sup> Clearly the map of Europe has vastly changed in the last thirty years. Just as we know where we were on 9/11, we know where we were when the Berlin Wall started coming down, when people started chipping away at that near thirty-year old structure (1961 it was erected) dividing Berlin in late 1989, but it wasn't until January of 1992 that Mikhail Gorbachev said, "The end of the Cold War is our common victory." Helen Caldicott is my source for finding out how close we came to nuclear holocaust in 1979 when a Pentagon employee inserted a game that the computer took to be the real thing and activated the early warning system (*Nuclear Madness: What We Can Do*, p 109). There were other close calls as well. Dr. Caldicott is particularly incensed at Clinton for missing the window of opportunity of full disarmament that presented itself to him when Yeltsin was at the helm. "He had no courage," Dr. Caldicott said of Clinton. And the reason he has no courage, according to Caldicott, has to do with his never going to Viet Nam, so he didn't know how to stand up to the Pentagon which Caldicott says is filled with "sociopaths" like Rumsfeld and Cheyney, who are brilliant but without moral compass (interview 10/1/11 by Heidi Hutner, posted on her website: [ecofeminism.mothering.blogspot.com](http://ecofeminism.mothering.blogspot.com)). The rumor is that Clintons and Obamas—both families—have their personal fortune in things nuclear. When Professor Hutner asks Caldicott in this interview for hope, for a way to pursue the dismantling of nuclear energy, Caldicott angrily questions why it is people don't vote in the US—says it's mandatory in Australia. She says that the people don't make sure their representatives represent them. How corrupt the politicians are. How people with "full bellies" are unwilling to be moved to change—but Caldicott seems inspired by the *Occupy Wall Street* movement that is, as of 10/15/11, still holding strong in Zuccotti Park. Caldicott offers a kind of hope in something that sounds very much like the waterlily's "winding way" of life, in a little ditty sang to her by her father: "The motion of the ocean...is really nowhere...so follow the stars...we don't know where we're going but we'll be there soon" (Hutner, [ecofeminism.mothering.blogspot.com](http://ecofeminism.mothering.blogspot.com), "Ecofeminism and Mothering Ruminations: Helen Caldicott October 1, 2011").

<sup>166</sup> Now here, Zelda, if she could, would like to take issue with me. "The energetic impulse," she would like to say, "will mitigate the problem, will defuse more than meets the eye." I, on the other hand, have said to her, "Zelda—I have one word for you—namely, landmines. And I have another: plutonium." In truth, I, like PreHistory, have oodles of words, oodles of things that seem to have no solution. Zelda



smiles, glares, really, her eyes afire, her dress of teal and emerald, a mix of these colors—this large pasture in western Massachusetts that I happen to be presently surrounded by offers up its color, and the sound of song birds and iridescent flies, seducing me into hope, arguing the lucid pessimism my recent readings on the fate of this planet have given me. “The earth has the last word,” Zelda says, speaking for the earth here, in this book, the word hers—although who will hear it?

<sup>167</sup> Not even in this one, I’m afraid.

<sup>168</sup> I made up this name. This short passage (it became part of a showcase I did—a one-woman show, that Woodie King, Jr. produced, with musicians Butch Morris, John Dean, and Wayne Horvitz, in New York City) came from a conversation I had with one of my parents’ best friends, my beloved uncle, when he explained that he’d bought stock in warplanes for his grandchildren who were then toddlers. It baffled me, and it saddened me, so I wrote this. And it is with outrage rather than sorrow that I recall the investments of the Clintons and Obamas—in the deadly nuclear energy. One wonders if the difficulty our country has in switching from nuclear to sustainable energy might have its roots in the personal investments of our government leaders—which make my uncle’s warplanes seem like succotash.

<sup>169</sup> Bill McKibben, in his book *Eaarth*, writes, “If an alien landed in the U.S. on some voyage of exploration, he might well report back to headquarters that we were bipedal devices for combusting fossil fuel” (28).

<sup>170</sup> I would feel remiss if I did not reference the government’s investment in uranium mines, most of which are located on land designated for Native Americans, sacred land, the pittance of territory allotted to them. The government—one can hardly believe it was in innocence—positioned Native Americans as well-paid workers among the yellowcake, deadly powder associated with the uranium mining. An acrid smell and powder like a halo and shroud around the men who came home to their families, spread the yellowcake making love to their wives, holding their children. Very high rates of cancer killed off workers, as the yellowcake seeped into the aquifers, poisoning the soil and the air, giving the people living near the mines cancer to contend with, to add to the depression, alcoholism and poverty that is a result of centuries of abuse, not the least of which is the camouflaged history of a country that is essentially governed by those whose descendants managed to successfully steal the land and commit numerous acts of genocide and make those who were here first look like the savages.

<sup>171</sup> Although it is not exactly in her awareness, what a third party might see is a slight image, a flickering of a lime green glow again. Grace is not exactly picking up the signs at this moment. Tentacles of green there are, and they will multiply, until Grace acknowledges that she has called forth a cocoon, a powerful protective mass that will not desert her.

<sup>172</sup> A potential site of civilization on Mars.

<sup>173</sup> Sundown is when all Jewish holidays begin. Sabbath, although not a festival day is still a holy day. It ends with the presence of three stars overhead. Grace is not an observant but neither is she unaware of the sacredness in the exchanges of light. Apparently, the Babylonians thought of the number 7 as unlucky, a time to refrain from doing things, and it has been suggested by the writers of etymonline.com that perhaps that was where the Jews got the idea of refraining from work on the seventh day. As well, they remind us that the word in Spanish for Saturday *Sabato* preserves the connection between the “Shabbat” of the Hebrew and the day the English brand as Saturday, not the Sabbath of the Christian world.

<sup>174</sup> The word “brick” comes from the word “break,” literally a “broken piece,” according to etymonline.com—fun to remember that in light of the way this cookie will crumble.

<sup>175</sup> In Mark Twain’s *Eve’s Diary*, Adam has an entry. Of course it’s at the end of the book, the end of the diary when Eve is no longer there, when all that is left of Eve is her diary. It’s very sad, and Adam writes, quite simply: “Wherever Eve was, there was Eden.” Also, at the end of *Finnegans Wake*, Anna Livia Plurabelle is speaking—this is one of the most beautiful passages in the English language in my opinion, so beautiful that one word, the word “home” evokes it for me; it is a passage very close to the end, going from “my great blue bedroom” to the word “Home.” In this very short passages, Joyce conjures up the soul detaching from all its encumbrances, both human and other, and it’s such a female voice, to my mind, and speaks so beautifully about “home”—and here it is for you: “my great blue bedroom, the air so quiet, scarce a cloud . In peace and silence, I could have stayed up there for always only. It’s something fails us. First we feel. Then we fall. And let her rain now if she likes. Gently or strongly as she likes. Anyway let

her rain for my time is come. I done me best when I was let. Thinking always that if I go all goes. A hundred cares, a tithe of troubles, and is there one who understands me? One in a thousand of years of the nights? All me life I have been lived among them but now they are becoming lothed to me. And I am lothing their little warm tricks. And lothing their mean cosy turns. And all the greedy gushes from out their small souls. And all the lazy leaks down over their brash bodies. How small it's all! And me letting onto meself always. And liting on all the time. I thought you were all glittering with the noblest of carriage. You're only a bumpkin. I thought you the great in all things, the guilt and glory. You're but a puny. Home!" It goes on, and this is the only mention of the word, but it conjures up the hugeness of the concept for me.

<sup>176</sup> These would be words whose vowels would range from ay to ee, whose sound is enhanced by the slight spreading of cheeks.

<sup>177</sup> The idea that the night is divided up into "watches" is an ancient one. The Old English word *waecan* means to "keep watch, be awake" and it is the word from which the "wake" is derived. It is not something I knew when deciding to have Grace cultivate a desire for this watch which you can see is something toward which she, like me, feels ambivalent—the weight of time, indeed.

<sup>178</sup> It is perhaps this star she sees, although I wish it were something more exotic like Sirius, or Vega or Betelgeuse, but I'm guessing it's not. Surely it's a star with a name, and I wonder if the stars have their names for us, as well, if they get together during their star holidays and adopt us, the richest ones, and call us names that—because of our relatively short time in their lives—must perish?

<sup>179</sup> Even though this is a fly not bound to the rules of fly-dom, as we to date know them, obviously, it is interesting to note that flies do sleep, even though they sport no eyelids. It's rather the opposite of my grandmother who used to close her eyes on occasion, and I would ask her if she were sleeping, and she would, after a moment, say, "No. I'm just resting my eyes."

<sup>180</sup> I am thinking of the way Jason speaks in *The Sound and the Fury*, namely down to the people he's relying on, although I don't wish in any way to conflate Jason with Starlinsky.

<sup>181</sup> While this is a color humans don't see, it has been given a name, and although it's inconclusive, experts generally agree that bees see this color, although they don't see many of the colors we see, such as red. In 1801, the Silesian (part of Poland, now, yet he's considered German) Johann Ritter discovered this invisible light, a year after Herschel discovered infra-red. It was later named ultra—meaning "beyond" violet.

<sup>182</sup> In the Old English, the word for breast also referred to the "seat of one's emotions," according to etymonline.com. Is it true that those—male or female—who are fixated upon breasts actually have longer lives than those who do not find their eyes riveted to the pair of protruding cosseted mammaries?

<sup>183</sup> Terrible clichés as they are comparing pride and joy to—in one case—a bird that is landed, and—in the other case—a bird whose name in verb form, second after the "occupation" of catching larks, means to "tease sportively," and applying this to a worm who has neither feathers nor impressive carriage nor any kind of proclivity for announcing the dawn.

<sup>184</sup> Regarding this description of dream-birthing, I must say that I wrote this long before my own experiences of childbirth, and before attending the birth of my closest friend, so I ask the reader to excuse the naivete of this take and to remember that it is a dream within a dream...a simulacra at best. However, I stand behind the idea that there is a bit of the miracle in every birth, that all birth is miraculous.

<sup>185</sup> Grace, grave, gravid, gravity—all with the same PIE root *\*gwer-* which spawns everything from pregnancy and wombs to burdens and catacombs, not to mention praise. Is it possible that those Latin scholars have allowed uterus to have a male ending? Shame on them. "Udder," "uterus," yes, they are utterly connected.

<sup>186</sup> What does it mean to dream of babies? Here's one: unacknowledged "hidden potential"...and if in your dream you forget your baby, it means, "there's an aspect of yourself you've abandoned" (dreammoods.com). "Dipping a baby in and out of water signifies regression...to a time where you had no worries" (dreammoods.com). Interestingly, in his copyrighted article (on the dreamsleep.net site), Craig Hamilton-Parker suggests that if a woman dreams she is nursing a baby it predicts "she will be deceived by someone she trusts."

<sup>187</sup> I have no memory of my imaginary friend whose name was "Didda," the culprit any time I misbehaved.

My mother would ask, “Who did that?” And it would always be “Didda. Didda did it.” A childhood friend had an imaginary horse and monkey. My daughter had an imaginary family that lived in a black house in the sky. Their names were Anna and Stacia—they were sisters, her sisters; in reality, she has no sisters, but she has an older brother. These sisters of hers had a father by the name of Sashicaga, and they had a pet deer, and their mother—who did not come with a name—made them minniemola for food, and minniemola was delicious. We, my son—eleven years her senior—and I, had a lot of fun asking my daughter about this family, and we did everything we could to keep it alive, to keep it going. My mother, apparently, had to set the table for Didda, or I would not eat. And then, very mysteriously, Didda decided to remain in Boston, where my mother had been born and where we had always gone for vacation, and my guess is that she’s there still.

<sup>188</sup> How lovely it is that “ilk” and “like” mean are nearly identical, constructed of the same materials—and its use as a “postponed filler” from 1778, and as a “presumed emphatic,” from, like, 1950

(etymonline.com), and we will not even begin to discuss the verb, especially as it relates to facebook.

<sup>189</sup> This comes from Rowan and Martin’s *Laugh-In*, a television show of my childhood. I couldn’t remember whether it came from *Saturday-Night Live*, or *That Was the Week That Was*, or the *Smothers’ Brothers*. What these shows have in common is a bit of satire mixed with a kind of vaudeville, their way of taking the news and putting a human, comedic spin on it, and offering their viewers a bit of a bonding experience. In separate houses, people, by way of shows like this, gained common ground, by way of questioning the status quo. I remember my parents arguing about the news, the collective swallowing of the news and the questioning of the news. Just watching one’s parents negotiate their relationship over an entertaining yet questioning performance is rather instructive for a child. My husband remembered the channel that *Laugh-in* was on, and how *Laugh-in* signaled the end of *The Man from Uncle*. For him as for me, the television was offering a landscape, a dictionary, a history book—but as first-generation Chinese, he was, I’m guessing, picking up more about America than he was about his parents.

<sup>190</sup> Who can think of the Plaza without thinking of Eloise, the precocious child who lives there in the story conceived and written by Kay Thompson that I remember living in when I was a child. I bought a collection of Eloise books for my daughter earlier than I needed to, which is to say before my daughter could possibly understand all the innuendo. And she did have the opportunity to have high tea in the Plaza with one of my old dear friends, and we windowshopped, as well with my sister, who bought her a little pink purse. In my extreme laziness, choosing to click rather than take the steps to the bookcase downstairs (to check that I’ve correctly remembered the name of the author), I have discovered, gratis of the handy Internet, that Eloise-at-the-Plaza is now a commercial venture into Birthday Party-ville, dedicated to reinscribing the humble birthday party whose anti-climax was a game of a pin-the-tail-on the donkey. Those interested and willing to invest \$80.00 per child may elect to have an Eloise party at the Plaza, where there are now rooms that ostensibly function as a kind of Eloise-land. This does underscore the changing of the guard at the Plaza, which had been used in set applications in many films and television scenes, there to establish mood and setting. Styled as a chateau from the French Renaissance, the Plaza was designed by a Henry Janeway Hardenberg in the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the mind of Grace, and perhaps me, it symbolizes the epitome of grandness and elegance.

<sup>191</sup> There is “faith” in this word, coming as it does from *fidare* “to trust” and *fidus* “faithful”—the Latin, *Adeste Fideles* might come to mind. “So called,” says etymonline.com, “from being the first word of sworn statements.”

<sup>192</sup> Yes, this is the real legalese, just a little confounded, as the “knowingly” part of the testament is problematic, one might argue. “Know” is one of those old, proto words, from PIE base *\*gno-*. The added meaning, to have sexual knowledge of “is attested from c1200,” according to Harper (etymonline.com), but the Hebrew in the Old Testament connects the two much earlier. Much, much earlier. *Yodaya* means both making love and knowledge, as well as loving one’s creator. Within the Hebrew word are other, different words with the same roots, including the root for hand, for being, and for God.

<sup>193</sup> But light can come from a number of sources and can be used metaphorically, as in the poem I happened to teach on the day I was putting together this footnote, reputedly one of the last in the Mayan calendar. I have a class (actually two) that I teach in Creative Writing, at Hunter College. The poem in question is Rilke’s poem translated by Bly, “The Archaic Torso of Apollo” by name. Light was something that came

from—it seemed to one of my classes—every pore of the headless, castrated (by time, presumably) god, by unapparent “seeds” (seeds themselves metaphoric, perhaps), but the point is there was no light source within the sculpture except for the light of the eyes, or the mind, of the viewer who might be willing to apprehend it. Or was there? And if it was, perhaps it was on a “star chart” that only someone like Charles Simic might see, as his “Stone” was another poem we discussed on this day. And did Wislawa Szymborska have both poems in mind when she wrote her “Conversation with a Stone,” among the first annotations in my book? In Szymborska’s poem, the stone rebukes the human for not having the sense of “taking part.” The stone remains aloof, does not permit entrance to the human who persists in asking, “Please let me come in.” In my first attempt to introduce the annotated book, I quoted from this poem and prayed that my manuscript would recognize me, would let me in.

<sup>194</sup>“We are signals to each other, don’t you understand?”

This was said to me more than once, and it was said with insistence. My uncle was dying of cancer in a veteran’s hospital, in Los Angeles. We’d come from the wilds of Long Island to visit, my daughter and I. She was no more than seven years old, so when I would go up to his room, my cousin—a semi-retired teacher—would amuse my daughter in the parking lot. Lots of pads and coloring books in the car, and I had a notepad myself, up there with Hank. He wanted me to take notes. It was the time of Bush, and he hated Bush. He hated Clinton, too, for his “immorality,” whereas Bush was an idiot. But maybe, Hank said, maybe Bush was faking it.

“They’re onto me,” he said, and I wrote that down.

“They might be onto you, too, though,” he said, nodding. He had that unnerving look in his eyes, and I was vulnerable to those eyes, vulnerable to the thought. You could call it raving, but for some reason I was believing it. “I hope you have courage,” he said. “But I don’t think you have.”

He could not get up out of bed. Too weak, too deranged, too much pain. His arm was covered with bruises. You could look at his arm and see the history of heroin. You could look into his eyes and see my mother there, eyes brown as the earth, with that right eye a little smaller than the left, a family trait, so that when my daughter was born, my mother took a look at her eyes and nodded as she took note.

“We are signals to each other, don’t you understand.”

I wrote that down.

“It’s signals through time. You will hear them when I’ve croaked. You will know it’s me.”

<sup>195</sup> Actually there was a game between the Oakland Athletics and the Yankees, at Yankee Stadium on this day.

<sup>196</sup> A “sob sister” is a female journalist of the female variety pens stories (or “advice columns”) that are considered sentimental. It dates to 1912, according to etymonline.com, which suggests that it’s “probably related” to O.E. *seofian* (“to lament”), and to O.H.G. “*sufan*, ‘to draw breath,’ W.Fris. *sobje*, ‘to suck.’”

<sup>197</sup> This kind of longing which I suspect is not confined to a woman, but must be a thing to which all lovers are subject, is however, but one among the ten curses the Creator assigns to Eve as punishment for tasting of the forbidden fruit. Still the worst curse is upon the snake, who lost a position second only to Adam, in the Garden, to whom—according to the *Talmud*, God says “Your sole intention was that Adam should die by eating it first and that you should then take Eve for yourself, and you came to speak to Eve first only because women are easily influenced and know how to influence their husbands” (Pentateuch with Targum Onkelos, Haphtaroth and Rashi’s Commentary Rev Rosenbaum and Dr. Silbermann, 5733; page 15).

<sup>198</sup> “Bite” and “bitter” both come from the PIE base *\*bheid-* which means “to split” or “biting”... (etymonline.com).

<sup>199</sup> Of course hysteria is a disease only suffered by women. “Thought to be caused by a dysfunction of the uterus,” writes Harper of Etymonline.com, as both the Latin and Greek words for “womb” may be seen in the root of the word: *hystericus* (L) and *Hysterikos* (G) respectively.

<sup>200</sup> At first I wrote “intolerably” but then the cadence came, from what I thought was purely Shakespeare (*Othello*) but turns out to have been used before by translators of Boccaccio (*Decameron*) and Euripides (*Hippolytus*). I’m guessing it was this phrase, the duplication of “strange” that released itself from the mind’s closet, there for a thousand repetitions, a thousand aural screenings.

<sup>201</sup> The word “dust” is an old one, coming from PIE *\*dheu-* which means dust, smoke, vapor. The idea of it being “that to which living matter decays”—according to Harper, “was in O.E., hence figuratively,

‘mortal life’” (etymonline.com). “Fairy dust”—oh, I can hear Mary Martin’s intonation—came from *Peter Pan*, the Disney confection. Not too old is the word “fairy,” writes Harper: “In reference to a class of supernatural beings, the word is not used before mid-15c” (Etymonline.com). “Fairy” comes from the word for “the Fates (Latin *fata*) and Old French *faerie*, meaning “*enchantment, magic*” (etymonline.com). The phrase itself, evoking enchantment upon the stuff of mortality, transforming it into the agent of transformation itself, belongs to the Scottish myth-maker James M. Barrie, whose first book with our beloved boy who never grew up, was published in 1904. Particularly wondrous is a word that suggests we might be able to enchant the dust, itself. Who knew that resurrection could be so close to fairy dust? While we’re at it, the word “resurrection” comes from the Latin itself (*resurgere*. [yes, with a little bit of surgery, we can all be resurrected] ) which Harper says “replaced O.E. *aeriste*” as a term for the church commemoration of “Christ’s rising from the dead” (Etymonline.com). Also, interesting is that “*resurrectionist*” was a term used to refer to a “grave-robber” in 1776 (Etymonline.com). And goodness knows well that there a surge of resurrecting going on at that time, for the future surgeons of the world. The evidence is not lost in the words, although this connection is my own, as Harper says “surgeon” comes from the Anglo-French *surgien*, and that “surgery” from the Latin *chirurgia*—both of which reference something done “by hand.”

<sup>202</sup> Foley Square is among those landmarks that was once the location of a forty-three acre-large body of (fresh) water by the name of Collect Pond. A rather substantial hill, though not the highest on the island, Mount Bayard stood not too far from where the street of the same name exists now, with water on both sides. The pond was fed by one of many, many springs that have been catalogued in Eric W. Sanderson’s book, to which I have previously referred, *Mannahatta: A Natural History of New York City*. Collect Pond has a fascinating history that I’ve gathered from a number of sources, but mainly from Sanderson. As in many spots on the island, large numbers of clam shells were found, suggestive of Native American presence, which, as may be recalled, Sanderson claims to have existed for ten-thousand years before the arrival of the Dutch. The Dutch and British, and the white Europeans who were to become New Yorkers fished in the waters and began to use the pond for their drinking water. They would gather water in barrels, and eventually they piped water. It would go north and would feed the entire island. They also built a canal between the East River and the Hudson River, where Collect Pond was. Apparently Fulton experimented with his steam boat in these waters, and there was a bridge that lovers walked on, called the “Kissing Bridge”—but eventually the intense pollution from the industrial businesses—slaughterhouses and tanneries, for example, would signal the end of the pond. Someone came up with an idea to level Bayard Mount and fill in the pond—an effort which took something like eight years. The Tombs, a prison-house, was built there but the instability of the foundation made that venture unfeasible after a while, and still, they tried to create housing there, “Five Points” which turned out to be the first slums in NYC. Ironical it is that the general area, outside of Chinatown became home to the courts and more prisons, as well as government buildings, City Hall, as well as an African-American burial ground. Where the Stock Exchange presently exists, African slaves were sold, were the stock that exchanged hands, were the labor this country was built on, a country occupied from the get-go. The relatively newly built Zuccotti Park is not too far from the shores of Collect Pond, where the Occupy Wall Street protest is taking place, where people are trying to impress it upon the powers that be that ours a country of the people, by the people, and for the people. I wonder if this part of New York is a vortex point. Whether it is a vortex point or not, it is certainly a location that thrives on metamorphosis. Lives change here, and the world changes here. One can hope it will be for the better.

<sup>203</sup> The word “swear” is from the PIE base *\*swer-* to speak. It suggests taking an oath, but the aspect of cursing isn’t part of the word until the early 15<sup>th</sup> century, according to Etymonline.com.

<sup>204</sup> New York’s nickname, “The Empire State,” was taken in 1834. The word meaning to rule or command has been around for centuries, but the use of it with the definite article began a little after the Revolutionary War, a nod to “The British Empire.” The building, “The Empire State Building” is 102 stories high, at the crossroads of Fifth Avenue and West 34<sup>th</sup> Street. The Plaza is some twenty blocks north on Fifth Avenue. For forty years, it was the world’s tallest building, but in 1980, the World Trade towers were taller yet. The PIE root, is “per” that has a number of meanings, from “command” to “prepare” to “give birth” according to etymonline.com. What one might perhaps find thrilling is the conflation of what it means to have and

exert power, both the masculinity of empire and “command-ing” and the femininity of giving birth,” both a kind of exertion, but one that suggests receptivity with the act of power, whereas the other, “command” rather broadcasts itself, allowing for nothing. The one who commands I suppose would like it to be that he has the creator’s power, as if he created his subject. As if. The deadly quality of the command, the creation of the subject is the death of the subject, of the subject’s right to power. Not so, in giving birth. Quite the opposite.

<sup>205</sup> This “dis” comes from the PIE *\*leud-* which means “to lurk.” Other connections are with words that mean “stooping” and “deceit” and “to be small” and “foolish” (etymonline.com).

<sup>206</sup> Bruce moves from being a stooping, lurking, deceitful fool to an out and out parasite in his misapprehension of Starlinsky’s insult.

<sup>207</sup> Words are the weapons of choice for a guy like Starlinsky, and here we have an example of the baffling failure of words.

<sup>208</sup> Starlinsky as well reads bodies whereas Grace reads lights, hears sounds; the invisible world is the world of Grace, a world whose sight Starlinsky is at the edge of.

<sup>209</sup> Ah, this is one of those words I was sure was Yiddish, when I was a child, but Harper says it’s of “uncertain origin,” citing the possibility of some relationship to “trespass” or from the Norwegian *trappa*” (Etymonline.com).

<sup>210</sup> Where Harper says that “pistol” is a “small hand-held firearm,” dating back to 1570, from M. Fr *pistol* or “short firearm” (1566), he also says that it relates to the term *pisteti* “to whistle” and further connects that to the Russian *pischal* which means “shepherd’s pipe” (Etymonline.com). What I am pleased to note is that there is a connection between a weapon that one holds in one’s hand that becomes the shaft for the moving elements of fire and iron or lead, whereas the other, an instrument that one holds in one’s hand that becomes the shaft for the element of air, for breath that becomes a wave of sound, and whereas that bullet is a killer, that wave of sound is a healer. Where that medium of war becomes the medium of music is reflected in language, in the formation of letters, and with a few changes in our lettering, the orchestration of war can become the waging of a music that could charm us out of our miserable urge to violence. Place an instrument in every soldier’s hands, whether it’s a pipe or a synthesizer, a violin or a tuba. The strings metamorphosed from the bow and arrow, the brass from the cannons, the pianoforte from the computerized weaponry, the drums and winds from the pistols and guns. And what’s left? The bells? The gongs? The triangles?

<sup>211</sup> Yes, well, this is here because I once had a dream about whales; there were three of them, like swimmers synchronized, circling in their swimming just at the bottom of the hill, the big hill that I used to walk up, and then down on my way to school. It just happened that the street at the bottom of the hill, the cross-street, was the street where my sweetheart lived. A long time ago, when I just a child, my friends and I would walk up to the top of the hill and though our town was a good fifty miles from NYC, we could see the George Washington Bridge and the Empire State Building, too, on a clear day. And then we could turn around and walk home, where, for a good, long time—but not forever—life meandered with the predictability of an endless stream whose waters one could actually drink from.



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