LIGHT FROM THE CITY

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment

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Master of Arts in English

by

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Accepted by the faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in English degree.

Eugene O. Young
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Dec 4, 1984
Date
The creative thesis *Light From the City*, is a novel, its author's first. Central to the theme of the work is the idea of regeneration (a coinage by the author).

As the reader wanders through this novel, hopefully he or she will run across similarities in characters otherwise separated by two generations and an ocean. Also, the juxtaposition of similar events may instill a feeling of deja vu. Some readers may conclude that "blood runs deep", or cite philosophical/metaphysical theories about cyclical time, in arriving at the final analysis for this work.

Yet *Light* involves much more. It tells the story of a growing romantic relationship of a young man and woman. They're at an age when they feel the energy and vigor to confront the world, yet remain unavoidably naive about the way their world works. Obstacles, in the form of a strangling, bureaucratic society and unbending, by-the-book authority figures thwart their goals before they have even stayed still for a long enough time to think through what those goals are.

The genesis for the novel arose from some curious facts concerning the life of Georges Melies, one of the pioneers of the moving picture medium. Blinded by artistic pride, he stubbornly refused to band together with the other European filmmakers of the day to form a
corporate-run industry. Inevitably, those businessmen stole his ideas (and even his films), forcing him into bankruptcy. Later, in a fit of rage, Melies set fire to a stockpile of his films, destroying most of them, so that the number remaining today is small. The premise arose thus: what if one or several of the old Melies films somehow turned up?

As it stands, the completed Light From the City concerns its two main characters, Andrea and Tony, first, and the recovered film second. In the novel, the Melies based emotional filmmaker has been named Jacques Moret. The professor of questionable ethics, Dr. Utrecht, plays the role of catalyst and chief authoritative obstacle.

While Light is an entirely creative work, bits and pieces of theory influenced it. The most notable of these are the Narrative Structure theories outlined by Seymour Chapman in his book Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978). These proved to the author of Light that today's reading audiences can deal with huge shifts in space and time through the narrative discourse, and that the technique can work tremendously if well-executed.

Accepted by: 

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Marc J. Garner
WITH SINCERE THANKS:

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Special thanks to Mrs. Mary Jo Netherton, who aided in the translation of French books concerning the life and work of Georges Melies. Several intriguing facts about the life and work of that man helped form the basis for the novel *Light From the City*.

Additional thanks and dedication of the book go to the myriad friends and acquaintances I have encountered in university life, the memories of whom have helped fill in the details of the characters involved in the story (even though any dead-on similarity to any person alive today is purely coincidental).

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1984
CHAPTER ONE

"So, where have you been hiding all semester? I've never seen you before."

Tony realized that he'd had to stoop when talking to her. At five-feet-nine with boots on, that meant to him that this girl was more than petite.

"I've been here," she replied.

From the neck up, she seemed to be made of hair, so Tony looked at the warm brown mane while thinking of what to say next. It tumbled from her head in huge whorls. The largest of the curls sprang from either side of her widow's peak, forming a symmetrical frame for her face. He stood beside her, and she faced front, gazing at the yellow-painted cinderblocks. The tress-frames blocked Tony's view of her eyes.

Tony said "So, do you think the old geezer's ever going to make it?" hoping that she would turn to face him.

She did. The delicate arcs of her eyebrows squeezed together. Had that remark about Dr. Utrecht annoyed her? Her lips curled crookedly as she shrugged, turning to face front once again.

"Well, my name's Tony Taverneau," he said, pushing himself away from the wall.

That got her to face him. After a slow blink of her rose-tinged eyelids, she said "Hello, Tony. Nice to meet you."

She wore gray sweatpants, Nikes, and a wine-colored tank leotard, and he wore his faded Van Halen T-shirt and fatigues. Yet from the way she'd said those words, he felt that he might have been in a bowtie and tuxedo, and she in a strapless evening gown, the situation a royal
cotillion, where they'd just been introduced by some gray-haired matron wearing long gloves.

"My name's Andrea Streicher," she went on. Tony expected her to extend her hand, yet knew she couldn't have when he looked at her arms. They clasped a load of books tightly against her chest.

At that moment, Dr. Utrecht appeared, weaving his way in and around his students standing in the hall. A burly janitor with a wire-brush mustache followed him. Dr. Utrecht huffed and puffed beneath the strain of a stack of films he carried, "Sorry I'm late," he said, wheezing, while the janitor unlocked one of the classroom doors. "At least I know this old body can still move if it has to." Tony wondered what would happen with the rest of the semester if Dr. Utrecht collapsed from heart failure, right there.

All the students filed in behind their teacher. Rooms at Heggendorf Hall made the best movie theaters Tony had ever seen. They jutted out from a central core, like giant fan blades. Each one was shaped like a miniature orchestra shell, with three rows of seats tiered and shelved. If Tony had been at the front of the room to lecture to people sitting down, he would have felt as if he'd been on trial by a panel of thirty jurists. The central core contained projectors that beamed movies and slides from behind, onto a twelve-by-five foot screen at the front of the classroom.

Tony watched Andrea glide into a seat, placing her books atop the table. He slid into a seat beside her, instantly realizing how she had blended in so well during the first couple of weeks: she'd always sat in the topmost row of the arena-like room. He'd always opted for the front seats nearest the screen.
They turned their attention to Dr. Utrecht, who stood behind the oak podium at the front of the room, on the "stage", as Tony liked to call it. He was an older professor in the department, easily sixty, who used his right hand to jiggle the corresponding side of his wire glass frames, tap a pipe against his lips, or (presumably) grade papers. "It doesn't look like the guy's hair grows out of his head," Tony had told a few of his friends during the first week of classes, "it looks as though someone took a can of Sherwin-Williams white and splattered it on."

Tony glanced at Andrea as Dr. Utrecht began to speak. She had flipped her stenography pad open to a clean page and poised her pen against it. For some reason, Tony thought of an Olympic runner tensing his calves and hamstrings against the starting block. "Today, we will study the films of Jacques Moret," he said, to which Andrea scribbled down the words "Jacques Moret" at the top of the paper. When the teacher continued with a barrage of other names and dates, she jotted those down also. Tony simply leaned back in his chair, arms folded, and watched her.

Dr. Utrecht paused, as if to punctuate an intense turning point in his lecture. His lower lip jutted. He said "When I die and go to heaven, I'd like to meet this man and talk about the old days, and how he made all of his films." With that, he gazed skyward and smiled, as if he could see a sneak preview of what awaited him there. How corny, Tony thought. The only other thing he needs to do is rest his hand against his heart.

Instead, the professor stepped away from the platformed podium and creaked the door open to the core, poking his head inside to tell the
technicians to roll the first film. The flourescent lights flicked off. The gears of a projector behind the screen whirred. The first image blazed before the class. Some French words with "Nova" placed in between, that formed the title. People appeared on the screen, frollicking amid some stage scenery. The old print contained so many fuzz scratches that the action appeared to have been shot through smoke pantyhose with runs. Yet, Tony could still make out most of the details.

A magician with a top hat, tails, and a pointed beard stood beside a chair, waving a wand. Dr. Utrecht said that it was Jacques Moret himself. A woman walked on from the left side of the frame, wearing an ankle-length dress, with her long, dark hair pulled away from her face. She sat in the chair beside Moret. The magician produced a printed tapestry, waving it in the air over his head. After two passes over the chair and the woman's head, he let the tapestry cascade over the top of her, blanketing her body. Moret mouthed some incantations and passed the wand with a flourish over the covered woman. When he yanked the tapestry off the chair, a skeleton lay underneath.

"This is flaky," Tony said to Andrea, who watched the screen, having apparently either ignored or failed to hear him.

Moret draped the tapestry over the skeleton, said the words, and yanked it off once again, this time, revealing a whole woman, the one who'd walked into the frame to sit down there. Shortly after, the images faded to black, and the flourescent lights flashed back on, causing Tony to squint.

He glanced at Andrea. She had leaned forward in her seat, eyes glazed, lips trembling, the way that Tony remembered people looking
after they'd seen the film *The Deer Hunter*. He thought that she'd been in a trance, and that no word he could say could snap her out of it, yet when Dr. Utrecht spoke, sparks flew from her pen once again. The professor said "Yes, he was a magician. Moret ran one of the most successful conjurer's shows in all of Paris. Naturally, as we can see from the first film, he tended to turn to the whimsical in filmmaking, also. Matte shots, dissolves, and double exposures replaced the scrims, trap doors, and wires of his Parisian conjurer's stage."

The second film was only slightly clearer than the first had been, and its first images showed what seemed to be a library or a study. Some subtitles in French appeared, and the professor apologized for failing to procure the English version. "I'll provide a running commentary," he said.

A balding man sat in a chair, onscreen, raising a pointed finger while he spoke. Another man stood behind him. When some words flashed onto the screen, Dr. Utrecht said "That man in the chair is starting an argument against spiritualism, saying that there's no such thing as spooks—logic and reason defy it." A face with a wide, obviously painted grin appeared along the left side of the frame. The rest of the body followed it—it was a man in the costume of a buffoon, wearing a gown with large stars and crescent moons printed on it. Several students in the class chuckled when the buffoon suddenly grabbed at the skeptical intellectual's neck and chin, yanking his head off (the scene hiccupped with the stop-camera trick needed for the effect).

French subtitles intermittently appeared while the buffoon ran around the stage carrying the head, chased by a scientist and his assistant. "This is really wild," Tony said.
Dr. Utrecht continued with the lecture while the film ran, saying "Moret liked to poke fun at all types of intellectuals. He was such a proud artisan and craftsman that it eventually led to his downfall."

While he spoke, the scientist and an assistant grabbed the buffoon, wrestled the head from him, and re-attached it to the body. The screen hiccupped once again, and the skeptic with the thinning hair continued on with his tirade as if nothing had happened. "Around the year 1913—several people from the Pathe company tried to persuade Moret into banding forces with them to set up a rental-distribution plan for their films. They also wanted to set up a guild that would unify the content of the films of the day. Well, Moret refused to merge, and the greedy competitors stole his ideas, his films, and finally forced him into bankruptcy."

The second film ended; the lights flashed on. The professor returned to his podium, as if what he would say next deserved more reverence. "Which brings me to my next point," he continued. When he droned on with shadowed, downturned brows, Andrea rose. She leaned down to Tony, and he flinched, startled at the sudden attention.

"I have to leave for a second," she told him. "Let me know if I miss anything." It must be that time of the month, Tony thought when he watched her breeze out the door. Great ass, he noticed.

Dr. Utrecht said that just before Jacques Moret went under, financially, he made a film that would have been the most spectacular production of its day. It was called Atlantis Underseas, and was shot with five huge water tanks in the inside of an old Parisian hippodrome. "Unfortunately, Atlantis Underseas was never to be seen," Dr. Utrecht said, stooping slightly during the ensuing, lengthy pause, his glance bouncing around
from student to student seated around the room. Is that supposed to be a big deal or what? Tony wondered.

Jacques' brother, Michel, was to tour the United States with the only print of the film, stopping from city to city to exhibit it, as if it had been a circus," Dr. Utrecht said. "However, he double-crossed the Pathe representatives in the States and fled to Utah to film westerns with a fledgling company. Well, Pathe's men found him out there, chased him across the Salt Flats, and killed him. The print of *Atlantis Underseas* was destroyed in the chase. When Jacques heard about that back in Paris, he became so overwhelmed with grief that he set fire to a stockpile of his films. Today, for that reason, only about one-eighth of his original output remains, with much of that in the form of single images!"

The professor backed away from the podium to peek through the door to the core once again. When he addressed his class, he said "You may have heard that I'm responsible for finding the only known frames from *Atlantis Underseas.*" Tony hadn't heard--he wondered what the hell the old buzzard was getting at. The lights flicked off. A single image blazed onto the screen: a young woman with dark, fluffy hair dangling in the air, floating, with a wide smile spread across her lips, and her arms winged. "This is Geneve Pryal, one of the stars in the film," the professor said, in the darkness. "She was a famous gymnast and circus performer of the day. Moret hired people like her in droves, to dangle them from the wires, and give them the illusion of floating, and swimming underwater, without the obvious disadvantages of filming the real thing." Dr. Utrecht went on about how the woman in the picture was a lover of Jacques Moret and that she'd been hurt in a fall. The
picture looked clear to Tony, much clearer than either of the first two films had been. The woman dangling from the wire gazed at him, as if she'd been able to see him. For a moment, he imagined that he could see the winged arms flourish in the air, and the curving, smooth legs glide. The hair was a little longer than the middle of her back, yet it was hard to tell because it had fluffed out. If the film had been shot underwater, some way, the hair would billow and snarl, possibly obscuring the actress' face.

A student spoke up from one of the rows below Tony, and that broke his concentration on the picture. She asked Dr. Utrecht "How did you find this picture?"

The professor had been beaming smugly, and he swaggered while standing still in answering the question: "Michel Moret, Jacques' brother who'd been commissioned to show the film, registered it with a Manhattan attorney, for copyright purposes. I was able to track down the office, by checking through some records, and found a file containing the film clip. And, voila!"

When the woman gymnast's image faded from the screen, the lights blared back on. Tony wished that they would stay off, since the constant changes from light to dark hurt his eyes. Dr. Utrecht said a few more words about Moret while the technicians behind the screen threaded the next film. Andrea reappeared in her seat beside Tony. She tapped his arm with her fingertips before she asked, "What did I miss?"

"Not much," Tony replied. "Utrecht said that this Moret set fire to all his films 'cause his brother screwed him on some deal about showing this film about Atlantis. He claims to have found a film clip from that Atlantis movie, and he flashed a frame from it on the screen."
It was of a lady gymnast, floating through the air like a mermaid."

"Do you think it was important?"

Tony paused. Utrecht seemed to think that it was pretty important and the image had an odd, ethereal quality. "Nah," Tony replied. "I don't think it's the kind of thing that's going to show up on a test, anyway."

The lights blinked out once again. Before the screen lit up with the final film, Andrea said "I used to do that."

"What?"

"Be a gymnast."

Tony believed that this Moret had a thing about heads. For in the final film, yet another skeptical, scientific-type gentleman sat in a chair, lecturing about "the power of speech." A buffoon attached a bellows to the man's neck and pumped on it, blowing up his head full of air, so that it became as big as the room. Then it exploded, as if it had been a balloon. "Hey, that's pretty cool," Tony said.

When class ended shortly after the final film (with a brief commentary from Dr. Utrecht about how Moret achieved the effect of blowing up a head), all the students gathered their books and rose. Andrea wondered aloud whether she should speak to the professor about the five-to-ten minutes of lecture she'd missed.

"Don't worry about it," Tony assured her. "It wasn't that big a deal." Once he'd convinced her, though, she turned the other way and scampered toward the exit. "Hey Andrea, wait up," he called after her, weaving around three other students to catch up. He met her outside the door, not far from where they'd talked before the class began.

She'd stopped to face him, clutching her books tightly against
her chest. Tony shuffled toward her, shifting his eyes around at the passing students, to make sure they weren't being watched. That was force of habit. In the two-plus semesters that he'd been at Little Egyptian, Tony had noticed a strange phenomenon. If he talked to a girl at a party, or even at the Student Center after a class, there was always some guy around to ogle them. If, Lord forbid, he was to show a girl affection, by kissing or embracing her, invariably some jerk popped up from around the corner to shout "Go for it!" The reason: men outnumbered women two-and-a-half to one at the university.

"If you're not in a hurry," Tony said, "how about grabbing a bite to eat at the Student Center?"

"I can't," Andrea replied. "I've got so much work to do and all."

"What about just coffee then? That wouldn't take too long."

She laughed. "I hate coffee."

"How about a soda? Coke? Sprite? We could just have a quick soda, on the stairs or somewhere."

Andrea grinned, shaking her head. She eased the grip on her books, allowing them to lower towards her waist. "Okay. I guess I have time for one."

Exits from the rooms on the south side of Heggendorf Hall led to a terrace that overlooked a gravel parking lot and the storage barracks for the Landeford-Wright Communications Building. It wasn't too nice a view, Tony thought, but at least the sun shone brightly. The warm rays brought out a few freckles beneath Andrea's eyes. When watching her cupid-bow lips purse around the opening atop the Tab can, Tony realized that he'd better say something, or she'd notice that he was staring. Women felt uncomfortable with that, when you were first getting
to know them. "So, what other classes do you have?" he asked her.

She laid the can atop her lap, pausing to gaze at him for a second before responding. Her eyes were light amber, and may have been flecked with gold, yet Tony had to turn his eyes away before he could tell for sure. "Intro to Advertising, Contemporary World, Stage Movement," she said.

"You're probably pretty good at that."

"At what?"

"At stage movement. I mean. . ." He motioned with an upturned palm at a waist so small on her that he felt he could completely circle it between his hands. She drew her arms upward, backing slightly. Tony covered his eyes, embarrassed that he may have frightened her.

"I guess," she said.

"So you were a gymnast, huh? You on the gymnastics team?" When Tony opened his eyes and looked at her, he felt relieved that she'd eased, letting her shoulders drop.

"Could have been. But I kind of gave it up a couple of years ago."

He resisted the impulse to ask why, continuing instead with "Hey, let me ask you something: are you a sophomore?"

"Yes."

"Film major?"

"Yes."

"How did you get out of taking Film Production 1, then?"

She shrugged. "I guess I'll take it next semester." After she inhaled the last sip from the can, she rose, brushing some dust off her sweatpants.

The sun blinded Tony when he looked up at her--he could only see
an hourglass-shaped silhouette. "Yeah," he said. "We have to make our first little film in there soon. I still don't know what I'm going to do yet."

Andrea arced the empty Tab can into a waste barrel near the bottom of the steps. "I have a job at the film developing lab," she said. "Anyway, it's been fun, but I really have to get going," She scooped her pile of books from the concrete, and started down the steps after a quick goodbye.

"Andrea," Tony called. She stopped at the bottom of the steps, swivelling to turn and look back up at him. "Where do you live?"

She shook her head and grinned that grin where one corner of her mouth snarled higher than the other.

"I mean, I might want to come and serenade you sometime," Tony threw in.

"At Harriman Tower? They'd put you away," she said over her shoulder while walking away.

"So I guess Harriman's it, huh?"

Andrea strode on.
"Listen, Ant-wine, all you have to do is call the desk at Harriman Hall and tell them you want a number on, what is it, Andrea Strikeout or something."

Tony clenched a fist, raising it across the table at Matt. "It's Streicher, asshole, and if you ever call me by that name again, I'll beat the fuck out of ya."

"You don't like Ant-wine, huh?" Matt went on. He had red hair that wisped out from his head in kinky curls that made it look like fire. When taunting someone, the pupils of his pale-blue eyes shrunk to pinholes, and his smile formed a deep "u", baring both rows of small, square teeth. Matt was smaller and bonier than Tony, yet with those taunting looks and his arrogance, he still scared him. At least, Tony thought, Matt knew when to quit. That was probably the only way they could remain friends.

They sat at the dinner table in the kitchen of their apartment. It was a barren, plaster and faded-tan linoleum place, an H-shaped red-brick building, with each quadrant of the "H" forming a separate apartment, with six bedrooms. Twenty-four young men lived in what had been named The Pennywell House.

The bathroom adjoined the kitchen. When Matt asked, "So what does this girl look like?" T.J. emerged from the bathroom, swathed in a Fort Lauderdale Beach towel, shaking excess water out of his "brillo brown" hair, as Matt liked to call it.

T.J. grinned at Tony. "What are you guys talking about? Did you pick up some jailbait over at the skating rink or something?" he asked.
Matt sneered when looking up at the near-nude T.J. with the jiggling beer belly. "It's gotta be better than the crabs you pick up from those biker mamans down at Sylvio's."

T.J. pretended to ignore the comment, Tony thought, because he lacked the wit to come up with something to one-better it. He asked "Hey Taverneau, there's something I've been meaning to ask you since we all got here. How the hell did you get off campus in your sophomore year? Did your mommy write you a note or something?"

"I told them I had real bad hemmorhoids," Tony said, "and that I need to take warm baths."

T.J. laughed like an old sea captain. "We ain't got no bath here," he said. "Just a shower with a bottom that feels like sandpaper."

"Admission doesn't know that," Tony said. "And I ain't got no hemmorhoids."

T.J. mumbled something to himself and waddled past them down the hall to his room. "It amazed Tony that someone relatively slim (aside from the pot belly) would walk like a three-hundred pounder. "Well tell me about her," Matt continued, when T.J. disappeared.

"She's small, a real little girl, can't be much over five-feet," Tony began, gazing at the ceiling to try and visualize her in his mind. "She's got this real fluffy, warm-brown hair, and her eyes...damn."

"That's nice," Matt said, nodding. "But you don't screw those. What's her body like?"

"Oh, excellent," Tony replied, holding up his hands with thumbs extended, so that they formed a circle. "She's got this tiny waist; that could fit right in there."

Matt looked at the void formed by Tony's stretched hands. "Hmm,"
he said. "Looks like she'd break in two the first time you put it to her."

"Matt."

"Aright, aright. Why don't you call her?"

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"He certainly sounds persistent," Cathy said. "What else has he got going for him? Looks? Wit? A Lake Forest address?" She sat at her desk, glancing at her psychology notes from the day while talking with Andrea, who lay on the bed across the room.

On her stomach, stretched out toward the foot of the bed, Andrea watched "Three's Company" on the little black-and-white RCA. Her roommate had often told her that such fluff would dissolve brain cells until she carried only a head full of jelly. "He's good looking, I guess," Andrea said. "His hair's nice. In the classroom it looks real dark brown, almost black, but out in the sun it looks...auburn."

Cathy turned to her at that point, her impish features pointing downward in an expression of disbelief. In the time that she'd been her roommate, Andrea noticed that her facial gestures were always overblown that way, with cavernous gaped-mouth horrors, oriental-squint smirks of mischief, and snarled-eyebrow scowls. She would have been a film star in a different era, with her bonnet of blond hair and dimples. "I've never seen hair that color," Cathy said.

She had been a hairdresser for a few years before starting college, and had probably seen lots of heads, so her remark surprised Andrea. To her though, there wasn't any other way to react other than to shrug. "Well, he doesn't seem like a jerk, but he does remind me of someone
weird I met once."

"Who?" Cathy wanted to know. She faced her full front at that point.

"It was last summer, when I was working at the photo developing place in the mall," she said. "This guy who looked kind of like Tony came in one day. He had a roll of film developed, but then he kept coming back to have individual shots of it re-printed, you know, at fifty cents each. I learned later that he probably saw our schedule hanging on the wall, because he always made a point of coming in when I was there. This guy was from New York, tough and wiry looking, like he might have been in a gang there or something. Anyway, he kept complimenting me on my face, saying that it looked like the faces of maidens in some paintings by Degas or some other impressionistic artist hanging in some big museum there."

"The Metropolitan," Cathy said, raising a finger. "So what became of him?"

"He asked me out," Andrea replied. "But I told him that I had a serious boyfriend. He told me that he had a girlfriend. 'But she's married', he said."

Cathy snickered, pushing herself away from the desk. "I'll raise you yet," she said. "That guy was probably married himself." At twenty-four, she was a few years older than Andrea, and took it upon herself to educate her about what she'd discovered in the real world. Cathy padded to the sink and turned on the tap. Andrea watched her wash some ink scratchings off her hands, which were still calloused from all the years of shearing (they'd compared them once, shortly after they'd met).

The telephone rang. It rang again. Cathy swivelled from the sink
to look at Andrea. "You going to answer that?" she asked.

Andrea lifted herself from the bed and stumbled across the room to the telephone. She lifted it off the hook and said, "Hello?"

It was Tony. "Listen, I'm on my way out right now, so I'll have to make this quick," he said. "I'd like to take you somewhere this Saturday night. Are you doing anything then?"

"Well, no," Andrea replied. It was only Tuesday. She wasn't a compulsive planner.

"Well then, how about it? I figure we could go skating, or to a movie or something."

She thought that maybe she should tell him that she would like to think about it. But then, that attitude, method, or whatever went out with the days of Scarlett O'Hara. "Sure," she replied.

"Aright! Listen, I'll talk to you more about it during school. Like Thursday, okay?"

Something gnawed at Andrea's stomach when she hung up the phone. Cathy had finished washing, and rubbed her hands on a towel, awaiting some kind of report, leaning forward, extending an ear. "He wants to go roller skating," Andrea said, realizing that the word "roller" had whined from her lips.

Cathy chuckled, crinkling her brows together. "Roller skating?" she said. "I haven't done that since I was in the eighth grade."

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Silent Narrative class met on Mondays and Wednesdays. That following day, Andrea arrived at class a little early, sitting in her usual seat on the top row. Tony joined her several moments later,
looking puzzled, tentative while he lowered into a chair. His last line to her over the phone had been that he would call her Thursday about their date. She decided to make things easier for him. "I was at the library earlier today," she said. "Looking up some things about Moret. He seemed really weird. Did you know that he set fire to a whole pile of films?"

"Yeah?" Tony said. "What did you read? That article that Utrecht published about him?"

Andrea wondered how much she had missed when she'd gone to the lady's room. "What article?" she wanted to know.

"It's in Film Comment magazine," he replied. "It's all about how he found this clip of film from Atlantis Underseas, and that, supposedly, he's the only one who has anything like that. It was a pretty big deal at the time."

"Wow, does he expect us to read that? Is he going to test us off it?"

"I hope not," Tony said, chuckling. "The only reason I know about it is that T.J., some friend of mine from the house, had Utrecht for a class before."

They paused for a moment. Andrea tried to think of something with which to fill up the space, yet restrained herself from interjecting anything too quickly. She didn't know whether she hoped Tony would chime in with something. When the silence got uncomfortable to her, she finally asked him a question: "So, do you have an idea of what you want to film for your class yet?"

That perked him up; his eyes widened and he grinned. "Oh yeah, I was going to ask you something about that," he said. But before he could
continue, the door behind them flew open with a whoosh, and Dr. Utrecht entered the room. "I'll have to tell you after class or something."

During class that day, Andrea could have compared the action within her mind to talking with a friend on the telephone while attempting to watch James Bond in Never Say Never Again on the television in another room. What was the proposition that Tony would have for her?

The D.W. Griffith film, Way Down East, blazed blue on the screen that day. At the end, in the sequences where Lillian Gish floats along the Niagara River on an ice floe, the film had been tinted blue, to give the viewer a frosty feeling. Before the film and after, Dr. Utrecht droned through one of his lectures. Andrea wrote down only a couple of sentences. Tony told her, "Hey, you're slipping. There's not even a paragraph's worth of notes there."

Once class ended, when Dr. Utrecht finished talking about the Gish sisters and D.W. Griffith, Andrea had hoped that Tony would stay and tell her. Yet, he snatched his books off the table and scrambled for the door as if he'd been double parked through the hour.

After a meal and a long talk with Cathy (the best kind--about nothing in particular), Andrea could finally get the wonderment out of her mind.
CHAPTER THREE

For three days until their date on Saturday night, Andrea expected Tony to call her, to tell her what to wear. She didn’t know why; but that was the kind of guy he seemed to her. When he didn’t call, she felt anxious.

When the hour drew near that he would pick her up, the minutes ached by on her clock radio. She'd felt similarly the day she waited in a dentist's office for an appointment to have some root canal done.

Cathy noticed her jitteriness and asked her what the hell was wrong. "There was one thing I left out about that weird guy from New York who came to the camera shop," Andrea said. "One of the things he kept saying to me was 'something incredible will happen to you soon: I can see it in your eyes.'"

"Oh, right!" Cathy said, exasperated. "Sounds like the kind of a guy who'd find a picture of you somewhere, stain it with tea to make it look old, and then show it to you and tell you that he'd been your lover in another time, you disappeared, and he travelled across the centuries to be with you."

Andrea had been seated before the mirror, on the upper platform of a two-level step stool that Cathy had people sit in when she cut their hair. She watched her friend in the reflection while she twirled the curling iron through her hair, "Cathy, that's weird," she said.

Cathy swirled around to face the mirror, so that she could address Andrea when she replied "Well just take a good listen to what you're saying."

The telephone rang. It was Tony. He was down in the lobby.
"Do you think what I'm wearing is all right?" Andrea asked.

Cathy looked her up and down, scratching her chin as she did so. Andrea wondered if her shimmery smooth corduroys of black and clingy black knit top flecked with gold threads might make her look sleazy. "What are you talking about?" Cathy replied. "That's the way you always look." Andrea's face flushed until she realized that it had been just another of the times that her roommate had been able to kid her into hot-tinged embarrassment. "Get your ass down there," Cathy finished, shoving her toward the door after nudging her purse into her ribs. "You look fine."

Tony wolf-whistled when he saw Andrea in the lobby. She pretended to turn back for the elevators to return to her room, and after joining him near the front doors, she wondered whether that had been such a bad idea.

He wore slick gray straight legs with zippers running down both outer seams. When she noticed the zippers and commented on them, he unzipped one of them for her, startling her so much that she covered her eyes (actually, she was to find that black pleats lay beneath the zippers, rather than bare skin). A sleeveless top of satiny nylon stretched taut over his shoulders and chest. Since he'd seemed so much taller, Andrea looked down at his shoes--shiny tan with heels at least two inches high.

"Hey, I hope you don't mind," Tony said, before they stepped outside. "Matt's coming along with us. He's driving. He was going to try and get a date himself, but no one would take him up on it. He'll tell you it was too short notice, but don't listen."

A glistening, canary-yellow car with sloping lines that seemed jacked up on the end lay parked in the front circle. That had to be
their ride to the rink, Andrea thought. It was. The driver sat inside; she might not have known that until they had both entered the car.

Instead, when Tony yanked open the passenger door, a voice bellowed from the other side of the car: "Hey, are you going to make her sit on the gear shift, or what?"

"No, we're both going to sit in the back seat, chauffeur," came Tony's reply.

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Three people greeted Tony when the three of them entered the skating palace, the United Skates of America. Andrea had followed him through the portals, and she noticed a swinging swagger that he affected once he came upon the open sidelines of the rink. Gaggles of giggling high school girls, with their spray-on Calvin Kleins gazed at him out of the corners of their eyes when he passed. Yes, a night before the tube had been an accurate premonition after all, Andrea thought.

Andrea couldn't remember when she'd last been to a skating rink, but knew that it had been the Melbourne in Schaumburg. Not only hadn't rinks changed much in appearance due to time, but they were also the same in other towns. All the lights had been dimmed in the one Andrea found herself in that Saturday night, and scrims had cast a reddish glow over the rink and carpets. Girls rented skates from one counter, boys from one much further down. For Tony, it didn't matter. He swung a pair of shining black ones with fluorescent red wheels from his shoulder. Matt, with the spaghetti-red hair, claimed that he was a "klutz" on skates and that he would pass the time playing video games and "scoping jallbait."
She hated to leave them to retrieve her own pair. It didn't take long—the teenage boy who worked behind the counter wore skates and moved fast. Yet, when Andrea glanced back at the spot where she'd left Tony and Matt, she caught them gazing in her direction and talking to one another. Comparing notes? Or arranging strategies? Whatever it was, it left a feeling that gnarled at the pit of her stomach, especially when Tony grinned at her.

Tony had waited until she had gotten her skates before he laced his up and tied them. Still, he finished with his when she'd barely gotten the laces of one skate tightened enough so that they would stay on. With the skates on, he sprang to them and immediately swirled into two ballet turns. Matt had been watching for Andrea's reaction to the little exhibition, and when he saw it, he guffawed.

Once she'd fastened her skates on and tied the ties, Tony extended a hand for her. "Shall we go?" he invited.

The sound system for the skating rink played the kind of Top 40 songs that Andrea had been trying to avoid when she broke the tuning flywheel on her stereo. Prince's "When Doves Cry" greeted them when they entered the hard, smooth surface of the rink. She felt her legs stiffen when she glanced over her shoulder to see how quickly the "human waves" flowed, so that she could push off the sides of her feet and adjust her speed accordingly.

Tony grabbed ahold of her hand and yanked her along with him. Tendons, ligaments, cartilage, or whatever lie up there felt as if it had ripped apart when he'd done that. For two circuits of the rink, Andrea felt like a Fisher-Price pull toy dragged along by a squealing Corvette. "Tony, I can't skate this fast!" she shouted.
"What?" came his reply, while he lifted his hand holding hers, drawbridge-style, so that a prepubescent, pig-tailed poplooly could squeeze beneath.

"I can't skate this fast!"

At that point, Tony had twirled past her in a circle, brushing his behind against her. "Oh", he responded, letting go of her hand. He gained speed and broke away from her, weaving through the clusters of teenage boys and girls, forming swirls and curls of figure eights past them, lifting his knees high in crossover when he rounded the turn.

Andrea blended in with the crowds flowing around the outer perimeter. When the first song ended, and Van Halen's "Jump" boomed through the speakers, she noticed that he jiggled at the knees and gyrated to the rhythm of the music. It was a corny thought, but she expected every girl and guy in the rink to stop and line the outer perimeter, forming a stage for the Master on Wheels, to dazzle them with his dips, swirls, turns, and twirls. After awhile, she noticed that her arms pendulumed from side to side from her drooped shoulders. She was also thirsty.

Would he notice that she had left the rink to get a Tab? No. It was his world out there, clearly, so unless she was entwined with him while rounding all those corners, he'd never notice her. She skated to the snack bar, noticing Matt playing a game of Pole Position along the way. Just after the toothless matron behind the counter jerked her a small cupful and handed it to her, the D.J.'s voice, with all the singsong accents of a game show host, wailed to the crowd--"Couples only! Waltz-time! At least one of you should be skating backwards!"

She had only drunk two gulps of the Tab before Tony found her.
"There you are," he said. "I was wondering where the hell you'd run off to. Let's get out there and twirl around."

"Tony."

"No, don't worry, I won't go fast or anything. I promise."

She set her Tab down and tagged along after him out onto the rink, having that steely feeling in her bones that often told of impending doom. Once they stepped out onto the rink among the swirling and turning couples, Tony immediately swished through a half turn and faced her, skating backwards.

"There," he said, his tone as soothing as the song "Faithfully" crooning over the loudspeakers. "It's not so tough now, is it?"

Tony had curled an arm around her waist, and at some point, joked to her that it could reach twice around. The other arm he held majestically high, with her fingers clasped between his. His arm around the waist guided, pushing, nudging, yet it gently prodded and edged her along through the turns and swirls past the other skaters.

He smiled down at her, and for the first time that evening, Tony had shown her that he was actually glad to have her along with him. For a moment, Andrea felt as if they had been floating. It was so nice a sensation that she soon wondered how many young girls had fallen in love with Tony while gliding around the rink with him that way.

Then he ruined it.

His eyes shifted, and he bit his lower lip, so that gave Andrea her clue that something was up. However, she'd never have guessed that he would swirl her around and expect her to skate backwards. When he did that, both her feet flew upward as if they'd been pulled on a string. Tony howled and spread his legs far apart—somehow he'd managed to
stretch both of them around her.

She sat, on the hard rink, with her legs spread. Luckily, when Tony regained his composure, he circled back against the flow of onrushing skaters and offered her a hand to help her to her feet.

After he made sure that she was all right, they sat together at one of the square benches designed to give the skaters a place to sit when they donned and doffed their skates. "I'm really sorry," Tony said. Since the softer music still played for the waltz ("Stuck on You," by Lionel Ritchie, at that point) they could speak to each other without shouting.

Andrea tried not to appear too mad—after all, Tony had only been over zealous (if a little bit reckless) and he hadn't intended any harm. "It's okay," she replied.

"It's just that...I assumed that you knew how to skate."

"Why?"

"Well, you're a gymnast and..."

"And you figured I'd be just wonderfully graceful on skates, right? Well, it's not quite the same thing."

"I guess not."

"Tony, I'm going to say something, and I hope you take it the right way," Andrea went on, leaning into him. He straightened and faced her, to listen. "Don't you think you're getting a little too--well, old for all of this?"

"I'm only nineteen."

"That isn't what I mean. God, I'm digging myself into a hole here. I mean, don't you think it's about time you moved on to other things?"

"Like what?"
"I don't know."

"I don't see what you're getting at. You looked like you were having a good time out there, before."

That remark startled Andrea, and stunned her speechless. This guy uses that auburn-haired noggin for more than just a hatrack, she thought. "I didn't mean to upset you," she said.

Tony raised his chin and gazed toward the ceiling girders of the rink. His lips formed a gnarled frown. "Let's find Matt," he said.

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The wheels of Matt's yellow boat chirped on the asphalt and grabbed the curb when he pulled away. Andrea and Tony remained on the sidewalk. "Let's talk," he had said. When Andrea had hedged, Tony goaded her on with the same kind of persistence he had used in persuading her to have a Tab with him at Heggendorf Hall. After the car had pulled away, leaving them on the sidewalk together, Andrea felt as if she'd watched a motorboat churn toward the currents, leaving them on a deserted island.

"Let's go into the lobby," Andrea said.

Harriman Tower stood seventeen stories high. Its wings were arranged in a "Y". On the first floor of the building, one section of that "Y" contained a large color television and several scattered, stuffed chairs. Someone had turned on Music Television, Andrea noticed when they sat in chairs beside each other. Only the multi-colored glow of the Jefferson Starship video "No Way Out" illuminated the open space. The volume was low; it only droned in the background.

In the dark, Tony's pale-blue eyes glowed. He chuckled at the
television, commenting on how silly Grace Slick's guttural tongue roll sounded. "Tony," Andrea began, "remember in class on Wednesday, when you said you had something to ask me?" He nodded. "Well, what was it?"

He shrugged. When he started to speak, the words came out garbled, as if his tongue had been wrapped in twine. But he managed to get this out: "Well, I feel kind of funny bringing it up now."

"Why? Just ask,"

"Oh, okay. I wanted to bounce an idea I had for my first film off you. Renton says that we should just try to find some kind of movement, and film that, practicing how to edit and all. Then I thought that maybe...you doing some of your gymnastics would make a good subject for the film."

Andrea paused to ponder the proposition. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched him wring his small, pale hands. When her delay grew, his head scrunched down into his shoulders, turtle-like. Finally, she almost laughed at how the poor guy tortured himself. "I might be up for that," she said. "I've been thinking that I've needed a good workout for awhile."

That eased him. He straightened in the chair, then slumped down, letting out a sigh. His head suddenly jerked when he turned to look at her. "Hey, how come you quit on gymnastics, anyway?" he wanted to know.

"It was time to move on to other things," she stressed the last part of that sentence, hoping that Tony would connect it with what she'd said back at the rink. A gleam in his eye told her that he did.

"Film?"

"Yes."

"Were your parents bummed out that you didn't try for an athletic
The inquiry sent a hot tinge through Andrea's temples. "Inquisitive thing, aren't you?" she shot back.

Tony coiled in his chair, raising a pair of flexed palms before his eyes. Andrea snickered at the shielding gesture. A wide-eyed, impish glare told her that he had probably only exaggerated his defensiveness, anyway.

"That's all right," she continued. "Actually, you hit the nail on the head. Back in high school they pushed me towards going after a scholarship. When I told them that I'd lost interest, my father said that he would finance my education, that I ought to go into business, and that if I went to DuPage Community, he'd get me a job with his insurance agency and even help me buy a car for commuting. They didn't like the idea of me coming here at all, especially to take something as frivolous as film."

"They seem overly protective."

"Maybe." After pausing to think it over for a few moments, she came up with something else: "You know what's really weird? My grandmother disapproves, I can't figure that one out."

"Your grandmother? My grandmother's so senile, I doubt whether she even knows what I'm doing. She probably thinks I'm in the service."

"Well mine normally isn't all that sharp either, but she feels really bad about me doing this. It's in her expressions. She looks as if I've hurt her or something, by studying film."

"Maybe you'll figure it out soon."

When they parted, Andrea left him with a response that would leave her semi-free: that convenient word "maybe."
CHAPTER FOUR

By Wednesday of that following week, the maybe turned into a "yes" for Tony. In the kitchen, T.J. said to him, "How'd you con her into doing a gig like that for you?"

Tony shrugged. "She must be crazy about me, I guess." He had asked her in Silent Narrative class, just before Dr. Utrecht ran the film *The Gold Rush*. That was one of the greater Charlie Chaplin films of all time, yet throughout the showing, he could only think of the next day, when he would meet Andrea to film her. More exciting than just the simple prospect of filming her was the fact that she must like him, if she was willing to do it at all. Yet, he'd learned long ago not to assume such things.

On that Thursday, Tony met her in the lobby of Harriman. She wore a fire-engine red jogging suit and immaculate white Nikes. He would never understand how girls and women could keep stark white athletic shoes spotless for so long a time.

He carried one of the school's pistol-like Super 8 cameras, with two cartridges of fresh film in his jeans pockets. At least the shooting stage would be simple. "Are you sure that no one will be using all that equipment during this time of the day?" he asked, as they left the building.

"Positive. I called earlier," came Andrea's reply.

One corner of the sprawling Dwight Haney Recreation Complex contained one small gymnasium solely for the purpose of gymnastics. When they arrived there, Tony looked at all the equipment, from a high bar, to parallel bars, to rings. "Some set-up in here," he commented.
"It looks like the Olympics."

Andrea stood in a corner of the gym. Tony noticed that she stepped on the heel of one shoe with the toe of the other, obviously trying to work the shoe free without bending over to untie its laces. Her birdsong chuckle echoed through the gym—it must have been her way of dealing with the jitters from being watched. Tony changed his mind about Andrea's apparent shyness as he looked up at her face, when she had kicked off both of her shoes.

Her chin had tilted downward, to one side, her lips parting to reveal a flash of one row of her perfect, white teeth. Tony almost dropped the camera when she began to work the waistline of her pants free. The jacket was large for her and covered her entire torso. Yet as the waistband slid further and further down, more and more of her satin-creamy thighs revealed themselves. They looked touchingly smooth and delicately formed to Tony. As the pants crumpled in a heap at her feet, his eyes trailed along her curving calf lines that tapered to narrow ankles.

With one leg, she kicked the pants toward the shoes, stood straight, and reached for the zipper of the jacket near her neck. The sound of basketballs pounding against the floor filtered through the opened entrance doors. Still, Tony could hear the teeth of the plastic zipper click apart as Andrea tugged on the lever. The red triangle of fabric widened to reveal shimmery-white underneath. At that point, Tony became aware of his machine gun fire breathing.

The white leotard's material dove to a deep "v" at the center of Andrea's breasts. A small tab had gathered the center together so the silky nylon shirred in subtle folds that stretched over Andrea's
relative ample roundness (most other female gymnasts Tony had seen had been built like pegs). Her bust must have been accentuated, Tony thought, by a waist that he could completely encircle with two outstretched hands. Before letting the jacket slide from her shoulders, she took something out of one of the pockets.

The glistening white fabric swathed her entire upper body (the leotard's sleeves were long). To Tony, the outfit seemed to arouse him more than if she had been sans anything. The intriguing thing was that Andrea seemed to know, showing a sly smile along with narrow, feline eyes every now and then.

She had pulled a hairband out of the pocket of the warm-up jacket, gathering her long hair between her hands into a pony-tail. When Tony saw her snap the band around it, he said, "Aw, I was looking forward to filming how your fluffy hair flows with the breeze, like they did on a shampoo commercial one time;"

With her hair pulled away from her face, her eyes stood out more. The brows over them crinkled at the remark, while her lip gnarled. She responded "Well I have to see what I'm doing. Besides, my hair's a mess anyway."

Andrea, like most other young women Tony had known, downplayed her physical attractiveness while talking about it. She bent at the waist and stretched her legs apart, to start a warming-up repertoire. With her feet only twenty-four inches apart, she could bend far enough to kiss the floor if she wanted to. Tony shuddered when he imagined the kind of view he might have had if he had been standing behind her when she went through that bending movement.

After completing her warm-ups, she sprang up to ask Tony "Well,
what kind of exercise do you think will work out best on film?"

"You tell me," he replied. "I don't know anything about all this."

Andrea stroked her chin and glanced over the entire layout of equipment. Her gaze locked on the uneven parallel bars. "I guess I could start off with a few things on the unevens, and we could go from there. That's very visual."

Tony settled onto one knee, positioned at a forty-five degree angle relative to the direction of the bars, about ten feet below them. "Do your stuff," he commanded after he'd set the proper focus on the lens. Andrea leaped from the mat to the upper bar. Actually, the only part Tony saw through his camera lens was when she had settled on the bar, suspended by her straight arms, leaning on her midriff. As long as she stayed on that top bar, Tony could accommodate her within the frame. If she transferred to the lower one, which he knew was inevitable, he would have to move the lens along with her.

Andrea let her head and upper body drop as she swung into two spins around the bar. On the third spin she lowered down so that she hung from her hands. That time, rather than spinning over completely, she thrust her legs apart and lifted them through the air so that her feet grasped the bar along with her hands. With her back arched, she stopped, straddle-legged, atop the bar, before bending her knees to spring from the top, into a swinging dismount, arching through the air in a free-fall that landed with a small thump on the mat.

"Bravo!" Tony said, when he released his finger from the trigger and lifted the camera away to gaze at Andrea with both eyes. "Why don't you try one of those things where you let yourself fall from the top bar and slam against the lower one with your belly?" She grinned.
wryly.

"You want me to kill myself?" she replied. "I didn't do that one very much when I was really into this."

"Only kidding", said Tony. "I don't see how anyone can do that, without shattering their hips." They both glanced around at all the various equipment. "Well, what now? That only took up a few second's worth," Andrea looked at the rings.

"I could do a couple of things from them," she said, pointing at the rings. Tony had always thought that only guys did stuff on the rings, and he told Andrea so. "Haven't you ever been to a circus? They always have a lady performing on what they call the Roman rings."

He felt that it would be better if he stood to film Andrea's action on the rings, so he positioned himself at an angle, fifteen feet away. That way, he'd be sure to include her entire body within the frame.

At first, her routine on the rings seemed similar to the male moves he'd seen. She grasped ahold of the rings and sprang up, so that she suspended herself with straight arms. It seemed odd when she lifted one of her legs and drew her knee in, pointing her toe, as if she wanted to "thread" her leg through the ring. But that was exactly what she wanted to do--first one, then the other.

She dropped herself lower after positioning both legs in the rings. Her back arched, and when she spread both arms in the air, like wings, while straightening her legs behind her, it was beautiful. To Tony it looked like a graceful high diver frozen in mid-arc over the pool.

Wait a minute, he thought. Comparing her to a diver, with the element of water, caused something to click inside his mind. Water. Rings. Lady Gymnasts. Graceful arcs. The smile he saw on her lips.
It was suddenly very clear.

"Holy shit!" he shouted. Through the lens, he saw that his outburst had startled Andrea--her eyes widened in shock and her body tensed, her legs slipping from the rings. She had to grasp behind her with her arms and grab for the rings.

"Damn it, Tony," she said. "You want me to kill myself or what?"

Having lost her concentration, she pulled her legs free of the rings, dropped her feet down and allowed herself to fall to the mat. Once she faced him, she paused for a moment to crane her neck, in order to look at her lower back and behind. "What, did my leotard rip out, or what?"

"No. Do you work over at the film lab today?" he asked, his words coming quickly, as if he had spoken them from the opposite side of a closing elevator door, to her. Knees bent, he clung to her shoulder when speaking.

"No," Andrea replied.

"Well, I want to go get this film developed, right now!"

"Tony, you haven't even shot half of it yet. You couldn't have."

She looked down at the camera.

"But I've got to see this film. Even if you're not working there, wouldn't they let you run a cartridge through and develop it?"

"Tony, why? What's wrong with you?"

"Nothing's wrong," When he paused to think for a second, he realized that it all must seem weird to her. So he decided to let her in. "That day that Utrecht showed all the Moret films. You weren't there during one part of the lecture. You stepped out for a second. While you were gone, he showed this one picture from Atlantis Undersea,
you know, that last film he made but that no one ever saw. It was a picture of this lady gymnast they had in the film. She had been hanging in mid-air like she was floating through the water and...

"And it looked like me hanging from the rings. So?"

"But it was dead-on? I mean, it was incredible! The only differences are what you wore and the way you had your hair. The lady, or whoever was in the picture Utrecht showed, her hair fluffed out more, like the way you have yours normally."

"Well, so what? God, I don't believe you."

"Andrea, put the rest of your stuff back on. Let's go to the lab to get this developed."

"But you kept on saying how you needed to get this done by next Tuesday. You're going to waste a whole roll of film so you can rush off to the lab to get a look at one shot?"

"There's just something so eerie about it," Tony explained, "I don't care about wasting film. And I can just set up something at the house to film this weekend."

"Are you sure?" Andrea asked. "I think you better at least use up this whole roll. And if this picture Dr. Utrecht showed looks so much like me, then why don't we go and see it, so that I can be the judge?"

"I guess you're right. I'd better get this stuff done, now."

They finished the cartridge of film when Andrea showed Tony nearly three minutes of moves on the balance beam. At one point, Andrea lay on the beam on her stomach, chin down, then coiled her body around so that one toe touched the beam in front of her face.

"Tony, it's four-thirty," Andrea said when she stepped into her warm-up pants. She had been responding to his urgings that they try to
get the film developed at the lab right then. "It closes up at five and I'm damned if Gerald will do your film ahead of whatever else he has there."

"Well, what'll I do then?"

"You just bring it by and drop it off in the box. Someone will get to it first thing tomorrow. Probably me."

When Andrea had dressed, Tony escorted her back to her dorm. "Tell you what I'll do," he said, along the way, "I'm going to check out that journal article in the library and bring it over to show you;"

"Okay," Andrea replied. "Give me a call first before you come over."

"All right."

They parted at the intersection of a walkway leading between the Harriman and Osterfield towers. For a moment, Andrea looked at Tony, squinting. It caused tingles in him, and he wondered if there was something else he should say or do before they went their separate ways. He felt as if he'd been in a film by one of the expressionistic European filmmakers, who rely on long pauses with stares to create tension.

"Well, I'll see you," he said.

"Yeah. It was fun today," Andrea's cheekbones were red-tinged. Tony felt that might have been because of her little workout rather than other things that would have favored him. Paired with her slight smile and the way her eyes glanced up at him, it cast an air of little-girl innocence over her. That was exciting, because it hadn't been so long since she'd been back in the gym, tantalizing him by peeling off those red, acrylic layers.

He skipped back to the Pennywell house.
"Oh, come on now!" Matt's voice boomed through the kitchen. "She's coming in her jeans for you if she'll do something like that."

"Well, we're not talking about sleaze here," Tony said, "like some of those sluts at the rink." He scooped up the last mouthful of the beef Rice-a-roni with tomato sauce and cheese out of the bowl. The 1980 volume of *Film Comment*, bound in green, lay beside his elbow, rested atop the table.

Matt shook his head, saying, "I don't get it. I always thought you were the kind who'd grab for whatever he could get."

"Yeah? Well that was before I got the clap five times," Tony said. "Hey, have you seen T.J. anywhere? I've got something I want to show him."

"He's in Paul's apartment," Matt replied. "Let me get him."

Tony expected Matt to push away from the table and walk through the den to Paul's apartment on the other side. Instead, he tilted his head back, cupped his mouth with his hands, and shouted, "Hey T.J! Tony's looking for ya! Get your ass in here!"

Tony pounded on his ear with an opened palm to ease the ringing. He called his friend an asshole, yet the novel way he had used in calling for T.J. seemed to work. A door flung open and banged the frame from one of the other apartments. Rubber soles of tennis shoes slapped against the linoleum floor of the den/lobby, and a couple of seconds later, T.J. poked his bushy head through their apartment door. "Yeah, what do you want?" he asked.

Tony invited him to sit with them. Without another word, he flipped
open the journal volume to the issue containing Dr. Utrecht's article.
The woman who was supposedly Geneve Pryal swung from her concealed rings
in the photograph and smiled out at T.J, who simply looked on and
shrugged. "Yeah, that's his article all right," he said.
"That's Andrea swinging there," Tony said.
"What?"
"The woman in the picture, who's supposed to be that Geneve
whatever, she looks exactly like Andrea, you know, that girl I was
telling you about."
"So?"
"I mean, it looks so much like her that I think it could be her."
"Well, this is an old picture."
"I know, but you're into photography, right?"
"Yeah."
"Is it possible to air-brush something in or out and make a picture
look old by yellowing it or something?"
"Yeah. That's how they get the stretch marks and tummy lines off the Playboy centerfolds."
"Well, do you think that Utrecht could have found some old picture
of Andrea dangling from the rings, doctored it up, and said that it was
a photographic image of that woman from Atlantis Underseas?
T.J. lowered closer to the opened journal on the table, to
scrutinize the picture. "I don't know. You can't really tell from this."
"But that doesn't seem like something that Utrecht would do?"
"Maybe. I thought he kinda seemed like a sneaky bastard. Hey,
why don't you ask this Angle if she ever had her picture taken while she
was going through her gymnastics shit?"
"Damn, why didn't I think of that today, in the gym?"

Matt chimed in with "Call her."

The telephone in the lobby was a pay-phone. "I don't have a quarter," Tony said. Matt jammed a hand into one of his jeans pockets and flipped one onto the tabletop for him. He and T.J. urged Tony out into the lobby to make the call.

His heartbeat thumped in his ear when he dropped the coin and dialed the number. The last time that had happened was when he'd been a junior in high school and spent two hours getting the nerve to telephone a girl he liked to ask her out. "Hello, Andrea?" he said, when her voice greeted him from the other end of the line.

Before he could continue on with anything else, she interrupted him with "Listen, I'm glad you called. I won't be able to look at that picture with you tonight."

"Well... that's all right. I've just got a question for you."

When you were in high school and on the gymnastics team, did you ever have your picture taken while you were doing all that stuff on the rings?"

She'd had to think about it, humming over the line. "Yeah, I did," she said finally, "but it was a long time ago. I think I was only about fourteen at the time. Why?"

It occurred to Tony to go back into the apartment to retrieve the bound Film Comment issues while speaking to her. He pulled the receiver away from his ear and stepped twice towards the apartment. Yet he stopped, because he hadn't explained to her what he was going to do.

"Tony, Tony? God, where did you go?"

"Oh, sorry. I had to lay down the receiver for a second."

"Well why do you want to know if I've ever had my picture taken?"
"I'll get to that in a second. What was the picture for? Was it in the newspaper or what?"

"Tony! God! It was in the little Schaumburg newspaper. Now why are you asking me all of this?"

"Well, do you remember how I freaked out when I was filming you today? Because for a second, the way you dangled from the rings looked exactly like the picture Utrecht showed. It looks so much like you that, I swear to God, I wonder if Utrecht might have found an old picture of you on the rings somewhere and doctored it up to make it look old."

"Tony, that's outrageous!"

"Maybe, but answer me this, answer me this. Do you remember the month and year when that picture was taken?"

She thought aloud. "Well, I was fourteen, and I was only in the eighth grade, because I started school late. That would have been... in 1979. Yeah, I remember now; it was around Valentine's day, 1979. There was a blizzard and not many people were able to make it."

Tony's pulse raced. Without going back into the apartment to check, he distinctly remembered that Dr. Utrecht's article was in the April 1980 issue. April Fools. He chuckled.

"What's the matter?" Andrea asked.

"It all fits," he replied. "You have to see the picture."

"Okay. Bring the journal to work tomorrow. I'm scheduled from two to four."
CHAPTER FIVE

The Landeford-Wright Communications building housed the offices for all the faculty of the Cinema department, a small soundstage and projection room, and the equipment room and processing lab, where Andrea worked. Other wings of the concrete, aircraft-carrier structure included dozens of other classrooms, the University Theater, a television studio, and a radio station.

Andrea arrived at the equipment room to find Tony there, waiting for her. He stood by the "half-door" that served as a counter, from which students barked out their requests for cameras, tripods, or lighting sets. She entered the room from an adjoining door further down and faced him. Gerald nudged the bridge of his too-large glasses frame as he sat at the desk in a corner and pored over the shipment forms for the developer, fixer, and stop-bath chemicals that arrived that day (boxes filled with bottles of the fluid lay in a neat pile beside the desk).

"So what can I do for you, sir?" she asked Tony, who squinted and grinned while leaning over the improvised counter.

Tony one-bettered her at her game. He said, "You don't really work here for the university, do you? No. You must work for a modeling or public relations agency, and the university brought you in to upgrade their image."

"Not bad. Not bad," Andrea replied. "It's better than some of the things some of the other guys say; like 'hey, baby, you look sexy today.'"

Tony glanced at Gerald down in the corner. "Hey now, you don't
flirt with your employees, do you?"

Gerald laughed like a braying mule, looking away from his paperwork for only a second. Andrea laughed at her boss, a white-shirted accounting major on an interdepartmental work-study. "I've tried Cinema people running the books for the place, and it was a disaster Andrea had overheard Dr. Leifheit, the departmental associate dean, say.

Tony called from the door, directing her attention back to him. He held out the cartridge of film for her, and she stepped across the room to take it. While she was near, he asked, "You are going to be able to get to this right away, aren't you?"

"Yes, no problem," she replied. "No one else left any film."

"Yeah, everybody does stuff on the weekend and swamps us with rolls and cartridges on Monday morning," Gerald snarled, in his Indianapolis-bred twang that sounded like a circular saw.

Andrea walked across the room with the film cartridge. Over her shoulder she asked Tony "Are you planning to stay here while I run this through?"

"Yeah," he answered. "It doesn't take too long, does it?"

She shrugged when tugging on the flimsy plywood door of the lab. It was actually no more than a shed built in the corner of the room opposite Gerald and his desk. The developer, which Andrea called "Sluggo" lay inside. It was pretty simple to run one cartridge through it. After breaking the cannister open in the dark (or with the aid of an infrared lamp with its annoyingly flickering bulb), she trailed her fingers over the exposed coil and found its "tail," a loop with the words "exposed" impressed upon it. She snipped the film apart with a scissors that always hung in the same place on the wall. The outer
end of the film sprang up so that she could cradle the coil in one palm while lifting it toward the machine feed.

One roll was easy. She only needed to check the mode (8mm) and thread the tail, making sure that the sprocket holes had caught. A foot pedal activated the motor. When she'd had many additional rolls of film to run through, she'd have to feel around for the end of one roll running through the machine so that she could stop the motor and staple the next roll on, so that it could run through. The developed films ended up coiled around a core at the other side of the machine.

The week before, on a Monday, which was when most of Tony's classmates had shot their films, Andrea ran eleven rolls through the machine. The 550 feet of film barely fit on the take-up platter.

When all fifty feet of Tony's roll had fed into the machine, Andrea opened the lab door. "Five minutes," she told Tony, who watched from the counter. "Actually ten, if you count the drying."

"Hey, does this room loan out projectors?" Tony wanted to know.

"No," Andrea said. "But there's one in the projection room. I don't think anyone's going to be in there. They all kind of flock to happy hour at this time on Fridays."

Tony nodded. A green book that looked like one of the library's bound periodical volumes lay beside his elbow on the counter.

"Is that the magazine article?" Andrea asked.

Tony glanced down, his elbow nudging the volume. He sprang up and said "Oh" as if he'd forgotten that he'd brought it along with him.

"Yeah! Come here! Take a look at it!" He yanked the book open and snatched at the pages, trying to flip to whatever one contained the article. Andrea tread lightly toward the counter. "Here it is!"
He pressed his palms down on the opened pages of the book to flatten it out, and then turned it around so that the print faced Andrea.

She saw the picture. "Oh my God," she whispered. In the picture of her as a fourteen-year-old, she'd had her hair dangling in a ponytail and wore a red leotard with a white side stripe. This print before her showed her dangling, arched-backed, from the rings, except that neither the rings around her thighs nor the line leading to the ceiling showed. In the picture that showed up in the Schaumburg Free Press, she'd had her arms winged at the same, upward angles from her body. Even the gap in the teeth was the same. Back then, before she'd gotten braces to aid the defect, she could pass the tip of a nail file through the gap between her two front teeth.

Someone had printed on a dark, mermaid's gown, or dress on her body, and brushed in fluffy hair. She guessed that they might have snipped just the image of her from the original newspaper picture, and doctored the rest. The background featured fronds of seaweed, and fishes passing by. Atlantis Underseas. The caption beneath the picture read "Geneve Pryal--one of the underseas mermaids."

She looked at Tony, who'd been nodding. "Isn't this wild?" he asked, grasping both of her shoulders (he seemed to love doing that). Glancing behind her, she wondered if Gerald should hear what was going on. He seemed, however, too wrapped up in his administrative duties. "Now, what we could do," Tony went on, "is to take this into the projection room and look at it along with the picture of you on the rings from yesterday. But...as if we really need to check!"

"I know. I just can't believe this!"

Moments later, the film was finished in the lab. Andrea lifted it
from the platter and wound it onto a white 50mm for Tony. She noticed that his fingers trembled when she handed it to him. "Let's go," he said.

When Andrea had been on gymnastics teams in high school, she'd always shuddered when shown a videotape of one of her performances. Many times, she'd refused to view them. Her muscles started shaking and her stomach rumbled when she thought about watching herself do gymnastics on film, when she hadn't been regular with it for over a couple of years.

"Don't get mad if I throw up," she told Tony, when he threaded the Super 8 projector.

"What's wrong? You can't stand to see yourself on film? Don't worry. You looked beautiful out there," He adjusted the angle of the screen placed fifteen feet in front of the projector. "Get the lights."

The action immediately blazed onto the screen, when Tony turned on the projector motor and lamp. The images were watery—to correct that, Tony twisted the lens to focus. On the screen was a shot of the upper uneven bar. She'd just leaped up to grasp it—all that could be seen were her arms and the top of her head. When she pulled herself up into the locked-arm, waist suspended start, her body fit into the frame better. She imagined her chest collapsing and filling as she huffed and puffed. God, I'm out of shape, she thought. With her white leotard and pale skin, the image of her twirling around the bar blurred. Flashes of light washed out the frame, and that surprised her, since she had expected that the film would have underexposed.

"It was really bright in that gym," Tony said. A few black frames passed by. They dissolved into the image of the rings, which was much
clearer than the bar had been. Andrea leaped up to grasp them, and while she watched herself in the darkened projection room, she winced. Her hair looked so greasy that it glistened when she looked up at the ceiling before pulling herself to a stationary mount. She looked away.

"Here it comes!" Tony said, with the kind of tone an eight-year-old might have when spotting the ice cream man cornering the block.

She opened her eyes again. Onscreen, she had just threaded one of the rings with her right leg. Her entire upper body trembled; in times past she could dangle herself high above the floor and twirl her legs through the rings with the kind of ease one normally experienced in swinging their legs off the bed when getting up in the morning.

The other leg threaded the ring. After a moment to balance herself, she straightened, then arched her back, flowing downward in what she called her imitation of a swan dive, with her arms winged by her sides, Her wrists tremored and wavered, blurring onscreen, since she had lost so much of her kinetic control.

"There it is, right there," Tony said. He flicked the "pause" button on the projector so that the image of Andrea dangling from the rings froze. He picked up the bound volume of Film Comment and showed it to Andrea. "Now look!"

She couldn't.

"Well, come on! Look at it! Doesn't it piss you off?"

"Why should it piss me off?"

"Well look at it! That's you!"

It was. The angle of the arms, the way the back arched, the smile
they were all the same. At that point, Tony rose, turned the lights in
the room back on, and clicked the projector into reverse. "I don't
want to see any more," he said, when Andrea looked at him.

"I don't need to see any more," Andrea said.

The film quickly regurgitated through the projector gate back onto
the white reel. Tony flipped the book closed with a snap. He chuckled
at her—the bewilderment, amazement, or whatever she felt must have
shown in her face. "That Utrecht's one crafty fucker, isn't he?" he
said. "You know what we ought to do? We ought to find him right now
and show him this." He vaulted himself out of the chair and sprang to
his feet as if he intended to do it right at that moment.

"Well, it could still be a coincidence," Andrea said.

Tony gaped at her in mock horror. "Does this look like that
newspaper picture of you or what?"

"Well yes, but. . . ."

Tony took the affirmation as permission. He grabbed the reel of
film and stormed toward the door.

"Tony, wait!" Andrea called. The soles of his Converse skidded on
the carpet.

"What's wrong?"

When she looked down at her lap, she noticed that her fists had
clenched there. "I've got to get back to the lab," she said. "Or
Gerald will wonder where the hell I've gone."

All the way there, Tony clung along after her, breathing words down
her neck. "Don't you realize what we've got here?" he asked. "We
could crucify the guy for this."

"Tony, there's more to it than just that," she replied, over her
shoulder, while entering the employee door of the equipment room.

"Well, I'm taking this over to Utrecht, right now," Tony said, while he quickened his pace and skipped over toward the Cinema department offices.

"He probably won't be there," Andrea warned, from the same counter that Tony had first shown her the picture in the Film Comment magazine.

Utrecht wasn't. Tony dragged his feet back to the Equipment room several moments later, muttering cuss words beneath his breath. "Well, what do we do now?" Tony murmured.

Andrea could afford to talk with Tony by the counter. The drop-off box for cartridges and rolls of film was still empty. And, along with all the professors, most students made it to the Friday Happy Hours too. Gerald still hunched over his desk, racking his brains over all the numbers and figures. "It still could be a coincidence," Andrea said to Tony.

"Are you kidding? I saw your expressions when you saw the picture in Film Comment and then the one we flashed on the screen. You're so blown away, you don't know what to think."

The remark gnarled a black cloud over her. "I still don't think that we should just go right to Utrecht and show him this stuff. He could always deny--or worse, laugh at us."

"What are you--afraid of the big, bad professor or what? He ain't nothing to be scared of."--

"Well, why are you so bound and determined to make crooks out of them?"

"Andrea, the man took a picture of you from a newspaper, doctored it up, and now he's trying to pass it off as some sort of a relic."
"Well, I've been thinking about that," she said, pausing coolly. "Do you think that some professor with a reputation and ethics is going to risk forging a copy of some picture?"

"Yes!"

"God Tony, you're really bitter." At that moment, she realized that due to the volume of their voices, Gerald would have to go to the Theater department to avoid catching bits and pieces of what they said. It didn't matter.

"Well, I just don't see how any of these guys in the Cinema department are going to help me get ahead in film," Tony explained. "If they were any good, they'd be out in Hollywood now, helping out with all the big productions, rather than trying to put one over on a bunch of students in Illinois."

Out of the corner of her eye, Andrea noticed that Gerald had lifted his eyes from the paperwork. She urged Tony to quiet down, and tried to think of a subject to divert him toward. "Well, I don't know. It might seem as if I'm unsure about this, but there's got to be something more to it. Did you ever stop to think that, if this was my picture that he chose to doctor up, then why did he choose me?"

"You mean," Tony asked, "why you out of all the other hundreds of thousands?" She deeply nodded for him. "I get it."

They paused in silence, looking away from each other, to think. "Yeah," Andrea said, "I think the better question for Dr. Utrecht is, why did he choose my picture?"

"I'll give you the best question," Gerald's voice boomed from across the room. He stood when Tony and Andrea gazed toward him, walking around from behind the desk. "If Dr. Utrecht really did doctor
up Andrea's picture from that gymnastics thing, and then put it in that magazine, don't you think that he would have really freaked out when she showed up _in his class_?"

Andrea thought that one over for awhile. Tony joined her. She then remembered Tony's remark shortly after he had met her: "So, where have you been hiding all semester?" She was going to speak, but Tony beat her to it. "So, you've been over there listening to this the entire time?" he said, tensing his entire upper body.

"It was hard not to, with how loud you were both speaking," Gerald said. The thickness of his glasses made his eyes seem smaller, droll, even cocky. "But, I'll be cool."

Andrea tugged on Tony's shoulder, to guide his attention toward her. She said, "Well, wait a minute, do you remember what you told me that first time? That I blended in easy? Maybe Dr. Utrecht hasn't even noticed me yet."

Tony looked her up and down, smirking. "Then he's missed plenty;" he said, laughing at his own remark.

Gerald asked to see the issue of Film Comment and the strip of film with Andrea's swinging rings images on it. Looking it all over, he nodded, and said, "You guys ought to just go over and see Dr. Utrecht first thing Monday morning."
CHAPTER SIX

Andrea had been in college for her third semester, yet that
Monday morning was the first time she'd ever seen a professor or
instructor during an office hour. It was nine o'clock in the morning
when Tony picked her up in the lobby of the Harriman Tower. "Well, at
least I know the world looks the same at this time of the morning;"
was the first thing he said.

Autumn encroached. Cool breaths of air blew over the dew-
dampened grass, and while the sun shone brightly enough for Andrea to
shield her eyes from it, it failed to warm her. She wished she'd put
on her warm-up jacket back at the room. Tony strode, head back, with
the bound copy of Film Comment beneath his right arm.

Faceless masses herded to class along the sidewalk with them.
The year before, when Andrea's friend Lori had come down from Mount
Prospect, she'd commented that the crowds of students all looked like
they had been extras in a George Romero zombie movie. When Andrea
looked up at Tony, during that moment, she realized why she liked him
more and more all the time—he didn't seem to fit in with those "faceless
masses." She asked him. "Have you ever been to see Dr. Utrecht on an
office hour, or any professor, for that matter?"

"No."
He had glanced down to look at her while walking on,
returned his eyes forward, "then double-taked, to look at her again. He
seemed, to Andrea, to be studying something about her.

"What?"
She wanted to know what it was.

"Oh, I was just noticing something," Tony said. "That way you were
looking at me just then. Your eyes open and close the way an aperture
on a camera does. I think your pupils even get a little larger."

"You make me sound like a machine."

"No, no," Tony said. the words urgently. "They look pretty, they really do." That was the last they spoke all the way to the Landeford-Wright building. By the time they reached the building, at the opposite end of campus from the Harriman Tower, Andrea's ankles ached. During the beginning week of classes, she'd had blisters; at least that had stopped happening.

Before they entered the Communications Building, Tony slid the clip of film out of the book, where it had formed a bookmark for Dr. Utrecht's article. He held it up to the sunlight to gaze at some of the frames. "What are you doing?" Andrea asked.

"Just superstitious, I guess," he replied. "I'm just checking to make sure that the images haven't metamorphosed to something else over the weekend.\) They hadn't.

The offices for the Cinema department faculty had once been a classroom. Some construction crew had erected tall aluminum and glass partitions within it. Burgundy carpet covered what had probably been a standard, white-flecked-with-gray linoleum floor. The partitions formed a "rat maze" between the offices, and when Andrea and Tony sneaked down the improvised hallway, they found that another student had beaten them to Dr. Utrecht.

They killed the time by sitting in a maintenance-closet sized lobby set apart from the offices. Andrea sat in one of two chairs and picked up one of the Cahiers du Cinema magazines that lay on the plexiglass coffee table. "I want to see how much French I remember since high school," she told Tony, who sat across from her.
Tony shrugged. "I can't even understand my father sometimes."
"Is he French?"
"Yeah. He was born over there. No, wait a minute— he was the first of his family born after they emigrated here."
Andrea glanced down at the magazine, unable to make sense out of any of the printing except for a few nouns (auto, chemise, maison). Only a few moments later, the student who'd come to see Dr. Utrecht left. Until that point, she hadn't realized how anxious she'd been to see him. She'd slept well throughout the weekend.

Good thing Tony had come along with her, because he served as the spokesperson for the first few minutes of the meeting. Dr. Utrecht had emerged from the doorway to greet them with a wide smile. "Very nice to see you both today," he said. Andrea had always felt that if someone had to speak a sentiment such as that, then they didn't actually feel it.

When they followed him into the office, Andrea thought that while she envisioned that Dr. Utrecht might live in a stale, musty old abode cluttered with relics, she never thought he'd be able to do the same with a corner of a converted, Landeford-Wright classroom. Dr. Utrecht eased himself into an antique, oak wood chair with red velvet upholstery, which had been tacked onto the frame with multi-faceted brass rivets. Shelves filled with crumbling, yellowed books lined the walls. The bindings had faded past the point of title legibility, at least from the wooden chair where Andrea sat.

A rack with pipes posed against it rested atop the desk, in the corner closest to Andrea. She prayed that he would hold off on the urge to light up a bowlful while they talked. Dr. Utrecht lifted his
palms toward his guests and said, "So what can I do for the both of you today?"

Tony glanced at Andrea, who had no idea of how to start things. He said (to Dr. Utrecht) "It's kind of hard to figure out a way to bring this up, so I just want to ask you a question." He gestured with raised palms toward Andrea. "Does she look familiar to you in any way?" Andrea felt voltage surge through her body. The casual, though blunt opening had been such a shock for her that she yelped.

She regained composure, though, in time to see Dr. Utrecht looking at her. He lowered, drawing his chair closer in to the desk. At such close range as that, she saw that his face was a fallen-leaf pattern of dry lines. When he squinted to look at her more closely, some new lines etched their way in. One eye closed, behind the thick glasses. Taking into account his background, Andrea expected him to form a "frame" with his outstretched palms, while studying her.

Both of his eyes opened--wide. He backed away, in the chair, the wheels underneath it creaking. A pink hand with straight-trimmed fingernails grazed across his navy-blue pinstriped vest. It reached up and stroked his chin, causing his jowls to ripple. "Good Lord," he said, "you know, I may have seen you before, but for the life of me I can't say where."

Andrea prayed--whatever you do, Tony, don't say "Well how about on a page of the Schaumburg Free Press?"

Instead, he was much more restrained. He said "Well, I was filming her last week for a project in Film Production I, and something interesting happened." With that, he grabbed for the bound volume of Film Comment, with its accompanying film clip of Andrea, setting them
atop the desk, side by side,

Andrea thought that it would be impossible for Dr. Utrecht to see the images on the film clearly. She said "I could go get a projector so that we can beam them on the wall or something."

"No, no," the professor bellowed. He pushed himself out of his chair with his arms and rose, shuffling over to one of the shelves of books. "I may as well stop kidding around with you." He grabbed one of the books on the shelf and yanked it down, cradling it into his hands to flip to a page, looking as if he'd been through the pattern several times before, in similar situations, "This is about Geneve Pryal, isn't it?"

Tony and Andrea looked at each other. Andrea had thought that the question was rhetorical, that Dr. Utrecht would answer it for them any second. When the pause lengthened to the point of awkwardness, Tony spoke up: "Well, yes, it is."

Dr. Utrecht nodded, knowingly, "And you probably have that picture from the newspaper that looks exactly like the one of Geneve Pryal that I found. Is that correct?"

Andrea had never stopped to think that possibly, other people in the cinema program, some possibly from North Chicago, could have connected the newspaper picture with her. Against her better judgment, the following words escaped from her lips: "But I'm the one in the picture, I'm the gymnast who was in that picture you're talking about."

Tony added "You mean other people have pointed that out to you?"

Dr. Utrecht's chin swivelled back and forth between gazes at Andrea and Tony. "Wait a minute now," he said, "One at a time." He looked at Andrea, and then down at a photograph in the book he cradled. "So
you say you were the gymnast in the picture that I supposedly doctored?"
Andrea nodded. "Well then, I've got something to show you," He handed
Andrea the book, opened to a page with a photograph. The picture was
an early photographic portrait—the young woman and man in it smiled
closed-lipped, forlorn smiles (it must not have been too far past the
days when photographers had to open the aperture of the camera for over
ten minutes and needed to affix their subject's heads to clamps to keep
them still).

"That's you," Tony said, over Andrea's shoulder.


Andrea gazed more closely at "herself" in the picture. Geneve
wore a high-necked dress embellished with lacy frills around the collar
and the tops of the puffed sleeves. She had done something to her lips
to darken them and create a pouting effect. Andrea wasn't sure
whether lipstick had been invented then, so she didn't know whether it
would be accurate to call the lip makeup that. The hairstyle was a
pompadour—gathered in a small bun at the top of her head, allowed to
billow out around all sides.

"Beautiful woman," Tony said. Andrea checked Moret after that.
The man who'd waved a wand over a tapestry covering a skeleton held
Geneve. He wore the same thin beard that appeared as if he'd drawn it
on with grease paint. His eyes narrowed and focussed ahead; Andrea
figured that he must have been thinking good thoughts while sitting
there beside Geneve, or he must have seen something in the distance that
pleased him. Collars on white shirts stood up much more stiffly in
those days, and the tailoring of charcoal gray tweeds conformed to
the gentlemen's body in a way not seen often in the "take it off the
rack world" of the present.

"Well why have you shown us this?" Andrea asked.

Dr. Utrecht shrugged, which seemed a strange mannerism in a man of his age and bearing. "It's what I show to everyone who shows me that newspaper article," he said. "I ask people to check the picture in the book you're holding against the one from *Atlantis Underseas* and the suburban Chicago newspaper."

Andrea looked at the picture of Geneve by Moret's side, then at the picture of her floating on the set of *Atlantis Underseas*. She wanted to speak up for the film clip showing her on the rings, but Tony beat her to it (she was beginning to think that either his mind or his tongue worked much quicker than hers--hopefully it was just the latter).

"Well, we're not even here about the newspaper picture, exactly," Tony said. "We just want to show you that film clip."

Rather than drag a projector into the little office, Dr. Utrecht agreed to go with them to the projection room. The other section of the film production class met at that hour, in the adjoining soundstage. "Goodness," Dr. Utrecht said. "I hope we don't disturb them all by the turning on and off of lights and beaming of projectors."

Andrea and Tony glanced past the glass and into the soundstage. Students slumped down into the desks in there; Jack Corell stood before them, saying something. "I wouldn't worry about it," Tony said. "When Corell lectures, your mind goes off in a million different directions anyway," Andrea felt embarrassed for him. She didn't know if that was the kind of remark to be said about an instructor to a professor.

The projector and the screen hadn't moved since the Friday before, Tony slid the pressure plate open and inserted the film clip. Andrea
flicked out the light when Tony gave the signal. The image of her
dangling from the rings blazed onscreen--Tony had activated the "pause"
and "lamp" buttons at the same time.

In the darkened room, Andrea couldn't see Dr. Utrecht's facial
reaction to the picture. He stood with his back to her anyway. She
thought, though, that she heard a small gasp. And he stood still.
"When did you take this?" he wanted to know.

"Last Thursday," came Tony's curt reply.

Dr. Utrecht revolved, to face Andrea. When he did so, the light
from the projector bulb reflected off his glasses, giving his gaze a
fiery glare that frightened her. "You are she," he said.

"Turn on the lights Andrea," Tony said. She reached back for the
switch, and when she felt it, she flicked it up. The light revealed
Tony, facing Dr. Utrecht with arms folded, tapping one toe on the carpet.
He had tilted his head to look at him out of the sides of his eyes,
smirking cockily.

"I am she," Andrea said, mostly to break Dr. Utrecht's stare on
her--it had started to feel uncomfortable, as if the heated glare that
had shown on his glasses from the projector bulb melted holes through
her. The professor blinked rapidly, lifting his glasses frame with a
thumb and forefinger to rub his eyes.

"Well what now?" Tony wanted to know. "We're not the run-of-the-
mill people who point out the newspaper picture, are we?"

Dr. Utrecht turned to him. He shook his head. Andrea wondered
if the man could still get words out if he wanted to. It felt like a
stalemate. Andrea wanted to ask him if he had, in fact, doctored the
picture of her. Maybe he'd break down and admit it, instead.
When he finally spoke, it shocked her. He turned to Tony and said "What did you do, stage this? I've got to admit that it's a pretty novel idea. Most people just show the newspaper clipping."

"No, I didn't stage it," he shot back. "What do you think I did, comb the country for the girl in the newspaper picture that you supposedly doctored and then launch off on this elaborate scheme just to humiliate you?"

"No, I don't think that," the professor replied. He turned to Andrea once again. "That image of Geneve Pryal in Atlantis Underseas is not copied from you, young lady. I'll admit that it rings as a coincidence that the image looks exactly like the one of you in the newspaper and on the screen here today. Now I don't know what else to say on that. I've got to go back to the office to do some things."

When Dr. Utrecht left the room with some heavy-footed booming, Tony said, "We've got him pissed off now. I think he really did airbrush your newspaper picture." He chuckled, but his grin evaporated when he looked more closely at her. "Hey, you look like you feel queasy or something."

"I do."

"Oh. You know that is kind of weird that not only do you look like that picture Utrecht found from that film, but he also found another one from real life. Do you think you might be related to her or something? Do you have relatives that come from France?"

"No, Tony. I don't know."

"Well, I remember how you said that your grandmother didn't seem to like the idea of you going into film. Hell, if someone in the family was in a film, you would think she'd be proud and want to tell you all
That was it. Andrea froze.

"Oh, oh," Tony said. "What's wrong?"

"Tony, I think you might have hit on something there."

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Later, they sat at a table on the third floor of the Darwin P. Carney Library. It was nearly eleven. Andrea had missed her Intro to Advertising class, Tony, his Technical Composition. Neither cared. On the third floor of the library were the books in Humanities, Radio and Television, and Film. The books dealing in the cinema had the Dewey Decimal number of 791.43, and occupied rows of shelves eight feet high and fifty feet long. Tony and Andrea sat near there.

Their table had become littered with every book they could find that obliquely or directly dealt with any aspect of the career of Jacques Moret. "Imagine what kind of extra credit we could get if we could write a term paper about all this," Tony said.

Andrea snickered. She said, "It's kind of strange to hear you talk so aggressively about schoolwork."

He had been reading over the text of a book about the dawning years of the cinema. The exercise had gotten frustrating for Andrea, since most of the books she had found said the same, general things about Moret. Moret sunk the rest of his energy and fortune into Atlantis Underseas. Michel double-crossed both him and the greedy people from Pathe by taking off with the film to the desert, to get killed out there in a chase.

"Hey, check it out," Tony said. "This one says stuff about
Andrea moved closer to him, attempting to read along. A picture of a house that seemed to be made entirely of glass accompanied the text. It was the studio of the Nova film company, adjoining Moret's property in a part of Paris.

Tony paraphrased: "It says that Jacques Moret and Geneve Pryal, a rising circus performer, were lovers. Well, we knew that. Geneve starred in *Atlantis Underseas*; well, that's nothing new, either. Holy shit. This Michel, Jacques' brother, he seemed as if he was a real weasel. You know what he did? He stole Geneve away from his brother. Took her to America along with him, when he was going to tour with the film. Well, we all know what happened from there. Geneve started performing with the Ringling Brother's Circus. Michel split to Utah, to help those guys make cowboy movies. The guys from Pathe came to Geneve's dressing room to find out where Moret was. That night she told the men, she slipped from the rings and fell to the circus floor:"

"Oh my God," Andrea said, grasping the book to read more closely yet. "Did she die?"

"Doesn't say. Anyway, those Pathe guys went out to Utah and ran down Michel in the desert, killing him and destroying the film at the same time."

"What happened after that?"

"Oh yeah. Jacques set fire to that pile of his films."

"It still doesn't make sense why he would do that--burn up all his films that way."

"Well shit. If my brother stole my girlfriend, fucked me over on
a deal like that, and then managed to let something valuable like that get destroyed, even if he did die doing it, well, I'd get bummed out, too. I might say 'fuck it' and light all the films on fire or something like that."

"God, where am I going to find out whether that Geneve died when she fell like that," Andrea said, glancing over the pile of books, to see if she'd overlooked any. 

"You could get on the phone to Information, in Paris. Ask them if they have a listing on a Geneve Pryal,"

"Tony! God!"

"What's wrong? She could still be alive today. She'd be about ninety years old, but she could still be alive today."

"Well, if we could find her, she could tell us if that picture Utrecht found is genuine or not."

"She could tell us a lot more than that," Andrea looked at him for a long while after he'd said that. He widened his eyes at her and nodded.

"Well, I'd better start thinking about leaving," Andrea said. "I don't want to miss out on Contemporary World, too."
CHAPTER SEVEN

That night, Andrea dreamt.

She and Tony rode on a boat, in the ocean. Made of splintering wood, it appeared to be a giant shoe, tottering on the waves. Tony wore a charcoal grey waistcoat and trousers, on top of a high-collared white shirt. His hair was brushed back from his face, and he sported the thin kind of a mustache that seemed as if it had been drawn on.

They sat on a hard bench against the bow, and Andrea felt the intermittent spray of the splashing water. Tony clasped a disc-shaped container on his lap. Written on the package were the words "Atlantis Underseas."

Crowds of other travelers had joined them on the boat. They all looked mired, plopped down among the benches, their clothes greasy with sweat. Some sneezed and coughed, moaning while drawing blankets tightly over themselves. Others snarled and scowled, and when they glanced at her, their teeth gritted. Andrea looked down. Her dress was crisp, and felt fresh. It covered her from the base of her neck to her ankles, with long sleeves that puffed out at the shoulders, accented with frilly lace. She also felt her hair gathered atop her head.

Someone yelled out "Land!" and pointed over the bow. When she looked out that way, she saw the Statue of Liberty, not green and crusty, the way she'd remembered seeing it as a twelve-year-old on a trip to New York City, but shining, copper. The buildings of New York lay just beyond the statue. They were much lower, naturally, yet still a cliff-like cluster.
The next part of the dream was fuzzy, as if it were the static of passing stations while switching channels on a television set.

Another image materialized. Andrea sat next to Tony on what, at first, appeared to be the bench on a buggy. Tony held the reins. Flying dust formed clouds that distorted her view of him, yet she could see that his eyes had widened, the brows gnarling in an expression of terror. The ride seemed smooth for a buggy, until Andrea realized that they had been out on the flat desert.

A team of four horses pulled the wagon for them. When she looked up, she saw that a canopy shielded them from the sun. They rode in a Conestoga wagon. Tony shouted something at her. "What?" she asked him, having to shout back over the rumble of the wheels and the horse's hooves.

"Are they there?"
"Where?"
"THERE!" He nodded toward her side of the wagon. She leaned over to get a look around at her side. The head lanterns of an open, vintage World War I era car glared at them like the eyes of a fly. It gained.

"Yes, they're there," Andrea said.

Tony yanked violently on the reins, shouting at the beasts tugging the wagon, screaming curses. He bounced on the metal bench, and Andrea grabbed ahold of his arm, afraid that he would fall out. She glanced back, over her shoulder, at the gaining car.

It loomed closer. She could see the grimaces on the faces of its driver and two passengers, all men. The flying dust clogged her nostrils, and she sneezed, her eyes tearing. When she was able to
focus again, the dust cleared for her, to form a frame for something that she was apparently supposed to see. The hub of the car's wheel protruded straight out, pointing. In *Ben-Hur*, a chariot rigged with such a spur at its spoke center whittled away the wheels of the other vehicles, causing them to crash.

The car caught up with them and angled in. Before she saw the flying flecks of wood, she knew what would happen. Her side of the wagon collapsed. Tony fell atop her. They screamed, amid the flying splinters of wood and sifts of sand.

****

''Andrea! Andrea!''

She woke, to find someone grabbing ahold of her arm, shaking it. Cathy. With her other hand, she tapped lightly at her face and cheekbones. When the details of her face faded into view, she saw that her eyes bulged, and her lower lip trembled. The last time she'd looked that scared had been when she imagined someone crawling about on the ledge outside the window.

''My God, girl, you must have been having one hell of a dream!''

''Oh wow,'' Andrea said. ''What was I doing?''

''You were thrashing around on the bed--and screaming!''

****

''Tony, I've got to get home,'' Andrea said on the phone, late that next morning. ''I don't know if I can afford the train. We don't get paid until next week. Do you know anyone who's going north over the weekend?''
"Yeah," came his reply, over the line. "I think this is the weekend Matt goes home. He goes home every other weekend. He's got a girlfriend up there."

"Well, do you think he'd take me? I mean, I know it's short notice, but..."

"Hell yeah, he'll take you. I was thinking of going along myself."

"Good. Would he be leaving Friday?"

"Yeah, hey, I'm glad you called. You're invited over on Wednesday night."

"What happens on Wednesday night?"

"Oh, well: I'm going to shoot another film. I was kind of late on the last one, so I'm going to do this one early, to get a jump."

"You're going to film something at your house?"

"Yeah. Oh, you'd better be prepared to be in it, too. You're not afraid of the camera, are you? Well, I know you're not, because I filmed you on those rings... come on over Wednesday night, okay?"

"All right," After she got some directions to the Pennywell House for Wednesday night, she hung up.
"I don't believe we're doing this!" Matt said.

Tony had slammed the door behind himself after letting T.J. into the back seat. He pointed at the ignition. He said "See that little metal thing you just put into the slot? Twist it and step on the long black thing on the floor and let's get the hell out of here."

Matt fired the engine on his Charger. Its wheels chirped on the dirt when he shifted into reverse, powdering dust onto a clump of shrubs beside the driveway. Tony wondered how many sets of tires Matt went through in a year. He also wondered how he kept enough fuel in the gas-guzzling dinosaur. Matt said "You know, I didn't think you were serious when you first told me you wanted to do this." The car groaned off the driveway's end dip and backed onto the cobblestone of Bayberry Street.

Tony ripped the pull tab off the top of a can of Olympia. He replied (with a chuckle) "Well you were really up for this film idea when we talked about it yesterday."

"I could get in trouble for this."

T.J.'s voice boomed from the back seat: "What else do you want us to use for a skeleton? One of those cardboard ones that people hang on their doors during Halloween?"

"Yeah--settle down," Tony went on, "Have a beer. You get a free drunk tonight for this gig, you know."

The Archaeology Department's barracks lay only several hundred yards away from the Pennywell House. Roads that snaked around the outskirts of the campus forever belied the old axiom that "the shortest
distance between two points is a straight line." Tony glanced at his watch. "See if you can double-time this," he said. "Andrea and her friend are supposed to come by about now."

Matt said "Hey, eat me Taverneau." Orange twilight glinted off the shiny yellow hood of the Charger, and cast a glow over his face that matched the color of his hair.

"So we finally get to meet this famous Andrea," T.J. said from the back seat.

"Yeah, shit," Tony replied. "You and all of those other guys in the house drooling over her. That's why I want to get back early."

They reached the barracks. There were three of them--Matt parked the car in the narrow drive between the ones designated for the Archaeology and Recreation departments. The buildings lay behind the library, where tall oaks stood over them. "Why the hell are these things here, anyway?" Tony wanted to know, when they all got out of the car.

"Cause the university got so big, there wasn't room for all the offices in the buildings," Matt answered. He served as custodian for the barracks area, as part of a financial aid program (actually, his wealthy father paid the bills for his studies; he used the money from his job to buy tires for the Charger, probably). "Yep, they put those things up about 1972. Shit, all them damn trees. They probably want me to clean out the damn gutters."

Globe lamps on sculpted metal poles flooded the area with a yellow haze. Redness in the sky had dissolved to navy blue within the short time they'd driven over. Tony laughed at Matt. He said "Your hair looks green in this light." That caused Matt to scowl and grumble under
his breath, and Tony laughed harder. Matt looked like a pissed-off leprechaun.

Matt leaped the four steps to the Archaeological barracks all at once. Tony and T.J. followed, their feet creaking on the flimsy wood. 'Yeah, this place scares the shit out of me sometimes, when I'm here all alone on a dark night,' Matt said, when he keyed open the door. Once it was open, he ran his hand along the inside jamb, to find the light switch. The following flourescent blaze revealed tables with black, granite tops, nozzled faucets spouting down into sinks built at the ends of them.

"This looks like a high school physiology lab," Tony said.

At the other side of the room, Arnold, a human skeleton, hung from his wrought iron bar. "There he is," said Matt, as if he had been introducing his roommate.

Matt undid some fasteners that fixed Arnold's backbone to the steel bar. The bones clattered and squeaked; Matt mumbled something about having to be careful, as he didn't know whether all the joints would hold. "Tell you what. T.J., grab his legs, and let's bend him in half. He's going to have to go that way sooner or later, anyway," T.J. squatted to grasp the sharp ankles and toes of the skeleton. It didn't make sense to Tony that T.J. should grab the low end, because at six-two, he'd have to slump over in order to keep his end level with Matt's.

"You both are going to have to get in the back seat," Matt said when they carried the skeleton down the barrack's steps. "No sense risking messing him up to try and put him in the back." After climbing into the back seat, Tony steadied the skeleton while Matt lowered it inside. "Hey, I just thought of something funny to do," Matt said,
after he entered the car and slid behind the wheel. "We'll cruise down Big Muddy Boulevard with this thing."

"Like hell you are," Tony said.

Tires chirped on the gravel drive as the Charger backed away.

****

"Holy shit!" Matt hissed.

Pulsating blue light blinked throughout the interior of the Charger. A campus security officer had pulled them over near the intersection of Big Muddy Boulevard and Soldiers and Sailors Drive. Matt jerked open the glove compartment and groped around in it.

"What are you looking for?" Tony asked.

"Fucking Certs, man," he replied. "That pig will be able to smell beer on my breath. Shit."

"Serves you right for taking a detour," Tony said.

"Hey, fuck you."

"Don't get so uptight. That's a campus porker. They can't do anything except yell at you," Tony watched the officer waddle his beer gut toward them, wielding a flashlight.

"Maybe I ought to get out," Matt said.

"No!" T.J. hissed. "Just sit back like nothing else is going on. I know how to deal with these assholes."

The officer stood beside Matt's door. Matt rolled the window down.

"Good evening," the officer drawled. He leaned over to look at the passenger seat. "What have you got there?"

"That's Arnold," T.J. said.

"That's a skeleton,"
"Hey, watch what you say about Arnold. He's sensitive about being thin, you know."

Matt covered his eyes. Tony covered his mouth, to stifle a laugh. The police officer went on, saying "Now where did you boys get that?"

All three of them looked at each other. T.J. said "Well, we're Biology majors. Arnold's our homework."

After asking for student identifications, the officer let them all go. "Yeah, you really know how to handle these guys, don't you?" Matt said when they pulled away. "We're lucky we ain't in the slammer by now."

****

"You don't think I overdressed;" Andrea asked Cathy while they walked down East College drive. She stopped to raise her arms, twirling slightly to model the outfit for her: black leather blazer with belt and back pleat, the same gold-flecked, clingy-knit black top she'd worn skating, her best mauve slacks, smoke hose, and black velvet sandals with cork heels four inch high.

"Andrea, you look fantastic," Cathy said.

"But I'm going to a house with twenty-four guys."

The light changed at a street corner. Cathy scampered across. "Are you coming or what?" she called from the other side.

"Let's go back," Andrea said.

Cathy slapped her thigh so hard that Andrea heard it from across the street. "No," she replied. "Now get your ass across here before the light changes again."

When they turned a corner at Cherry street, Andrea knew that it
wasn't far to Bayberry. It would be difficult to see the street numbers in the dark—Tony had said that the Pennywell house was brick, with a white roof, one story. Every house along Cherry street contained brick construction of some kind.

The next intersection they reached might have been the one. A street sign reading "Bayberry" protruded from the patch of turf at the street corner. Andrea noticed a small "700" on the right side of the sign. She said "It's got to be one of these first few houses." They glanced toward the row of houses. Screeching electric guitars wailed from an old Cape Cod two doors up. A lamp on the front lawn splashed light on the number "707".

"That isn't it, is it?" Cathy asked.

"Yes," The men lived in a brick structure behind the Cape Cod. That dwelling had actually dampened the full din of the stereo music coming around from the back. Andrea and Cathy tip-toed around to the back to see where they might find a door.

A screened breezeway connected the Pennywell House with the Cape Cod. "That looks like a giant red brick rat maze," Cathy shouted, above the volume of the stereos. Andrea urged her through the screen door. Once inside the breezeway, only a particle board door separated them from the inside of the Pennywell House. War whoops bellowed from the other side of the door—Andrea had heard similar cries from her older brother and all his friends playing Cowboys and Indians when they were all pre-teens.

"Might as well bite the bullet and get it over with," Andrea said, pounding on the door with her fist. A live advertisement for beer opened the door for them. The young man with straight blond
hair wore a Budweiser t-shirt and carried a brimming mug of brew. The music that played behind him became clear at that point--ZZ Top--"Legs." Andrea glanced down at her mauve slacks and smoke hose. Oh God, she thought, while entering the room ahead of Cathy, "Women!" someone yelled. "We thought you were getting to be an endangered species."

We'd certainly go to any lengths to avoid a dump like this, Andrea though. They had entered a central room that looked as though it was supposed to be a lobby, or recreation room. Two gray, plywood benches lined both walls, giving the room the appearance of a seedy bus station in a small town. The guys who lived in the Pennywell House perched atop the ridges of the bench or else sat down. Most of them drank beer (a keg lay in the back room, beside the washer and dryer, she was told). To Andrea, they all looked faceless collectively, yet each possessed his own distinctive quirk. For one, it was an odd hat, a fedora with a plaid lumberjack shirt. For another, it was high cheekbones, thick black hair, and the chiseled, stern expression of an angry brave. These were they kind of guys who all would have been token misfits in whatever fraternity they had joined, so they simply banded (or else fell) together to form their own.

"Where's Tony?" Andrea asked the Indian brave.

"Taverneau?" came the reply. "He went out to pick up something for the movie he's going to film."

She and Cathy decided to go find a beer. A smaller room adjoined the central den, with the laundry closet beyond that. When passing through, she saw the school's tiny, carbon-arc lamps sprouting from the floor atop their flimsy aluminum stems. Someone had hung a dark brown
sheet against the far wall.

By the washing machine and the dryer, Andrea and Cathy helped themselves to plastic cups and filled them from the tap. Since they were sheltered from the lobby, the apartments, and the rest of the building, it was easier to speak back there--Andrea didn't have to raise her voice. "Listen, I don't want to give you the wrong ideas about Tony, by the guys who are here," she said. "Believe me, he wouldn't fit in."

Cathy nodded while she filled her cup. Out in the lobby, someone yelled "There he is! Yeah, your chickie's back getting a beer."

"That must be him," Andrea said, "Want to come out and meet him?" Cathy followed her past the lighting set-ups and out into the lobby. Once through the doorway leading into the lobby, Andrea came face to face with a skeleton. She screamed and dropped her beer on the floor. Falling back slightly, someone caught her at the underarms. When she turned around, she found that Cathy held her there.

"Hey T.J, take Arnold somewhere, Sit him down or something," Tony said. A bushy-headed bruiser grabbed ahold of the skeleton.

"Did you call that thing by name?" Andrea asked. She still felt limp, her heart pounding against her ribs.

"Yeah, Arnold," he replied.

"Oh, God, you scared the shit out of me," Andrea said, her breath wheezing. It suddenly occurred to her that "Arnold" was also her father's name.

"He's going to be in the movie tonight," Tony explained. "Hey, what do you say I get you away from all these crazies for awhile. I've got to tell you something," Andrea glanced at Cathy, to see how
she fared. Cathy had struck up a conversation with the Indian boy (when she saw Andrea glance her way, she said "This guy's in my Speech class"). It would be okay to "abandon" her.

Tony led Andrea into one of the apartments. It was barren in there—faded amber formica seemed to cover everything. The linoleum floor had been pock marked with crescent shapes from where people had leaned back in chairs. A poster of exotic flora from Tahiti and pasted pictures cut out of magazines saved the white plaster walls from complete barrenness.

He pulled out a chair for her, from the dinner table. The upholstery was tattered and grated against her thighs when she sat. Tony sat too, and he said "You're going to be in this film, did I tell you that?"

"You alluded to it," she replied. "What am I going to have to do in this film?"

"Sit. Remember how I told you, wait a minute, remember how we saw that film that Moret did? The one about how that magician throws that tapestry over the lady, she turns into a skeleton, and then he turns her back into a lady again? Well, I'm going to make my own version of that."

Suddenly a devil with fiery hair poked his head around the door jamb and yelled at Tony. "Hey Ant-wine, when are we going to get this show rolling? Lisa just got here with the costumes."

"Be there in a minute," Tony answered.

"Why did he call you Ant-wine?" Andrea asked. She detected a tinge of red on Tony's cheekbones.

"Because he found out that my real name is Antoine. You know,
A-N-T-O-I-N-E. Haven't heard the end of it since. But I get him back every now and then." Most of the people in the house had gathered in the room with all the lights by the time Tony and Andrea made their way back there. A slender, willowy girl about Andrea's age carried the costumes on coathangers. Long dresses, with billowy shoulders and lace frills—very similar to those she had seen in her dream of a couple of nights before. Tony introduced Andrea to Lisa, and at once, Andrea recognized the dark shrouds around the eyes and the sunken cheeks—she'd seen her in the theater department and at a couple of parties, dancing along with the soundtrack to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show.*

"I tried to find a dress that would fit you," Lisa said, in a nasal tone. "I heard that you were—shorter." Lisa stood eyes and nose above Andrea, a nose that she looked down while saying the second half of her last remark. She handed her the visibly shorter dress.

"You can change in my bedroom," Tony said. "Let me take you there."

Andrea felt crowded in that bedroom. Tony had it as nicely fixed as it could be, with collages on the walls, a small circular patterned throw rug, fluffy yarn bedspread, and stereo system. The "desk" was two dressers of the same size with a long piece of plywood laid across the tops of them. Brackets with shelves held books. As she looked around, she noticed that Tony could lie in his bed and reach across the room to turn the stereo on or off.

She undressed, then stepped into the early twentieth century outfit. For the moment she stood, in nothing more than her lace bra and hose, a lustful thought entered her mind. It was a flash of time
where Tony could have been a lucky, lavished man if he'd decided to barge in. Of course, it was fleeting. That's why Andrea flinched when Tony called "How are you doing in there, Andrea," from the other side of the door.

When she stepped out, she noticed something about his eyes. They looked wet, and narrowed. "Wow, you look just like that picture of Geneve that we saw in Utrecht's office," he said.

The dress felt funny grazing against bare skin and sheer nylon. It was meant, she realized, to be worn over bloomers and quarter-inch thick corsets drawn tight. They strolled back out into the lobby, where Andrea saw that they selected the only Pennywell House resident with a beard to play Moret. He wore a tux with tails and a white dress shirt with the collar up, to represent magician's garb (he looked more like an Old West undertaker).

Tony started shooting. They'd affixed one of the Super 8 cameras to a tripod in front of a chair, one of the tattered ones from the apartment dining rooms. Lisa sat in the chair first, after Tony exposed several feet of the Moret character raising his eyebrows and waving his wand through the air. The tapestry the magician would use in covering the chair was a tacky, red, Indian-flowered wall hanging from Brahmin's on Big Muddy. Andrea thought that they'd gone out with the sixties.

"Liven it up," Tony shouted from behind the camera, when the magician draped the tapestry over Lisa. "Put on a real cocky expression."Shortly after, he told him to freeze, while the stagehands helped the prima donna out from beneath the tapestry and off the chair.

Mr. Bush-head clattered over with Arnold the skeleton. Tony
helped him bend the joints so that they could force it into a sitting position. It didn't seem hard; the skeleton must have been fitted with swiveling joints and pins. Once in place, Tony allowed the magician out of his freeze when the film rolled again. "Laugh or something, Ted!" he shouted, at his actor. "It's funny--you just turned a chick into a skeleton."

It was almost an accurate comment, Andrea thought. Certainly enough men had turned women into catatonic crazies, from what she'd seen while in her stay at the dorms. That Tony would think that turning a woman into a skeleton was humorous annoyed her. He ordered the magician to freeze after a few more wand passes.

"Now we're going to put you in the chair, Andrea," Tony said. He guided her towards that chair, and for a moment, she felt like slapping his arm away. She sat down. He pressed in the trigger on the camera, to start rolling again. "Now Andrea, smile real devilishly," he told her. She didn't know what kind of expression she flashed at him, but it wasn't devilish, at least not in the mischievous way that he probably wanted. "Cut. Wait a minute." He lifted his head from behind the camera viewfinder. "Andrea, loosen up."

An impulse told her to spring up and bolt out of the room, but she remained there. When she imagined impaling Tony on the end of a giant pitchfork, she felt a grin erupt, curling her lips upward. Her eyes also widened.

"That's it!" he shouted. He ducked down and rolled the film. "That's great! Perfect!"

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Later, everyone stood in the lobby, the shooting room, or in the individual apartments, drinking beer and conversing. Tony and Andrea stood together, along with Cathy and the Indian brave (who had been introduced to Andrea as Josh).

"I'm curious about something," Andrea told Tony, who'd begun to teeter from all the beer. "What was the point of the film we made?"

Tony shrugged. His answer came out slurred. "Just a brainstorm I had. Particularly appropriate, considering everything that's happened this semester, isn't it?"

"I don't see how."

"You will."
CHAPTER NINE

The rest of that week passed quickly. Aside from class, Andrea spent most of Thursday sleeping, nursing a hangover. Just before noon on that Friday, she burst through the lobby door with her pile of dirty laundry. Matt's yellow boat waited for her, parked beside the curb. Tony and Matt leaned against the quarter panels, their arms folded.

Matt would bring his dirty laundry home, also. He had set it on the back seat, where he set Andrea's also. "Why ain't you got any dirty laundry, Antwine? Do you just recycle everything you wear? God, no wonder why you stink the way you do," Matt's voice still reminded Andrea of an animated cartoon beaver sawing through a tree trunk.

Tony could come up with no better comeback other than to call his friend a jackoff. They put Andrea in the back seat, amid all the dirty clothes.

When, upon pulling away from the curb Matt said "Let's get some beer," Andrea knew that it would be a long ride north to Chicago. (It was already a six-hour ride, legally). She didn't want to get bombed all the way up there.

Matt stopped at a truck-stop/quick store at the intersection of New Thebes Highway and the Interstate. Andrea stayed inside the car—she'd been inside the musty, dusty truck-stop before, and had sworn away from it ever after. Her fellow travelers returned to the car carrying a twelve pack of Olympia, and a small bag. It carried a Diet Pepsi for her. She was glad of that.
Shortly after the boat pulled off the entrance ramp, Tony and Matt opened their first cans of beer. Matt glanced in the rear-view mirror at Andrea. She felt that she must have shot him a look of tense-lipped disapproval, because Matt said "It's a long drive up there and tipped his can to her. Tony laughed along with him.

"Let's put on the jams!" Tony said. He lifted a case full of cassette tapes from beneath the seat. Andrea glanced behind her, at the rear panel, and saw two saucer-sized stereo speakers, each placed only a couple of feet from her ears. She winced when Tony inserted a tape into its slot on the dashboard.

The twanging guitar and bass chords that opened the 38 Special song "Hold on Loosely" seared her eardrums. Matt and Tony sang the chorus each time it came up: "Hold on loosely, but don't let go."

By the time they'd made it to Mattoon, Tony and Matt had already finished their third beers, working on their fourth. They'd stopped in Effingham to tap their kidneys. Andrea held on tightly—to the back of the seat—monitoring Matt's driving. Now and then she would perceive a slight weave, and if it continued, she was going to take over the wheel.

Tony noticed her. "What's the matter?" he asked, turning to her. "Calm down. Look at the way you're white knuckling the seat there," he had turned down the volume of "I want a new drug" on the stereo to speak to her.

Andrea eased her grip. "Well, you guys don't seem like you're paying attention to the road."

"We're okay," he said. He paused. "Andrea I want to tell you something, and keep in mind that it's because I care for you. I
think maybe you ought to get silly more often. You tend to be too serious."

"Getting bombed while driving down the highway is not my idea of getting silly."

Matt's lips formed a small "o," as Andrea could see in the rear-view mirror reflection. He looked as if he wanted to set up a sound proof booth around him.

"God, I don't mean just that," Tony said, covering his eyes with his palm. "I just meant that you ought to relax every now and then. And do something just for fun every now and then."

"I'll do whatever comes naturally," she said.

"Well, of course I'd only want you to be yourself."

"And I think that if you ever bothered to look closely," Andrea went on, "you'd realize that I'm not Miss Grim all the time." She thought of herself in smoke hose and lace bra when standing in Tony's bedroom, that Wednesday night before.

"I guess I just don't know you that well, yet," Tony said, turning to face front.

They rode in silence until the outer edges of Champaign. Then Matt said that they would have to stop to fuel up. He eased the car off an exit ramp and up an intersecting highway to a Standard station, pulling in. Tony filled the tank while Matt went inside to pay and buy some snacks. "I'm sorry if I made you mad back there," Tony said while crouched down, holding the nozzle.

Andrea straightened and leaned against the quarter panel, folding her arms. "That's okay," she said.

When Matt returned to the car carrying bags of pretzels and
a Tab for her, he said. "You can take it from here to Chicago if you want to."

At first, she reluctantly accepted, but when she got behind the wheel, she saw that it was a great day for a drive—the sun shone brightly and wispy cotton clouds floated across the sky. Firing the engine on the monster felt enlivening. Matt, who'd moved to the back seat, laughed with Tony when Andrea killed the engine on pulling away from the pumps. The last stick-shift Andrea had driven had been her mother's Datsun (the boat powered like a rocket ship compared to that).

However, she got them on their way north. "Have you got any music even remotely resembling jazz in that box?" she asked. "Like the Police, or even Yes?"

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The falling sun cast an orange glow over the flatlands by the time Andrea had reached Kankakee. It wasn't even six o'clock yet. "Winter's coming," Andrea said, when pointing out the shortening days to Tony and Matt.

"At least we're going to miss the rush hour traffic," Tony said, sipping from his last beer.

"It's not going to be too long before you have to get off," Andrea said to Tony. "You live in Chicago Heights, don't you?"

"Yeah, but I'm going to Matt's for tonight."

As they gained on the Chicago metropolitan area, Andrea thought about seeing her grandmother at home. That caused her stomach to bubble. She'd never had a problem talking to Nana in the past, but
never had she had something so intense to discuss.

Matt didn't help things. "Hey Andrea," he called from the back seat, "Tony told me all about those pictures of you on the gymnastics rings and how they look like a picture of some lady in a movie that Utrecht has."

Andrea turned to Tony. "How many people have you told about that?" she asked. "Your whole house?"

"No. Just Matt and T.J. They're cool. It's a pretty intense thing. I can't just keep it to myself."

"Well anyway," Matt went on, "do you think you're reincarnated from that lady in the picture, or what?"

"Who knows?"

"All I know is that's pretty freaky," Matt said.

"You know what you ought to do?" Tony piped in, "You ought to talk your dad into flying us over there, so we can look around for this Geneve Pryal."

"In the Cessna? Sure," Matt said. "Do you know of any fuel pumps floating around in the Atlantic Ocean? It would take that thing damn near a whole tank just to get from Midway to Little Egyptian."

"And besides," Andrea threw in, "we'd be totally lost over there anyway. I don't know French that well. And we can't go around flipping through dictionaries."

"No," Tony replied. "We could just look up my uncle Charles."

"You've got family over there? You never told me that;" Andrea said. Matt seconded her on it.

"Well I haven't seen Charles since my confirmation. That was
ten years ago," Tony went on. "But the guy spoke good English back then. And he's a character, too, from what I can remember."

Andrea circled Chicago on the expressway. When she arrived at the exit for Schaumburg and Mt. Prospect, the sun was only a narrow orange band on the horizon. Soon she pulled the boat into the driveway of her parent's ranch house, white with black shutters (she'd always referred to it as the "doll house").

Tony handed her her basket of laundry while Matt walked around to the wheel of the idling car. Before they parted, they exchanged telephone numbers. "We might stop by a little later," Tony said. "Matt lives in Barrington. That's not far."

"Okay."

"I've got a feeling that this is going to be one hell of a weekend," Tony went on.

"Uh-huh." She watched them pull out of the driveway and ease back down the street. When she walked up to the front door, she noticed that someone had taken the Datsun somewhere.
Only Nana had been home that night. Andrea walked through the front door into a dimly lit house. Her mother loved knicknacks of wrought iron and gold leaf: sconces nailed to the wall and chandeliers in both the living and dining rooms cast shadows of stretched bone, skeleton-like over the plaster and paneling, in the dim illumination cast by the small table lamp in the hall.

In the full light of day, the living room looked clean and immaculate, the way one might picture heaven's waiting room, with the white velour sofas and cream carpet. The darkness, tinged with shadows cast a ghostly haze over the room. One would have to feel along the wall to the hallway at the living room's far corner, turn and walk ahead some ten or twelve feet before coming to the kitchen. The alternative would have been to cross through the dining room and snake through the wrought iron gates there.

Andrea set her laundry basket down on the living room carpet. A rustling swish, followed by a thump, another rustling swish, followed by another thump met her ear from the direction of that hallway in the corner leading to the kitchen. "Nana?" Andrea called out. She turned her eyes away from the jamb leading to the hallway (at one time, a door had swung there).

When she glanced at the end of that hallway, she saw the backlit figure of her grandmother. Strands of her short hair wisped from her scalp, flashing in the dark, creating a beatific aura around her. It somehow took her a disconcertingly long time for her to respond or say anything. Andrea wondered for a moment whether she had been
looking at an apparition of Nana, seeping into the living room from the kitchen, when her body had collapsed due to a stroke, heart failure, or any other of the myriad things that could go wrong with a person that old.

"Hello, dear," Nana finally murmured. "What are you doing home?"

"Well I just," Andrea paused, wondering how she should take her grandmother's remark. Wouldn't, or shouldn't she be glad to see her? "I just thought I'd come up for a visit. A friend drove me up. Listen, do you mind if I get a little light on the subject?" She extended both arms before her to grope for the chandelier light switch on the wall. She found it.

Nana dragged herself away from her post in the middle of the doorway. The light of the chandelier burst forth all her details: the sagging skin that distorted the clear, almond-shaped eyes Andrea had seen in flapper-era photographs, and the housedress that looked like a hospital gown, bagging out at her shoulders, together with the crinkled, cracked, wrinkled lips that had deteriorated the most from her grandmother's own reluctance to put in her false teeth. She had probably been fixing herself a pot of tea in the kitchen—Andrea wondered if she had taken to living off the stuff in the past two years since Papaw had died. "Nice to see you again, precious," Nana said, lifting her arms as high as arthritis would permit them. Andrea clasped her with a quick hug, then stepped back.

"Well, where's Mom and Dad?" Andrea asked her.

"Gone for the evening," came the reply. "The symphony. They also went out to an early dinner."

"Bet Dad loves that," Andrea said with a chuckle. Nana brayed
with a nod, pausing with her chin tucked low. Andrea worried for a moment that she wouldn't be able to lift it again, but it rose.

"Like to come into the kitchen?" Nana asked, turning toward the hallway in the corner. "I've made some tea. We could have a nice chat." Without checking to see whether Andrea had taken her up on the idea, Nana lumbered toward the hallway. Andrea followed her on tiptoe. Nana's left shoulder rose higher with each step, causing an impulse in Andrea to thrust a hand under each of her armpits and lift, so that the shoulders would line up parallel with the floor, the way they should, and probably did, twenty years ago or more. They travelled one foot per second on their way into the kitchen. Once there, the acrid stench of Sri Lankan herbal essence assaulted her nostrils. The year before, Nana had given up Ginseng.

Black and white ceramic tile lay beneath Andrea's feet. It had come with the house when first built, in the early fifties. In the silence, the stiff soles of Andrea's jazz oxfords swished with rat-a-tat clickings over the grouted crevices. She realized that she'd been able to hear that normally minute sound because it was the only one to hear, save for the hiss of steam escaping from the teapot. Andrea yanked her personal mug (it bore her name) from the cabinet above the porcelain sink, and drew water from the tap to fill it. Her father always showed houseguests all the original kitchen fixtures—the steel faucet was flanked on either side by old-style "hot" and "cold" knobs that reminded Andrea of the Commodore's wheel on a yacht, miniaturized.

Once she'd filled her mug with water, she placed it inside the microwave oven atop the counter beside the sink. Invariably, those
same guests who would look over the ancient fixtures would chuckle at that odd juxtaposition of old and new.

A minute later, the timer on the microwave beeped, signalling that the water had been heated. Andrea reached for the Maxwell House instant and Cremora, cringing when she saw Nana purse her lips and pour the greenish liquid into her mouth. When Nana had first started drinking the foul concoction, Andrea joined her in it to oblige. Her grandmother's days would be few, and heaven forbid that she would let her carry the memory of a graceless granddaughter to the grave.

"You hate this, don't you?" Nana had asked, one of the times that Andrea had joined her with the acrid tea. "Let me tell you something young lady. Don't humor me," The episode had so shocked Andrea, as being the one time over the course of a decade that she'd seen her grandmother react to mundane life emotionally. Andrea promised herself thereafter to drink coffee with her.

Nana stared at the wall across from her while she drank her tea, Andrea eased into the chair beside her. After sipping from her mug a couple of times, she wondered whether Nana would show interest in her school life. She certainly wouldn't just launch off into an oratory of all her latest news--she wanted to make sure that at least she would be listened to. Finally, Nana periscoped her neck so that she could direct her gaze to her first granddaughter and start a conversation.

"So how are things going for you down there?"


Nana nodded. She blinked with an oozing of the eyelids, reminding Andrea of how cats seemed to like to sit around and "test their eyes" the same way, blinking slowly. "Meeting any nice fellas
down there?" she continued on.

Andrea ground her molars. "Some," she said. She thought of the film, and the picture of Geneve with Moret and wondered if her own grandmother had ever worn a dress similar to the one she'd had on when they made the film. Come on, make things easy for me, she pleaded inside. Ask me something about film.

"Still learning about those films, huh?"

There you go! "Yes," Andrea replied. "Grandma, I was wondering about something that has to do with that." She checked to see how intently her grandmother was listening. Since the woman had edged forward in her seat and widened her eyes just slightly, Andrea figured that she had a pretty good hold on her attention just then. "You never have seemed to like the idea of my going into film."

Seconds later, Andrea wished that she could have rewound reality as if it were a giant reel on a tape deck, to that point before she had said those words. Nana started to tremble. One of her rings clinked against the teacup handle she held. "Well dear, what would have given you an idea like that?" Nana asked.

"You get upset when I talk about it or even mention it," Andrea said. But don't point out to her that her fingers started to tremble when you mentioned it that time, she thought. "Well, maybe I shouldn't say that," she added for good measure.

Nana shrugged, averting her gaze and sipping from her teacup. It appeared that she'd calmed down; at least Andrea couldn't hear the clicking of her ring against the teacup any longer. For what seemed to her several minute's time, they each quietly sipped their beverages.

Andrea pondered over a way to get Nana to talk about her family's
history. Thinking back, she couldn't remember the last time she'd heard the old woman talk about her girlhood. The subject hadn't even arisen during the weeks surrounding her husband's funeral.

They finished their drinks. Nana lifted her body from the chair and shuffled with the teacup to the sink, where she'd laid it down. "If you're hungry," she told Andrea, "you might want to fix yourself a snack or something. I think I'm going to go lie down." It was eight-thirty.

"Nana," Andrea called. "I was wondering about something this week at school. I forgot where you came from before you came to this country as a little girl. Could you tell me again?"

Nana stood above the seated Andrea, pausing to think, as if she'd lost the memory of her youth. She looked back at her granddaughter to recite the following: "I was born in France. My parents died when I was very young, and I was put in a girl's home. When I was ten, a very nice man found me there. He adopted me and brought me to America."

Andrea gulped before asking this question: "Did you have any brothers or sisters?"

Again, Nana paused to tap her mental resources for the answer. "I had a sister. She was older than I, about thirteen years older. A magician took her under his wing, I think." Never before had Andrea heard about the sister, though she did know about Nana's girlhood in France.

"You never said anything about her before," Andrea said.

Nana opened the cabinet so that she could set her cannister of tea aside. She shrugged, once again. "That was a long time ago, and I've forgotten much of it."
Andrea had followed her around the kitchen with her eyes, nodding. She finally rose from her chair, and faced Nana. "There's something I very much want to tell you," Andrea said.

Before she said another word, Nana's lower lip began to tremble.
CHAPTER ELEVEN

"This chick's house is a lot harder to find in the dark," said Matt. Tony knew that he had paid attention to the schematic of streets and cul-de-sacs that led to Andrea's subdivision. Manicured pines crowding the street signs tipped him off that the Charger neared that white house with the black shutters.

"We're headed the right way," he said.

Matt's old high school girlfriend Corinne sat between them, straddling the old console atop an old pillow. Her face shone in the darkness as if she'd polyurethaned it. No matter how many times Tony glanced, gazed, or outright stared at her, she didn't seem aware, humming while looking out over the hood at the onrushing road. During late night bullshit sessions at the Pennywell House, Matt had hyped her so thoroughly to everyone, yet he knew exactly what to expect when they picked her up earlier in the evening—a potbellied, tight-lipped redhead. "But you gotta see that red pubic hair," Matt said when he and Tony had stopped for yet more beer, leaving Corinne out in the car.

Periodically, Matt would ask Tony for the time. He would have to drop Corinne off at the AM-PM quickstore for her midnight to eight in the morning shift later. "Turn off her?" Matt asked, motioning to the street sign at the corner he'd just rounded.

Tony chuckled, "Yeah; But what would you have done if that wasn't the right street? Turn around in this guy's yard over there?"

Matt glanced at his girlfriend and flashed a crooked smile at her (for the kind of passionate love that Matt said the two of them had shared, it seemed to Tony that they weren't too thrilled to see each
Can you believe that I live with twenty-two other guys just like this asshole?" Corinne gurgled back some sort of a response to indicate to her lover that she'd heard and at least rudimentarily understood what he'd said.

Tony knew they neared Andrea's neighborhood yet felt puzzled at the flashing blue and red lights glowing over the rooftops. "That looks like it's coming from a couple of doors away from Andrea's," he noted when the Charger drove past a sign saying "The Hinterlands."

They came from the driveway of Andrea's parent's house.

"What the hell's going on," Tony shouted while yanking open the passenger door, leaping out of the coupe before it had even stopped fully. Parked in the driveway was a Mount Prospect squad car, behind it, an ambulance. Both vehicles flashed their lights in the cool, early autumn air. In scrambling, Tony had failed to identify any distinguishing marks on the ambulance. Instead, he leapt toward the trio of cops forming a wall of some kind around someone much smaller than they. All gravity of the situation aside, Tony prayed that that someone would be Andrea.

It was.

Grey tears streaked down her face from her swollen, red eyes. She shouted out Tony's name when she saw him, and one of the policemen instinctively stepped aside to allow him to rush through and embrace her (she had held out her arms for him). They rocked from side to side as he held her, amid the squawking buzz of the cop's radios. Over the top of Andrea's head, Tony could see the white-coated emergency medical technicians wheeling a stretcher past. The white waxen head of an old woman poked out from under a sheet and
lollled back and forth as the men moved her forward. Suddenly, Tony wanted to let go, to find out what had happened there, since they had dropped Andrea off, not so many hours earlier. But she clung tight. Finally, rather than fight her, he decided to ask "What happened?" only to be answered with a series of cackles, babbles, and sobs.

One of the policemen, a tall, auburn-haired, pink-skinned young man with a properly rigid bearing intervened. "She's in a great deal of shock now, sir," he said. "We gather that there was some sort of disagreement between the elderly woman and her that triggered an outbreak of respiratory trouble in the older woman."

The siren on the ambulance crowed with an explosive, steely ping in Tony's ear. "Looks like they want to leave," Tony said, glancing back at the vehicle--its engine had started with a gunning roar and the odor of gas-tinged carbon. "Come on Andrea, we'll take you along to follow them." He offered her an arm to lead her toward the Charger, but another of the officers nudged it aside.

"Sir, I'm afraid that Miss Streicher has asked to ride along with her grandmother," that officer said. The Canadian Mounted Police style hats with wide brims and identical mustaches of varied colors unified their appearances in Tony's eyes.

Tony fought back an impulse to ask the officers how they had gotten that request out of Andrea when they had failed to get so little of anything else. He jogged back toward the Charger, Matt had climbed out of the driver's seat and leaned against the right front quarter panel. Only moments before, Tony's consciousness had been shrouded in a fuzzy, velvet halo, yet when he'd seen the trauma on the driveway, he'd noticed how steam fogs bellowed from people's mouths.
In the air that had chilled him through his flannel shirt and jeans. "Christ, it's cold out here," he shouted. He ran to the Charger.

"Get in! We're going to the hospital with them!"

Matt raised his arms and scowled at him. "Where? There's a whole shitload of hospitals around here!"

When Tony checked with the police, he found out that they would take the old woman to DuPage East. Matt had the engine fired up by the time he returned. "You could just tell that she was going to blow, over something," Matt said, when he backed out of the driveway.

"I picked up on it at that shooting party."

Corinne wanted to know what a shooting party was.

Matt squealed his tires around an intersection. Tony wondered whether that was a defiant reply. The ambulance had curved around on the grass to pass him when he had still been idling on the driveway--its red lights faded from him, racing through traffic lights.

Matt stopped at the first red-light intersection.

"What are you doing?" Tony asked him.

"Calm down man!" Matt shot back. "They'll still be there when we get there."

"What is a shooting party?" Corinne asked again, this time through gritted teeth.

Matt said "We bought five cases of beer, got into a guy's pickup truck, and went around shooting people the moon."

"Damn it," Tony said. "I'm sorry for giving you shit. You don't have to take it out on her."

When they reached the hospital behind the ambulance (which had already parked and unloaded), it seemed to Tony that they lived out a
scene from one of those corny rescue dramas on television. The only thing missing was the part where the efficient young men handle the stretcher, wheeling it into the emergency room, while a distraught relative runs alongside, sobbing over all the bad things he had said or done to the hapless victim.

Tony was cold sober. When he ran into the waiting room area, he saw that a registrar had already attended to Andrea, clipboard in hand. She balanced it against her yellow polyester covered chest, tilting her head in a professional listening stance while Andrea stammered to her.

He positioned himself between the hospital clerk and Andrea, thinking that it was strange that someone would try to meet her near the lobby rather than behind a booth of some kind. The clerk's lipstick seemed too thick for what was supposed to be a sanitary setting. Tony could look on with a critical eye because his much older sister, Eva, had worked the same type of a job while working her way through school in Cincinnati at one of the largest receiving hospitals there. (she'd told him many stories).

"What's the trouble here," Tony asked the clerk.

"There's no trouble," the clerk droned. "We've got her grandmother admitted, and the doctors are tending to her. We just need some insurance information." She directed the next question to Andrea: "Is there a way that you could get ahold of your parents?"

"They're at the Amphitheatre," Andrea said, the skin around her eyes kneading, as if priming the pump that would flood them with tears again.

"Wait a minute," Tony said. "Can't you just check on some old
records for that? I doubt that this is the first time that she's been here. And this ain't no back country outpost. Now stop hassling her.

Ther clerk tensed her jaw, and when she did so, the shimmering bun that her hair had been pulled into twitched. She marched away on stiff legs. "It must be her first week on the job," Tony said, when watching her walk away. When he noticed her ass sashaying away, he wondered why all the bitches in the world got blessed with the best bodies.

He grasped Andrea's arm and led her toward the waiting room chairs. Along the way, she sobbed with such force that she yelped, "They have to know," she said.

"Your parents?" Andrea nodded.

Tony soon learned that it was possible to page someone at the Amphitheater. He didn't think it could be done. Andrea's tears dried while she sat beside Tony, waiting. That surprised him. Her gaze locked on the television set, hanging from the ceiling above them, but she couldn't have really seen anything. The set played a re-run of Three's Company.

His thoughts swirled. Matt? When Tony had rushed out of the car and into the emergency room, Matt had stayed out there with Corinne, apparently. Yet, he couldn't leave Andrea there to go out to the parking lot and tell him what was what. "Matt, get your ass in here," he thought.

"We have to find her," Andrea murmured. "We have to find Geneve."

Tony tried to curl an arm around her, to soothe her, but she felt--cold. He lifted it away. "What are you saying Andrea?"

"Geneve was her sister."
"Oh God."

Across the lobby, the sliding electric doors swished open. Matt stomped through with a grimace. His scowling features softened, though, when he saw Tony and Andrea seated there. "I came in to see what was going on," he said, lowering his head when he looked at Tony.

"It looks like we're going to be here for awhile," Tony said.

Matt nodded. "Well, what about..."

"You don't have to stay here if you don't want to."

"Oh, but how will you get back?"

"I don't know. Just come back in about an hour or so, Maybe two."

Matt sighed with such force that he lifted a cowlick of his hair, while nodding. He mumbled something about coming back after awhile, backed up, and walked back through the sliding electronic doors.

"It was horrible," Andrea continued, after he'd left. "All those years of holding it in."

Tony wanted to ask who and what about the holding it in, but he held off. It must have been painful for her to talk about it. He would let her disclose what she wished.

"But if I go to try and find her," Andrea went on, "it will only make it worse."

Tony clasped his hands together on his lap and squeezed them until the knuckles hurt. He tried to escape with the antics on the television set, but to no avail. He didn't see anything, either. If only she'd let him hold her hand, or something. When he edged his fingers in the direction, they encountered a force field of icy heat. He hoped that her parents would get there soon.
They arrived shortly afterward. The electronic swish of the doors sounded louder when they stepped through—as if to announce them. When Tony looked up, he saw the man in a suit with the woman in a full fur collar and glistening pearls. Andrea sprang up and rushed to them. Tony knew; he couldn't look. Instead, he listened to the muffled sobs, hushes, and purrings of "It's okay, it's okay," coming from her father.

Andrea and her parents stood in the same spot where Tony had found Andrea and the clerk when he had swished through the electronic doors. They whispered to each other, while Mrs. Streicher dabbed at Andrea's tears with a handkerchief. Tony wondered why they thought they had to be so secretive—none of the passing doctors, nurses or clerks paid them any attention, breezing by as if they'd been thoroughbreds with blinders on.

On the other hand, the trio failed to acknowledge Tony for fifteen minutes straight. That was strange, since he was the only one in the emergency room area wearing something other than white or sky-blue. He wondered if he should go find the hospital cafeteria, and have a cup of coffee or something. A sign hanging from the ceiling, across from an open corridor, pointed to that hallway and read "Gift shop, Admitting, and Radiology." A cafeteria had to exist someplace near them.

He rose, and started off toward the corridor. "Tony!" Andrea called after him, "Where are you going?"

Tony glanced at her and said "I thought I'd go try and find a cup of coffee somewhere, while you talk with your mom and dad."

She told him to come over her way so that she could introduce him to them. He shuffled over, hanging his head down. Mr. Streicher offered his hand, and Tony shook it, getting only a glimpse of the man's...
doubling chin and graying curls. Mrs. Streicher was "striking" from the neck up, wearing a loose, pulled-up hairstyle well, with her sparkling earrings and hint of rose on her eyelids. Andrea had clearly gotten her delicate, infant-like features from her mother. Tony could have looked at the woman for a few minutes longer, to see how the old axiom "you can tell how a young woman will age by looking at her mother" would flatter Andrea. He decided to excuse himself, instead, and go try to find the hospital cafeteria.

That cafeteria adjoined the gift shop, and was relatively empty. He wondered whether lack of activity in a hospital cafeteria meant that all the doctors and nurses were all busy tending to their patients. Yet there were no sirens, no flashing red lights, apparently no crashed D.U.I.'s that night.

Tony purchased a large styrofoam cup of coffee, and when he sat down with it, he cradled it between his fingers, warming them. He breathed in the steam, which soothed his tightened chest. His hands had remained stiffly cold since the scene in front of Andrea's house, yet it was early October, and outside he could have otherwise remained comfortable without a jacket.

So what did all this newfound information make Geneve Pryal, as related to Andrea? A great-great-aunt? Maybe, give or take a "great." There were more shattering things to consider: If another guy had met Andrea, and they'd been attracted to each other, they would have gone out a few times, perhaps profess their love to each other (if they felt, or wanted to feel that emotion), and then make love when they could get alone, on the weekends. If one of them changed, or grew apart, they'd break up, sometimes remaining civil, sometimes not.
Very simple.

But not for Tony. What attracted him to these girls who always seemed to be embroiled in life-or-death crises? There was the girl he'd dated during his freshman year--Jenny. At first she'd seemed straight enough, with a variety of interests that ranged from science fiction to water sports. Yet, with a little alcohol in her, she liked to tell gruesome stories--such as the death of her father, run over by a train in Kentucky, with gory detail down to how the fire department had had to "spray" him off the ties and rails. It soon occurred to him that she told lots of gruesome stories.

"She's a real wild partier," Tony's friends had said when they'd seen her slurring and weaving at the dorm several times. "I'll just bet that she'd be wild in bed. You ought to try and get her there." That had been the last time he'd ever followed a friend's advice over his own judgment. He rented an eight-dollar room at the Royal Inn and brought her there. When he advanced, Jenny fought him off with a repertoire of flinches, waving hands, and shoves. She then flopped into a stupor atop the bed. Tony vowed that from then on, he'd never take a woman to bed unless he cared for her.

Later that academic year, Jenny became a born-again Christian. She sent reams of inspirational mail through Tony's slot in the residence hall post office. The tracts denouncing the Roman Catholic faith as an evolution of barbaric sun-god worship angered him the most since they were the kinds of things that would upset his mother. Only a nasty, two o'clock-in-the-morning phone call put an end to the spiritual barrage.

"Tony," a voice called from the cafeteria entrance. He glanced.
up to see Andrea pad toward him. Besides the obvious differences in appearance (Jenny was five-foot-eight and dark), there was this: While Jenny was out-and-out crazy, Andrea was troubled.

She side-stepped around the maze paths created by the scattering of tables and made her way to Tony. As she neared, he noticed that her face had cleared of all the gray streaks and her eyes had lost their puffiness. There must have been time for a touch-up job in the ladies' room. He'd only seen her wear liner and mascara, and at that moment, both looked as if they'd been caringly applied.

Once she sat down beside him, she pushed aside the coffee cup and reached for his hands. "Ooh, they're so cold," she said, tracing her silky fingertips along the edges of his palms.

"How's your grandmother doing?"

"Oh, Nana's going to be fine." The joy registered in her voice as a cheery song. "It was just a particularly bad asthma attack. If they hadn't been able to bring it under control, it might have led to other complications, but she's going to be okay."

Andrea's touch and smile warmed him the way stovetop honey on a winter evening had, when he'd been little. Returning the caresses, Tony felt that he might have closed his eyes, to hone in on the sensations, if the situation had been different. "I'm so glad to hear that," he told her. "Will she be able to go home, or what?"

She sucked her bottom lip in, a trait that indicated she had something important to ask or say. "Well no," she said. "That's why I've come down here. I mean, she's okay and everything, but they've admitted her for the night--just for observation. I'd like you to come up and see her."
"Wait a minute, are you sure?" Tony responded, resisting when Andrea tugged on his hand as she rose, trying to lead him.

"What's wrong?"

"Well, I'd just kind of feel funny up there. Like I didn't belong or something."

"Tony, it'll be okay. I need you up there."

"What? Why?"

"You might be able to help while I explain to everyone why we need to go to France."
CHAPTER TWELVE

Tony followed Andrea through the maze of hallways, passing the maternity ward and the children's wing. "Damn, those tiny legs can get you motoring if they really have to, can't they," he said.

They'd put her grandmother in a room on the third floor--312. Blue-garmented traffic in the hallway reminded Tony of five o'clock at the Union Station. "Andrea," Tony called from behind her, "I hope you've realized that you got me totally freaked out after what you said down there."

"Well, it's just something I thought about," she replied, keeping her face forward while nearing a stairway door.

One flight up, and a short stroll down the hallway brought them to room 312. Tony felt afraid to enter. He remembered the days from his youth, when a friend would lead him into his family's living room or den or some other place where the boy's mother and father would be sitting. And the friend said "Mom, Dad? Can Tony spend the night?"

Andrea had stepped through the doorway. "Tony," she said. "Come on in--don't be shy."

He felt sheepish upon entering, head down. Mr. Streicher stood at the foot of the bed. His wife sat in a chair by the head, clasping Andrea's grandmother's hand. At least that seemed to clear up the question of what side of the family the grandmother belonged to. The room was doubly occupied--another withered old woman lay in a bed across the floor, blankets pulled up to her chin.

Had Tony been expecting a teary, soap-opera type situation? If so, then that scene in the room didn't fulfill it. Mrs. Streicher
sat straight, elegant, offering soothing smiles to her mother. Her husband rocked from the heels to the balls of his feet as he stood there, rising slightly as he did so. It seemed to Tony to be the kind of mannerism bored sentries might acquire from their hours of often boring duty. "So, you in class with Andrea, huh?"

"Yeah."

Mr. Streicher nodded. He didn't seem to know what to bring up after that, so he sighed, twiddling his fingers while watching his wife and mother-in-law. A grin curled on his lips when he looked at his attractive wife. Tony inferred that Mr. Streicher had been an ordinary sort of man when he'd been younger, possibly a hard worker and high achiever, proud of the fact that he'd been able to court and marry such a desirable woman.

Andrea edged along the opposite side of the bed from her mother. Tony noted an identifying tag hanging off the foot of the bed. It read "Alice Johnson." The woman had drifted far from her French heritage. She seemed pale and uncomfortable beneath the tube that circled her face, apparently pumping air through her nostrils. "I'm sorry," Andrea told her when she leaned forward to embrace her. Her voice had sounded clear—with her back to him, Tony couldn't tell whether she'd started to cry again.

Mrs. Johnson mumbled something to her granddaughter, apparently telling her that things were all right, even managing to lift an arm to pat her blue-jean jacketed back. When Andrea pulled away, she looked across the bed at her mother. "Did you know?" she asked her.

Mrs. Streicher shook her head, a movement barely perceptible, as she placed her porcelain hands in her lap. Each glossy, manicured
fingernail glistened beneath the greenish, flourescent glow.

Out of the corner of his eyes, Tony saw Mr. Streicher's thin lips twitch, pursing outward, as if he searched his mind for something to change the subject to, such as: "So Tony, how do you think the Bears are going to do this year?" If the conversation at the foot of the bed hadn't been so important, Tony would have started such a discussion himself.

"The subject seemed painful--I never asked," Mrs. Streicher said. Her voice was more mellow, and several tones lower than Andrea's. Did aging do that to a woman? It didn't happen to men, Tony thought. His father still squawked like a parrot caught in a mousetrap.

"Well Nana, do you remember anything about her?" Andrea asked. Tony thought that the question would shock Mrs. Streicher ("What are you trying to do? Cause a relapse?") , but she just looked on, listening.

"No child, I don't," Nana replied. That eased Andrea, who Tony noticed had edged forward, awaiting the answer. Yet, he saw Nana's pondering, faraway eyes. It didn't surprise him when she continued--

"There was just that man."

"What man, Nana?" Andrea asked.

Andrea's grandmother, at that point, seemed like a medium speaking from beneath a trance, to Tony. She said "I was only about five. But my older sister spent much time at the house of this man."

Mrs. Johnson paused once again, probably trying to get the image of the house clear in her mind. Andrea asked her "What was the house like?"

"Glass," her grandmother replied. "Lots of glass. Like a greenhouse." Andrea looked at Tony. "The man who lived there yelled at me one day."
"What about?"

"I found him in the basement--fixing some bricks down there. He yelled screamed, shooed me away." Nana's voice trailed off toward the end of the sentence. She closed her eyes. Mrs. Streicher reached up to lay a hand across her mother's chest.

"Andrea," she said. "I think we'd better let her alone for awhile. Let her rest."

"Mom," Andrea said. "I think I'd like to go there, to try to find Geneve. In Paris."

"Why, honey?" Mrs. Streicher asked, while loosening the blankets around her mother's neck. "If the woman's alive, she probably still feels bad over what she did to her younger sister. You'd only cause lots of pain. Leave it be."

"Well, there's just...something," Andrea replied.

"Where would you get the money?" Mr. Streicher asked. The voice boomed, startling Tony, whose ears had gotten used to feminine whispering.

Something different occurred to Tony. "You know Andrea," he said, "the last thing we could find on Geneve was that she fell to the floor at the Madison Square Garden, and that she never did gymnastics again after that. You know, she could still be here then, in the states."

His remark seemed to discourage her. The sparkle drained from her eyes. "Well, whatever," she said.

Mr. Streicher spoke up. "Loretta," he said. "They're not going to let us hang around here much longer. Maybe your mother could rest better if we left."

"Maybe," his wife said. "Andrea what are you going to do?"
Andrea looked at Tony, who said "Matt's due to show up here soon. We could give you a ride back." He hoped that she'd accept the offer, because she still had his mind buzzing about the Paris thing, and he wanted to talk to her about it.

"Sounds good," Andrea said, nodding. She bid her parents and grandmother good-bye for the evening.

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They thought they'd find Matt in the emergency room lobby. He wasn't there. Tony noticed the clerk who'd hassled Andrea earlier, sitting behind an admitting window. He walked up to the window and asked "Has anybody been by here looking for me?"

The clerk replied "Does your friend have red hair?"

"Yes."

"I told him that you were up visiting Mrs. Johnson. He just said 'thanks' and left. I was going to try and stop him and at least give him the room number so that he could call..."

Tony turned around and muttered "Fuck." He led Andrea toward the waiting room chairs once again. Matt wouldn't just leave him there, of course; he'd probably gone to get more beer or something, and would be back. Still, it prolonged his ordeal at this antiseptic dungeon.

They sat—Andrea easing back into the chair with her arms folded and Tony on the edge, ready to pounce when he saw Matt stride through the double doors. "That was Moret, that Nana was talking about," Andrea said.

"Don't take a mental heavyweight to figure that one out," Tony replied.
"And that house, with all the glass," Andrea continued.

"Yeah, I know."

"It's so intense. We've got to find her."

"Well, you know, it seems to me that we've still got some things to find out about her, before we go trying to do that."

"Do you have your uncle's telephone number, over in Paris?"

"I don't know. My mother might have. Why?"

"Well, he might know if that house still stands. Or, at least he could find out, and then write a letter saying if it is."

"What good would that do us?"

"I don't know. Maybe someone related to Moret still lives in the house, and he could tell us what happened to Geneve."

"That is a long shot. For one, the house probably got knocked over to build a parking lot. For another, even if it was up, ten different families have probably lived there since Moret's time."

"You're probably right. God, you know what I could use right now? Something to drink." Her thought caused a pounding inside Tony's skull. He didn't notice that Matt had swished through the doors up front.

"Hey, there you two are," Matt bellowed. "Let's get the hell out of here. This has been some night, hasn't it?"

"I don't want to hear it, Motorhead," Tony said. "Let's double-time it. Without looking back, he strode through the electronic doors so quickly that they almost failed to open quickly enough for him (thus adding to his headache). Matt and Andrea kept pace with him.

The Charger lay considerably closer than where Matt had been able to park it the first time. All the better to get away from there as quickly as they could, Tony thought.
Andrea tore the tab off an Olympia and drank it while the Charger pulled out of the hospital parking lot. "It's been so cold in here," Matt had said, when he handed it to her, "that it kind of kept it--refrigerated."

Tony kept an eye on her, from where he sat, up front (both women were in the back).

"What time is it, Ant-wine?" Matt asked. Tony felt too drained to react in any other way than to look at his watch.

"Eleven forty-five," Tony replied.

"Shit," Corinne chimed, "I've got to be to work."

Matt took her there. Before he let her out of the car (by bending his seat forward) he smacked a tight-lipped kiss on her. When they pulled away from the AM/PM store, Matt asked for suggestions on what they would do next. Silence. Matt slumped in his driver's seat and aimed his car up and down several lamp-lined, suburban streets.

Andrea had inhaled her first beer, and asked Tony for a second. "Say," she said, "Do you think we could go home tomorrow?" Both Tony and Matt whirled to look at her--fortunately Matt turned his eyes back to the oncoming road after only a couple of seconds.

"Well, I wasn't going to leave until Sunday morning," Matt said.

Tony asked her "What's wrong? You want to go back and look up some stuff on Moret, or what?"

"Well, yeah," she replied. "There's no reason to stay here any longer, for me. My brother won't be home this weekend, and it would be a bitch to stay with my parents, after what happened."

Tony was going to point out that her parents didn't seem to carry...
any grudges, but he held back. He understood why she wanted to leave so early. "God," Tony said. "If we leave tomorrow, then I won't ever make it out to the Heights. I told my mom I'd be out tomorrow. She doesn't like to be disappointed."

"Yeah," Matt added. "And what is it about the library? It closes at four-thirty on Saturdays and on Sundays it doesn't even open until two o'clock."

Andrea slumped in her seat and gulped at the beer. "I just don't want to have to be around my parents any more than I have to. They're going to ask me all sorts of questions about why I want to find out so much about Geneve, and that won't be comfortable. Get it?"

That hadn't occurred to Tony. He looked at Matt. Matt said "Well you're going to spend the night tonight, Ant-wine, right? And you want to go out to the Heights tomorrow, right? Well, we could just pick her up tomorrow and bring her along."

"Well, what about tomorrow night?" Andrea asked.

"My parents are going to be gone," Matt said. "You could just spend the night at our house."

Tony liked that idea. Andrea could live with it. Matt took her home. "We could just leave real early Sunday morning," he said, when Tony bent his seat forward, to let Andrea out.

Everyone was happy--sort of. It was a good way to wind up the evening.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Tony and Matt roared by in the Boat that next morning, at eleven thirty. Andrea wished they had arrived at least two hours earlier. She hadn't slept, and wondered if it showed. It made for one of the rare days that she wore foundation, to cover the dark circles she perceived beneath her eyes.

"We just got up an hour ago," Tony explained, while Andrea climbed into the back seat. "Were things tense at your house this morning, or what?"

"Could have been," Andrea replied. "I was up at about seven-thirty, and got all my laundry done. Mom and Dad weren't up until around ten. They had breakfast together and stayed out of my way. They're getting Nana now."

She shielded her eyes from the sunlight peeking in through the rear window. Two days in a row of sunshine, in October. Hard to believe. The further they travelled from the Hinterlands subdivision, the more freely the tenseness from her flowed.

Aside from Tony's opening comment, the two men up front seemed to have forgotten the events of the night before. They talked baseball, grumbling to each other about how the Cubs had failed to lock away the playoff series twelve hours earlier. "I've got what some people might call psychic premonition," Tony said (his statement clicked in Andrea's mind), "and I say that the Cubbies are going to blow it out in San Diego. Sutcliffe's going to get killed--he's living on borrowed time."

"Aw, you're full of it," Matt said.

"I've been right about lots of other things," Tony went on.
Matt guided the Boat on the expressway, around the outer edges of Chicago. They headed toward Tony's home, on the south side, in the Heights. Andrea felt nervous about cruising through the Archie Bunker neighborhoods down there. While growing up in Mount Prospect, she'd only been there a handful of times, visiting such places as Hyde Park, Oaklawn, and Evergreen Park. "People are crazy down there," her mother had always said. "They'd just as soon put a knife in you as talk to you."

Until her sixteenth birthday, Andrea had always considered her mother's warnings as paranoia of the unknown. On that day, a small group of her friends took her to the Yes concert at the Chicago Stadium. During the evening, gangs of greasy-looking, slouched shouldered Puerto Ricans had harassed them while they walked down the street. One of them had even tweaked Marla's ass, causing jitters in her that hung on for two weeks. Later, while they waited on a concessions line inside the arena, two teenaged boys high on Angel Dust (apparently) plundered their way through the line and hopped the counter, toppling soda fountains and candy racks before five security officers smothered them. From that point on, Andrea and her friends traveled no further than the Horizon for concerts. And Andrea swore to stay away from the south side.

Tony's neighborhood didn't seem bad, though. "Hey, what did you guys do for fun down here," Matt said, looking at the tightly spaced houses, "with no front or back yard?"

"What do you think we did? We played in the streets," Tony replied. As if on cue to Tony's travelogue, Matt slammed on his brakes, shortly after rounding a corner. A football had wobbled along in front of the
car, followed by a wiry junior-high-er. Matt yanked the window down.

He yelled "Motherfucker!" at the kid. "Wanna get yourself killed?"

When the car coasted further up the street, it passed a dozen stiff-shouldered, snarl-lipped youths. Andrea sank down into her seat.

"Matti!" Tony scolded. "You don't ever say anything like that to anyone down here--unless you got a football team keeping you company. Good thing I know most of their older brothers."

Matt parallel parked a couple of doors down from Tony's house, on Beliveau Avenue. "My parents bought a house here," he said, while emerging from the car, "because the street name reminded them of all the stuff Grandma and Grandpa used to talk about."

Tony's parents lived in a gingerbread colored house with dark brown trim. When Andrea pointed out the fairy-tale similarity to him, he replied, "Tell me about it. All our relatives used to call my sister and me 'Hansel' and 'Gretel.' One aunt used to tweak my cheek whenever she saw me, and she'd say 'Oh Hansel, you're so handsome.' It's a wonder that side of my face isn't all stretched out."

They climbed a flight of steep, concrete steps to the front porch. Tony had leaped up and yanked open the front door before Andrea and Matt had made it half way. Andrea heard Tony yell "Hey Ma! Dad! The boy's here," through the opened door. She reached the opened door in time to see Tony embrace his petite mother, who pecked both sides of his face with loud kisses.

The front door opened to a living room that appeared to form the core of the house. Matt closed the door behind himself after he and Andrea entered. Tony introduced them to his mother, who beamed while shaking Matt's hand. Andrea blushed when Mrs. Taverneau looked
at her and clasped her hands together, across her heart. The woman gushed "Oh Tony! She's positively gorgeous!"

"The boy's got his old man's taste in ladies, I see," a voice bellowed from a far corner. A bony, gray-haired man about Tony's height wavered above a cane there—he was Mr. Taverneau, "Gil," as he introduced himself while limping forward to shake Matt's hand.

Andrea looked at Mrs. Taverneau and decided that the remark was a compliment. She was a robust matron with a glowing complexion and sparkling eyes. Her shoulder length strawberry blond hair shimmered in the sunlight that sprayed through filmy curtains. "Well sit down everybody!" she invited, while her husband dragged himself back into the kitchen. Andrea remembered what Tony told her about his father—he'd gone straight from high school to the Korean War. Grenade shrapnel had torn through his right hip joint over there, in the days before medical science could rebuild such destruction. Disability pay and his on again/off again stints on the city payroll (dispatcher of maintenance vehicles) had kept his family afloat over the years—barely. Tony attended Little Egyptian on a combination of Pell Grants and V.A. disability. "A fuck of a way to attend college," he'd said, "because your dad got blown up in the war. But I'll take it."

Andrea sat on a couch that had worn threadbare at the pillow corners. Matt shifted around in a stiff looking antique lounger made mostly of wood. Four end tables lined the perimeter of the room, beneath dozens of propped-up photographs. Gil, in the war, standing straight and smiling proud. A beautiful, soft focus portrait of his wife, in her early twenties. A graduation picture of a girl with a bouffant hairdo and horn-rimmed glasses (obviously Eva). Tony, as
a smirking grade-schooler. Tony, with black bowtie, beaming highlights off his white teeth. She turned away from the picture of him in a tux, standing in front of plastic palms, hand in hand with a blonde girl in a halter dress.

"Mom," Tony said. "How's Uncle Charles doing?"

His mother's eyes narrowed while she gazed ahead to think. "He's fine. We get a card from him every Christmas. Why do you ask?"

Tony paused, and looked at Andrea. Gil Taverneau hobbled in from the kitchen. "What's this talk about my big brother?" His wife urged him to keep weight off his legs, so he pulled out a folding chair to rest on. The Taverneau's intently watched their son.

"Something really freaky has been going on at school," Tony began. He told them the entire story. Andrea paid close attention, so that she could help him through some of the rougher spots. If need be, Tony made it on his own. Sighs of disbelief wafted throughout the room.

"That's a wild one," Mrs. Taverneau said, looking at Andrea.

"Tell you what," Gil said, raising a finger skyward. "Why don't we just call Charlie. We'd really knock him for a loop."

"Certainly would," Mrs. Taverneau agreed. "When's the last time we called there—a couple of New Year's Eves ago?"

"Dad, that could get expensive," Tony said. "Are you sure it's okay."

"Sure. It's Saturday. Charlie could really help you guys out. He's the kind of guy—-he would not only tell you he knew about that glass house, but he could tell you who's lived there for the past twenty years and what kinds of parties they throw. Helena, get me the phone, huh?" The phone was a tabletop job, black, with a cord
that could have circled the outside of the house twice. Helena handed it to him, along with a yellowed address book.

Matt glanced at Andrea, wide-eyed. Gil dialed the number with a sad-eyed smile curling his lips upward. That smile, along with piano key teeth, ran in the Taverneau family men, Andrea thought. "Charlie!" Gil boomed: "You son-de-la bitch! How's it hanging! Yeah--Gil... uh, Gilbert."

Helena shook her head and turned her eyes toward the ceiling. Gil jabbered with his brother throughout the opening minutes of the phone call, until he said: "I'll tell you why I called. It's my boy, Tony. Yeah, yeah. He's fine. Great. He wants to talk to you about something. What? Yeah, he's right here--home for the weekend from college. What? Yeah, here he is." Gil held the phone up for Tony, who inched toward it, swallowing before he grasped the receiver.

"Uh, Uncle Charles?" Tony asked. "Yeah, Tony. Uh, do you know of a house there in Paris, I don't know what part it would be in, but it belonged to the filmmaker Moret at one time... What's that? You do? Well, do you know who lives there now? I can't believe it's still standing."

While waiting for the answer, Tony's mouth dropped. Andrea, who'd inched forward on the couch throughout the conversation, rose when that happened.

"Wait a minute Uncle Charles, I gotta tell everyone here what's going on. This is incredible." Tony cupped a palm over the speaking end. "My God. Geneve lives in the house."

For Andrea, it was too much. She pressed her knuckles against her temples; closing her eyes. Helena tried to calm her by patting
her back, asking what was wrong. Tony had returned to the overseas conversation with his uncle, but with Andrea's swirling thoughts and dizziness, the words only buzzed in the background. Matt helped her into a recliner. Helena brewed hot tea for everyone. The intercontinental telephone call ended when Gil closed with some more jabbering between himself and his brother.

The tea arrived quickly—the Taverneau's owned a tarnished guest set with six or seven porcelain cups. Andrea thought that the painted Oriental designs on them were pretty. "Hey Tony," Gil said, "what was that last thing Charlie was saying to you over the phone?"

"He asked me for my telephone number down at Little Egyptian," Tony replied. "He says he'll call, once he finds out some more stuff. He also wants me to fly out there, but I can't do that."

Gil shrugged. "Where there's a will, there's a way," he said.

"What are you saying, Gil?" Helena asked.

"Charlie's the kind of guy who would send Tony air fare, if he could afford it."

Andrea thought that she'd better interject something. "But we couldn't possibly..."

Helena added "But he couldn't afford to miss that much school now, could he?"

"What's he gonna miss, huh? Some prima donna spouting off about some commie filmmaker—uh, what was his name? Einstein? How's that gonna help him get anyplace? I mean, you complained about that all last year, didn't ya, Tony?"

"Dad, I couldn't agree with you more."

"Yeah, I mean, if you could do it," Gil went on, "you'd learn a
lot more about film than you would by listening to some stuffed-shirted jerk lecture in an auditorium. I'd foot your bill, if I could afford it."

Matt said "Mr. Taverneau, I ought to have you come talk to my father."

Andrea cradled her tea silently, overwhelmed.

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"God, we might be going to France," Tony said, while the Boat cruised the expressway north.

"Tony," Andrea said, "we ought to just speak to Dr. Utrecht about it. He'd be really interested in this. There must be some way he can get a grant together or something, to get us over there. If we go over there. God! This is happening so fast."

Tony and Matt looked at each other with disgusted scowls. "No way is he going to come through for us on something like that."

"Why wouldn't he? He seems so enthralled with Moret--he'd jump at a chance to go over and talk to one of his stars in the flesh. We could just go and do his talking for him."

"Andrea," Tony snarled. "Do you know what you're saying? First of all, there's no way that the department is going to sponsor a couple of flunky sophomores to go overseas on some wild goose chase."

"It is not a wild goose chase."

"Not to you and me. But what's in it for them? You gotta think about that."

"Tony, weren't you listening last night? Remember what Nana said about that man patching up something in the basement?!!"
"My God," Tony said. "What if Moret was sealing up some of his films or something. Making a time capsule out of them."

"What?" Matt said, laughing so hard that the car veered into the other lane.

"Tony, get real," Andrea chimed in. "He might have been sealing something up in there, but I doubt it was films."

"What? What? Andrea, weren't you reading any of that shit we looked at in the library that day? We're talking about a guy who burned up a whole pile of films. Who was a magician at one time. Who made movies about blowing up people's heads with a bellows, and changing ladies into skeletons. And trips to an imaginary world underseas. Need I say more?"

To Andrea, it made a wacky kind of sense. "Well, it still seems far-fetched," she said.

"This is too weird," Matt added. "And I wanted to find someplace to watch the Cubs game today."

He drove on to Schaumburg, jamming in a cassette tape when the conversation inside the car died down. Andrea hoped that it would be something upbeat. It was "Owner of a Lonely Heart," by Yes.

The boat stopped in front of a tan, raised-Ranch in Schaumburg—the house where Corinne lived. "It's five-thirty," Matt said when he opened the door to go up her front walk and get her. "She should have had enough time to sleep by now."

When he came back out with her, Tony surprised Andrea by offering Corinne the front seat. She shifted close to him when he climbed into the back seat with her.

"So where should we go to have something to eat?" Matt asked, when he pulled out of the driveway.
"Woodfield," Corinne chimed in.

Over the previous summer, the giant mall had become a home-away-from-home for Andrea. Tony oohed and aahed when they stepped through the front doors, causing Andrea to giggle. He explained that places of such size, with so many people, blew his mind. Matt wanted to eat at Al's Garage. At first the name stumped Andrea, but then she realized that it had been because she had never eaten there during the summer she worked at the camera shop. The lines had always been too long.

Surely enough, when they arrived at the front entrance for Al's Garage, tucked away in a remote corner of the mall, they found a long line. A group of people their age wearing blue jackets that said "Depaul" stood at the end of it. "What do they serve here? Filet Mignon for a buck and a half?" Tony wanted to know.

The line moved quickly. Before long, the four of them stood at the sign that said "The Hostess will seat you." When that hostess arrived, carrying four menus, Matt said."See if you can find us a table overlooking the rink." She had been able to do that, leading them through the maze to the rear of the restaurant. A plexiglass shield separated their table from the ice skating rink on the other side.

While waiting for a waitress to take their order, Andrea glanced at the decor of rough wooden panel, "aged" with dark streaks of varnish to help it look like the inside of an old-style garage, with license plates dating back to the fifties nailed to the walls. Tony, who'd been seated beside the glass, gazed in the opposite direction. He watched teenagers glide on ice skates. A girl with a skirted leotard twirled by the window every few seconds. Tony appeared to be watching
the entire scene rather than just her. "Reliving some fond memories?"
Andrea asked, nudging him in the shoulder.

He flinched. "Oh, no. No," he said, smiling at her. Before long, however, his eyes returned in the direction of that rink.

Matt asked Andrea if it would be all right if he let Corinne in on the story surrounding Moret, Geneve, the mysterious print, and herself. She replied yes; Matt had probably only wanted something to make conversation with. While they talked that one over, Tony and Andrea looked at the menu. "Get whatever you want," he told her, "Dad gave me some money."

"Wow, that's really something," Andrea said, "considering how hard he and your mother tried to get us to stay for dinner."

"Generosity runs in the family," he replied.

Everyone dined on Greek salads and Gyros, the house specialty, Long after they had finished, Matt made small talk on subjects ranging from his business courses at school to whether or not the Cubs were putting away the Padres as they sat there,

"Hey, come on, let's get out of here," Tony finally said, while he twisted a straw between his fingers. "Why are you stalling."

"I want to make sure my parents are gone by the time we get there," Matt explained.

"Why, are you ashamed of us?" Andrea asked.

"No, I just don't want them to think we're going to be partying while they're gone," Matt explained. At seven o'clock, they left Al's Garage and the Woodfield Mall.

Matt drove them out to the executive neighborhoods in Barrington Hills. His parent's house was huge and colonial, with white pillars
sprouting from the semi-circular front porch. The Boat fit into the
center slot of a three-car garage, set at the end of a cinder driveway,
behind the house. An older model, metallic blue Corvette lay in the
slot beside it.

Matt led them through the front door, which opened to a circular
foyer lit by a crystal chandelier. Andrea expected a butler in tie and
tails to appear from the darkness of the living room and stand at
attention for duty. Mirrors hung from the walls in symmetric, criss-
crossing patterns (the images in them bled to infinity, because of the
mirror across from it forming the center). Tony joined Andrea to look
in the mirrors to wave to themselves across a dozen planes.

"Do your parents give guided tours here?" Tony asked, and Andrea
saw that he had been pointing to the restraining velvet ropes dangling
from chrome posts across the living room doorway. Before then, she'd
only seen fixtures such as those in museums or movie theaters.

Matt sneered at the ropes, groaning. "I don't know why they still
do that," he said. "You'd think I was nine years old or something."
Through the darkness, the foyer led to another corridor bearing several
doors. Matt opened the door that would bring them to the basement
stairs. "I'm going to show you my apartment--it's just about the only
place my parents let me run around in."

Plush maroon carpet covered the stairs, and vertically striped
wallpaper lit up the walls beside them. It was indeed an apartment
down there; some builders had erected a particle board pattern of
panelling, walls, and doors, similar to the Cinema Department offices
at Landeford-Wright Hall. "There's the gameroom," Matt said, flinging
open one of the doors to reveal a pool table and cues flanked by a
Pac-man and Asteroids video game. A tavern-style, stained-glass lamp hung over the pool table; Matt announced a challenge for the game, yet no one wanted to play. Behind the next door lurked the washing and drying machines as well as a laundry tub. At the end of the hallway lay Matt's room and a study with a pull-out sofa that might be used as a guest room.

Andrea assumed that they would all sit in Matt's room, listen to a few records, and talk for awhile. Yet, after Matt displayed his room, with the black satin sheets stretched over a waterbed, he winked at Tony. Bookcases filled with science fiction paraphernalia, and a Bang and Olufsen receiver with linear tracking turntable sat beside the wall, but no one would be reading or listening to records.

Tony nudged Andrea toward the door. "Let's go to the gameroom," he whispered, while he guided her out into the narrow hallway. Before they'd even cleared the jamb, she heard mischievous chuckles cackling over from the waterbed. "There's some Michelobs in the fridge in the guest room," Matt called as Tony shut the door to close them off.

"Wonderful," Andrea said. "I hope she screws his brains out."

"It wouldn't take too long," Tony said. "But I knew that when he wanted to come here, he didn't have card-playing in mind."

Andrea still didn't want to play a game of pool, after she and Tony entered the gameroom. She felt glad that Tony didn't feel bold enough to suggest that they go into the guest room, though. Instead, he invited her to sit on the barstools with him, after he retrieved a couple of beers. Minutes passed as they sat silently. Andrea thought she heard sloshing and gurgling of two bodies thrashing on a waterbed coming from the other end of the hallway.
"Gotta ask you something," Tony said. "Are your parents always so uptight?"

"They're not uptight."

He shrugged, sipping from the bottle. "I just don't see how there could be someone famous in the family like that, and you never heard of them."

"Skeletons in the closet," Andrea said. She looked at Tony, it suddenly occurring to her that he held the magic tapestry.

"So what did Geneve do?" Tony continued. "Did she dump your grandmother in a foster home and then take off for America?"

"Something like that," Andrea replied. "It's hard to talk to her anymore. Even about simple things." Tony snapped his fingers, alarming her.

"Did you ever tell her that this man who scolded her in the basement was probably Moret?" he asked.

"I think she knows. Remember how I told you that she never seemed to like the idea of my going into film? Now, I want to ask you something I've been wondering about since this all started. How come you're so interested in the genesis of my family?"

He shrugged. "Well, there's a lot more to what's going on than just that." Andrea backed away from him so far that the stool teetered on two legs for a moment and she had to grab ahold of the bar to steady herself. Tony had nonchalantly returned to sipping from the bottle and probably hadn't realized how his remark had affected her.

He rose, saying that he'd tired of talking, and picked up one of the pool cues. While he silently twisted the blue chalk to powder the tip, Andrea listened for more gurgling and squishing coming from
Matt's room. Nothing. She sipped and gazed at Tony as he dropped the billiard balls into the rack with echoing clunks, swirling the filled triangle over the felt surface to line one of the apexes over the dot at the center.

When sidling along the edges of the table to stand at the opposite end of the rack to shoot, Tony brushed past Andrea sitting atop the stool. She didn't lean back to allow him better entry; instead, she nudged one of her knees forward so that Tony's corduroy clad thighs grazed her more brusquely than it might have otherwise. For a few seconds after he had brushed past, her leg tingled.

The multi-colored ivory balls clacked, scattering over the table when Tony thrust the white cue ball into them, via his stick. One of them sank into a far pocket with a hollow clunk. Considering that so much fuzzy loam carpeting covered the floor and paneling broke up the expanse of the basement, sound echoed strangely down there, into Andrea's ears.

Tony noted what type of ball he'd knocked in, laid his stick beside the table, and leaned over, eye-level with the table top to survey the arrangement of solids and stripes, even closing one eye to gain a better perspective. She hadn't noticed how closely she'd been watching him until he lifted his head from the table and glanced back at her, smiling. He straightened fully, lay one hand down on the felt, poised his stick atop it, then thrust it forward with an arm follow-through that reminded Andrea of how knights must have looked to maidens gazing down at them from the castle parapets as they skewered rogues with swords, turning to glance up and smile after each slash.

He continued on with straight practice, while Andrea nursed her
beer. A trio of balls clunked into a succession of side and corner pockets. Soon Tony stood at the end of the table, facing her—the same position he'd been in several moments earlier, when he'd glanced up at her and she'd realized she'd been staring at him. He'd bent over the table once again, to close one eye and scrutinize the patterns of balls remaining on the table.

As with the time before, he glanced up at her. That time, along with smiling, he also straightened. Her heartbeat quickened, stepping up its pace even further when Tony allowed the cue stick to slide out of his hand, graze the table and fall to the floor with a sharp slap. He stepped toward her. From that moment on, she gazed into his face as it loomed nearer to her. She became aware of a twitch in her chest, because out of the corner of her eye, she saw a ruffle on her blouse jiggle. Her breathing came out in short spurts, each one keeping time with the pounding of her heart.

During the seconds in which Tony closed the gap from arm's length away to touching, her vision blurred. Controlled, almost tantalizingly so, he floated toward her while widening his arms, then lay them around her shoulders and drew her to him. She had lifted her head, still gazing into his eyes, and when he embraced her, she had to tilt to one side. In doing so, she emitted a sigh of release that rang through the small room, startling her. She was aware that Tony had been rocking her, as if they'd been slow dancing together, while trailing the fingertips of one hand down the center of her back.

He held her a few moments longer—enough time for Andrea to drift off into a delirious oblivion where it rained warm. When his arms released their hold on her and he backed away slightly, she
turned toward him to submit her lips for the kiss—yet, with her eyes closed and heartbeat at a crescendo, she realized that the only place she felt him was through the palms of her hands and her fingertips. Upon opening her eyes, she saw his sidelong gaze and assured grin. It seemed special, an expression of his that she knew that she'd never seen and that he'd probably seldom shown to anyone.

Eventually, they'd gazed at each other for so long that Andrea had to turn away. She widened her eyes and shuddered to calm her veins, arteries, and nerves that had probably dilated from the surge of blood that had exploded through them when her heart had beat so heavily.

"Great stuff, isn't it?" Tony said.

Andrea nodded to him.
Andrea slept like a baby that night, on the pull-out bed in the guest room. Tony found a sleeping bag in the closet and laid it down on the floor, where he would spend the night. Nagging thoughts kept him awake while Andrea snoozed. He imagined what Matt and T.J. would say when they learned about it: "God! What the hell are you waiting for? After all you two have been through!"

A few times through the night, he thought of crawling onto the pull-out bed and snuggling beside Andrea but held back.

In effect, he saved his sleep for the long ride back to Little Egyptian, starting around the middle of that next morning. Green exit signs flashed past, with the same effect on him as a hypnotist's pendulum, soon lulling him into dreamland along the highway south. He woke up just south of Effingham, with only an hour remaining on the trip. Andrea was driving, with Matt in the back seat, among all the laundry. Unbelievably, he'd slept through a fueling stop in Champaign where Andrea and Matt had traded off the driving duties.

Tony noticed throughout the rest of the trip that Andrea would glance toward him occasionally, with a guizzical look in her eyes. He felt that perhaps she was wondering why he hadn't climbed into bed with her the night before. Well, he'd once read or heard a bit of advice from a well-known ladykiller—keep them guessing.

They pulled into Alexandria around four o'clock. Andrea wanted to head immediately to the library, so after Matt took her to Harriman to drop off her laundry there, he drove them there. "I'm not really in the mood to look through a stack of books," Tony complained when they
walked through the main door. Andrea dragged him up the flights of stairs to the Moret section in the 791.43 stacks.

"That first time we were here," she said, while retrieving the same books, "we gave up reading at the point where Moret burned all those films: I'd like to find out what happened to him after that."

Since it was pointless to fight it, Tony looked through the stacks with her. If they finished quickly, he could get to the Pennywell House to get something to eat. He noticed one with the title "Jacques Moret" that seemed different. The byline read "Par Jacques Briand" rather than "By Jacques Briand." "Andrea," he said, tugging the paperback volume down, "I don't think we looked through this one yet."

When Andrea looked at the book that Tony held in his hand, she said "Oh yeah. I overlooked that one because it's written in French, but I'm not finding anything new in those ones we've already looked at, so I may as well try to figure that one out." She cleared aside some space on the table to look at it. Her delicately arched eyebrows knitted together while she studied the opening pages of text, "This could be tough;" she said.

She quickly gave up the idea of trying to decipher the text word by word, resorting to leafing through the book, probably in search of pictures. Something caught her eye around the middle. "What is it?" Tony asked.

"These pages in the middle look as if they're in the form of a diary or something," she said.

As he looked on, Tony wondered whether it was Andrea's perfume that had deepened his drowsiness. She had always worn Night Musk, one of his favorites, and that day she seemed to have splashed on
a couple of extra dabs. He figured that the alcohol base had intoxicated him, which was in line with his "dumb blond" theory—that constant inhalation of such perfumed spirits eroded brain cells.

"Tony, wake up!" Andrea said, nudging him. "I think I've found something!" Her index finger, with its glistening red nail, pointed to a passage marked "Avril 1931." He glanced over the French words and came upon the name "Geneve Pryal." His eyes widened, and he leaned forward for a closer look. "It says 'se marl' in here," she went on. I think it means that in April, 1931, Geneve married Jacques Moret!"

"Oh? That's nice."

Andrea continued skimming over the journally arranged section. She let out a sigh, slumping in her chair sad-eyed when she came upon one particular entry. "What's wrong?" Tony wanted to know.

"This entry of October, 1933," Andrea replied. "It says that Jacques Moret died then."

"Oh? Well that's cool. At least he got to spend the last couple of years with his honey."

"Well you sure seem excited."

"I'm dying. I feel like I'm going to fall flat on my face. I want to go home and get something to eat— and then crash."

"Go ahead then."

Since she'd seemed disappointed in him, Tony hesitated, thinking about asking her what was wrong. He chased the thought, walking down the stairs, out the front door, and across the campus to the Pennywell House. Luckily, it wasn't far.

He arrived there to find ten of his housemates gathered around the television set. Matt, perched atop a gray bench, noticed him
first. "There he is!" Matt called out. "I've been telling everyone here about what went down over the weekend."

Tony nodded. Josh, who reclined on a plastic patio lounger, spoke to him. "Hey guess what?" the Indian said. "Remember that Andrea's roommate, Cathy? We went out this weekend. It was great!"

"Fine," Tony said. He looked at the television set, which played the final game of the Cubs-Padres League Championship Series. "What's happening there?"

Matt scowled, waving a hand at the screen in disgust. "The Cubs are up now, but the Padres tied the game last inning," he said. Tony walked into the apartment where he lived and made himself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. He then brought it out into the lobby to sit down, eat, and watch the game with his friends. By the time the Padres had finished batting in the bottom of the inning, they'd run the score to 6-3. Tony finished his sandwich, rose and started back toward his bedroom, to retire.

"Where are you going?" Matt asked him. "They'll come back!"

"No way," Tony said, over his shoulder. When he entered his room, he dive-bombed atop the bed, without even taking off his shoes.

In what seemed an instant later, he woke up. The digital alarm clock read "11:30." It was quiet out in the halls. Since his throat was parched, he got up to get a drink of water in the kitchen. He found Josh in there, poring over one of his Construction Technology textbooks, scrawling down notes on a pad beside it. "There's the man of the hour," he said, when he glanced up from his studies.

"Hooray," Tony said, as he reached for a tumbler in the cabinet.

"Where did everybody go?"
"Matt and T.J. went to McLwane's Pub to drown their sorrows. The Cubs blew it, you know."

"I can't believe I slept through all the groaning."

"Hey, how come you're so bummed out?"

Tony paused, to draw water from the tap. "Oh, I don't know, I guess it's because we've come to the end of the line."

"What do you mean? From what I've heard, some pretty intense things are happening."

"Yeah, well I'm afraid that we might be getting ourselves all excited over nothing."

"How can you say that?"

"Okay. So we find out that Andrea's got a connection to Geneve. And that Utrecht might have forged the Atlantis Underseas picture after all. And there's a couple of other mysterious things worth checking out. But I don't think anything's going to come of it. Where are we going to come up with the money for a trip which, when you get right down to it, is really only Andrea playing Alex Haley."

Josh nodded, gazing ahead with narrowed eyes, in apparent deep thought. Tony, as well as most of the other guys in the Pennywell House, had dumped their troubles on the dark-haired young man at some point or other. "Every frat house, or dorm, or any kind of group of guys needs someone like him," Matt had said once,

"I wouldn't give up on it just yet," Josh said. "You never know what will happen." Tony emptied half of his glass of water with one gulp.

"Maybe. But I can't think of any rich relatives I've got who are ready to kick off and leave me money,"
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It happened toward the middle of that next afternoon. Tony had been in his room, looking over the text to Dr. Utrecht's Silent Narrative class, when someone knocked on his door. T.J. poked his head inside and said "There's someone on the phone for you, man. It sounds like a foreigner. I think it's long distance."

"Shit!" Tony flung his opened book aside and raced out the door and down the hall to the telephone. The receiver dangled from its cord. Tony picked it up and said "Hello?"

"Allo? Allo? Tony?"

"Yes! Charles?"

"Yes! I feel good that I catch you. I talked to some people about Geneve Pryal. She's alive, but is struck with illness. They tell me that the newspapers run a story."

"What about?"

"Some men want to take over the property that she lives on, when she dies. They don't have this--certain piece of paper, so they can do it."

"Wait a minute? I don't understand."

"These men, they have a crane parked near the Moret house, because they want to tear it down as soon as Geneve dies. Tony, you have to come. That girl. She has to come. If they see Geneve has family, they might be able to do something. I try to call, tell her that she has family. Lawyers answer the phone, and they say she don't talk to nobody."

"Charles, what are you saying?"
"The people—they don't want the house tore down. It is... historical. But they can't do anything. Maybe you, the girl, you can do something. I'm going to send money for you to come here."

"Charles, but I can't possibly..."

"I send dollars, no francs. Don't worry."

"But I have to talk to Andrea. God there's so much... I can't believe it."

"Tony, you have to get here. I can call you back after you talk to Andrea." The conversation could only go that far; at that moment, for the hour until Tony would leave for Silent Narrative, he paced around the lobby and through the various apartments, bumming two cigarettes in a row from Mike. He soon tired of that and grabbed his books, racing out the door to Heggendorf Hall, hoping that Andrea had decided to go to class early that day.

No one was in the classroom yet. Tony decided that if he ran along the campus path that led to Harriman Hall, he might catch Andrea on her way to class. He set his books down at the place where he and she usually sat, and darted out the door. It wasn't too good a day for a jog; Tony realized when he leaped the stairs, three at a time. The run of sunny weather had ended with a cold front misting drizzle over the campus. He wished that he'd worn his Converse, rather than his old topsiders.

Some students laughed when Tony juked side to side to avoid crashing into them, yelling out "Run!" That angered Tony and suddenly he hated such a campus where guys would pop up from around corners at parties during his tender, romantic moments with young ladies, saying "Go for it!" and laugh and yell when anyone did
anything slightly out of the ordinary. He scowled at the library when he passed it, and shouted "Fuck you, nerds" at the Technological Complex.

Tony stopped at the base of the walk bridge that crossed over the train tracks and Gilsey creek. Herds of students flocked across from the Harriman and Osterfield towers, as well as Jefferson Point, the site of all the men's dorms. If he waited down there long enough, he might catch Andrea crossing. Scanning the sea of faces, he wondered if he might lose her among so many others, especially since she was so short. When a male student around his age passed, and Tony noticed his watch, he stopped him to ask him for the time. Five minutes till three.

Andrea wasn't the type of person who would run late to classes, at least she seemed so to Tony. After a couple of more minutes' wait, he jogged back toward Heggendorf Hall. He arrived there wheezing, out of breath, and drenched. His head felt sticky and tacky, where his own sweat had combined with the rain droplets to glue strands of his hair to his forehead.

He found Andrea walking up the stairs—talking to Dr. Utrecht. "Tony, my God, you look a mess," she said when she saw him. "What have you been doing?"

"Andrea," he was able to force out, through short breaths, "I just got off the phone with Charles."

"You did?"

"Who is this Charles?" Dr. Utrecht wanted to know.

"Somebody in France," Tony snapped.

"Oh, by the way," Utrecht went on, "Miss Streicher has told me
about your Parisian caper. It sounds interesting, but I doubt that
the department will be able to come up with funding for something like
that—especially on such short notice. I don't mean to discourage
you..."

"Yeah? You could get the funding if you wanted to go over there
for that reason. You're worried that if we dig around enough over
there, we're going to find something that proves that your print from
that movie isn't real, I bet."

"Young man, I think nothing of the kind."

"Tony! God!"

"Well you don't have to worry," Tony continued. "We're not going
over there to search for something to make a name for ourselves. It's
a family matter. We won't tell your little secret. This is much more
important than that. And most of all, we don't need any help from
you or this damn university. Andrea, come on! We've got to talk."
He took her hand, and led her away. At first, she hesitated, stopping
to look back at Dr. Utrecht, who stood, shaking his head before he
disappeared beyond the door off the steps.

"Tony, God, I don't believe you," Andrea said while they walked
toward the Student Center. "Why did you talk to Dr. Utrecht that way?"

"I could have told you he would have said something like that if
you asked him for a grant," he replied.

"Well then who the hell do you think you are to come up to him and
tell him that he's full of shit and that you don't need his help?"

"We don't need his help. Charles just called me. There's
something crazy going on over there. We've got to plan to be over there
like tomorrow. Charles is sending money. Let me tell you about it."
CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Charles' money arrived two days later, on overseas express; registered. Four hundred dollars. Tony knew that it wouldn't be enough for both himself and Andrea, but at least he could start planning the trip. What about passports? Matt, who'd been to London and Rome, told him "They got this place in downtown St. Louis where you can get it all done up within a day."

"Why St. Louis?" Tony had asked.

"Well, that is where you're going to fly out of, right?"

Tony thought they would fly out of O'Hare, but Matt pointed it out to him that to go from Lambert Field to Kennedy, in New York might have been easier, and less expensive. So it was. "Matt, do you know what I'm going to do? I'm going to withdraw from school for the semester. It's not mid-term yet, so I could probably get at least half the money back."

"Go for it," Matt told him. "The way your dad was talking, he would probably like the idea, too."

Registration for the semesters at Little Egyptian had always been a hassle, so Tony dreaded the red-tape that would probably accompany a withdrawal. Yet it required only a few forms and a signature from his academic advisor, Stanton Woods. "Why the sudden decision to drop school?" Dr. Woods asked, with a cocked eyebrow.

"There's a crisis in the family," Tony said.

With seven hundred dollars in his wallet, Tony called Andrea that night. He had taken care to wear his camouflage pants with the flap over the pocket that buttoned. "This is just too much," Andrea
replied, when Tony told her that they could leave for Paris at any
time. He hoped she wouldn't ask how he'd gotten enough money. She
didn't.

Free from the obligation of taking classes, Tony walked downtown,
to the travel agency, first thing that next morning. While waiting
for the next available clerk, he pondered over what he would say.
Then, a tall, slender woman with dark hair cut in a dated, page-boy
style called him to her desk.

Shortly after he'd sat down, Tony pulled out his wallet and
fanned the hundred dollar bills at the woman, as if he were showing a
royal flush in a game of seven card stud. "A girl and me need to get
to Paris, toute suite," he said. "This is what we've got to work
with."

He expected her to blush, giggle, stammer, or show some other
sign of bedazzlement. She only nodded. When she spoke, in her soft
alto, her slender, delicate hands fluttered before her. She said
"You realize that that could get quite expensive."

"This is an emergency." He told her as much of the story as he
thought he needed to in order to stress that point. The agent, whose
desk plaque read "Anita Hall," nodded all the while, looking into his
eyes. Tony thought she was quite pretty, in her plum skirted suit and
pink blouse with the enormous bow.

Anita Hall revolved the IBM computer terminal on its platter so
that it faced her. The keys clattered beneath her satiny frosted
fingertips as she dialed up information. Tony answered a few questions
for her, such as whether he wanted to fly out of New York or Chicago
and just how soon he really needed to fly. "I don't know whether or
not you'll be able to go one-way for less than three-fifty apiece," Anita said.

Tony had edged forward in his seat, and his pulse quickened. "Well don't you have any discount fares, or isn't there some kind of a way that students get a break on rates?" he asked.

Anita told him that normally, the "Super-Saver" fares needed a twenty one day advance reservation on flights. He asked if there was a way that he and Andrea could get someone's seat on a flight who'd had to cancel at the last minute. Again, he stressed how much of an emergency the situation was. Anita retrieved the manager. Together, the both of them gazed at the IBM screen and played with the keys, until the manager, a sallow man with pale eyes, said, "We can get you out of Lambert Field Friday morning, and over to Orly, for somewhat less than three-fifty."

Tony left the office with the airline tickets in his button-down pocket.

Friday morning, at ten o'clock, Matt unloaded Tony and Andrea's luggage from the trunk of the Charger. He set them atop the sidewalk in-front of the Pan American terminal at St. Louis' Lambert Field. "Well this is it Bud," Matt said, extending his hand. Tony shook it, and then drew his friend closer, to embrace him.

"Thanks for everything," Tony said to him. The evening before, while Tony had been up at Andrea's room in Harriman tying together all the loose ends, calling Charles on the dorm dial card to say when they would arrive, Matt and Josh had been passing the hat at the Pennywell House. They'd come up with an additional seventy-five dollars for them to use on the trip.
Andrea kissed Matt before he said "Better hurry up, you two. The City of Lights is waiting," ducking down to get behind the wheel of his Charger. Tony watched the car curve around the loading circle and over the grade toward the exit lanes, until it disappeared.

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To Andrea, it still didn't seem as if they were really going through with the trip until they boarded the 747 at Kennedy Airport. It was four o'clock, and the stewardesses told her that they would arrive at Orly the next morning at eight. "The time was misleading," the black one said, "because they're six hours behind us, in time."

It seemed to her that they would ride to Paris in a giant living room. She had expected to see a bus or train-like interior; the plane they'd ridden from St. Louis seemed standard, with a center aisle and rows of seats, three abreast. On the 747, she found rows of seats two abreast, lining the windows. Two aisles separated the window seats from a middle section of seats three abreast. "I wouldn't mind if they put me in the section with the boxed dogs and cats," Tony said. "As long as we get there."

Since the plane would sit for awhile, with dozens of people boarding and technicians checking the engines and fueling it, the flight attendants took a drink order while they were still on the ground. She and Tony asked for wine, surprised that they weren't asked to show identification. They proposed a toast, linking their arms together, the way Andrea had seen it done in continental movies. "Geneve, I hope you're ready to meet two wild kids from Little Egyptian University," she said.

On their ride over the Atlantic Ocean, the movie Dreamscape
played for them. They'd been given a window section, so they could choose between that or the scenery below them. Mostly couples accompanied them on the flight—it was a Friday, after all, and many of them looked as if they were on a holiday, making toasts to each other, the way Tony and Andrea had.

"This is crazy," Tony said, looking out the window. "We're flying into what looks like a black hole." A bald man seated behind them overheard the remark—he was with a wrinkled woman in pearls who must have been his wife.

"That's what's going to be the incredible thing about this trip," the man said. "You see, in effect, the sun bids us farewell when we leave Kennedy here, and says hello to us when we arrive at Orly." After Andrea thought that over for a few moments, it made sense to her. Through their flight over the Atlantic, they would see the sun sink over the horizon and then rise again even though it would take considerably less time than ordinary nightfall. She unbuckled herself to go to the restroom, passing a mother who cooed to her crying children, telling them how wonderful it was to ride a plane over the "big water." It occurred to Andrea that that could have been the reason the kids were crying in the first place.

The pilot's voice crackled over the intercom while she wandered toward the front of the cabin: "If you look out the sides of the cabin, all you'll see is solid water," he said. "We're on schedule to arrive at Orly eight o'clock tomorrow morning. We'll catch the rising sun there, and I'm sure you'll agree, it's a pretty sight."

Upon returning to her seat, Andrea found Tony sipping another glass of wine while reading an in-flight magazine. She remembered
something she'd forgotten to tell him. "Tony, I hope you don't get mad," she said, "but I told Dr. Utrecht about this trip we'd be making."

"Great," he replied, rolling his eyes.

"Well, he was interested," Andrea said. "And I don't think he deserved all that shit you gave him that day. Part of the reason I did it is because I wanted to make sure he wasn't holding any grudges."

"Who cares?" Tony snarled. "The guy's a blowhard. I've got something to tell you. I got disgusted with the whole scene so much that I withdrew from school, so we'd have money for this trip."

"Tony! God!"

For the next few hours, Tony ordered a drink every time the cart passed. Andrea snuggled next to him, resting her head on his shoulder. Besides being comfortable that way, she also wanted to show that she wasn't mad at anything that he'd done, or his attitudes toward Dr. Utrecht and the Cinema program at Little Egyptian. She felt that if it hadn't been for their exposure to Moret, through the program, then they never would have learned all those things that led them to where they were going now.

Hopefully, Tony would still be able to stand when he met his uncle in a few short hours. Andrea promised herself to cut him off the next time he tried to order something. He averted a potentially sticky situation for her by falling asleep after he'd finished his wine. The stewardess walked by in time to prop a pillow behind his lolling head. Andrea closed her eyes and rested against him, to see if she could sleep away some of the remaining time, as well. In a haze, she heard a woman in one of the other rows say "Look at those two over there. They look so sweet. Ah...young love."
Andrea tensed her lip muscles to keep from grinning or, worse yet, laughing out loud.

They lay for what seemed to Andrea an hour. When Tony stirred, it jolted Andrea out of the fuzzy mid-region between deep sleep and wide-awake alertness in which she had been floating. "It's on fire out there!" he exclaimed so loudly that a couple of passengers in the rows in front of them lifted their gaze above the seatbacks and glanced behind at him. When she looked out the window with him, she knew that the trip would soon end.

The sun had risen, casting a reddish orange glow over the sky. Everyone on board noticed the change in scenery and buzzed to each other about it. "We should be landing at Orly right on schedule, in about another hour from now," the captain's voice crackled over the intercom. To go along with the fiery bursts out in the atmosphere, Andrea thought they should play the song "Eclipse" from Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon album. "If you look out of either side of the cabin about another fifteen minutes from now," the captain added, "you may notice part of the British Isles."

Andrea pounded her fists on her thighs the same way she used to when she'd been a much younger girl and her father had just pulled the station wagon into the Mariott's Great America parking lot, and she could see the upward and downward dips of the roller coasters. Tony looked at her and smiled. She embraced him quickly, holding on until he gently broke away, to look out the window some more. His eyebrow cocked when he looked at her. That puzzled her until she realized what he'd probably been thinking--for all the time they'd known each other, he'd been around her in moments of her boredom, frustration, and even
despair, but never joy.

After tiring of looking out the window, Tony gazed at one of the in-flight magazines as if he'd been on a Metro bus headed for the Loop back home. Andrea guessed that the lingering effects of all the glasses of wine had probably dampened his excitement of landing. But then, she felt enough for the both of them, clutching her chest and leaning against the backrest.

"We're waiting for clearance to land at Orly within the next twenty minutes," the captain said. "The current weather in the City of Lights is, well, sunny, as you can see for yourselves, temperature at forty-eight degrees." Andrea urged Tony to switch seats with her—he hadn't seemed too interested in the scenery anyway.

She saw wisps of clouds scurrying over the green patches of forest below. "When you fly into Chicago," Tony said, "all the buildings, the Sears Tower, the John Hancock, they all look like pieces of artist's charcoal placed on end." Rather than sticklike structures, a yellow glow illuminated the ground below them. "Where's the Eiffel Tower?" Tony wanted to know.

The bald man answered with "You don't see it on this particular air route, unless you know where to look."

"What about the Louver?" a twangy male voice barked out, causing a chorus of chuckles.

As the plane dipped downward for its final approach, Andrea's ears stung, the way they did when she would dive toward the bottom of the Municipal pool's deep end. Buildings rushed past the window. She braced herself in her seat for the landing. The wheels bumped down, smoother than they had at Kennedy airport, which seemed strange to her.
because that plane had been much smaller. Wind roared over the wings, and when the plane had come to a complete stop, Andrea said "Here we are."

"Yeah. Look out," Tony replied. "Don't forget your carry-on bag." She had him reach into the compartment above to grab for her accessory case and his teardrop pack. People surged into the aisles from all sides. Tony gathered Andrea into his arms and formed a wall around her as they flowed with the crowd toward the front hatch of the plane. The voices buzzing around her all muddled together, since the increase of pressure had pushed her eardrums in. She trudged on with stiff, telescoping limbs.

The pilot and flight crew in dingy, dirt blue bid them farewell at the exit hatch, wishing them a pleasant stay in Paris. Then, they began the short walk down the tin tunnel to the terminal. "Charles said that he would meet us at customs," Tony told her on the way out. The terminal looked the same as the one at Kennedy, with all the glass, gleaming tile, and potpourri of people whizzing past. Yet to Andrea, it seemed artier. That could have been because of the sculptures standing atop marble monoliths, spaced every hundred feet, or the nonsensical hieroglyphics printed on all the signs for Arrival, Departure, and directions for what she assumed were the airport cafes, giftshops, and shoe-shining stands.

She and Tony flashed their passports at a clerk and showed their carry-on baggage to a tight-lipped woman with hair pulled back so severely that it narrowed her eyes. Andrea chuckled at how Tony's face reddened when the customs lady leafed through a few of his low-rise briefs of rainbow colors. When they cleared all the formalities of
foreign country entry, Tony said that they would find her larger bag off a customs carousel. "Now where the hell's Charles," he added, studying the faces in the crowd. Andrea looked for women of her own age to gaze at, since she could get a handle on how different things were over there by checking out the changes in her peer group. The first two who walked by had escorts, just as she had, and with their layered tops and jeans or linen dresses with padded shoulders, they could have been from back in the states (and probably were). A pair of young black women passed by—those she knew couldn't have been from back home, judging from the beads that clacked in their hair and the loosely cascading tubed tapestries they wore as a form of dress. Andrea wondered how close Paris was to Nigeria, or Morocco, or any of the other countries that she vaguely knew occupied the northern half of Africa. Before she'd had much longer to think the matter through, a single white girl passed by—one who appeared to have stepped through a time warp from a shooting of a Rowan and Martin's Laugh-In segment. The vinyl, canary-yellow micro-mini that blond woman wore slapped against her upper thighs in rhythm with the swinging shoelaces of her white granny boots. The oddest thing about the outfit was the sleeveless black sweatshirt top layered over the plain, white, short-sleeved sweatshirt.

Tony backed into Andrea, startling her. He glanced up at the signs, symbols, and arrows, as she had. "If I have to call Charles," he said, "I'd like to be able to tell him where the hell we are."

Suddenly, someone yelled out "Tony! Over here!"

Andrea whirled in the direction of the shout to see a short, compact man with onyx hair and mustache, who waved at them. His large,
dark eyes sparkled along with a double rowed smile of white, piano key teeth.

They scampered toward him, nearly running a few people over. Charles raised his hands into the air; Tony was a distant relative in every sense, yet Charles welcomed him as he would an old friend whom he hadn't seen for awhile. They embraced, the teardrop pack slapping around on Tony's back, since Charles had hugged with such force as to lift him. Andrea knew that a smile had spread across her face when Tony gestured toward her to introduce her to Charles. "Charles, this is Andrea, the girl I was telling you about." Charles nodded and bowed to her; she wondered if he would also raise her hand, cradling it in his palms to kiss it. Instead, he merely hugged her, with less force than he had with Tony (her feet stayed on the ground). He murmured a few words to her, bogged down by a heavy accent. She nodded and smiled, positive that whatever he said was only the patter associated with greetings.

Then Charles tugged Tony close to him so that he could whisper something in his ear. Tony laughed. He told Andrea "He says that you're gorgeous and that I better treat you well," Andrea blushed.

Charles offered to carry Andrea's accessory bag as they walked to the baggage carousel. Luckily, Andrea's larger bag and Tony's suitcase revolved around for them when they got there. Just a simple ticket check by a clerk cleared them to leave the airport. Charles carried both of Andrea's bags for her. "We gotta get out of here quick," he said. "I parked in the taxi zone at the circle." Charles' English was good; Andrea realized that he had probably said something French to her back at the customs area.
Electronic doors, similar to the swishing ones at DuPage East, opened for them on their way to the terminal loading zone. A red Ford Escort lay beside the curb. "There she is," Charles said, putting the bags on the sidewalk to dig in his pockets for the keys. Andrea and Tony looked at each other--she knew that he must have been thinking the same thing as she: What was Charles doing with an American car? A week before, Andrea had ridden with some girls from her dorm to the Thebes Corner's Mall, in a car very similar to that one.

"Charles," Tony asked his uncle while he opened the hatchback door, "What are you doing driving an Escort? I thought you would have a Renault Fuego, or a Citroen or something."

"What are you talking about," Charles said, placing the luggage inside his car, "the French don't know how to make cars."

Andrea sat in the back seat, beside her large suitcase. The interior of the car was also red--so far, she hadn't seen anything that would indicate to her that she had traveled overseas.

Her head jerked back when Charles stomped the accelerator and yanked on the wheel to drive them away from the curb. If Tony's uncle was in any way indicative of the way other Frenchmen drove, then their philosophy was to waste as little time as possible journeying from one place to another. As they joined the line of traffic (blending in with a few of the more traditionally-French, aardvark-shaped Citroens), Charles had the further disconcerting habit of gazing directly at whomever he was speaking to while aiming the car forward at dangerous speeds.

When the car approached the entrance to a boulevard he said "So, you two must be hungry, hah? We must go someplace." They'd served a
chicken dinner early on in the flight across the ocean, and towards the early morning hours they'd followed up with Danishes and coffee, yet it all had failed to stay with Andrea.

"Sounds good," Tony said. "But it doesn't have to be anything fancy."

Andrea chuckled, replying "Well I'm sure they don't have any Hardees or McDonalds out here."

"Sure. Sure," Charles said, with a grumble that reminded Andrea of Yosemite Sam from the Saturday morning cartoons.

"What do you mean?" Tony asked his uncle.

"We 'ave them," Charles said. Andrea thought that the French had probably picked up the habit of dropping "h's" from their neighbors across the channel. He said that he would take them to a place that was like those. Along the way, Andrea watched the scenery blur past. The wisps of clouds she'd seen from the air floated by and blocked out the sun, yet lack of light robbed no ounce of color from all that she saw around her. "This is really nice," she said to no one in particular.

Charles and Tony conversed with each other, up front. "Back home, condominiums line and tacky posters line the streets. Here, trees do." Trees, she thought, that frame the walkways to the pillared mansions and burst forth in shades of yellow, red, and brown.

They approached what looked like a commercial section, with tightly bunched row buildings and pedestrians. Charles said that a place called "Freetime" lay just around the corner. After parking the car, they went inside. "This is wild," Andrea said to Charles and Tony when she saw the inside of the restaurant, with its formica, wood-veneered tables, bright lights, brick-tiled floors, and rows of cash registers. The
workers even wore striped/solid patterned smocks and "you deserve a break today" smiles.

Charles agreed to order for all of them, since a marquee listing all the items hung from the ceiling as in all the American fast-food restaurants, yet all the choices were in French. They stood on line with him. It seemed to Andrea that the French had copied everything else about the style of fast food serving from the Americans except for the orderliness of the line. Construction workers, women, and children—all formed a triangle behind a trio of cash registers attended by cheerful looking teenagers. Wild scrambles ebbed and flowed whenever another patron would leave the counter with his food, with shouts for orders coming from all directions.

Andrea shifted from one foot to the other. Finally, Charles approached the counter and spoke to a blond-haired girl, glancing up at the marquee all the while. As he named off items (Andrea vaguely recognized "pommes" from her introduction to the language during her freshman year of high school) the girl entered them onto some sort of a keyboard. When Charles finished ordering, the girl continued on with what Andrea recognized as questions, from the voice inflections, before retrieving any of the food from the slots behind her, she wielded a pad and pen in front of her. An order form, to keep up with inventory?

Charles grumbled and growled at the clerk, who glanced at Andrea and Tony for a second. Andrea recognized the phrases "ils sont américains" and "aux Etats-Unis" from the patter of Charles' answers, as she watched the girl scribble long-hand onto the pad. Charles muttered a few additional things while the clerk had her head down, and
there, Andrea realized what had taken so long about the other customer's orders.

After some more banter and growling from Charles, plus a few more pad scribblings, the clerk finally brought them their food and they sat down. Charles had ordered croissants (with cheese and mushrooms), orange juice, and "pommes" for them. Tony gazed at the surfboard-shaped "pommes" in disbelief, before tapping it on the table as if it had been made of the same material that it had mimicked in miniature. Charles laughed. "Pommes" had apparently been modelled after the pressed hash browns found in the states.

While they ate, Charles explained that the tie-up at the counter had been because "you give those bastards a chance where they can fill out a damn form and they write forever. Next thing, they ask why you here."

He told them that they would go straight to the old Moret house, on the Gare Montparnasse--as soon as he'd had a chance to check in on some things at work. "You know, that whole struggle over the property, it is a...a very big deal. They report it on television."

"Oh God," Andrea said.

"You--you," Charles said, pointing at her. "We have to get there! Vite, vite!"

Andrea failed to understand his last two words, but rushed through the rest of her croissant just the same.

*****

Charles drove on to the cemetery where he worked. He said that it was just a few boulevard miles toward the eastern side of the city, yet
it took a while to get there. While the roads were pretty, with their groves of trees and small parks dividing the lanes, the intersections were horrendous. Cars jammed at each traffic light, as if their drivers had stopped to flip a coin to decide where they would turn. Andrea marvelled at everything, since she'd never had the opportunity to travel anywhere other than the Rocky Mountains in Wyoming, when she was much younger. Tony, on the other hand, slumped in his seat and gazed at the road ahead. He had told Andrea of the many places he'd been. "Look at how the concrete on the bridges looks like someone sculpted and chiselled it," she said.

"Yeah," Tony said. "They got bridges and apartment buildings like this in Kansas City, St. Louis, and Cincinnati. This must be where they got the idea."

"Look over there!" Andrea went on. "There's one of those cops like they have in the Pink Panther movies." Tony looked at the flat-topped capped policeman along with her.

By the time they'd reached the Cimitiere Pere Lachaise, the mid-morning sun had chased all the wispy clouds toward the horizon. The sun shone over all the markers and headstones; as living people exhibit entire spectrums of differing colors and hues, so did the headstones here, in their years of rest. Until Andrea had visited the French cemetery, she had thought of them as open fields of large piano keys on end, spaced apart. Green, wrought iron gates at the entrance were the only similarity between the other cemeteries she'd seen as compared to the one where Uncle Charles worked.(on the way out of the restaurant, he'd told her to call him that).

"What do you do at this cemetery?" Tony asked Charles while they
coasted along a narrow, asphalt drive.

"I make sure four other men do their work," he said. "And sometimes I give a tour for people. We got famous people here--Balzac, De Gaulle, and sometimes I gotta show to them the place. Mostly Americans with fancy cameras."

He parked in front of the caretaker's stone house. When she and Tony had emerged from the car, Tony pointed out that much of the cemetery's land had curved upward along the slope of a hill. Some of the graves "climbed" the hill. He wondered out loud if they had to dig the graves deeper than six feet or else risk having one end protrude from the grass. They stood beside the car and waited for Charles while he walked inside the caretaker's house to discuss some business.

Tony leaned against the left front fender of the car. He looked over the fields rolling before them, and when Andrea followed his gaze, she saw a few older working gentlemen raking leaves that had fallen from trees that formed a shroud over one grave that had a huge granite mausoleum. "What if Moret is buried here?" he said.

"He died practically living off Geneve," Andrea replied, shrugging. "Where did you find that out?"

"I read it in that book. You remember, just after we got back from up north. It took a while. I had to wade through all that French. Anyway, the book said that when Geneve found Jacques, he was practically a bum. He was living with some woman who ran a shack-type candy store in one of the sleazy sections of the city. She whisked him away and married him. You know, he had practically dropped out of sight."

"Became a hermit, huh?"

"Yeah. But when Geneve found him, she notified some historical
film society. They threw a party for him and showed a few of his films. And he wrote a couple of articles for Cahiers du Cinema before he died."

"That's interesting. I didn't know that that magazine has been around that long."

"They paused. Andrea stared ahead and shivered, when she started to think. It wasn't cold out there in the bright sun, and she'd worn her padded light jacket. Tony slipped his jeans jacket off, and flung it through the opened car window, onto the front seat--the cold must have been in her head.

"Man, I'm burning up," he said. "But look at you. You're shaking like a leaf. What's wrong?"

"Tony, I'm scared shitless," she replied. "Do you realize what we're going to do within the next hour?"

he shrugged, after he stopped to think about it for a couple of seconds. "You're going to see Geneve."

"That's all you can say?"

"I don't know. I just want to get at that basement." He glanced around at some of the headstones. "Come on. It looks like ol' Charlie's going to take a little while. We might as well make like tourists, look around this place a little." He started off toward the headstones, yet stopped, returning to her. Growing tenseness had made her legs feel as cumbersome as if they'd been made of heavy clay. "Aren't you coming?"

"I don't know if I can walk. I've got to sit down."

Shortly after she climbed into the back seat to sit down and try to spill her pounding heart, Charles emerged from the stone house. Tony opened the door and sat up front, ready to leave.
CHAPTER SIXTEEN

There it was. The Moret house. When Charles had stopped the Escort and parked it along the Gare Montparnasse, the three of them looked at it in silence for several minutes. Tony had climbed into the back seat with Andrea for the drive over from the cemetery. On the way over she had trembled with such force that it seemed that she had been convulsing. Tony had rubbed her arms through her jacket sleeves; they seemed hard, tensed.

The house was green, and had two distinct halves. One half looked like a residential dwelling, with its dark trim framing the windows and lining the steep roof. The other half had once been the greenhouse-type studio where Moret had shot most of his films. Someone had replaced the glass with wood though, so that it looked similar to a miniature airplane hanger. A crane, with dangling wrecking ball had pulled onto what had been a garden beside the old studio. Tony saw two stern looking men in suits pacing on the front porch of the house, talking to one another.

On its city block, it was the only remaining residential building. Box-shaped office structures had sprung up around it. "We have to go in," Charles said. Tony heard Andrea emit an audible yelp. He had to help her out of the back seat, tugging hard because her tenseness had solidified her muscles to dead weight. She ambled with him, clutching his arm, while they made their way up the front walk behind Charles.

Charles had thrust his chest out when the men on the porch saw him coming. One of the men immediately growled something in French at him. It seemed hostile to him, as if the man had said "Where do you
think you're going?"

Charles shot back a reply in a grumbling, tough voice. "This man says that visitors are barred from Madame Pryal," Charles explained to Tony. "He doesn't know who he's messing with." He turned back to the gentlemen on the porch, immediately launching a verbal barrage to which both men narrowed their eyes, looked at each other, and shook their heads. Charles raised his palms to shake them at the men, stressing what he wanted to say. When the men still seemed unaffected, Charles clenched his fists at them, gritting his teeth so that his words came out more sharply.

The suited men spoke with each other some more. One of them disappeared through the heavy, mahogany door. The one whom remained said something to Charles—it was in a very cool tone, as if he'd said "We'll see if you get to enter. We'll give you the time of day."

Charles gestured to Andrea when he responded to the man, tapping her shoulders, his eyes pleading as he leaned forward. The man on the porch looked long at Andrea; Tony supported her by holding her waist tightly.

The man's partner emerged from the house slump-shouldered. He glanced at the three of them on the concrete walk, saying "Entre."

Andrea gushed with joy, straightening herself, the tenseness in her muscles evaporating. Charles shouted a French expression that Tony imagined had to stand—for intense relief. The men opened the door for them and showed them the way inside. It surprised Tony when Andrea pushed herself in front of him and Charles.

Tony immediately thrust his arms out in front of him, for fear of bumping into something. It was dark in there, "Let this lawyer through,"
Charles said. "He has to show us the way to the room where we can find Madame Pryal." They let the man get ahead of them, and he had to squeeze past, in the narrow hallway. Tony saw light leak through a door at the end of the hallway—the door behind which Geneve lay.

The lawyer opened the door, and light from inside there flooded the hallway. He poked his head inside and mumbled something to whomever had been in there. Tony and Charles let Andrea walk ahead of them, toward the doorway. Tony swallowed hard and followed, ahead of Charles.

The bedroom was beautiful—like some restored rooms Tony had seen at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, rooms that had existed during the reign of Louis XV. First he noticed the wide planks of the wooden floor, then the flowered, striped, wallpaper design, with velvet gold accent. Then, the Hepplewhite chairs with red velour cushion. Strangely to him, Tony remembered one of the final scenes of 2001: A Space Odyssey, where the astronaut, having aged to a decrepit old man, reclines on a bed with ruffled, silky blankets and a canopy.

It was bright in that room—oh, so bright. A nurse, in a light blue uniform with white apron and hat, sat on a wrought-iron Hepplewhite chair beside the bed. The bed in which Geneve lay. Tanks of oxygen and dangling Hickman bottles pumping fluid through clear tubes to Geneve's body clashed with the elegance of the room. Geneve lifted her head from the pillow, causing the mousy-looking nurse with tucked hair to widen her eyes and squeak something in horror to Charles.

"The nurse says that Madame Pryal hasn't moved for a week," Charles said, his voice echoing in the silent chamber.

Andrea had stood at the foot of the bed, and Geneve gazed at her through eyes around which the skin had sagged and drooped deeply.
He said something to the nurse that appeared to calm her.

"What did you say to her?" Tony asked him.

"I told her to let the woman be," Charles replied. Tony noticed that Geneve and Andrea were oblivious to whatever else went on in the room. They had paused, still gazing at each other. Tony suddenly remembered the basement.

"Andrea, the basement," Tony told her. That snapped her out of her trance-like gaze.

"What, what did you say?" she asked.

Charles interjected. "What about a...basement?"

"I told you about it, didn't I?" Tony replied. "About what her grandmother said."

"Oh yes. Maybe this nurse knows something about it. I don't think I should bother Madame Pryal." He turned to the nurse and asked her. She responded, gesturing with her hands as to the location of the basement. Charles thanked her, and started toward the door. Tony followed him. The nurse called them back.

Charles looked at her and then at Tony. "She says that we'll need a lantern," he said.

****

Charles and Tony entered the basement, with Tony instantly holding his breath to shut out the foul mustiness. They'd found a lantern in what had once been a carriage house, since converted to a garage. Charles had cursed during the five times he'd tried to get the thing lit. He carried the clanging lantern. Tony followed him with a sledgehammer. Charles had asked him why he would want to
Since she'd had her back to him, Tony couldn't check out Andrea's reaction. He decided, instead, to gaze at Geneve. Through all the years, through everything that had probably happened, her hair had never lost its fullness from all of the pictures of her that Tony had seen in the books Utrecht had shown him. Only the woman's head and shoulders poked out from beneath the blankets, and when Tony looked closely into Geneve's eyes, the sparkle, the vitality, seemed familiar to him. It was the same kind of searching look that Andrea had shown him when they'd first met.

Geneve's pale, thin lips trembled, forcing out a wheezing of breath. She'd been trying to speak, finally saying "I know little English." Horrified, the nurse sprang from her seat and hovered over her, resting her hands on her shoulders. Geneve's arm poked out from beneath the blankets. It waved the nurse away, and she reluctantly sank back into her seat. Andrea edged forward so that she leaned over the foot of the bed, closing the gap between her and Geneve's faces to less than five feet.

"Go on," Andrea murmured.

"You're beautiful," Geneve continued. There was a long pause. "Alixia..." Tony recognized the name—Andrea had said that it had been given to her grandmother at birth and that she'd changed it when she arrived in the States.

"She forgives," Andrea said.

Geneve's gaze lifted heavenward, as if in thanks. The blankets rose and fell, perceptibly, atop Geneve's chest, causing the nurse's knitted eyebrows to cross each other in grave concern. She stammered out a couple of French phrases, and Charles moved in closer to her.
bring that down, but Tony had avoided the question by saying "You'll see."

The concrete steps crackled and disintegrated beneath their feet as they cautiously lowered down. Light from the lantern revealed cobwebs as thick as curtains, wooden boxes, and a foundation made of bricks. "Come on," Tony hissed. "Let's walk along the wall. We have to find something."

He and Charles edged along the wall, knocking aside wooden boxes with their feet. A high pitched squeal suddenly startled them. Charles had stepped on a rat. "God," Tony said. "Good thing you were able to keep the lantern lit, the way you were flinging it around."

They continued, crouched down in the darkness, until Tony could see the vague outline of a makeshift break in the foundation. He imagined a little girl, playing ball in the dank dungeon, coming upon a crazed, frustrated artist who screamed at her.

"This is it," Tony said, rising to his full height, wielding the sledgehammer.

"Tony, what are you doing?"

"Stand back. Put the lantern over there, so I can at least see where I'm hitting."

"Tony no! You can't!"

He paid no attention. Bringing the sledgehammer behind his back, he inhaled, to gather his strength. If there had been solid brick behind there, he would probably break an arm. But he knew there couldn't be. With a whining grunt, he drove the sledgehammer around. It slammed into the wall. Charles cowered, rolling away from the shattered brick. The wall was hollow.

When the dust settled, Tony said "Give me that lantern!"
Charles peered inside the hollow void along with him. A disc-shaped, leather-hard container lay inside. Tony grabbed for it, and the outside coating crumbled between his fingers. Charles held the lantern above Tony's outstretched palms that cradled the container. The light fell upon the word "Atlantis."

When Tony had set it down, jumping up and shouting with delight, Charles held the lantern against the void, noticing something else inside there. "Tony, there's a box in there," he said, reaching inside to retrieve it.

"Wow, this is going to set the world on its ear," Tony said.
EPILOGUE

Tony listened to the ringing at the other end of the line.
"Hello?" Josh said (Tony recognized the deepest voice in the Pennywell House).

"Josh, it's Tony, long distance. Get me Matt if he's there."
Josh shouted "Hey Matt! It's fucking Tony!" It wasn't long before Matt got on the line.

"Hey Tony, you son of a bitch! You're an international celebrity! You were on the evening news last night!"

"Yeah," Tony said. "Well I've been talking to so many reporters lately that I don't know which end is up."

"What the fuck did you find there? The whole film of Atlantis Underseas?"

"No. It was a paper reprint. Back around 1915, they used to make paper contact prints of all the films, for a kind of copyright protection. They tell me that celluloid film would never have lasted that long—even closed up the way it was. I'll tell you what, though. We found a strongbox containing some papers on the house. That's what was causing all the uproar."

"Well where the hell are you calling from?"

"I'm calling from the Moret house. There's three bedrooms here. I've been living like a king."

"When are you coming back?"

"I don't know. I'll be here through the week and probably for quite a while after that. We have to wade through all this legal mess. You wouldn't believe all the lawyers and translators. That French
film society, they're trying to work out a deal between me and Andrea about Atlantis Underseas. Some film lab over here is reproducing every frame, so that it can be shown."

"What about Andrea?"

"God, you wouldn't believe it. Geneve wants her to run some gymnastics school that she set up in the old studio. It's been going since around 1925. That girl's got a lot to think of now."

"Well Tony, this is un-fucking-believable."

"Yeah, I know. Listen, let me get to the reason I called. Yesterday, Utrecht sent a wire here. He wants me to come back to Little Egyptian with the film. The telegram contained five hundred dollars for me to get back on. It seems that he was suddenly able to swing a departmental grant for me."

Matt laughed. "No doubt, after he heard about what happened, on television."

"You got it. Now listen: here's what I want you to do..."

*****

Dr. Utrecht finished his lecture on Erich Von Stroheim. He snarled at his students for looking bored. "Well," he said, "hopefully the film will help you wake up."

He stepped down from the podium to peek inside the core door to tell the technicians in there to start the film. Having done so, he sat in his chair near the front door and awaited that time when Greed would grace the screen.

The projector threw a much smaller frame on the screen than what he had been expecting. Someone back there had started the Super 8mm
projector instead of the sixteen. "What's going on?" he called out, rising.

The image of a magician blazed onscreen. It looked like a student who'd put on a tux, waving a magic wand in the air over a chair. The entire class buzzed at what was apparently a foul-up from the projection room. A girl dressed in a period outfit from the World War I era entered the screen and sat in the chair. The magician dropped a tapestry over her. "What is the meaning of this!" Utrecht shouted.

The magician onscreen waved his wand over the tapestry, then yanked it off. A skeleton lay underneath. Students around the room giggled—to Utrecht their laughter seemed arrogant. The magician in the picture dropped the tapestry over the skeleton, mouthed an incantation, and yanked the cloth off again. A different girl sat on the chair. When the camera lens zoomed in on her, Utrecht recognized her. It was that Andrea. She smirked at him, devilishly.

Utrecht had been just about ready to storm toward the core door when the film shut off and the lights switched on again. He still continued on toward the door, to yell at whomever was responsible for the crude prank, or whatever had taken place.

"Hey Utrecht," someone shouted from the direction of the class; "we want to talk to you." He turned around to see who had said that.

Three young men about twenty-one years old apiece stood on the top row of the tiered classroom. Each one walked down the steps of a different aisle, toward him. The boy in the center was small and compact, with fiery red hair and an evil grin. A tall, thin, dark-haired young man who looked Indian descended down from the right.
On the left, a bushy-haired guy who looked slightly older than the other two strode down the steps. "What kind of an absurd spectacle is this?" Utrecht shouted.

He noticed that the red-headed troublemaker approaching him from the center carried an envelope. The three young men walked until they'd reached a point within arm's length of him, just in front of the podium. Then, they stopped.

The middle one spoke with a sneer. "Here's your money, man," he said, handing Utrecht the envelope, "With a message from Tony, in Paris. You leave him the fuck alone, and he'll leave you the fuck alone."

With that, the three young students exited.

THE END