

Songs  
from  
Orion

by John Eckalbar

# Songs from Orion

© 2006 by John Eckalbar  
All rights reserved

Permission to reproduce copies, except excerpts for reviews, is prohibited unless given in writing by the author:

**John Eckalbar**

Chico, California

**(530) 343-6791**

[jeckalbar@saber.net](mailto:jeckalbar@saber.net)

*Songs from Orion* is posted on the Forum page of the Heidelberg Graphics Web site: [www.HeidelbergGraphics.com](http://www.HeidelbergGraphics.com) in Chico, California, for the enjoyment of readers. It may not be copied or reprinted except for personal reading.

Several people deserve thanks for their help on this project. My wife, Anne, my sister, Mary Glazer, and my friends Laurence Boag and John Elstrott all read early versions of the manuscript and got me to believe that I should stick with it. My great friend David Crosby did the same, and I doubt that I would have kept at it except for their encouragement. Ernie Brace, a POW captured in Laos and released in Hanoi, was kind enough to read the sections on the MIA/POW experience. Capt. Zeke Cormier and Mr. Joe Ciokin arranged for me to fly out to the USS *Constellation* and the USS *Carl Vinson* to see what carrier catapult shots are like. And my son, Walter, both inspired and proofread the sections on wrestling.

# The Songs of Orion

Preface .....	6
The Spirit of Orion.....	14
Martin Landry .....	22
Dreams of the Innocent.....	30
The Music Lesson.....	33
A Star in the Broken Sky .....	37
Jack Landry.....	41
When the Music Came.....	49
Into the Big League.....	53
Sittin' In .....	56
Press Conference.....	63
The Bong .....	70
I Like It Like That.....	82
Song Writer.....	96
School Days .....	103
Who Done It?.....	119
A Quick Trip to Canada.....	123
The Fighter Who Just Won't Quit.....	124
The Lottery .....	135
Crayfish.....	148
Even in the Rising Air.....	159
A Letter From the USS Corregidor.....	162
Boulder .....	165
Hello .....	171
The Smile of a Yearling Child .....	180
On the Road .....	193
Songs of the Dark .....	200
The Wait .....	207
Dear Mrs. Landry.....	216
The Amber Waves of Grain.....	226
Tricycles .....	231
Voyage of the Damned .....	236
Somewhere Deep Inside .....	251
Heavenly Digital.....	290
So Long, Isaac.....	305
The Sin We Both Loved .....	326
The Seed .....	349
A Sprout.....	361
Details.....	372
Avarua.....	388
The Tangaroa .....	391
Aitutake.....	406

Back to Rarotonga .....	419
Taveuni .....	460
The Song of the Pouring Rain.....	481
Where Water Meets Sand [or it's there] .....	496
Epilogue: Through the Eyes of an Angel.....	500

## Preface

I sit on the veranda of my brightly painted little house in the lush green hills above Avarua, and I look out at the tiny harbor and the endless blue-eyed Pacific beyond the seawall. A boat motors out of the harbor, turns into the wind, and raises its sails. Two native Polynesian boys clatter down the hill toward town on an ancient bicycle. Laughing as they bound through the ruts in the cobbled road. Seagulls and frigate birds hang motionless above me, like kites keeping watch in the on-shore breeze. There are many worlds on this planet.

I am exhausted from the emotional and physical strain of the past few days, but I still have the presence of mind to appreciate the idyllic tranquility of this scene. The tropical air is moist and fragrant in the morning sun. It feels like feathers being drawn across my skin. I close my eyes and listen to the shrieks of the sea gulls. For a moment I think I hear a stock-car race in the distance. That's improbable on this placid little island. I open my eyes to look for the source of the noise and see that it is bees at work behind me in the hibiscus.

The dog that walked me home last night, uninvited but welcome companion, lies stretched out beside me. Together we soak up the sun's life-giving energy. I feel it's warmth, like a massage, working out the tension that has accumulated in my shoulders. The dog raises his head and looks around, as if he is trying to remember how he came to this place. In a way, that is my project now, too.

It's hard to believe that I can sit in such a peaceful setting, pencil in hand, quietly assembling my thoughts, while just beyond the horizon a desperate air and sea search is underway for my friend Martin Landry, who disappeared a few days ago in his sailboat somewhere between here and Fiji.

Yes, I am talking about *the* Martin Landry. Former right fielder for the Los Angeles Evaders and rookie of the year in 1965. The one whose off-hand remark in support of Muhammad Ali's resistance to the Vietnam War caused a firestorm of angry

reactions that ultimately drove him from the game. The same Martin Landry who surfaced a few years later, in the wake of Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, as the singer/songwriter who wrote and performed the multi-million seller "Who Done It?" The same Martin Landry who then fell back into obscurity and became, at least in the eyes of the fickle public, little more than the answer to a rock trivia question.

My friend Martin vanished a few days ago in Typhoon Leaha, and now P-3 patrol planes from New Zealand, ironically known as "Orions," are crisscrossing the South Pacific between Tonga and the Cook Islands looking for him. All vessels in the area are scanning the horizon. Overflying commercial aircraft and shore-based radios maintain a constant listening watch on the emergency radio frequencies. In my desperation and frustration I have even borrowed an airplane and flown out over the search area to look for myself. So far, there is no trace.

It's difficult for me to say just why I am writing this now. Maybe it is nothing more than an act of personal therapy. A need to do something, rather than just sit on the shore and stare into the un-blinking Pacific, wondering what truly became of Martin. Not knowing whether to hope or to mourn.

Since his family flew in from the U.S., there has been a lot of that. A lot of sitting quietly near the water, lost in our separate worlds, just looking out. There has been a lot of quiet talk amongst us, and even some hard laughs. But they're the sort of laughs that have you wiping at a tear, the sort that are more like the chattering of the steam-vent on a pressure cooker.

The family talks about Martin in the old days, and I fill them in on how things were for him these last few years, when it seems that I was one of the few people who really knew him.

And an odd group it is that sits quietly in the sand each evening. Staring into the fire. Looking absently out to sea. I know I called them his family, but that is probably not the right word for them. There is his childhood sweetheart and ex-wife, Stephanie. Their teen-age son, Kevin, who quotes from Homer's *Odyssey* the way my generation repeated

lines from *Saturday Night Live*. Kevin was a year old when his parents divorced, and he barely knew his father, except for a few visits and a bunch of newspaper clippings. Maybe that makes his loss all the more difficult to bear. There's Martin's brother Jack, who virtually returned from the dead after being shot down and captured in Laos during the Vietnam War. I'd heard from Martin that Jack was hell-on-wheels as a kid, but you'd never suspect that now. And then there is Martin's sometimes-senile and sometimes amazingly lucid mother, Flo. I can't even begin to understand her. The frail little woman will sit in the shade wearing those enormous sun glasses that old folks favor. Hardly saying a word sometimes for hours on end as she sips her Southern Comfort and watches the world go by. Sometimes she'll get talkative and tell the same cockamamie story three times in one hour. But then just when you've written her off, she'll make some pronouncement that stops everyone cold. Seems like she oscillates randomly from dementia to profundity.

Funny how it is that we need to gather near the water, as close as we can get to the mystery, and try to keep Martin alive in our thoughts. As if his survival depended upon our collective will.

Maybe we've also come together to shield each other from the hounds in the media. For some reason the press has decided to feed on this story. I know they will be gone with the next celebrity murder trial or political sex scandal, but for now they are here, or even more infuriating, they are back in their offices in L.A. and New York spewing out headlines that are really starting to get under my skin. "'60s Rock Icon Martin Landry Mysteriously Disappears Alone at Sea.'" "Typhoon Leaha Claims Baseball's 1965 Rookie of the Year Martin Landry.'" "Sales of Long Forgotten Album Heat Up While Family Grieves—But Is It a Hoax?" "Where's the Lifeboat?" "Suicide or Alien Abduction." And even this, "The Inside Scoop: Did Martin's 'Friend' Joe Sabotage the Boat in a Fit of Jealousy?" That's me, Joe, and though I guess I shouldn't be surprised that these demented newspapers connect me to Martin's disappearance, nothing could be further from the truth. Martin was my best friend. What would I be jealous about? But



then truth doesn't sell newspapers, does it?

I come back to the question of why I am writing this account of his life. It is certainly not my intention to contribute to or exploit the swirling media speculation following Martin's disappearance at sea. Nor do I write to reveal any secret information. I can tell you all I know in a few sentences: I flew Martin to Australia about six weeks ago. I was ferrying an airplane, a Beech Baron, from the U.S. to Brisbane for a friend. Martin went along for the ride. Actually, it was more than that. He wanted to stop in Avarua, here in the Cook Islands, to see his old sailboat, The Spirit of Orion. In fact he had cooked up a legal scheme to get it back. Martin had abandoned the boat here years ago. Back when he fell from grace, you might say. The new owner, a complex Polynesian character that I am beginning to get to know, salvaged the boat back in 1975 or '76 and built a life around it. The boat is here now sailing charters with its new owner. Maybe this actually is a long story, but anyway, Martin didn't get his old boat back, and instead he decided to go on with me to Australia and find another boat.

The last time I saw him we were at a harbor in the Whitsunday Islands in northeast Australia. I undid the bow line and gave his boat a shove out of the slip to start his journey. We had flown in to Australia from Lord Howe Island, and soon after we landed, we met Ray Stanley, the owner of the plane. The three of us went out to lunch. Ray had read Martin's autobiography and listened to Martin's old songs, and he was enthused about meeting him. The two of them seemed to hit it off right away. Martin was like that—people just took to him. Ray got Martin telling stories about his baseball days and about his fleeting, but huge, success with music. All three of us laughed until we were sore. Like everyone else, Ray took to Martin like a long lost brother. Martin had that natural friendliness, that easy charm that seemed to say that he was as amazed as anyone else by the fascinating swings in his life. Is it a contradiction to say that Martin was both self-centered and ingratiating? I don't know, but it seems to me that he was. Or is.

Martin and I had planned to rent a car and head up the coast to look for a new

boat, but Ray, typical friendly Australian that he is, dropped everything and offered to show us around and help Martin find a boat. It didn't take long before Martin fell in love with a Catalina 36 called the The Ana-Ni'a. The boat was a lot smaller than The Spirit of Orion, but he was going to get it rigged for single-handed sailing, which is something that would have been impossible with his old boat. We knocked around in the Whitsundays for a few weeks while the boat was surveyed and re-rigged, and then once he got it outfitted the way he wanted it, we sailed it around in the relative shelter of the Whitsundays to get the feel for it. When he thought he was ready, I caught a plane back to Avarua, and he set off alone to meet me there.

When I left him on that dock in the Whitsundays, Martin seemed happier than I had ever seen him. More focused, more open and hopeful. Suicide? Hardly. He was writing songs again after a twenty year dry spell. "A walk through the desert," he called it. In fact, he and I wrote a few songs together. Maybe that's why I feel the need to write this now, since it doesn't look like Martin is going to be around to sing these new tunes, and I'm not really up for it myself. Maybe I'll put them in this book. We'll see.

He seemed really jazzed up about the trip. It was going to be his first solo open-ocean passage, and he was excited and proud that he was up to the task. That kind of surprised me, given that he seemed to be one of those people who "always relied on the kindness of strangers," and that sort of dependence was not going to be possible when he was alone in the ocean hundreds of miles from help. If it were me, I'd have been more apprehensive. Then again, he'd been so lucky throughout his life, he must have just figured everything would turn out right. That it would make a good story. But as the fates would have it, a hellish storm, Typhoon Leaha, overtook him (and a number of other yachts) southeast of Tonga. It blew like demons here in Avarua, and we were six hundred miles from the center of the storm.

He made a radio call on the night the storm hit. He said the seas were running at fifteen to twenty feet, but everything onboard was holding up well. At that time he was four hundred miles southeast of Tonga. Nothing further was heard from him. By the next

morning, New Zealand patrol planes were busy tracking down emergency radio signals from the EPIRB beacons of a half-dozen other boats, and things were getting desperate for a handful of sailors spread over a vast area of the South Pacific. It is true that on the day following the worst of the storm, an overflying Qantas flight picked up a garbled message. And Martin did have my hand-held aviation radio, so that may have been him. The Qantas crew couldn't make out the identity of the caller, but when we heard the tape, we thought we heard the words "...sunset 6:37...." That may not mean much to most people, but it could have been a clever attempt by Martin to give rescuers a clue as to his approximate longitude. Within a few hours the search was intensified, but so far nothing has been found.

We, the family and I, are all going a little crazy waiting for news from the search, and we are all dealing with it in our own unique ways. We spend a lot of time together, usually late in the day, cooking tuna down at the beach and talking about Martin and life back in the '60s and '70s when things were really happening with him. With all of us, for that matter. And then we spend a lot of time on our own, too. His brother Jack, and sometimes Kevin, run the trails through the hills on the island. Steph and Jack say that Kevin really reminds them of what Martin was like as a kid—good looking, quick to smile, naturally personable, and possessing that mix of grace and power in movement only found in a natural athlete or dancer. But I've heard Stephanie say that there is a darker undercurrent in Kevin that she never saw in Martin. Martin's mother Flo spends her days sitting out on the patio looking over the lagoon, a bottle of some spirit never far off. I don't know how many times she's told me that all Martin's fame and success never changed him at all. "Not one bit, honey," she'll say, "not one iota." Or she'll say she always tried to make Jack feel just as important as Martin, even though Martin had all that success in sports and music. Stephanie takes walks alone and spends a lot of time talking to Kevin. I wish there were something I could do for them. Me? I try to swim in the lagoon every day, and then, of course, I'm starting to write all this. Like I said, the writing is a sort of therapy. I guess I've always been like that, retreating into some

complex project when things around me are going to hell.

I'll probably reveal more about myself than the reader might expect. I offer no apology. Back when I was a math professor, before I became a night cargo pilot, and years before I met Martin, I went to a lecture about the famous British economist John Maynard Keynes. I remember that someone asked the speaker, Austin Robinson, what he thought of Roy Harrod's biography of Keynes. Professor Robinson said that the book didn't reveal much about Keynes, but you sure learned a lot about Roy Harrod from reading it. That struck me as the most insightful comment of the evening. And it seems inevitable. I don't think it's possible for one human to penetrate the mind of another, to get in there and see what's going on. I certainly don't pretend to know the mind of Martin Landry. We can only make contact tangentially, like two beach balls pushed against each other. And at the points of contact, the locus of tangency of our being with theirs, the slope, the shape of our being must be the same as the shape of theirs. I can only see the things in Martin that I can also recognize in myself. That is why when Harrod tried to tell us about Keynes, he invariably told us more about himself. I've chosen to be up-front about that in this narrative. To explicitly tell my story as I tell Martin's, partly because the two tales intertwine in the end, but also to reveal the distortions in the lens that I hold up to Martin so that the reader can apply corrections as he or she tries to form the image, much the way the images from the Hubble telescope were sharpened once the errors in the original mirror were understood.

I recognize that this is unconventional, but look at where convention has taken us. I'm not concerned with conventions. I recognize also that most, if not all, of the readers are more interested in the "inside" story on Martin Landry. In this age of celebrity, he is (or was) a somebody, at least for a while back in the '60s and early '70s before he was booted off the stage. And by the standards of today, I'm a nobody. So be it. As I've said, I think you'll learn more about Martin if you know a little about me.

The professor in me demands that I reveal my sources and explain my methods.

As I said, Martin was my friend. We spent a lot of time together over the past few years. We nearly died together a few weeks ago after an engine failure in that Beech Baron, and that can cut through a lot of the bullshit and posturing that stand between people. And we talked a lot. Seems like we both reached a certain critical point of reappraisal in our lives at the about the same time. Plus there is his autobiography, *One Hit Wonder*, that casts some interesting light, and throws some even more interesting shadows. My thanks to his publisher for permission to quote from Martin's book. I have benefitted especially from the hours of conversation with his family, and I am sure we will be continuing to talk as I pursue this work. In an effort to fill in the picture of Martin, I have often reached a little deeper into him than I might be entitled to go, so it may be that parts of this narrative are speculative, but I have felt it necessary in the interest of completing the story. Jack, Stephanie, and Flo have been kind enough to promise to read through the early chapters when I complete them, and they seem to be comfortable with my approach.

## The Spirit of Orion

The headlights of my old Toyota made a tunnel of weak yellow light as I drove down the hill toward Avatiu harbor. Curious shadows darted about as I found my way down through the dark groves of wind-driven palms and banana trees. I turned left on the ancient Ara Tapu Road and drove past the Rarotonga airport. Their plane was due in any minute, but for some reason, I just couldn't bring myself to turn in toward the terminal quite yet. I couldn't stand the thought of being alone in that happy crowd waiting at the airport. I had a warm, tied-up feeling in my stomach, and an ill-defined dread of meeting their plane.

I pulled off the road near where the runway meets the ocean, and I scanned the northern sky for their landing lights. There was no sign of the plane. I decided to walk down to the water and sit alone for a while.

The air was velvety and pungent with the life and death aromas of the ocean. I could hear the surf breaking three hundred yards out on the reef, but I couldn't see much of anything as I groped around the rocks toward the water. Tripping over little tangles of driftwood and kelp, I finally found a dry log and sat down. As my night vision improved, I saw an infinity of stars, then gradually the phosphorescence of the waves, and finally the pale sand contrasting with the dark, man-sized rocks sitting gnome-like and inscrutable on the beach. Waiting with me. Looking north.

Martin Landry's family was coming in from New Orleans on the Air New Zealand flight out of Los Angeles. Their trip started the day before with one of those midnight phone calls that everyone dreads. It was me who called. I introduced myself to the voice of Martin's mother, Flo. Apparently Martin had told her all about our trip, and she knew who I was right away. I got straight to the point and told her that Martin was missing at sea somewhere between here and Australia. "Here" being the town of Avarua on the island of Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, about twenty-five hundred miles south of Hawaii.

She didn't scream or break down like I half expected. Maybe that was because she had been through such things a time or two, back when her other son, Jack, was shot down over Laos and missing in action. She just whispered, "Oh, sweet Jesus. Could you look after my boy?"

She asked me to call Stephanie, Martin's ex-wife, and explain how the family could get out here. She said her eyes were bad, and she didn't trust herself to write it all down. Funny how she referred to Stephanie as her daughter-in-law, even though Martin and Stephanie had been divorced for more than a decade. I phoned Stephanie, and a half-dozen calls later everything was set. They were coming the next morning.

Sitting on the log there in that soft tropical air, I scanned the gorgeous night sky for their airplane and thought about all the time I'd spent hanging around airports. I could see myself as a kid running through the Seattle-Tacoma airport, going down there with my mother at all hours to pick up my father, who flew for Northwest. Those were happy times. Back when love was as solid and tangible as a seawall. I smiled when I thought about my Dad teaching me to fly when I was just a kid of fifteen. Couldn't even drive yet. I remembered working as a night cargo pilot, sitting on the airport ramp in Oakland, waiting for other 747s to fly in so they could load up my plane for a midnight trip, alone to god-knows-where. And I remembered leaving Oakland at dawn a month or so ago with Martin in our little Beech Baron. We were bound for Australia, via Hawaii and Rarotonga. Those were all good times. Amazing how quickly events can turn on you.

I saw their plane when it was fifteen miles out. It was lit up like Evader Stadium the night Martin was booed off the field for his anti-war statements. I watched the plane maneuver toward its final approach, and I thought about the three hundred other stories strapped down inside. The native kid who just graduated from UCLA and is coming back to a family that has known only fishermen for fifty generations. The honeymooners from Minneapolis who orbit each other like binary stars in a universe where all else seems unreal and slightly out of focus.

The plane passed thirty feet over my head. Wheels hanging down like talons.

The air itself seemed disturbed. Torn and confused. A choir of howls and shrieks. I closed my eyes and opened every pore to its incredible, visceral passage.

By the time I drove up to the terminal, the 747 stood above the little building like a gargantuan alien visitor. Every taxi on the little island idled out front. Native music drifted over the excited voices in the crowd.

The family was exhausted from the eighteen hour trip, and they were more than a little spaced-out when they got off the plane. They were also jazzed up by the new surroundings and anxious to hear if there had been any developments since they checked in with me before boarding their flight at LAX. Sadly, I had nothing new to report.

First impressions can be tricky, and it's always a little disorienting to finally meet someone that you have already heard a lot about. That is because you are busy erasing the picture of what you thought they would be like at the same time you trying to draw a fresh picture. Martin's brother, Jack, for instance, seemed older and more composed than I had expected. Martin talked about his brother constantly, about his wildness as a kid, about how he wrestled in high-school and college, about his time as a Naval Aviator and POW in North Vietnam. Those events are long in the past now, but somehow I expected Jack to be young and still untamed. "Full of piss and vinegar," as my father used to say. Instead, he seemed subdued and deliberate. His steel-gray eyes moved slowly as he spoke. As he listened. Odd how he stood there in the terminal rubbing the fingers of his right hand, as if he'd just gotten an electric shock.

I don't mean to imply that Jack is an old man, for he certainly isn't. Like me, he's in his mid forties. He's trim and fit from an hour or two at the gym every day, and he still has that broken-nose athletic look. Jack is a pilot with Delta, and he has the bearing of an airline captain. Understated. Competent. Used to saying things once, and being listened to. Something like my father in that respect.

Once the family cleared customs, I piled all their stuff in the car, and we set off around the island for the little house that my friend Terry Tuapotu had arranged for them.



Martin's ex-wife Stephanie sat up front with me. The only pictures I had ever seen of her were from twenty-five years ago when she was in her early twenties and really great looking. She still looked a lot better than most women her age, but a little thicker here and a little thinner there. Quick brown eyes that seemed to take things in and moved on.

There was no doubt about the fact that Stephanie was the decision-maker for the group. When we walked into the little two-bedroom cinderblock house, Stephanie sized it up with a sweeping glance and assigned the rooms. Flo in the big bedroom, Stephanie in the smaller one, Jack on the couch, and Kevin in the hammock on the porch.

They dropped their stuff and looked around the tidy little place. It was a simple house, probably less than what they had expected, but clean and freshly painted. Cheap furniture. An odd-sized refrigerator that clanked when it came on. Thin flowered curtains hanging where doors might have been. Floor-to-ceiling louvered windows to let the sea-breeze through.

Martin's eighteen-year-old son, Kevin, ferried the bags into the house. From a distance, he looks like a clone of Martin. He is a big kid, maybe six-two and a hundred and ninety pounds. He reminds me of pictures I've seen of Martin at that age—those all-American-boy good looks that work as well on the baseball diamond as they do at the prom. But he doesn't have his father's green eyes, he has those quick brown eyes of Stephanie's instead. And when I shook his hand at the airport, it seemed small and frail for a person his size.

When he brought the last of the bags in, Kevin told his mother he was going to walk across the street to the beach. "A visit to the wine-dark sea," he said, quoting a phrase from Homer's *Odyssey*. Stephanie turned to me and asked if it was safe. I didn't quite know what to say. Seems like I never do. Safe from predatory gangs, like you might find in the U.S.? Yes. Safe from an occasional shark that might come inside the reef? Probably, but who knows? I shrugged at Stephanie, and Kevin slid out the door. Jack said, "I'll go with him. I could use a stretch."

I started backing toward the door thinking they would want to relax, but

Stephanie asked me to stay and talk a while. I was trying to figure out if she meant it, or if she was just being polite, when Flo shuffled out of her room wearing this god-awful flowered terry-cloth mo-mo/house-dress thing. She was carrying a bottle of Southern Comfort, and she held it up to me with a wink and said, “Just a little something, darlin’, and you’ll sleep like a kitten.”

Funny how when I’d painted my little picture of them, I completely forgot to color in their accents. Sounded like a cross between Dallas and New York City. Flo must have called me “dawlin” a hundred times by then. As in, “How’d you and Martin end up down here, dawlin?”

We sat out on the porch drinking the Southern Comfort, and I told them about how Martin’s old sailboat, The Spirit of Orion, was running charters down here now, and how when I got the opportunity to deliver an airplane to Australia, Martin wanted to come along so he could stop in to see his old boat and maybe even try to get it back. That’s a long story, and I’ll get to it in due course, but the short version of it is that back in the sixties, back when Martin was riding high, first as a professional baseball player and later as a rock musician, he and Stephanie had this sailboat, The Spirit of Orion. When Stephanie left Martin and things came unglued for him, he set off across the Pacific with a bunch of his crazed friends. This was in about 1975. When they got down here to Rarotonga, he had an accident that nearly killed him, and he flew back to the U.S., leaving the boat here. Martin spiraled further down into drugs and alcohol, and he never went back for the boat. It turns out the boat became a derelict, and a local guy, my new friend Terry Tuapotu, bought it from the city and fixed it up. Then about a year ago I stumbled onto a picture of the boat in a vacation brochure, and I showed it to Martin. He was just dying to see the boat again, and in fact he worked up this legal scheme to try to get it back. That’s why he came along with me when I got the job of delivering the little plane to Australia.

Stephanie was intrigued. It turns out she loved that old sailboat every bit as much as Martin did, and she said she often wondered what had become of it.

Flo said, "I've got of picture of the boat here somewhere," and she struggled out of her chair on the porch and waddled back into the house. Her fuzzy pink slippers thwapping at the linoleum. Red-orange dyed hair all askew and bobbing as she walked. I watched Flo go into the house and chuckled at her appearance. I turned to share my impression with Stephanie and found her staring at me stone-faced, studying my reaction to Flo. I tried to morph away my smile, but I'm sure it didn't work. Suddenly I felt sort of awkward sitting there with Stephanie. Small talk is not exactly my thing. Fortunately, Flo came right back out with an enormous scrapbook, and we turned on the porch light and looked at some pictures of The Spirit of Orion.

Stephanie told the story of how they bought the boat in L.A.. She ran her finger over the faded photo and said it was back in those heady days of late 1965. Martin had been signed to play professional baseball by the L.A. Evaders a year before, and all of a sudden he was the baseball star whose life was the envy of every little-leaguer in America.

Stephanie leaned over the picture of the sailboat, and it looked to me as if she could tumble right back onto the deck. I asked her about the meaning of the name The Spirit of Orion, and she sort of lit up when she started to talk about it. She said the boat had been named long before they bought it, but she loved the name and couldn't have come up with anything better. She said she had always been interested in myths. She looked me square in the eye and said, "Do you know what I mean when I say, 'The truth of the myth'?" I shrugged, and she went on. "Anyhow," she said, "Orion is a mythical figure. His father was Poseidon, the god of the sea, and his mother was a nymph named Euryale. Legend had it that Orion could walk on water."

"The god-like boat that walks on water," I said.

"No," she said, "just a boat. Anyway, Orion fell in love with Merope, who was the daughter of some king whose name I can't remember. The king said he'd let Orion have Merope, if Orion could rid the kingdom of all the wild beasts. Orion did that, that's why you always see him with the club. Orion the hunter, right? But the king backed out

of his deal and instead got Orion drunk and blinded him, then he left him on a beach. Orion woke up blind and heard a hammering sound. He followed the sound and came to Vulcan's forge. Vulcan felt sorry for him and told one of his men to guide him to the sun. So Orion carried the guide on his shoulders, and they set off toward the sun. Helios, the sun god, cured Orion's vision with a ray of light. Later on, Orion fell for Artemis, the goddess of the moon, but her brother Apollo was jealous and tricked Artemis into shooting Orion with an arrow when Orion was swimming. When his body washed up on the shore and she realized what she had done, Artemis was heartbroken. That's why the moon looks so sad. So then Artemis put Orion up among the stars, where he could hunt forever."

"Those old myths are so beautiful," said Flo. "I wish they were part of our lives now."

Stephanie turned a page in the scrapbook, and there was a picture of Martin in his baseball uniform. "I'm not so sure we don't still live by a few myths," she said.

I turned to the next page and pointed to a picture of Martin at maybe sixteen. He had that big grin of his, and his arm around a young girl. "Is that you?" I said to Stephanie.

Stephanie closed her eyes for a second, and Flo scooted back in her chair. "No," said Stephanie, "that's my little sister, Holly."

It was quiet for a second and out of nowhere I said, "Orion's probably the first constellation I learned as a boy. It's got all those really bright stars, so it's easy to spot. Orion. The hunter. The navigator. Rising due east and setting due west. The signpost to lead you home, I guess."

Stephanie nodded but didn't say anything. I drained the last of my Southern Comfort, and we all sat there half-dazed, just staring into space. The booze and the long hours were beginning to take their toll.

I asked about how Martin made it into the major leagues, and Flo flipped back toward the beginning of the scrapbook. She had just found a faded picture of Martin as a

kid of ten or eleven, posed in his little-league uniform, when we heard Kevin and Jack laughing as they walked up the driveway toward the house. They were both soaking wet, pushing and shoving each other, arguing about who threw whom into the lagoon.

Stephanie seemed irritated. “Will you two ever grow up?” she said. “Leave your wet cloths out on the porch and watch that you don’t get any water on these old pictures.”

I stood up and said, “I’d love to hear more about what Martin was like as a kid, but I’ve got to get back and get some sleep. I’ll get in touch with the rescue coordination center in the morning and then come right over and let you know if there is anything new.”

Flo pushed the scrapbook toward me and said, “Here, take it with you and have a look. It’s all in here. Pictures, newspaper clippings, everything.”

Stephanie picked up the book and handed it to me before I could say anything, and a few minutes later I was driving back to my little house. Addled from the strain of the past few days, I craved the release of a decent night’s sleep, but I looked at that scrapbook and knew it wasn’t going to happen.

## Martin Landry

And it didn't. I didn't sleep very well last night. I lay in bed kicking at the covers, flopping around, listening to the night-sounds. Thinking about the four of them over at that little house. Thinking about Martin as a kid. Wondering if he is alive now and struggling somewhere out there in the storm that still rages off to the west, or whether he has slipped into history.

Their history. My history. All of our histories.

I turned on the light around 3 a.m. and started paging through the scrapbook, looking at the pictures and reading the newspaper clippings. Later I re-read the early chapters of Martin's autobiography, One Hit Wonder, and now I sit on the porch in the morning sun. It's too early to check in with the rescue coordination center and report to Stephanie. The family can use some sleep.

I sit here with the happy little birds. Eternal optimists, excited about each new day. I wish I shared their simple outlook on life. Out toward the west-northwest I can see the distended anvil tops of distant thunderstorms, deceptively pink and innocent-looking in the morning light.

I'm trying to picture what Martin was like as a kid. Trying to size up his life. Maybe it's pure fantasy, but I see a golden boy. Good looking, graceful, strong, athletic, likeable. Not at all like me. I read a clipping from 1956, back when Martin was twelve years old. "Ninth Inning Homer Gives Carrollton Tigers 9-7 Win Over Metairie...Martin Landry slams the 0 and 2 pitch over the 276 foot left field fence." Twelve years old, 276 feet. I can imagine what that must have felt like. Or maybe I can't. I wonder what it's like when you begin to realize that things that come naturally and easily to you are practically impossible for other people. Does it make you feel privileged, or does it make you feel alien? I'll never know.

I certainly never did anything like that when I was a kid growing up in Seattle. I was a swimmer. And a daydreamer. Pretty low profile stuff. But Martin, God, he was

magic. All eyes were on him.

By the time Martin was in the seventh grade, the coaches from the local Catholic high-schools were coming around his parents' music store asking them about their plans for Martin's schooling. The summer after seventh grade, the family got a letter from Jesuit High offering an athletic scholarship, provided Martin could pass the entrance exam. He took the test in February and passed handily. That was 1958.

Jesuit was a unique school, and it had attracted the best and brightest from New Orleans for generations. It offered a Classical, prep-school education with four years of math, English, religion, and Latin, plus the usual complement of history and science courses. Honors students took two years of Greek and read parts of Homer and Aeschylus in the original. (That must be where Kevin picked up his fascination with Homer. I'll have to ask him about that.) The school had a long history of being a powerhouse in sports. The halls on every floor were lined with pennants and trophies and pictures of proud teams with stern looks and puffed-up chests. Martin glided into this tradition and lettered in three sports as a freshman—football, basketball, and baseball. The glamour sports. By the time he graduated in 1962, he was all-state in football and high-school all-American in baseball.

By coincidence, I went to Seattle Prep, which was also a Jesuit high-school, so I knew plenty about the Spartan ethic that pervaded the halls. The athlete/warrior/scholar/defender-of-western-civilization ethos. I knew about the regal status of the gifted athlete. And about the bizarre glass-bead-game that those mysterious medieval priests played with our young heads.

Like millions of other people who aren't sports enthusiasts, I first knew about Martin from his music, from the albums he released in the late '60s and early '70s. I thought his music was the best stuff of the era. It could have a raw, unpolished energy, like Sam and Dave. It could make a social comment like Dylan. It could be smooth and celestial like David Crosby. And always with a little twist to snap you to attention, a little something from out there somewhere. I never was much of a sports fan, and I didn't

know all the details of his baseball career, but when I got to know him over the past few years, I enjoyed talking about his early success in athletics.

I remember asking him what it was like, being on the spot with hundreds of people screaming and yelling while you stand at the plate. He said that never really bothered him. He said his father put it all in perspective when Martin was still a little-leaguer. I remember the two of us sitting in an outdoor restaurant in Hanalei talking about sports just a couple of months ago. Martin looked off into the distance and repeated his father's line: "It's just a game, Marty, they don't even play it in the rain." A casual line tossed off by his father, and it echoed through Martin's whole life.

I can picture him at that game in 1956. The people in the stands chanting, "Tigers, Tigers," and stomping their feet with each syllable. The coach might have put his arm over twelve-year-old Martin's shoulder and drawn him in close so Martin could hear over the noise of the crowd. The coach's breath was acrid. Fresh peanuts over stale beer and Camel cigarettes, just like my little league coach. Martin might have tried to look away. "This is the one you've been waiting for, Marty. We're down seven to six, and there's two out in the bottom of the ninth. Runners on first and third. When the going gets tough, Marty, the tough get going. Now get out there and show us what you're made of."

Martin stepped away from the coach and walked toward the batter's box. He held the bat above his head and rocked it left and right as he walked. Maybe he was thinking, *Jeez, Mr. Garry, you stink. And I wish you could think of a new line. "When the going gets tough..." Man, I've heard that a million times. I think Dad's got the right idea.*

Later on, Martin talked to me about how that line "they don't even play it in the rain" was a sort of two-edged sword. I think it sort of tore at him his whole life. On the one hand, it took the pressure off of Martin, but on the other hand, it devalued what he was doing. This became an issue when Martin's younger brother Jack started wrestling, because wrestling is so much more than a game. But we'll get into that later.

Martin dug into the batter's box, got the "hit" sign from the coach, and watched



the first pitch go low and outside. “Strike one!” He rolled his eyes toward the umpire and waited for him to meet his gaze. The umpire glance at Martin and then looked away. Martin looked over at the coach. Again he got the “hit” sign. He turned back toward the pitcher and caught his eye. He spit toward the pitcher and smiled. Someone in the stands yelled, “Protect the plate.” Martin swung on the next pitch and could tell from the instant of contact that he did not get it all. The ball arced over first base and went foul.

As the pitcher rubbed the new ball. The noise level rose, and the crowd got to its feet.

Martin stepped out of the batter’s box. He told me that at times like these it used to seem to him that things slowed down and got quiet. Maybe he noticed a pigeon landing high in the light tower behind center field. Maybe he could make out the voice of his little brother, Jack, yelling, “Cream it, Martin! Knock the stuffing out of it!” Stephanie was in the stands, and maybe he heard her saying, “You can do it, Marty.” And he thought, *Yes, I can do this*. And at the same time maybe he wondered why it seemed so vitally important to almost everyone else. Why all the excitement if it’s just a game?

Stephanie and Martin were girlfriend-boyfriend way back then. Martin told me that as long as he could remember he was “engaged” to Stephanie LeBlanc. “I can’t even remember when she wasn’t around,” he wrote. “It was me and Steph and Jack as far back as I can remember.” (*One Hit Wonder*, p. 11. Quoted by permission.)

Stephanie was the oldest in a family of four—two brothers, one older and one younger, and a baby sister, Holly. Her mother and younger brother, Kevin, died in a car wreck when Stephanie was about eight. The whole family was in the car returning from a fourth of July picnic at Bay St. Louis. Apparently her father was drunk. With her mother gone, Stephanie found herself assuming a lot of adult responsibilities and attitudes. According to Martin, she more or less held the household together, making sure her father, the sports editor of the *Times-Picayune*, stayed on top of the infinity of details it takes to maneuver three kids through schools and camps and sports and parties and all the

rest.

Martin said that until the hormones lit up, they were like brother and sister. He was the “brother” who didn’t need to be taken care of, and she, as his “sister,” could feel “mothered” by Martin’s mother, Flo—a job which Flo, who had no daughter of her own, was more than happy to take over. No doubt that is why Stephanie and Flo are still so close.

The ball left the pitcher’s hand as if in slow motion. Martin saw it spin clockwise and float toward him. I bet he could feel every square inch of his body. The dampness of his feet. The warmth of his hair beneath his cap in the afternoon sun.

He swung the bat with an innate, un-teachable grace and smashed through the ball as if it didn’t exist. “*That’s* what its about,” he told me one time, “that feeling you get when you crush the ball like that.”

The ball carried into the parking lot beyond left field. The crowd was ecstatic. Martin did a little dance as he rounded third and passed his teammates coming off the bench.

I bet it was like that on that long-gone day in 1956.

Stephanie just drove up to my little house and has already left again. She sort of caught me off guard, since I was sitting here in the sun just looking through the picture album and jotting down a few lines in my notebook. She’d been up for a couple of hours already, rented a car, and gone to the little grocery by her house. I was embarrassed that I hadn’t called the rescue coordination center yet, so I got right on it while she was still here. There was no news about Martin. Weather in the search area had improved, and a New Zealand couple had been rescued by a Fijian boat, but nothing is known about Martin.

Stephanie seemed distracted when I gave her the news. She didn’t say much and didn’t seem to know what to do with herself. After while she said, “I don’t know why he

felt like he had to make this trip *alone*. It's not like him at all."

I didn't know what to say. Never do. I was even a little uneasy that Stephanie might have read the stupid tabloid headline that suggested that I might have something to do with Martin's disappearance. The "jealous friend" angle.

She stood there looking down at the scrapbook, open to the clipping of that game in 1956, and it seemed to me like she was trying to remember that day. After a while she sat down at my little outdoor table and spun the scrapbook around toward her. She said, "That might have been the time we went out to the lakeshore after the game. The day Martin met Antoine for the first time." Still looking at the picture, she nodded her head slowly and said, "That was actually a critical for Martin."

"Antoine Peoples?" I said, "The black guy who played guitar on Martin's first album?"

"Yeah," she said. "Antoine was playing at some restaurant by the lake, and we all went out there after the game. It was me, Martin, Jack, Flo, and Martin's dad, Sid. It was the first time I'd heard live music that was anything like what Antoine played. I mean, growing up in New Orleans I heard live music all the time, brass bands marching at funerals, clarinet players standing on corners in the French Quarter on Sunday afternoons, beatniks with their bongos in Jackson Square. But I was like eleven years old, I'd never been to a bar, and I'd never heard stuff like Antoine played except maybe on the radio. I know it really made an impression on me, and on Martin and Jack, too."

I asked her what it was like, and she told me that the restaurant was a noisy little seafood place built on stilts over the lake. "We didn't have a lot of money back then, and we didn't go out that often. Anyway, the place was jammed with locals and tourists, and the waitress put us right down in front of the little bandstand. We were soaking up the atmosphere. Probably squirming around like Mexican jumping beans, but trying to be adult and casual at the same time. Anyway, this thin, shy, black man, Antoine, walked out onto the stage alone carrying his guitar. Martin's dad, Sid, knew Antoine, because Antoine was a customer at Sid's music store. Sid waved, and Antoine gave him that

gentle smile of his.”

I told Stephanie that I’d met Antoine, and I knew that smile. It’s the first thing anybody would remember about him.

Stephanie sat quietly for a minute and then went on with her story. “Antoine sat down and adjusted the mic then turned around in his chair and fiddled with his amplifier. Still sitting with his back to the crowd, he started picking a soft, soulful, bluesy improvisation. The guitar seemed to come alive. It would cry and moan. Like I said, I’d never heard that sort of music live, and it sent a chill up my back. Antoine turned back toward the crowd and started singing.”

Stephanie closed her eyes and sang, “Summertime, and the livin’ is easy, fish are jumpin’, and the cotton is high.” I was startled. Startled by the husky, sweet timbre of her voice, and startled that she sat there and sang at all. I can’t imagine spontaneously breaking into song in front of a virtual stranger, but that seems to be something that these New Orleans people do all the time. Kind of cool, really, but people from my up-tight neck of the woods would rather die first.

Stephanie went on with the story. “The audience was into it immediately. I remember Martin and Jack were absolutely transfixed. Martin watched Antoine squeeze those big round notes out of his guitar, twisting his face as he bent the strings, every head in the restaurant moving in time with Antoine’s foot, as if he controlled them like puppets with invisible wires. It was something else. Amazing how little random events like that can change the whole course of your life. Anyway, after the show Antoine sat down on the stage next to our table and said hello to Sid. Martin couldn’t restrain himself. He was always right at home talking to anybody, even as a kid. He wanted to know if he could learn to play guitar, and was his hand big enough, how long would it take, and so on. Sid got him a guitar right after that, and from then on he was married to that thing. Nearly flunked out of school from playing music all the time. And he started working down at his dad’s store and meeting the local musicians. It was amazing how quick he picked it all up. He was a natural. He was a natural at damn near everything.”

Stephanie finished her story and then just sat there looking down the hill toward the harbor. I didn't want to break the spell, plus I couldn't think of anything to say. After a few minutes she said, "Your place reminds me of our old house in Los Angeles, the way we can look down at the boats and all." Then she stood up and stretched and said, "I better get back and fix lunch for the rest of them. Ought to take Mom for a walk on the beach before she drinks so much she can't stand up on the sand."

I stood up and nodded. "I'll let you know right away, if I hear anything from the rescue center."

## Dreams of the Innocent

I felt kind of odd after Stephanie left. The whole scene from 1956, the game and the music, just hung on me like a five-hundred pound raincoat. I thought about the way things were for me back then when I was eight or nine. Martin and I couldn't have been more different. People never seemed to notice me at all, while they were drawn instinctively to Martin's innate energy and charm, not to mention his multiple natural talents. The Fates seems to have given him so much. Am I jealous of the way things were for him? In all honesty, I suppose I am. Who wouldn't be? Does that mean I sabotaged his boat? Hardly. We were the best of friends. Life is strange. Who'd have ever thought?

Now I watch the coconut palm swaying above me in the morning breeze, and I think about a cedar tree I used to know. I see myself as a kid of nine or ten sitting on a limb sixty feet up this giant atlas cedar.

Back in 1956 I used to like to sit in that tree and just watch stuff. I'd watch a tugboat haul a barge up Puget Sound. Or I'd watch an earwig carry a bread crumb into its home beneath the bark, and I'd think about how there are worlds within worlds. Little ones and big ones that barely touch.

I can remember sitting high up in that tree thinking about how no one but me knows about the life of that earwig, and about how even I didn't know that much even though I sit and watch. And who really knew about my world either?

I had climbed the tree at about ten o'clock, and it was now close to one. Cedars were my favorite trees. The limbs were spaced at good intervals, and the area near the trunk was relatively free from the tangle of dead branches that were typical on most trees. And the green part, whatever that is called, was soft and generally free of sap.

This particular tree sat on a hill in Normandy Park, a neighborhood along Puget Sound about twenty miles south of downtown Seattle. I looked off into the distance. Down the hill to the east and up the other side of the valley was the Seattle-Tacoma

International Airport. I could see the control tower and an occasional airplane taking off and landing. My father was due to fly in sometime that afternoon from Tokyo. He was a pilot with Northwest, and he'd been gone a week. It would be great to see him again, to swing on his arm, to wear his hat, to hear him tell about his flight. Maybe he'd bring crab from Alaska like last time, or papaya from Hawaii. Looking south of the airport I saw Mount Rainier. Huge, white, and somber. Swinging my gaze around further south and west, I saw the beautiful sailboats in Puget Sound, the largely uninhabited islands of Vashon, Maury and Blake, and behind them the Olympic Mountains. It was a clear, fine day. A good day to be an eagle in a tree. Or an Indian scout.

I stuffed the remains of my lunch into my backpack. Then I tidied up my little nest, put on my backpack, and pulled my baseball cap down tight. Steadying myself with the nearby branches, I stood up and walked out on the bending limb as far as I could go. For a second I reveled in the unobstructed view of the mountains and the islands.

Then I jumped. Laying face-up with my arms spread as I fell, trusting each branch below to support me for a second, then bend and drop me to the next branch, as if a staircase of angels were catching me, with each one lovingly handing me down to the angel below. As I fell, I slid outward on the tree toward the end of the bottom branch, which I grabbed at the last moment and swung softly to the ground.

This was not an attempt at self-destruction. Not a cry for help. By my nine-year-old logic it was merely a way to combine my two loves, trees and flying. And when you think about it, there aren't a lot of other ways to combine these two things.

I was surprised that evening at dinner by my parents' animated reaction when I calmly described my flight. My mother put her hand to her head. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," she said.

My father, a master at sarcastic understatement, said, "What were you thinking, Joey? That you can fly? That gravity only applies to everybody else?"

I studied at my tuna casserole. "Nosir."

I was stunned. I thought they'd smile and congratulate me. Tell me I was clever. Tell me that jumping out of a tree sounded like fun. Maybe they'd want to watch me do it. Maybe they'd like to try it, too. I never seemed to be able to guess how other people would respond to me. Still can't.

That night back in 1956, as I climbed into bed I turned on the radio and set the volume low so that my parents couldn't hear it. Like hundreds of nights before, I pulled the covers over my head and brought the little radio into my secret space. I set it by my ear, and the ritual began. I twisted the tuning knob all the way to the bottom of the AM band, and ever so slowly I tuned up through the frequencies pausing to listen to each station.

AM radio signals skip through the atmosphere freely and almost randomly at night, and I never knew what I was going to hear. One night it might be a live broadcast from a hotel dance hall in New Orleans, and I'd imagine myself grown up and rich, drinking scotch on the rocks, whatever that was, with my adoring wife. On other nights I'd hear rock 'n' roll from Fresno and imagine myself as the high-school football hero at the dance after the big game. I fell asleep thinking that life was out there waiting. A wondrous warm river that would carry me along. And who's to say if it is for better or for worse, but the dreams of the innocent sure don't come true.



## The Music Lesson

I met Antoine Peoples, the legendary New Orleans guitar player, one night about a year ago when he passed through California and stopped at Martin's house. In fact, I got to jam with him on the guitar, and that's one of the coolest things I've ever done. He was amazing. We'd play one of Martin's old songs, and Antoine would throw in a guitar lick that would just make us stop and giggle. It was that fresh, and just startlingly good. When he was playing, he'd always have this big grin. Like he was listening a joke or something.

Antoine blew me away years ago when I heard him on Martin's first albums. He was a musicians' musician, no doubt about it. Martin said that when he and Jack were playing in their little garage band, they would go listen to Antoine after their gigs, and there would be musicians from all over New Orleans dropping in to sit at the feet of the master.

Antoine was totally self-taught, but very bright and very conscious of what he was doing with the guitar. Martin said that Antoine was a regular at his parent's music store, Carrollton Music. After meeting Martin at Guidry's Seafood Bar, Antoine took a real interest in Martin's guitar playing, partly because he saw that Martin showed so much promise, and partly, I'm sure, just because Martin was such a great kid to get to know. In any event, he became Martin's musical tutor when Martin was a kid in high-school.

In his autobiography, Martin tells the following story about Antoine:

I was working down at the store one Saturday when I was about fifteen. I used to dust up the display cases, sweep the floor, wait for chicks to come in, stuff like that. Anyway, when I finished my jobs I took a guitar down, and I was strumming through some top 40 hit when Antoine walked in. Big grin like always.

“My man, Martin!” said Antoine. “Where ya’ at, Marty.”

I looked up and smiled. “Hey, Antoine, check this out. Does this sound right?” I loved it when Antoine came by, and I always tried to have something new to run by him.

I played through the song again. Antoine stopped and listened. He wrinkled up his face and said, “That sounds like what they’re doin’ on the record alright, but it seems kinda dull to me, you know what I mean?” Then he took a new Fender Telecaster off the wall and started a little speech as he tuned it up. “The key to good music is surprise, you know what I’m saying? If you’re going to turn their heads and have them say, ‘Oooo, that’s cool,’ you gotta give ‘em a pleasant surprise, a nice surprise. Like dig, if I say, ‘One, two, three,’ what are you gonna say?”

I shook my head and said, “Four.”

Antoine played through a chord and did a little blues run. “Right. Okay. I understand that. That’s cool. I expected that. But it ain’t going to stand out in a crowd. I ain’t going to remember it for long. Now if I say, ‘One, two, three.’ And you say, ‘Eleventy-six.’ Then I’d say, ‘There you go, you gettin’ it now.’ Like dig this. Ninety-nine and forty-four one-hundredths of the slow dance songs you hear follow a circle six, right? Just like that song you was just playin’. You know what a circle six is? It’s like C, A-minor, F, and G over and over, man. And that’s okay. Like the guy that thought that up was onto something, but after the first gabillion times you hear it, it starts gettin’ a little worn out, right? So like play with it some, find a surprise for me, like C, Am, A-flat major seven, G. Listen.”

Antoine played through the chords and grinned. I just sat there smiling and nodding at the master. You never knew what that guy was going to come up with. Antoine continued, “When you get to where you expect the F, you get the A-flat major seven, and you say, ‘Wait a minute, that ain’t right, but then right away your ear says, ‘Oooo, but it’s kinda cool.’ It works ‘cause that F chord you

was expecting has a big fat C note in it. That C is not quite the backbone of the chord, but it's the hip bone, you know what I mean? Now when you play that A-flat major seven instead of the F, the A-flat major seven has the C note sitting in it, and in the A-flat major seven the C note is a cool note, the note that makes it a major instead of a minor. And that C note says, 'I know what you was thinkin'. You expected an F chord, well, here's a little bit of it, but dig the rest of this.' And your ear says, 'Cool...that's real cool.' And there's lots of stuff like that you can pull. It makes things interesting. A little surprise, you know what I mean? It says, 'Hey, Listen up, I'm alive, and you alive, too.'

That was Antoine, always finding some connection between music and life.

Anyway, that was my lesson for the day, and when it was over, Antoine hung up the guitar and headed for the door. But he stopped at the door and turned back to me and said, "Oh, and hey, I saw your picture in the paper this morning catching that pass to beat Holy Cross. Man, that must have been something. One of these days I'm going to have to get up the nerve to go see you and the rest of them white boys play football."

I stopped playing, looked over at Antoine and said, "Sure, Antoine, anytime." (One Hit Wonder, pp. 46-47. Quoted by permission.)

When Martin wrote in his autobiography about Antoine wanting to see him play football, that line seemed to really gnaw at him: "Sure, Antoine, anytime."

Martin was a fifteen-year-old white kid in New Orleans in 1960. Antoine was a thirty-five-year-old Black man. They were friends, but only within narrow bounds. Antoine, who was known all over town, could drop into a bar or a fraternity party and listen to Martin play guitar in the little band that he and his brother Jack had started, and Antoine could come by the store and spend half a day playing music with Martin. But it was simply unthinkable that they do much of anything else. Together in any other

context, they would have stood out like a politician with integrity.

Schools were segregated then, and if Antoine had actually gone to one of Martin's games, there is no telling what would have happened. Martin knew that, and he just brushed Antoine off with the line, "Sure, Antoine, anytime."

In an odd way, Martin atoned for this years later, right after Martin Luther King, Jr.'s assassination, when he wrote his first million-selling song "Who Done It?" Back in '68, when that song played on the radio every hour for three months, you could hear Martin singing: "..was it me/when I never called/was it us/were we all involved/I wonder who done it?/who done it?" And in the background, like a little voice on Martin's shoulder, you could hear Antoine crying through the strings of his guitar.

## A Star in the Broken Sky

I just got a call from the rescue coordination center. They wanted me to listen to a voice on a tape. Last night a Qantas flight from LAX to Sidney picked up a single transmission from an unknown source. The caller wanted me to listen to the tape and tell them whether the voice was Martin's or not. I had them play it over and over. The quality was very bad. Whoever the speaker was, he was using a very low powered radio, and since I was hearing the Qantas tape through a telephone, it was almost unintelligible.

I thought the voice was saying, "Upset if four seven," and this made no sense to me at all. Was it Martin's voice? I couldn't tell.

I told them I'd go get Stephanie, and we'd call them back in forty minutes. They could play the tape for her and maybe she could make some sense out of it.

Thirty minutes later Stephanie was standing beside my phone with the receiver in one ear and her finger in the other. Flo, Jack, Kevin, and I stood quietly watching her. She had them play the tape again and again. She sat down and stared off into the distance as she listened. She nodded her head.

"I think that's him, but I can't be sure," she said into the phone. "Whoever it is, he seems to be saying, 'Sunset six forty-seven.' He's saying that the sun sets at his location at 6:47. It's his way of giving us information about where he is."

Jack nodded and smiled.

Stephanie talked for a few more minutes, then hung up. She turned to us and said, "They are going to tighten the search area."

"Thank God," said Flo. "Now he's safe."

"No," said Stephanie, "if that's him, he's still out on the ocean somewhere."

Jack understood the transmission, but he didn't understand how Martin had contacted the Qantas flight. I told him that when I left Martin in Australia, I gave him the hand-held aviation radio that we had carried with us in the Baron that we flew over from

the U.S.. So it all began to make sense.

Flo didn't get it at all, and she was impatient to have someone explain things to her. Jack said, "Look, Mom, right here the sun might set at, say, 6:41. A little to the east, it sets at 6:40. A little to the west, it sets at 6:42. So if Martin says it sets at 6:47, any good navigator can place him on a line that runs roughly north and south. That doesn't tell us where he is, but it tells us something. Maybe if they take that information, together with a knowledge of the location of the Qantas flight at the time of the transmission and the likely drift, they can narrow the search area. That would be real good news. Plus, it means he was alive last night, and the worst of the storm is over now."

It looked to me like Stephanie's mind was running a hundred miles an hour. She said, "How do we know that Martin's watch was right? Jack, what's the error if his watch is off a little?"

Jack looked up toward the ceiling, like he was trying to figure it out.

I said, "The Earth spins three-hundred-sixty degrees in twenty-four hours. That's a quarter of a degree per minute. Each degree is about sixty miles, so the error in distance is about fifteen miles for every minute his watch is wrong."

They all just stared at me like I'd spoken in Martian. "My Dad was a navigator," I said, "and I was a math professor for quite a while."

Jack nodded and gave me a knowing smile. I think that's the first time he paid any attention to me at all.

Stephanie said, "His watch could easily be off by five or ten minutes, that's like a hundred-and-fifty miles either way. If we know where the Qantas flight was when it heard the transmission, how much help is that for figuring out the position of the plane?"

Jack said, "Those radios transmit on line of sight, and from thirty thousand feet the line of sight is, I don't know exactly, maybe a hundred and thirty miles. But then if the radio is weak, maybe even less. That still leaves a lot of ocean to search."

"With a hundred mile range, he could be anywhere within a 31,416 square mile area," I said. Stephanie gave me a curious look, then she exhaled slowly as she

shook her head.

“But he’s alive,” said Flo.

Kevin had been silent all this time. “If that’s *him*,” he said. “You don’t even *know* that’s *him*.” He raised his hands to punctuate his statement, then he turned, and walked out the door. A moment later Jack went after him.

Flo put her hand on my arm and said, “You got anything to drink around here, honey? I feel like I’m spittin’ cotton.”

I found her a little Glenlivet, and we all went out onto the porch and stood around in the shade. We could see Jack and Kevin about a hundred yards off in a row of coconut trees. Kevin was throwing the coconuts as hard as he could into the tree trunks. Jack stood nearby with his hands in his pockets. Stephanie just stood there alternately looking out at the two of them or down toward harbor. Flo made a lot of nervous, meaningless comments like, “I know they’ll find him, I swear I can feel it.”

I just stood there and nodded like an idiot. After a while we sat down and Stephanie told us a story about the first time she and Martin went sailing out on Lake Pontchartrain. When she finished the story, we sat there for a while not saying much of anything. I watched Jack and Kevin walking around among the coconut trees, and I decided I’d make an effort to get to know them a little better. I’m not much good at getting to know people, but I figured I’d try.

Jack and Kevin came back and just hovered over the three of us. It was pretty clear they didn’t want to sit around. Kevin wondered what exactly was going to happen with the search, and Stephanie told him that all she could say was that the air/sea rescue team was going to focus on the area suggested by the transmission. If it wasn’t Martin, then maybe it would be one of the other sailors that got caught in the storm.

Kevin said, “This hanging around is driving me nuts. What’s there to *do* around here anyway?”

Stephanie said, “I don’t know, Kevin, we didn’t plan this like a vacation trip.” She turned to me and raised her shoulders, sort of passing Kevin’s question on to me.

“Well,” I said, “you can snorkel in the lagoon, hike up into the mountains, bike around the island, go into town. It’s not a tourist sort of place, but there’s stuff to do.”

Kevin gave me a bored look, and Stephanie said to Kevin, “Why don’t you and Jack take a swim in the lagoon down by our house, and maybe Joseph (that’s me, Joseph Claypool) will come over and we’ll barbeque on the beach. How does that sound?”

Kevin gave a shrug that seemed to say, “Not so great, but I can see that it’s inevitable, so I’ll go along with it.”

I said, “I’ll stop at the store and pick up some home-made ice cream and French bread. There are some things here that are better than back in the States.”

“Great,” said Stephanie, “come on over anytime.”

I walked them out to the car, and when I came back, the phone was ringing. It was Ray Stanley, the Australian that Martin and I delivered the airplane to. He had just found out that Martin was missing at sea. “Damn shame, it is, Joseph,” he said. “We can’t sit on our arses while Martin bobs around in the Pacific, now, can we? The lad’s likely to get thirsty.”

The Australians will never quit amazing me with their energy, their friendliness, and their willingness to do damn near anything at the drop of a hat. Ray was calling to say that he was leaving Brisbane at dawn and flying the Baron back here so that we could search for Martin. “By God,” he said, “if the Kiwis can’t find him, we’ll do it, aye, mate?”

I was stunned. I put down the phone and just stood there shaking my head, then I gathered up some snorkel gear and headed over to the store and then Stephanie’s with the news.



## Jack Landry

Coming out of the store with the bread and the ice cream, I bumped into Marie, a woman I met here last month. She's the secretary to the lawyer that Martin was using when he was working the legal angle for getting his old boat back. I gave her a plane ride just before Martin and I left for Australia. She is unbelievably gorgeous. Funny, but it's like my stomach recognized her before my brain did. When I saw her, it didn't register with me right away who she was, and yet my stomach did a little rolling maneuver. Finally it dawned on me that it was Marie. She is about the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. A picture perfect Polynesian with those dark, dark eyes. Damn, she looked good. I must confess that I took an interest in her the first time we met.

Marie gave me a warm smile and reached out to hug me. The hug didn't work out too well with me fumbling the grocery bag between us. I wish there was a book somewhere that would help me with this sort of thing.

She was concerned about Martin and wondered if I had heard any news. I told her about that sunset radio transmission and explained what that was all about. I asked her about work and whatever else I could think of. We stood there in the sun just outside the door of the store, and I could feel the ice cream melting through the little box it was in. I thought about going back into the store and asking them if I could put the ice cream back in the freezer while I talked to Marie, but then she might just tell me to go on ahead wherever I was going, and I really did like talking to her and wasn't that eager to leave. So I just stood there thinking about the ice cream, nodding like an idiot, and not even really follow the conversation. God, where's that book?

She finally broke off the dialogue, and I went out to my car and drove around to a side street. When she left, I went back into the store and bought some more ice cream.

When I finally got over to Stephanie's house, they were already down at the beach. I gave Stephanie the bread and told her I'd better put the ice cream in their freezer.

When I came back to the beach, Jack and Kevin were in the water racing back to shore from the buoy that the dive boat uses. I watched them swim. They both had pitiful strokes—heads out of the water, arms flailing. Martin was a lousy swimmer, too. I don't know why, but I get a kick out of seeing otherwise-athletic people flounder in the water.

I took off my shirt and walked down to the water with the mask, snorkel, and a pair of racing goggles. Jack barely beat Kevin to the beach, then they both sat gasping in the water. Kevin asked what you could see out there with the mask, and I handed it to him and said, "Let's go out and look."

He started putting on the mask and snorkel. I put on the goggles, and then waded out and dove in. I was never a record-setting swimmer, but I could hold my own. Second in the state in the hundred backstroke when I was in high-school. I love the water in this lagoon. The temperature, the buoyancy, the clarity. I swam out about ten yards and then rolled over on my back and watched Kevin. He was standing in the water up to his waist adjusting the mask and snorkel. He put his head in the water, and I could see him turning from side to side. A second later his head shot out, and he shouted, "You wouldn't believe it. It's like an aquarium in here. There's fish everywhere."

I waved him out toward me, and then I led him around and pointed to the various fish. I could hear him mumbling through the snorkel. We hung there motionless while a parrot fish swam by. "Holy shit," he mumbled. When we got to deeper water, I tried to get him to dive down with me to look at a box fish that was backed into a little crack, but Kevin would only go down a few feet and then return to the surface. I led him back to shallow water, and then I swam ashore.

I didn't remember Ray's call until I was walking up the beach toward the barbeque, but when I told them about it, they were impressed. Especially Jack. "You mean he's going to fly that thing all the way from Australia to help look for Martin?"

"Yeah," I said. "We could alternate. You, me, and Ray, taking it out and searching."

Stephanie said, "Wow, how well did this Ray guy know Martin, anyway?"

I said, "They just met a few weeks ago, but they spent some time together in Australia looking for Martin's new boat."

Flo was sitting in the shade with a drink in her hand. She had on a big straw hat and those monstrous sunglasses that old people often wear. The brown ones that are about as big as a license plate and wrap around the sides of your eyes. She said, "Martin was like that. I don't know why, but people would do about anything for him. Ain't that right, Jack? He was like that."

Jack pulled two beers out of the ice chest. He held one in each hand and interlocked the caps, then he jerked them apart and both caps went flying off. He didn't spill a drop. Looked like he'd done that a time or two. He handed me a beer, and I sat down.

Stephanie said, "I finally feel a little hope. Maybe Martin is still alive, and we can get involved in the search ourselves. You can give me one of those beers too, Jack."

So Stephanie cooked the fish while Kevin snorkeled back and forth in the lagoon. Then we all ate and sat around the fire while the sun got low. Without really planning to get loaded, we were drinking fairly steady the whole time. I hadn't had much to drink in the last couple of months. I never felt right drinking in front of Martin, who was religious about AA ever since he straightened himself out. But for some reason, we just sort of let it out. Even Kevin had a couple of beers.

After things loosened up some, I asked Jack about his high-school and college wrestling. Martin had talked to me about Jack's wrestling a number of times. It seemed like they all had something to say at once. Stephanie finally got the floor and said, "The one I remember best was that match you had in high-school against Austin Dupuit. You remember that, Jack?"

Jack nodded. He looked into his beer and smiled.

Flo said, "That Dupuit kid is a big-time lawyer now, just like his daddy. I think he's got his fingers in the casinos, too."

"The guy really bugged me," said Stephanie. "Typical conceited, rich boy,

pretty boy, hot shot.”

Jack said, “His high-school, de la Salle...”

Flo cut in, “We used to call them ‘Sallys’,” she said. Then she cackled, and that turned into a coughing fit.

When Flo settled down again, Jack said, “Anyhow, they beat us in football that year, and Dupuit was their quarterback. He was all puffed up, strutting around town, lording it over everybody in sight. He was on the wrestling team, and he was my weight, a hundred and seventy-one pounds.”

“Yeah, but he didn’t want to wrestle Jack,” said Stephanie. “Nobody did.” Then she repeated herself, slowly and with a funny accent, “Not no body.”

Kevin had perked up as soon as the story started. He said, “Dad used to say that you were built like an engine block and quicker than a mongoose on a hotplate. But I can kick your ass now, Uncle Jack, and you know it.”

Jack laughed and looked over at Kevin. “Anytime, amigo.”

Stephanie said, “So what happened is, when it dawned on Austin that he was going to have to wrestle Jack, he quit eating so he could drop down to a lower weight class.”

Jack said, “I heard about this a few days before the match, and I dropped down, too. You should have seen Dupuit’s face at the weigh-ins before the meet.” Jack laughed and took a long drink from his beer.

“This was 1964,” said Stephanie. “Martin and I were going to LSU in Baton Rouge, but Jack called and told us what was up, and we took the Trailways bus down Airline Highway to see the match. I remember sitting in the stands with Flo and Martin and Jack’s dad, Sid. Sid was so proud of Jack he couldn’t wipe the grin off his face the whole evening.” Stephanie turned to Jack and waited for him to look back at her. “God,” she said, “your dad loved to watch you wrestle, Jack.”

“That’s a fact,” said Flo.

Jack looked off toward the water and nodded.

Stephanie went on. "I remember Sid sitting in the stands and saying something to Martin like: 'You really have to hand it to your brother. It takes guts to go out there one on one and do what he does. I don't mean to take away anything from you. You've got the most natural swing I believe I have ever seen, but that brother of yours has got guts. He walks out there to the middle of the mat, boy, and he is all alone. Scares the crap out of your mother, I'll tell you. But she loves watching you play baseball. Sitting in the sun, munching some popcorn, watching you glide around those bases. That's more her speed.' He said something like that," Stephanie said, "I don't remember exactly."

Flo said, "Yeah, these two boys were really different. With Martin, the sports were like an art, like a dance. And he was a real artist. I loved to watch him. With Jack, it was more like pure guts. I always went, but it scared the bejabbers out of me."

"Anyway," said Stephanie, "I think his dad's comment kind of stunned Martin, and I know it ate away at him, because the whole way back on the bus he was talking about how he always figured it took guts to play baseball."

"I used to rub that in, too," said Jack. "Maybe I shouldn't have, but I did. I used to jerk him around saying stuff like, 'You've got eight teammates and you still need to carry a bat. You call that a sport?' That used to piss him off pretty good."

Kevin said, "What about the match? What happened?"

"Oh, yeah," said Stephanie. "Here's how the match went. When the referee called them out to the mat, Jack was pumped up, all business. You should have seen him when he was about to wrestle. He ran to the center of the mat and shuffled back and forth like a boxer. He stared at the de la Salle bench. Not just Dupuit, but all of them. The Jesuit side was chanting, 'Rip him up! Tear him up! Go, Blue Jays!' Dupuit fiddled with his headgear on the sidelines and walked slowly to the center of the mat shaking his head. They shook hands and the referee blew his whistle to start the match. As quick as you could blink, Jack shot in and grabbed Austin's ankle. He pulled the leg off the ground and held it, and then he pushed Austin over onto his back. He followed Austin down on the mat and pinned him. As quick as that, the referee slammed the mat with his hand, blew

his whistle, and signaled that the match was over. The Jesuit side went nuts. Sid, slapped Martin on the back and jumped up cheering.”

“That’s a fact,” said Flo. “It looked like that Wild Kingdom show where the leopard pounces on the goat, and you see the leopard on top with the goat’s legs twitching underneath him.” She took a drink and smiled at Jack. “Brutal,” she said. Then she looked at me and nodded toward Jack saying, “That kid was a barbarian. Yes, sir. A regular heathen prince.”

Stephanie went on. “But then the thing that makes it so memorable is that Jack wouldn’t let Austin up. He held him, pinned to the mat, with the ref turning red blowing his whistle and Austin trying to wriggle free and yelling, whimpering really, for Jack to get off. This went on for, I don’t know, maybe thirty seconds. By the time Jack let him up, pointing to his ears and pretending he hadn’t heard the whistle, Austin was absolutely livid. Fit to be tied. But with Jack dancing around him grinning and asking if he wanted to go again for best two out of three, there was nothing for Austin to do but turn his back and walk off the mat. With anyone else but Jack on the mat, this would have started a melee, but Jack just stood there facing the bench, and there was no one on the de la Salle team who felt up to messing with Jack Landry at that exact moment.”

Kevin was laughing and patting Jack on the back. “I never heard that one, Uncle Jack. I wish I’d have thought of that last season. Man, I’d have done it, too. Family tradition.”

Stephanie said, “Sid was laughing and squeezing Martin’s shoulders and saying, ‘Goddamn it, where does that kid get his balls?’ Stuff like that. And Martin just grinned and shook his head. Jack walked off the mat with both arms up in victory, and there was pandemonium in the Jesuit stands. The crowd went insane, and it must have been fifteen minutes before the officials could start the next match.”

Jack picked at the label on his beer bottle and said, “You know the truth of it? I wasn’t going to let him up until he quit wiggling. I whispered to him, ‘As long as you keep fighting me, I’m going to hold you down.’ I wanted to totally dominate him,

humiliate him, not just beat him with a quick pin that he could blow off later as being a fluke. When I had him down, I just squeezed him until all the fight was out of him. I mean *all* of it. That's something you can feel." Jack paused. He seemed to be looking in on himself, but I have no idea what he was seeing in there.

Stephanie laughed and continued, "When things finally settled down and the meet resumed, Jack got this bright idea and passed a note back up to the Jesuit cheering section."

Jack laughed and said, "I hadn't thought of this in years, but from then on during the rest of the matches, whenever a Jesuit wrestler had a Sally down, the crowd would chant, 'Jack, off! Jack, off! Please, Jack, off!'"

Kevin roared with laughter. "God, you must have got penance hall for two years for that. What did the Jesuits do to you?"

Jack laughed. "Well, there were a lot of kids staying after school for a while, but there wasn't anybody who seemed unhappy about being part of it all."

"Except that twerp Austin Dupuit," said Flo.

We all laughed at that, and when it got quiet I asked Jack if he did any other sports. Turns out he was a pole vaulter. Stephanie said, "Get this, he used to call his pole 'Archimedes,' and he'd tell everybody that with a good pole a man could get over anything." She winked at Jack. "Remember that, Jack? You really tried to get the girls from St. Joseph's to fall for that, too, didn't you?" She turned to me and said, "And God, the girls loved Jack. He was wild. He was fun. He was funny. He was untamed. I think my little sister, Holly, is still in love with him."

Flo reached over and squeezed Jack's shoulder. She said, "And even as a kid, he was his own man. Weren't you, honey? "

We pondered that for a moment, and then I said, "And you and Martin had a band when you were in high-school, didn't you?"

Jack lit up. "Yeah, and that was great fun. We were pretty good, too. Martin sang and played guitar. I played bass. We used to play the bars and frat parties, stuff like

that. In fact I think Martin stayed nearby for college, mainly because he wanted to keep the band going.”

“That was fun for me, too,” said Stephanie. “I can still picture you guys playing music. I can see Martin at the mic and you with your back to the crowd, standing in front of the drums working your voodoo with the drummer. Moving your cute little butt with the beat.”

Kevin wanted to hear about some crazy stuff his father might have done, but we were pretty much played out by then. Stephanie just sighed and stretched. Flo said, “I better get back to the shack and lay these old bones down for a while.”



## When the Music Came

When I got back from our evening barbeque, I was a little buzzed, and I didn't feel like going to bed right away. I flipped open Martin's autobiography, One Hit Wonder, and I paged around looking for 1964. He mentioned the wrestling match that Stephanie and Jack were talking about, but all he said was, "The kid nearly started a riot when he wouldn't let his opponent up after the match." That seems pretty bland, given Stephanie's comments about how Martin was upset about his father thinking the Jack had all the guts and Martin was just an artist with a bat.

What Martin did write about was his baseball and his music. It seemed like his first love was music, but the pragmatist in him recognized that it is very difficult to make a living at music, and with professional baseball scouts contacting him regularly about a career in baseball, he wasn't about to give up a chance at the game. He could always return to music, but baseball was going to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. "Thought I'd give it a shot," he wrote, "what the hell?"

New Orleans must have been a fabulous town for music. Martin writes:

I lucked out growing up down there at that time. Back then a kid could legally buy liquor at eighteen, and fifteen worked just as good if you had a fake i.d., which, naturally, everybody did. It sounds crazy now, but in the early '60s a group of sixteen-year-olds would think nothing of meeting Friday night in a downtown bar to drink beer by the pitcher and dance to a local band up on the stage. And the bands were hot. World-class musicians like Art and Aaron Neville, Deacon John, Ernie K. Doe, Irma Thomas, Fats Domino, Dr. John, and I could go on and on. If you haven't heard the music, I can't really describe it, but I'll try. It's soulful, bluesy, complex, jazzy, and always laid over a solid, infectious, deep-groove, head-bobbing, foot-tapping rhythm. These bands played the bars and school dances and fraternity/sorority parties doing the top-40 hits plus a lot of

original material and what might be called the 'New Orleans standards' like 'Don't You Just Know It,' 'Ya, Ya,' 'Ooh, Poo, Pah, Doo,' 'Mother in Law,' 'I Like It Like That,' and hundreds of others. (One Hit Wonder, p. 61. Quoted by permission.)

Clearly, Martin was enthralled by this. It seems like the music could take him to a magic place, a place beyond even the Olympus of the "baseball-hero." When he started playing guitar, it became a near obsession. Stephanie said that he hardly danced at his own junior prom. He just stood there transfixed in front of Deacon John, trying to figure out how he got that big Gibson guitar to sound so fine. Apparently his parents' music store was a gathering place for local musicians, and Martin would hang around on Saturdays waiting for a local musician to stop by so he could learn a trick or two. He was so genuinely in love with the music and the instrument, and such a likeable kid, that it got to where the musicians, like Antoine, would drop by the store looking for Martin and wanting to show him something new.

And Martin had talent, the "gift." Under Antoine's coaching, he soaked up the music and learned how to give it back with something fresh. By the summer before his senior year in high-school, he was already sitting in with some of the great New Orleans bands.

There was a night back in '64 that stood out in Martin's memory. His little band was playing a formal dance for a sorority at the Monteleon Hotel. The challenge for a band playing in an environment like this, he said, is to get the crowd up on its feet, dancing and "into" the music. If everybody sat around talking about football games and classes, the band wasn't doing its job, and it wouldn't get asked back. But if the band kept them up on the floor dancing and sweating and drinking, then things were going well, and they would probably get hired for parties in the future. After a couple of good nights, a band might even be "adopted" by the sorority or fraternity and end up playing for them every few months. The college kids seemed to enjoy getting to know the band and its material. And the pay (several hundred dollars split four ways) was okay,

especially for a high-school or college kid doing it mostly for fun.

Martin writes:

We usually started with a few instrumentals to loosen up. This was not only to loosen the band up, but also to start getting the crowd in the party mood. That night at the Monteleon we began with a jam around a Jimmy Smith organ instrumental called "Back at the Chicken Shack." By the middle of the tune it was clear that this was going to be a good night. Things were already cookin'. I turned around to check what my brother Jack was up to, and I saw why.

Jack was turned away from the crowd facing the drummer. I think it was a guy named Paul, but I don't honestly remember. We had a lot of drummers back then. Anyway, Jack and Paul were deep into an unspoken musical communication. Jack would 'say something' with the timing and phrasing of a bass line, and Paul would 'answer' with a subtle shift in the attack on his drums or a little twist in the beat. They were looking for a magic groove to set the tune into, and they were definitely getting onto something. And this inspired a little something from Ace on the Hammond B-3 organ. When my improvised solo came up, I just closed my eyes and let go with run that actually startled me. Slow, understated, from the gut. Jack looked at me as if to say, "Where the fuck you been keepin' that?"

I just shrugged, because I had no idea where that music was coming from. When the tune was over, the dance floor was full, and we jumped right into a hot Chuck Berry song before anyone could sit down. We were going to make it up as we went along, and, yes, it was going to be a good night.

All that night I continued to surprise myself, but one song in particular stood out, and I knew I would remember playing it that night for the rest of my life. It was Chris Kenner's "I Like It Like That." (Remember the line? I can't help singing it while I type, "Come on, come on, let me show you where it's at/Come on, come on, let me show you where it's at/Come on, come on, let me show you

where it's at/the name of the place...I like it like that.") This was a typical New Orleans song with lyrics that meant damn-near nothing, but a cool slinky beat that could make you care less. I flat loved injecting my guitar into this kind of music.

When my solo came up, I walked over next to Paul and Jack and just stood there letting the drums and the bass pour through me. For a second, they might have thought something was wrong with my guitar, since I wasn't playing anything, but I think Jack had a feeling that the dam was about to burst. And it was.

This is hard for me to explain, and I don't want to make too much of it. It's not like I became possessed or anything, or that by some miracle I found the ability to play at three times my normal speed. It's more like something inside of me just relaxed and opened up a little bit, and the music simply flowed out through me. Like an electric current. The hands were mine, the skill and knowledge were mine, but somehow I found a link between feel and technique. Between intuition and dexterity. It was an incredible sensation, caught on the moving present, like a surfer improvising on a monstrous wave, where premonition becomes action. Actually, it's something like the feeling you get when a pitch is coming toward you and you know, I mean you positively know, that you are going to knock it out of the park....

A threshold had been crossed. It was a milestone. A masters thesis. A four minute mile. And any musician there would have known it. (One Hit Wonder, pp. 57-60. Quoted by permission.)

I copy those lines out of his book and I wonder if I have any idea what it might have actually felt like. Maybe like being in the grip of a larger force. Maybe like doing the sweetest landing of your life after completing a tense, foggy-night approach.

## Into the Big League

Stephanie came by early this morning. She said she had a bit of a headache from drinking two beers last night. Like me, apparently she is not much of a drinker. Luckily I had already called the rescue coordination center. Un-luckily there was no news on Martin. Stephanie sighed and sat down in the sun out on the porch. She seemed to want to talk, so I made her a cup of coffee, and we sat there talking about this and that. I told her I had been reading about Martin's move to the big leagues, and she said that those were some of the best times of her life. She went on for over an hour, and the gist of the story is this:

In September of 1962 Martin and Stephanie moved to Baton Rouge. She majored in education and lived in the dorms. He move in with the jocks and, for lack of a better idea, majored in business.

Martin's baseball career at LSU was spectacular. The team won the title in 1963 and 1964, and Martin's standout performance brought him national attention. In his freshman year he hit .336 and made second team collegiate all-American. In his sophomore year he hit .402 and the professional scouts were all over him. A bidding war developed between the New York Yankees and the Los Angeles Dodgers. The Dodgers reached the astronomical sum of \$35,000. Martin wanted to sign, but out of deference to his parents he decided to stay in school.

Everything changed in August of '64, when Martin's father collapsed and died of a heart attack. When things settled down, the family had a talk about finances. Flo had worked part time as a music teacher at St. Joseph's, but with Jack about to go off to LSU and Martin already there, money was definitely a problem, even though they both had gotten scholarships. The lure from the pros was now irresistible, and Martin let it be known that he would consider their offers. A month later he was living by himself in an apartment in Los Angeles and getting some playing time with the Dodgers as the '64

season drew to a close. Stephanie stayed in New Orleans, and she and Flo planned a November wedding.

One not-so-minor detail that had to be worked out was Martin's draft status. As long as he was in school, he had a student deferment, but as soon as he quit school, he was subject to the military draft. He brought this up with the L.A. coaches when they were working out the contract, and they asked if he had any injuries. He mentioned a knee problem that cost him half of the football season in his junior year at Jesuit, and they told him not to worry about the draft. Team doctors and political connections would take care of it. As a worst case, he would end up in the National Guard. He took a perfunctory draft physical when he got to L.A. and a month later got classified 4-F, unfit for service. He didn't ask any questions.

Martin went back to Los Angeles with Stephanie in November 1964, and they soaked up the new environment in wide-eyed astonishment. They had both lived relatively sheltered lives in and around New Orleans prior to that. Now everything seemed so novel and fresh. Stephanie said they marveled at the whole scene. At the mountains sticking up into the cloudless, sharp blue sky. The intensely colored plants and flowers that grew by the ocean. And the ocean itself, along with the seemingly carefree existence of the people who lived by the beaches.

But most of all Martin soaked up the red-hot music scene. He had heard the West Coast music on the radio back home, but it was something else again to see it performed in person and experience the up-front feel of it. Whenever they could, he and Stephanie would go listen to The Mamas and the Papas, the Beach Boys, the Turtles, and dozens of others. But their favorites by far were the Byrds. Stephanie said that Martin was captivated by the Byrds. In his autobiography he referred to the Byrds' "shimmering wall of glorious sound."

And Martin was struck by the fact that the lyrics actually added up to something. The lyrics coming out of New Orleans were largely good-time nonsense. Now, thanks mainly to Dylan, at least some of the lyrics constituted a serious statement to the

audience. Martin found this whole new dimension fascinating, and for the first time he actually listened to what the singer was saying, looking for a message.

But of course he went to L.A. to play baseball. He didn't come up through the farm system, and he didn't play winter ball, so when he arrived that first summer, he definitely had something to prove to the rest of the team and to the skeptical fans and reporters. But things went well for him from the start. It seemed that whenever the coaches would try him, he would show them something they didn't know he had. Running in hard on a ground ball to right field and making a rifle-shot throw for an out at third. Deep hits over the left field fence. Sheer artistry bunting down the third base line. He gradually won the respect of the coaches and most of the other players. In '65 the right field position was his. That year he hit .321 and was named rookie of the year.

Here, perhaps, was a new golden boy. Talented, good looking, articulate. He was pursued by the local business community for endorsements, and by the end of his first full season he was nearly matching his salary with commercials and appearances.

It was a hell of a story. I knew most of the headlines, but Stephanie made it all seem so real as she sat there and told it. She finished her coffee and set the cup on the my little table. She sat there quietly for a minute or two and then said, "I better get back to the house. Come on over anytime, and we'll cook out on the beach again. That was fun."

## Sittin' In

I just called the airport and asked if they had an inbound flight plan for Ray Stanley. They said that they didn't. I'm not sure exactly when Ray left, but he probably decided to break up the trip and spend the night somewhere along the way. Maybe Numea or Tonga or Niue. There's really not much that I can do at this point. Just wait for him to call. Wait for the rescue coordination center to call. Turn on the TV news every once in a while. I did see videotape of a New Zealand couple being picked up at sea. That was encouraging and discouraging at the same time. The sea was an angry mass of gray and white, and the New Zealanders looked pretty shaken up.

I can't stand just sitting here, so I turn back to my project. I'm curious about how Martin made the transition from a sports hero to a rock icon. This is something he wrote about in One Hit Wonder. Seems like he got his foot in the door at a big party thrown by the owner of his team. Martin writes:

Mike Allison, who owned the Dodgers, threw a big welcome back party at his house at the start of the 1966 season. I'd seen some big houses in my life, old uptown mansions on St. Charles and so on, but Allison's place was like nothing I'd ever seen. All angles and glass and decks. Big pool with fountains and statues. It was something else. Allison was a real show off. I don't think he ever did a damn thing in his life except get born as the son of the owner of half the real estate in southern California. His way of being in the limelight was to buy people who had earned their place in the limelight. But that's another story. Anyway, he had chefs flown in from all over the U.S., and they brought all the exotic local home foods. There were these gorgeous barmaids walking through the crowd carrying champagne. There were movie people and a bunch of local hotshots.

Allison hired this band, The Innocents, who were pretty hot at the time.



They had two top ten hits in the past twelve months, and I liked their music. I'd play their records at home and jam with them on my guitar. Kind of audio masturbation. Man, I was really missing my music back then.

Meeting all those other guests at Mike's was something else. Funny how they all seemed to know me, even though I didn't know them. That always struck me as bizarre. One minute a famous actor would be grinning and telling me about his heroics as a high-school baseball player, as if I'd be impressed. The next minute some local business mogul would be shaking my hand and waving the prospect of big money in front of me.

When the band started to play, I dragged Stephanie over to the bandstand. I stood right in front of the band, gulping a beer, mouthing the lyrics, playing air-guitar, grinning, jiving. Stephanie stood beside me struggling to find some elegant way to plug her ears and block out all the noise. A few people danced on the pool deck behind us.

After a few songs the band took a break, and this chubby little long-haired bass player hurried over to me and stuck out his hand.

"You're Martin Landry aren't you? Pleasure to meet you, man. I'm a huge fan. I was at the Yankees game last year when you shagged down that blooper and then fired the ball over to third to get Newcomb. Infuckingcredible, man. Oh, I'm Dan Spinetti, itinerant bass player."

Like I said, people seemed to just know me. Weird. I shook Dan's hand and introduced Stephanie. I told him that I loved their music and jammed with their record at home. That seemed to blow him away. He wondered what I played, and I told him I'd played guitar since I was a kid.

Dan's eyes lit up. "Yeah? That's cool. And you play along with our records?" I nodded. Dan said, "Imagine that, a baseball hero who plays guitar and likes my music. Farfuckingout. What's your favorite Innocents tune?"

I told him it would have to be 'Soul Struck.' I said that when I play it by

myself I slow it down a little, make it a little more bluesy and add some New Orleans flavor, if you know what I mean.

Dan took an interest. "Come on up here and show me."

I turned to Stephanie. She shrugged and kind of motioned me off with Dan.

Dan went up on stage, got an acoustic guitar, and handed it to me, motioning for me to have a seat on the bandstand. He says, "Do your thang, man. I'm dying to hear this."

I set down my beer and took the guitar. I played through an E chord, listened to the tuning, brought the B-string up a little, and played the chord again.

Dan looked at me sideways and grinned, "Why is it I've got this feeling like you know what the fuck you're doing?"

I just grinned and started a slow, rolling, bluesy introduction. Dan smiled and slapped his thigh in time to the music. I played through a whole verse and then sang: "It was more/than love at first sight. It was more/like the light in your eye. It was more/than the way you looked/ It was more/like I was soul struck."

Dan rolled his eyes to the heavens, then started babbling a mile a minute like he always did. "I'm fucking blown away, man. Phychodelia. Where did you get that shit? This is unreal. Who would think that a big fucker like you would have a silky voice like that? Don't go away. Let me get Brian over here."

So I sat on the stage noodling with the guitar and a minute later Dan returned with his bandmate, Brian. Dan and Brian had written all of the Innocents' songs. Brian was kind of the brains behind the band. He sang and played lead guitar. He and I had quite a history after that.

Anyway, Dan introduced us. "Martin Landry, Brian King, though sometimes he likes people to call him King Brian." And that was a fact. Or at least he sometimes wanted people to treat him like King Brian.

I stuck out my hand, "Nice to meet you, King."

Brian smiled and nodded. "Sorry if I didn't recognize you, but I don't pay any attention to baseball."

"No problem, man. It's just a game."

"Dan says I've got to hear you play 'Soul Struck'."

I shrugged. "I was just twinking around with it. It's not like you've got to hear it or anything."

Dan was effervescent. "*No*, man, *do* it for him. He'll love it. Fuck, you blew me away."

So I started playing the song again and gave it a little different twist this time. Brian seemed impressed right away. "Fuck, that does sound good, man. Where were you when we were putting this down in the studio?"

I did a verse and then quit. I thanked him and told him that I played in bands all my life. "Fraternities, bars, clubs in New Orleans, that sort of thing. In fact one of the bad things about moving out here is I don't get to play music anymore."

Brian shook his head. "Oh, man, you could walk into any number of bands out here. You've got style, you got chops. And if you'd grow your hair out a little, the chicks would dig you big time."

My hair. Funny he would mention that. I was just beginning to wonder how I'd look if I let it grow out a little. I'd had a flat top all my life and never given it much thought. I never was very style conscious, but I was beginning to think that if society divided into people with crew cuts and people with hair (which it was starting to do back then), I'd join the hairy ones.

Dan swatted Brian on the arm and said, "Brian, why don't we let Martin sit in for a while? The guy's *good*. And all the guests think he's God, man, they'd love it. Could be big fun."

Brian looked at his feet and rocked his shoulders pensively. I could tell he wasn't too hot on the idea. He turned to Dan and said something like, "This is

our livelihood, man. We can't fuck up."

But Dan pleaded with him, "Yeah, but it's just a private party."

Brian said, "But it's a party where everybody who's anybody in L.A. is here." Then he paused and said, "How about if we start the next set with 'Soul Struck'? You come up and play it with us your way, and then we'll see what happens. Maybe Dan's right. Maybe they'll dig it."

I said something like, "I don't want to impose, man. But it sounds like fun, and it will be okay. Trust me."

Brian said, "Okay, go through it again on the acoustic and let me get a feel for it."

He watched me play the song again and said, "Yeah, okay, that'll work. Let's get up there and do it before somebody wonders why we quit playing."

Dan winked at me and gave me a whack on the back. "You want to smoke a little weed before we go up there? Loosen you up a little."

I picked up my beer and climbed onto the stage. "No thanks, man. I had about six glasses of champagne already, plus this beer, and I'm plenty loose." I'd had a joint now and then since I don't remember when, but I never was a doper, I mean not at that point. But I was a drinker since I was fifteen or sixteen. If I was out at a party, I was always at least a little buzzed.

Dan went to the microphone while I was hooking up a guitar. He said, "I know everybody here knows that Martin Landry is a hell of a baseball player." People clapped and whistled. "But how many of you know he is a killer guitar player and singer?"

Stephanie waved her arms over her head and bounced up and down like a cheerleader. "I do." She was something else.

People laughed. Dan continued, "Besides his wife? Okay, you're in for a treat. Here's Martin Landry doing 'Soul Struck,' and I hate to say this, but he does it better than The Innocents ever did."

I really felt totally at home. I did a little bow and motioned for Dan to come with me over to the drums. I muted the guitar strings with my left hand and started chopping out the rhythm on the strings with my right. When the bass and drums had gotten into the groove, I walked over by the mic, closed my eyes, and started the introductory guitar solo. Somewhere out there I found something new for it, and off we went. When I opened my eyes, I saw Dan looking over at Brian and giving him an I-told-you-so smile. Brian grinned and nodded back. People crowded up toward the little bandstand. Smiling, clapping, dancing in place. Middle aged women dragged their porky husbands out of deck chairs to dance. What a kick. I hadn't felt like that in a year or so.

When the song was over, I unstrapped the guitar and set it in a stand. People in the crowd clapped and shouted, "Encore." "Martin, Martin." Stuff like that.

Brian smiled at the crowd, walked over to me, and handed back the guitar. People clapped. Brian bent toward me and said, "What other Innocents songs do you know?"

I told him I could fake my way through all of the ones on the first album, and if I didn't know something I'd just back off.

"Fair enough. You know 'Caretaker'?"

I said, "How about if you guys do it and just give me the guitar solo."

"You got it."

And so it went through a half dozen songs. The people seemed to eat it up, and the whole band had fun as I served up tasty little New Orleans inspired appetizers. When the band took a break again, Brian went straight over to me and shook my hand. "Man, that was fun. So loose and funky. I came here thinking it was going to be a drag playing for these baseball players, power brokers, and old-money aristocrats, but this turned out to be a gas. Somehow or other, you've *got* to get into music."

Yeah, he was right about that, but I couldn't very well get in a band when I was playing baseball. I mean, if you're in a band and you get a good date, you've got to take it, you can't go running off to do something else.

Brian understood. "I can dig that, but don't be a stranger. Let's play some tunes from time to time. Just fuck around. Maybe I'll even go see a baseball game."

Dan got excited at that, "Oh, man, I never knew a major league ball player. This is cool. Could we like go through the locker room and meet some of the other players and see a game from the dugout maybe? Please, please?"

I told him that the dugout part might be hard to swing, but I could get him in before a game and show him around. Maybe get him into the family and friends seating. Something like that.

Dan found a pencil, and we exchanged phone numbers. (One Hit Wonder, pp. 63-65. Quoted by permission.)

Martin reveled in the compliments he got on his guitar playing. In his book, he wrote, "I hadn't played music in front of people for a year or so at that point, and I guess I'd forgotten how good it feels when things are going right. Anyhow, it sure felt great to be up on that stage with the music pouring out. Better than any grand slam I ever hit."

So Martin faced a pleasant dilemma: He loved music above everything, but baseball was affording a good living, and he'd have felt foolish walking away from the game to become a starving musician. As it turned out, events forced him into a decision.

## Press Conference

One time when Martin and I were hanging out at his place up in the redwoods of Northern California, we got to talking about how it was that he left baseball. He said that some off the wall question at a press conference triggered an avalanche. I remember looking puzzled. He said, "Come on in here and look at this."

We went into his den, and he rummaged around in a cupboard under the TV and finally came up with a videotape. He had managed to get it copied from some archival film shot at the press conference in May of 1967. He put on the tape, and we watched. It was strange to see him as a young man.

Martin sat with Dodgers' catcher Terry Maze at a table in the press room at the Los Angeles stadium. The table was covered with dozens of microphones. The room was noisy, crowded with reporters and photographers. Mike Allison, the team owner, stepped up to the podium and tried to get the room to come to order.

"Ladies and gentlemen, could you listen up please. I've called you here before today's game to announce that we have just signed Martin Landry and Terry Maze for another two years each. The coach and I have felt that it would be best for the team, and for these men, not to drag out contract negotiations through the season. They are solid contributors to the team, we want them to feel that they have a place here. We want them to feel that we are not playing games with them, we'd rather have them concentrate on playing games for us. Each of them will give you a short statement, and then we can open this up for questions."

The owner nodded to Terry, who rose and went to the podium. "This is my seventh time putting my name on the dotted line with the Dodgers, and I've got to say it just keeps getting better and better. This is a fine ball club, and I hope I can finish out my career here," he turned and smile at Mike Allison, "but not too soon. Well, I'm no speech maker, let me bring my buddy Martin up here to save me."

Martin met Terry at the podium and shook his hand. Terry sat down and Martin stepped up to the mic. “Well, I guess I’ll just second Terry’s remarks. This is a great organization, a dream come true for me. Things have gone well for me and for the team so far, and I hope it will stay that way right through the season.”

Martin sat back down as the cameras continued to click. Twenty hands went up and all of the reporters shouted their questions at once. A reporter from *Sports Illustrated* asked Martin how his old football injury was doing. Martin replied, “The trainer and the doctors are staying on top of it. I ice it once in a while, but everything seems fine.”

“You a Beatles fan?” somebody shouted.

Martin grinned, “Yeah, why?”

Everybody laughed. “Well, I see a little more hair on your head is all.”

Martin quoted Dylan. “Well, the times they are a changin’, ain’t they?”

An L.A. *Times* reporter stood up and said, “Martin, how do you feel about Cassius Clay, er, Muhammad Ali, refusing to be inducted into the armed forces last week and how do you feel about his remark last year, and I quote now, ‘I ain’t got no quarrels with them Viet Congs’?”

Martin put his hand to his throat and massaged his Adam’s apple. “How do I feel about that? Well, ah, there are a lot of people who think that war is a mistake. Muhammad Ali has been pretty good at picking his fights. Ah, he’s not willing to get into this one, and he’s willing to pay the price for what he believes. Jail, or whatever. Seems to me that’s what this country is all about. You can say what you think and take the consequences.”

The reporter pressed, “Do *you* think the war is a bad idea?”

Martin turned toward Mike Allison as if to say, “Do you want to cut this off? We’re really not talking baseball here.” But Allison sat impassively looking back at Martin.

Martin turned back to the mic. “The truth is I *do* think this war is a mistake. I’ve read a little bit about the history of that area. We used to debate foreign policy in high-



school, and Southeast Asia was one of the big topics. Seems to me the Vietnamese should have been free from France after the Second World War. After all, they fought against the Japanese. They earned it. We shouldn't have helped the French reclaim their colony after the war. We shouldn't be fighting in Vietnam now. They get help from the communists, but they'd take help from anybody just to get their independence. We're in a worldwide struggle with the communists, I know that, but that does not mean that everybody or every government that says it hates communism is good, or that every country that takes help from the communists is bad. Its just not..."

Mike Allison broke in, "Gentlemen, I'm sure you didn't come here to find out what Martin thinks about Vietnam. Now we've got a game to get ready for, if you'll just excuse us."

The reporters pressed forward, but the coach grabbed Martin's elbow and escorted him out the rear door.

I remember that Martin shut off the videotape and sat there in his den staring at the carpet. He said that Allison was fuming. "Do you have any idea what you are getting yourself into?"

Martin said he was stunned. "They asked, I told them what I thought."

Allison shook his head. "When are you going to learn that the last thing you do at a news conference is tell people what you really think. Tell your wife what you think. Tell your friends what you think. But don't tell the world what you think."

That night Martin's comments were on every news program in the country. And they set off a shitstorm of angry reactions. Calls to the Evader switchboard were profane and vehement: "Get that candy-assed communist out of the Evader uniform, or I'll never come to another game." "I hope they draft the bastard and he gets his balls blown off. Then we'll see what he thinks." "How are you going to trust a coward like that when its 3 and 2 in the bottom of the ninth?" And worse. There were threats against Martin's life. And threats against the coaches and the owner. The local papers all ran editorials playing on the irony that a "hero of America's Pastime" is actually a traitor, and so on.

When Martin took the field for the next game, the crowd was in a ugly mood. He stood facing the flag during the Star Spangled Banner with his hat off and over his heart, but there were constant catcalls. "Go play baseball in Hanoi, you commie bastard." "You don't deserve to wear that uniform." They threw beer bottles, apples, paper, whatever was handy. Police were everywhere in the stands, but they refused to intervene. I went to my share of anti-war demonstrations, and I've seen how the police acted. I'm sure some of them would have pulled out their pistols and shot Martin, if they thought they could get away with it. Remember Kent State? The police probably could have gotten away with shooting Martin. Anyway, the game was halted for thirty minutes as the announcers and coaches tried to restore order.

When the game finally began, Martin was all thumbs. "I couldn't hit a watermelon with a tennis racket," he told me. He struck out to thunderous cheering in the second inning, overran a ground ball in the third, and struck out again in the fourth. He asked the coach not to send him out in the fifth, and when he didn't take the field, the noise in the stadium was deafening.

And as bad as this was, Martin told me that the worst part for him was the reaction of the rest of the team. There was no visible sympathy for him anywhere on the team. He said, the players flattered themselves that they were real American heroes, even though nearly all of them had managed to avoid the draft with dubious physicals or appointments to the National Guard. They weren't happy about seeing their sterling image tarnished. And of course if people thought baseball players were overpaid commie bums, they might not pay to see the games, and then how does the owner pay the big salaries?

Martin asked to be put on the injured list for a month. He and Stephanie went into virtual seclusion in their house. For the first few days reporters and photographers camped in the street out front. But as the weeks went by and it was obvious that Martin wasn't coming out, and wouldn't make a statement if he did, the gaggle outside gradually

evaporated.

Not everyone, of course, was angered by Martin's statement. People in the anti-war movement called and thanked him for the support and for having the guts to say what he thought, regardless of the consequences. Martin was honored, but confessed that he might not have said what he did if he had known what the reaction would be. The activists wanted him to become a public spokesman, but Martin was not interested.

His rock musician friends were also supportive. Brian and Dan stopped by from time to time to play music and try to cheer him up. The majority view among the musicians was, "Fuck baseball, play music."

Martin wrote: "The most touching visit I got was from Preston Williams, a black rookie outfielder. Williams came by and said something like, 'I wish I could do what you did. Man, that took guts. Maybe someday I will, but right now I just can't do it. My Daddy is a janitor, and my Momma works in a hotel. I'm the first one in the family to even finish high-school. I want to buy them a house. I want to get then a car that's safe to drive on the highway. I made more money this year than they've made their whole life. A couple more years and I'll be set. I see my brothers going to that war, and it makes my blood boil. But I can't stop the war. If I speak up, I'll be finished, then what am I going to do? Empty wastebaskets at 3:00 a.m.? Look what they've done to Ali, they won't even let him fight. Now he's broke. I just can't do it, man. Not yet, anyway.'" "

Stephanie just stopped by my little house on her way to the bank. She said they were all starting to get cabin fever over at the house, and she needed to get away for a while. She saw my legal pad and all these notes and wondered what I was working on. I felt a little embarrassed, but I told her that I was working on a book about Martin. I told her that I didn't know what I would do with the manuscript, that it was just my way of dealing with all the turmoil. I was afraid that maybe she would feel that I was exploiting my friendship with Martin, but she was actually supportive.

"Better you than some creep who didn't even know him," she said.

She asked if she could read part of it, and I showed her the last section on the press conference. I thought she'd take it with her, but she sat outside and read through it. I fidgeted around inside. I was nervous. Finally she put it down and said, "You know what I remember about that time?" I shrugged and she said, "I was afraid. I saw an ugliness in people that I'd never seen. I felt physically threatened and hounded."

She flipped through One Hit Wonder and found a picture. "Did you see this?" she said. It was an Associated Press picture of her and Martin coming out of an L.A. restaurant. Martin had his hand up shading his eyes, and Stephanie appeared to be shouting at the press. "I was what, twenty-two, twenty-three? I was married to a baseball player for Christsakes. I sat in the sun while he ran around in the grass. I confess, I loved it. I loved that bright white uniform. I loved the sound of the bat, and the crowd, when Martin hit one over the fence. I loved making a road trip once in a while, and I loved coming back to the house. I loved Martin. I loved seeing him live his game. Now all of a sudden there are all these angry, hateful people all around me. They are calling us commies and cowards and whatnot. God, they seemed to be everywhere. Martin said a few words, and it just ended. Period. I thought this was a free country. I thought a person could have an opinion about whether or not the government was doing the right thing."

Stephanie paused and I said, "Yeah, I know. I marched against the war. I saw the hate on both sides."

Stephanie said, "And Martin... God, this was devastating for him. His house of cards just folded. He hated being trapped in the house like that. He started drinking. I mean he was always a drinker, but he started really getting into it. That probably scared me more than anything. And all our friends changed. Suddenly there were a lot of strange people coming around. People in the anti-war movement wanted to make a counter-culture star out of him, and there were some pressures and some guilt trips there, but basically Martin said he didn't want to have anything to do with it. He was no dummy, but he wasn't a spokesman, and he wasn't a debater, and he didn't want to be anybody's symbol for anything. That didn't interest him at all."

Stephanie sat quietly for a while and then said, “In some ways though, the change was good. We met some good people and had some good times once things settled down.”

## The Bong

Out of nowhere, Stephanie said, “Do you remember the first time you smoked grass?”

I smiled at the thought. “Yeah,” I said, “I had some goofy fun times with it for a while, but it got so I didn’t like where my head ran off to, and I quit.” I asked her about her first time, and she said it was right after Martin’s exile from baseball. She said that Dan and Brian used to come over and hang out a lot back then, and they introduced Martin and her to grass. She told me the story, and I had to laugh thinking back to those loony times. The flashes of “insight,” the meandering loony conversations, the unheard depth of the music, the incredible goodness of peanutbutter. I’d been there, and I could see the scene unfold as Stephanie told the story:

Stephanie invited Dan and Brian over for dinner one night, and after dinner she shoed them out of the kitchen and sent them down to the basement to play guitar. After a few minutes she could hear them laughing like children. When she finished in the kitchen, she walked down the stairs to join them, smiling to think how good it was to hear Martin laughing again. At least Martin still had his music.

As she walked into the room, she wrinkled up her nose and said, “What’s burning? It smells weird down here.”

The three of them were sitting on the floor, legs crossed, in front of an odd looking plastic device with smoke pouring out of it. The guitars were on the floor, and a Byrds record was playing on the stereo. Dan looked up and gave an evil wink. “We’re burning young Martin’s brain, missy, step up to the bong and we’ll set fire to yours, too.”

Martin giggled and motioned for Stephanie to sit down. “Steph, it’s time you move on to the Age of Aquarius.”

Brian held up the bong and said, “Yes, my dear, the time has come for you to

feel the power of the flower.” All three of them giggled again.

Stephanie looked at the smile on Martin’s face and said, “What do I do?”

Brian said, “It’s elementary, my dear. Any fool can do it. Just suck in through here and hold your breath.”

The smoke was scratchy and hot, but she held it in like they said. When she finally blew it out, the three of them clapped and howled.

Dan dropped a little more weed into the bowl, and the pipe was passed around and around. He said, “Ooo, this is good shit.”

Brian rolled onto his back. “Shit? We’re smoking shit? No wonder my mouth feels so strange in the morning.”

Martin turned his head from side to side and said, “I can feel my brain sloshing around in my skull.”

Stephanie tipped her head from side to side and giggled. “Really? My brain feels like the last gumball rattling around in a gumball machine. I can feel it rolling around when I move my head.”

Dan blew out a plume of grey/blue smoke. “The last gumball...that’s classic, man. Ought to be a movie.”

Stephanie was drawn into the Byrds record. She felt like she had never really listened before. Were the voices always that angelic? Was the guitar always that manic? When “Eight Miles High” was finished, she got up, nearly falling over, and put the needle back to the start of the track. Then she closed her eyes and swayed through space and time with the music. When it was over she giggled and said, “Are we high?”

Brian said, “Well, I can only speak for myself young lady, but me? Most definitely.”

Dan added, “Beyond an unreasonable doubt.”

Martin shook his head, “You mean a *reasonable* doubt.”

Dan, “How can a doubt be reasonable?”

Stephanie jumped in, “Yes, reason is positive and constructive and blue, but

doubt is negative and cowardly and orange.”

Martin reached for his guitar and said, “This is way too heavy for me.” He started playing along with the record. The stereo went off when the record ended. Dan and Brian picked up the guitars and tried to think of a song to play. They were stumped. Brian turned to Martin and said, “Play some of that New Orleans stuff, man. That slinky, groovy, foxy, voodoo, bayou, gris-gris shit of yours.” Stephanie says they were genuinely intrigued with Martin’s musical style.

Martin improvised a blues chord sequence and threw in some of Antoine’s licks. Brian and Dan ooped at some of the runs and changes. Brian said, “That is good shit, man. You definitely know what you’re doing with that ax. Have you written anything, man? We’ve got to get you into the studio and meet Leon. Fuck a bunch of baseball, man, you’re a guitar player. At least you could be if you grew your hair out a little. You might scare the freaks off with that recently-was-a-flat-top do of yours. I can hear ‘em now. ‘But, man, that narc can wail.’ “

Dan laughed and picked up the bong. He smelled the bowl saying, “Baseball player. Red-neck hero. Fuck that, it’s time to play music for the people.” He reached over and roughed up Martin’s hair. He said, “Besides, Brian, he’s starting to grow his hair out. Look at this, it nearly touches his ears.”

Martin put down the guitar saying, “You know, it would be cool to play music again. Do you think I could do it?”

Brian said, “Oh, man, fuckin’ ay. Have you listened to some of the shit on the radio, man? Paul Revere and the Reindeer. Herman’s Turnips. Shit, those shitty bands are making millions, man. There’s people who could make it happen for you. Trust me.”

Dan said, “What do you think that Paul Revere guy smokes, man? Gunpowder maybe? Uppers? I notice they have a hard time keeping him from climbing on the amps.”

Brian laughed and said, “I feel for the guy, man. Like he can’t find his kix anymore, you know he says his kix keep gettin’ harder to find. Like somebody keeps hiding his cereal.”



They all laughed 'til they cried.

Out of nowhere, Dan said, "How come we can remember the past, but we can't remember the future? That violates the symmetry of things."

Brian pinched Dan's ear. "Can you believe this guy? Complete proof that a little knowledge is a stupid thing."

Martin looked up from the guitar, "I think I can remember the future. I remember us eating the banana cream pie that Stephanie made."

Stephanie got excited. "Oh, yeah, I completely forgot."

Brian, "Oh, my god, I don't know if I could handle that. Did you really do that, Steph? That is fucking incredible. How did you know how to do that? How did you follow all those instructions? How did you know that would be the perfect thing for right now? This is fucking cosmic."

Stephanie tried to remember. "Yes, I think I *did* make one. Was that *today*? Was that *me*? I'll go check."

Steph went upstairs to look for the pie and was overjoyed to find it sitting on the kitchen counter. She says she remembers carrying it over to the kitchen table as if it were a sacred object. She lit a candle and put it beside the pie and then just sat staring at the swirls in the whipped cream. After while she got a fork and dug in.

Some indeterminate time later, the three guys walked in and found Stephanie sitting at the kitchen table looking out the window at the harbor lights. The pie was in front of her with about a third of it gone.

She startled when Martin sat down beside her. "Look," she said. "Look at all the little waves in the whipped cream. Each one is so different, so unique. Can you believe it? I *made* this, but I didn't even pay attention. I never noticed how it's like a little frozen ice field. And *good*. God, this is good."

The four of them sat around the table eating the pie and marveling at the wonders of the banana. "They call it mellow yellow." When they had finished the pie, Dan groaned and said, "The human race owes its evolutionary ascent to bananas."

“Oh, God, here we go,” said Brian. “The deep thinker is rising to the podium.”

Dan was insistent. “No, man, I’m serious, think about it.”

“What are you talking about?” said Stephanie.

“Well, monkeys love bananas, right?” said Dan.

Martin had a vacant grin. “Yeah, so?” he said.

“So you can’t eat a banana unless you peel it, and to peel it you’ve got to use your thumb.”

Brian shook his head, “Man, you’re fucking dangerous when you smoke weed.”

“No, I see what he’s saying,” said Stephanie, “The good banana peelers have good thumbs. They thrive and reproduce, and natural selection leads to monkeys with good thumbs.”

“There you go,” said Dan. “If monkeys liked apples, we’d have tiny little thumbs that wouldn’t be worth a damn.”

Martin said, “Yeah, then you’d have to stick out your middle finger to hitchhike, and people would stop and beat the shit out of you for flipping them off.”

Everybody chuckled.

Brian said, “I think I saw a monkey peel a banana at the zoo one time, and he used his teeth. That blows the shit out of your theory.”

Dan looked disappointed, “His teeth, you kiddin’ me?” Then he sparked up. “Man, we ought to get high and go to the zoo. We could really dig those animals. Get into their heads, man, you know?”

“I don’t know,” said Brian. “I went fishin’ on psilocybin one time and I couldn’t handle it. I felt that fish fighting for his life on the other end of the line, and I just freaked out. The zoo might be fun though. We’ll bring some bananas, and I’ll bet you a thousand bucks they peel them with their teeth.”

Dan said, “I’ll take that bet.”

Martin said, “How’d we get onto this monkey business anyway. This is strange.”

“You remember,” Stephanie said, “Dan said we owe it all to the bananas, ‘cause you need a thumb to peel them, and then...”

“Oh, yeah, okay,” said Martin, “God, that seems like ages ago.”

Dan stood up and stretched. “Thanks, man, but I’ve got to do like a banana and split. Why don’t you come down to the Pacific studio tomorrow at noon and check out what me and King comma Brian are doing, man? We’ll introduce you around. Maybe put you to work.”

The next morning, Martin got up before Stephanie and was sitting on the deck staring out at the water when she came out looking like she had been hosed off and then dried in a tornado.

“Did you hear me throwing up in the bathroom last night?” she asked.

“No, are you okay?”

She shuffled out on the deck and sat down. “I am now, but all that pie made me sick. I’ll probably never eat a banana again.”

Martin patted her knee. “That pie was great. Best one I ever had.”

Stephanie rubbed her face. “I don’t think I’m going to smoke grass anymore. It just doesn’t agree with me.”

“It wasn’t the grass, it was the pie. Grass is cool. You were kind of silly. It was fun to see you that way.”

“Yeah, I know it was the pie. But I don’t like feeling out of control like that. I don’t like getting stupid and staring at a pie crust for twenty minutes.” She stood up, “I’m getting some coffee. You want some?”

Martin called after her as she went through the door, “It’s like being a kid. It’s fun.”

She walked back on the deck with her coffee. “I don’t *want* to be a kid. I’m okay the way I am. You go ahead if you want to, I won’t be a prude about it.”

Martin stood up and stretched. “I’m going to go down to Pacific today and see

what's going on in the studio.”

Steph swallowed a sip of coffee. “That’s great. It was real nice of Brian and Dan to invite you.”

Martin walked over to the railing of the deck. “They want me to play music. I think they’re serious.”

Steph look up at Martin. “Would you give up baseball?”

“It’s more like baseball has given up *me*. I know this much: I am never walking out on the field again to listen to an angry crowd, to wonder if some kook is going to hit me with a beer bottle.”

Twenty-some years later, Stephanie finished her story and said, “I couldn’t blame him for that. I told him to go ahead and see where the music thing leads. You know, I always loved his music. But I wanted him to be straight with the Dodgers, too. I mean, baseball had really been good to us.”

So Martin went down to the Pacific studio that day. I’ll let him tell the story:

...This cute little receptionist led me to the control room where Brian and Dan were in an animated exchange with their producer. Those two guys were always bickering over their arrangements. It’s amazing they ever got anything done. Anyway, they stopped when I came in, and the producer walked toward me with his hand out. “Hello, Martin, I’m Leon Whittaker, it’s a pleasure to meet you. It took a lot of nerve to do what you did, and I really respect that. Brian and Dan said you might come down here. They said you were a hell of a guitar player, too.”

I shook his hand and told him I didn’t want to interrupt. “I’ll just get out of the way and watch how you guys do it.”

Brian said, “We were arguing about putting a key change at the start of

the third verse. I think it sounds cool, adds a little interest, but asshole here says it's trite, or tripe, or—"

Dan broke in, "The King is full of shit on this one. We go from the key of C to D, a whole step. It's a cheap shot. It's been done a thousand times. The last refuge of a musician who's out of ideas."

Brian said, "Who the fuck are you—"

"Play it for me," I said.

They went out to the instruments and Brian played guitar as he and Dan sang. When they were finished Dan looked at me and said, "See what I mean, man. It's so totally fucking predictable."

Brian waited for my answer.

I didn't want to get into their fight. I said, "Hey, I'm just here to watch. Don't look at me."

"Well, give us your two centavos, amigo."

So I spoke up. "Alright, my old teacher, Antoine, used to say, 'You got to provide a little surprise.' So, let's see. How about a change to a key that will be more of a surprise. Like you're playing in the key of C and you have this A minor in there, and the ear is real used to that. So how about after the bridge, you swing over to an A minor and then change it to an A and go on in the key of A? So instead of going up a step, you go down a step and a half."

Brian squinted, as if he were trying to focus on something far away. He couldn't picture it. "Do it, man. Let's see what it sounds like."

I picked up a Gretsch electric guitar and played through the chord changes. Dan and Brian looked at each other and smiled. Brian said, "Yeah, but it's odd dropping the melody down that far."

I said, "So don't drop it. Instead of having the melody start at the root, start it at the third after the key change, so it's actually up a half step with different intervals. That will be even more of a surprise."

He still couldn't picture it. "Do it," he said.

I played through it slowly, feeling my way along, while Dan and Brian worked out the new melody and harmony after the key change. When they got through it, Dan grinned and said, "This is far-fucking-out, man. It's like a whole new song, and way better. Let's run through it a couple of times and then we'll try to lay it down."

I thought that was cool. I unplugged the guitar and started to head for the booth, but Dan stopped me, "Wait a minute, Beauregard, you're in on this, too." I looked at Brian, who was always the fussier, less impulsive one in the duo. He motioned for me to pick up the guitar again.

The three of them plus the drummer did the vocals, drums, bass, acoustic, and electric rhythm tracks live. Leon had hardly said a word as all this was happening, but when it was over he brought us back into the control room to listen, and it was clear that he was very pleased. He said something like, "Martin, why don't you go out there and lay some ripped-up guitar track over it all, and we'll call it a day?"

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "I'd love to give it a shot, man. Are you sure?"

Leon smiled and nodded. "I am sure. I am *really* sure."

The first take went well enough, but I wasn't completely happy with the way it sounded at the key change. "Give me the Telecaster and run it back again. I'm not going to play anything until we get to the key change, then you can take the Gretsch out and let the Tele cut right in." I took one more run at it, and with all due modesty, I think I knocked them over.

We listened to it over and over, and then while the others were packing up their instruments Leon took me aside and said something like, "Martin, this was a hell of a day, man. Totally fresh stuff here. You are a talented guy. We've got to talk."

So we had a little talk, and it was like something out of a dream. I couldn't wait to get home and tell Stephanie.

I found her out on the deck when I got back. "You're not going to believe it, but I played in the studio with Brian and Dan. They liked my stuff, and their producer, Leon, liked it, and he wants me to... Are you ready for this? He wants me to sign up with Pacific. He wants me to start thinking about an album."

Stephanie clapped her hands together. "Oh, my God, Marty. That's fabulous. What are you going to record?"

That was a pretty good question, because I hadn't written anything at all at that point. I never even thought about writing music. I figured that's just something other people do, not me. "Well, I don't know exactly. He likes the New Orleans twist I put on things, the 'swampy, voodoo shit,' they call it. So maybe some New Orleans tunes, maybe some stuff that Brian and Dan have written. We didn't get into that too far. He asked if I'd written anything, and I told him that I had done a few chord changes and stuff like that, but nothing much. And he said that I ought to get busy with that, get started writing some songs. I'll get Brian and Dan over here and see if they can show me some stuff."

"Marty, that's great. How soon is all this supposed to happen?"

I walked into the kitchen and grabbed a beer. "Soon, I guess. We didn't sign any contracts or talk about times or anything. It was all pretty loose."

Stephanie put her arms out and spun like a ballerina, then she stopped abruptly. "Oh, Mike Allison called. He wants you to call him as soon as you get in."

"Did he say what he wanted?"

"No, but I think he wants to know what your plans are with the Dodgers."

I felt kind of queasy all of a sudden. "Yeah, I was thinking about that driving home. What if I ask for another month, really bear down on the music, and see if I can pull something together?"

“Will they let you? Do you think that’s fair to the team? If you don’t want to play baseball anymore, why don’t you just make up your mind and quit? Take the plunge. We’ve got more money than we ever thought we’d have. If we’re careful we could live for years on what we’ve got. If the music doesn’t pan out, you could even go back to school. You don’t have to play baseball, not if you don’t want to anymore.”

She was right. We were flush, though the endorsements were drying up fast. I thought I was going to have to talk her into it. I really dtd want to play music. I felt like I was made for it. Baseball wasn’t even close. I told her I’d sleep on it and call Mike in the morning. Maybe call Leon first and make sure I really heard him right. But I wanted to get this behind me as soon as possible. I remember we spent that night cooking on deck and sleeping down on the boat, The Spirit of Orion. We did that every once in a while. It was cool laying there feeling the boat rocking gently in the slip, back and forth against the softly squeaking fenders. We lay awake a long time. Things were changing, and we were caught up in it. We talked about baseball and New Orleans and music and LA..

I really was relieved to be done with baseball. I told Stephanie that I never really did understand all that fan stuff. I could never see why they got so emotional about the outcome of a game they weren’t even in. Seemed crazy to me. Always has. I told her about this letter I got from a fan a couple of months earlier. I said, “The guy was pissed off because he felt the coach left Bull Dinkler in the game too long. The guy writing the letter said something like, ‘We’d have won’ if we took him out sooner.’ *We?* Who’s *we?* Somehow this crackpot thought *he* was part of the team. Jesus Christ, I don’t get it.”

Stephanie said, “They like to watch you because they can’t do it themselves. They do it through you. I don’t know, / liked watching you. A little drama sometimes. A little grace. It was fun. I’ll miss it.”



Like I said, I never understood it. “They do it *through* me? Weird. Well, I’m not going to carry them along anymore. It just doesn’t work for me. I’m going after what I need.” (One Hit Wonder, pp. 58-62. Quoted by permission.)

So off he went into a new world.

## I Like It Like That

In June of 1967 Martin called a press conference to announce his retirement from baseball. He prepared a little speech for the reporters and printed the text in his book One Hit Wonder. Stephanie was kind enough to fill in some of the details. Here's what Martin said:

“One of my biggest regrets is that my father didn't live to see me play with the Dodgers. I am sure he'd have really gotten a kick out of it. He was one of those great men that very few other people know about. Just a quiet guy making a living, raising his family. But a man with tremendous integrity, great values, and real perspective. I remember when I was a kid playing little league. If I was nervous before a game, he would take me aside and say, 'It's just a game, Marty. People do it for fun. They don't even play it in the rain.' Well, he was certainly right. Baseball is just a game. Just something for kids to do after school, or for adults who need a little exercise. I think big league baseball has gotten a little out of hand. We players are not America's heroes, we just happen to be good at a game. What we think about what our government does is no more important than what anybody else thinks. There are a lot of people in this country who are opposed to the war in Vietnam—truck drivers, school teachers, senators, and as far as I can tell, one baseball player. We have a right to express our opinions. We have a right to explain our views without being shouted down by an angry mob, or without being threatened. I was shocked by the ugliness and hatred that came out after my remark about Muhammad Ali. I got a lot of hate mail. But I also received some letters that really touched me. I'd like to read from one that just got here the day before yesterday.

Dear Mr. Landry,

I don't suppose you've got time to read a letter from a nobody like me, but I just feel like I ought to write. I am a Marine up in the Khe Sanh area in Vietnam. A

lot of the guys here are saying that you are a coward and a traitor for saying the war is a mistake, but I want you to know that I think you are right. A lot of good people are dying over here for nothing. This war is a mistake. Most days we hike around in circles just waiting for somebody to shoot at us, then we call in the artillery or an air strike, and they smoke up the jungle. We sleep in the rain and die in the mud to take a hill or a bridge, and then we just walk away. Maybe we'll even have to take the same hill again in a week or so.

The locals seem to hate us, and their own army isn't worth a shit (if you don't mind me putting it like that). A lot of guys I know hate all the Vietnamese—northerners, congs, southerners, everybody. And that has led to some bad stuff. I don't even want to go into it, but I've seen some bad stuff. Anyway, I've got a little brother who is sixteen, and I hope he never has to see this place. So if you can get people to think more about the war and maybe stop it, I think it would be a good thing.

I am not going to sign this, maybe I'll write you again if I get out of here okay.

Thanks”

Martin folded the letter and put it in his pocket. I can imagine him taking a drink of water, hoping to suppress a sob that was building up in his throat. I'm sure he did not want to cry in front of this group. He went on, “The result of all this controversy is that baseball is not fun for me anymore, and I feel that it is time for me quit this game and get on with other things. I have today submitted my resignation to the Dodgers, and it has been accepted. To my fans, I say thanks for the support and kind thoughts over the years. You'll find other players to take an interest in, or better yet, why don't you do something on your own—go bowling, ride your bike through the park, take a hike, play softball? But don't get too wrapped up in it, remember, it's just a game. They don't even play it in the rain.”

Martin turned and went straight out the rear door. Stephanie hurried to catch

him, and she put her arm through his. She was struggling to maintain her composure.

“God, Martin, I never thought it would be like that. So emotional.”

Martin couldn't speak.

Stephanie said, “I called Brian and Dan and asked them to meet us on The Spirit of Orion for dinner. I hope that's okay.”

Martin couldn't speak until he got out the door and took a slow, deep breath of fresh air. “That's *perfect*,” he whispered. “I can't think of anything I'd rather do than sit on that boat with you, drink a few beers, and play guitar with those two guys.”

When they got to the boat, the lights were on and the barbeque was going. Dan was playing the guitar and Brian was sitting next to him smoking a joint. Dan's expression lit up when he saw Martin. He affected a Mexican accent. “Hey, amigo, how did it go? Today's the last day of the first of your life, I guess, huh? Or some heavy shit like that. Come have a toke of this weed. Killer Columbian stuff. Do you some good.”

Martin had to laugh. The finality of walking away from baseball hung about him like a fog, but Stephanie said that he really enjoyed these guys and their musician friends a lot more than the baseball owners, coaches, and players. His mood began to change. He grabbed a beer and sat on the other side of Dan. Stephanie squeezed in next to him.

They cooked some steaks and sat out under the stars drinking beer and smoking weed. They passed the guitar around most of the night. Martin knew a million songs from his New Orleans days playing top-forty hits at fraternity parties, and Dan and Brian got a kick out of trying to stump him. At one point Martin said, “You know I can play all these tunes, but I've never written anything. You guys don't know a lot of songs, but you've written some killers. Leon says I got to start writing. What do I need to do?”

“Well, that's a tough one,” said Brian, “I don't think I've got a receipt for you. Sometimes they just come pouring out of me all at once. Sometimes I struggle with them for a year or so. Sometimes they start with a chord change or a lick, and I develop

it. Sometimes I get a lyric line I like, and I build on it, then look for music that fits the mood. Sometimes I get an idea about what the song ought to be about, and I build it up. Each one's different."

Dan added, "Yeah, but it comes down to this, man, don't force it. Don't do it until you feel it. Make it real."

Brian added, "Like, what do you care about? Write about that stuff. The ones that really piss me off are the moon, spoon, June things."

Dan added, "I mean, if you don't have anything to say, shut the fuck up."

Steph jumped in, "Wait, some of the coolest New Orleans songs had lyrics that were just plain silly. 'Ooh Poo Pah Doo.' I mean, what's that all about? But they were fun, and people loved them. Right, Marty? Music's supposed to be fun, too, you know."

Dan put his hand to his forehead and said, "Yeah, yeah, you got a point there." He turned to Martin and said, "Why do I always feel like such a dumb shit when I talk in front of her?"

"Because you are a dumb shit," said Martin with a laugh. "But we love you, and we're not arguing here. Music is big enough for all of this."

"Amen, brother," said Dan.

In the weeks that followed, Martin started trying to write songs. He found that he worked best on The Spirit of Orion. Sometimes he would leave the boat tied in its slip and go below with his guitar. Sometimes he would motor out a few miles and drift while he worked on songs. Sometimes in a good breeze, with The Orion happily cutting through the swells, he would get an idea and jot it in a little notebook he carried.

It wasn't that long ago that Martin was helping me write my first songs, and we talked a lot about his early efforts. At first, he said, he was self-conscious about the writing. It seemed too deliberate, too premeditated, too fake, too forced. He would start with a phrase that sounded original, build it into a line, come up with a theme, and try

adding other lines to develop the theme. Often these efforts ended up rolled into balls of paper and tossed into the trash. But little ideas that seemed good, were entered in his notebook, and he began to juggle them subconsciously all the time. Years later, when he and I talked about songwriting, he told me that he got the idea for one of his first good songs at a fancy party at Leon's as he watched a beautiful ice sculpture of a runner slowly melt away in the sun. "I just sort of watched things and soaked up images," he told me, "and I waited to see if they would add up to something."

But he struggled in the beginning. He talked to Dan and Brian about his early difficulties, and they suggested that he pick out a couple of other people's songs and record them just to get warmed up. Throw in some twists and variations to get the juices flowing. Martin thought that was a good idea, and Leon went along with it.

He called Allen Toussaint and Chris Kenner in New Orleans and worked out a deal to record "I Like it Like That." Then he called Antoine and got him to come out and help with the arrangement and maybe do a guitar part. He knew he could always count on Antoine to give something a little tweak, to lift it up a notch or two. Antoine suggested they bring Jack in to do the bass and inject some of his funky magic, so Jack left LSU for a few days and flew out to Los Angeles.

The band for that session was Martin, Antoine, and Jack on guitars and bass. Martin sang the lead, with Brian and Dan doing harmonies. The drummer was a studio musician and friend of Dan's. As they set up for the session, they played Chris Kenner's version of the song over and over on the studio speakers. The Californians had heard the song before and never paid much attention, but Jack and Antoine were jiving and dancing and cutting up, and that got everyone in the mood. When the drummer was set up, Jack, Martin and Antoine crowded around him and started laying out a slowed down, funky variation on the rhythm of the original. Each one contributed a little something to the gumbo, and when it was ready, they brought in Brian and Dan to work out the harmony. Those two could hardly sit still as they listened to the rhythm getting laid down. They found a Beach Boys meets Beatles and Byrds harmony for the line "We're gonna rock

away all our blues, come on...," which, in my opinion at least, really added a lot to the good-time feel of the song.

Martin came up with the idea of having the guitar instrumental be a "conversation" between Antoine's and Martin's guitars. Antoine would play a measure of slinky, funky, warm-toned guitar, and Martin would give it a psychedelic twist playing his "answer" through a wah-wah pedal.

It worked. The result was a rowdy, fun-loving, contagious song that could make LBJ do the funky chicken. Martin told me that Leon was beaming as they played the tape over and over. And Stephanie, who had come in just as they were finishing the guitar parts, just smiled and shook her head. She must have been hugely relieved to see Martin on a new positive track. And she told me she was proud to hear this great New Orleans music getting re-vitalized and reinterpreted as it was poured through this California filter.

When things began to settle down, Leon asked Martin how the writing was going. "I am beginning to get some ideas that I like, nothing that is ready to record yet. It's going to take some time, but it will happen."

Leon put his arm on Martin's shoulder. "Work with Brian and Dan. These guys are pros."

Martin nodded. "They've been real helpful already."

Leon smiled and said, "I love your brother's stuff, man. That guy can really cook. It was a good call bringing him out here. Antoine, too. You got any other brothers?"

Martin laughed. "No, that's it. But he's a cool one alright. Don't fuck with that guy either, he's an all-conference wrestler at LSU."

"Yeah, I noticed he was built like a stump."

Jack came up just in time to hear the last few words. Grinning, he wrestled Martin into a half-nelson and said, "Hey, dickhead, did you just tell Leon I was dumb as a stump? I heard that. Maybe I ought to just nail your ass right now. Come on, bro', the

time has come.”

Dan broke in, “Peace, brother. I declare peace on Earth and goodwill in a can.”

Jack let go, and Martin straightened his shirt. Martin turned to Dan saying, “Isn’t anything sacred to you?”

Dan brightened up and began to speak, but Martin cut him off, “Besides your dick?”

Dan faked a look of thoughtfulness, “I’ll get back to you on that.”

Stephanie swatted Dan on the arm and said, “Let’s all go to The Orion tonight and celebrate. Everybody stop and pick up something to eat. Potluck. We’ll do a moonlight sail or just sit in the harbor or whatever. We’ll celebrate Martin’s new start.”

Martin said, “I want to give Jack a ride in the airplane first.” He looked at his watch, “So how about if we meet at the boat at seven?”

“Where are you guys going to fly to?” Stephanie asked.

“We’ll just cruise out over Catalina and right back. You want to go?”

Stephanie said, “No, I’ll get a ride with Dan and meet you at The Orion, if that’s okay with Dan.”

“Would be my pleasure,” said Dan with a bow, and quick as that, the night was planned.



## Airborne

I was re-reading the last chapter, when I heard the mailman go by. After I finished, I walked up the little path to the mailbox and found there was nothing there but a postcard. It was an aerial picture of the Great Barrier Reef. When I turned it over and looked at the back, I felt as if I'd been punched in the stomach. It was a card from Martin.

I'm no handwriting expert, but I was impressed. I'd never noticed his writing before, maybe never even seen it, but it was amazingly open and neat for a man's writing. Mine is all rat-tailed and jumbled. I can barely read it myself. Here's all the card said:

“Hey, bro’. Looks like I’m about ready to launch. I confess that I’m a little nervous, but I’m really looking forward to pulling into the harbor at Avarua in a few weeks. It’s just something that I need to do. Like you needed to fly across the Pacific, I guess. Give what’s-her-name...Peaches, Devon’s secretary, a good one for me. See ya soon, Martin.”

“Devon’s secretary,” is Marie, the woman who melted my ice cream, so to speak. Martin could never remember names. The “Peaches” thing is something else. Nearly every time he met a woman, he’d name her after a fruit according to the size of her breasts. It was like a running joke with him. More on that later.

I dropped the card on the table and just sat there staring at it for a while, then I scooped it up and headed over to Stephanie’s.

When I showed it to her, she took it and sat down. She read it a couple of times and then gave it to Flo. “Peaches,” she said, shaking her head. “Some things never change, I guess. Here I am thinking of him as such a wonderful guy, and now all this brings me back to Earth a little.”

Kevin read the card over Jack’s shoulder and said, “Peaches? What’s that all about?”

Jack sort of laughed and said, “Your old man had an odd sense of humor, that’s all.”

Jack handed the card back to me and said, “It’s getting late, I’m going down to the beach to start a fire, you want to go?”

The three of us, Jack, Kevin, and I, headed down toward the water with a sack of charcoal and some starter fluid. Kevin turned around after a few yards and jogged back to the house. He ran up to catch us a few minutes later with three beers.

Jack poured out some charcoal, and Kevin doused it with fluid. Jack backed up, and Kevin stood over the pit with some matches. He joined his hands as if he were praying and said, “May Volcan be pleased with our humble efforts.” Then he threw on a match, and a monstrous orange fireball leapt out. Strange shadows ran from the three of us. Kevin turned and grinned, “Volcan is pleased.”

Jack shook his head and smiled at Kevin’s antics, then he interlinked the caps on two of the beers, ripped the tops off, and passed them to Kevin and me. He used a car key to open his own. Kevin poured a little of his beer into the sand and offered a libation to Poseidon, god of the sea. He asked that his father be kept safe, and then he took a long drink.

We stood around the fire drinking the beer and looking out at the water. After while Jack said, “Stephanie tells me you are writing a book about Martin.”

He didn’t look unhappy about it, and that was a relief. “Yeah,” I said, “I don’t know what it will turn into, but I was just now writing about his first recording. You were in on that weren’t you?”

Jack smiled and nodded.. He sat down on a fallen log and set his beer in the sand. “You mean ‘I Like It Like That.’ Yeah, that was some fun. God, I still love that song.”

Jack sang a few lines, and Kevin joined in, “Come on, come on, let me show you where it’s at....” It’s pretty cool how these New Orleans people are always breaking into song.

When the singing stopped, Kevin gave us another Homer quote: “For in every nation of mankind upon the earth minstrels have honor and respect, since the Muse has taught them their songs, and she loves them, one and all.”

Jack looked out at the ocean, then back to Kevin. He said, “Yeah, for a while the Muse might have loved him, but it didn’t last long.”

I noticed that Jack had started massaging his fingers again. After a while he said, “Anyway, that recording session was pretty cool. I was black and blue by the time I got to California, ‘cause I just sat there on that 727 with Antoine pinching myself and wondering if I was really headed out to L.A. to record at Pacific Studios. I never even imagined such a thing.”

I said, “I read in Martin’s book that he gave you your first ride in an airplane that day, too.”

Jack lit up. “Yeah, that’s right. When Martin went out to L.A., the whole world opened up for him. One of his friends on the team gave him a ride in his airplane, and six months later Martin had a private pilot’s licence and this sweet little V-tailed Bonanza. Man, he loved that airplane. And when the recording session was over, he gave me a ride. That was the first time I was ever in a little airplane, and, man, I was hooked.”

Kevin said, “Damn, I missed out on some neat stuff. Can you imagine my step-dad Rob getting an airplane?” He faked an English accent, “Not bloody likely.”

Jack looked over at Kevin and patted him on the knee. “You missed some good stuff, amigo. And you missed some not so good stuff. Don’t sweat it, Kevin.” Then Jack turned to me and said, “I probably ended up joining the Navy because of that flight. Martin flew us about five miles offshore and then went south along the coastline toward San Diego. Just north of Oceanside he turned west, out to sea toward Catalina. He handed me the controls and told me to fly for a while. I took the yoke and experimented with the controls. I remember I pointed to a sailboat about five miles away and said, ‘Can I fly over that boat?’ Martin didn’t care, so we overflew the boat at about 500 feet. It was a John Alden schooner. Maybe seventy feet long. Beautiful. And get this, there were naked

women waving to us on deck. Man, I thought I was in heaven.”

Kevin laughed and took a long drink from his beer. Jack continued, “So anyway, Martin took the controls as the airplane started losing altitude in the turn. And as he brought the left wing up, he caught something out of the corner of his eye and pointed it out to me. It was two F-4s headed back toward Miramar or North Island. The two Navy jets were on a converging course with us, but a couple of hundred feet higher. They were flying in a tight formation about a thousand feet above the water. Martin rocked his wings and flashed his landing light as if to say ‘Hello’ to the U.S. Navy. The lead plane rocked its wings in acknowledgment. And his wingman rolled inverted. The two Phantoms passed five hundred feet above us, tucked up tight, one right-side-up and the other up-side-down.”

I said, “That must have been a cool sight.”

Jack said, “Oh, yeah, my head was on a swivel as they slid past the Bonanza.”

Jack put his hands together like two airplanes and rolled one hand over. “Total cool. Absolute confidence. They were fucking warriors, man, and I could relate to that.”

“So that’s what made you join the Navy after college?” I said.

“Yeah,” said Jack, “that was a big part of it at least. Well, I had to do something. They’d have drafted me, if I didn’t sign up with somebody, and I figured it could be a lot worse than flying jets from a nice clean aircraft carrier.”

I didn’t want to talk about what I did during the war, so I changed the subject. “What else do you remember about that trip to California?”

“Oh, that was the first time I sailed on The Spirit of Orion, too, so I got to play with all of Martin’s new toys that day. He took us all out on the ocean. It was a gorgeous night. Once we got out of the harbor, everybody but me and Martin went below to dig into the food. I sat by Martin at the wheel and said something like, ‘That was a gas today, man. I never dreamed I’d be recording at Pacific. Those guys Brian and Dan are

*good*. And that flight. Shit, big fun today.’ And it was big fun, man, I was wide-eyed. Then Martin said, ‘Yeah, I’m glad you could make it out here. When we get some more stuff together, I’ll be calling you again.’ Then we just sat there for a while and looked out at the city lights. After while Martin said, ‘I haven’t talked to you about all the shit that went down with the Dodgers. What did you think about that?’ I said something like, ‘Do you really want to know?’ “

Kevin got up and poked at the fire. Jack continued. “Martin said, ‘Yeah, I asked, didn’t I?’ So I said, ‘Okay, I think the guys over there in Vietnam are in a tough spot, and we shouldn’t be telling them it’s all a big mistake.’ Then I told him about a guy we both knew, Adrian Shiller. He was a tight end at St. Mark’s high, a year ahead of Martin. I told him that Adrian came home in a box about a month ago.”

“Martin didn’t know about Adrian, and he was really upset. He said something like, ‘But what if this war *is* a big mistake? We shouldn’t send any more people over there, and we ought to get the ones who are there back.’ I thought Martin was full of shit on that one. We shouldn’t just walk away and let the communists have one more country. I figured we had the power to make it go our way, and we just weren’t using it. Martin got really pissed, and Stephanie must have heard it from below, because she came up with a couple of beers and pretty much stuck around after that. She always hated it when we argued.”

About then Flo and Stephanie walked up to the barbeque with some yellow fin tuna in a Styrofoam ice-chest. They sent Kevin back for the plates and spoons and stuff.

Jack said, “I was just telling Joseph about how you hated to see me and Martin fight. We were talking about that night when we went sailing right after the recording session for ‘I Like It Like That,’ and Martin and I got in that argument over Vietnam.”

“One of many arguments about Vietnam,” said Stephanie. “Well, it was such

a great day and such a great night, I just didn't want to see them ruin it by talking about the war. I tried to get them to talk about music or something. I remember telling them how great it was to hear them play again. And bringing a New Orleans song to Los Angeles...that was neat. Then Martin said that there wasn't going to be a record unless he could come up with eight or nine more good songs. The pressure to get more material was already beginning to get to him, but I told him he could do it. Hell, I *knew* he could do it."

Jack said, "Yeah, that was the thing about him. You just knew he'd do it. He'd get friends to help, and he'd end up pulling it off."

Stephanie put the tuna on the grill and sat on the log next to Jack. She said, "The tension between Jack and Martin faded and the beauty of the scene soaked through us all. The stars were thick overhead, and the sound of the water on the hull of The Orion was mesmerizing. The city lights sparkled to the east, and every now and then LAX shot out an airplane as if it were a Roman candle. Then Brian brought up a guitar and played one of the hits from The Innocents, and everybody came up and sang along. Dan played another Innocents' song. And then Jack, Antoine, and Martin traded off teaching the Californians some of their favorite dance songs from New Orleans. And Antoine dazzled them all with his incredible guitar playing."

Stephanie got up and flipped the fish over, then she sat back down. We were all waiting for her to finish her story. After while she went on, "It was nearly dawn when The Orion got back to the harbor, and Jack was due out on an early flight. Antoine was going to stay and see the sights for a few days, and he went off with Dan and Brian. Everyone just seemed to evaporate into the night as soon as the boat was secured. Martin, Jack, and I walked up to the car by ourselves. Martin had been drinking steadily all night, and he'd smoked a lot of dope. He stumbled on the walkway up from the dock and had trouble getting his key in the door lock. That kind of stuff was beginning to get to me by then. I hated it. I hated seeing him falling down and weak. And I refused to let him drive. I made him get in the backseat, and I drove. This made him mad, but after a few minutes

he was asleep, or he passed out, or whatever. He'd say, 'It's only a beer, Steph, it's no problem.' But it was a problem, or at least it was getting to be a problem."

Jack said, "Yeah, I remember talking with Steph about his drinking on the way to the airport. That was the first time I remember anybody making an issue of it."

Stephanie looked over at Jack and smiled, "What else do you remember about me dropping you off at the airport, Jack?"

Jack said, "I remember you telling me how you missed Flo and all your friends back home. It was the first I'd heard that everything wasn't totally wonderful in sunny California."

"And then what do you remember?" said Stephanie.

Jack got a far-away look, then he turned to Stephanie and said, "You kissed me. Right on the lips. Martin was passed out in the backseat, and you kissed me."

Flo looked from Jack to Stephanie and said, "I always wondered about that. But I never knew what to think. Now I don't *want* to know. If you two have got some secrets, keep 'em."

About then Kevin came up with the silverware and a clanking sack full of beer. We ate the tuna and talked long into the night.

## Song Writer

Last night we got to talking about Martin's early song writing efforts. I came home and read a few sections of his book and then fell asleep listening to a tape of his first album. I woke up thinking about the first song he wrote, "Child's Play."

This was really his breakout song. It was not only his first composition, but it was a statement of his reasons for leaving baseball. It was a cool-sounding minor-key rocker that let him speak his mind and state unequivocally that he was through with the game. Stephanie said that his spirits seemed to lift as he pulled this song together. He'd dance through the house singing and twirling her around. I listen to the song now, and I can see that happening.

I could run like a cheetah  
to the roar of the crowd.  
I could nail you at third  
in a dirty brown cloud.

I could glide to second  
on a baseline shot.  
It was a game for children  
and, man, I was hot.

I was a game for children  
in a grown man's world  
It was a toy balloon  
turned to a Hindenberg



You can keep your money  
you can keep your fame  
but get off your ass  
and play your own damned games

I had to be their brother  
I had to be their friend  
I had to cut my hair  
and be just like them.  
I had to run them bases  
keep the smiles on their faces  
ride a big tin bird to the strangest places.

It's a game  
they don't even play it  
in the rain.  
This is life  
and you won't be comin'  
here twice.

“Child’s Play” was followed quickly by “Ice Sculpture,” and this one shows us the other side of Martin, a side of him that, as far as I can tell, really only came out in his songs. “Ice Sculpture” was based on his experience at Leon’s party. Sitting in the sun on the deck of The Spirit of Orion on a Sunday morning in August of ’67, he wrote this out:

The sculptor tapped his chisel  
and brought the ice to life

delicate and brittle  
a runner straining for the prize.

And I said, "Don't you know that as sure as the sun shines  
all that work drips away?"

And he said, "But for now its such a fine thing,  
and who are you to say  
that the thought won't live on?  
Its never really gone  
and here you saw it shine  
if just today."

An old man watched the water drip  
he stood there for a while  
he turned to me and took my arm  
and said this with a smile.

"I know you think that as sure as the sun shines  
all this fades away  
and I don't know any more than you,  
but believing this has pulled me through:  
what's good, lives on  
To find you when you're gone  
and here you saw it shine  
if just today.  
what's good, goes on  
but even if I'm wrong  
here you saw it shine

here you saw it shine  
here you saw it shine  
if just today.”

Musically it was an acoustic guitar finger-picked over a flowing melody with very tasty harmonies provided by Brian and Dan.

Now I sit here in the morning sun, listening to Martin’s first songs playing over and over through the headphones. There’s something that I can’t quite figure. I can’t even clearly say what it is that I don’t get. But Martin was a big, active, physical, fun-loving, self-centered, somewhat raunchy guy, and here he is writing a song, a poem really, that has this...I don’t know what to call it...this gravity, this cosmic depth to it. And this is a theme that he continued to develop throughout his writing career, even in the songs we wrote together in the past few months. Yet he didn’t show this part of himself, this struggle for depth, any other way than through his songs. It’s as if the songs were a window into a place that he for some reason felt a need to otherwise hide. Or from his point of view, the songs were an outlet from him, a means to frame and express issues that the rest of his lifestyle forced him to close off. In any case, every once in a while he’d write a song that showed you there was a lot more going on below the surface than you might have thought.

For several months, that was all that came to Martin. He would listen to a song that he liked and analyze what he liked about it, figuring out what the musicians were doing on the guitar. He would sail The Spirit of Orion and occasionally jot down an idea, but nothing of substance seemed to come.

He wrote in his autobiography that this period in his life, when he was trying to come up with songs for the first album, was the most challenging time he ever faced, but now and then he’d find something that would draw a song from him. He writes:

I remember a time in the spring of 1968. Stephanie was in the kitchen chopping up some vegetables for a salad or a stew or something. I went out on the deck and poured charcoal starter on a pile of briquettes in the barbeque. I stood for a minute finishing a beer and looking out at the ocean, then I tossed a match into the barbeque. Damned if I didn't (for about the zillionth time) put too much of that starter fluid on the briquettes. An orange flame leaped up around my head for a second and singed my eyebrows. Son of a bitch, I was going to look like a fucking Buddhist for the next month. So I jumped back, and man I could feel the heat on my face. I went inside and wiped my face with a damp dish towel. Stephanie was sort of chuckling. She wasn't the most sympathetic person you'd ever meet. "When are you gonna learn?" she said. Shit, I dunno, maybe never. I went over and turned on the TV in the den and stood at the kitchen counter with Stephanie as the news came on.

Walter Cronkite was talking about Vietnam, and then the scene shifted to a reporter in the field. He was watching Marines peeking up from behind a stone wall and getting off quick bursts with their M-16s. I watched behind the reporter as a Marine duckwalked to one of his fallen buddies and drug him behind a jeep. The fallen Marine bounced like a rag doll along the rough ground. That kind of shit just tore me up. I closed my eyes and shook my head. When I opened my eyes again I saw two F-4s pass low over a tree line. Large canisters tumbled from the airplanes, and a quarter-mile swath of trees was engulfed in a big orange fireball. The Marines went over the wall and walked cautiously toward the tree line.

I kissed Stephanie on the forehead and asked her to hold dinner. I was going to go down to The Orion for a little while. I told her I'd call from the dock later, I just didn't feel like eating right then.

I grabbed my guitar and drove down the hill to the boat. My head was swarming with ideas for a song. There was almost too much there to deal with at

once. I had a vision of earth in the future. The human race had annihilated itself. Celestial beings surveyed the wreckage, wondering if it made any sense to start over.

I sat on the deck and pulled the lyrics together quickly. I wove a melody through an open, airy acoustic guitar background. When I finished, it was already dark. I called Stephanie and asked her if she would bring dinner down to The Orion, maybe we'd spend the night on the boat.

When Stephanie came, I sat her at the wheel and played my new song. (One Hit Wonder, pp. 114-116. Quoted by permission.)

In a thousand years  
or maybe three  
when there's no trace  
of you or me  
when man is gone  
the breeze will blow  
the sun will rise  
and the tides won't know  
we're gone.

Like kids in the car  
on a trip to the shore  
we fight in the backseat  
then we can't explain  
what were fighin' for.

When angels walk  
this holy land

will they cry or laugh  
at the sad, sad story of man?  
Will they take that spark  
and try again  
or will they set their course  
for the garden moons  
of the far off promised land?

Like kids in the car  
on a trip to the shore  
we fight in the backseat  
then we can't explain  
what we're fighin' for

In a thousand years  
maybe tomorrow  
in a flash of night  
this could end in sorrow  
or we could get a grip  
think this through  
and find the thread  
from me to you.

Here's the guy who got brushed back by an inside fastball and nearly started a riot in Yankee stadium when he rushed the mound and knocked Squirrel Feaster's front teeth out. "Find the thread from me to you." Go figure.

## School Days

I remember what was happening with me in 1968. I can see myself trudging up the steep hill toward the little house I rented with my three ex-fraternity brothers near the University of Washington campus. The collar of my Navy-surplus peacoat turned up over my long hair, head down in the endless mist. I was returning from class in a dreary 4:00 p.m. half-light, ruminating about my least favorite downer subject at that time—Jenny Redmond.

When I thought about Jenny, which was almost always back then, I felt as if my heart were being sliced open. Like it was squeezed in an icy fist. For the thousandth time I sorted through the events of our three-month encounter, looking for an explanation for our split-up. I met her in English class. She seemed to bounce through the room like a neon ball. Like a hummingbird from flower to flower. A smile for everyone. A quick laugh. Everyone noticed her. Everyone seemed to know her. Everyone but me. She plopped down in the seat next to me one day, leaned forward, and looked sideways at me with a cutesy look that she'd probably practiced a thousand times in front of a mirror. Of course, I fell for it. I looked over at her. She grinned and stuck out her hand. "Jenny Redmond," she said.

I shook her hand, surprised by the strength of her grip. Turns out she was a tennis player. I relaxed my grip an instant too soon and felt impotent as she squeezed my limp fingers. The professor droned on about symbolism in the *Heart of Darkness*, while I watched Jenny duck behind the girl in front of her and struggle with some math problems. Now and then she would look over at me with a luscious pout. When class ended she turned to me, extended her lower lip and sent out a puff of air that blew the blond bangs off her forehead. She said, "I am going to flunk the next math test." It seemed like she could scarcely believe it.

As the class filed out I gathered up my books and said, "Yeah, I noticed you

were doing a lot of erasing over there.”

She leaned over and put her hand on my forearm. I don't know why, but it's all I can do to not jump back when somebody does that. Anyway, she said, “This stuff is so stupid. Listen to this problem.” She let go of my arm and turned back to her book and read, “You want to enclose a garden of maximum area using forty feet of fence. What is the optimum shape for the garden?” She closed the book and looked over at me, smiling and shaking her head. “That is *so* dumb,” she said. “When am I ever going to care about that? If I plant a garden, I make it whatever shape fits in with the rest of the yard. If I need more fence, I'll buy it.”

I grinned. “It's a circle,” I said. “Nature likes to pull in the edges, cut off the corners. You get the most area from a given perimeter with a circle.”

She smiled and looked at the ceiling for a second. “Pull in the edges, that sounds cool. Are you a *physics* major or something?” The way she said it, you'd have thought physics majors were sub-human. She stuffed her books in a backpack and stood up next to me. “Math,” I said, looking up at her from my desk. Trying not to be too obvious when my eyes rolled across her breasts. She put her hand on my shoulder and patted it like I was a spaniel, “Maybe *you* could take my test.”

I shook my head and got up. “No, but I could give you some help. When's your test?”

For the next few days I tutored Jenny, and a week later she called me, bubbling over with excitement. “Meet me in front of Shafer Hall at four,” she said. “We'll have a little party.”

I stood in a gray mist until 4:20 wondering if I had been stood up. Then a yellow GTO convertible pulled up, and Jenny came running out from behind the driver's side waving her test. I can still see her bouncing up and down as she held the test in front of me. Gorgeous boobs dancing bra-less under a dampening tee-shirt. She kissed me on the lips, took my arm, and led me to the car. She drove me to a little restaurant by the Ballard Locks, and we talked like long lost friends, then walked arm in arm in the rain



along the locks watching boats move between Lake Washington and Puget Sound. She said, “This is where the Sound meets the Lake. You live on the Sound, I live on the Lake. Symbolic.”

I looked at the swirling green water. “Yeah, symbolic,” I’d said, “and deep.”

She thought that was clever. Me too. Funny how when I’m around some people, that kind of stuff just jumps into my head.

Somehow it just got to be assumed, at least by me, that we would see each other regularly from then on. And we did. For a while. Meals between classes. Basketball games. Rock concerts. Long walks in the afternoon. And always the non-stop conversations led by Jenny.

She seemed to want to get right into my head. “How do you *feel* about your parents?” she’d say.

“Jeez, I dunno, like everybody else does, I guess. They’re my parents,” I’d say.

“Do you *love* them?” she’d say.

“Yeah, I guess. I never really thought about it. They’re my parents.”

“Do you think they are *right* for each other, like they were *meant* for each other?”

I probably looked puzzled, “You mean like some higher power wanted them together for some reason?”

Jenny nodded.

I said, “No, I don’t think some higher power cares about that sort of stuff.”

“So you don’t think *we* are supposed to be together right now?” She looked hard at me and canted her head, waiting for my reply.

My mind raced. How do you handle a question like that? “No,” I said, “I just think we’re lucky, or at least *I* am.”

She looked away. “Do your parents ever argue?”

I had to stop and think, “No, not while I’m around at least. Well, wait a

minute, they did once.”

“*Once*,” she said, “and how did you feel?”

I tried to remember. “I thought I was going to faint,” I said.

And she would tell me about her parents’ fights. “Like dogs and cats. They are so, so *incompatible*,” she’d say. “My father’s a happy-go-lucky guy, but my mother is a real snob. It’s weird. Her family was poor. I think she got pregnant to snare my father. She’s never done anything in her life but play bridge and shop for clothes and fancy crud for the house. She’s made zero contribution to the human race, and she has the nerve to bitch about everyone else and what they do. She acts like she deserves the best of everything, and she’s the gatekeeper that has to approve everyone else’s privileges.”

I said, “I’ve seen women like that. Cruising the shopping centers like battleships. Bismarks of the mall. Shopping for the clothes that will give them the look they want for the next time they go shopping, so they can buy the clothes that will give them the look they want for the next time, and so on.”

Jenny laughed and nodded. “Exactly,” she’d said.

“Do you *L-O-V-E* her, your mother I mean?” I asked with a smile, spelling it out.

Jenny made a dumb expression and dropped her voice an octave. She imitated me, saying, “Gee, I dunno, I guess. She’s my *mother*.” Then we both laughed, and Jenny kissed me.

I felt like I was walking through a dream. I can still feel the curve of her naked back, right above her dazzling white ass. The firmness of her breasts. Her breath on my neck. The way her eyes moved when we made love in her car. “She’s so different and so alive,” I’d tell myself, “and she makes me feel alive, too.” But she seemed to be looking for something in me that neither of us could find. And there were places in her, places I could sense but not define, that I knew I needed to get a grip on if I was to keep her. She moved so fast, there were things in her I couldn’t see. Things hidden in a blur of gestures and clever turns of conversation. The connection didn’t hold. Like an energetic

molecule on the surface of a liquid, she flew off, evaporated.

I picked her up at her house one time toward the end. An ostentatious stone two story house on Lake Washington. Her father owned a famous old restaurant downtown. Her father's grandfather had started it in 1900. Her carefully dressed mother opened the door. "Claypool, Claypool," she had said when she met me. Her eyes were half closed, and her gaze went over and beyond me. Maybe she was scanning her internal file of society page clippings. "What does your father do, Joseph?" she had said, as if she'd remember with just a little hint.

Jenny was taking me to play tennis at the Lakeshore Country Club. She came down the stairs sparkling white, like she just stepped out of a bleach commercial. I was in some counter-culture garb, probably cut-off jeans and black high-top tennis shoes. We went to the public park instead and batted the ball around some. She ran me ragged.

When the game was over she said, "You didn't know you've got to wear white to play tennis at the country club? Your father's an airline captain. You guys have money. I thought you'd *know* stuff like that," she said.

"Not my game," I said. "Never paid attention. I was a swimmer. All I need is a Speedo and some H<sub>2</sub>O."

Jenny seemed distracted that day, and she was busy the next. And the next.

So there I was back in 1968, marching up the hill in the rain, thinking about Jenny and struggling to find brighter thoughts. And there were some bright spots. I had just gotten an A on a topology test that had mauled the rest of the class, and I had finally met the girl I was going to marry. Or so I thought. In fact, I hadn't really met her, I had just seen her talking to someone I knew. I would have gone over and butted in, but there was a bunch of other guys crowding around her like dogs at a barbeque, and I knew I wasn't very good at standing out in a group like that. I sat on a bench about thirty feet away and just memorized her.

As I got to the top of the hill and approached my house, I could hear "Sgt.

Pepper” playing from 50 yards away. The whole house seemed to be bulging, cartoon-like, to the beat of the music. “No more acid,” I said to myself.

When I opened the door, the noise went from loud to stupefying. Donny was shirtless on the floor smoking a cigarette. He flashed a peace sign and blew a smoke ring. Bill was face-down on the couch. And Tim was in the darkened kitchen messing with something. I stepped through a minefield of shoes, books, clothes, beer cans, and plates as I moved toward the kitchen. Tim jumped when he saw me. “Holy shit, man, you scared the fuck out of me. Did you just materialize or what?”

Tim was bent over the stove fiddling with the gas knob for one of the burners. “Check this out, man, it’s really cool. Like if you just barely turn the gas on, there’s not enough gas to light the ring all the way around the burner, and you get one little flame that goes round and round. Dig it, see?”

Sure enough, a tiny flame went around and around the burner. I said, “Ain’t it amazing the little discoveries you can make when you stay home and smoke dope all day.”

Tim nodded and said, “Donny and I had races all afternoon. He took that burner and I took this one. The guy may be a great runner, but I kicked his ass at the stove races.”

I opened the refrigerator and looked inside. “Is there anything to eat on this planet?”

Tim didn’t look up from the stove. “I think there’s some pizza under the couch, but I don’t believe I’d eat it. Oh, Donny’s got news, man. We got a plan.”

I closed the refrigerator and looked at the R. Crumb cartoon stuck on the refrigerator door with a magnet. “What’s that, you going to experiment with sanity for a while?”

Tim looked up and showed a little excitement. “No, a fucking road trip over spring break. You in?”

Donny walked around the corner. “No shit, Joey. How does this sound?”

Warm sunny beaches, joints as big as your arm, beautiful señoritas, joints as big as your arm, margarites from heaven, joints as big as your arm.”

I picked up a roach that was sitting on the stove, “No, man, I told you I was backing off with the dope. I’m going straight, no more of this hippie bullshit, it’s time to grow up.” I popped the roach in my mouth, chewed it thoughtfully, and said, “When do we leave?”

Donny slapped me on the back. “All right, Joey! A week from Friday. We’ll do an all-nighter to Tijuana, then detox coming back easy along the coast.”

And so it was. The four amigos drove straight through and arrived in Tijuana at about two in the afternoon, feeling about like we’d been drug through a keyhole. We checked into a run-down hotel, took showers, and went into town for a meal and a blow job. Everything that happened on the trip was supposed to be punctuated with a blow job. A swim and a blow job, a cup of coffee and a blow job, and so on, and on.

At dinner the waiter brought us a tray loaded with dozens of tiny, sweet, smooth little margaritas in half-ounce earthen cups. We drank them with the abandon that only ignorance and peer pressure can produce, and by the time the food came, the combined effect of thirty hours in the car and way too much tequila left us tipping in our chairs. Somehow we made it back to the hotel room, where we fell like leaves into beds and chairs and floors and bathtubs.

By four the next afternoon we were cruising the neighborhood on foot, trying to find some grass, and having not much luck, mainly because we were too paranoid to ask anyone where to get some.

“What you guys looking for?” said a voice from a doorway as we passed.

Startled, we stopped and gathered like a flock of chicks, looking nervously at each other, and only if necessary glancing in the direction of the stranger, who looked like he had just stepped out of an Italian Western.

Trying to be cool, Donny said, “What have you got, man?”

“You tell me what you need, and I’ll get it,” said the shadow. And from the look of him plus the way he said it, we knew he meant just that. *M-16s? Women? A ’65 Corvette?*

Donny said, “How about some grass? Can you get us some grass?”

The stranger smiled and nodded his head imperceptibly. “Yeah, I can get grass. How much do you want?”

*Here we go again. An ounce? A pound? A ton? A freight car full?*

“How much for a pound?” asked Tim.

“Thirty bucks.” A cloud of blue/grey smoke came out of the doorway. “You want a pound?”

We nodded.

“Wait here. I’ll be back in ten minutes.”

We stood together. Hands in pockets, rocking back and forth. Trying to find a fitting pose. Donny did his James Dean.

Ten minutes later the stranger showed up carrying a shopping bag. Inside was a clump a marijuana wrapped in newspaper. It was the size of a basketball. We paid quickly and beat it back to the hotel room. Heads swiveling around, thinking the heat was onto us.

When we got to the hotel room, we spread the grass out on the floor and sat around it wide eyed like three-year-olds on Christmas morning.

“Far-fucking-out,” said Tim as he packed it into his ever-present corn cob pipe. “I feel like King Midas.”

“Did you see that dude? Holy shit. Right out of central casting. Un-fucking-believable.” And so on, as the pipe went around and around.

“What are we gonna do with all this?” I asked of no one in particular.

Donny lifted up an enormous bud. “We’ll stay stoned for a week and then bring the rest back to Seattle. It’ll pay for our trip.”

“Hey, I don’t think we should try to bring it back,” I said. “Did you see the

gestapo at the border, man? They are going to look up our assholes with a telescope when we cross back in. They'll ram seeing-eye dogs up our assholes. I don't know about you, but I'm going to try to stay out of jail for a while."

We debated crossing the border with the dope and ended up voting three to one not to try it. Donny was in the minority, so we told him he could take it across in the car and we would walk. He thought about it for a while and said, "Ok, fuck it. You think we can get in the Guinness Book of Records by smoking a pound of dope in a week?"

"We can try," said Tim.

And we did.

Toward the end of the week, when it was obvious we weren't going to finish it all, things started getting a little crazy. We would throw handfuls of it into boiling water and drink it like tea. We would bring it to restaurants and mix it with the chili. One night Donny used some newspaper to roll a joint that was about a foot long and an inch and a half across. It was under his shirt when we walked into the whorehouse at Happy Acres.

We sat in a dark corner drinking beer and passing this humongous joint around. Some girls came over and sat on our laps, sticking their tongues in our ears and whispering about the back room. They were a mixed lot—thirty-somethings shaped like footballs, thin young girls with delicate hands and eyes like deer. The girls puffed quickly on the huge joint, but they weren't too interested in getting stupid. They were more interested in money. And we didn't have much left.

The beer and the grass and the incongruous scene made the hippie humor flow.

Tim said, "I wish you hadn't wrapped this using the funny pages, I think its making me silly."

"Yeah, I think I'm going to ask Olive Oil here to marry me, at least for a few minutes." That was Donny taking one of the girls by the hand and heading toward the back hallway.

“What part of Kansas is this, anyway?” And so on.

The rest of us were loud and stupid, and the girls drifted off. The locals at the bar were not amused. Out of nowhere, a guy dressed like a cop or a security guard appeared and said, “This place is for selling beer and meeting women.” He pointed at the comic joint. “You guys can’t bring that shit in here.”

I said, “We were just leaving.”

And the guard said, “Yeah, I know.”

We waited for Donny for about fifteen minutes on a dirt street out by the gate. The scene was bleak. Roaches scurrying under the harsh light. The sound of arguing and kids crying in the distance.

When Donny finally showed up, he didn’t look too happy. “She was a sweetheart, man, but when I was getting dressed, she started talking about her little brother and everything. I think she wanted more money, but I didn’t have much. I gave her a few extra pesos. Shit, I didn’t know what to do.”

“This place is starting to give me the creeps,” I said, “Why don’t we get back on the fucking road?”

We went back to the hotel and had a couple of quiet joints, while we worked out a plan. I was for heading straight back to Seattle the way we came, but the majority voted to angle through San Bernardino to pick up Highway 395 through the Owens Valley on the east side of the Sierra Nevada Mountains.

So we four burnt-out amigos crossed into California and then set out toward the Owens Valley. Somewhere near Four Corners, out in the desert east of Edwards Air Force Base, we pulled into a roadside diner. The “vibe,” as we used to say, was not good. Back then the country was divided right down the middle according to whether you thought the Vietnam War made sense or not. And you could pretty well tell who thought what by looking at the way a person dressed or the length of his hair. The tension between the two groups was palpable, and there were definitely places a hippie would not want to go.



As we four scruffy hippies walked into the diner, we were greeted with cold stares and smirks from the small group inside. They seemed to be local ranchers and a few service men on the road between the numerous military installations in the desert.

“That’s got to be the four ugliest women I’ve ever seen,” said one of the Marines. People smiled malevolently and looked over at us.

For a while the waitress ignored us, preferring instead to stand behind the counter in front of two Air Force men, now and then treating them to a look down her dress as she fiddled with imaginary objects under the counter. “You guys want menus?” she finally yelled from across the room.

We smiled unconvincingly and nodded. I pretended to be interested in balancing the salt shaker on edge, but what I was really trying to do was disappear and re-materialize in Seattle.

The waitress said, “You got any money? Last week some low life lookin’ like you came in and ate and then stood here smiling like an idiot saying that he was broke and that we all need to take care of our brothers. I think he’s still in the jail, if you want to go see him.”

My strategy in these situations was to maintain a low profile and be exceedingly polite. “We’ve got money. We’re not here to try to steal from you,” I said.

One of the locals turned around and slid out of his stool. He walked over to the window, and looked out at our car while he picked at his teeth with a toothpick. “Now that’s a big relief. For a minute there I thought you was coming in here to rough us up.” He walked toward our booth. “Where you fuckin’ commies goin’ anyway? You’re a long way from Washington State, ain’t you?”

One of the Marines said, “Maybe they’re going up to Edwards for a sit-in.”

“I’d love to see these ladies do a sit-in in front of my jeep. Could get kinda messy, though,” said the Air Force sergeant.

Tim spoke up, looking at the rest of us one by one. “It’s getting late and we probably ought to get back on the road. What do you say, guys?”

This was the critical part. Either we would slink out, or one of the men in the diner would find some pretext for violence, and things would get very ugly. We started sliding out of the booth.

The sergeant rose and cut us off at the door. “About six months ago when I was in Thailand, I pulled a dead airman out of an airplane at Korat. I can still feel his blood on my hands. When I think he died for little shits like you, it makes me puke. Now get the fuck out of here before I lose it.”

He stepped aside, and we walked quietly to the car and left.

As the car pulled out Donny said, “Jesus, man, I thought the shit was going to fly that time.”

“No wonder they call this the ‘Bad Lands,’ let’s get the fuck out of here,” I said, looking back to see if anyone was following us.

Tim turned around from the front seat and said, “I could have smashed that fat Air Force guy, but I don’t know about the Marines.”

“You don’t *know*?” Donny said, “Let me help you figure it out. They’d have ripped your fucking head off.”

“And no matter what, they’d have thrown our asses in jail and lost the paperwork,” I said. “We’re lucky to be movin’ down the road. I’ve heard of freaks driving through Texas and never being seen again. So don’t break any speed limits, but let’s definitely be gettin’ the fuck out of here.”

“I don’t know about you guys, but I could sure use a hit,” said Donny. “Who’s got some weed?”

I was losing my patience. “That is the *last* fucking thing you need,” I said. “I’ve had it with this shit. I feel like I’m livin’ through a bad Kerouac novel.”

Donny said, “Kerouac didn’t write any bad novels.”

“Yeah, well who’s writin’ this?”

With that, we lapsed into silence.

Slouched down in the back seat, I did a slow inventory of my situation. I was

hung over and exhausted to the core from the trip, and we still had 1500 miles to go back to Seattle. I was hungry, and discretion dictated that we not stop for food any time soon. I was a physical wreck from two years of junk food, endless dope, and no exercise. Final exams were coming in three weeks, and I was behind in all of my subjects except topology. I'd be lucky to pass everything, and barely passing was not going to make my parents very happy. My university career was half over, and I didn't have much idea what would come after that. And to top it all off, here I was in the middle of the desert among a zillion military guys and rednecks who took an instant disliking to me.

"You know what I don't get?" I said. "Why did that guy figure people were dying in Vietnam for *me*? Fuck, I didn't ask them to go there. I wish they'd come home. I don't give a flying-fuck if South Vietnam is run by communists, capitalists, socialists, Jesuits, Girl Scouts, or what-the-fuck-have-you. And the people who live there aren't that eager to fight either. You know they don't even draft nineteen-year-olds there? We should never have gotten involved. Vietnam should have been unified and independent after World War II, and instead we helped the fucking French try to take it back as a colony. Uncle Ho may be a communist, but what he really wants is just to see a free and unified Vietnam. And then we end up supporting every tin-horn dictator on the planet, no matter how corrupt he is, as long as he makes anti-communist noises. Is what we are doing good for the people of Vietnam? I don't think so. Sorry, sarge, but I'm not jumping in the meat grinder for that shit."

"Right on, brother."

It was my canned anti-war speech. Pointless rhetoric. I threw up my hands and looked out the window. "Right on, right off, right up. Fuck it," I said. I watched the blur of withered-up desert shit bush go by and fell back into brooding about Jenny.

By the time the four amigos made it back to Seattle, I had resolved to adopt a more toned down mode of existence. Less dope, maybe none. Eat better. More time with the books. Maybe a little exercise. Some hiking this summer. Maybe getting back into

swimming laps. A little sailing in Dad's boat. Maybe some flying if I could scare up the money. But no more counter-culture road-warrior bullshit.

And maybe another girlfriend. Maybe my luck in that department would change. Seemed like women gravitated to everybody but me. I envied the way some of my friends could make women light up. But me? No way. I felt invisible, insubstantial. I didn't have the gift for bringing women out with small talk.

"What's your major?" I'd say.

"Sociology."

"Really? That must be interesting."

"Sort of. What's yours?"

"Math."

"Oh." And like that to nowhere.

It seemed to me that women went for two different types of guys. I called them "puppies" and "felons." The puppies were the ones who had the smile and the body language that, like real puppies, seemed to say, "I am so glad to see you I'm about to wet my pants. I've got no motives, no plans, I'm just thrilled to be here with you right now." And the women loved it. Who wouldn't? The felons were the dangerous, self-destructive types. Drove too fast. Got in fights. Flunked out. I couldn't fake either one of these angles, and I couldn't figure out any other way to approach the problem. Maybe that was it. Maybe I saw the whole exercise as something like a math problem that needed a solution. Maybe women sensed it, and didn't want to be solved.

But then there was Beth. Now that I'd bombed with Jenny, I couldn't quite get Beth out of my mind. She was the younger sister of Donny's one-time girlfriend. A year before, late in the summer after my freshman year, I had a blind date with Beth that went well. She had just finished her junior year in high-school, and for some strange reason she seemed to get that glow when she smiled at me, which was surprisingly often. We dated off and on that summer, but her parents weren't too warm to the idea, with me older and my long hair and all. And then I pulled back from her as the summer drew to a

close. The thought of going to her high-school dances or posing for the prom picture made me cringe. But every now and then I'd hear from Donny that I really ought to call Beth, she's asking about me, and so on. *Well, I thought, Beth ought to be about finished with high-school now, so maybe I'll give her a call when I get through finals.*

Which I did. And to my amazement, things just took off between us. Sailing, hiking, talking, movies, music. It all came very easily and naturally. She said, "I feel like a caterpillar that just became a butterfly. I'm out of that house and finally free."

We slowly pulled away from the matrix of our friends and formed our own little world. I was in awe as I watched things develop between us. She actually seemed to like me, love me even. You could see it all over her. She even said so. And I loved her right back. I loved to look at her, with her reddish-blond hair and those sky-blue eyes that sparkled like the reflections of the sun on a lake when she smiled. I loved to talk to her. I loved how she listened to my twisted tales and then gave them a twist of her own. I loved her quick laugh. And maybe most of all, I loved the fact that she loved me. I guess that's how it goes.

I thought about her constantly. Wondered what she'd think of this or that. I watched the world for things to share with her. Funny little stories. Secret places to show her. I wanted to pull her so close we would merge to a single being. To drink her up and have our cells flow interchangeably. It was frightening. It was risky. But I let myself go.

And my parents loved her. They thought she was cute and bright, and they actually wondered how I had pulled it off. They were hopeful that Beth would get me interested in moving forward with my life, where no amount of calm reasoning from them had ever worked.

But Beth's parents did not love me. No, they saw me as the hippie who was screwing their sweet little daughter.

Which, of course, I was. In the sailboat. In the car. In the woods. In the basement. Back at my apartment by the University. Morning, noon, and night. Twice on Thursday. It was glorious. Such true, honest affection. We would drift over Puget Sound

in the sailboat, planning our lives together, make love in the cabin until we fell asleep. Then wake up and plan some more. How many kids? What were their names? Where would we live? For a while there, Beth lifted my gaze up to the horizon.

That fall we were both at the U. of W., with Beth majoring in journalism. What a change from a year earlier. I went back to school and discovered that it was actually fun and interesting when you read the material and went to class. I discovered that I not only had an ability, but also a real fascination with math. I loved the way it proceeded so rigorously, and without emotion or opinion, from the unknown to the known. By the end of my junior year, my math professors were encouraging me to think about going to graduate school.

In my senior year, which was 1969/70, Beth and I moved into a little house, and our planning for the future began to move beyond fantasy toward imminent decision. But everything after graduation hinged on the draft. What would we do if I were drafted? I had opposed the war from the beginning. I was not going to risk my life for the corrupt government of South Vietnam, or for a flawed theory of dominoes, and I was not going to risk it for the sake of some politician's contorted pride. But what *would* I do? Go to jail as if it were a crime to decline to die for some old man's mistake? Move to Canada, never to return to the U.S.? Try to find a relatively safe niche like the National Guard? It was a very real problem, and the truth is I didn't know how I would handle it.

## Who Done It?

When Martin Luther King, Jr. was shot in April of 1968, Martin Landry was almost paralyzed with anger, shame, and grief. He was raised in the south, but bigotry is taught by parents, and he was not taught to be a bigot or to feel better than anyone else. He didn't tell crude jokes about the blacks, like so many did during his school days back in the fifties and early sixties. When his friends told those jokes, he would squirm inside and fake a laugh. But he wouldn't speak up against the bigotry either. If he had, he'd have been branded a "nigger-lover," and he would have lost a lot of "friends." As a teenager in a racially tense city, he did not even consider taking that step. And though he felt real affection for his black musician friends back then, he did treat them very differently from his white friends. It never occurred to him, for example, to invite one of his black friends to go crayfishing or to play guitar over at his house.

On the busses back then, there were signs that attached to the backs of the seats. They said, "NO NEGROES IN FRONT OF THIS SIGN." You could take the sign off the back of the seat and move it up and down the aisle—if you were white. Martin told me about getting on a bus one day after school with some of his friends. The bus was full, and one of his friends grabbed the sign and placed it behind a black woman sitting with three children and a bag of groceries. The woman looked up at Martin's friend and then at Martin. The look seemed to say, "What's wrong with this world? What's wrong with *you* that you would do this to me?" She turned to her children and said, "Come on kids, we'll let these fine young men sit down." Martin's friend smiled and slid over toward the window signaling for Martin to sit down. Martin declined, but another friend jumped right in.

Once things came into focus later in the '60s, Martin felt a horrible remorse. Why didn't he speak up? Why didn't he stop his friend? Why didn't he listen to those "jokes" and tell his friends to knock it off. He had such charisma, not to mention physical prowess, they might have listened to him.

On the day of King's assassination, Martin went down into the basement, picked up his electric guitar, plugged it into his amp, and brought the volume up to an ear-splitting level. Then he turned on his tape recorder. He faced the amp to generate a little feedback and add a rawness to the sound. He started laying down a deeply grooved rhythm track in D minor. He experimented some with the chords and rhythm, but quickly fell into pattern that seemed to perfectly capture the tone of his anger and frustration and shame. He rewound the tape and added a snarling guitar lead. Even as he was adding the second guitar part, the lyrics started forming in his head. When he finished the guitar parts, he played the tape over and over at high volume as he sat with a pencil and pulled the words together. In thirty minutes he had written "Who Done It?"

This wasn't the false apology of a slick politician, cynically, hypocritically apologizing for someone else's sins. Martin would have seen such stunts as no more than a sanctimonious pose intended to gain favor with certain voters in order to further the politician's own career. No, Martin had been there. His hands weren't clean. He didn't assume a posture of moral superiority. He didn't point fingers at easy targets. He sang of a hope that died and needed to be reborn. He alluded to his own experience on the bus. He said later that the lyrics came to him as if someone were whispering in his ear.

He was so jazzed by the result that he called Leon at the studio and got him to come right over and listen to it. Leon was there in twenty minutes along with Jim Klein, an executive with Pacific Records. They were flattened by the tape. They wanted to go into the studio and re-record it that night. Martin told them he wanted a couple of days to round up some musicians and do it right. Two days later Antoine and Jack were there, and the track was laid down in an hour. Antoine took the inspiration from Martin's guitar leads on the tape, but then polished it and gave it some startling twists. With Klein's help, the single was on the radio within a week, and it sold a million and a half copies in a month.

Everywhere you went you heard people humming the first verse:



Was it him  
with the gun in his coat?  
Or was it me  
when I laughed at that joke?  
Was it her  
when she moved that sign?  
Was it you  
did you wear a disguise?

I wonder  
Who done it?  
Who done it?

Things virtually exploded for Martin. Until that time, most people who knew him, knew that he was a talented baseball player who nearly caused a riot after a remark about Muhammad Ali. A few people in New Orleans or L.A. knew that he could sing and play really good guitar. Now virtually everyone knew him, and even the elite rock musicians were impressed.

The success of the single really put the pressure on Martin to finish the album. Klein was telling him he had to get the album out while the single was still hot. Years later Martin told me that he felt like he was tied in knots. He would go to The Spirit of Orion and try to squeeze out another song, but there is only so much a person can do. He would sometimes take a set of chord changes that he liked, weave a melody through the chords, and then grope for some lyrics, even though he simply didn't have anything that he needed to say at the moment. Or he would take a single line of lyrics that he liked and try to stretch the idea, sometimes past the breaking point, into three verses. The next step was to give the song the litmus test by playing it for Dan and Brian. At this

stage, they often ended up suggesting that he put the song aside and wait for the inspiration to come for something better.

The effort was beginning to wear him down. Martin and I talked about that period more than once. I remember him saying, “It’s not like other sorts of jobs, where you put some effort forward and then have something to show for it later. I could work and work at a new tune and then end up throwing it on the scrap heap. And there were people depending on me. There were pressures.” I told him that my days as a university professor were often like that, too. That I might get nowhere trying to derive a new theorem, and that I’d sometimes end up abandoning a line of research that I’d been on for months. I don’t think he’d ever thought that other people had similar problems. In any event, I know he often came home from the boat exhausted and frustrated. He’d drink a few beers, a couple of shots of bourbon, smoke a joint and pass out on the couch.

I also know the drinking caused problems between Martin and Stephanie, because Martin told me as much. I tried, as delicately as I could, to get Stephanie to talk about this period, but she kept changing the subject. I can understand that. It’s really none of my business.

## A Quick Trip to Canada

This is about the time, 1968, when my personal shit hit the fan. I feel sort of weak now as I try to write about it. I really don't know what I can say. I remember riding in the car with Beth on the way home from Canada. I said something like, "It will be better this way. The timing was all wrong. We were not ready for this."

Beth was inconsolable. Doubled up in the seat next to me. She said, "But we'll have kids, right, Joe? We will?"

I felt like I'd been punched in the stomach, but I tried to be upbeat. "Sure we will. We'll fill a school bus with them. We'll make a pyramid out of them. First quadruplets, then triplets, then twins, and a little girl on top. When we're ready to be parents, we'll do it right. You'll see."

Late the next night Beth was very sick. There was a fever and the pain twisted up her pretty, young face. We were scared and didn't know what to do. This wasn't the sort of thing we would bring to our parents.

We waited too long. When she finally went to the hospital, the news was bad.

Worse than bad. Crushing. Suffocating. Stunning.

We ran from it.

For twenty years.

And we ran in different directions.

## The Fighter Who Just Won't Quit

Ray made it in from Nandi, Fiji around sundown last night. I put him up in the back bedroom. It was a seven hour flight, and he's still sleeping. I'm sitting on the porch, as usual, writing all this down. I realize that I actually don't know Ray very well. I met him the first time I went to Australia a few years ago. I was there to give lectures and flying lessons to a pilot group he belonged to. We had dinner a few times, and I think I flew with him, but it's all a blur, and I don't even remember now. After I got back to the U.S., he called me a couple of times and asked me to pick up an airplane part that he couldn't find or check out an airplane that he might buy. Stuff like that. I went back to Australia a few years later, and it was more of the same, except this time I stayed at his house for a few days when my teaching was finished, and he took me sailing on Sidney Harbor before I left.

He's a big Viking of a red-headed guy about my age. Big laugh, loud voice. He is just bursting with energy, and there does not seem to be a gloomy bone in his body. When I met him at the airport I said, "I can't believe you came all the way out here to help look for Martin."

He slapped me on the back and said, "No worries, mate. We can't leave the lad bobbing around in the ocean forever, now, can we?"

Our plan is that starting tomorrow, we are going to fly out over the search area and look for Martin. We are going to be concentrating on an area about two hundred miles south of Niue, which is about six hundred miles west of here, so it's a twelve hundred mile round trip to get to and from the search area. We could simply go to Niue, but we are going to be swapping pilots, with Ray going out some days and me on others. And I want to be here with the family when I'm not out flying. Besides, Jack may want to go along.

Stephanie just came by and invited Ray and me over for an early dinner. Once Ray wakes up, this is going to be a busy day. We are planning to do a search flight

tomorrow, and that means leaving at or before sunrise, and we've got to get the plane serviced and ready to go today. I can see the intensity building, so I'm just going to lay low and charge up my batteries, so to speak

I've been sitting out on the porch reading through Martin's book and listening to his first album. I never had a brother, and I'm interested in the way things were between Jack and Martin. I've just read a section of the book dealing with a big wrestling tournament in May of 1968. Jack was a senior at LSU at the time, and Martin's "Who Done It?" had just reached number one on the charts.

I could quote from Martin's book, but I'll just tell you how I "see" the events of that day after reading Martin's account. The usual cautions apply.

Martin sat with Flo and Stephanie in the bleachers of the Hoyt Sports Complex in Baton Rouge. He wrote that he felt like a time traveler. The last time he had been in this building was four years earlier in 1964, in a previous life, when he was a baseball star at LSU. The building seemed familiar, and yet so much had changed for him since 1964 that he seemed to be seeing it for the first time. Back then he had come to watch a basketball game, and those who had recognized him—the baseball fans, boosters, and students—had treated him with a friendly deference. Now with the single "Who Done It?" at the height of its popularity, most people recognized him, and as they walked by in the aisle below, they thought nothing of simply stopping and staring at him as if he were a public sculpture. And just as with a public sculpture, some liked what they saw and some didn't. The endless intrusion of strangers, whether friendly or unfriendly, put Martin on edge.

And it didn't help that Flo and Stephanie were so tense they couldn't sit still. The three of them had come to see Jack wrestle at the South East Conference Team Championships.

Flo leaned toward Martin and said, "When Jack wrestles, I think it's harder on me than it is on him. By the end of the day, every muscle in my body is tighter than a

fiddle string, and I've got a headache that is worse than any hangover you ever had. I used to stay home and let your Dad go to the matches, but I guess I can't do that now."

Stephanie put a cold sweaty hand on Martin's forearm, leaned toward Flo, and said, "God, I know. I've got to pee about every ten minutes. Watching baseball was mostly fun and relaxing, sitting there in the sun munching peanuts and waiting for something to happen. But this is tense."

Martin closed the program he had been reading and looked out at the wrestling mats on the gym floor. "According to Jack, he shouldn't have trouble with anybody until he meets the guy from Alabama, Stan Britton, probably in the finals. Look at the picture of this guy. Would you want to wrestle him?"

The lights dimmed and a spotlight shone on the large central mat. The announcer said, "Ladies and gentlemen, we are about to begin the team warmups for the 1968 SEC Team Championships. First on the floor tonight are the LSU Fighting Tigers led by team captain and All-SEC one hundred and ninety pounder Jack Landry."

Lloyd Price's "Stagger Lee" came up loud on the PA, and a spotlight moved to the door under the far bleachers. Fifteen hooded figures jogged in line through the door and out onto the mat. The timing and spacing worked out so that the leader, Jack, just closed in behind the last man after the first lap around the mat. They jogged around the mat in time to the music. It was a sinister, otherworldly sight to see these athletes, faces hidden, moving like leopards in time to the music. It made the hair stand up on Martin's arm.

On command from Jack, the team began running in a sideways shuffle step, crouched low, facing outward toward the crowd. They radiated menace, strength, fearlessness, and agility. On command, they turned inward and continued the circling shuffle. Jack called it "the ballet of balls," and said other teams found this sort of thing so unnerving they would never watch it. But Jack, of course, loved it. "Best part of the sport," he would say. "Skip the wrestling if you have to, but don't miss it when we come through that door."

The wrestling started with the lightweights. Jack drew a bye, meaning he did not have to wrestle in the first round. Martin, Stephanie and Flo squirmed for two hours before Jack's first match.

Jack drew Don Lynd from Ole Miss, and it was obvious from the first few seconds that Jack had the match under control. Lynd was shorter than Jack and very strong, but Jack was amazingly quick. He could shoot in, grab one or both of Lynd's legs, and bring him down almost at will. Each time he did this, he scored two points. His strategy was to take Lynd down for two points and then let him up, which gave Lynd one point. If Jack got the advantage on the takedown, he might make a few extra back-points. Lynd's strength couldn't change the outcome. Jack won 14 to 5.

Flo had watched enough wrestling over the past few years to know what was going on, and at the end of the match she put her hands over her heart and said, "If only they could all be that easy."

An hour later Jack wrestled Paul Scoville from Georgia. Scoville was a 190 pound running back at Georgia, and he was nearly as quick as Jack. Jack had wrestled Scoville before and always won. Jack couldn't use the same strategy with Scoville that he used with Lynd, because Scoville was quick enough to get take-down points against Jack. This time the wrestlers spent most of the match pushing each other around on the floor trying to get back-points or win with a pin. At the start of the third, and last, two-minute period it was tied six all.

Martin, Flo, and Stephanie nearly swooned from the tension, each injecting body English with every move on the mat. Stephanie spoke through her hands and said, "God, if he loses at this point he might not even get into the medals." Martin couldn't look away to speak.

As the third period progressed, Scoville began to slow down and weaken. He wanted to stay away from Jack and rest, waiting for an ideal opportunity. But Jack ran the river levees year-round and was an aerobic monster, he didn't fade in the third period.

Jack hadn't lost a match in the third period in the past three years. He could feel Scoville weakening, and that just gave him the energy to push even harder. With thirty seconds to go, Jack rolled Scoville on his back and pinned him. This put Jack in the finals against Stan Britton.

There was a two hour break between the semi-finals and the finals. Flo and Stephanie looked drained. They stood and stretched. Stephanie said, "We've got some time to kill, what do you want to do?"

Flo grabbed Martin's hand and pulled him to his feet saying, "Let's just get out of the noise for a little while. Maybe take a short ride and get something to eat."

Stephanie hugged Martin and said, "Great idea. You won't believe it, but I'm dying for a burger from the Pit Grill. Let's get a bite and then just drive through the campus and see how things have changed. Marty and I haven't been here in years."

The sunlight and the peace outside did them all some good. As they passed the sorority houses sitting placidly on the lake, Flo said, "I wish your Dad would have lived to see this. He would have been so proud of Jack. I wonder if Jack is thinking about his Dad right now."

Steph reached up from the back seat and rubbed Flo's shoulder, "Sure he is, Flo. I am sure he is dedicating this match to his Dad."

"My guess is he is thinking a lot about Stan Britton right now," said Martin. "Maybe I ought to go back and talk to Jack some before the match."

Martin went into the locker room looking for Jack. He bumped into Coach Oliver, whom Martin knew slightly from his baseball days. With a cold, direct stare, Coach Oliver said, "If you're looking for Jack, he's probably jogging and stretching out on the track, trying to stay loose. I am surprised to see a peace freak like you down here with these warriors. Kind of far from home, ain't you?"

Martin was opposed to the war, but he was not a pacifist. At least a little of



the same hot blood flowed in Martin's veins as flowed in Jack's. In his book he wrote that he felt an impulse to grab the coach's neck and slam him into the wall, but he didn't. Some fights were worth getting into, and some weren't. He ignored the jab and said, "Thanks, coach."

He found Jack jogging easily on the track. Martin stood to the side and waited for Jack to come around the track. "How you feeling, man?"

"Like I'm going to rip that fucker Britton's head off. Like I'm going to tie him in a knot and squeeze the breath right out of him."

Martin smiled and shook his head. "Confidence is a good thing."

Jack walked off the track toward the bleachers. "I tell you what, bro', if I thought I was going to get whipped, I would get whipped."

Martin followed Jack. "Are you nervous?" He realized immediately that he'd asked a stupid question. He wrote that he never knew what to say to Jack about his wrestling. Not being a wrestler himself, he felt he hadn't earned the right to say much of anything.

Jack turned around and winced. "What do you think?"

Martin acknowledged the stupid question with a shrug of his shoulders. "Good job with Scoville, Jack. You really looked strong."

Jack turned around to look at Martin. He jogged backwards as he talked. "It's usually like that with football players. They can be real tough. Very physical. Very strong. But they usually train for a burst of power every few minutes, and wrestling is not like that. A lot of times they come out and shoot it all in a big explosion of energy, and if you don't get nailed in the first period, you come back and smear them. I can hang in there. What I've got is I'm quick, and I'm in better shape than most of these guys, and that shows in the third period."

"What's the scoop on Britton?"

Jack started dancing from foot to foot. Shadow boxing, looking at the sky.

“This guy’s something else. Kind of a red-neck anomaly. He’s pretty quick, strong as an ox, and he runs a 4:30 mile, so he’s not likely to run out of bullets in the third period. He’s also a mean son of a bitch. He got a roughness warning in a match this morning for throwing his elbow into a guy’s face. Britton is not going to hand this to me for sure.”

Jack turned and walked over toward the bleachers. Martin followed him, saying, “I remember when Dad use to take me aside before a baseball game and tell me to just go out there and have fun. It’s just a game, and so on.” He looked across the track at the busses in the parking lot. The ‘Bama bus had “Tame the Tigers” written on the side. He turned back to Jack and said, “What did Dad used to tell you before a big wrestling match?”

I think it’s fascinating that Martin wrote about this in his book. He wanted to probe the relationship between his brother and his father. He was aware of the differences between his relationship and his brother’s, and he wanted to clarify the issue.

Jack sat down straddling the bench, facing Martin. He extended his leg on the bench and stretched. “Wrestling is a little different, isn’t it? It’s not like, ‘Go out there and have fun.’ After all, the other guy is trying to rip your arm off. You know what he used to say? He’d say something like, ‘I admire your courage.’ He’d say, ‘In my mind you win just by showing the guts to walk out there and do battle with that other guy. One on one. No excuses. No help from your teammates. Everybody watching.’ He’d say, ‘I know you’ll go out there and give it everything you have, because that’s the kind of person you are. The way I see it, you win every time.’ He’d say stuff like that. And he was dead serious. Even when I wrestled as a kid, he talked to me before a match more like I was an equal than like I was his son.” Jack got a far-away look. “It was weird, man. I loved it when I looked up into the stands after a match and saw him standing there.”

Martin looked at his hands, “Heavy shit, man. Yeah, this is way different than baseball. I’ve got to tell you, I’d have never had the guts to do what you are doing. Dad was right. You’ve already won.”

Jack smiled and gave Martin a little push, “Eight teammates, and you still

needed a bat. See, I always told you.”

Martin stood up and squeezed Jack’s shoulder. “Well, you are different, man, and you are tough. And I got to tell you, I admire you, too. What more can I say?”

Jack pulled his hood up over his head and stepped back onto the track. “I’ve got to stay loose, bro’. See you in an hour.”

As Stan and Jack stepped onto the mat, the announcer said, “Stan Britton is a senior from Alabama. His record this year is 26 and 1. He is graduating in Agricultural Economics and plans to work on the family farm.” The Alabama side went wild, and several of the LSU fans made “mooring” noises. Stan scratched his forehead with his middle finger in a thinly disguised gesture. The announcer continued, “Jack Landry is also a senior. His record is 25 and 0. He is graduating from LSU in Mechanical Engineering with a 3.6 GPA and then heading off to Officer Candidate School as his first step to becoming a Naval Aviator.” Jack hopped up and down as the crowd roared.

The referee called the two to the center of the mat. They shook hands, the referee blew the whistle, and the match began. The two crouched and circled for just a second before Stan shot in and grabbed Jack’s right leg just above the ankle and raised the leg to his chest. Flo covered her face with her hands. Jack hopped on one leg trying to keep his balance, but Stan tripped him. Jack landed on his hands with Stan still holding the leg. Stan went to Jack’s waist and the referee signaled two points for Stan. The ‘Bama crowd screamed. Martin’s fists were clenched so tight a fingernail was cutting into his palm.

Jack got to all fours and then broke Stan’s grip and escaped with a rolling motion. That gave Jack a point. Stephanie said, “That ‘Bama guy is good.”

Martin nodded.

The two crouched and circled each other again. Stan was pushing on Jack’s head and face, while Jack was batting his arms away. “Is that legal?” Stephanie asked.

Martin, not taking his eyes off the mat, said, “Only up to a point. They can’t

really hit each other, but he's pushing the limit."

Stan faked an arm to the head and shot in again for Jack's ankle. This time Jack was ready, and he darted backward and spread his legs, grabbing Stan from over the top. They hit the mat with Jack on top holding Stan's torso, and Stan holding Jack's right leg just below the butt. They each tried to maneuver into a better position, but the period ended before any further points could be scored. It was Stan 2 and Jack 1.

The referee flipped a coin to see how the next period would start. Jack won the toss and selected bottom. He got down on all fours, and Stan positioned himself above him. The referee blew the whistle and Jack tried to stand up. If he could get free from Stan, he would get a point. But Stan knew the tricks and hung on. Twice they ended up out of bounds with no points. Each time they returned to the center of the mat with Jack back on the bottom. On the third try, Jack exploded off the bottom and got a point. Stan seemed startled and frustrated. Jack turned instantly to the attack and brought Stan down and close to a pin as the buzzer sounded. The score was 6 to 2 in Jack's favor as the second period ended. Stephanie squeezed Martin's hand and muttered, "Come on, Jack. Come on, Jack."

Stan stalked around the mat like a caged Panther before he assumed his position on all fours on the bottom. Jack positioned himself above, and the referee blew the whistle to begin the final period. Stan was a blur of wildly swinging arms as the whistle sounded. His left elbow smashed into Jack's nose, and he twisted free for a point. The LSU crowd screamed about roughness and unsportsmanlike conduct, but the referee did not call it. Jack was clearly smarting from the blow to the nose, but he had been on the mat many times, and he knew how to channel pain into focus and intensity.

The two faced each other standing up. Stan was pushing at Jack's head as they danced in circles. Stan moved his arm up toward Jack's head one more time, and Jack grabbed the wrist and ducked down as he threw his other arm between Stan's legs. He dug his shoulder into Stan's stomach and lifted him just enough to be able to throw him off balance onto his back. Jack flashed from position to position trying to engineer a

pin, but Stan was too fast and too strong and got out of bounds. The referee awarded two points for a take-down and brought them back to the center. There were forty seconds left and Jack was ahead 8 to 3.

Stan took his position on the bottom. It was do-or-die for Stan. When the whistle blew, Stan got his feet under him, stood up, shoved with all his strength against Jack's hands and got free for a point. It was Jack 8 and Stan 4. Time was short. Jack did not want to make a mistake. He shot in and grabbed Stan's legs. Stan sprawled and stuck his left arm down between Jack's head and Jack's right arm. Stan brought his right arm outside of Jack's left and joined his hands. He had Jack's head and arm. He squeezed and twisted to break Jack's hold on his legs. Stan broke Jack's grip and swung him around onto his back on the mat. They were both laying face up, with Stan holding Jack's head and arm and with his back pressing into Jack's chest. Stan arched his back and pulled with every ounce of his strength trying to press Jack's shoulders to the mat for a pin. The referee signaled three points.

The score was eight to seven in Jack's favor, but if Stan pinned him, the score didn't matter. There were ten seconds left in the match. An eternity. Flo was peaking between her fingers. Martin was yelling, "Short time. Short time. Hold him off."

Jack arched his back holding his shoulders off the mat with his head, forming a tripod from his head to both feet. Every muscle in his body was involved. The tripod had to hold both Jack and Stan, who was crushing down on Jack's chest at the same time he was trying to pull Jack's head off the mat. Stan struggled to get his weight onto Jack's chest and force him down onto the mat. Stan's coach was screaming, "Look up! Look up! Pull his head up!" The crowd on both sides roared.

If Jack could hold his shoulders off the mat he would win, but the required effort was enormous. The referee was on the floor looking at Jack's shoulders. The crowd called, "5...4." One of Jack's shoulders went down. Flo dug her nails into Martin's leg. "3...2." The shoulder came back up. "1...0." Jack won.

The wrestlers went limp on the mat, Stan still laying on Jack. Jack shoved

him off and sprung to his feet. The crowd went nuts. Stan rolled over and got up. He tore off his headgear and threw it toward his coaches. Jack walked toward the center of the mat. The referee called Stan over to the center and made him shake Jack's hand, then the ref raised Jack's arm and turned him toward the cheering crowd. Jack raised his other arm and grinned up toward his family.

Martin, Stephanie, and Flo were on their feet clapping and yelling. They were in tears.

## The Lottery

Ray got up around noon, and we went right down to the airport to get the airplane serviced. We put enough fuel in it to go to the search area, fly a search pattern for three hours, then divert to Niue to refuel. Then we'd go back to the search area for three hours before heading home. This would make a thirteen or fourteen hour day. I am going to take the first flight, and it looks like Jack is going to go with me.

Ray and I just got back from having dinner with the family, and that was interesting. Now Ray is asleep again, but I'm a little too jazzed up at the moment. The weather is still not all that great in the search area, and I've got a big flight tomorrow. I may as well carry on with my project until I get sleepy.

So this evening I introduced Ray to everybody, and he gave the women a big hug and slapped the guys on the back. He'd picked up about a dozen Foster's Lagers, and it wasn't long before we were all sitting down at the beach listening to Ray go on about damn near everything—politics in Australia, politics in the U.S., flying the oceans, sailing, farming, crocodiles, sharks. "No shark problem in North Australia," he said, "the crocks eat 'em." We all needed a laugh, and Ray gave it to us. It was like we were suffocating and didn't know it, then Ray opened the window and we all had a breath. And with us about to start searching tomorrow, it just seemed like a new beginning.

Ray had a way of genuinely tuning into everybody and including us all in the conversation. He had a son Kevin's age, for instance, and he brought Kevin out in ways that I certainly hadn't been able to. He had him talking about cars, and girls, and sports, and college. In fact he invited Kevin to Australia to live at his house and go to school abroad for a year, and I wouldn't be surprised if that actually comes about. Ray is just that sort of guy. Full of energy. Full of life. Everybody liked him right off.

Ray also told us about how much fun he and Martin had in Australia. They

knocked around in Sidney and flew up and down the coast looking at boats. He said Martin's new boat was real nice. A fairly new Catalina 36 called The Ana-Ni'a. He said something in that name just about hypnotized Martin. Ray said Ana-Ni'a is the Tahitian word for the star Polaris, and Martin was all choked up about how weird that was, since you can't even see Polaris from Tahiti. Ray just shook his head and said, "I think the reason he bought that particular boat is 99% due to it's being named Ana-Ni'a, though it is a damned fine little boat." Martin's attraction to that name made pretty good sense to me. Ray didn't really know the background to this, but I didn't feel up to explaining it at the time. It had to do with our trip on The Spirit of Orion last month, and I'll get into that later.

Ray asked what we had been doing the past few days, and Kevin said, "Not much of anything really. Sitting around talking."

Kevin told Ray the story about Jack's high-school wrestling match against Austin Dupuit, and the way he told it cracked everybody up. In Kevin's version, Jack wouldn't let Austin up until the referee, both coaches, and about a dozen Jesuits priests pulled Jack off. Ray got a big kick out of that, and then he talked about how he tried wrestling when he was a freshman, but he quit to play rugby instead, because he'd rather get his nose broken than get twisted into a pretzel.

So Ray and Kevin got Jack to tell more wrestling stories, and I enjoyed listening to them, though I was preoccupied with the next day's flight, and I really didn't get into the conversation very well.

It was good to hear Jack go on about his wrestling again last night. I feel like maybe I'm beginning to get to know him, and I'm sure I'll know him a lot better when we get back from the flight tomorrow night, but I confess that I've always felt that there is a big divide between the guys our age who, like him, went to Vietnam, and the guys like me who didn't. I'd really like to go to sleep now, but I find myself thinking about this stuff, and sleep won't come.



As I see it, this divide is not about guilt. I don't feel guilty for not going to Vietnam. I agree with what Martin and a lot of other anti-war people used to say back then. The U.S. made a huge mistake when it let the French try to re-colonize Vietnam after the Second World War. The Vietnamese helped us fight against the Japanese in World War II. The Vietnamese were our allies, and they deserved to be free from the French. Of course they fought for their independence from the French after World War II. Of course they accepted help from whomever would give it, including their age-old enemies the Chinese. We would have done the same thing. Our alliance with France was immoral, and it put us on the wrong side of the later conflict. If we weren't in an international chess match with the communists, we'd have seen that more clearly. At any rate, I don't feel like I ducked out on my duty, I wish we'd all stayed home.

Still, I'm not sure why I should feel awkward around the veterans. Maybe it's because they paid such a terrible price for what they believed, and it's not good manners to tell someone who bought something that you think he paid too much.

Anyway I've been thinking ever since dinner about those days back in the late sixties when I was in college and the draft was breathing down my neck. I was thinking about how the lottery in 1969 changed everything for me, and the whole depressing draft episode came flooding back.

When I close my eyes I can remember it now as clearly as I can recall the shape of my own hands. As clearly as I recall the vacant stares of Donny's parents at the service. Maybe that's what age is all about. Knowing that all those years can collapse to nothing. As if time weren't real at all. As if time were the set for a play, and when the play is over, the set is taken down and everyone goes home with nothing but his own feelings for the drama. Time—nature's way of dragging out the inevitable.

I remember that I'd been distracted by it for weeks. Now it grew like a sound coming from a distance. Like a train that might hurdle by, or might smash me beyond recognition. I didn't know what I'd do, but I wasn't going to be part of that stupid war. Like Muhammad Ali, I didn't have any quarrel with the Vietnamese. I wasn't going to

jail, as if it were a crime to decline to kill or die for a confused theory of world order. I didn't want to run like a criminal across the border to Canada, even though it was only a hundred miles or so away. And the National Guard was full, bursting with the sons of the politically effective. So I waited for the draft lottery.

This was back in December of '69 when they put all our birthdays in a hat and started pulling them out one by one to see who would get drafted and sent to Vietnam. A sort of national rock/paper/scissors for the guys my age. Rumor was that if they didn't call your birthday before about the two-hundredth draw, you probably wouldn't be drafted. It was a tense night, to say the least.

I was living in Seattle with Beth, who is soon to be my ex-wife. We weren't married yet. She was twenty, and I was twenty-one. Those should have been great times for me. For both of us. Young love and all. But, like I mentioned in the last chapter, I had already managed to screw things up pretty good. I really didn't want to talk about it. Not back then. Not now, either.

We lived in a little house in the University district. She was a sophomore studying journalism, and I was a junior in math and physics. Back then I thought that if I could solve the mysteries of the four fundamental forces of nature, I would be able to see God's hands at work. Maybe make some sense of the randomness and bedlam all around me. This was before I became a night cargo pilot, and long before I started writing songs with Martin Landry.

I remember pacing around all day on the day of the lottery. Fidgety. Charged up like I had just stuck a dime in an electric outlet. But kind of numb, too. Everything seemed a little fuzzy. For some reason I had my friend and ex-roommate Donny Holcomb in mind all day.

It got dark early up there in the winter, especially when it was overcast, which it always was. Beth was in the kitchen making dinner. She was frying some pork-chops. I sat at the little table in the kitchen and tried to make conversation. "Did I ever tell you about the time Donny and I hiked up Mt. Deception?"

“So that’s it,” she said, still facing the stove, “you’re thinking about Donny.”

The meat sizzled like static on a field radio. I didn’t look, but I could see the blood boiling up out of the bones. “No,” she said, “I don’t remember you telling me about a hike with Donny.”

I was a doodler. Still am. I was sitting at that cheap little kitchen table drawing a cylinder inside a sphere. Adding little touches of shading, trying to make two dimensions look like three. It’s a question of perspective. Partly art, partly science. It was turning out pretty good. I stared into the sphere as I spoke. Trying to visualize how the shadows would look if the light came from above and to the right. “Well anyway, it was the summer after my freshman year, and we’d been sailing for a week over on the Hood Canal. We’d been watching the Olympic Mountains the whole time. Or maybe they were watching us. Anyway, at the end of the week we decided to hike up into the mountains. We did this quickie little camping trip where one day we walked up the Dosewalips River and then hiked about half way up Mt. Deception and camped out. The next day we went the rest of the way up the mountain and came back.”

Beth was opening a can of Campbell’s cream of mushroom soup. She turned to me for a second and said, “Yeah?” Then she turned back to the can and twisted the handle on the opener. She was like that—interested in other people, but practical, too.

“By the time we got back down to the Dosewalips after the climb on the second day, we were hot and sweaty and tired, and we started talking about how we’d jump in the river when we got down to it.”

She rinsed the can opener and put it away. “Sounds like fun,” she said.

“Well, as soon as we got there, Donny peeled off his shirt and his boots and he jumped into the water. We were at a place where there were big pools laying one after another in a sort of stair-step with little rapids and falls in between, where the water formed kind of a chute. The water was really flowing hard in those little rapids. Donny said, ‘Hey, watch this,’ and then he swam over to where one pool dropped through a rapid into another. He went into the rapid and the current just sucked him over the top

and into the white water. Kind of like a slide.”

“You two were like kids,” she said, “no doubt stoned out of your minds besides.”

I admit I used to smoke a little grass back then, but that didn’t last long. It seemed to give my brain legs of its own, and I didn’t usually like where it ran off to. “Probably,” I said, “I don’t know. But anyway, I was about to go in behind him. I saw his hand sticking up as he shot through the white water, and I treaded water waiting for him to pop out in the lower pool. Always a joker, I figured he’d hold his breath and come out somewhere unexpected. But he didn’t come to the surface for a scary long time. I swam to the side and ran along the shore up close to the chute. I could barely make him out in the boiling water. The river had him pinned, doubled over a submerged log with his back to the current. I could see his hands moving under the surface.”

She poured the can of soup over the pork chops and put them in the oven. For a moment she stood there with her back to me, stirring the meat around in the soup before she shut the oven door. She didn’t turn back toward me. After a moment I went on, “So as I scrambled toward him, he managed to push himself up enough that the back of his head broke the surface, and he could breathe in the little gap under the wave that formed over his head. But he was still pinned to the log by the current. I got to the shore and started wading out toward him, but I didn’t really know what I could do for him. By the time I got about thigh-deep in the water, I couldn’t keep my footing. The force from the current was way too strong. I took another step, and the current shoved me up against the same log. I was about four feet from Donny. The water was shallower where I was, so I wasn’t in as bad a spot as him, but I couldn’t move toward Donny. I couldn’t help him. He’d breathe and scream, and I’d struggle to move along the log toward him, but it was like a bad dream and I couldn’t move. I was fighting with every bit of strength I had, but I couldn’t move an inch. I can remember wondering if I was really trying hard enough. I couldn’t believe it was happening, and at the same time it was way too real. I kept thinking that people die like this. One minute they are having fun, and the next minute

it's all over. I could picture his dead body on the shore. People standing around. I don't know how long we hung there like that, but finally Donny came up a little higher and then shot over the top of the log into the pool. I managed to back up into slightly shallower water, and then I went over the top into the pool, too. We both swam up onto the shore and just lay there gasping. It was so close to disaster. I mean, the creator had him in his grip and then just let him go. Like a warning." I added a little shadow to the cylinder, and it seemed to take life within the sphere.

Beth turned around and leaned against the counter. She was wiping her hands on a dish-towel. I looked up at her for a second, then back at my doodling. She said, "How did he get out?"

"It turned out that Donny's foot was downstream from a branch on the log, and he couldn't get over the top of the log until he could work his foot over and upstream of that branch. We sat there shaking for about an hour, then got dressed and walked down the trail. We went over and over it."

Beth shook her head and turned back to the stove. She was wiping up where the grease had splattered. I said, "I felt so powerless to help him. I was so close, and yet I couldn't do anything. I had wondered if I really tried, but when we walked back I noticed I had a knot on my leg as big as a softball where the current had pushed me up against the log, and all my fingernails were broken and bleeding with pieces of the log jammed under the nails where I had tried to pull myself along. That day I saw how shaky our grip is on our normal lives, how we hang by a thread over any number of horrors, how quickly the wheel can turn. And how powerless we can be to help someone else."

I put down my pencil and pushed my sweaty hands back and forth over my thighs, drying them on my jeans. I stood up. "I don't know why I'm talking about that now. It just kinda hit me like a ton of shit out of nowhere."

"It's the draft lottery," she said. "Your spooked. Let's eat and clean up before it comes on."

So we had our little dinner. I don't know what we talked about. Maybe

Beth's schoolwork or something. I was kind of in a daze. But I remember sitting on the bed listening to the birthdays being read off. We sat there holding hands, listening to the radio. My stomach felt hot.

A gravely-voiced announcer recited the dates, "September 14...April 24..." We were waiting for August 30, and every time a date began with August, our sweaty grip tightened for a second.

Beth offered what she thought would be a bit of cheer, "Your horoscope for today says that you don't have to worry. Good things are afoot."

Astrology. What a crock of shit. We used to argue about it all the time, but I wasn't in the mood.

The minutes dragged by as the numbers were read. I sat there numb, looking aimlessly around that dreary little house. The brass waterpipe my mother brought back from Turkey sat coiled like a red snake on the shelf. She had given it to me with a wink, pretending not to know what it was for. Beside it was an eight by ten picture of Beth and me sitting on the porch at my parents' house. Beth on my lap. Big smiles. Happier times. Back before the shit passed through the fan. Behind us, in the background of the picture, the reflection of the sun was turning Puget Sound into molten copper. Beth's hair shone like strands of pure light over the darkness of Vashon Island. I looked over to the desk. I noticed the Herman Hesse book Beth was reading, left just so on the desk top. The dishes still sitting by the sink. All these things suspended in silence, waiting to see if I get run over by the Vietnam steamroller. I thought again about the fragility of all human arrangements. Our tenuous perch above the next horror. "This stupid fucking war," I said as if I were about to spit. "I am not dying so that asshole Nixon can claim peace with honor. Those old fucking men aren't playing geo-political chess with my life."

"December 4th...July 9..." The clock ticked on. There was no let-up to the tension. It didn't really matter whether my birthday were called first or fiftieth, either way the Selective Service was sure to come after me.

My eyes wandered over to my shirt, thrown across the cheap metal chair at

the dining table in the next room. I remembered picking out the shirt with Beth down by the old World's Fair site the previous summer. Back before Beth got the infection. Back before the doctor gave us the news that left us feeling so cold and weak. A lifetime ago already. I looked at the shirt and thought about how pathetic it is that we pay so much attention to the way we look. As if it made any real difference. "Sooner or later the U.S. is going to have to walk out of Vietnam," I said. "It might as well be now."

Beth took a sip of water and said, "They're at one hundred and eighty three, Joey. So far so good." She gave my hand a squeeze.

The radio droned on. "October 1...September 29..." A car screeched out front of our little house as it accelerated away from the stop sign by the bus-stop. "Asshole," I said.

As the announcer got past number 200 without calling August 30th, I thought I could feel a relaxing of the tension in Beth's hand. She gave little grips of encouragement with each new number. I closed my eyes, raised my free hand and gestured as if to say, "Not yet. It's not over yet."

Beth's grin widened as they went past number 230, and by 250 I suppose even I was smiling, but I remember I was still thinking about Donny. His memory, almost a presence, hung about me like a ghost.

At 300, Beth said, "See, I told you it would be okay."

I was afraid maybe they called my birthday already and we missed it, but when they announced August 30th on the 333rd drawing, she gave an all-knowing smile and opened her hands palms up as if she were a magician showing me that the egg had vanished.

I couldn't move. I just sat there mute on the bed. I'm not sure I really believed it. I took a long breath and let it out slowly. She took my hands and looked hard at me. The smile still on her lips, but a question in her eyes. "God, Joey, where *are* you? You don't even seem happy about this."

I shook my head slowly. I started to get up and then sat back down on the

bed. “I am. Really, I am. It’s a huge relief. It’s just that, I don’t know, the whole thing seems so strange. They pull numbers out of a drum. Some people live, some people die. But I’m glad, I’m *really* glad it turned out this way.” It was like I was reading someone else’s speech. I walked over by the window and just stood there looking out at the wet road.

Beth came over and put her arms around me. Head on my shoulder. Soft, red-blond hair that smelled like nothing else on earth. Like nuts. Like flowers. Like the ocean. She said, “Cheer up, Joey, you can quit thinking about the draft now. Re-join the human race.”

“Okay,” I said. I put my arms around Beth and slid my hands down over her hips. “Maybe I do need to think about something else for a few minutes.”

Beth eased me away and took a step back. I raised my hands, then dropped them at my sides. I tried to say something, but I couldn’t seem to form the words. Beth sat down and looked absently at my doodling, then over at the wall. I looked out the window again. I needed to get outside. I said I was going to walk down to the store and get a sixpack.

It was a dreary Seattle night. More than mist. Not quite rain. Colder than usual, my breath a silver plume that formed and disappeared. Formed and disappeared. I walked toward a streetlight. It looked like it was spraying down a greenish cone of not-quite-rain, like a giant misting overhead sprinkler irrigating the road with luminous water. I felt like an insect in a bizarre and godless greenhouse.

The convenience store was nearly deserted. “Three-thirty-three,” I said to the cashier when he asked. I picked up some beer and headed back. I don’t know why, but I crossed the road and came back on the other side. When I got across from the house, I didn’t want to go in yet. I sat at the bus-stop and just looked across the road at the house. Every now and then a car swished by. I couldn’t quit thinking about my ex-roommate, Donny.

Crazy Donny who got the blues after he screwed the sad little prostitute on



that weird spring-break trip to Mexico. Crazy Donny who came from a beautiful little town called Brinnon over on the Hood Canal, thirty miles west across Puget Sound, but many hours away from Seattle on the roads that wound around through Tacoma and Olympia. He used to say that he was part Native American. Sometimes Issaquah. Sometimes Spokane, as his moods changed. And with his straight black hair and dark eyes, who knows? I remember one wild night he was a Cheyenne. He used to wink and say he was one-third Indian, knowing that simple arithmetic wouldn't allow it. I used to think that was mathematically impossible, being one-third Indian, but we got stoned one night and he explained it to me. I don't remember how he did it, but I know now that it can be done.

I was thinking again of the summer after our freshman year, when we sailed the Hood Canal for a week in my Dad's boat. Who could forget? Sparkling clear weather. Music blaring from the eight-track with the boat heeled over in the fresh afternoon wind. Gray rocky beaches. Islands dense with cedars and firs. Beer flowing. Magic mushrooms one day at anchor in a deserted cove. Mystical grass.

And "the twins." Oh, yeah, I'm sure I smiled when I thought about the twins. It makes me smile now. Angie and Gwen. Two Brinnon girls. Friends of Donny's, who looked like sisters, but weren't. Just out of high-school. I sat there at the bus-stop remembering Angie taking me by the hand and leading me down into the cabin for delirious, hypoxic sex and then back on deck on a rare warm night to lay sweaty and naked beneath a jillion stars. Donny and I pretended we couldn't tell the twins apart, and after while the twins played along and claimed they couldn't tell me from Donny. It became a free for all.

Donny made a game out of it. He was magic that way. He'd bring down the sails and say, "Who wants to play the horny princess and the cabin boy?" All hands shot up. People always wanted to be part of his games. The possibilities seemed unbounded.

I sat at the bus-stop and remembered laying on my side on the bunk next to Gwen one night, my head propped up in my hand, absently rubbing her naked back and

watching a disk of light move through the cabin as the moon shone through a porthole and the boat swayed gently in the small swells. The disk would stretch and warp as it floated up her legs, climbed over her perfect ass, and then moved back down her legs again.

“Topologically equivalent,” I’d said.

She raised her head and looked at me. “What?” she said.

“If you move the projection of a disk around on a smooth surface, what you get is still topologically equivalent to the disk,” I said. Those were my early egg-head days.

She must have thought I was some sort of freak, but she rolled onto her back and smiled as she watched the light caress her, sliding up to her navel and back to her feet. Then she took my free hand in hers and drew it slowly up her stomach and across her breast to her face. As if I were blind and she wanted me to “see” her. “Are you okay?” she asked. Her eyes looked like melted chocolate, dark and bittersweet, with a little flame in the center. I thought her eyes said, “Turn off your head and kiss me.” And I did.

During the day, when the others were distracted, I’d slip into the cabin and play my guitar. Finger-picking Beatles songs, quiet as a mouse. Donny knew three chords and could entertain for hours doing raunchy improvisations of Dylan and Neil Young. “Everybody must get boned,” he’d sing. We’d all laugh and sing along.

Two days before I sailed back to Seattle, Donny and I set out to climb Mt. Deception. Like I said, we hiked up the trail along the Dosewalips River, waded across Deception Creek and went up the switchbacks toward Gray Wolf Pass. We camped in a clearing beneath a meteor shower, talking, as sophomores do, about the meaning of life. Clueless, but not yet too “mature” or shell-shocked to express our wonder. The next morning we set out for the summit of Mt. Deception. Donny ran most of the way, waiting and ambushing me as I trudged up the trail, then sprinting off again toward the top. He was indefatigable. Lighter than air.

We stood at the summit in a cold west wind, turning in silence to all points on the compass. Etching into our memories the incredible view of the dark islands of the Sound laying still on the mirrored water far below and to the east. And the Olympic mountains standing shoulder to shoulder, outside the flow of human time. Olympus, home of the mythical gods.

Donny ran a 4:18 mile as a senior in high-school and went to the U. of W. on a track scholarship. He lost interest in “running around in circles,” as he put it, and quit track after one season. A year later he lost interest in school and flunked out. He was in Vietnam within six months. I got a letter. Donny said that he realized he’d made a huge mistake, and when he got back he was going to get serious about school and work on a teaching credential. Maybe we’d live together again.

Two months later a small group stood around his casket in an indifferent Brinnon rain. A lot like the rain at the bus-stop that night all those years ago now. I was haunted by the vacant expressions of Donny’s parents at the service. Like their insides had been torn out. Their living parts removed. Like fish who had stopped flopping at the bottom of the boat and sucked reflexively at air they knew could not sustain them.

I saw Beth at the window, but I couldn’t move. I sat in the rain at that bus stop until I was soaked and cold. After while I got up and walked across the shiny wet street. Back to the little house.

# Crayfish

My back is killing me. My eyes are burning. Jack and I just spent fourteen hours in that little airplane, with just an hour break in Niue. Most of the search area was covered with a mid-level cloud deck. The sun was in hiding. The sea was gray and choppy. There were whitecaps everywhere, and we were looking for a white boat with a white sail. There were a couple of times when we thought we saw something a mile or so away, but nothing ever materialized.

When we got back I dropped Jack off and came straight back to my house. I got down on the floor and had Ray take off his shoes and walk all over my back. One of those weird mixtures of pain and pleasure. I'm really burnt out, but too wired to go right to sleep.

Jack and I had a lot of time to talk. We talked about Martin, and we talked about Stephanie and Kevin and Flo, and of course we talked about flying. He told me about how his first flight with Martin had got him hooked, and I asked him about his flight training in Pensacola. It turns out he had a vague recollection of seeing a film on ditching an airplane at sea, and I told him that it was my father who flew the airplane into the water for the film. He thought that was pretty cool.

Jack talked at length about how Martin tried to keep him from joining the Navy. I talked to Martin about that too, and Martin wrote about an incident in New Orleans when the issue really came to a head. It was a crawfishing trip the two of them made in June of 1968, not long after Jack's big wrestling match.

Martin and Stephanie went down to Louisiana in the summer of '68 for Jack's graduation from LSU. They went to Baton Rouge for the ceremony and then back to New Orleans for a few days. Early in the morning on the day before they were to return to L.A., Jack and Martin set out to perform an ancient family ritual. They loaded

the car with a bunch of nets, a bag of frozen chicken necks that Flo had accumulated, two gunny sacks, and an ice chest full of beer. Then they drove into the gathering dawn toward Bayou Piquett to get some crayfish.

Sitting in the sun on the bank of the bayou, they drank beer as they fasted the chicken necks into the weighted nets. Then they waded out into the muddy water to drop them off every few yards. Martin said he hated this part. He hated not knowing where he was putting his feet in the chest-deep water. He hated the muck that floated everywhere. But most of all he feared an encounter with a water moccasin. The snakes were all over in this water, and every now and then he would see the wiggling head leading V-shaped wake. It made Martin's skin crawl.

Jack knew about Martin's fear, but he didn't share it. In fact he enjoyed kidding about it. When they were thirty feet from shore, Jack called to Martin and pointed to an approaching snake. It was cruising in their direction. If it stayed on course, it would first pass near Martin and then Jack. Martin froze. His skin felt prickly and cold. Time slowed to a crawl. Jack dropped his nets and brought his arms out of the water. The snake passed about two feet from Martin and moved toward Jack. When it came up next to Jack, Jack's right arm shot out and he grabbed it behind the head in a lightening fast motion. Jack held the wiggling snake up high for a second and then swung it around like a lasso until he could feel the spine break. Then he threw it into the bayou thirty yards away and howled like a banshee.

When Martin told me this story, he said he nearly fainted. He dropped his nets and walked toward shore. "That's its, cowboy. You can fuckin' finish this one on your own. I'll get a beer and watch."

"You fuckin' pussy," said Jack. "Don't you know you're more likely to be struck by lightning than bit by a snake."

"Yeah, but I don't go around grabbing lightning rods in a storm, asshole. You do it, if it turns you on. I'm getting a beer."

So Jack finished spreading the nets and then waded ashore and stood grinning

over Martin. Martin wouldn't look up. He handed Jack a beer, and Jack sat down.

Martin knew it was coming—some variation on the baseball players are sissies theme. Sure enough. “How can such a pussy have been a big league hero, man? I don't get it. Maybe you should have wrestled instead of playing baseball. Then maybe you'd have some guts. What a weird sport. You got eight team mates and you still gotta use a bat. You ought to walk out on the wrestling mat sometime and see what it's like. All by yourself except for some fuckin' gorilla who wants to break you apart. It's good for the soul, Martin. No shit, you could use it.”

Martin changed the subject. “Did I ever tell you about the guy I knew at LSU? His name was Gaston. He used to work out here checking lines for the phone company. I asked him if he ever got bit by a snake, and he said he got half-bit once. He said he used to cruise through the bayous in a forty mile-an-hour pirogue checking out the lines with this crazy machete-wielding Cajun steering in back. Whenever this Cajun saw a fuckin' snake, he'd steer the boat over by the snake and cut him in half with the machete. One time when he chopped a snake, the front end of the snake came flying out of the water and landed on Gaston's lap. The fuckin' snake was going ape-shit snapping at everything in sight. That's how he got bit by half a snake.”

“So if Gaston was a real hero, he'd have caught the motherfucker behind the head and tossed him back onto that crazy Cajun. He who moves slow becomes a victim. He who is paralyzed by fear is without power.”

And so on. After three or four beers, Jack waded back out and retrieved the nets, which each held a few crawfish gnawing on the chicken necks. They put the crawfish in the gunny sacks and then into the ice chest for the drive home.

By the time they left the bayou they were getting hungry, and they decided to pick up something to eat on the way home. About half way back to New Orleans, and still out in the country, they pulled into a clam-shell paved parking lot in front of a rundown little store that sold beer and bait and po-boys, which are sandwiches made with the local French bread.

While they were waiting for their po-boys to be made, a rusty old truck pulled into the parking lot and a porcine, semi-toothless woman of about thirty got out of the passenger side and came into the store. She had matted brown hair, dirty clothes that pointed every which way, and a fearsome black eye. She brushed passed the brothers trailing an aroma that reminded Martin of a very old rope he had found in a locker on The Orion. When she got barely out of earshot, Martin leaned over toward Jack and muttered, “I could ask her if she’s got a sister. What do you say, bro’?”

Jack watched the woman walk by. He didn’t laugh at Martin’s remark.

When the po-boys were finished they took them up to the clerk by the door to pay, and they stood there idly looking out the window as they waited for the clerk to finish a phone call. They could see the silhouette of a stocky man sitting in the driver’s side of the truck. All that was clearly visible was his plump, tattooed arm resting on the door holding a cigarette. Now and then the arm would swing out of sight inside the truck, and then smoke would pour out the window. Martin was singing softly, “Well, they said you was high class, but that was just a lie.”

Martin got his change from the cashier and picked up the po-boys. As they opened the door, the arm flicked the lit cigarette onto the porch.

Walking through the door on their way out, Jack said, “Fuckin’ smokers. They think the whole world is their ashtray.”

Jack bent over and picked up the cigarette. He walked up to the truck window and tossed it into the cab onto the man’s lap. “Hey, chief, I think you dropped this.”

And then he just stood there looking into the truck. Waiting.

“Son of a bitch, you fuckin’ peckerwood!” The arm shot into the truck and the cigarette came flying back out.

Jack put his feet apart slightly and dropped his hands. Still staring into the truck.

The arm came out the window again and went to the door handle. The truck door opened and a sweating, oily-haired man got out. He was fifty pounds overweight

and his beer gut hung out of the bottom of his shirt over his belt.

He took a step toward Jack, saying, “What the *fuck* do you think you’re doing?”

Jack didn’t move.

The man stopped and looked at Jack.

Jack radiated confidence. And menace. He wiggled his fingers and the muscles in his upper body danced under his skin like puppies under a blanket. Jack said, “Just cleaning up around here some. Trying to keep America beautiful.”

The man said, “I’ll do some cleanin’ up of my own, motherfucker. I’ll mop this place with you.” But still the man didn’t move forward.

Martin never knew what kind of hornets’ nest Jack would kick over. His mind raced, searching for a way to short-circuit the escalating scene. Turning toward the man he said, “You really don’t want to fuck with this guy, mister. And you definitely don’t want to fuck with both of us.”

The man looked over at Martin and paused for a second.

Then he lunged toward Jack.

Jack ducked a swinging right hand and stepped to his left as the man skidded past him and fell in a cloud of chalky clam-shell dust. The man got to his feet and rushed toward Jack again, head down as if he were going to tackle him. Jack backed up and stepped right, and as the man shot past, Jack gave him just enough of a push to send him into the shells again. This time the man got up slower. His stomach was heaving up and down with his rapid breathing. He winced from a cut on his palm that was bleeding.

Jack backed up about ten feet, so now the distance between him and the man was maybe twenty feet. The man let out a roar and ran toward Jack again, but the man’s legs were getting rubbery, and this time he tripped and fell into the shells about five feet before reaching Jack. He lay there breathing like he’d just come up from two minutes under water. Between gasps, “You chickenshit motherfucker.”

Backing up another fifteen feet, Jack said, “You fight your way, I’ll fight



mine, you fat shit. I could do this all day. Could you?"

The man staggered to his feet and ran at Jack, but fell face down again as Jack stepped to the side at the last second and gave him a shove. But this time Jack was on him like an alley cat on a rat. Jack stuck his knee in the man's back and grabbed his right arm, pulling it behind the man's back. He pushed the man's wrist toward the back of his head, and then pinned the hand there with his knee. Shoving the man's head into the shells with both hands.

The man groaned. Jack tightened down and said, "Now tell me you're not gonna throw your cigarette butts around anymore."

The man breathed hard but wouldn't answer.

Jack grabbed the man's hand and forced it closer to his head and then put his knee on the back of the man's neck.

"Okay, okay."

The woman came out of the store and stood silently on the porch. Orange striped shirt over gray checked pants. Dirty bare feet.

"And tell me you're not going to hit your old lady anymore either."

The man could barely speak. "Did that bitch go in there and tell you that?"

"No, she didn't. But I've got eyes, you ugly piece of shit."

Jack crunched down hard one last time and stood up. The man's arm flopped down to his side. He followed Jack with his eyes, but otherwise he didn't move. Jack walked over to the truck and grabbed the keys. He motioned Martin into the passenger side of their car, and Jack jumped in behind the wheel. The man was getting up slowly as Jack started the car. He leaned out the window and said, "I'll leave your keys on the white line down the road a ways. The exercise will do you good." And off they went.

Martin was beside himself, "Jesusfuckingchrist, man, how did you know that guy wasn't going to rip your fuckin' head off?"

Jack was breathing hard from the adrenaline rush, "Like you said, he sure

wouldn't want to fuck with both of us." He laughed and slapped Martin on the shoulder, "Man, I don't think I ever heard you talk so tough. Were you really going to jump into it, if it got bad?"

"I was *trying* to get the guy to *forget it* and get back in his truck, man, I don't know. We could have got creamed."

Jack stopped the car, opened the door, and set the keys on the white line. "You've seen too many fights in the movies, bro', where they bash each other around for ten minutes. I train all year for six minutes on the mat. Fighting is about the most physically demanding thing you can do, and I know damn well no fat shit is going to get out of his truck and last more than thirty seconds with me. I just let him wear himself out and then pounced on him."

Martin shook his head and smiled. "Ever hear of over-confidence? What if the fucker had a gun? And what was that shit about beating his wife?"

"Didn't you see her, man, *somebody* was beating on her."

Martin came unglued. "How do you know that? Maybe she walked into a fucking door. Maybe that guy was her brother, and he was trying to help her out. Jesus, you didn't know any of that."

Jack looked over at Martin and grinned. "Yeah, well, looks like I was right though. He who hesitates doesn't do shit."

Martin opened a beer and passed it to Jack. "Please, brother, next time you want to save the world, keep me out of it."

Jack took a long drink and pushed down on the accelerator.

Stephanie remembers when Jack and Martin came back home. She told me about it when she was over here the other day. I've never seen a crawfish boil, but from the way she described it to me, it was a real ritual. A twenty gallon aluminum pot was filled with water and put on a steel stand over a large propane burner in the back yard. Into the water went several pounds of salt, onions, potatoes, garlic, and an exotic complex

of strong seasonings called Zatarains's "crab boil." All this was cooked like a scalding soup while the crawfish were prepared.

There were maybe forty pounds of crawfish in the dripping gunny sacks. Martin and Jack filled a big aluminum washtub with water and added several pounds of salt. Then together they picked up the sacks and poured the crayfish into the water.

Stephanie knew that Martin had been wanting to talk to Jack about Jack's decision to go to Navy flight school, but he was afraid of getting into an argument and spoiling the mood of the crayfish trip. But time was running out. Stephanie sat on the back steps and watched the scene unfold.

Martin stood up tall, stretched his back and said, "So you're going to do this thing, you're going into the Navy?"

The idea was that the saltwater would make the crayfish sick. It would purge them. They would throw up and get diarrhea, and when that was done, Martin and Jack would rinse them off before tossing them into the boiling pot. Clever.

"That's right." Jack said, "First week of July, four weeks from now."

Most of the crayfish were still very lively, and they scurried around in the water. The dead ones tended to float up or lay out flat with their tails extended. The brothers started picking out the dead ones and tossing them in a garbage pail.

"You'll end up in Vietnam. You know that."

Jack stopped picking out dead crayfish and looked straight at Martin saying, "I know what you think about this war, but it's my country...and yours. They're callin'. I gotta go."

Martin looked straight back at Jack. "Vietnam? That's your country? I didn't--"

"Don't be an asshole, Martin," said Jack. He looked back at the tub and he resumed picking out dead crayfish. "Not if you can help it."

Stephanie knew that Martin didn't want to see this become an argument. He simply wanted to get his brother to change his mind. "Okay, okay. Let me start over.

People are getting killed there. It isn't our fight. The South Vietnamese government is corrupt. Their leaders are skimming off our aid. Most of the South Vietnamese won't even fight. They won't draft nineteen year olds. They call it 'America's war.' It isn't worth it. We should be building up the South rather than dropping bombs. For every Viet Cong we kill with a bomb, we create three more by pissing the rest of them off from all the destruction. Did you read that Bernard Fall book I sent you?"

Together they tipped the heavy tub and drained the salty water. Jack grabbed a hose and rinsed the crayfish, then they carried the tub over to the big pot of boiling water and began pouring in the live crayfish.

"You didn't hear me," said Jack. "*This* is my country. It's given me a lot. And you, shit, look at what you've got. Now my country is at war. It's asking me to go, and I'm going."

Jack took the tub from Martin and set it over by the hose. He picked up the beers and walked back to the boiling pot, handing Martin a beer. Martin looked at the now-pink crayfish rising to the surface of the boiling water. He moved out of the pungent steam. "The war is a mistake. Just because this country has given you a lot, it doesn't mean you need to jump in a fucking meat grinder whenever it asks you to."

Jack drained his beer. "Did you see what happened when the North Vietnamese went into Hue during the Tet Offensive? They executed about 3000 people—teachers, doctors, policemen. If we just walk out now, there'd be a bloodbath over there. Let me ask you something. If that big tattooed prick in the truck this morning had started kicking my ass, would you have jumped in?"

Martin thought for a second and then looked up. "Yeah, sure, I would have."

"But you thought the fight was a mistake, right?"

Martin exhaled slowly. "Yeah, I did."

"Well, bro', there you go. My brothers are getting beat up over there, and I'm not going to sit on my hands." Jack pressed on. "Do you think Dad should have stayed home from World War II like a chickenshit and let other people carry the load?"

Martin turned on the hose and started rinsing the tub. “Is that what it’s about, not being a chickenshit? Jack, you’re smarter than that. You know—”

Jack broke in, “Don’t you fucking *dare* give me that patronizing bullshit about how I’m smart enough to see it from your almighty perspective. I’m the one who got the academic scholarship, remember?”

Martin turned off the hose. He had lost. There was no point in going further. He didn’t want to slam a door between himself and his brother, but he was also convinced that the war was a mistake, and he emphatically did not want to lose his brother to it. Stephanie said that he was never one to let up in an argument, and she was nervous about how far he would push it with Jack. “What is it? You want to fly the Phantom, play with the F-4? You want to go a thousand miles and hour, land on a carrier, be shithot? Come to L.A. and fly my Bonanza. I’ll fucking *give* it to you.”

Jack dried his hands on his shirt. “There’s stuff you can’t buy, Martin. I don’t want your fucking airplane.”

Martin looked at the boiling pot, then back at Jack. “Don’t tell me you’re carrying my weight. You are not going there for me. I don’t want you there. I don’t want anyone there. *Fuck*, how can I say this? It isn’t worth your life. It isn’t worth anybody’s.”

Stephanie walked up with a couple of beers. Jack took them and handed Martin one, then the three of them stood together looking through the steam into the boiling crayfish. She said, “Think of all the times we’ve stood in this yard boiling seafood. Since we were little kids watching your Dad do it.”

Jack said, “I’ll be okay, guys, really. I’ve been in some tough fights. And you’re forgetting something here. The Selective Service will be after me. My student deferment is up. I’m not going to Canada. I’m not going to jail. I don’t have a bad knee like you supposedly do. What am I going to do? I sure as shit don’t want to go in the fucking Army. The National Guard is stuffed with politicians’ kids. This is my best shot. I’ll come out in four years, get an airline job, and start a long and distinguished career of fucking stewardesses.”

Flo was coming through the back door with a tray filled with corn and potatoes to throw into the pot. “Jack, what did I just hear you say?”

There was a time, not that long before, when uttering the word “fuck” would have created a class-A emergency in this household, but as Dylan had foreseen, the times they were a-changin’, and now Flo simply pretended she didn’t hear right.

Martin said, “Mom, I’ve just been trying to talk Jack out of getting into that war. You talk to him.”

She dumped in the potatoes and corn and said, “I wish you didn’t have to go, Jack. I wish you didn’t have to grow up at all. Both of you.” She looked around the yard. “God, we had it so good here. Sometimes I wonder if I knew it back then. But what could I do? You can’t stop time.”

The crayfish turned pink and floated to the top of the pot, and no one said anything for a long time after that.

## Even in the Rising Air

In spite of his frustrations, 1968 was a good year for Martin musically. That is when he began to find himself as a songwriter. Martin looked back on this as a golden time for him, and he wrote about it in his book.

I owed a lot to Brian King, and I really ought to be up-front about that, even though we're not the best of friends right now. I remember a crystal clear October day in 1968. I brought Brian out to The Orion and told him about my frustrations as a songwriter. It was starting to drive me nuts. It was like I was trying to tune into a distant AM radio station. Sometimes it would come in, and sometimes it wouldn't. Sometimes I'd get two good ideas in an hour, and sometimes I'd get nothing for a month. I was in the midst of a dry spell at that time.

Brian kept telling me stuff like, "Write about what's important to you right now. What do you care about, man? What's going on with you now?"

We got out of the harbor and got the sails up and I sat at the wheel and said, "I care about getting this fucking album project done. There are people, like Leon and Dan and Steph who are counting on me. I had one quick hit, now I need a whole album. Sometimes I wonder if I really fucked up leaving baseball. I mean, I love music, but I am taking a big chance here."

I turned fifty degrees to port, and the sails filled. That's always a cool moment in sailing. The sails give a little snap, and the boat leans over and gets into its thing. "There you go," said Brian, "write about that. Don't you think there is some universal appeal to your problem, don't you think everybody can relate to it? You would like to do this, you want to make it work, but you are afraid of the risk. Find some sort of image and go with it. Find the mood of the piece, and play it."

I looked up and checked the sails. “But that isn’t the kind of shit you hear on the radio.”

“Fuck that radio stuff. Take it from your heart.”

I let the boat run west and thought about what Brian was saying.

After fifteen minutes, Brian said, “Let’s furl the sails and bring out the guitars. I’ve got an idea.”

I turned The Orion into the wind and we started bringing down the sails. Brian got a guitar, and by the time I was finished with the sails, Brian was singing: “Even in the rising air/the hawk must spread her wings.”

I picked up a guitar and sat down. “This is new? Are you writing this now?”

“We are writing it. I’ll sing it again, you tell me what’s next.... Even in the rising air/the bird must spread her wings.”

I sang, “And fan her fragile feathers out/to soar above the kings.”

Brian grinned. “A little heavy on the alliteration, but okay. There you go. Take a chance. Sing it out. Take a risk. That’s it. How about a chorus that just pounds on that?”

I sang, “It’s a risk.”

Brian sang, “It’s a chance.”

I answered, “It’s a choice.”

Brian, “It’s a dance.”

“Just needs a couple verses now,” said Brian, “but we definitely have a new one here.”

“Fucking amazing, man. It’s not here, and then all of a sudden it’s here. Where does this shit come from, man?”

“Beats the hell out of me,” he said.

I patted The Orion’s deck affectionately, “It’s from the boat, man. The magic boat.”



“This is a cool boat alright. Good things happen on this boat.”

Little did he know that a couple of years later I'd gross his old lady out so bad on this boat that she never spoke to me again. In fact she almost left him for being dumb enough to bring her on the trip with me. (One Hit Wonder, pp. 178-179. Quoted by permission.)

And so it went. Every once in a while, a song would appear as if from nowhere, and Martin would go down to Pacific to record it. By early 1969 there were eight songs finished.

Ultimately, Dan and Brian contributed two of their new songs, and Martin's first album, entitled “Who Done It?,” was released in June of 1969. It was a pleasing gumbo of sounds and themes. There were the raucous, good time New Orleans sounds such as “I Like It Like That” given a new and modern hard-rock twist. There was the social commentary blended with raw energy of “Who Done It?”. There were hopeful, positive, life-affirming themes floating through rich melodies and harmonies over fingerpicked acoustic guitars.

The album came out to rave reviews and sold more than a million copies in the first six months. Klein insisted that Martin begin work on a follow-up, but Stephanie intervened and persuaded Martin to get away from the pressures for a while. They decided to sail The Spirit of Orion down to Baja.

## A Letter From the *USS Corregidor*

Here's a letter from Jack that Martin put in his book. I'll let it speak for itself.

Where ya at, Marty,

I bet you never thought you'd get a letter from me, but here it is.

Congratulations! Mom says you and Steph are going to be parents. I wonder if the world is ready for another Landry. Wow! It's really great news. She said the baby is due in December, is that right? I should be back soon after that. Uncle Jack. Who'd have ever thought?

Right now I'm sailing up and down the Gulf of Tonkin with 5000 of my best friends out here on the *USS Corregidor*, but I guess Mom has kept you up to date on that sort of thing.

Anywho, some of what goes on is kind of a kick in the ass. Like getting shot off the deck by the catapult. It's kind of hard to explain, but it's sort of like this. Imagine you're parked at a stoplight waiting for it to turn green, and you get rear-ended by a train going a 150 miles an hour. (Oh, and speaking of getting rear-ended, remind me to tell you about my little side trip to Thailand to visit the Air Farce. Maybe they ought to call that place ThighLand. hehehe.) Anyway, no shit, like I said, a cat shot is kinda like getting hit by a train. 0 to 150 in about two seconds. It's so cool. You taxi up to the cat and they hook you up. Guys running all around making sure everything's right. You bring the engines up to full power, and they pull the trigger on that cat. I'll tell you, you know you're going someplace. Maybe in the air, maybe in the ocean, but something big is surely going to happen. You is in the grip of a mighty force.

And this airplane, God I love it! You're going to have to get one of these when the war is over. No shit, at the end of WWII you could get a P-51 for

a thousand bucks. Think about it. Maybe we'll get two and go out over the ocean and dogfight. I'd wax your ass for sure. Hey, I gotta run. Duty calls. I'll add a little more when I get back.

Hey, bro', I'm back. Were you nervous? Got to admit that was kinda piss-ant. We dropped some bombs where somebody said he thought he heard that his cousin might have said that maybe there were going to be a couple of trucks. And then we went and shot some missiles at a little footbridge that Charlie can probably replace in a day or two, if they haven't already. I can't believe guys are getting killed for these targets.

On the way back to the boat, Mutt, my backseater, had a cool idea. He said our little raid probably cost the US taxpayers about \$300,000, and maybe if we offered Charlie \$100,000 they'd agree to tear down the bridge for a few days and blow up one of their trucks. Then we could all take the day off, nobody would get hurt, the taxpayers like you would get a break, and everybody'd be happy.

But seriously folks, what I'd really like to see is a change in targeting. I mean, tell me if this makes sense. We watch a boat sail into Haiphong carrying Soviet SAM missiles, and we can't touch it. Those are the rules. The only time we can go after them is when they are all set up and ready to fire at us. Then it's fair, I guess, I don't know. But I do know this, a lot of good people are getting killed going after chickenshit targets. DON'T quote me on that. I know you'd just like to see us come home right away. I'd like to see us kick ass for a while and win this thing. Then come home.

Shit, my hand is killing me. (No jackoff jokes, please.) I can't believe I wrote so much. So anyhow, I got the tape you sent and it sounds great. I do miss the music. Maybe when this show is over, I'll be able to get back into it. Tell Mom I wrote, she's always bugging me to write to you. And give your lovely wife one for me.

So long,

Jack

(One Hit Wonder, pp. 202-203. Quoted by permission.)

# Boulder

Once the result of the draft lottery was known, Beth and I could start making plans. I was going to try to get into graduate school in math, but would we stay in Seattle until Beth finished school, or would we move to my new school and have Beth transfer and finish there? Where would we like to go? When would we get married?

We decided to send out applications, collect our options and decide later. We applied to the University of Oregon, the University of Colorado at Boulder, and UC, Berkeley. Beth was accepted at all three, but I only got in to Oregon and Boulder.

We had never been to Boulder, so we drove there to check it out during Spring break. It was spectacular. The grass on the mountains was bright green and the sky a vivid blue. Huge rocks shot out of the ground dramatically at the edge of town where the rising Rocky Mountains had pushed up from the prairie. The town was small, prosperous, easy going. The campus sat beautifully at the base of the hills. It was an easy decision. On our last day there we hiked up Green Mountain and sat for hours looking out at the mountains and valleys to the west and the vast prairie stretching east.

Driving home, we decided on a small wedding in June and a move to Boulder in July.

Life in Boulder established a rhythm. I dove into my graduate math classes and worked a few hours per week teaching drop-in math labs, where undergraduates would come to get help with their classes. Beth studied journalism, worked on the school paper, and had a part-time job at a book store off campus. We didn't have much money, but if you had to be a broke student, Boulder was a great town for it.

When the days were long in Spring and Summer, I remember we would drive up into the foothills in the evening and watch the sun go down and the lights come on in the town below. Just like in my younger days high up in the cedar, I could sit on an

outcropping of rock for hours and silently absorb the panorama. Here I sit now doing the same thing, looking down the hill to the harbor in Avarua. Funny how some things change, and some things don't. Sometimes I'd go alone while Beth was at work or home reading a book or out to lunch with a friend. Sometimes Beth would sit next to me sipping cheap German wine. "There it is, Joey," she'd say, "the whole world at your feet. Just the way you want it."

Initially, the plan was for me to just do a masters degree, and then we would find a small town where I could teach in a junior college and Beth could work at the local paper. But the closer I got to finishing my masters, the more I heard about the dreary repetition of teaching low-level math classes in junior college. After a lot of discussion we decided to stay in Boulder until I completed my Ph.D. and then look for a teaching job in a small town with a four-year university. Beth graduated in 1972 and took a job at the local paper. I finished in 1974.

Thinking back to that time, I can see that something new arose in me during my graduate studies at Boulder—I developed a craving, a real passion, for scientific truth. The cold, deep, immutable, hidden truth. For what always was, is now, and ever shall be. The truth of math and physics. Things upon which a person could depend. Things beyond emotion. Beyond luck. Beyond control or responsibility. The validity of the Pythagorean theorem. The fact that pi could not be given as the ratio of two whole numbers. Newton's  $F = ma$ . Einstein's  $E = mc^2$ . These were the rocks upon which I struggled to build my new world. And to some extent at least, I can see now that these also became the boundaries, the fences for my world.

It got to where I couldn't understand how anyone else could have a passion for anything besides scientific truth. Everything else was too ephemeral. A mere illusion. An accident. We had friends studying law, and I would say to Beth, "I don't see how anyone could devote a life to learning a man-made code that could be thrown out tomorrow. There is no truth there. No permanence. No reality. No necessity. It's just a lot

of made-up crap.”

Beth would shake her head and look away. “They study that stuff because they think it’s interesting, and because they hope to use it to do something good with it.”

I’d say, “But *wonder* is the essence of the human condition. We need to wonder about the deep mysteries. About truth.”

She’d say, “Yeah, sometimes I wonder about you.” Maybe she hoped I would laugh, but I didn’t.

Friends who studied art and psychology especially mystified me. Why study how people *feel*, when it doesn’t matter anyway? I found these subjects a useless maze of opinion and subjectivism. They failed the truth test, so they must not be worthwhile.

She’d say, “Joey, there’s more to life than your philosophy. That’s just a set of thoughts, a string of words. Real life is deeper and broader.” I’d look back blankly. She’d throw up her hands, “I don’t know how to explain it, how to *prove* it to you. It’s feeling, it’s intuition. Where do you think you are going with this stuff? Lighten up, for God’s sake, and join the human race.”

I became almost completely absorbed in my search for the fundamental truths of math and science. I could talk for hours with the few people I found who shared my passion, but most of the rest of the human race gradually drifted out of focus. Including Beth to some extent. Her job at the paper put her dead center in the vortex of local political intrigue—the center of ephemera according to me at the time. She’d come home bubbling over with a story about the mayor’s hidden agenda or some contract that didn’t go to the lowest bidder, and it was all I could do to sit still and pretend to be listening. I’d be watching her lips and nodding at the right moments, but I’d be secretly trying to visualize a separating hyper-plane in four dimensions. And she used to plant little traps in the conversations when she sensed that I wasn’t listening. She’d stop and say something like, “So what do you think of the new editorial policy?” I’d look back dumbly, and she’d say, “I don’t know why I even bother talking to you.” Then she’d storm out of the room. I tried to listen, but I couldn’t, and then when she got mad, my skin felt cold and dead like

junkyard tin.

But I guess I was human, and no one can actually live by such a vapid thing as a philosophy. I subconsciously made exceptions. The main exception being music. I had played guitar since I was thirteen, and I loved rock 'n' roll. In some inexplicable and unanalyzed way, music had a grip on me. When my head was swimming with theorems, and no further progress was possible, I'd put on a record. Beatles, Stones, Byrds, Wilson Pickett. If Beth was gone, I'd put it on loud, pick up my guitar, and join the band. Weird.

I remember when I really got into Martin's music. It was 1971. I bought his album and brought it home one afternoon when Beth was at work. I slid the right stereo speaker across the floor and positioned it about a foot from the left speaker. I turned the speakers to face each other. I went into the bedroom and got a blanket and two pillows. I put the pillows on the floor between the two speakers and threw the blanket over the speakers creating a sort of tent with the speakers as supports. I peeled the cellophane from the album, pulled out the record and put it on the turntable. I found a half-inch roach in the ash tray, lit it, and took a few hits, then I started the record and crawled under the blanket, putting my head on the pillows between the speakers.

The music began with an angry guitar riff over a slow, deep, rocking minor chord pattern. The voice came up, "Was it him/with the gun in his coat?" In my dark little world, I grinned from ear to ear. My left hand moved with the guitar. I had heard this song on the radio every once in a while for over a year, but it really came alive over the stereo. It moved through me like an electric current.

The rest of the album was new. I floated over land and sea during "Ice Sculpture," soaring with the intricate harmonies. I was touched by the theme of "Down This Road," and I laughed out loud at the fresh, rollicking version of "I Like It Like That." And so on through the album. The music filled me with energy, humor, and hope. "Amazing," I said to myself under the blanket as the needle came off at the end of the last cut and the arm on the turntable swung back to start playing the record again.

The second time through I focused on the lead guitar. It was Antoine. Little



did I know that one day I'd jam with him at Martin's house. That thought would have blown my mind back then. "Far out," I said to myself, "the guy is good. Jesus, I wish I could do that. Where is this stuff coming from?"

Next time through, I focused on the bass, then the voices. "Wow," I said as the record ended its forth play.

I crawled out of my little world and found Beth sitting on the sofa flipping through Time magazine. I shut the stereo off.

"How long have you been sitting there?"

She tossed the magazine on the table, "About twenty minutes. How long were you under there?"

I pulled the blanket off the speakers and started folding it up. "I don't know. I listened to this new Martin Landry album a few times. It's pretty groovy. Were you listening?"

Beth looked up blankly. "I couldn't help it, could I?"

I tried to look enthused. "Did you like it?"

Beth shrugged. "Yeah, it was okay. Why don't you use the headphones like everybody else on earth?"

"It's different like this. You can feel it in your gut. It's more like you're really there with the musicians."

Beth got up and headed for the kitchen. "Yeah, but you're really here in this little apartment with me."

I had class work to do that night, but all evening I was wanting to get back to the record. To read the lyrics. To see who wrote the songs. To see who played what on each cut. To listen to it again. To choose a song to figure out on my guitar. By ten o'clock I was sitting on the floor in front of the speakers with my guitar, playing along with "Who Done It?". I was thinking, It's amazing how simple these songs are. I can usually figure them out in a few minutes, and yet it seems to be completely beyond me to come

up with something like this on my own. What part of themselves were the musicians reaching into, what well-spring could they draw from that made all this music possible, and why is it out of my reach?

For weeks, I listened to the album until I knew every note. And then for months the songs played constantly in my head. I could hear them as I sat in class, as I walked home from the university, as I fell asleep, as I dreamed of a two-year-old boy with the ancient eyes of God.

## Hello

This is my day off from flying the search missions. Ray left at dawn to look for Martin. He offered to take Kevin, but Stephanie wouldn't hear of it. As tired as he was, Jack went out again.

I went over to the other house around eleven. I thought I'd take everybody for a ride around the island and show them the sights. Maybe stop into Mama's Café down in Avarua and get some deep fried crab fingers. Kevin didn't want to get stuck all day with us. He said he'd jog from their house to mine, and he'd take the inland route that goes up over the mountains in the center of the island. It's about a 1400 foot climb, up along the Papue Stream, past "The Needle" and down the Avatiu Stream trail. I confess that I didn't give it much thought, and neither did anyone else. Kevin and Jack had been part-way up the hill a few times, but never over the top and down the other side.

So the three of us took off in the car and had lunch, then we went over to my house. There really wasn't much for us to do when we got there. I could see Flo eyeing the counter-top, so I made everybody a drink and we sat outside under the awning.

Flo broke the silence. "God," she said, "it's the waiting that kills you. Just let me know what's going on and I'll deal with it, but don't keep me waiting. It's like that goddamn business with Jack. We waited for *years* when he was missing, and I nearly went insane."

"You mean when he was got shot down in Vietnam?" I said.

"Yes, *hell yes*," she said, "and it nearly drove us all mad."

Martin talked about this period with me some, and he wrote about it in his book, but given Martin's condition at the time, I figured Stephanie and Flo would have a clearer picture of events.

Stephanie started telling me about the initial phone call after Jack's shootdown. Flo filled in some of the missing pieces:

It was 1971. Stephanie, Martin, and baby Kevin were at their house in L.A.. Martin set his beer down and picked up the ringing phone. "Hello."

"Martin? It's Mom."

I can bet that Martin felt a hot wave wash over him. Flo was obviously in a distressed state of mind. Martin pulled a stool under him and sat down. He stared blankly across the room at Stephanie, who was holding their two-month old son, Kevin. "What's the matter, Mom?"

Now Flo was obviously in tears. "There's a chaplain here and a lieutenant from the Navy. They say that Jack is missing."

There was a pinching in Martin's stomach. Stephanie could see it instantly. She laid Kevin in his crib and stood at Martin's side with her eyes closed and her hands over her mouth. "Missing? What exactly does that mean?"

Stephanie moaned.

"It means his plane was hit over Laos, and then it went into the clouds and nobody saw it again. Oh, God, Marty this sounds bad."

"Did anyone see a parachute or did they get a radio call from him?"

"I don't know. Let me ask the lieutenant." Martin looked at Stephanie. His eyes were hollow. Flo came back to the phone, "No, no one saw or heard anything after he was hit."

Stephanie moved to the window. Head down. Arms across her chest. Shaking.

"Mom, let me talk to the lieutenant for a second."

"Hello, Mr. Landry. This is Lieutenant Sandlin. I am sorry to have to bring you this news. What can I do for you?"

Martin could hardly get the words out. "Lieutenant, is my brother dead?"

Stephanie groaned and sat down.

"Sir, I don't know that he is. At this moment, we simply don't know. He is

officially an MIA, missing in action.”

“Did anyone actually see his plane when it was hit?”

“Yes, sir. He was coming off the target when he was hit. His wingman saw it.”

“And how did he describe it? Did it explode in a fireball, or what?”

“No, sir. To the best of my knowledge, and I will get back to you as soon as I have more information, the plane was hit in the right wing, and it...it rolled slowly and descended into a cloud deck trailing black smoke. The wingman pursued your brother’s aircraft, but it was not sighted or heard from again after it entered the clouds. Apparently the weather was bad and the clouds went down to near ground level. That is really all I know right now. There is an intensive search underway at this moment.”

Martin rubbed his forehead. “So he could be alive.”

“Yes, sir. That is correct.”

“If he bailed out, would you have heard from him by now?”

“Not necessarily, sir. Many of the pilots who eject are hurt either before or during the ejection. He may not be able to get word to us.”

“Thanks, lieutenant. Would you put my mother back on. Oh, and leave her a card with your phone number on it so we can get in touch with you later.”

“Yes, sir. I will be getting constant updates on the progress of the search, and I will stay in touch with your mother as long as the search is underway. And sir, this may sound strange to you, but for your brother’s well-being we are asking that you not publicize the fact that he is missing in action. And again, I am very sorry sir.”

Flo came back to the phone. “Marty, maybe he’s okay. We’ll pray that he’s okay.”

“Is anybody else there with you now?” said Martin.

Flo said, “Stephanie’s father, Jim. He saw the Navy car and came down. That was good of him. Do you want to talk to him?”

“No, maybe Steph will call back for him later. We’ll get on the next plane

and maybe get in there tonight. I'll call you back as soon as I know."

There was a pause. "Okay, Marty. I love you. How's little Kevin?"

"He's fine, Mom. He's sleeping right here. I love you too, Mom. I'll talk to you again in a few minutes."

Flo downed the last of her scotch and rattled the ice in the glass. I got up to get her some more and then sat down again with them on the porch. The sun was getting low. The little black birds were filling the trees, and bragging about their day.

Stephanie said, "The worst part was Christmas. I'll never forget that Christmas."

Flo nodded and looked off toward the harbor.

That would have been the Christmas of 1971. I read Martin's account of that day, and for the next twenty minutes Stephanie and Flo described what happened. I see it like this:

Martin stood in the hall that day looking into the room that he and Jack shared as they grew up. I remember cleaning out my father's den the week after he died, and I can guess how Martin felt. About like he had a softball stuck in his throat. Stephanie said the room still looked much as it did when Jack finished Jesuit High and left for LSU in 1964. There was a blue and white Jesuit pennant on the wall. A poster of a tiger from LSU. A yearbook picture of Martin in his LSU baseball uniform. Crew cut, bat in hand, looking focused and fierce. There was a black and white picture of Jack standing in the center of a wrestling mat. A referee was holding his right arm up to signal that Jack had won the match. Jack was holding his other arm up and grinning. It was the 1962 State high-school championships. Jack won as a sophomore. There was an ivory-colored Fender bass leaning against a blond Fender Bassman amp in the corner. Martin closed his eyes tight, and a tear snuck out. I bet he could almost hear Jack coming down the hall

from the bathroom, whistling and snapping his towel. The same way I could hear my father shuffling around in the den.

It was more than Martin could stand. He turned to head back to the kitchen for another beer and immediately bumped into Stephanie coming up the hall carrying one-year-old Kevin. She put her arm around Martin's waist and pulled him slightly, so they were both in the doorway looking into the room. She said, "Do you remember the time back in high-school when we thought everyone was going to be gone all afternoon, and we came in here and...you know...did it." She bumped Martin with her hip and grinned, "and then we heard the door slam and Flo was calling out to us? Jeez, I never got dressed so fast in my life."

Martin smiled, "And then we walked down the hall trying to act like nothing was happening. La di da. Oh, hi, Mom. We were just back there looking at my scrap book."

Stephanie looked into the room and shook her head. "I wonder what Flo was thinking."

Martin changed the subject. "How do you think she's holding up?"

"Oh, Marty, you can imagine. It doesn't get any harder than this. She's trying to be brave. I don't know if that's the right thing. Maybe she should just break down. And I don't know what to do. I know Jack's on her mind constantly. I don't know whether to talk about it with her or try to bring up happier subjects. God, it's just a mess. I feel all twisted up inside." She ran her free hand through her hair. "The poor woman, I don't know what I can do."

"Let's just try to stay busy and get through this goddamn day. Maybe go for a ride along the lake after dinner."

"Good idea." Stephanie put her arm around Martin's waist again and turned him out of the doorway steering him back down the hall. "Come on, let's go help her get the table ready before my Dad gets here." She stopped short and turned to Martin. "Oh, I completely forgot to tell you what I was coming down here to say. She wants us to set an

empty place for Jack.”

Martin stopped, turned sideways, and fell back against the wall, closing his eyes. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. He searched for the words, but couldn't find them. For a moment he examined the feeling, then he pushed it away. He turned back down the hall. “I'll put the leaf in the table, if you'll go get me another beer.”

A few minutes later he walked into the kitchen and found Flo staring out the window. An old rope swing with a large knot at the bottom hung from the big oak in back. She startled and turned quickly toward the refrigerator when he came in. “Help me get the potatoes mashed, will you Marty? Stephanie's father is going to be here in ten minutes, and I've got a million things to do.”

Martin drained the steaming potatoes, threw in a half stick of butter, and got to work with the masher. “This will just take a minute. Do you need me to do anything else?”

Flo walked back toward the refrigerator. “To tell you the truth, I don't even know. I don't know where my head is sometimes. Stephanie, bless her heart, has been getting it all done. I take stuff out of the refrigerator, put it on the counter and don't even know why.”

Her eyes were puffy. Nose a little red.

Martin stopped mashing the potatoes and continued to stare into the pot. “I know, Mom. I feel it, too.”

Flo turned and hugged Martin from behind. “Of course you do. He's your brother. I know you miss him. Now come on, let's get this done. And where's that little angel, Kevin, I want him in here with me.”

The doorbell rang and Martin could hear Stephanie talking to her father in the living room. Stephanie sounded angry. Flo let go of Martin and whispered. “I don't know what I'm going to do about that man. He calls me every other day. Wonders if I want to go to a movie or out for dinner. I tell him I can't just now, but he keeps calling.” She faked a look of exasperation.



“Well, Mom, he’s lonely. His wife’s been dead for a long time. All the kids are gone now.” He turned toward her and winked, “And besides, you’re still such a fox, what’s a guy to do?”

Flo tossed her towel on the counter. “Martin Landry, don’t you talk like that. What would your father say if he heard you talking like that?”

Stephanie’s father walked into the kitchen. “Hello, Flo. Merry Christmas.” He handed her a brightly wrapped box and took her by the shoulders, bending over to give her a kiss. Flo ducked and took it on the hairline.

“Oh, Jim, cut it out. Thanks. Now I feel like such a fool, I didn’t think to get anything for you. Merry Christmas. I’m sorry.”

“No, no, no. Just being here is my present. Thanks for thinking of me.”

Flo set the present on the counter and wiped her hands on her apron. “Well, I think everything’s ready, but let’s have a drink in the living room before we eat. I’ve been standing in the kitchen ever since church, and my feet are killing me.”

Martin said, “Great idea, Mom. Jim, what would you like?”

“Well, according to your wife, I’ve had enough already, but maybe just one scotch. Do you have any scotch?”

Flo took little Kevin from Stephanie and led them toward the living room. “You know where it is, Marty. Would you get it?”

The four of them sat in the little living room watching Kevin play on the floor. The lights on the Christmas tree did their twinkly best, oblivious to the gloom. The four struggled to keep a conversation going.

Jim took a long drink and asked, “Do you ever hear anything from the Dodgers, Martin?”

Martin looked at the ice turning slowly in his scotch. “No. I saw their catcher, Terry Maze, at the airport a year or so ago. We talked for a couple of minutes. That’s about it.”

Jim brightened up. “He had a hell of a season last year, didn’t he?”

Martin shrugged his shoulders. “To tell you the truth, I didn’t even know that. I just don’t pay attention to baseball at all anymore.”

Jim started to say something and stopped. A second later he said, “I just can’t understand how anybody could walk away from a spot in the major leagues. Mystifies me.”

Stephanie gave her father an icy stare and said, “Marty’s been working on his music mostly. It’s going real well.”

Jim smiled and nodded. There was a pause. They looked at the lights. They watched Kevin try to stick his foot in his mouth.

Flo got to her feet and said, “Who’s ready to eat? I just realized I’m half starved.”

Martin, who had four beers and a big scotch, nearly fell over when he got up. Stephanie scowled. They walked into the dining room and shuffled around deciding where to sit. Flo said, “Jim, you go over there by Stephanie. I’ll sit here where I always do. Kevin’s going to be over on this side of me. And Marty, you can leave that other chair empty right by me.”

When they had settled in, Flo asked Jim to say grace. They bowed their heads as Jim said, “Bless us, oh Lord, for these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive, from Thy bounty through Christ, our Lord. Amen.”

“Amen.”

Martin downed the last of his scotch. Nobody moved. The air in the room was thick and charged. Like right before lightning.

Flo told them to help themselves, and everyone reached for a dish and started serving the food. Then they all waited for Flo before beginning to eat.

Flo set the last of the serving dishes down and picked up her fork. She looked at the other four and at their overflowing plates. She looked at the empty plate at Jack’s place. Her eyes dropped to the vacant chair. It was the pause between the lightning and the thunder.

She dropped her fork and put her face in her hands. Stephanie got up and moved toward Flo.

Flo sobbed. “I can’t take it. I don’t know if he’s alive or dead. If he’s alive, he might be getting tortured right now. Right as we sit here at this table. He might be hurt. Crippled even. Or he might have been killed in that goddamn airplane. Maybe that would be better, I don’t know. I don’t even know what to *hope* for anymore. Not that it matters. I keep hearing that the government isn’t giving us the full story. They keep telling me they are doing everything they can, everything they can. What the hell is that supposed to mean? What is this goddamn war all about anyway? He was twenty-five years old for christsakes. Why do I have to lose my son? He was the greatest kid on earth. For what?” She took her face away from her hands and looked up. She screamed at a startling volume, “For what?”

A coconut let go from high up in the tree just behind my porch. It fell sixty feet and hit the ground a short distance from where we were sitting. The deadly thump startled us all back into the present. Flo looked at the coconut lying on the ground and shivered. “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph,” she said.

Stephanie got up from the chair on my porch and stretched. “Kevin ought to be here by now, shouldn’t he? How long does it take to run across the island?”

“Two or three hours,” I said. “I’ve hiked it in half a day, but I’ve never run it.”

Stephanie’s jaw moved as she looked up at the darkened face of the hill.

## The Smile of a Yearling Child

All the crosscurrents of anxiety were too much for me. Stephanie was nervous about Kevin. We were all nervous about Martin, and now I was beginning to wonder what had become of Ray and Jack. It was about eight p.m. now, and they had left at around six a.m., so they should be here any time. I looked out to the northwest from time to time, hoping to see their lights.

Flo was doing her best to stay awake, but every once in a while, her head would make a little circle and her chin would fall toward her chest. It was now pitch black outside, but she was still wearing those goofy big sunglasses.

Out of nowhere Stephanie said, “You know, those times were hard on Martin. I mean they were hard on everybody, and everybody was tense over it, but it was especially hard for Martin, and I really didn’t give him much slack over it. He had pressures from the music business and all sorts of conflicting emotions about Jack’s situation. He hated the war, but he loved his brother. Nixon and Kissinger drove him nuts, but he was no fan of the North Vietnamese or Jane Fonda either. People on all sides wanted to use him for their own purposes, and he was resisting that. It’s no wonder he tried to use drugs and alcohol to run from it all. But all I could see was a formerly great guy who was wasting himself and melting out of my life and Kevin’s life just when we needed him the most.”

I didn’t have the nerve to ask her to elaborate on how it is that she and Martin actually split up, but I read about it in Martin’s book, and Martin talked with me a lot about it back a few months ago when I was having my own problems over my separation from Beth, my soon-to-be ex-wife. Seemed like the similarity in our situations brought it all back to him, and he wanted to talk through it. Now I need to write about Martin’s break up, and I confess that I have some anxiety about putting the account on paper. I’ve

heard the stories, I've read Martin's book, and a picture takes shape in my head. I realize that I wasn't there and that when I write this out it is at least partly fiction. But even if I saw the events with my own eyes, wouldn't my report still be somewhat fictional? Haven't you ever had an experience with another person and then talked about it later only to realize that what you thought was happening wasn't at all what the other person thought was happening? Where is the objective truth in human events?

It would have been 1972. Martin woke up slowly. He rolled over toward Stephanie and opened an eye. Stephanie was already up and gone, but their two year old cocker spaniel, Madeline, was laying in Stephanie's place with her head on the pillow between her two paws. She was staring at Martin. Smiling. Martin said, "Hey, Mad Dog, what's up?"

Stephanie called her "Maddy." Kevin called her "Ha da." (He called everything "Ha da.") Martin called her "Mad" or "Mad Line" or "Mad Thing" or "Fluff" or whatever. He could feel her tail thumping onto the bed when he spoke. He turned over and looked at the clock. 10:48. He rolled onto his back and stared absently at the bedroom ceiling. The sunlight bouncing off the surface of the pool outside created a dizzying, kaleidoscopic effect on the ceiling. Maddy put her nose in his ear and snorted..

He had a headache. For the thousandth time, he resolved to cut back on his drinking.

He could hear Kevin pounding something against something, probably a spoon against the plastic tray in his highchair.

He rolled out of bed and went into the bathroom. He turned on the shower and then took a leak and brushed his teeth. The steaming water on the back of his neck was rejuvenating. He probably sang a line from one of his new songs.

He came out of the shower, pulled on a pair of levis, and set out for the kitchen still shirtless. He found Kevin scooting around on the kitchen floor in a little contraption they called his "walker." It was sort of like a highchair on wheels, but it sat

low enough that Kevin's legs could touch the ground, so he could push himself all around. He loved it, and he scooted around like a demon in the thing.

Stephanie was sitting at the kitchen table by the window, and Kevin was over by his mother rattling an oversized set of plastic keys. He'd try to jam them in his mouth, fist and all, then he'd yell and bang them on the tray of the walker.

Maddy was pacing uneasily about six feet from Kevin. Ears back with the noise of the banging keys, wary of getting a toe smashed by the walker (which happened about once every hour), but always hopeful of snatching a cookie or a Cheerio from Kevin's tray.

"Looks like all's right with the world this morning," said Martin as he opened the refrigerator and took out a beer and a half-empty bottle of clamato juice.

Stephanie looked over at Martin and watched him pour the beer into the clam and tomato juice mix. She closed her eyes and shook her head. Martin stood by the sink gulping down the drink. Stephanie watched the flab jiggle around his mid-section. "You've really lost your athlete's build," she said. "You should see yourself. Stringy hair hanging down and all."

Martin drained the bottle and put it in the sink. "You've put on a few pounds yourself, you know."

"That's a cheap shot. You know I've been working on it. It's only been a year."

Martin ignored the comment. He got down on all fours and started crawling toward Kevin, growling like a bear. Kevin shrieked with delight and pounded his keys on the tray as Martin approached. Maddy, who loved the Martin-on-the-floor game, bounded over to Martin and tried to stuff her head under Martin's arm and up toward his face. Martin put her in a headlock, and Kevin giggled and pounded. Maddy pulled her head out and jumped over Martin, digging a deep scratch across Martin's back.

Martin yelped, "Jesus, Mad Dog." He reached for his back and started to get up. Maddy dropped her ears and retreated toward the corner of the kitchen. Kevin threw

his keys across the room and laughed. Maddy grabbed the keys and ran out of the kitchen. Kevin yelled at Maddy and started to cry.

Stephanie went to Kevin and picked him up out of the walker. “Jesus Christ,” she said, “you are in here for two minutes and the whole house is in an uproar.”

Martin took Kevin from Stephanie and sat down at the table. He sat Kevin on the table in front of him and held him below the arms, jiggling him slightly and making a face. Kevin was still upset at Maddy. Martin smiled at Kevin and blew gently into his face. Kevin closed his eyes and smiled like an angel. Martin kissed him on the forehead and blew again. Kevin let out a big laugh.

Years later, Martin wrote, “Deep inside my head, a camera clicked a picture of Kevin’s expression and put the image into a file. I felt as if a feather had just been drawn across the back of my neck.” (Like I said, a few months ago, when my marriage was coming unglued, Martin really opened up about all this stuff. I don’t know if he was trying to help me out or if my situation just brought it all back to him and he felt like he needed to deal with it. Anyway, he tried to tell me about this. We were sitting on the deck of his house up in the redwoods of northern California. He said that if he could rewind his life to any particular spot, he would go back to that seemingly insignificant moment and do it all differently from there onward. He’d have stayed with Stephanie and raised Kevin. “Ah, well,” he said years later, “if horses had feathers, they’d be big fucking birds.”)

Maddy peeked around the corner with the keys in her mouth. Kevin saw her and yelled, “Ha da, ha da!”

“You tell her, hotrod,” said Martin.

Stephanie was looking at something on the table. She said, “When we were in New Orleans last month, I picked up this old scrapbook. I didn’t take time to look at it until this morning.” She let out a slow breath. “Look at this.”

She pointed to a little black and white picture that showed Stephanie’s family sometime in the early ’50s. They were standing in front of a 1951 Ford. Martin handed

Kevin a stuffed toy and set him back in his walker. He bent over the picture, looking at each face. “That’s Jim and your mother, your big brother Tim, you, your little brother Kevin, and the baby must be Holly. You kinda look like your mother. I haven’t seen many pictures of her.”

Stephanie said, “Maybe a little around the eyes, but that’s not what got to me. Look at how much our Kevin looks like my little brother Kevin.”

Martin bent over the picture again. “Yeah, there’s definitely a resemblance there.” Martin felt choked up. “You know, I can just barely remember him. It sure is too bad about him and your Mom.”

Stephanie said, “This picture must have been taken just a few months before the accident. There we stand. Frozen in time. Waiting for the ax to fall.”

“Do you remember the wreck?”

“The actual crash? No. I may have been asleep. We were across the lake all day at a fourth of July picnic. I was probably pooped out in the back seat. But I remember people trying to help us at the side of the road. And I remember the big coffin for Mom and the little one for Kevin.”

“I remember that, too. It was probably the first funeral I ever went to. What happened? Did another car hit you guys or something? I don’t think I ever got the straight story.”

“No. Dad just wandered off the road and hit an oak tree.”

Martin shook himself. He got up and went over to the refrigerator. Stephanie said, “Can’t you wait with that? Do you have to start getting loaded at 11 o’clock in the morning? Can’t we talk, spend some time with Kevin?”

Martin’s temper rose. “I’m not getting *drunk*. A couple of beers is nothing. Helps my headache. A little buzz gets the creative juices flowing.”

“Creative juices? Really? How’s the song writing going these days?”

Martin opened the beer and slammed the can down on the counter. It started foaming over the top. “I’ve got a couple of chord changes that I’m working on.”



He stood over the sink, staring out the little window. “I’m going to take Mad down to the beach. I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

Three hours later, Stephanie was putting Kevin into the car seat and saying, “I guess your Daddy doesn’t want to do anything with us today. We’ll just have to go on our errands anyway, won’t we Kevin?”

They went out the driveway and down the hill toward the beach. They stopped at the bottom of the hill and waited at the light to make a left turn on Palisades toward the Safeway. Kevin got excited and said, “Ha da, da da.” He was pointing out the window. Stephanie looked out and said, “Oh, there’s a doggie that looks just like Maddy. How cute....No, that *is* Maddy.”

Maddy was sitting patiently on the sidewalk, tied to a parking meter in front of a beachfront dive called the Lazy Ace. A lady stopped to pet her. Maddy stood up and wagged her tail. Martin was nowhere in sight. Someone honked and Stephanie looked up and saw the light was green. She turned left and took the first parking place she could find.

She unfolded Kevin’s stroller, put him in it, and pushed him over toward the Lazy Ace. Maddy saw them coming and started hopping up and down at the end of her leash. Kevin screamed, “Da da, ha da!”

Stephanie looked in the window as they walked by and saw Martin sitting at the bar raising a beer glass to his lips. She untied Maddy, took her in the car, and drove home.

Martin showed up around seven. He was agitated and very drunk. “Mad Dog ran off. I’ve been looking high and low. I can’t find her.”

Stephanie said, “Really, what happened?”

Martin said, “Some joggers went down the beach with a couple of loose dogs, and Mad broke her leash and took off after them. I called her and ran after them, but they

didn't hear me and she didn't come back. Shit, I've been everywhere looking for her."

Stephanie said, "Take a look in the backyard." Her voice was tired, flat.

Martin stepped around Kevin's walker and looked through the window over the sink. Maddy was racing through the yard, leaping and snapping at a butterfly. Martin said, "Oh, great. She must have found her way home. I thought we'd lost her."

Stephanie said, "I saw her tied up in front of the Lazy Ace and I brought her home." She stared, expressionless, at Martin.

Martin let out a long breath and went to the refrigerator. He reached in and grabbed a beer. Before he opened it Stephanie said, "If you can't get your drinking and drug taking under control. I am leaving." She paused to study his reaction, then continued, "Kevin and I are leaving. I am not going to put up with this. You should have seen Maddy sitting there like a stray. How could you be like that?"

Martin opened the beer and walked past Stephanie out onto the deck.

Martin said he dreamed he was in a burning building that night. Everything around him was bright and hot. People were screaming and running in all directions, but he wasn't going to leave until he found Jack. He tried to yell his name, but no sound would come out. So bright. So hot.

Martin woke up on the couch with the sun beating down on him through the window. He was sweaty and stiff. He sat up slowly and looked for a cigarette. Nothing there. He put his head back and closed his eyes, but the sun was boring through his eyelids, turning his brain to an orange fireball. He had a ferocious thirst. He gathered his strength and walked into the kitchen. He pulled a beer out of the refrigerator and sat down at the kitchen table. He opened the beer and took a long drink. It was quiet in the house.

His eyes glided over the table and landed on a note written on a yellow legal pad. *Stephanie must be out somewhere*, he thought. He slid the pad over and read the note.

Marty,

This is the hardest thing I've ever had to do, but I don't see any other way. I can't stay and watch you destroy yourself. And I can't let Kevin watch it either. I know things have been hard for you, and I've done everything I can to help you get through this, but nothing has worked. If you don't control your drinking, you're going to be dead one of these days. Dead. It's true, but do you believe it?

I am going to New Orleans with Kevin. If you can straighten yourself out, quit the drinking and drugs, let me know. But don't try to con me. I'll see right through it. I am not looking for a promise. I've heard all the promises from you I can stand. You get straight and stay that way for six months, then call me.

I'll pray for that call.

Love,

Stephanie

Martin drained the last of his beer and crushed the can in his right hand. He got up and walked over to the window and stood looking out to sea. He was muttering to himself, "When the going gets tough, the tough get going, right Steph? So I have a few beers. So I smoke a little dope and get a little stupid. I never hurt anybody. I am the one who is hurting here. So you take off. Get well soon. Call me when life is good again. Fuck that. There are lots of women in this big blue world. I don't know why I should get hung up on one."

He walked over to the refrigerator and got another beer. He pulled the top off and dropped it through the opening in the top of the can. He leaned backwards against the refrigerator, jostling the photos stuck there with magnets. He watched the beer foam up in his can.

The silence of the house exploded like a bomb into his consciousness, and he

slumped sobbing to the floor. A blizzard of photos fell like snow around him. Stephanie with little Kevin sitting in the sand. Martin standing at the wheel of The Spirit of Orion with Stephanie squeezing him around the waist and making that ooh-it's-sticky look of hers. Jack waving from the wing of Martin's Bonanza.

He spent the next week alone in the house. Drinking beer. Watching TV. Eating cereal, peanut butter, TV dinners. Smoking joints.

Sometimes he'd sit by the phone waiting for it to ring. Sometimes it would ring, and he wouldn't answer. Sometimes he'd take it off the hook.

Friends came around and knocked on the door, but he wouldn't answer. He'd pick up his guitar and try to play, but his fingers didn't work right, and nothing sounded good. It was all so flat, so forced, so fake. The spirits just weren't with him.

He'd pass out at night and wake up after a few hours, exhausted but unable to sleep anymore. Sometimes he would tell himself that it would all be over soon, that Jack would be found, that Steph would come back, and things would be good again. Sometimes he would tell himself that he was glad that unsympathetic bitch had left.

And he'd talk to Jack. Sometimes he'd believe that Jack was alive in a POW camp, and he'd say, "Be tough, Jack. You always were the tough one. I was the pussy. Eight team-mates and I still needed a bat." Sometimes he'd try to imagine Jack's death. Was it quick? Did the SAM get him instantly? Or was he alive and helpless as his plane rolled out of control into the ground? Did he bail out? Was he murdered by the Pathet Lao on the ground? Was he brave to the end, or did fear finally overtake him?

Sometimes he'd think of better times. The wrestling tournaments. Crayfishing with Jack. The studio session and the excitement when "Who Done It?" was in process. The flying. God, Jack loved to fly. Would he have gone into the Navy if Martin hadn't given him a ride in the Bonanza? Would he have wanted to be a warrior if Martin weren't against the war?

There were no good thoughts. Every starting point led to the same spiral into hopelessness.

No Steph. He remembered how cute she was at the Jesuit High prom. How it seemed like it was the night of her life. Like she would bubble right out of her skin. He remembered how she used to look at him. Like he was all there was. All she would ever need. And all those times when he could have had other women, on the road with baseball or with music, but he wasn't even interested. Martin and Stephanie, together like a verse and a chorus.

No Kevin. Such a doll. So wide open to everything. Who's going to be his father? Who's going to tell him not to worry about the little league game, that they don't even play it in the rain?

And no Jack. Oh, fuck, Jack, where are you?

So he took pills to help him sleep. And then pills to wake him up again. And beer and whiskey to file off the rough edges. Maybe a joint or some psilocybin if he was good. Or if he wasn't. The house filled up with beer cans and dirty clothes.

Time flew. Time stopped. Most of his old friends gradually gave up on him, just as he gave up on everything and everyone.

One morning, months after Stephanie left, he woke up to the ring of the telephone. He swung himself out of bed quickly and stood up. The next thing he knew he was coming to lying face down on the bedroom floor. It felt like someone had driven a nail through his forehead. He was laying in a pool of blood, a deep gash above his temple from a fall into the nightstand. The little sane voice inside said, "That could have been it. Are you ready to die?"

He resolved to give up the pills and cut back on his drinking. He managed to put off his first beer until 2:00 p.m., but it was a struggle. After the beer he decided to drive down to The Spirit of Orion for the first time since Stephanie left. He just sat in the sun on deck rocking with the little swells from the passing boats in the harbor, wishing he had a beer to fix his headache. After an hour or so he drove home and went straight to the refrigerator. *Just one, just until I feel a little better.*

He sat at the table by the window looking out at the ocean. Stephanie's favorite spot. He remembered how she just stood there smiling when the real-estate agent was showing them the house. He could feel her there. He slid the legal pad over and picked up a pencil. In thirty minutes he was finished.

Just Like You Were There

I was sitting at your favorite window  
staring out to sea.

I was thinking 'bout that day in April  
and the things you said to me.

And it sounded like a whisper,  
but passed too quick to hear.  
It moved through every fiber.  
It was just like you were there.

Just like you were there  
for a moment  
just like you were there  
with me  
just like you were there  
then gone  
just like you were there  
were you thinking of me?

In my head I know you're miles away,  
where the sun already shines,

'cause a letter came just yesterday  
and I've memorized each line.

It was just like you were there  
are you coming home?  
just like you were there  
I could feel you with me  
just like you were there  
sittin' by the window  
just like you were there  
looking out to sea.

He tore out the page and took it with him to the basement. There he picked up his Gibson acoustic guitar and searched for the chords that would follow the melody that was already spinning through his head. In another thirty minutes he had it on tape. He put the tape in a box and sent it to Stephanie in New Orleans.

A week later the phone rang. "The song is beautiful, Martin. I was moved. Believe me, I would like to be at that window now, but only if you're finished with alcohol. Finished with dope. For good. I mean it. For good."

"I can do it, Stephanie. I know I can."

"Have you had anything to drink today?"

"I had a beer this afternoon, and another one when I watched the news. I won't lie to you."

"What about dope?"

"Just a joint now and then when I run into a friend...."

"They aren't your *friends*, Martin. Wake up." There was a pause. Stephanie continued. "Maybe you're doing better, I don't know, but I can't be in a family with a drunk. I couldn't even put Kevin in the car with you. Straighten up, Martin, please. When

you've been clean for a while, let me know."

There was a coldness in her tone. A distance. The firmness of a nine-year-old who had to grow up too early after the death of her mother. Martin knew he couldn't argue. "Have you seen Mom? How's Flo?"

"How do you *think* she is? One of her sons is missing in action, and the other is trying to kill himself with drugs and alcohol."

"Tell her I'll call her."

"Just *call* her. Why would I tell her you are going to call, when maybe you won't? Call her right now."

"I can't. I'm a fucking wreck. I don't want her to hear me like this."

"Then don't *be* like this. Pour the beer down the sink and straighten up. Don't you wonder about your son?"

"Of course, I do. How is Kevin?"

"He asks where his father is, but other than that he's okay. He's a kid. He doesn't know what is serious and what isn't."

"Tell him I love him."

"Tell him yourself. Better yet, if you love him sober up."

Martin couldn't stand it anymore. He started to draw the conversation to a close. "I'm going to do it, Steph. I'm going to stay straight for a month. I'll call you in a month."

"You've got so much to live for, Martin. Don't throw it all away."

Stephanie hung up. Martin felt shaky. He had a headache. He sat by the phone for a few minutes, and then he went to get a beer. And then another. And another.



## On the Road

It was fully dark now, as Stephanie, Flo and I sat out on my porch waiting for Kevin to get over the hill from his run and for Ray and Jack to get back from their flight.

Out of nowhere, Stephanie said, “I remember one night in particular. Kevin and I were staying with my father in New Orleans after I’d left Martin. One of my oldest friends, Janice Eubanks, called and told me that Martin was playing at the old Wilford Theater in Baton Rouge. She was a real dear, and I know she was just trying to help. She wanted to see me and Marty get together again. Anyway, she wondered if I’d talked to him lately, and I said that I had and he sounded sad, and he sounded like he had been drinking. I told her that I wished he could get over this. I wished he could quit the drinking and drugs. I wished I could help, but I didn’t want to be with him when he was like that.” Stephanie looked over at me, then at Flo. Maybe she wondered if we were interested in her story. I looked back to show that I was listening, and she went on. “I told Janice that I didn’t want to be his mother, I didn’t want to take care of him. I’d been taking care of people since I was kid, and people could take care of me for a while.”

Flo shook her head, “In sickness and in health,” she said.

Stephanie took a slow breath. “He could get ugly. He never hit me or anything, but I didn’t want Kevin to see him like that. I told him a million times I’d go back if he could straighten up. I just wanted things to be like they used to be.”

I didn’t know what to say. I just sort of shrugged to show that I was sympathetic and that I was listening. She went on.

“Well, Janice wanted us to go up to Baton Rouge and watch the show. She said that we wouldn’t even tell him we were in the audience. Just see how he is. Maybe if he’s doing good, I’d go backstage and say hello. I thought I owed him that much, so I agreed to give it a try.”

“We got there early. The theater was slowly filling. Most of the crowd was

brightly dressed hippies. Women in flower-print granny dresses. Men in bell bottoms and tie-dyed shirts with long hair and bright headbands.” She turned to me and said, “You remember what it was like back then.” I nodded, and she went on. “A beach ball bounced over our heads with people batting it from group to group. The air was thick with the smell of marijuana. I sat low in my chair, head back, looking around at the fine old theater. It dated from the 1930s, and it was decorated to look like a bedouin encampment at an oasis just before dark. Tents and camels and campfires were painted on the walls. Sand dunes were off in the distance. The ceiling was deep blue, with a hint of light to the west and fake stars twinkled in the ceiling. It’s probably converted to a Cinema 10 by now, but that was a nice old building.”

Flo cut into the conversation with news about a theater in New Orleans, and we just let her say her piece. When she finished, Stephanie went on, “On the stage was a stool with two microphones in front of it and another stool by its side. I was as nervous as a cat. It used to be so much fun to watch him play music, but this was different. The crowd was starting to get restless. It was 9:15 and the show was supposed to start at 9:00. At 9:25 the lights dimmed and a man stepped out into the spotlight and said something like, ‘Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for coming to the Wilford. Tonight’s guest needs no introduction in Baton Rouge. Martin Landry was an all-American right fielder at LSU.’ There were some cheers, some sarcastic cheers, some boos. ‘And some of you might remember him playing in bands around Baton Rouge and New Orleans in the ’60s.’ This time there was a loud cheer. ‘As you know, he left Baton Rouge to play with the Dodgers, but quit after a few years to play music.’ This remark got a mixed reaction from the crowd. Racism and pro-war sentiment were still alive and kicking in that part of the South. There were some red-necks in the crowd who had just come to hear the music and try to pick up hippie girls, and they knew damn well why Martin left baseball. So some people cheered his heroism in taking a stand, and some booed at the stand he took. The announcer finally introduce Martin, and people cheered and whistled, but when I saw him I felt like a cold hand was squeezing my guts.”

I look at Stephanie and said, “Those were tense times. The lines were drawn. Hell, I was afraid of going down south back then. There were stories. But go on, tell me how the show went.”

Stephanie nodded, “Well, Martin walked out onto the stage, and I was startled by the change since I’d seen him last. His hair seemed a lot longer, and it was oily looking. He wore a flannel shirt only half buttoned up the front and hanging out of his jeans. He was barefoot. He walked onto the stage carrying a guitar and a bottle of Jack Daniels. He stood in front of the cheering crowd, raised the bottle to his lips and took a long drink. The crowd loved it. He set the bottle on the stool next to him and sat on the other stool arranging the mics. I remember Janice gave my had a squeeze. He played through a chord on the guitar and said, ‘Sorry if the guitar doesn’t sound too good tonight. I used to have a better one, but I drank it.’ The crowd went nuts. ‘That’s a line I stole from Roger Miller. Maybe for this group I ought to say that I smoked it.’ Again they cheered, and he went on in his charming way, ‘Well, thanks for coming. It’s good to be home again.’ Bla, bla, bla. Same old Mr. Charisma. So they cheered again, and he said, ‘What do you say, I play some down home stuff for a while and then get to some of the things that I’ve written or that Brian and I have written? So who remembers this?’ He played some of that fancy stuff that Antoine had showed him. And after a couple of chords, people recognized “I Like It Like That,” and a big cheer went up. I just sat rigid in my chair. I couldn’t move. After the first verse, Janice leaned over toward me and said, ‘It’s good. He’s doing good.’ But I was thinking of the day the song was recorded at Pacific. Thinking of Jack and Antoine and the excitement in the studio. Tears were filling up in my eyes.”

I said, “So he could play even when he’d been drinking hard?”

Flo said, “Hell, everybody drank hard back then. It wasn’t that unusual.”

Stephanie rolled her eyes. She said, “Flo, I wasn’t going to be an enabler.”

Flo drained her glass and set it hard on the table. “So you decided to be a disabler.”

Stephanie wrinkled up her mouth, but didn't say anything for a few seconds. Then she went on. "Martin finished the song, and the crowd was happy. He reached for the whiskey, took a long drink, and said, 'I love this southern music. Best in the world, man. Absolutely.' He could really push their buttons. Anyway, while they were still clapping he started playing Lee Dorsey's hit 'Ya, Ya.' A couple of girls in the front stood up and started space-dancing. At the end of the song Martin raised the bottle in a toast to the girls who danced, and then he leaned over toward this bimbo with long straight blond hair and handed her the bottle. She took a drink and did a little dance as she handed the bottle back. Martin stumbled getting back into his stool and knocked a mic over. As he put the mic back up, he said something like, 'Fuck, who put that there?' There was scattered laughter, but I think some of the people were starting to get a little edgy."

"Janice wondered if I wanted to go, but I told her that I came to see the show, and I was going to see it. So for the next twenty minutes he played "Hit the Road, Jack," "You Talk Too Much," "Certain Girl," and a bunch of other New Orleans tunes that they all recognized. And each time he finished a song, he would drink more whiskey. At one point he said something like, 'Here's a song I just recorded. It ought to be on my new album sometime early next year.' The crowd clapped and he started a funky version of "War Fever." That's a eerie song, but I actually liked it a lot." Stephanie sang a line from the song, "When you're mad, the strangest things make sense." I couldn't help thinking that these New Orleans people break into song at a moment's notice. Jack and Kevin did it just the other night.

Stephanie went on, "At the end of the song a small group of hippies stood up and began chanting, 'Ho, Ho, Ho Chi Minh.' The rednecks tried to shout them down, and several beer cans flew toward the hippies out of the redneck section. Martin watched in silence, shaking his head. He set his guitar in a stand and turned to the chanting hippie group. He said something like, 'Shut the fuck up, you assholes.' Something like that." Stephanie turned to Flo, "Sorry, Flo."

Flo was nodding and smiling. She raised her glass as if to toast Martin.

“That’s quite alright. Good for him. I’d have said the same myself. You know, that’s one thing about Martin,” she said, “You could always count on him to tell you what he was thinking. He did care what anybody thought.”

Stephanie turned back to me, ‘The rednecks roared. They loved that. Then Martin said, ‘We shouldn’t be in this war, but that doesn’t make the other side right. If you are going to ignore the brutality of the North Vietnamese and cheer when they beat up on the Americans, then you’re as big an asshole as Westmoreland.’ There were some applause and some boos. Things got pretty strained. Then one of the chanting hippies yelled, ‘Who’s side are you on?’ Martin stared at him for a second and said, ‘In a war that doesn’t make sense, once the shooting starts, there aren’t any angels.’ Then he picked up his guitar and started playing the introduction to “A Thousand Years.” The crowd clapped. I think they were glad to let the politics drop and go back to the music. While he was playing the intro, Martin looked over at the hippies and said, ‘If you want to have a demonstration, take it out in the street. I came here to play music.’ There was more applause as he started to sing.”

Flow looked over at me, “I’ll tell you one thing, that boy was not afraid to tell you what he thought. No, sir.”

Stephanie said, “At the end of the song, Martin said, ‘I’m going to play one more, and then I gotta take a little break, if you know what I mean. But I’ll play tonight as long as the whiskey holds out.’ His speech was beginning to slur. He started into an old dance tune called “The Dog,” and everybody cheered. Half way through he forgot a lyric and backed away from the mic trying to think of it, while he continued to play the guitar. The lyric didn’t come to him, so he improvised a guitar solo that fell out of time with their clapping. At the end of the solo, he still didn’t have the lyric, and he just stopped playing. He said, ‘Fuck it, I’ll be back later.’ Then he grabbed the bottle and stalked off the stage.”

“The crowd clapped half-heartedly and the lights came up. I put my face in my hands, and Janice put her arm over my shoulder. We stayed in our seats while the

crowd milled around and stretched. The group in front of us had a discussion about whether to stay for the rest of the show or go out to the river levee and get wasted. They voted to leave, and by the time the lights dimmed again, the crowd was a lot smaller. Martin came back on the stage with his guitar and the whiskey. He walked with that careful walk that drunks use when they are trying to look sober. He sat back on his stool and adjusted the mics. He said, 'Here's the one that got it all started for me,' and he began the introduction to "Who Done It?" The little crowd cheered and then began clapping to the rhythm of the song and singing at the chorus. At times Martin would back away from the mic, close his eyes, and listen to the crowd sing."

"I never got that one," said Flo. "Who done it? Hell, everybody knows it was James Earl Ray."

Stephanie nodded and turned back toward me. "At the end of the song he took a quick sip from the bottle, and said, 'I wrote this one with my buddy, Brian, out on The Spirit of Orion, my sailboat. My little island of sanity.' Then he began "Even in the Rising Air." He stumbled at a chord change in the beginning and cut it short when he couldn't remember how the third verse started. I remember moving my lips, offering him the missing line. 'I know that I must hoist my sails.' By then I was balling pretty good."

"Martin just sat still for a little while. The silence was awkward. Several groups got up and left. Then he said, and I'll never forget this as long as I live, he said, 'Here's a song I haven't released yet. I wrote it after my wife left me. Thought it might bring her back.' He took a drink, 'but it didn't. Ah, well. Like Stephen Stills says, 'If you can't be with the one you love, honey'...' He put his hand up to his ear waiting for the crowd to answer, and he pointed to the girl with the long blond hair who took a drink from his bottle earlier. The crowd roared, 'Love the one you're with!' He slapped his guitar and said, 'You got it.' "

"That was it. I'd seen enough. I guess that's when I gave up on him."

"For better or for worse," said Flo.

Stephanie finished her story and doubled over in the chair stretching her back. She got up and stood looking out at the lights in the harbor. Nobody spoke.

A minute later we heard Kevin walking around the house. When he came up under the porch light Stephanie said, "Where in God's name have you been?"

"Relax, Mom, Jesus, I'm eighteen years old. I sat up on 'The Needle' and watched the sun go down, and then I headed straight back. It sure gets dark quick around here when the sun goes down, though. If there hadn't been a fair sized moon, it would have been a struggle staying on the trail. Anyhow, where's Ray and Uncle Jack?"

I said, "I think that was them I saw just now coming down final approach, why don't we drive down to the airport and meet them?"

By the time we got to the airport, Ray and Jack were tying down the airplane and getting it fueled for tomorrow. Jack looked beat, but Ray, as always, was upbeat and energized. Ray said that the sea conditions were a little better than yesterday, so they didn't end up chasing a bunch of whitecap ghosts, but they saw nothing of Martin. Tomorrow promises to be better.

## Songs of the Dark

Stephanie drove Jack and the others back to their place. Ray dropped me off and headed into town to see what sort of night-life he could scare up. Said he was looking for a poker game. I don't know how people like him can do it. If it were me, I'd just take a bath and collapse. And tomorrow it will be me.

I'm still thinking about that period when Martin was living alone and Jack was missing in action. Imagine having a brother and not know if he is alive or dead. Intellectually, I knew all these things about Martin, but now that I know the people involved, the reality of it is beginning to sink in. I think I can really get the picture.

I read some more of Martin's book and then listened to some of those tortured songs from his second album. I can imagine how things were back in September of 1972, but, God, I'd sure like to talk to him again and hear the story from him:

Martin sat in a straight-backed wooden chair at a desk in his darkened basement. It was 3:00 a.m.. The house creaked and moaned in a demon wind. A howling Santa Anna blew the palm tree into ghoulish midnight shapes. Like a mournful, shrieking, winged specter, a harpy, reaching shuddering wings toward the west then dropping them in despair.

The room was dark except for a quarter-inch red light glowing on his guitar amplifier and a small but intense desk lamp pinning a white-harsh circle of light to a yellow legal pad on the desk in front of him. A soft electric humming came from the lamp's transformer.

He had just finished writing out the words to "Screaming in the Distance." He sat by the desk holding his electric guitar. Swaying almost imperceptibly. He was experimenting with the guitar and amp tone controls, looking for a sound to fit his hellish soul-state.

He'd fallen asleep that night watching a TV news special about the war in



Vietnam. Here's how he described that night in his book: "My dreams were harrowing and disjointed. Jack slid in and out of view. Sometimes a wrestler. Aggressive, quick, and competent. Sometimes caught in a tree in his parachute, hanging helpless as Pathet Lao soldiers laughed and aimed their rifles. Human faces would turn to me, smile wickedly, and then explode in orange fireballs. Or crack and crumble like a building hit by a wreckerball. Snakes were about. Evil eyes like tiny glowing coals. I woke up around two, drenched in sweat. I found a bottle of scotch, went down into the basement, and wrote out the words to the song."

The music that came out when he played seemed distant. Eerie. Lifeless. Spare. Haunting. Haunted. He clicked on his tape recorder and recorded the song. Then he went upstairs and sat at the kitchen table waiting for the sun to slay the dragons of the night. He wrote, "I shuddered as I watched the palm tree moving outside in the wind. I felt the secret creepiness of things, if you know what I mean." (The "secret creepiness," I know what you mean, Martin.)

His eyes were dry and scratchy. He swept the unopened mail into a pile on the table in front of him and lay his head on it. He exhaled long and slow.

Martin awoke slowly to the sound of the doorbell. He struggled to shake off his dreamvisions. To re-assemble himself from all the freakish, disembodied parts that floated and circled in the buzzing ether around him.

By the time he raised his head, Leon and Brian were walking into the kitchen. Brian said, "Hey, man! Long time no see. How goes it?"

Martin nodded and tested his voice. "Good," he said. He cleared his throat and tried again, "Good." He pinched at the bridge of his nose and blinked hard. He looked at his visitors. "I just finished a song last night in fact. You guys want to hear it?"

Leon took a careful look at Martin and then glanced at Brian to compare impressions. He put his arm on Martin's shoulder and said, "Sure, man, I'd like to hear it, but first tell me how you're doing."

Martin got up cautiously, like an old and brittle man. As if a sudden move might turn his bones to dust. He went to the refrigerator, pulled out three beers and passed them around. "Like I said, I'm getting by. Come on down to the basement and listen to the new tune."

When Leon and Brian got comfortable, Martin started the tape. An electric guitar picked slowly back and forth through a minor chord. The amp had maximum vibrato. The voice came up. Just above a whisper.

Old men slide the checkers  
young men march on squares  
buzzard colonels circle high above  
the crowd just sits and stares.

I hear screaming in the distance  
I see fear on every face  
and I wake up to a nightmare  
that the daylight can't erase

but we've got honor  
and our image still intact  
a thousand bombers  
with the bodies in the back

They were our brothers  
and we packed them off to die  
to fight the demons  
behind an old man's eyes

Secret wars in Laos  
political intrigue  
Henry's got the paperwork  
says pretty soon we'll leave,

with our honor  
and our image still intact  
a thousand bombers  
with our brothers piled in back

We had to burn it down  
just to clean up the joint  
We had to kill them all  
to make them see our point.

Martin clicked off the tape recorder and looked over at Leon and Brian. Leon was sitting forward in his chair, elbows on his knees, hands together, head down, staring blankly into the carpet. Brian was sprawled backward in the couch, eyes closed. Neither one of them spoke for a long time. Brian exhaled and sat upright. Leon looked over at him. Their eyes exchanged a question.

Leon broke the silence. "That's a spooky song, Martin."

Martin took a drink. "It's a spooky war, Leon. I've got to tell it like it is." He looked out the window at the palm tree, then over at Brian. "Isn't that right, Brian? Haven't you always told me to take it from the heart, to write about what's going on in me?"

Brian turned toward Leon. "Yeah, that's what I've said. But this may be just a little too spooky."

Leon pretended to examine the palm of his hand. "I'm not sure the people

who bought the first album are going to be able to relate to this. You're going to have fans screaming for the old Martin Landry. Asking for some beauty and some hope and some fun."

Brian added, "Inspiration, insight, melody, harmony."

Martin looked up at the ceiling and then at Leon. "The first album had 'Who Done It?' That wasn't exactly bubblegum."

Leon said, "No, it wasn't. You're right." He paused. "But 'Who Done It?' was more, I don't know, more musical. Less depressing."

Brian said, "And there was a lot of other stuff on the album to balance the mood of 'Who Done It?' Fun loving stuff like 'I Like It Like That,' or musically fine stuff like 'Ice Sculpture.' Maybe if you had that kind of balance."

"Well, there's 'Favorite Window.' Musically, that is more like the early stuff."

Brian said, "Still, the lyrics are about a guy getting dumped."

Martin took a drink. "I *am* a guy who got dumped. I *am* a guy whose brother is an MIA in a meaningless fucking war. What am I going to sing about, putting flowers in my fucking hair?"

Brian said, "Have you heard anything at all about Jack?"

Martin shook his head. "He got blown out of the sky over Laos. That's all I fucking know. He might have been killed right then and there, or he might have parachuted out and landed in Laos. He might be a prisoner, he might not. I don't think the fucking government is doing everything it can, because we're supposedly not *in* Laos, man. Big secret. How's the government supposed to make a stink about what happens to our people in Laos when they won't admit we're there? And since there's no declared war, our guys aren't prisoners, they're 'air pirates.' I've heard rumors, and these are just rumors, I don't really know, but I've heard that the Pathet Lao don't even *take* prisoners." His voice was barely audible. "They just execute the guys on the spot. So even if he survived the plane crash, who knows what happened to him. And he may not have

survived at all. I don't know. I don't fucking know *anything*."

Leon said, "It's been tough for you, Martin. I know, *we* know that. We are your friends. We came to see if there is anything we can do for you. If I could make things better for you, I would, believe me."

Brian said, "Have you got anything else you want us to hear?"

"Yeah, there's one more. But after the way you reacted to the first one, I don't know if I should play it."

Leon said, "I'd like to hear it, man. Put it on."

"Okay. It's called 'Love is a Joke.' Remember, you asked for it."

Martin rewound the tape and clicked it on. An acoustic guitar strummed slowly at a minor chord. After a few measures, a sorrowful electric guitar came up softly in the background. The vocal began.

Love is a joke  
and the laugh's on you  
nature's trick  
to keep you pushing through

she says she loves you  
that she wishes you well  
it suits her purpose  
but it's just an evil spell

and you feed on lies  
that you tell yourself  
a house of ice  
that the wind will melt

and the lovely feeling  
just hangs by a thread  
in another hour  
you could wish that you were dead

Martin clicked off the tape. No one spoke.

The sprinklers came on in the back yard. They said, "Tss. Tss. Tss. Tss. Tss."

Again Leon broke the silence. "My advice is to hold off with this stuff. I don't think it would go over very well. But it's your call. You can put it out there if you want."

Brian added, "People listen to music to feel good, man. They don't want to be paralyzed with heavy stuff."

Martin gave a wry smile and shook his head. "Take it from the heart. That's what you guys have always said, right? Well, this is from my heart. I'm laying down tracks, man. You know what I mean? I'm leaving a trail. A chronicle. It shows where I'm at right now. I can't lie about where I'm at. I can't make up a lot of crap about how good life is, because for me, right now, it isn't."

He drained his beer and threw the dripping can across the room. It landed in a corner with a dozen other empty cans. "I want to put the record out. We'll see how many other depressed music lovers we can find."

## The Wait

God, I wish I could sleep. This is so typical for me. The more demanding tomorrow is, the harder it is to get any rest tonight. And tomorrow's flight is going to be another killer.

I am beginning to get pessimistic about finding Martin alive. No one is voicing such thoughts, and I am not about to be the first, but it's been what, seven days since the storm went over him? It's not that I've given up, it's just that my hope is eroding.

I am still reading about that period when Jack was missing. I'll quote from his book and let Martin speak for himself:

My mother called on the evening of the 27<sup>th</sup> of January, 1973. She was really tense. She asked if I'd been listening to the radio or watching the TV, because some heavy prisoner stuff was coming down. The U.S. and the North Vietnamese had signed the so-called peace agreement that week.

She told me that the North Vietnamese had just released a list of all of the POWs, and I asked her if she had heard anything from the Navy.

"Nothing yet. I think I'm going to lose my mind. This is driving me crazy."

She sounded like she was going crazy, too. Me? I was pretty well medicated, if you know what I mean, but the tension was getting to me, too. I felt like my feet were buzzing all the time. Sometimes I'd catch myself swatting bugs off my legs when there weren't any.

"I'm going a little nuts, too, Mom," I said. "Is anybody there with you?"

"Jim was down here this morning. He really is a dear man. He's been here at least once a day all this time, and I know it's hard for him. It's no fun being with someone in my condition. And Stephanie, she's here practically all the time with little Kevin. I honestly don't know what I'd do without that little angel

around here to cheer things up. Bless his heart, he doesn't know what's going on."

I felt like saying, "Shit, Ma, nobody knows what's going on," but I just hung onto the phone and didn't say anything.

So Mom said, "Well, stay by the radio and say a prayer. I'm going down to St. Joseph's for a little while. Stephanie is going to stay here in case some message comes through. You call here if you hear anything."

"Say a prayer," she said. As if that would make any difference. If the side that prays the most wins, why do we have to send over the troops. We could just hire a bunch of nuns and kick everybody's ass. But I said, "I will, Mom. So long." I mean, there's some stuff even a drunk is too smart to argue about.

"Bye, Marty."

I remember I took a small pair of tweezers and picked a roach out of the ashtray. I lit my Bic lighter under the roach, and when it started to smoke I put it under my nose and breathed deeply.

I didn't know what to do. I went down to the basement and plugged in my old Gibson ES-335 hollow-body electric guitar. Best damn guitar I ever had. Beautiful sunburst finish. God knows where it is now. I picked through riffs that were lifeless. I experimented with chord changes that went nowhere. Totally uninspired. Sometimes you can fool yourself, but it's hard to fool a guitar. I felt like just ripping everything to shreds.

I set the volume on my Fender amp to ten, the maximum. I set the guitar volume to ten, and then I turned and faced the amp. The feedback from the amp to the guitar and back created an ear-splitting squeal. A hellish roar that made an empty beer can dance across the table top. The guitar quivered in my hands, and I felt the roaring in my gut. I stood in the noise like you might stand under Niagra Falls. Then I kicked at the speakers until the amp just made this



clicking sound.

I went upstairs and got a beer and then sat alone on the deck watching the sun drop into the off-shore overcast. It got cold on the deck, and I went back inside. I picked up a pencil and a little yellow legal pad. I sat at the kitchen table humming as I wrote:

Maybe he's here  
under this same sad sky  
maybe he's gone  
to better things  
maybe he found  
the fight of his life  
the boy with the  
golden wings.

If there's a god  
for this crazy place  
who knows how  
all of this unfolds  
I wish he'd rise  
and show his face  
I need a hand  
to hold.

There might have been more, but that's all I can remember now. Bleary-eyed, I read the lyrics back. I crossed out the last two lines and wrote, "The strain is/getting old." I groped for a tune. After three false starts I rolled the paper into a ball and threw it into the fireplace. With all the others. (One Hit

Wonder, pp. 265-266. Quoted by permission.)

## Angel Falls

I guess I laid my head back on the couch sometime late last night, but all I know for sure is that Ray was shaking me at five, and when I woke up I felt completely drained and stiff everywhere. Ray was singing some raunchy outback song while he made the coffee. The light in the kitchen was a harsh yellow.

I ate a bowl of this lousy wheat cereal they have here, then we headed down to the airport. The sky was just turning white off to the east as we climbed out on course toward the search area. I climbed through multiple cloud layers to sixteen thousand feet, then leveled off and turned on the autopilot.

Ray was asleep in the seat next to me. Maybe he *is* human. We were just above the tops of the clouds. The sun came up and painted them every shade of orange and pink and gray. It was clear above us, but the cloud cover was thick below. I was in a funky mood, but I'll have to admit it was beautiful.

I stared out the window and watched the clouds slide past. Now and then one rose up to our altitude, and we would punch through it with a little wagging of the wings. I was thinking about how my life was going back in early seventies, back when Martin and his family were going through all that turmoil.

That's when Beth and I moved out of Boulder and I took the teaching job in Montana. It was hard for both of us. We had come to love Colorado for a thousand different reasons. For the clarity and dryness of the air. Where mountains a hundred miles away could stand sharp and vibrant. And for the spontaneity of the weather. Where dawn brought rosy-colored new-born mountains under a still-silver sky. Where noon painted the mountains brown and green, and set the sky to a deep sharp blue. Where late afternoon could bring billowing thunderstorms with shafts of rain driven into the now-dark and sullen folds of land. Where you could walk over squeaking snow at minus twenty degrees on Tuesday and run the trails in shirtsleeves on Thursday. And we loved

the way the prairie reached for the mountains with hardly a ripple of warning and then shot straight up to 14,000 feet without the foreplay of foothills. But there was no way for me to continue my academic career in Boulder, and we were forced to start looking elsewhere.

As it turned out, I was hired as an assistant professor of mathematics at Richter College in Angel Falls, Montana. With lots of regrets over leaving the beauty of Colorado, Beth and I moved up there in the summer of 1974. Beth got a job as a reporter for the local paper, the *Angel Falls Free Press*. We bought a little house and settled into a new routine.

Angel Falls was a town of about fifty thousand people sitting on a plateau above the confluence of the White River and the East Fork of the Pope, in the high prairie of north central Montana. It was a college town and a local center for commerce, banking, and medicine. It was otherwise isolated and a long way from not much.

I taught calculus, linear algebra, and statistics to a fairly homogeneous student body. They were the well-behaved sons and daughters of prosperous Montana families. Most of the students intended to pick up degrees and return to the family farm or the family business. Too old for high-school and too young for the world, they just seemed to drift through college by default. I did my best to make the classes interesting and worthwhile, but this wasn't a place for pushing the frontiers of mathematics in the classroom.

It seems like a lifetime ago already, but I remember starting each semester with a little speech. I look out at the blanket of cloud below me, but in my mind I'm watching a young professor stand before his class. "We all seek truth. Something we can rely on. Something we can trust. We need it. We hunger for it. We look for it everywhere. But most people look in the wrong places. They look for it up on the surface world of our day to day lives. But it's not there. Not in the friendships and loves that come and go for no apparent reason. There is no constancy there. No inevitability. No immutability. In vain we look for the causes of economic depressions or the reasons for the rise and fall of

nations, but these things elude our understanding even after centuries of study. The world that we can know, the world that we can truly understand, truly trust, is out of sight, just below the surface. In a way it is a simple world, a world where there are only a few reasons why things happen the way they do. It is the world where things happen because of gravitation, because of electromagnetism, because of the weak and the strong nuclear forces. This is where truth is. This is where inevitability and reliability are. But most people can't understand this world, because the language there is mathematics. The world of deep truth is strung together by mathematics. It's like a web. We are standing here at the door to this world. Calculus allows your first step inside. I can help you take your first step, but the journey is up to you."

God, was that really me? I think of that lecture now and just smile at the purity and simplicity of my own young mind. I was a Newtonian, and a bit of a Pythagorean. Quantum mechanics, chaos theory, and vast areas of human interaction escaped me entirely. Probably still do.

What I really liked was showing my students the brilliance of a mathematical insight or breakthrough. I loved to lead them up to the point where they could see the problem faced by a previous scholar, where they could feel the tension in the problem. See how he was blocked as long as he stayed with the mind-set of the past. I would let it hang for a moment. Every eye was on me. Every mind caught in the chase. (Or so I hoped.) And then I would show them the great mind of Newton or Leibniz or Euler and how it had found a way. "We stand on the shoulders of giants," I would say, echoing the words of my father. I wanted to strike a spark, drop it in the kindling of their young heads, and fan it into a flame. Now and then this worked on a bright student, who sometimes went on to study math at a larger university, but for the most part these students weren't very interested. They simply wanted to complete a degree requirement with minimum energy and move on through the diploma mill.

Still there was my research. I continued to be interested in the subject of my doctoral dissertation, which dealt with dynamical systems that change character as they

move from one region to another. I worked in this area for about ten years, producing some grants and a series of publications in prestigious math journals. All of this led to tenure and promotion and security, but an uneasy suspicion that gathered up over the years, a feeling that I was drifting out of the flow of life. A feeling that I was missing something.

Beth's work at the *Angel Falls Free Press* put her on top of all of the goings-on in town. At one time or another she worked on about every type of story imaginable—petty intrigue at City Hall, local personalities, charities, homelessness, regional economic issues, you name it. Her life was phone calls, contacts, notes in spiral binders, records at the county office, planning commission meetings. She put herself into the swirl of life. The day to day doings of the people.

There wasn't much overlap between her world and mine. Not a lot to talk about.

Ray woke up when I reduced the engine power to start my descent for the search area. We entered the clouds at about fifteen thousand feet. It got progressively more bumpy as we descended, and every once in a while we would fly through a moderate rain shower. The cloud deck was solid here, not the layers we had climbed through leaving Rarotonga. We both fidgeted as we descended on instruments toward the water.

We were still in cloud when I leveled off with five hundred feet showing on the radar altimeter. I turned the airplane forty-five degrees left and right and watched the weather radar. It showed rain almost everywhere. We turned to each other with looks of frustration. I carried on for a few minutes, and we flew out of the clouds, but the view was not encouraging. There were lower scuddy clouds here and there beneath us that virtually lay on the water. There were gray rainshafts falling into the ocean, and the opening we flew into closed up again in seconds.

"Looks like today's not the day, mate," said Ray.

I just nodded.

Ultimately we decided to turn north for a half hour and stay at five hundred feet, hoping we would come into a clearing somewhere in the search area. But what we got was more of the same—steady rain, little patches where we could see for maybe a half mile. We briefly debated heading for Niue, but the weather there was worse, and reluctantly we turned for home.

## Dear Mrs. Landry

Jack and Ray flew out again at dawn this morning. The weather is supposed to be better out in the search area today. I went over to Marie's last night for dinner, then I came back and slept late. I called Stephanie around eleven. She said that Kevin was getting cabin fever. There really isn't much for him to do around here. While I was on the phone I looked out the window and noticed that Martin's old boat, The Spirit of Orion, (which its new owner now calls The Tangaroa) was back in the harbor after a charter to Aitutake. The owner's son is a great kid named Winston, and he's about Kevin's age. I thought I'd go down to the boat and see if Winston had any ideas about things for Kevin to do. Maybe that's a risk, since those two kids are worlds apart, but I told Stephanie I'd look into it.

So I went down to see Winston, and it turned out that his father needed him to work under the boat most of the day, scraping junk off the bottom of the hull. Winston was running the air compressor and filling some scuba tanks when I showed up. I told him about Kevin and said that I didn't know if Kevin could dive or not, but maybe he'd like to just hang out down there on the dock.

Winston was happy to play host, so I drove around the island, picked up Kevin, and brought him back to the dock. I thought maybe I'd have to hang around and help the guys get to know one another, but Kevin, who had never scuba dived before, went right over to the equipment and started asking a million questions. I don't even think he turned around when I left.

Then I drove over to Stephanie's and found her taking wash off the clothesline and talking to Flo, who was sitting in the shade on the porch. Flo had bought one of those big straw hats that the native women wear, and she was a real sight sitting there with those huge sunglasses and that hat. Anyway, I sat down with Flo, and a few minutes later Stephanie finished with the laundry and joined us on the porch.

"I'm beginning to think it's hopeless," said Stephanie. "You guys go out



there day after day, risking your own necks to find him, but it's been...what, ten days? Maybe it's time for us to start getting realistic."

I sort of bit my lip and looked over at Flo. She sat still for a moment and then said, "We'll quit when it's quitting time, and it ain't quitting time just yet. We never gave up on Jack, did we? We didn't know what happened to him for *years*, and we didn't give up." She looked over at Stephanie, "At least I didn't give up on him."

Stephanie said, "Oh, God, I hate bringing that up again. But Flo, I always had hope for Jack. I never gave up."

Flo said, "You were great, honey, I couldn't have made it without you, but I do believe that you gave up on him right at the end."

Stephanie said, "When we got the letter? Is that what you mean?"

Flo said, "That's right. The day we got that goddamn letter."

I looked over at Stephanie and shook my head to indicate that I didn't follow what they were talking about.

Stephanie said, "It was February 1, 1973. I can see it now like a scene from a movie I've watched a hundred times. We were at Flo's house. She stood by the door holding the envelope from the State Department. I was at her side with an arm across her shoulders. Flo's hands trembled as she tried to open the letter. She handed me the envelope and fell into the couch. I could hardly open it either, and my mouth was so dry I just whispered as I read it out loud. I read that line a thousand times, and I'll never forget it. The State Department letter said, 'This confirms that Lieutenant Jackson S. Landry is not on the list of U.S. prisoners in Vietnam provided in Paris January 27, 1973.' I read that and then just collapsed next to Flo. I felt weak. My blood felt cold and bubbly, like it was 7-Up."

Flo sat there in the lawn chair, her head rocking from side to side. her voice was shaky. "We just sat there stunned," she said. "Jack's picture looking down at us from the mantel. Him with his clear, focused eyes and just the hint of a smile. I felt like I couldn't breathe."

Stephanie said, “It was an odd sensation. It’s like I had kept this space open for him, and the space just slammed shut. The air in the room was strange. Like an enormous bell had rung and the sound just now died away, leaving the air all shook up. Agitated. Did I really give up on him? I don’t know, but that letter sure hurt.”

I didn’t understand. I said, “But Jack came home. Why did they tell you he wasn’t a prisoner?”

“Well, that’s the interesting part,” said Stephanie. “Right after we got the letter, the phone rang. It was Rob, the guy I’m married to now. At the time, he was a physician who was engaged to a Belgian nurse who had been captured in Laos. Flo and I had run into him at a meeting of families of POW/MIAs in Washington. Rob wondered if we had gotten a letter, because he had heard that other families did. I told him that we got one, too, and Jack was not on the list. Then I asked about Jumet, his fiancé.”

Flo said, “It turns out that his fiancé died in a prison camp. Sad, sad story. That goddamn war was nothing but sad stories.”

Stephanie said, “Rob hadn’t heard a thing, but that didn’t surprise him since his situation was so much different from ours. Then he said that he was not sure we were getting the story straight. The papers had been saying that the prisoner lists were incomplete and that people captured in Laos weren’t shown on the lists. In fact, two days earlier a Defense Department guy said, and I remember the exact words because I found the article and clipped it out after Rob told me about it. The Defense Department said, and I quote, ‘We firmly expect to have a list of the POWs to cover Laos.’ Which sounded to me like they didn’t have that list yet, so Laos prisoners wouldn’t, or couldn’t, be on the list no matter what. It was all so confusing.”

Flo swivelled her glass in front of her eyes and stared at the ice. Stephanie went on, “I remember telling Rob that the peace agreement mentioned *all Americans* held in Indochina. And I was sure that the Belgians would be included, too. But he reminded me that North Vietnam signed the agreement, not Laos. And the North Vietnamese may not even know who the Laotians were holding. So POWs captured in Laos wouldn’t be

on the list from North Vietnam.”

Flo leaned toward me, elbows on her knees. She said, “It was a goddamn mess, I’ll tell you that. Pain, confusion, Jesus F. Christ. I remember sitting there thinking: Maybe he’s here. Maybe he’s there. Maybe he’s alive. Maybe he’s dead. No one even knows if he was captured or killed. Is this how it ends? He’s just *not* on some goddamn list.”

Even after all these years, Stephanie and Flo still got very agitated talking about this episode. I nudged the conversation toward happier times, asking them how they actually found out that Jack was alive. I was relieved to see their mood improve as they told me that story, but the whole time they were talking, I was thinking about Martin’s reaction to it all. Last night I read about how Martin finally got the good news. Here’s his story:

I was passed out, dreaming that I was at a beach. I was crawling over hot sand. Pissed off people were all around me. They were shouting about something, but I couldn’t figure out what they were upset about. But they were bore-pissed. Red faces with spit gathered at the corners of their mouths. I felt like I’d done something terrible, but I didn’t know what it was.

The pay phone by the restroom at my dream-beach was ringing. If I could just crawl to the phone, maybe I could find out why all these people were so fucking mad. But it was so hard to move. Typical dream.

I groaned and rolled over toward the nightstand. “Hello.”

“Martin, have you heard the news?”

I was still a little confused. “Stephanie? What news?”

“He’s on the list. Jack is on the list.”

She sounded excited. Maybe this was good news? I propped myself up on an elbow. “What list are you talking about?”

“Hang on, I’ll let Flo tell you.”

Mom came on the line. "Marty, thank God, I can hardly believe it. You know the North Vietnamese released a list of prisoners a few days ago, and Jack was not on the list?"

"Right, right."

"Well, they just released a supplemental list of names of prisoners of war that they are now holding. It's just ten people from Laos. It's part of the peace settlement. Jack is on the list! He's alive. The Navy just called. They said they don't know exactly when he will be released, but things are happening fast."

I felt the hair rising on the back of my neck. I had never even dared to hope. "Oh, that's great. Am I dreaming this? Tell me I'm awake."

"I feel the same way. It's like I can breathe again, but I can hardly believe it."

I pushed myself upright in the bed. "Did they say how he is? Is he hurt or anything?"

"They didn't say. I don't think they know yet."

"When can we see him?"

"The Navy guy said that the tentative plan is to fly them to the Philippines then Hawaii then California, so I guess we'll come out to California as soon as we know what's going on."

I swung around in the bed and put my feet on the floor. "This is so great. It's incredible. I'm going to go turn on the news. Come on out here as soon as you can. We'll have the biggest damn party this town has ever seen. Bring Steph and Kevin, too."

"Don't you worry. I know she wouldn't miss Jack's homecoming for the world. You can't believe how great that girl has been. It's such a shame you two can't work out your problems, but I must say I'm glad to have had her down here with me these last few months."

"Well, it will be great to see you, but to see Jack again...incredible. I

still can't believe it. Call when you know when you're coming."

"Okay, Marty. So long. I love you."

"I love you too, Mom." (One Hit Wonder, pp. 290-291. Quoted by permission.)

I thought of that passage as I sat on the porch with Stephanie and Flo. What a huge weight must have fallen from all of their shoulders. I turned to Flo and said, "I'll bet you were beside yourself with joy when you finally talked to Jack."

She said, "It's a night I'll never forget. I'd heard so much b.s. from the government that I wasn't really going to believe anything until I spoke to Jack myself. We were all over at Martin's place waiting for a call. Finally this communications officer called to say that Jack's plane was in free airspace over the Gulf of Tonkin. All three networks should be giving live coverage of the landing in the Philippines in a few hours. Well, we were all jumping for joy, but I wanted to hear Jack's voice before I'd allow myself to fully believe." Flo drained her glass and sat there shaking her head.

Stephanie said that they turned on the TV, but there was nothing on yet, so they shut off the sound and kept an eye on the screen while they waited. Finally the network broke in with the story of the returning POWs. The commentator droned on about the history of the POW release, killing time while a C-141 pulled up and stopped on the tarmac at Clark Air Force base in the Philippines. After what seemed like an eternity, a door opened in the airplane and the former POWs came out one by one. Stephanie, Flo, and Martin stood in front of the TV. Fists clenched, dancing from foot to foot in anticipation. Two year old Kevin scooted around the room on a tricycle that Martin had just bought.

Stephanie jumped and put her hands in front of her mouth. "That's him! That's him!"

"Oh, my God," said Flo as she leaned into Martin. "He looks so *thin*."

Martin put his arm around Flo and steadied her. "But he was walking okay

and standing tall. He must be alright.”

The ranking POW on the flight went to a microphone and made a short statement to the crowd and the cameras. The words flew over the heads of the three of them as they stared at the TV screen waiting for another look at Jack.

They thought they saw him as the former POWs marched to the busses that took them to the hospital, but they weren't sure. When the former POWs were driven out of camera range, the three just fell into the furniture, emotionally drained. Kevin climbed up onto the sofa and dove into Flo's lap.

Flo caught Kevin with a grunt and wrestled him still. Kevin said, “No, Grandma,” and jumped down.

Flo said, “I feel so bad for the families of all the MIAs that didn't get the good news that we got. Some of them waited a lot longer than we did, not knowing if their husband or son or father was alive or dead. And now they don't hear anything at all. This is the last plane. The government says that's everybody, no more prisoners in southeast Asia. We are so lucky. Say a prayer with me now.” She bowed her head and wiped at a tear.

Martin said, “This calls for a celebration. Who's ready for a margarita? It's time to get into the party mood. Jack is back. Let the good times roll.”

Stephanie closed her eyes, “Martin, please don't get sloshed tonight. Please, don't ruin this day for us.”

Kevin mimicked his mother, “Please, Martin. Please, Martin.” Then he ran into the kitchen and pulled on the refrigerator door.

Flo rubbed Martin on the back and said, “Steph, it's a special occasion. One little drink isn't going to cause any problems. We've got to wait for Jack's call, and God knows how long that's going to take.”

Two minutes later the phone rang. Martin answered it with Flo and Stephanie at his side. “How did you get this number?...Yes, I saw him get off the plane.... No, I haven't heard from him, and I won't if you tie up the phone line.... No, I don't have any

comment... How the fuck do you *think* we feel, you fucking idiot?" He slammed the phone down and turned to Stephanie and Flo. "Maybe we should get used to the newsmen, because this is the way it's going to be. But those people drive me nuts."

The phone rang again. Stephanie picked it up. "We are waiting for a call from Jack Landry. If you are not Jack Landry, please hang up...." Stephanie waited a second then put down the receiver and smiled at Flo and Martin.

Martin went into the kitchen and made a quart of his killer margaritas—three parts tequila, two parts Cointreau, one part roses. He brought out three glasses. Flo downed hers, and Stephanie set hers aside.

Stephanie got a deck of cards, and they sat at the kitchen table playing three-handed bridge as the hours dripped by. The phone rang every few minutes for a while, but it was never Jack. After three hours Flo got up, stretched and plopped into the couch. Stephanie sat at the table looking out at the lights in the harbor below.

Martin poured the last of the margaritas from the blender into his glass and sat next to Stephanie. "There were some fun times here, remember?" The alcohol was evident in his speech.

Stephanie didn't look at him. Her expression hardened. "I remember, Martin. I know the whole story."

Martin looked out at the harbor lights then back at Stephanie. "It doesn't have to be a sad story. It could still have a happy ending."

Stephanie looked at Martin, "You can still write just about any ending you want. But you have to *do* it, not just wish for it. You have to straighten yourself out."

Martin got up, walked over and lay down in the other couch. "Same shit, same day."

Stephanie stared out the window. "This isn't 'shit.' It's personal responsibility. It's deserving to be a parent."

She looked over at Martin. He was asleep.

The phone startled all three of them. Martin and Flo asleep on the couches

and Stephanie dozing, head down on the kitchen table.

Stephanie went to the phone. "Hello?"

"Hello, this is Jack Landry. I can't hear you very well. Who is this?"

"Jack! Jack! It's me, Stephanie. Everybody's here. How are you?"

Martin and Flo pressed in around Stephanie.

"I'm doing okay. All in one piece. It's great to be back, I'll tell you."

"Jack, you can't believe how good it is to hear your voice. I'm going to put Flo on. I love you, Jack."

"I love you too, Steph. I'll see you in a few days."

Flo took the phone. Her voice was shaky. "Jack, I prayed for you every day. I knew you'd come back."

"I prayed, too, Mom. I really did."

"We saw you get off the plane. You look so thin. Are you alright?"

"I was banged up some in the beginning, but, yeah, I'm alright. I just had a couple of steaks and a half dozen eggs, so don't worry about that. I'll fatten up some when I get back to New Orleans and get some of your cooking."

"That will be so great, Jack. I can't wait."

"Me either, Mom. You know what, there's a line of guys waiting to use the phone. That's why it took me so long to get a call in. I ought to sign off and give some of them a chance. So I'll call again when I can, and I'll see you in a few days."

"Say something to Marty first. He's right here."

Martin took the phone. "Where ya at, Jack."

"Hey, Marty. How's life in the fast lane?"

"Not so bad. Hey, we're having a party for you. Too bad I just drank your share of the booze."

"No sweat, bro', we'll have more parties when I get back. Look I gotta run. Take care of those fine ladies 'til I get there. See ya."

"Adios."



Stephanie finished her story and looked out at the surface of the lagoon. It was starting to turn golden in the low sun. I heard a familiar rumble coming down the road. It was Winston's ancient Toyota pickup. He was bringing Kevin home after a day down at the dock.

When they pulled up, I introduced Winston to Stephanie and Flo. Winston was the perfect gentleman. He offered his sympathy to the family. He spoke warmly of Martin, and said that he still had hope that he would be found alive. He told them of a cousin of his who had been adrift for eighteen days before a Japanese fishing boat picked him up.

Flo said, "Eighteen days? What did he eat all that time?"

Winston grinned. "Sushi," he said. "He caught a few fish, and every once in a while a flying fish would land in his boat. He wasn't so fat when he came back, but he was plenty happy. Maybe that's the way it will be with Martin."

Kevin couldn't wait to break into the conversation. It turns out that Winston showed him the basics of scuba diving, and the two of them worked together on the bottom of The Spirit of Orion, and when they finished early, Winston took them out in the dinghy and they scuba dived on the reef.

Kevin was beside himself trying to describe everything he'd seen. "There were these little colored things clinging to the coral. They looked like popcorn in every bright color you could imagine. When you swept your hand past them, they would just disappear, then they'd pop out again in a few seconds. We saw a white tipped shark just cruising along the bottom. Starfish, tuna, God, it was incredible," he said.

I was glad that things turned out well for Kevin, and I enjoyed hearing him talk, but I felt like I needed to get back home for a while and just lay low and recharge my internal batteries before dinner. I told them I'd wait around my place then pick up Ray and Jack when they got back from the day's search. I started easing toward my car, explaining that we'd all be back later for dinner.

## The Amber Waves of Grain

Having a lot of people around has always worn me down. I need to get away by myself and read a book, play my guitar, look out a window, something like that. When there is a lot of busy-ness around me, it can get to be a craving.

I went home and just fell into bed and closed my eyes. The silence was as sweet as chocolate. Not silence really, just the little sounds that add up to silence. Birds debating their property rights to the trees. The sea breeze moving the curtains. The kids two doors down. Somebody practicing a flute off in the distance somewhere. I'd heard that sound a time or two before. It was a hauntingly beautiful sound, something that you wouldn't even hear unless you stopped doing everything else.

I lay there on the edge of sleep, wondering how Ray and Jack were doing out on the search site. Wondering how Martin, if there still was a Martin, was getting along on the open seas. Wondering if he'd come back with some sushi stories.

I drifted close to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come. After maybe twenty minutes, I got up and read through more of Martin's book. I was interested in what happened when the family finally got to meet Jack after his release.

Martin wrote about their reunion in Oakland April of 1973:

Stephanie and Flo were as fidgety as junkies while we were waiting in that crumbly little room at the Oak Knoll Navy Hospital. Kevin sat on the floor humming to himself while he put little plastic people into a toy airplane. He'd put them in, shake them out, put them in again.

Stephanie leaned toward Flo and me and said, "Remember what they told us, don't ask him anything about being a prisoner. Just keep it light."

Keep it light. That's a good one. Like nothing ever happened, I suppose. Just a government sponsored walk in the park.

Flo said, "I don't know why I should be so nervous. Feel my hands.

They are like ice.”

That didn't prove much though, because her hands were always like ice.

The door knob turned and all three of us jumped up. An officer opened the door and smiled, then he stood aside and Jack walked in. I nearly fell back into my chair. It was great to see him, but it was also a shock to see what he looked like.

Flo moved slowly toward him, grabbed him around the waist, and wouldn't let go. Stephanie and I stood on either side with our arms around them both.

I was startled at the boniness of my brother's shoulder.

After a minute, Flo backed up saying, “Let me get a look at you. I haven't even seen you yet.”

Jack stood facing the three of us. Arms out slightly, palms forward. There was a touch of gray around his temples. His eyes seemed darker and quieter. His face was drawn and thin. The clothes hung loosely on him.

I stepped up and shook Jack's hand saying, “Damn, it's good to see you, man.” Or some dumb line like that. His hand was thin. The grip weak.

We sat in a small circle. Jack held his right hand in his left, massaging his fingers. Rubbing and rubbing, like he was trying to get gum off them or something. Kevin had withdrawn toward the corner of the room. He eyed Jack suspiciously.

Jack nodded toward Kevin and smiled, “And who's this?”

Stephanie looked over at Kevin and said, “Kevin, come over here, darling, and meet your Uncle Jack. Uncle Jack has been away a long time.”

We were all looking at Kevin. He picked up his toy airplane and carried it over and set it on Jack's lap. Kevin said something like, “I fly *big* airplane.” He was always telling us what a bigshot he was.

Jack put his hand on Kevin's head and moved his fingers slowly through Kevin's soft hair. Like he'd come from a planet where everyone was bald, and he didn't know what it was. "Hello, Kevin. How old are you?"

Kevin held up two fingers.

Jack said, "Kevin, I think you and me are going to be good friends. What do you think?"

Kevin said, "No!" Then he grabbed Jack's right hand and gave it a vicious pinch. That kid could be like that. He kicked me so hard one time I nearly cried. I never understood it.

But Jack just sat there. Impassive.

Stephanie gave Kevin a little swat on his butt and picked him up. She apologized all over the place.

Flo said, "It's just the terrible twos. You should have been around when Jack and Martin were that age. Sometimes I thought they were going to kill each other."

Stephanie said, "Kevin, you tell your uncle you're sorry, and don't you speak like that to your uncle. He came a long way to see you."

Jack said, "It's okay." His voice was hushed. He turned toward Stephanie and said, "I knew you were pregnant before I was captured, but I didn't know if you had a boy or a girl. I often wondered. I'd try to picture the kid. You know, six months old now. One year old now. I didn't know about anything. I didn't get any letters. Nothing. They wouldn't let me send any either." He paused, "What else is new with everybody? How are you, Mom?"

Jack didn't know that Stephanie had left me then. I was wondering how he'd react to that.

Flo said, "Today, I'm wonderful. Until we heard from you, well, sometimes not so good. But today's a new day. Every day will be Sunday, by and by."

Jack smiled and nodded, "I haven't heard that one for a while. How's the music business, Marty?"

I said, "Good. The first album is still selling pretty well, and I've got another one that's about ready. In fact, you've got some fair-sized royalty checks from the first album. We're holding them in a special account. Whenever you're ready, I can use a bass player."

Jack smiled, "I did used to love that. Maybe one of these days." He stretched and extended his fingers and then curled them into a fist.

Stephanie said, "Do you have any plans? I mean, I don't want to rush you, and you can do nothing as long as you want, I just wondered if you had thought about it."

Jack said, "I thought about it a lot. Lot's of time to think. I want to get back into flying, but I think I'll leave the Navy. I don't know when yet. We haven't covered that sort of thing in the de-briefs yet."

There was an awkward pause.

Flo said, "When you are finished here, why don't you come back to New Orleans and stay with me for awhile until you get on your feet. I'll put some meat back on your bones. Red beans and rice. Gumbo. Soft shell crab."

Jack smiled and said, "That sounds real nice. On the plane coming over here, when we were finally able to think about food from home, I had a craving for an oyster loaf." He paused. "Funny, isn't it? The stuff you miss."

I said, "I know what you mean. I get the same craving living in L.A.. No Cajun food there either." Thinking about that remark now, I've got to admit, I can be a real dumbass sometimes.

Jack had a distant smile. He looked quickly at me and nodded. I had a strange feeling run through me right then. It was like I didn't know my own brother anymore.

Another awkward silence.

Stephanie turned to Kevin, “Your Uncle Jack can fly an airplane, Kevin.”

Kevin stood up holding his toy plane. “Fly *big* airplane, shhhooop.” He dropped the plane onto the floor and the little people bounced in all directions.

Jack nodded and looked at Stephanie, then at me. There was nothing in his eyes.

There was a knock at the door and the knob turned. Jack startled and slid back in his chair. He was obviously agitated, at least for a second or two. I studied Jack’s expression and realized that I had never seen Jack show fear before.

A Navy officer looked in and smiled. “Lieutenant Landry, I’m going to have to drag you away to see the dentist. Folks, I’m sorry, but we are going to have to keep the visits short to begin with. But as time goes by, we’ll be able to loosen up some.”

Jack stood up and moved toward the door. (One Hit Wonder, pp. 304-307. Quoted by permission.)

What a scene. I can barely imagine it. I can barely imagine being so torn by a crosscurrent of emotions. They thought he was dead, but he was alive. Then they thought they’d get him back, but he wasn’t the same.

## Tricycles

I set Martin's book down and lay back in the bed thinking about what life was like for me back in the '70s. It was nothing like what it must have been for Martin, Stephanie, Flo, and Jack. I was teaching math in a quiet little college town in Montana.

I remember that I used to like Wednesdays. I didn't teach on Wednesdays, and as soon as Beth left for the newspaper, I had the house to myself. I'd generally read the technical, mathematical books and papers that had gathered during the week. I'd make out exams, outline the next week's lectures, and do some research or writing if I had a project in the works.

I remember one day I got through my academic chores and picked up a paper by Robert May entitled, "Simple Mathematical Models with Very Complicated Dynamics." A colleague in biology had given it to me the previous Friday, saying the math looked interesting. I had read the introduction the night before and was excited about digging into the paper.

The house was quiet. I got a cup of coffee and sat at my desk by the window. The window looked out onto the street. It was a modest neighborhood. Young families just starting out, a few retirees.

I flipped through the paper. "Looks pretty simple," I said to myself. The paper dealt with difference equations, and mathematicians had been studying these for hundreds of years. A difference equation lets you use the today's value of  $x$  to predict the value  $x$  will take tomorrow, and then use the value for tomorrow to predict the value for the next day, and so on *ad infinitum*. The intriguing thing about May's paper was that he showed that surprisingly simple equations can give rise to appallingly complex motions for  $x$ —the values of  $x$  can follow a chaotic-looking path through time.

I remember that I was stunned as the import of this sunk in. Until now, scientists had thought that complex motions, like swirling smoke, or heart arrhythmia, or

jumpy stock prices, could only be explained by randomness or very complex underlying equations. And we felt that when the data moved around in a random-looking fashion, it could not be explained at all, it was simply “white noise.” The implication of May’s simple paper was that complex motion could be explained by simple equations—there could be simple reasons for what had until then seemed beyond explanation. I sat transfixed thinking of the implications. “This means that a seemingly insignificant event,” I whispered, “could have extraordinarily large consequences downstream.”

My concentration was interrupted by a scratching, rumbling sound coming from outside. I tried to concentrate, but the obnoxious noise prevented it. “Oh, crap,” I said. I turned, looked out the window, and watched Nick, the three-year-old from across the street, as he peddled his little plastic-wheeled tricycle down the sidewalk. The noise seemed out of all proportion to the size of the boy and the tricycle. I wished he’d get a tricycle with rubber wheels and leave the rest of the neighborhood in peace. I got up and stood at the window, watching Nick zip back and forth tirelessly along the sidewalk. I knew Nick could keep this up for an hour or more.

My concentration broken, I picked up my guitar and played a few chords. I wasn’t inspired. I put the guitar down, went back to the kitchen to get another cup of coffee, and then returned to my desk and continued going through the paper.

Nick made a joyous squealing noise outside the window. I turned and looked. He was sitting on his tricycle at the top of his driveway. His mother was at the bottom, near where the driveway met the sidewalk. Nick roared down the driveway toward his mother. When he got to her, she plucked him out of the tricycle and raised him up over her head. Nick screamed with delight. His mother said, “That’s my boy. That’s my big, big boy.”

I smiled at Nick and his mother, and then the smile fell from my lips and I felt as if a spear passed through my heart. I shook myself and fought to keep away a painful image from my past. I couldn’t do it. The year was 1969. Beth and I were living together and going to the University of Washington. Beth stood in front of me in our little



house. Tears streaming down her cheeks. “We could handle it, Joe. We could if you *wanted* to. How old were your parents when *you* were born?”

“Early thirties,” I’d said. My skin felt cold and electric.

“Well, my mom was nineteen, and they managed okay. Unless maybe you think I’m all screwed up.”

I said, “It’s not that I don’t want kids, it’s just that the timing is all wrong. Let me get through college, you get through, too. We’ll get our foot in the door, get established, do it right.”

Beth turned her head from side to side, tears streaming down. She started to speak, then threw up her hands, turned, and stalked into the bathroom. She slammed the door. Pictures rattled on the walls.

I just stood there. I felt sweaty and weak. Hopeless. Beth flew back out the bathroom door and glared at me. “So what am I supposed to *do*? Have you figured that out?”

“I want us to stay together,” I said. “I want to have kids, but later. Is that so bad?”

“Well, maybe it’s not so bad for you,” she said, “but it’s going to be bad for me.”

Now back in Montana, I shook my head and sat back at my desk, staring at the math article. I forced myself to read on. Robert May wrote, “...in the chaotic regime arbitrarily close initial conditions can lead to trajectories which, after a sufficiently long time, diverge widely...Lorenz had called this general phenomenon the ‘butterfly effect.’” (*Nature*, 1976, p. 466.)

*So, I thought, a simple equation might explain a very complex outcome, BUT if the system is disturbed even slightly, as by the flapping of the wings of a butterfly, downstream the effects can be profound. Simple causes, profound effects. Two particles start out very close and then diverge wildly over time.*

I saw that May’s results offered both a bright side and a dark side. On the

bright side, there was the tantalizing possibility that math could explain complex happenings, phenomena never before thought to be explicable, and do it with simple equations. But on the other hand, being even slightly wrong about the numbers in the equations would mean that any predictions taken from the equations would be worthless. I interpreted the paper as pointing toward both hope and futility.

I heard the rumbling outside and again looked up from the article. Nick was roaring by on the sidewalk, and his mother was watering the roses and turning every few seconds to keep track of him. I went back to the window to watch. My thoughts fell back to 1969 again.

I was waiting in a cold, sterile examining room with Beth. Nothing lived there. The doctor came in the room with a clipboard in his hand. My skin felt tight and cool. The doctor was blunt. He shook his head and looked up from the clipboard.

“I wish you’d have gotten down here sooner after the infection set in,” he said, “then we would have been able to do something for you. I’m afraid at this point, we are at a dead end. But I want you to stay on top of developments in the fertility field. They are doing amazing things now, and who knows, maybe by the time you kids are ready for a family, it will be possible.”

Beth nodded slowly. She wouldn’t look at me.

I stepped back from the window and sat at my desk. I read, “The elegant body of mathematical theory pertaining to linear systems...and its successful application to many fundamentally linear problems in the physical sciences, tends to dominate even moderately advanced University courses in mathematics and theoretical physics. The mathematical intuition so developed ill equips the student to confront the bizarre behavior exhibited by the simplest of discrete nonlinear systems.” (*Nature*, 1976, p. 467.)

I felt numb. I made a mental note to ask for some time on the campus main-frame to do simulations. I took my calculator and started experimenting with an equation, then I shoved the calculator aside.

I sat at my desk trying to drain all thought from my mind. I decided to take a

drive. Down to the river, out to the airport. Anywhere.

When Beth came home I was in the kitchen making stroganoff. She set a couple of folders on the counter and stood looking through the mail as she spoke to me. "What's the occasion?" she said. "Did I forget that it was my birthday or something?"

"No occasion. I just felt like cooking something a little more exotic than usual."

Beth set the mail aside and followed her nose over to the counter. "And brownies, Joe? What's up?"

"Nothing, I told you, I just felt like cooking for a change. So, what happened to you today?"

She dropped down in a chair by the kitchen table and kicked off her shoes. "Oh, God, you wouldn't believe it. You know that story about the re-zoning out on East 17th that I told you about. The one where McDill had tried to get it zoned commercial for thirteen years and got nowhere, and then Simons gets elected mayor and all of a sudden....Well, you know. I've been working on that off and on for three months and Stephens just gave the story to Dana Jeffries and told me to start working on the school bond. I went straight into my office..."

I could hardly bring myself to follow the story. As I listened, I felt as if a truck were parked on my chest. Like I was trying to breathe through a soda straw. I struggled to show the right expressions, to inject the right questions, but I secretly just hoped the subject would change before I went insane.

I heard Beth say, "So what happened to you today?"

I took the lid off the boiling potatoes and looked up at Beth through the steam. "Nothing," I said. "I did some schoolwork for a while, then drove out to the airport and went to the grocery. I think I'm going to get back into flying."

## Voyage of the Damned

I must have dozed off, and then around 5 p.m. I got a call from the rescue coordination center. My hand is shaking as I write this. An overflying aircraft located *The Ana-Ni'a*. She was capsized and drifting three hundred miles south-southeast of Niue. There is no one visible on or near the boat.

It sometimes happens that the crew is alive in a capsized boat, and they are riding it out in the chaos and darkness of the inverted cabin, but at this point, no one knows anything about Martin. The search team expects to be able to get a diver to the site by early tomorrow morning. The diver will be able to swim into the cabin and check out the boat.

As soon as I got the news, I rushed over to tell the family, and as much as I tried to put a favorable spin on things, still I watched the color fade from their faces as I told the story. Stephanie wondered if there was enough air inside, and I told her that I thought there was. Flo asked about exposure, but I said that the water was fairly warm, and I didn't think that would be a problem either. In any case we will know tomorrow. Kevin was off somewhere with Winston. I really dreaded being the one to tell him about the overturned boat.

I invited them to come over to my place to cook up a simple meal while we waited for Ray and Jack to get back.

It was late afternoon when Stephanie and Flo drove up to my house. They seemed very tense, which was understandable. It was going to be a long night waiting for word to come back from the diver at The Ana-Ni'a. I poured Flo a fairly large scotch, and she stood in the kitchen and drank it straight down. Stephanie just paced around on the patio.

When I went out to Stephanie, she was staring down the hill toward the harbor. She said, "Is that The Spirit of Orion down there?"

I said, "Yeah, it just came in last night."

"Do you think we could go down there and have a look at it? I haven't seen it in years, and I'd love to see it again. And God, I've got to do something. I'm going crazy just hanging around all the time."

She was right. Anything would be better than just sitting around my place. I put them in the car and we drove down to the harbor.

Stephanie didn't say much on the way down the hill, and when we parked by the dock, I just sat in the car and watched as she got out and walked up toward the boat. Flo sat in the car with me. She was pretty loose by then from gulping down that huge scotch.

"I never cared for boats," said Flo. "Went out once fishing in the Gulf of Mexico with Martin's father and one of his friends. I got so sick I thought I was going to die. I actually wished I would die, you know what I mean? Martin wanted to take me out in his boat a few times but I said, 'No thanks, I'd rather just get the flu.' Goddamn, I never threw up so much in my life. I thought my rear-end was going to shoot out between my teeth."

I told Flo a couple of my sea-sick stories, and then it got pretty quiet in the car. Except every once in a while Flo would cut a little fart and try to cover it up with a cough. But she couldn't get the timing of her farting and her coughing to come out right, so I always heard the fart. I tried not to laugh, but it cracked me up. Fart-cough-fart, or cough-fart-cough. Try it some time, it isn't easy. Finally she muttered something about the corned-beef hash that Stephanie had made for lunch, and we both had a good laugh. She said, "Looks like the honeymoon's over, sugar." I don't know if it was the strain of everything that was happening or the humor of the situation, but I just couldn't stop laughing. There were tears running down my cheeks when I got out of the car and headed down the dock toward Stephanie.

It was pretty dark when I sat down next to Stephanie. She hardly moved. Just sat there looking at the boat. After a while she started telling me the story of Martin's last

trip on The Spirit of Orion. It was a trip to this very spot. I'd heard parts of it before and read about it in Martin's book. Stephanie herself wasn't there then, but I could tell that she had tried to get a feel for what had happened. It turns out she knew a lot less about it than I did, because Martin had told me the whole story just a few weeks ago when we were sailing on The Orion ourselves..

Martin's second album was released against the advice of his friends in January of 1975. The reviews were universally dismal. Martin quoted some in his book. Phrases that stuck in his mind were: "brooding," "depressing disappointment," "makes Neil Young at his gloomiest seem like Mary Poppins." Sales were slow. A tour had been planned before the album release, but once it became obvious that the album was going nowhere, the tour was scaled back to a few small clubs and bars in California. Martin called Jack and asked him if he would like to come out and play bass at the club dates, but Jack declined, saying that he just wasn't in the right frame of mind for that sort of thing yet.

Martin played the clubs solo to audiences that were more interested in talking and getting sloshed than in listening to his music. At a typical show, Martin would slowly get drunk as the audience lost interest and drifted away. He would quit early and then mill around among the other losers, sliding through the smoke and liquid enthusiasm looking for women.

When the string of shows ended, Martin returned to his house in L.A.. His life consisted of sleeping, eating, drinking, and scrounging the bars and beaches for women. Most of his friends had given up on him, but Brian remained sympathetic and made an effort to push Martin onto a different track.

Brian proposed that they get a small crew together and sail The Spirit of Orion to Hawaii. For lack of anything better to do, Martin went along with the plan.

Martin had enough sense to know he ought to find a more experienced sailor to skipper the boat. The owner of Western Yachtworks in Long Beach put him in touch

with Ed Ladner, a free spirit of about thirty-five who had been chartering and delivering sailboats around the world for the past ten years. Ed checked out The Orion and agreed to skipper it to Kauai for fifteen hundred dollars. Martin left the details to Ed, telling him he wanted to leave as soon as possible.

Martin and I had dinner with Ed about three months ago in Sausalito. He's a colorful guy. Long wild hair, a mischievous wink. He still delivers sailboats all over the world, at least whenever the wanderlust takes hold. Ed and Martin sat there for hours reminiscing about that trip.

In the first week of August, five of them set out for Kauai—Ed, Brian, Brian's girlfriend, Allison, Martin, and Martin's woman *de jour*, Nancy.

Martin met Nancy a few months earlier at the last show on his ill-fated tour. She worked in the bar and had just started at a junior college part time. She was in her late twenties and just beginning to lose her corn-fed cheerleader good looks. Until about a year before, Nancy had spent her whole life in Grand Junction, Colorado. She had been married to a trucker for six years and had recently left him and their little house and moved out to L.A. to see what else life had to offer. Nancy was dizzy from the last twelve months. She had been involved with a string of difficult men—mostly sleazy men from the bar or returning Vietnam vets who were at the college on the G.I. Bill. And she had evolved from a moderate drinker to a hash smoking, acid dropping freak. She had rings on every finger, long blond hair, and a conviction that she could see auras around people. "One crazy woman," Ed said all those years later.

It was obvious from the first day that Nancy and Brian's girlfriend, Allison, were not exactly two peas in a pod. Allison came from a rich L.A. show business family, and after giving up on acting, she paired up with Brian and continued to live the good life. She dressed carefully, every hair in place. She saw herself as refined, a gourmet, a paragon of good taste and good sense in general. And knowing Martin as she did, she had only reluctantly agreed to come along as a favor to Brian.

The run to Kauai took twenty seven days, and by the end of the third day, it

sounds like all five of them probably would have swum if they thought they could have gotten there any quicker. Allison and Nancy were at each other's throats constantly.

"Like two cats in a sack," said Ed.

Nancy would tell Martin, "That stuck-up bitch won't lift a finger. That is the *last* time I wash one of her goddamn dishes. I may have been a waitress, but I'm sure as shit not her fucking slave." Martin would promise to speak to Brian. But Brian was stuck in the no-win zone between Martin and Allison, who complained constantly that she would never have come along if she had known that Nancy was such trash and that Martin was going to belch and fart and piss off the side of the boat and generally stay drunk and obnoxious most of the time. Not to mention the moaning and groaning that came from Martin and Nancy's stateroom at all hours. "Sometimes it sounded like the tower of London down there," said Ed, punctuating the comment with a wink.

Martin made an attempt to disconnect from the matrix of interpersonal gripes. "Go tell the fucking dolphins," he'd say, "maybe they give a shit." This always brought a chuckle from Ed, who otherwise acted like he couldn't hear anything.

In his more lucid moments Martin would sit over by Ed learning what he could about open-ocean sailing. By the time they got to Kauai, Martin was fairly good at celestial navigation, and he picked up a lot of valuable experience handling the boat. But he would also go days on end taking one pill after another from Nancy's endless supply, and, as always, drinking and smoking hash.

When The Orion sailed into Hanalei Bay, Brian and Allison offered a perfunctory goodby, had Ed row them ashore in the dinghy, caught a cab to the Lihui Airport, and left for Honolulu on the next plane.

Martin, Nancy, and Ed went into town for dinner that first day and then sat on The Orion all night getting wasted on scotch and hash. It turned out that Ed was nearly as debauched as Martin and Nancy, except that he took his job as skipper seriously, and he wouldn't touch a thing until he was in port. I remember him talking about this in Sausalito and saying, "The ocean doesn't forgive a lot of foolishness. I can get pretty



wild, but I ain't a fucking idiot.”

They hung around Hanalei Bay for a few days waiting for some sort of inspiration about what to do next. Martin called Leon and learned that the second album had all but died, so there was no hurry getting back to L.A.. He also called Jack and invited him to join the merry band, but again Jack demurred, saying he had an interview coming with Delta Airlines, and he needed to hang around.

On the fifth day they met a couple of hippies in town who had been wandering around the Pacific Islands for the past year or so. Robin and her boyfriend, David. Robin had inherited some money a year earlier, and they both dropped out of the University of Wisconsin at Madison to go see the world.

David and Robin went out to the boat for dinner that night, and they all hatched a plan as they lay out on the deck smoking hash and skinnydipping in Hanalei Bay. David and Robin had spent a few weeks right here in Rarotonga in the Cook Islands, and they said it was the best place they had ever been. Unspoiled beauty, no tourists, good food, incredible music, unbelievable beaches. They really made it sound inviting, and they were itching to get back. Martin got enthused and offered them a ride. Ed agreed to go for another fifteen hundred dollars, and the next day he was busy provisioning the boat for the trip.

It was a fairly long sail, due south almost as far as the run from California to Hawaii. Under the leadership of David and Robin, the drug taking began to approach a religion. If you could get a degree in trippiness, those two would have been Harvard post-docs. On certain days Robin would declare that the vibe called for mescaline, taken on an empty stomach, naked, sitting cross legged in the bow facing east. Other days were designated for psilocybin and free sex, which Ed said he always appreciated. Saturdays were LSD and attempts, usually deemed successful, to communicate with the dolphins. And the drinking and hash were constant.

Ed played mother and father. “I know you think you can do it, but believe me, you can't swim as fast as the boat, and it's five hundred miles to the nearest island.

Don't try it."

By the time they sailed into the harbor here in Avarua, these were five very salty and four very spaced out individuals.

David immediately began dragging the rest of them around to see the island. Under Robin's direction, even the simplest activities had to become incredible visionary adventures. Mind expanding experiences.

They hiked up a road that ran along Avatiu Stream. The one Kevin ran the other night. As the road gradually shrank to a narrow trail, they passed simple, brightly colored cinder block houses with tin roofs. Chickens and goats in the yard. A radio somewhere in the distance playing island music. Neatly planted taro fields. Wash waving on the line. Children laughing and peeking out from behind trees. That's what was really there, but what they saw was only the roots in the trail beneath their feet as they stumbled along, giggling, high on mescaline. Robin speculated that the natives probably had incredible pot gardens and stayed stoned all the time. David told a story he had heard from an ex-Peace Corps worker who had been in the jungle of South America. David's friend had said that he met medicine men, "serious dopers," who had teleported themselves to the moon and back. NASA had found Peruvian artifacts on the moon, and they were hushing it up. "Farfucking out," said Robin. "Farfucking up," said Martin.

They were heading toward Te Rua Manga, a massive jutting rock called "The Needle" sitting 1400 feet above the ocean. "It is a holy place," said Robin, "guaranteed to blow your mind."

"Mindfucker extraordinaire," said David.

They went to the CICC church in Titikaveka to hear the incredible singing. David's recommendation was peyote buttons "so they could really get into the vibe." While the congregation soared through unearthly harmonies, they made jokes and snapped pictures in the back. Karen and Robin were wearing shorts and halter-tops, the men were in jeans and t-shirts. Two Polynesian men, broadfaced and built like fullbacks, asked them to leave.

The island virtually closed up on Sundays, so they decided to sail The Orion around the island to Ngatangiia Bay on the eastern side. They dropped anchor in the bay and snorkeled around a few little islands inside the reef. Then they sat on deck drinking gin and smoking hash.

David climbed a few rungs up a rope ladder suspended from the mast. He gave a rebel yell, and dove into the bay. From the water he yelled, “Come on, Martin. You can fly.”

Martin put down his glass and went over to the ladder. He climbed a little higher than David had gone, and as the boat rocked slightly, giving him a push, he did a swan dive. When Martin was back to the surface, David was already up near the top of the ladder. He yelled again and went off feet first. This time Martin went to the top of the ladder, and from there he walked out on a horizontal extension from the mast called a “spreader” about thirty five feet above the water. He held onto a cable called an “upper shroud” that ran from the end of the spreader to the top of the mast.

I sat there on the dock with Stephanie twenty or so years later and looked up the same mast. The boat must have looked incredibly small beneath his bare feet. The slightest roll of the boat was amplified by the length of the mast.

Karen and Robin looked up from the deck, hands at their eyes. David treaded water below him. I bet Martin’s sane inner voice said something like, “Maybe this isn’t too smart.”

Martin let go of the shroud and began to shove himself forward with his feet. The boat rolled. His feet slipped. He fell thirty five feet. His right leg hit the edge of the deck just below his knee, and the rest of his body missed the deck and hit the water still relatively flat.

He floated to the surface, face down in a red foam. David got to him in seconds and pulled his head above the surface. Ed dove in a few seconds later and helped support Martin, who was beginning to regain consciousness. Ed and David drug Martin to the boarding ladder and held his head up with the help of the ladder rungs.

With a lot of difficulty, they managed to get Martin aboard. He passed out in the process.

Ed winced when he told me about this years later, “His right leg was a mess. The tibia and fibula were both broken, and about four inches of the tibia was poking through the skin. The leg lay on the deck at a crazy angle. Blood was everywhere. Martin came to, threw up, and passed out again. I got a tourniquet and tied off the right leg just above the knee.”

David brought the dinghy along side, and as gingerly as they could, they lowered Martin into the small boat. Once on shore, Ed ran for the phone and called the hospital. Fifteen minutes later Martin left in an ambulance.

Two weeks later, after five days in an L.A. hospital, Martin was learning how to navigate through his L.A. house in a wheelchair. And learning to love morphine.

A month after the accident, Karen and Ed stopped by to see him. When Ed told me about this years later, he was very sheepish about it. Not proud of himself at all. Karen gave Martin some “medicine”—a sandwich bag half-filled with multi-colored pills. Ed asked what was going to happen to The Spirit of Orion. Martin hadn’t given The Orion much thought, and he didn’t feel like thinking about it then either. Conversation was sparse. All eyes moved uneasily.

After they left, Martin scooted over to the living room window in his wheelchair and watched as Karen slid over next to Ed, and they sped off in his Cutlass.

Stephanie and I were still sitting at the dock when we saw the lights of the Baron as Ray and Jack flew in from the search area. We drove out to the airport to meet them, and they looked very frazzled. The strain from all the long flights was definitely beginning to show. They had heard about the sighting of Martin’s upturned boat, and they had gotten the co-ordinates and actually flown over the vessel themselves. The boat was riding upside down, and there was nobody on or near it. Ray did remark that the dinghy was gone, but that didn’t mean much, since whatever rogue wave knocked the boat over

could easily have ripped the dinghy away. Jack was ashen, and didn't say much.

It was getting late at this point, and we all headed for home. I told them to come over the next morning, and we'd wait to hear from the rescue coordination center about what the diver found at The Ana-Ni'a.

## Like Father, Like Son

I hadn't even pulled out of the airport parking lot before Ray had fallen asleep next to me in the car. All this flying was really taking its toll, even on a Viking like Ray. For some reason I didn't want to head right home, so I elected to drive around the island the long way. This would turn a five minute drive into more like forty, but I just felt the need to cruise.

Passing by the runway, I thought about how I got back into flying when Beth and I lived in Montana. It would have been about the same time that Martin and Ed had their fateful voyage.

A year after we moved to Montana, I began flying again. Under my father's guidance, I had soloed on my sixteenth birthday and gotten my private pilot's license at seventeen. But aside from occasional flights with my father, I hadn't done much flying since then. I was too busy with school and too broke as a college student to afford airplane rentals. Now things were a little different.

Beth and I bought a little two-seat Grumman airplane, and I started working my way through more advanced pilot ratings and licenses—instrument, commercial, instructor, multi-engine, and ultimately airline transport pilot. I instructed and flew charters and night cargo trips when I could fit them around my schedule at the college.

Beth enjoyed the freedom the little airplane gave us, its ability to shrink the vastness of Montana. Trips to the mountains or back to Seattle were, if the weather allowed, scenic, quick, and easy, compared with the torturous airline connections or endless driving.

For me, flying was the perfect counterpoint to my academic life. I could work on a theorem until it felt like my head was full of bees, and then an afternoon flight would flush out my system and leave me feeling refreshed and alive.

And there was more to it than that. I had begun to feel that there was

something very artificial and unsatisfying about the safety and inconsequentiality of academic life. You try to work a problem, and if you fail, you can always go read a few books and then try again later. And if you never solve the problem, then you can always look for a different problem that, hopefully, you *can* solve. There is no immediacy, no necessity to academic work. Time is unreal. But with flying, things are different. You are in the air with two hours of fuel in the tanks, so whatever jam you find yourself in has to come to a resolution in two hours. Time is real. Of course the art of being a good pilot involves being smart enough to not get in a “jam” in the first place.

And now that I think about it, I see that the attraction to flying went deeper still. My father was pleased that I had made an effort to enter his world, and this was important to me. I wanted to be able to see the world through my father’s eyes. And as my father’s health failed later on, this became increasingly important to me. I would fly to an abandoned military base and just sit alone, watching the tumbleweed roll between the barracks, imagining the texture of life there in the ’40s, when my Dad was a Navy pilot.

Maybe in a sense I needed to fly because my father was so emotionally reserved, and this was my way of making contact. Contact with both my father’s past and his present. Who’s to say?

And the seed was planted in my very early years. Nearly all of the male family friends were military or airline pilots. I can remember curling up like a cat behind a chair late at night listening to their stories. Lost under a high overcast at night five hundred miles from land in the middle of the Pacific, hoping for a break in the clouds to get a star shot to fix position and navigate to a tiny island. Slamming onto carrier decks in a pitching sea. Sweating out an unexpected headwind on an ocean crossing and then running out of gas taxiing to the gate. Zero/zero instrument approaches in the snow at Fairbanks, Alaska. This was my father’s world, the world of real men. These were the things men did.

My innate need to find precise answers to practical questions led me deeper

and deeper into aerodynamics. When a flight student asked a question, I wasn't content until I could give an answer that was rooted in physics. A question about how to get maximum miles per gallon or minimum sink rate would lead to a month of part-time study. And just for the fun of it, I would write up my findings and get them published in flying magazines. After a few of these were published, editors would call with job offers, article ideas, or questions. I ultimately put them all in a book that my father helped write. The book sold pretty well. Life's full of surprises.

With the string of publications, I began getting calls, letters, and visits from pilots all over the world asking about this or that technical detail. And I got invitations to go all over the world and teach pilots—that's how I met Ray, for instance. I found that I could limit myself to giving instruction only to interesting people with interesting airplanes, and leave the routine cases to the neophyte instructors. And there are lots of interesting people in aviation.

Like Philip Glass, who called one night from Idaho. He had just bought a Pressurized Beech Baron and wanted to get a check-out. Philip was an engineer about my age, who had just started a little business making peripheral storage devices for computers. He planned to use the Baron to visit customers and suppliers all over the West, and he wanted to spend a four-day weekend flying with me to learn the fine points of his new airplane. Philip flew up to Angel Falls, and the two of us spread out a map of the U.S. on the floor. We closed our eyes and tossed a dime. A half hour later we were in the air headed toward the town where the dime had landed—Sedona, Arizona. On the way, I gave Philip hints about how to fly his new airplane. Philip was a natural pilot, very bright, and an engineer who had an interest in the nerdish aerodynamics that fascinated me. And on top of that, Philip's father, like mine, had been a Naval Aviator, so the two of us had a lot in common and got along right away. That weekend we visited Sedona, Aspen, San Diego, and San Francisco before heading back to Angel Falls. It was exhausting, but great fun for both of us.

On the last leg, homeward to Angel Falls from San Francisco, Philip said he



was tired and asked me to fly. We took off about an hour before sunset and flew toward the gathering darkness. Philip fell asleep in the right seat, and I turned on the autopilot and stared out the window from 15,500 feet, watching the colors disappear and the lights come on below. Out over the sparsely settled regions of Idaho, where the houses were miles apart, I watched the lights of a car come down a long empty road, turn into a driveway, and stop by a house. Seconds later the lights pulled away from the driveway and went back down the road. *Was someone waiting there? Waiting to jump right in? Or did the driver have a change of heart and turn around?* A feeling came over me. I can feel it now as I drive by these little native houses on the island. It is hard to describe. The feeling was prompted by the perspective had by sitting up there miles above the rest of the world. Their little houses and little cars and little lives and little loves and frustrations going by at four miles per minute. I knew there were a million stories, and a million different versions of each person's story. And I realized that my story was both unique and the same as all theirs. A huge heart-breaking drama unfolding. Unspoken. Unspeakable. And I realized that this made my story both trivial and at the same time infinitely valuable as a part of this stupendous epic. It was a feeling of kinship. And distance.

Philip woke up in the descent toward Angel Falls. I landed in the dark, and we walked over to the Airport Café to write up Philip's log book. We sat in the café drinking coffee and talking about the trip and the lessons learned. Philip said, "I learned more about flying this weekend than I did in the past ten years. You can't believe how much better I feel in that airplane. Maybe I shouldn't say this, but do you ever buy stocks?"

I stopped staring at my coffee and looked up, "Yeah, now and then. I've bought stuff since I was a kid. My Dad got me into it. Why?"

Philip leaned forward, "Well, I've got to be careful how I put this. There are insider trading laws, you know. But I am a strong believer in my company, StorageSolutions. Let me put it this way, since this is public information, I am buying the

stock right now. Enough said?”

I nodded. “I hear you. I’ll take a look.”

I nearly forgot about the stock until I was telling Beth about the weekend with Philip, and then I made a little note to myself and taped it to the refrigerator. On Monday morning I looked into it, and decided the company was promising. I bought 3000 shares at \$4 each.

Months went by. I stayed in touch with Philip, and flew with him every once in a while. Whenever I asked about the stock, Philip would wink and say, “Be patient. We’re getting there.”

The stock wandered around \$4 for a year or more and then slipped to almost \$3. Philip winked, and I bought some more. Eight months later, the stock started up and never looked back. I hung onto my shares as the stock split and split again. Four years later the company was bought out by General Peripherals for \$35 a share, and I made well over a half million dollars—and this was at a time when that amount of money would have bought a real palace in Angel Falls, and most other American towns.

But we didn’t buy a palace. We stuck the money in a mutual fund and left it alone. No spending spree. No big-ticket consumption. Just a little less concern with financial constraints and a little more freedom in thinking about our options.

Ray woke up when I pulled into the driveway and shut the car’s engine off. For a minute there, I don’t think he knew where he was, then he stretched and got out of the car. “I think I’ll walk down to Trader Jack’s and get a beer, mate. Maybe find another poker game. You care to join me?”

I didn’t want to be unsociable, but I was running on empty at that point, and I begged off. I just marveled at Ray as I watched him head down the hill.

## Somewhere Deep Inside

I woke up at about eight and heard Stephanie and Ray in the kitchen. I could smell the coffee and something else I didn't recognize.

When I walked out I saw Flo, Jack, and Kevin sitting in the sun out on the porch. Stephanie handed me a steaming cup of coffee and said, "Tell me what you think of this."

I took a sip, and it dawned on me. "Oh, it's coffee and chicory, isn't it? This is great. I had it once in New Orleans years ago."

Stephanie smile and patted me on the back. She said, "You go on outside and have a seat. Ray and I are going to make a big breakfast."

The sun felt good. I could feel its energy passing through me. I just closed my eyes and drank it up, not paying much attention to what Flo and Jack were talking about. I may have even drifted off to sleep again, I'm not sure, but I know that when I finally came around Flo was saying something like, "If it hadn't been for you, Jack, he'd have been dead a long time ago. You really pulled him back from the brink. Gave him some good years that he wouldn't have otherwise had."

Jack said, "Yeah, and I may have pushed him to the brink, too. Who knows?"

"You did what you felt you had to do," said Flo. "You didn't invent that goddamn war. But I know this much, if you hadn't taken him up to Canada on that trip, he'd be dead right now."

Jack started to say something, but cut himself short.

Flo said, "How did you manage to get him to go through with the detoxification in the first place? Nobody else could do it. I never understood that one."

It finally dawned on me that they were talking about Jack's success in straightening Martin out. That was in 1978. It was a pivotal moment for Martin, and he wrote about it at length:

I was living in L.A. at the time. I remember I was asleep, passed out, whatever, when Jack showed up unexpectedly. I could hear knocking. I was dreaming that I was in a strange room. There were many doors. With much effort I moved to the door with the knocking sound, but I couldn't turn the knob. Then the knocking was behind me. I struggled as if moving through oatmeal to get to the door on the other side of the room. Again, I could not open the door. Now the knocking was coming from my left, I fought to cross the room again, but I couldn't move my legs. The knocking grew louder. I tried to call out, but I couldn't get my breath. Still the knocking grew louder. I could hear a voice. "Martin, get up. Open the damn door."

I stumbled out of bed and shuffled toward my front door. The light was intense. I held one eye shut and could barely squint through the other. I felt like I had gravel in my eyes. I opened the door. "Jack! You son of bitch. What the fuck are you doing here?"

Jack was standing at the door with his arms spread in a hug-me gesture. I motioned him into the house and shook his hand. "Man, I didn't know you were coming. You're looking good, man. Finally starting to put some weight back on. Did you tell me you were coming?". (One Hit Wonder, pp. 311. Quoted by permission.)

I sat there in the sun listening to Jack tell his mother about the whole episode. "You should have seen the chaos in his house back then," said Jack. "It was a real dump. Anyway, I made up some story about how I came out to give him his birthday present. Told him I wanted it to be a surprise."

I closed my eyes and watched the scene unfold as Jack told the story. Knowing Martin as I did (or should I say "as I do"?), I supplied my own bits of color and shading:

Martin turned and headed toward the hall bathroom. “What the fuck are you talking about? My birthday? I don’t know if you remembered or not. Shit, that was months ago.”

Martin went into the bathroom and gave the door a weak push behind him. Standing outside the door, Jack said, “What I’m saying is, I was sitting around the house the other day and I thought, ‘Damn, I forgot my big brother Martin’s birthday again this year, and that just ain’t right.’ “

There was a thunderous sound of urine blasting into the water in the toilet bowl. A pause. A long, loud fart. A pause. More thunder. A little fart. And a flush. Martin was pretty casual about stuff like this. He came through the door and headed for the kitchen. “So you thought you’d come out here and bake me a fucking cake?”

“No, it’s better than that, man, look at this.” Martin stopped, and Jack handed him a small photograph. It showed Jack and someone Martin didn’t recognize. They were standing in a forest on either side of a stringer of enormous fish.

Martin whistled and said, “Jesus Franklin Christ, look at those fish. Where the fuck was this at?”

“That’s me and Dell Stewart, a doctor and flying buddy of mine back in New Orleans. We flew up to Canada last year and caught those monsters.”

Martin handed the picture back and headed toward the kitchen. “No shit? What are those long ugly peckers that look like barracuda.”

Jack followed him down the hall. “They’re Northern Pike. Wild fighters, man, you’d love it.”

“Some day, man, we’ll have to do that. Tell me again what the fuck you’re doin’ here.”

“Someday is today, Marty. That’s the deal. That’s your birthday present. I’ve got it all set up. My plane is at the airport all fueled up and ready to go. It’s six hours to customs in Swift Current, Saskatchewan. Then another couple of hours to Wollaston Lake. From there we get on a sea plane that takes us out and drops us off at Rainbow

Lake. Then later they come pick us up and we play the same movie backward. Pretty hot, huh?”

Martin stopped at the kitchen window and looked out at the boats leaving the harbor, then he continued toward the refrigerator. “You serious? Oh, man, I can’t go running off like that. I’ve got shit to do.”

Jack stood at the window. “Like what?”

Martin opened the refrigerator and took out two cans of Guinness Stout. He handed one to Jack, who shook his head and set it on the counter. Martin said, “Like, I don’t know, man. The truck is running like shit, I’ve got to have somebody look at it. That kind of stuff.”

“We’re not taking the truck, dumb ass. Fix it when you get back.”

Martin pulled the top off the beer and threw it in the sink. “I don’t have any camping stuff man. Do I look like Paul Fucking-Bunyan?”

Jack shook his head. “The plane is jammed with stuff. I’ve got it all.”

Martin took a long drink from the beer. “Yeah, well you might not have everything I need.”

Jack looked Martin in the eye. “Like booze? You can bring anything you like. It’s your birthday.”

Martin took a bottle of whiskey off the counter. He opened the whiskey and poured it carefully into the top of his half-empty beer can. He stared pensively at the foaming concoction and then took a long drink and belched. “What about the bears? You know me. Creatures of the jungle upset me.”

Jack grabbed Martin’s shoulders, turned him toward his bedroom, and steered him to the closet. “Just pack some clothes, get some comfortable boots, a toothbrush and we’re out of here.”

“Oh, man, I just fucking woke up. Give me a couple of days to think about it.”

“No, man. This is going to happen. You could use a change.”

Martin stood in his room with his eyes closed. He didn't say anything. After a second he gave a resigned sigh and walked into his closet. He found a little suitcase and started pushing some clothes into it. "Alright. Alright. As long as you don't sing happy birthday. And wait up while I fix a little eye-opener for the road."

Martin went back to the kitchen and poured most of a fifth of Johnny Walker into a mid-sized thermos bottle. Then he grabbed another bottle of Johnny Walker and squeezed it in among the clothes in his suitcase. "Help me lock up, and we'll split." He sang as he went out the front door, "We're off to see the lizard. The wonderful lizard that was."

Martin wandered around the airplane while Jack did a pre-flight inspection and re-arranged the baggage. Martin pointed to some new writing on the nose of Jack's plane, "Who's LuLu? You got a new squeeze?"

Jack stopped and looked up at the inscription. "No. LuLu stands for Legendary Union of Laotian Unfortunates. That's what we called ourselves in the prison camps in Hanoi. There were ten of us."

Martin watched as a flight student bounced a little Cessna down the runway. "I thought there were several hundred."

"There were nearly six hundred POWs, but only ten came out of Laos." He closed the baggage door. "You ready to go?"

It was a spectacular, clear day as they climbed over the coastal mountains, and then flew over Mojave and Death Valley. They crossed the high desert in Nevada. Mountains like clumps of brown clay on a table top. Dried lakes and desert. Martin slept most of the way, but woke up now and then to take a drink from the thermos and stare out the window. "I got you into flying, Jack, you remember?"

"Sure, I remember. You had that beautiful little G-model Bonanza. You gave me a ride out to Catalina the day we cut 'I Like it Like That.' You and me and Antoine."

“Yeah, I remember. Man, that plane was fun. So light to the touch.

Fabulous.”

“Maybe you could start flying again.”

“I don’t think so, man. I’ve got a string of DUIs as long as my dick. Well, that’s an exaggeration. As long as your dick. The FAA kind of frowns on that shit.”

“You know,” said Jack, “you are really crude. Sometimes I don’t think you’ve evolved much beyond the locker rooms at Jesuit High.”

“Well, pardon me, but I didn’t have the benefit of a college education, like you. As I recall, I had to go off to work.”

“Don’t give me that. You were itching to quit school and play baseball. But about the DUIs, why don’t you just straighten yourself out. People do it. Maybe it would be worth it.”

Martin turned back toward the window. A road went twenty miles, as straight as a string, then it doglegged around a mountain and went straight for another twenty miles. Not a car was in sight. “Sister Mary Landry. Always trying to save the world. I’m okay, man. I’ve got this under control.” A few minutes later he was asleep again.

Jack’s airplane slid over the Rockies of Idaho and western Montana.

They landed in Swift Current and cleared customs. Martin said he had to pick up some stuff, and he took a cab into town. He came back with a cardboard box full of scotch. He loaded it in the plane saying, “You said it was a party, little brother. So let’s party.”

They left Swift Current at three in the afternoon and cruised for an hour over flat Canadian farmland, laid out neatly, with section lines stretching to the horizon. West of Prince Albert the terrain began to change. There were more trees, fewer farms and roads, and many more lakes. Paved roads petered out completely just past Lac La Ronge, and they flew on over nearly undisturbed wilderness. Forests and lakes. Half way between La Ronge and Wollaston Lake, the earth below was a fifty-fifty mix of lakes and trees. There were no roads in sight. Martin stared out the window. “Fuck, man, if we



went down out here, they wouldn't find us for three hundred and eleven years. I thought I'd been around, but I've never seen anything like this."

Jack nodded and smiled. "We're about forty minutes out. Think positive."

They landed on the gravel at Wollaston Post and were met by a couple of guys in a jeep from the charter company. They took the stuff out of Jack's plane, put it into the jeep, and drove over to the dock where an ancient silver twin Beech sat tied up, rocking peacefully on its floats.

Twenty minutes later they lifted off from Wollaston Lake and took up a heading toward Rainbow Lake, about one hundred and twenty miles further north. The charter pilot flew as Martin and Jack stared out the window at the passing scene. Deep blue sky and puffy white fair-weather cumulus clouds drifting above the greens and yellows of the trees and the multi-colored lakes. After an hour the engine noise dropped, and they set down on Rainbow Lake.

The plane nosed up onto the beach, and they climbed down the ladder from the cabin, out onto the floats, and then jumped onto the shore. About fifty yards inland, sitting on cinder blocks, was a plywood and tar-paper shack maybe fifteen by twenty feet in size. In the dirt out front was the bottom foot of a fifty-five gallon drum that functioned like a fire pit, and around the fire-pit were some sawed-off logs that formed the seats. A free-standing sink sat about half way between the cabin and the lake, and down by the shore there were a couple of aluminum row boats chained to a tree.

Martin looked at Jack and said, "Remember that line from the movie 'Little Big Man,' something like, 'On first entering a Cheyenne camp, you think, here's the dump, where's the camp'?"

"Be it ever so humble, bro', this is our happy home for the next ten days."

Martin stopped short and looked incredulous. "I thought it was like a couple of days."

"It will seem like that. Trust me."

"Oh, I've heard that shit before."

The pilot and the co-pilot showed them around the camp and explained the quirks of the outboard motor. They unloaded the supplies, and the pilot took off for the return to Wollaston. As the noise of the plane died, the silence of the place came over them like a fog.

“Spooky,” said Martin, taking a drink from his thermos.

“It’s going to be good. Grab a fishing pole and a spinner and I’ll show you what I mean.”

They walked down to the lake and Jack invited Martin to cast out and reel the lure back in, which Martin did. With the lure half way back, Martin’s pole bent over and the drag started singing. “Son of a bitch.” Ten yards from shore a three foot Northern Pike stirred the water to a boil and then dove down and went hard to Martin’s right. After a couple more runs like that, Martin finally dragged the exhausted fish onto the beach.

“Holy shit, man, that was a kick. What do we do with him?”

“A lot of people don’t eat these things, but I think they are pretty good if you can get past the weird, free-floating, forked-shaped bones. Besides, we don’t have anything any better and it’s getting late, so let’s start a fire and cook him up.”

“Fuckin’ ay, Dan’l Boone, let’s do it.”

After dinner they cleaned up and sat around the fire. Martin was just finishing the thermos and opening a new bottle of scotch. “Man, I feel wasted. This has got to be the longest day of my young life. What time is it anyway?”

Jack looked at his watch. “Nearly eleven.”

Martin looked amazed. “No shit. Does it ever get dark up here?”

“Yeah, but not very, and not for long.” Jack pointed toward the northwest. “The sun dips down over there for a while, moves a little below the horizon, and then comes back up over there.”

“Well, man, this could be fun after all. I’m going to turn in, and I’ll see you manana.”

The next morning Martin walked out onto the front step of the cabin. He stretched and sat down. It was 6:30 and the air was cold, but there was already warmth in the sun. Flies buzzed around scraps of fish near the fire pit. Jack was about a hundred yards off shore in the little power boat headed back in. Martin waved. Jack waved back. Martin got up and walked toward the beach. When Jack cut the engine and glided in, Martin said, "Couldn't wait for your brother, eh? How's the fishing?"

Jack stepped onto the beach and pulled the boat up. "I wasn't fishing."

Martin took the bow line and tied it around a stump. "Just out for a morning cruise?"

Jack stood still and looked at Martin. "No. What I did is I took all your booze and dropped it in the center of the lake."

Martin looked hard at Jack. "You're kidding, right?"

Jack rubbed his wet hands on his shirt. "No. I'm not kidding. You can check inside."

Martin took a step toward Jack. "Why would you want to do that?"

Jack didn't move. "Because that stuff is killing you, and I couldn't live with myself if I didn't try to get you cleaned up."

Martin's eyelids tightened. "I don't give a shit if you can live with yourself or not. Who the fuck do you think you are? It's none of your goddamn business what I do."

"It's going to be my goddamn business for the next ten days."

Martin slumped and sat on a log by the beach. He put his head in his hands. "Ten days! This isn't going to happen. Have you got any idea what you're dealing with? I've got a headache now that won't quit. The only thing that's going to do me any good is a beer or a shot. I've known people that nearly died when they quit turkey."

Jack sat on the bow of the boat across from Martin. "I've done my homework, bro'. I've spent hours talking to my doctor buddy in New Orleans. I spent a day at a detox facility to learn about this."

Martin looked up at Jack and then put his head back in his hands. "You did

your homework. Oh, that's fucking rich. My little brother Jack always did his homework. What a good boy."

Jack continued, "I brought a whole bag of drugs and vitamins and herbs. It's going to be tough, but you can get through this."

"*Tough*, you say? It's going to be *tough*? No, it's going to be torture. Happy birthday, Martin. You prick."

Jack stood up. "Don't you tell me about torture, you son of a bitch, I've been there." He paused and looked at Martin waiting for a reaction. Martin's head stayed hidden in his hands. Jack continued. "This will be hard, but I've seen old grandmothers do it, and you can do it, too, by God. All your life you've taken the easy way out. Think about it. You had a gift for baseball, a painless sport if there ever was one. You slipped up and took a stand for Ali and against the war, and when you got a little heat for it from the fans, you quit baseball. As soon as you weren't everybody's hero, you hit the road. Then it was music. You took your anti-war message to the hippies, where it was easy, since they already agreed with you. And you played your tunes, and life was good as long as they all loved you. But when your second album bombed, guess what? You quit music. The spirits left you, you said. Poor Martin. So you went to alcohol and drugs, and when your wife and kid needed you to clean up, you couldn't do it. You took the easy way instead. It's the pattern of your life. Well, it stops here, bro'. I should have done this a long time ago, but I had my own crap to deal with." Jack was breathing hard.

Martin looked up. There were tears in his eyes. "Have you got anything in your trick bag for a headache? I've got a fucking headache like you wouldn't believe."

Jack put out his hand and helped Martin to his feet. "Come on up to the cabin and I'll show you what I've got."

Jack unzipped an overnight bag and started putting bottles of pills on the rusty kitchen table. "First, you're going to have to drink a lot. I'm going to force water and soup and juice down you constantly. Second, you're going to take a ton of vitamins

and minerals. In the beginning, I'm going to give you some Valium to keep you calm. And diazepam for a while. You can thank Dr. Stewart for those when this is over. After a few days you come off Valium and start taking this herb valerian. We don't want to swap an alcoholic for a Valium junkie. Here's vitamin C and B and a ton of other stuff. There's aspirin and tylenol. You can take whatever you want for your headache, and drink a bunch of water with it."

Martin took a glass and went to the sink, while Jack doled out the morning's ration of pills. Jack said, "I'll fix you some oatmeal. It's probably best if you eat a little bit every few hours. How are you feeling?"

"Like I said, I've got a killer headache. You know it's really fucking simple, man, a beer would knock this right out."

"You can start forgetting about beer, man, it ain't going to happen."

Jack carried two bowls of oatmeal out into the warm sun and the brothers sat on the logs near the fire pit. Large flies buzzed everywhere. Martin ate half his oatmeal and stood up slowly. "I feel like shit, man, like I'm going to puke. I'm going to go lay down."

Martin walked slowly into the cabin, and Jack sat on the log finishing his oatmeal and watching the light dance on the surface of the water. He heard the spooky cry of a loon coming from across the lake.

An hour later he peeked in the window and saw Martin asleep in his bed. Jack picked up his fishing pole and went down to the lake to catch lunch. In five minutes he caught a two-foot northern pike and put it on a stringer. He then put on a barbless lure and moved back and forth along the beach catching and either losing or releasing more pike. He was careful to keep the cabin in view.

At two o'clock he heard the cabin door slam and turned to see Martin stagger out the door, collapse on all fours, and retch. Jack picked up his fish and walked toward the cabin. He went in to get Martin a glass of water and saw that the cabin had been

ransacked. When he went back out, Martin was sitting by the fire pit with his head in his hands. Jack handed Martin the water and said, "I should have saved you the trouble. There's nothing here with alcohol in it. No mouthwash, no vanilla, nothing. Drink this. We've got to fight dehydration."

"We? *We*? It's me, asshole, not you." Martin sipped at the water. His hand was shaking badly. "This is bad. I've got a bad feeling about this place. We're out here a zillion miles from nothing. This is creepy, man."

"The place is good, bro'. It's all in your head. You'll see."

"God, I need a drink. Can't you see that? What I wouldn't give for a fucking beer."

Jack fixed Martin some soup, and when Martin had held that down for a half hour, Jack gave him another round of pills. Martin's shaking was getting worse. By five o'clock his whole body was quaking. Jack put a sleeping bag over Martin's shoulders, and they continued to sit in the sun by the fire pit. Martin sat there trembling, occasionally swatting at a fly.

Around seven, Martin startled. "What the fuck was that?"

Jack said, "What are you talking about?"

Martin was agitated. "Something just shot out of the lake at a zillion miles an hour. Went straight over the trees on the far side."

"What did it look like?"

"Like a big fucking bird or something. Ugly motherfucker."

Jack moved next to Martin and put his arm on his shoulder. "They're cool, bro'. I saw them when I was here last year. They make a beautiful sound at night."

"They birds or something?"

"Something like that. No sweat, they're okay. Sit tight, I've got to get you something more to eat and drink."

Jack built a fire and cleaned the fish, keeping Martin in view the whole time. He went in the cabin to get a frying pan, some flour, and cooking oil for the fish. He put

on a pot of water for rice. As he was shaking the fish in the flour, Martin groaned and keeled over. He was rigid and shaking. Jack held him to the ground and made sure he was able to breathe. "You'll be okay, bro', these things will pass."

After what seemed like hours, Martin came around. "Oh, Dad, I feel awful. Help me to my room."

"It's okay, Marty, I'm right here. Take a little drink." Jack laid him out on his sleeping bag and covered him with another from the cabin.

Jack cooked a simple meal and made sure Martin got some of the food down. He gave Martin another glass of water and more medicine. That night Martin had a restless sleep by the fire with Jack sitting at his side.

The next three days were more of the same. Martin shook, begged for alcohol, hallucinated, paced, fidgeted constantly, slept fitfully, and had two more seizures. Jack sometimes dozed when Martin was asleep, but he more or less remained awake the whole time, slipping toward exhaustion. He'd gone without sleep for days at a time years before, and he knew he could do it again. He was afraid that if he slept, Martin might wander off into the endless woods.

On the fourth day, Martin seemed profoundly confused. For hours on end he would think Jack was their father, or Stephanie, or a coach, or a teacher from Jesuit High. Jack improvised the other side of the otherworldly conversations and tried to comfort Martin.

Martin sobbed. "Father Benjamin, I'm sorry I'm late for class. I was with Stephanie. She thinks she's pregnant. Oh, my God, I don't know what to do."

Jack replied, "It's alright, Martin. I said a prayer. She's not pregnant. It's okay."

Martin nearly collapsed in relief. "Oh, thank you father. Thank you, father, I have sinned."

Martin would pick up little twigs and break them into smaller and smaller pieces and toss them in the fire pit. He would walk around and around the pit.

Hyperactive, sweaty, confused. Jack kept the fluids, vitamins, and medications flowing, and made sure Martin got a little nutrition every few hours.

When Martin fell asleep on the fifth night, Jack was afraid that he couldn't remain awake any longer. He tied his ankle to Martin's, so Martin would wake him if he moved.

Just after dawn Jack was dragged from a deep sleep by the sound of screaming and the feel of something pulling on his leg. Martin was frantic to get up, struggling, tangled in the sleeping bag and the rope. "Let me out! Let me out! Don't fuck with me."

Jack had trouble waking up. Still not quite awake, he said, "Hang in there, major. We can't let these little bastards beat us." When he finally realized where he was, Jack said, "It's okay, Martin. It's okay. Sit still and let me untie this."

Martin looked at Jack with amazement. "Jack. Where have you been? We've waited and waited. The Navy guys said you were dead. Oh, Jesus, Jack." And he cried uncontrollably.

Exhausted, Jack replied, "No, man, I'm right here, be cool."

Martin fell back onto the sleeping bags and looked around, "Where the fuck is this?"

"Canada, man, we're fishing in Canada."

Martin brightened up. "That's cool. I like to fish. But I don't feel good. Where's Stephanie? She was just here."

Exhausted, Jack dragged himself to his feet. "Sit tight, bro', let me get your medicines."

All that day and the next Martin's demons led him through his own personal hell. He played rock and roll to an audience of stone-faced Jesuits. He watched Stephanie grow seventy years older in five seconds. He ran bases manned by dead Marines. At every turn, Jack was there to console him.

On the seventh day, things began to slowly improve. The first good sign was



that Martin knew Jack for who he was. And he gradually accepted the fact that he was on a lake in Canada. The shaking that engulfed his whole body gradually subsided, though his hands continued to shake for days, and his headache never seemed to leave. By the eighth day he was getting his own water and helping with small chores at the camp. And toward sundown Jack took him for a boat ride around the lake.

Martin sat in the bow wrapped in a sleeping bag as Jack ran the little outboard motor and steered them slowly along the shoreline. The sky gave up its vivid blue as the puff-ball clouds changed through pinks and reds and yellows and finally grays. The surface of the lake was smooth and reflective. Birds came and went. At the far side of the lake, at the opening to a stream, Jack cut the engine, and the two sat in silence as the walleye started to rise to the surface. Martin stared unfocused into the water. Jack watched the changing sky. Two worlds. Close enough to touch. A mirror-like surface between them.

They sat side by side on the logs by the fire pit after breakfast the next morning. Martin was swatting at the flies. Jack sat still, absorbing the beauty of the place.

Martin asked, "How long have we been here?"

Jack smiled at Martin. "Today is day nine. They will come back for us tomorrow."

Martin shook his head. "God, I don't even remember how we got here."

Jack tossed the rest of his coffee onto the fire. Steam and ash rose up. "A float plane dropped us off. A Beech 18."

Martin twitched and blew a fly off his lip. "Well, it's beautiful here. So still and peaceful, except for these fucking bugs."

Jack laughed and patted Martin on the thigh. "Ah, he's back. My brother is back. Complaining and swearing. Yep, that's him."

Martin looked out at the placid lake. "Maybe we ought to go fishing today, since we came this far and all."

Jack stood and stretched. Thirty-one years old and he still looked like a college wrestler. He raised his hands to the sky. "I was hoping you'd say that. I'll tell you what, bro', you aren't going to find fishing as good as this anywhere else on the planet, except maybe at Sea World."

Martin laughed as he stood up. "Let's do it."

They loaded their gear in the boat and motored along the shore for a half mile, then killed the engine and drifted with the light breeze, casting their lures toward the shadows near the sunken logs by shore.

Martin broke the silence. "What's Stephanie's new husband like, anyhow?"

Jack stopped reeling his lure in and looked pensive for a minute. "Rob? A decent guy, really. He's been through a lot."

Martin felt a fish strike and jerked his pole back hard. The lure flew out of the water, zipped past his ear and dropped into the lake behind him.

"Easy, podner," said Jack.

Martin ignored the gaffe and quickly reeled up the slack in his line. "Like what? You said he'd been through a lot. Like what?"

Jack took his lure out of the water and struggled to pinch open the clasp that fastened it to the leader. His fingers didn't move quite right. "These damn fingers of mine haven't been the same since..." His voice trailed off. He got the lure free, dropped it into the tackle box, and rummaged around for another. "Hasn't Mom told you about him? About Rob?"

Martin cast again, but the lure whipped into the water about ten feet from the boat. "Fuck." The reel was snarled now, because he had brought in the line with too much slack. "Not really. Said he was a doctor. Said his wife was killed in the war or something. Is that right?"

Jack watched Martin fumble with the line. He looked away from Martin and grinned, then he fired his lure fifty feet into a shadow beside a stump. The ghost of a pike shot past the lure like a torpedo. "Stephanie met him through the network of families of

the POW/MIAs. He was a doctor in the Army in Vietnam, and he met this Belgian nurse when they were on R & R in Hong Kong. She was on her way back to Vientiane, Laos for her last four months as a volunteer. They hit it off big time and were planning on getting together again as soon as his tour was up. They were writing letters and planning on getting married when she got captured by the Pathet Lao. He went nuts trying to find out what was going on with her, but essentially never heard anything definite until he pieced things together a couple of years after the war was over. Turns out she died in a Laotian prison camp.”

Martin had his reel apart, struggling with the snared line. “Man, that’s some shit isn’t it? So what’s he doin’ now?”

Jack brought his lure in and changed it once more. He cast again, this time a little past the same spot in the shade of the stump. “Well, it must have been ’75 or ’76, and he was kinda falling apart. Stephanie talked him into coming down to New Orleans, and he ended up getting a job at Charity Hospital. He’s still there, and he’s doing a lot better now. Stephanie has been good for him, and he’s been good for her.”

“Motherfucker.” The line in Martin’s reel looked like a hairball, all snarled and knotted. No obvious beginning or end to the chaos. He looked up at Jack. “How is he with Kevin?”

Jack reeled his lure slowly past the stump. “Good. He’s a quiet guy, and he works a lot, but he tries to spend time with Kevin. He grew up around Boston, and he’s kinda lost in the New Orleans scene, but I’m showing Kevin how to catch crayfish and shuck oysters, so between the two of us, things ought to get covered. Kevin could sure use a little more time with you, though.”

Martin had gotten a knife from the tackle box and was cutting wads of line from his reel. “I tried to get Stephanie to send him out to L.A. for a few weeks, but she wouldn’t hear of it. No fucking way, hosenose.”

Jack threw his lure a little past the stump again, and brought it back slowly through the shadow. “Yeah, that’s because she didn’t trust her only son with a drunk.

Maybe things will be different now, if you can stay sober.”

“Maybe so.” Martin set his pole in the boat. He took off his shirt and stretched. Then he pulled the unsnarled line through the guides in the pole and tied on another lure. “God, this sun feels good. You’re going to kill me for saying this, but man, it’s fucking Miller time.”

Jack pulled his lure out of the water and took a weed off the hook. He shook his head. “That would be the easiest thing in the world for you to do, to start drinking again. But for once in your life, you’re going to have to put up a fight.”

Martin raised a hand, “Just kidding, bro’. Be cool.”

Jack continued anyway, “You are through the worst of it now, you’ve just got to stick it out from here on. No more booze, man. I mean zero. You’ve come close to killing yourself and God knows how many other people, driving your truck around on the interstates like you do. I’ll tell you something. If you start drinking again, I’m not going to bail you out. And if you hurt somebody on the highway, I’ll tear you apart. That would be unforgivable. When you get back, you see a doctor, and you join AA. Is that agreed?”

Martin made a long, arcing, downwind cast. “I’ll try, man.”

Jack laid his fishing pole across his lap, the lure dangling just above the water. He looked squarely at Martin, watching him reel in his lure. “No. You’ve got to *do* it. You hear me? Forgive me for this, man, but I’ve got to get this off my chest. All your life you’ve been a quitter. Things came too easy for you. You had a gift with music, a gift with baseball, and a gift for being liked—which you don’t hear much about, but is very real. These things just came naturally for you. And when anything would go wrong, you would just walk away looking for the next Easy Street. You did it with baseball. Think how much more effective you’d have been as a spokesman against the war if you had stayed in baseball. The golden-boy-baseball-hero stands up against the war. But you didn’t, you quit. And then you quit music after a bunch of bad reviews on your second album. You didn’t fight to keep Stephanie and Kevin. I wasn’t gifted like you. I didn’t have the creativity to write music or the dexterity to play those guitar leads. But I had

something you didn't, and it's time you try to find it."

Martin turned his head in a silent question. Jack continued. "I could stick it out. I could hang in there. I could walk to the center of the mat and face a gorilla. I can honestly say that if I had been more like you, I would not be alive today. I would not have survived twenty-seven months as a prisoner of the Pathet Lao and the North Vietnamese, and I would not have fought to get my life, and now *yours*, back on an even keel once I returned." He paused until Martin looked back up at him. "People can do hard things. I've been there. I've seen it. Trust me, I *know* this."

Martin stared back at Jack. "Are you talking about Vietnam? What are you saying?"

Jack cast his lure into the shadow behind a stump. "I've seen people dragged through hell. Old ladies can quit drinking."

Martin continued to look at Jack. "Before you came back, the Navy told us not to talk to you about Vietnam, or not to try to get you to talk."

Jack worked the lure back toward the boat. "The U.S. Navy is the finest organization on earth, but it's not right about everything. Are you sure you want to hear about this? This is not pretty stuff."

Martin's mind was beginning to work. He realized that he hadn't asked Jack to talk about it, but maybe Jack wanted to. "It's your call, Jack. If you want to talk, I'll listen, but don't talk for my sake. Only if it will do you some good."

Jack cast the lure into the shadow again. "I could write book about everything that happened."

Martin watched Jack's lure swim toward the boat. "I'm sure you could. I've read a few."

Jack was also watching his lure, but he glanced quickly over at Martin. "Really? You've read some of the books by former POWs?"

"Yeah. Richard Stratton's book. Dieter Dengler's amazing story. And one by Hubble. And a magazine article about Ernie Brace."

Jack looked back at his lure. "I'm impressed."

"Well, I drink a lot, or at least I used to, but I'm not a complete basket case. I wanted to understand what you went through."

Jack retrieved his lure and cast it back. "But you never asked me about it?"

"Like I said. I figured that you would talk when you needed to, and if you didn't need to, that was okay, too. Okay for me, at least."

Jack hesitated, then spoke. "When I punched out of my airplane, I had arms and legs flying every which way. My right arm smashed into something and broke just above the wrist. I was in cloud, swinging back and forth in the chute, not really knowing up from down. While I was still falling, I tried to get my emergency radio out of my vest with my left hand, and I dropped it. The clouds went nearly to the ground, so one second I'm hanging there and it's gray everywhere, and the next second the ground is fifty feet below me and coming up fast. I couldn't control the chute with one hand, so I landed hard and twisted my right ankle pretty bad. I tried to run, but I could barely stand up. The Pathet Lao, the communist Laotians, were on me in nothing flat. I was bent over holding my arm when they came up to me. One of them smashed me in the face, and I fell over in the dirt. There was a lot of angry talking, and I thought maybe they were going to shoot me right then and there. Turns out there were a couple of soldiers from the North Vietnamese Army, NVA, with them, and they probably saved my ass.

"They stripped me down to my skivvies and took my boots. They tied my arms behind me at the elbows, in spite of the broken arm, put a rope around my neck, drug me to my feet, and we marched off. Me just hobbling along. There were about six of us. The Pathet Lao with ancient bolt action rifles and the two uniformed NVA, who seemed to be in charge.

"My arm was killing me and I tried to let them know, but they just jammed their guns in my back and pushed me down a trail. They led me into a little village and stood me up over by a well. The people came out and screamed at me, shook their fingers in my face, pulled my hair, slapped me, spit on me. Again, I thought maybe they were

about to shoot me, but they didn't.

“That night they left me tied up by the well with a couple of soldiers, just kids really, sitting off to the side playing some game. I was thirsty, God I've never been so thirsty, my arm was killing me, I couldn't sleep. And I'll never forget this. Late that night this toothless old woman snuck out to me and gave me a drink. Held a cup up to my lips. She had the saddest little smile you ever saw. She took out this picture and showed it to me. The picture was about worn out, and we only had the light of half a moon, but there was this kid in the picture standing there looking so serious. Holding a rifle about as big as him. She pointed to me, she pointed to the picture, she jabbered about something and just sat there rocking back and forth on her feet crying this far off cry. Anyway, she gave me a drink, smiled that worn-out smile, touched my shoulder, and disappeared back into the shadows. I've dreamt about that face a thousand times. There's a story there, and I'll never know what it is exactly, but I can guess.

“Anyway, they left me tied up all the next day and around sunset the second day, a truck pulled up and four NVA soldiers loaded me up. I sat blindfolded in the back, my arm throbbing, nodding off whenever we stopped. We lurched over rotten roads all that night and stopped just before dawn and slept that day. Then more driving at night and sleeping in the daytime until we came to a place I guessed was near Dien Bien Phu, the place where the French got creamed in 1954. They put me in a little bamboo cage, and I stayed there for forty seven days. A doctor there set my arm and gave me a shot of something. Most of the guards were Pathet Lao, but there were some NVA around, too.

“After forty seven days in the cage, I was back on a truck headed for Hanoi. They had reservations for me at the Hilton. There were a couple of days of interrogation that I don't even want to think about, and then I was put into solitary. I was scared shitless, I'll tell you. At the interrogations they would say stuff like 'nobody knows you here. If you don't sign this statement or answer these questions, we will kill you right now and nobody will know.'

“In the beginning I had no idea where I was, or who else was there, or

anything. But after a couple of weeks they moved me to a cell with another guy who had also been captured by the NVA in Laos, and I learned a lot from him. Turns out they kept all the people caught in Laos separate from the others. Just like us, the North Vietnamese weren't supposed to be operating in Laos, and so they couldn't admit that they had prisoners taken in Laos. That put us in kind of a ticklish spot, since they couldn't very well release us without admitting that they had us in the first place. On the other hand, we weren't being constantly harassed to make anti-war statements, because they couldn't use them without letting it be known that they had us.

“The guy I was with showed me the tap code, and pretty soon I was in contact with other POWs, making sure they knew I was in there. Some of those guys had been in there for years. Actually by the time I got there, things had lightened up a little bit, but it was still scary shit, I'll tell you.

“You know what really got to me? And maybe I shouldn't tell you this, but they'd play your music over the PA, and they'd read your statements about how the war was a mistake and the U.S. ought to get out of Vietnam. Well, in my little part of the world, real men, brave men, would rather be tortured for a month than say something like that. And it happened that way. It happened to me in the beginning. They'd show me a statement and ask me to sign it. Some bullshit about how the imperialist aggressors should quit interfering with the domestic policies of the peaceful Vietnamese, about how sorry and wrong I was for flying missions into Vietnam and Laos. It was a battle of the wills. They weren't even going to use the statement. I wouldn't sign, and they'd beat the crap out of me. Little sadistic fuckers. One on one, I could have broken them in half. Can you imagine what it was like for me to just sit there and take it?

“They'd tie my arms so tight behind my back, my elbows would touch, then they'd pull my arms up toward the back of my head. The pain was unbelievable, you can't even imagine. They'd leave me like that for days. Think about it. Days. No food. No water. In a dark, filthy cell full of rats and mosquitos. Peeing in my pants. When the ropes came off, my arms were black. I couldn't move my fingers or even feel my hands.



They broke us down to the level of animals. You can't imagine what that's like. Sometimes just a cup of rice a day. Filthy water. You wouldn't believe the things I'd eat just to get some energy. I caught a lizard once, stepped on his head, and ate him raw. The other day I was having dinner with Stephanie and Kevin. I set a plate of scraps down for Maddy, and I had a flash about how as a prisoner I'd have fought her for them. I'd have killed her for them.

“When Nixon started the heavy bombing around Christmas of '72. We cheered. We cried. We knew it would take that sort of force to bring the war to an end. The U.S. should have done that years before, but the peacenics would have freaked out. You guys prolonged the war. I am convinced of that.

“Then they signed the deal and started letting everybody out. For a while it looked like it was going to be everybody but us. Then on March 27, 1973 they told us we were going out the next day.”

Martin sat quietly, no doubt unsure of how he should respond. He looked over the side of the boat and followed a light shaft into the dark water. “Jack, I didn't say what I said back then, or do what I did, to cause you or any other military person any grief. I wanted the war to end. I thought it was a mistake, and I still think so. Suppose we'd have nailed them back when it first got started, mined the harbors, bombed the levies and dikes, blown up the railroads and bridges, just ripped the shit out of them. Where would we be right now? How would things be any better for us? How would things be for them? And what would we have done then, station a million troops over there and make them run the country in a way we approved of? Forever? Make good little Democrats and Republicans out of them? Nixon got tough. Got them to sign a meaningless piece of paper so he could claim 'peace with honor,' you guys came home, the troops came home, and the south collapsed. What if we had just walked out in 1968, or 1967, or never got involved at all way before that? Let the French go down in flames in 1954? Fuck 'em. Ho Chi Minh fought against the Japanese. Why should we have helped the French re-establish a colony over the Vietnamese? If we'd have stayed out of

it, the story would have ended the same, only a lot more people would be alive today. The problem is that we grabbed the tiger by the tail in the first place, and then once we had him, we couldn't hang on, and we couldn't let go."

Jack said, "Look, man, the Communists wanted to take over the world. East Germany. Hungary. Korea. Vietnam. They were going to take it piece by piece. Did you want to wait until they got everything but the U.S. and then fight them in the streets here, or would you rather go fight them over there?"

Martin said, "If those are my only choices, then of course we should fight them over there rather than here. But I don't think those are the right options. I don't think that's the way it was. After all, we lost. The domino fell. And the rest of the world didn't crumble. So what did we gain from the fight?"

Jack shook his head.

A fish rose to the surface thirty feet away, and a circular ripple began to spread. Jack cast his lure into the spreading circle. "If we had kicked the shit out of them right off, we wouldn't have lost all those soldiers either."

Martin had had enough of the argument.

Jack's rod doubled over and his drag sang out. The yellow underside of the fish flashed, and the water boiled where Jack's line went below the surface.

---

Ray and Stephanie came out as Jack was finishing his story. They set the breakfast on a little table, and sat quietly and listened. Nobody touched the food. After a long silence Stephanie said, "I should have straightened Martin out years before that. You managed to do it, Jack, there's no reason I couldn't have done it. I just gave up on him and let him sink into the booze and drugs. Jesus, I've beaten myself up over that."

"There's only so much one person can do for another," said Flo, "Now let's eat this great looking breakfast before it gets cold."

There was a huge bowl of scrambled eggs, toast, and three or four cut-up papaya. God, it looked good. We all dug into the food and tried to steer the conversation

around our anxiety as we waited for word on what the diver found on The Ana-Ni'a.

The tension was palpable. We all knew that the next phone call could resolve eleven days of uncertainty and apprehension. Perhaps Martin would be found alive and well inside the hull, and he'd be on his way to Niue by helicopter by the time we heard. Things like that have happened. I could imagine the joyous scene here if that were the way it turned out. But maybe they'd find his body tangled in the inevitable spaghetti of stays and shrouds and lines that would surely hang under the surface like the tentacles of a giant squid. I didn't want to dwell on that thought, but we all knew it was a possibility. And thinking of the overturned boat on the rolling ocean, I made a quiet wish for the safety of the diver who would probe the tangled wreckage.

So there we sat as the morning wore on. No one wanted to get far from the phone. No one wanted to leave and come back to a wake. No one wanted to leave and miss the euphoria that would follow good news.

The conversation was forced and too deliberate. Jack asked how long I planned to stay down here, and I told him that I really didn't know. I wasn't running away from Western Civilization, but I wasn't all that eager to get back either. I asked Kevin about his plans for college next year, and without any enthusiasm he said he was probably going up to LSU in Baton Rouge. Was he going to play any sports? "No," said Stephanie, "he's just going to study." Ray brought up the idea of having Kevin spend a year, or at least a semester, in Australia. Kevin was keen on the idea, but Stephanie was non-committal. Flo didn't say much of anything. She just sat there staring out from under that big straw hat, munching the papaya and sipping her scotch.

The phone rang a couple of times, and we all jumped up like a cannon had gone off. Every time I put the phone to my lips, my heart was beating in my throat, and I could barely speak. The first call was from Winston and the second from Marie. They both wondered if we had heard anything.

Time seemed to stop. I'd look at my watch thinking maybe it was 1:00 or 2:00 in the afternoon, and it would be 10:30 then 10:46.

The call came just before noon. There was no trace of Martin on The Ana-Ni'a.

Standing there holding the phone, I had that same hollowed-out feeling that I had all those years ago in the hospital talking with Beth's doctor. To him it was just a job. His life went on unbent. I asked a surgeon-friend one time what it was like when things started going to hell in the operating room. What he said was interesting. "It's like ham and eggs," he said. "The chicken is involved, but the pig is committed. I'm involved, but the patient is committed." Like my physician friend, the air/sea rescue folks did what they could and then went on with their day. But where did that leave us, the family and friends? Caught in the middle, more than just involved, but less than committed.

As I stood there listening on the phone, it sounded to me like the search and rescue officer was looking at his notes as he spoke to me. The diver had pounded on the hull and got no reply. He then swam up under the boat and entered the cabin. Martin was not aboard. Martin's safety line was still secured to the boat, but it had been disconnected at the harness which Martin would have worn. The boat had been dismasted in a rollover, probably by a rogue wave. The emergency inflatable life raft was not located onboard, but it was impossible to do a complete inventory in the chaos. The EPIRB, emergency position indicating radio beacon, was found with its switch in the "ON" position, but the battery was dead and the antenna broken at the attach point. (With a functioning EPIRB, the planes would have been able to home in on The Ana-Ni'a on the first day of the search.) The dinghy was also missing, and the painter, the line that ties the dinghy to the stern of the boat, was cut at the dinghy-end of the line. The search had already been intensified in the vicinity of The Ana-Ni'a, but nothing had yet been found.

Everyone standing by me knew as I spoke with the officer that the news was bad. Stephanie took hold of Flo and led her back out onto the patio. Kevin closed his eyes hard for a second and then ran out the door and down the hill toward the harbor without saying anything. "Damn it," said Jack. "Goddamn it. Why didn't he stay with the boat? If he had stayed with the boat, we'd have found him."

Ray said, “Don’t be too harsh on him. He may have un-clipped from the harness in order to work on something and been knocked overboard. There may have been diesel fumes in the cabin that drove him out. He may have felt that his chances were better in the dinghy. Or in the inflatable raft. Who knows at this point? They’re still looking, and I don’t think it’s time to give up yet.”

I said, “I’ll go out tomorrow and search within a...I don’t know, say a hundred mile radius of the boat. What do you think, Ray? He couldn’t have gotten that far from his boat by drifting in the raft or rowing the dinghy.”

Jack cut in, “You guys talk about it. I’m going to go look for Kevin. But I’ll take the flight with you tomorrow, Joseph.”

I nodded and turned back to Ray. He said, “A hundred miles? I hate to say it, but it could be more than that. He may have abandoned the boat eleven days ago.”

I said, “How far can you row or drift in eleven days?”

“Well, that’s just it,” said Ray. “His dinghy had a sail. It was a queer little craft. I’d never seen one quite like it, and Martin took a lot of kidding about it wherever he went. See, the previous owner was something of a sailing purist. The dinghy didn’t even have a motor. It was an orange inflatable, something like a Zodiac, with a hard bottom, a rudder, a little retractable centerboard, and a bright red sail. The guy must have been color-blind or something. If Martin is in that boat, he could be hundreds of miles from where he left The Ana-Ni’a.”

The uncertainty was beginning to drive me nuts. Maybe he was washed overboard. Maybe he was in this weird dinghy. Maybe he was in the raft. I walked toward the kitchen and realized when I was halfway there that I didn’t know what I was going there for. I stopped and stood still for a second, then grabbed a bottle of scotch and a handful of glasses and headed out onto the patio. Ray waited at the patio door and gave my shoulder a squeeze as I went out.

We told Flo and Stephanie about our plan, and then just sat around trying to recover from the emotional rush of the phone call. My head hurt like I had a crowbar

running from ear to ear.

## A Canyon That's Carved Through Cloud

Jack and I took off the next morning before dawn. We were beginning to work well together in the cockpit, to fly as a crew. Jack read the checklists, handled the radios and navigation, and kept track of our fuel status, while I flew. I was starting to feel like I knew him. Martin was right, he was a great individual.

It was a gorgeous night. Once we had the plane squared away in climb, we both just sat there soaking up the incredible scene. There was a broken deck of puffy low fair-weather cumulus clouds laying like cauliflower all around us. Above the clouds stood a three-quarter moon that gave the clouds a silver-white translucence. Through the breaks in the clouds below, the ocean was here and there sparkling in the moon's glow or hiding in the shadows of the clouds.

"This is an incredible place," said Jack, "a holy place."

"You mean the South Pacific?" I said.

"No," he said, "the whole thing. This whole planet. I'll never get used to it."

I smiled and nodded. I knew what he was saying. We flew on toward the search area without a lot of talk. I thought back to a night something like this one that I had encountered on a flight a few years ago. I was flying night cargo trips out of Oakland back then.

A call from the dispatcher roused me from a restless half-sleep in my Oakland hotel room. I had a fitful dream that a young man stood at the wing of my airplane. I had never met him, but somehow we seemed to know each other. As if we had met in other dreams. The young man was very pleasant. He wanted to fly with me. He seemed excited about it. I was pleased. I told the young man to get in the airplane while I made sure the plane was ready to fly. When I finished inspecting the plane, the young man was nowhere to be found. I tore the airplane apart looking for him, and was nearly

frantic when the phone call from Oakland dispatch woke me.

I rose and stood in the dark at the window of the motel room watching the rain fall into a bubble of orange light held down by the lamp poles in the parking lot. I was searching for the source of the nameless regret that hung about me like an oversized coat. Like nostalgia for a past that never was.

The rain was falling in wind-driven curtains as I walked through the 4:30 a.m. December darkness toward the twin-engine cargo plane parked on the Oakland Airport ramp. My mood was glum. Since I was a kid growing up in Seattle, I had always detested getting up before the sun. Short gray Seattle days and long black nights. Sky like aluminum foil. Alarm clocks that drag warm feet onto a cold floor. It seemed to underscore the sometimes bleak necessities of day to day living. There were times when I felt nearly strangled by an almost palpable worldwide sadness that seemed to ooze up from within me and from every expression of my fellow men, from strangers whose eyes jump away, from every house with the door shut tight, from every dog huddled on the porch out of the rain, from the rain itself. The feeling that we are actors, drafted against our will for roles in an unspoken tragedy. This feeling would creep over me at odd times ever since I was a kid, and it was there this dark and rainy Oakland morning.

The flight was simple enough, Oakland to Redding, then standby, but the weather was rotten and my eyes had that scratchy feeling like I hadn't slept right in weeks. Checking the weather on the phone to flight service, I got the details: multiple cloud layers to 25,000 feet, some embedded thunderstorms, and a freezing level at 4000 feet. I clicked on the TV in the hotel room, and watched as I brushed my teeth. The Weather Channel was showing work crews dealing with mud slides in the Bay Area. It had rained three inches in the last twenty-four hours. Various lowland roads were closing from slides and flooding, and both I-5 and I-80 were closed by snow in the mountains. Could be worse, I thought, at least I'm not going over the hills to Reno or Portland or Salt Lake.



Back on the Oakland ramp, I put my flight gear in the airplane, took out a flashlight, and did a careful pre-flight inspection of the exterior of the plane. Then I climbed into the cockpit and got organized while the ground crew finished securing the cargo. The loading chief brought me the forms, some of which I signed and gave back, some of which I kept, then I grabbed my flashlight and went back into the wind and rain to check the cargo door and take one last look at the airplane.

Once again in the cabin, I closed the door and began the transition from the world of hotels and ramps to the world of flight. I put on my seat belt and shoulder harness and tucked a small flashlight under my crotch. I double-checked that the appropriate charts were on the seat next to me, and I put my clipboard on my right knee. I then picked up the checklist and went through the “before starting” and “starting” lists, holding up to get the attention of the ramp marshal before actually starting the engines. With the engines running, I turned on the heater and defroster to bring a little comfort into the cold, damp cockpit. I called on the radio for my route clearance up to Redding and then my taxi clearance, and finally I began moving toward the runway.

The rain was driving hard and the winds were gusty enough to rock the airplane as I waited on the taxiway for the control tower to give me takeoff clearance. Sitting alone in the dim red light of the cockpit, I gave myself a little talking to: “Better forget about being tired here for a minute and get focused. It’s going to be runway heading to intercept the Scaggs Island 165 degree radial, with a climb to 8000 feet. I’m going to raise the nose at 90 knots, then pitch the nose up to five degrees and accelerate to 110 knots. I’ll bring the landing gear up at 110 knots and then pitch the nose up to 12 degrees for the first 500 feet of climb. If I get an engine failure before 110 and gear up, I’ll abort the takeoff.” I got clearance and turned out onto the runway and lined up. *My favorite part*, I thought as I brought the power up for takeoff. I held the brakes for a second and checked power as the engines spooled up. Then I released the brakes and began accelerating down the runway. *Here comes the tricky part*, I thought as the airplane

reached flying speed. *An engine failure here, before the gear is up and the airplane has gained more speed, can be a big problem.* There are times when a twin-engine airplane needs both engines to fly—when it its really heavy, when it is at a very high altitude, or just after takeoff, when the landing gear is down and the speed is low.

The noise from the rain increased as the airplane picked up speed in its climb. At 500 feet, I began to relax. Off to the right I saw the lights of Alameda and Oakland through the rain, and I could feel the thick warm sleepiness of the people down there in their beds. I saw the cars moving on the roads and thought once again of the sometimes dreary daily struggle. The sadness of the dreams that wouldn't come true, and the sadness that arrives when dreams do come true. *What is this tragedy we struggle to ignore?* In another second the lights of town were gone as I entered the wet overcast.

I settled down to the job of flying the airplane on instruments. This was always a challenge I enjoy. It involves keeping track of a great many things simultaneously—staying on the routing and altitude, watching the weather, monitoring the aircraft systems and performance, communicating with air traffic control, studying the sometimes complex instrument approach procedures for the destination airport, and dozens of other things. But I had made a science of all this, and I was comfortable.

As the plane climbed through 3000 feet, I noted that the outside air temperature was down to 35 degrees Fahrenheit, and I turned on the anti-icing systems. There had been times on nights like this when I had picked up huge loads of ice flying over these innocent looking hills north of the Bay. Ice is one of the more threatening things to a pilot of a plane this size. Ice messes up the shape of the airplane and adds considerable weight. Many an airplane has been brought down in the winter by an icing encounter. The threat on this flight was not particularly high, since there was 4000 feet of warm air below me, and even if the plane picked up too much ice to hold altitude, I could descend into warmer air and melt it off.

What I did was characteristic, I suppose. I decided I would pass the time by studying the icing and taking notes, maybe he'd write an article on it later or use it in the

next edition of my book. I kept track of the outside air temperature and the other flight conditions as well as the ice buildup and the behavior of the airplane as it iced up. I couldn't see anything out the windows, but I kept careful track of where I was with the radios, and I noticed that when the airplane flew over a line of hills, I would feel a bump from below and there would be a rapid increase in the rate of ice accumulation. I thought about why. *Maybe that air crossed 6000 miles of ocean and picked up a lot of moisture, and then when the hills forced the air to rise and cool, the moisture supercooled and was primed to stick on the airplane. Interesting.* I was at last beginning to shake the somber mood from earlier.

Level at 8000 feet I turned on the ADF radio and tuned in an AM station searching for some music. I tuned past one talk show after another on the dial. *Why do people find it so important to spue out their halfassed opinions?* This, like so much of the rest of what I saw my fellow creatures doing, totally mystified me. *Everyone's talking. No one is listening. Nothing comes from all this talk. Why are they all so eager to step up and toss their opinions onto the scrap pile with all the others. And the subjects. They haven't the attention span to consider anything complex and important, all they can do is spout opinions on British royalty or the latest celebrity trial or football game.* I wondered if I was some sort of freak because I found all this so offensive, so depressing. I wondered if there was some mixup and I was actually intended for another planet.

Finally I found a station playing some soft jazz. *Much better.* I turned on the autopilot and closed my eyes for just a second. It wasn't a nap, I just wanted to exercise the muscles in my eyes and roll my eyes around on my inner eyelids. It felt good. I noticed that the turbulence, which had been light but steady since takeoff, had dropped off, and I sensed a light through my closed eyes.

I opened my eyes to the most amazing sight I had ever encountered in all my years of flying. I had flown out of the solid cloud and into an opening, a "canyon," a "room" within the storm that was maybe twenty miles in diameter. No one else on earth was in this room. Below me was an undercast carpet of clouds, and there were towering,

billowing, cauliflower-like clouds on all sides. The clouds that formed the “walls” of this room reached more than two miles above my airplane, and above that there was clear sky and an infinity of stars. And most amazing of all, though I had not given it a thought in the gloom below, there was a nearly full moon that was bathing this scene in an otherworldly silver light. I was looking over and up and down on clouds lit from above by the moon. The clouds were bright and white on the edges, shading to deep gray in the moonshadow. For a moment I could view the scene as if from high on a cloud on the canyon wall, and I saw my tiny airplane moving through this sacred room. A gift in the midst of the storm. It was a stunning sight. It was worth the years of schedules and check rides and rainy ramps at 5 a.m.. I hope I carry this vision with me forever, a constant reminder of how quickly the wheel can turn.

The clouds were melting away as Jack and I neared the search area. I reduced the power and descended toward five hundred feet. Jack had a search grid already mapped out. Once we got to the southeast corner, we were going to fly north for a hundred miles, then west for six miles, then south for a hundred miles, then west for six, and so on. When fuel burned down to the point where we’d only have one-and-a-half hours reserve after landing in Niue, we’d depart the search area for Niue.

“Orange,” I kept telling myself. “The raft is orange, and the dinghy is orange. The sail is red.” I had to talk to myself to stay focused.

We both sat with our faces pressed toward the plexiglass. Now and then we would turn the airplane to look at something, but it was always a false lead. The work was exhausting.

By the time we got to Niue, my head was pounding from the eye strain and the pressure of the headphones. And Niue was just the half-way point. We caught a ride down to the Niue Hotel for lunch, and while Jack ordered some food, I scrambled down to the water and just fell in. Sitting cramped in that little plane, I’d been craving the weightlessness of the ocean for hours. It was all I could think of to relieve the strain.

But the relief was temporary. An hour later we were refueled and headed back to our search grid. I was falling into that world-weary frame of mind. That condition where good thoughts seem too implausible to hold, but sad ones sense your weakness and gather like vultures. I was thinking about Martin and Stephanie, and about Beth and me. I was wondering how two decent people could do such a lousy job of being good for each other. The incident that kept playing in my mind was a decade old. It was back before I was flying cargo, back when I was still a math professor.

I was working in the study of our house up in Montana. But I was in another world really, doubled over a legal pad. It was Saturday afternoon. I was drawing diagrams on the paper and trying to visualize surfaces in three dimensions. Now and then I would set my pencil down and make shapes with my hands, looking at them from various angles.

The desk was covered with opened books and highlighted articles from mathematics journals. Other opened books were on the floor along with balls of discarded scratch paper.

I felt the need to get up and take a leak, but I didn't want to lose my train of thought. My intuition told me that I had all of the pieces to a very large mathematical puzzle sitting before me. My concentration was intense. My pulse rate was up. I was on the verge of seeing something that no one before me had ever seen. I felt anticipation running through me like a high-voltage current.

The key insight seemed just beyond my grasp. *It all hinges on continuity*, I thought. *If the dynamical system jumps discretely, almost anything can happen. But if the borders are only piecewise continuous....* I heard someone else in the room. I looked up.

"How long have you been standing there?" I said.

"About a minute," said Beth. There was a chill on her voice.

I looked back at my legal pad. "I'm on the edge of something here. Give me twenty minutes and I'll come out."

“That’s what you said at eleven o’clock this morning. Do you know what time it is?” This time there was frost.

I closed my eyes for a second and then looked at Beth. I honestly didn’t have a clue about the time, but judging from my hunger and the burning in my bladder, I guessed maybe three o’clock. I struggled not to lose the insight I was getting. And not to reveal any irritation. “No, what time is it?”

Beth folded her arms over her chest. “It’s a quarter to five.”

I had promised to go with her to look at a new dining room table. She had seen it when she did a human-interest story on a new artisan in town who did handmade woodwork from rare woods. I actually loved beautiful things made of wood, and I had been looking forward to going. “Shit, I didn’t know. I lost track. Let’s try to get down there.”

Beth dropped into the little couch in the study. “It’s too late, we’ll never make it now.”

I shook my head. “Why didn’t you tell me a half hour ago?”

“Because you were busy and I didn’t want to bother you. I know you don’t want me to drag you away from your work.” *There was a tone of sarcasm. Or was it frustration? Or maybe even hate?* Beth continued, “I swear, I might as well live alone. My friends are always looking forward to the weekends. They go out and do things. I creep around the house like a mouse, hoping I don’t bother you.”

I spoke with my eyes closed. “Okay, let’s do something.” I opened my eyes. “What sounds like fun to you?”

Beth’s voice went up in volume. The tone a notch more strident. “No, I don’t want you to stop what you are doing just to do something with me out of a sense of obligation. I want you to *want* to do something with me.”

*Was it anger? Was it frustration? Are they different?*

My mind raced through the intricacies of the situation. Two equations with six unknowns. It made my differential equation problem look simple. *I should have*

*watched the time, but I didn't. Why? She should have reminded me sooner, but she didn't. Why? She said she didn't want to bother me, but then she bothered me when it was too late. Why? Maybe the frustration just got too much for her, maybe making me feel guilty was more important than going out to look at the table, maybe...*

Beth stood up. "Are you going to say something, or just sit there?"

I dreaded emotionally charged encounters of this sort. "I was on the verge of breaking through on a theorem. Something I've worked on more or less for eight years. I'm sorry. I wanted to go down to the store, too. I just got lost in my head."

The air in the room was almost too thick to breathe. You could have spread it on a cracker.

"That's just *it*. God, you're here, but you're like a ghost. I feel so *alone*. You are *always* lost in your head. Where do you think that leaves *me*?"

"I don't know. What have you been doing?"

"I did the normal stuff that needs to get done. Washed the clothes, went to the grocery. Then passed some time reading a book on the parallels between Babylonian and Chinese astrology."

We had fallen down this rathole a thousand times. Why did she lead us over to it again? The astrology-is-a-crock-of-shit/or-not argument had a long history between us. She'd say, "You think you're so goddamn smart. You think you know everything. You think I'm an idiot for believing this stuff. Well people have used this for a lot longer than math." And I'd say, "I don't think I know everything. I think the universe is an unimaginably complex thing. I know almost nothing, but I don't believe the positions of the planets have a damn thing to do with anything." And so on.

It really wasn't a debate at all, it was just the steam we blew at each other when the internal pressures and temperatures rose past a critical level. I didn't want to get into astrology right then, and I didn't want to get into an emotional food fight. I said, "Let's go to a movie."

Beth threw her hands up and stormed out of the room screaming, "So we can

sit in the dark and watch other people talk? No thank you.”

Sitting out there over the Pacific with Jack. Staring at the water and hoping for a red sail. That line just echoed through my head: “..sit in the dark and watch other people talk...” It was my fault, wasn’t it?

I turned to Jack and said, “You ever been married?”

He gave me a funny look, as if to say, “Where the hell did that come from?” Then he turned back toward his window and spoke through the intercom. “Me? No. It just, I don’t know...before I went off to Vietnam, I thought, why get married, it would be like taking a baloney sandwich home from a banquet, then when I got back I felt differently, but I just never found anybody that seemed like a good fit. It doesn’t help that I wake up screaming sometimes, either. Plus, with the kind of work I do, the kind of schedule I keep, it’s tough. There’s a hell of a lot of divorce in the airline business. Having the right woman around would be great, but I’m not obsessed with the idea. I learned how to live with myself a long time ago...at least this way I know what I’m dealing with. Steph told me you’re going through a divorce now. How long were you married?”

“Since 1971. Long time.”

“Jeez,” he said. “That must be tough. Sorry.”

I didn’t know what to say, and it didn’t seem like a great topic for conversation anyway. I shrugged and let his comment go.

Later on we talked some about Kevin. Jack said that he thought Kevin fought a lot of secret battles. He said Kevin worked harder at sports than anyone he ever knew, but things just wouldn’t go right for him. He never hit over .280, and he had a tendency to throw wild on critical plays. He’d tried for scholarships, but nothing ever came along. Jack said he believed that deep down Kevin hoped that if he could excel at sports, Martin would take more of an interest in him. “I tried to talk to him about it,” said Jack. “Talk to him about sports and stuff. I told him that some people are born able to do things that you



could struggle all your life and never be able to do. It's a gift. They don't even deserve much credit for it. I don't know how else to explain it. I told him his father could hit a curveball as well as any man who ever lived. He could sing. He could write music. You or I couldn't do any of these things. And it's not just sports. You could be willing to do anything on earth to get a certain woman to love you. Jump on grenades. Cut off your fingers. Write poetry. Work till you drop. And maybe she couldn't care less. Then along comes some guy who bumps into her at the grocery, and she can't take her eyes off him. That's just the way it drops. Shit, I can't explain it. But I told him that he was fearless. That he never gave up, and that was a quality his father never had. Kevin asked me if that was a gift, too. He asked if people were just born with a certain amount of fortitude and determination, so they didn't deserve any credit for that either. Hell, I don't know. I can't figure this crazy world out, but free will is in there somewhere, and it's not that simple." He looked over at me and shook his head, then he looked back out the window. "Christ, listen to me ramble on. I'm starting to sound as scatterbrained as my mother. What was I talking about, anyway? I'm so tired I can't see straight. Oh, yeah, all those years that Kevin tried so hard, Martin just hovered in the distance. When Kevin was a kid, he hardly knew his Dad. Martin was like a distant uncle who came around once in a while. Now losing Martin comes at the worst possible time for Kevin, because Martin had finally started making an effort to get into Kevin's life. He'd call Kevin now and then. He sent Kevin a card from Hawaii. They had talked about taking a sailing trip, for instance, and now all of that is beginning to look like it is going to be impossible. I do what I can," said Jack, "but it's tough on the kid. I was his age when my father died, and it was rough. I'll tell you. I never have been able to shake the feeling that my father is still watching me, still keeping track of the way I handle things."

I knew all about how that felt, but I didn't want to get into it. I just nodded and said, "Been there, I know it's tough."

We went back to staring out the window, but we didn't see a thing all afternoon. The sun was getting low when we reached minimum fuel and turned for home.

## Heavenly Digital

Flying home from the search area, I handed the airplane over to Jack, slid my seat back, and closed my scratchy, burning eyes. I was hoping that I could daydream my way into a short nap. I started going through my relatively short list of pleasant things to think about, and the first thing I came up with was Carolyn Fleming. I decided to go with that.

I was living in Angel Falls, Montana back in 1982. Beth was working at the paper, and I was still teaching math at the college. We were down at the creekside park at the July 4<sup>th</sup> barbeque for the newspaper staff. I used to get claustrophobia at those sorts of things. I hated standing around with those newspaper people pretending to be interested in the office intrigue and small-town political gossip.

Beth was over by the barbeque helping to lay out the food. I had no urge to join in. I nodded at her, set my beer on the picnic table, and hiked over to the volleyball court. I recognized a couple of the people from Beth's paper, but most of the players were SOs, "significant others," like myself, trying to find some way to pass the time at the party.

I stood on the sidelines for a minute before an overweight sports writer picked up his beer, trudged out of the sand, and waved me in to take his place. The game stopped for a second while I kicked off my shoes and jogged out onto the sandy court.

She was on the other team. Tall and athletic, long blond hair and who-knows-what-colored eyes behind her mirrored sunglasses. White tank top, yellow shorts. Built like Venus herself.

I took my position at the net. The other team served, and the ball arced over the net toward me. I stepped back and hit it underhand, lofting it back over the net. She shot up out of the sand like a surface to air missile and spiked the ball back into the

ground by my feet.

“Yeah,” she said. And there were high fives all around on the other side.

I picked up the ball and tossed it back under the net. One of my teammates gave me a sympathetic look and shrugged his shoulders. “Her name’s Carolyn,” he said. “She’s been doing that all afternoon, Joe. Rumor is she played at State. But look at her. God, she makes my teeth sweat.”

I laughed and got ready for the next serve. The ball went over my head and was returned by one of my teammates, the husband of somebody down at the paper. Someone on the other team batted the ball low over the net toward me. It looked like a perfect spike opportunity until I saw her rise up to meet me on the other side of the net. I tapped the ball just out of her reach to the right, and it went off the fingers of a young guy from the mailroom. I looked over at Carolyn. She raised her sunglasses and smiled at me. Something moved in my stomach. Like I’d swallowed an eel years ago, and it just woke up. *Oh, my God*, I thought, *look at those eyes, like melted chocolate*. Say what you will, but to me, eyes are the sexiest part of a good looking woman.

My team got the serve and worked up a little rally by keeping the ball away from Carolyn. We fought back from 19-16 to 19 all. I got in some good shots, and each one drew an acknowledgment of one sort or another from Carolyn. A smile. A twist of the head. A faked pout.

“Game point,” somebody said. The wife of the sports editor arced a high serve that just barely crossed over the net. Carolyn was eighteen inches off the ground and spring-loaded when it fell within her reach. I was nearly as high on the other side of the net, with both arms raised to block her shot. She drove the ball across the net, and it smashed squarely into my nose. I saw a flash of white light an instant before I registered the searing pain. I went to my knees and then sat down in the sand holding my nose. The blood ran down my to my elbows and dripped onto the sand.

“Oh, my God, I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she said. She bent over me, at a loss for something to do. I pulled a handkerchief out of my pocket and pressed it onto my nose. I

tilted my head back. The people nearby were mumbling useless advice. Pinch your nose and so forth.

I sat there in a daze. Someone ran up with ice and paper towels. She wrapped the ice in the towels and held my head back, gently putting the ice up against my nose. The blood still flowed freely.

I sat still for a few minutes. I felt as if my entire body were one giant throbbing nose. The rest of the players drifted away. As the sting wore off, I felt her hand on my head, and I opened my eyes. I could see the concern in her expression. Lips drawn, eyes intense. I let out a long breath and rocked my jaw from side to side. "I guess it's your serve," I said.

"No way," she said, "I don't have the heart for it anymore."

Looking up over the paper towel, I tried to smile. "So you guys forfeit then, is that what I'm hearing?"

"What a *male*," she said. "You've always got to win. No way, we'll just call it a time-out. Game called on account of pain."

I started to get up. Carolyn held my arm and helped me to my feet. "Where to?" she asked.

I tried to think. "I'm going to walk over to the creek and just stand in it for a while, maybe run some of the cold water over my face and try to snap out of this."

She held my arm as we walked the hundred yards to the creek. "I'm really sorry," she said. "I guess I get carried away sometimes."

"Well, I'm a big boy," I said. "I knew what I was getting into. Hockey's a rough sport, I knew that." She laughed and squeezed my arm. God, she even had a sense of humor. I started feeling better.

We walked into the creek and sat on a fallen log with our feet in the cold, clear water. Then she stood above me and took the paper towel from my nose and winced. "How bad is it?" I asked.

She dipped the towel in the creek and wiped carefully at my nose. "Well, it

stopped bleeding at least, but it looks pretty messy.”

I looked up at her as she tended to my wound. She was stunning. “So what connection do you have with this big happy newspaper family?” I asked.

She wiped at the blood on my face. “I just started in June. They hired me to edit the personals and compile the horoscopes. Stuff like that.”

I rolled my eyes and bit at my lip. Astrology, good grief.

“Do you work at the paper, too?” she asked.

“Me? No, my wife Beth is a feature writer.”

Carolyn nodded and looked downstream for a second. “Beth Claypool?”

“Yep,” said I.

“I’ve met her. She’s real nice.”

I nodded. “That’s the one.”

Carolyn swiped hard at my nose, and I drew back. “Did you really play volleyball at MSU?” I asked.

“No,” she said, “just some intramural stuff. Is that what they were saying on your team?”

“Yeah, killer from the north country, that’s you.”

She laughed again. “What do you do?”

I pinched my nose and checked my fingers for blood. “I’m a math professor at the college.”

Carolyn looked impressed. “Really, so you’re *Doctor* Claypool.”

I stuck out my hand, “I’m Joseph, sorry I didn’t introduce myself.”

She took my hand. “Hey, it’s okay. We were busy, right? I’m Carolyn Fleming. So how are you doin’ anyway?”

“I’ll be okay. I’ll go back and put a little ice on it, drink a beer, be good as new.”

“I’m so sorry, really.”

I began feeling awkward, sitting there with her, away from all the others.

Like we had some private thing going. “Not a problem,” I said. I started to stand up, and for the first time I can ever remember, I felt dizzy a little clammy. I sat back on the log and took a deep breath.

Carolyn dipped the paper towel in the creek and then put it on the back of my neck. It really seemed like she wanted to care for me. She told me to sit tight while she went to get us each a beer, then she came back and sat on the log with me. She talked about growing up in Montana. Riding horses, chasing boys at the rodeo, counting the endless stars and watching the Aurora Borrelias twirl like a curtain in the northern sky. I told her a little about sailing on Puget Sound and hiking the Olympic rain forest. She seemed like a pretty neat person, bright and funny, a little on the wild and unconventional side. I could have sat there with her the rest of the day, but like I said, I was starting to feel a little edgy about the two of us being off by ourselves like that. Carolyn seemed to sense that in the pauses while we talked or in my glances off toward the others.

I caught her eye a time or two later in the afternoon, but left without saying anything further to her.

A week later, Beth and I had a party at our house. It was Beth’s crowd again, newspaper people, some local politicians and business folk. I was hoping that Beth had invited Carolyn, but there was no good way to suggest it or even to find out. I just waited to see who would show up. These sorts of evenings didn’t happen very often, but I dreaded them even more than functions like the picnic. They left me feeling like a wallflower. Like I said, I wasn’t interested in local politics or business, and the inter-office intrigue at the newspaper made my eyes glaze over. I felt for the other SOs who got dragged along, but I was never in the mood for propping up a conversation with one of them. I generally drifted around with a smile painted on my face, replacing olives in the trays and keeping my beerbuzz alive.

I saw her when I came out of the kitchen with a couple of bottles of wine. She was dressed seductively in a low-cut black dress with a gold star between her big breasts. She looked even better than I had remembered her. She smiled and walked right

over, offering her hand. I set the wine on the table and took her hand. "How's the nose, Joe?" she asked.

"Well, it's, ah, it's been a real problem. See I never sleep on my back, and now that's the only way I can lay down without making my nose hurt. So I lay on my back, but I don't sleep very well, and then that makes me all muddleheaded and clumsy. So yesterday I stopped in at Duffy's for a beer with this new guy in statistics. Big burley guy, Lars, who looks like the Viking he actually is. Anyway, I picked up a couple of beers at the bar and turned to carry them back to the table, but caught my foot on something and spilled a few drops on this girl by the bar. Her half-drunk boyfriend jumped up and started poking me in the chest and telling me I was a real jerk and so on, making a big stink. Lars walk up and told the guy to shut up, but then the guy took a swing at Lars and the whole place exploded. Like a wild west movie. When we left, the place was in flames. So I guess my nose is okay, but that spike of yours nearly precipitated a wold crisis."

"Lordy, me," she says, "sounds like ladies night in Kalispell."

"It's the butterfly effect," I said. "Little causes with big consequences. I've been studying that lately."

"Yeah, I was talking to Angie about you, and she said you were some sort of math guru or something. So what sort of research do you do?" she asked.

I was studying patched-together differential equation systems, and I thought I'd try explaining the issue. After all, not many people asked, and it might be an hour or two before I could think of anything else to say to her. "Imagine," I said, "that you and I are sailing to a far off desert island that sits right on the equator." She looked over her drink and raised an eyebrow as if to ask if this was some not-too-subtle proposition. I gave her an ambiguous look in response and went on, "I want to get there by spiraling around the island clockwise, gradually getting closer and closer with each revolution. And you want to do the same thing, but my spirals are shaped different from yours. Mine are like ovals with the major axis oriented east and west, while yours are ovals oriented

north and south.” I picked up one of the wine bottles and drew two ovals in the condensation along the side. She pressed a breast hard into my arm as she moved close against me as if to get a better look.

“Suppose we make a deal where you get to steer in the northern hemisphere, and I get to steer in the southern hemisphere. Remember, the island is right on the equator. So if we start in the north, you steer us around in a steep oval that leads to the equator on the east side of the island, and then I take over and steer us in a flat oval that sends us back across the equator on the west side of the island, and then you take over again, and so on.” I moved my finger on the bottle, and she looked up at me and smiled. “Will we ever get to the island?”

Carolyn stirred her drink with her index finger and said, “Could be fun, but why do you want to know that?”

She smelled like a flower, but I couldn’t place which one. There was something in those eyes. I said, “It’s got applications in economics and maybe other areas someday. It’s a tricky mathematical problem.”

She sucked the gin off her long finger. There were stars on her fingernails. There were rings all over her hands. “Sounds like a yin/yang thing, Joe. Haven’t people known about that for years? I’m surprised that scientists are just now getting around to it.”

I looked back at her and faked a look of profundity. I invented an *I Ching*-like quote, “Six in the third place means: to nourish one’s self on fog invites disaster.”

Carolyn cocked her head and looked hard at me. She said, “You study the *I Ching*? I’m surprised.”

I smiled. “So you handle the personal classified section, huh? ‘Women seeking men,’ all that.”

She nodded and smiled, “Women seeking women. Men seeking sheep. Yeah, yeah, I’ve seen it all.”

I didn’t think of anything to say right away, and she continued, “Tell me,



what would you put in a personal ad?"

I looked at the ceiling then back at Carolyn. I tried not to look down her dress, but I couldn't help myself. "Never gave it much thought," I said. I dragged my eyes back toward hers and saw a smile run across her lips. I continued, "How about... married white male seeking young deaf woman for long and meaningful relationship? Will consider short meaningless relationship. Must be brilliant, insightful, and of legendary beauty. Call Joseph at 677-3645. If a woman answers, hang up."

We both laughed. Carolyn said, "How's a deaf caller going to know whether or not a woman answers?"

I shrugged, "Well, see, that's part of the brilliancy test. She'll have to have a way of figuring out the sex of the person at the other end of the line. If she can do it, then I'll be interested."

"Nice puzzle," she said, shaking her head. "You know, you're weird." She paused and studied my reaction. "Now, why do you want a deaf woman?"

"Every man's dream," I said. "I could never say the wrong thing."

"Yeah, but you could never say the right thing either."

"Yeah, well, not much risk of that, coming from me."

Beth appeared at my shoulder. I probably jumped a foot. She smiled at Carolyn. "Joe, can you get some ice out of the freezer and put it in with the beer for me, please?"

I nodded a goodbye to Carolyn and went off to do the chore. I didn't have another chance that night to speak with her one on one.

The following Wednesday morning I was working in my study when the phone rang. An irate voice jumped out at me through the line. "Is this Joseph?"

"Yeah," I said. "Who's this?"

"Never mind who I am. You've got a lot of nerve. A married man, putting an ad in the paper looking for a mistress, and a *deaf* one at that. It is absolutely shameless. I

have never in all my life heard of such a thing. This country is slipping, and it is people like you who are dragging it down. If Jesus were ....”

I pulled the receiver away from my ear and started laughing. Then I spoke up, “Wait, wait, wait. You said there was an ad in the personal section?”

“Yeah.”

“It was just a joke. Somebody I know, somebody I just met, put the ad in there. It’s not serious. You can back off here, I’m sorry if it offended you.”

I hung up and went out into the kitchen. I found the newspaper and read through the men-seeking-women personals. There it was, “...call Joseph...” I laughed and shook my head. “This is going to be interesting.”

An hour later the phone rang again. I smiled as I picked up the receiver. An inflectionless voice said, “I am a hearing-impaired employee of Heavenly Digital Corporation. Please don’t try to reply, as I will be unable to hear you. Heavenly Digital is now in your town with this exclusive one-time offer of a free digital prostate exam. To get your free exam, please come this afternoon between the hours of two and four to 1165 East Bryant Avenue, Apartment 202. Ask for Carolyn. If this call has reached the lady of the house, I apologize for the intrusion. Please have a nice day.”

I was laughing so hard I could hardly talk. Heavenly Digital prostate exam, that was rich. “Okay, Carolyn, you win, that’s...”

“Please don’t try to reply, just come to 1165 East Bryant Avenue, Apartment 202 between two and four today.”

There was a pause. I said, “You’re serious, aren’t you? That’s your real address, right?”

“Heavenly Digital, just come, 1165 East Bryant.”

“Apartment 202,” I said.

The other end of the line went dead. I sat there looking at the phone.

I was there a little before three. She opened the door with a big smile and

stepped aside. I walked in feeling off balance and unsure of the situation. “Hey,” I said with a weak smile.

She pointed to her ear and shook her head as if she couldn’t hear me. I nodded and smiled. She put her arms around me, and a moment later I put mine around her. Then she stuck her finger up my ass and with that flat voice said, “Heavenly Digital, at your service.”

We both laughed so hard we fell on the floor. The rest came easy. She pulled my shirt out of my pants with her teeth and ran her hands up my chest. A minute later I did the same to her. It was glorious. We rolled all over the apartment. Laughing. Playing. She seemed interested in every inch of me. It was intoxicating. I tried to remember how long it had been since Beth and I had this sort of warm, affectionate, agenda-less, spontaneous sex. Sex without history. The feeling that the other person wants to be touched. Wants to touch. Since before we were married, I guessed, but even then, never like this. I’d forgotten how good sex can be. And the whole time, Carolyn acted like she couldn’t hear me. I kept trying to call off the joke, admit defeat, talk to her, but she would have none of it. Finally, at five o’clock, I found a pad and pencil and wrote, “This has been great, but I gotta run. Can I see you again?”

“Tomorrow,” she said in her robotic tone.

“What time?”

She pointed to the pad of paper and shook her head. I laughed and wrote it down.

The next day was more of the same. Still she acted like she couldn’t hear me. The sex was great, the body language of affection and attraction was as real as it could be, but I thought the pad and pencil business was already beginning to wear thin. The problem was that it was my joke, yet I still felt that it was a little kooky that she would carry it to this point. Things went on like this for a few weeks. She would roll on top of me in bed, sitting up and straddling me. No painter on earth could capture the way her hair fell messy and beautiful on her shoulders or the way her breasts swayed when she

moved. She'd tap her finger on my chest, smile, and in a flat, inflectionless voice she'd say, "You are good for me, Joseph. When Aquarius meets Gemini, the stars do smile."

I'd grin and nod, looking up at her, trying to get every detail into my memory, trying to slow the clock on the wall. A silver mobile of the solar system turning slowly on the ceiling as the false breeze from the air-conditioning made it spin.

Between orgasmics, we'd lay in bed and play tic-tac-toe or hangman. She'd go in the kitchen and bring back treats. Goofy stuff like Twinkies and Kool-Aid, as if we were kids. One time she walked in the bedroom door with a big bowl of popcorn. She shrieked, threw it into the air over the bed, and dove in next to me. Scared the crap out of me. The popcorn fell all over us like snow. "Let's fuck like Eskimos," she said in her flat voice, and she rubbed her nose against mine and giggled.

Carolyn's second-favorite pastime was a picture drawing game that she invented. Laying naked in the bed we would pass a sheet of paper back and forth taking turns drawing a single line or curve, neither of us knowing what would materialize on the paper. Once I thought I saw an old man with glasses taking shape, but it turned into one of those tandem bicycles with two riders. Another time a Thanksgiving turkey became two people making love. The guy had a huge butt, and we laughed until we cried.

When the picture came out well, Carolyn would squeal with joy and roll on top of me. But sometimes nothing would form, and she would rip the paper from the tablet and turn away from me.

One day she said, "Did you read your horoscope for today, Joey?"

I said, "No, you know I don't—"

She shrugged as if she couldn't hear, and I just shook my head as if to say, "No."

She hopped out of bed and went to get the paper. I watched her ass as she went through the door, and I wondered how this strange dream would end. She came back with the paper and pointed to Gemini, which is me. It read, "It's time to come out of your shell and greet a new day. Aries figures prominently. Virgo could spell trouble."

From then on I checked the horoscope column every day, and found coded messages for me. “Where have the old ways taken you? Trust the Aries to find your hidden self.”

Some days she’d pour oil on my back and rub my shoulders. “Too tense,” she’d say flatly. “Loosen up, Joey.” And I was tense. The massage made me feel indulgent and self-conscious. Very uncomfortable. In a way, the pampering was the hardest part for me.

I felt torn up inside. Carolyn was great. She was bright, funny, imaginative, light as a feather. But odd in a way that I couldn’t define. Still, Beth and I had been through a lot, and a cold-steel guilt crept over me when I imagined leaving her. And the constant risk of being found out gnawed at me. The thought of going through an emotional shitstorm with Beth made the hair on my arms stand up. I noticed that when Carolyn was busy for a few days, I relaxed knowing that I wouldn’t have to concoct stories to explain to Beth where I was all day. Gradually I began to pull away. “Not tomorrow,” I’d write, “maybe Friday. I’ll leave you a message.”

One day in October I came out of class and saw her waiting in the alley by my car. I waved and walked toward her. She smiled and looked away. It was bright and cool. Hints of Fall. The new-fallen leaves scratched along the pavement in the dry wind. I could feel my intestines slide around as I approached her.

“What am I doing wrong?” she said.

I didn’t speak for a long time. I watched a cat float to the top of a fence. “Will you hear me this time?” I said.

She nodded. Her eyes looked a little wet, and her nose was red.

I took a deep breath. The cat looked at me with absolute feline indifference. Or maybe it was curiosity. Maybe he wondered how I was going to handle this. I said, “I don’t know what it is. I just need to back off a little. You’re great. My God, I do like you. Really, you’re amazing.”

She said, "It was the game that bothered you, wasn't it? That I played like I was deaf?"

I nodded, "That's part of it, but, hey, I started it. It was my fault." I blinked, and the cat vanished.

"You know," she said, "I thought it was something you *needed*. The way you just blurted it out like that at the party, that you needed an affair with a deaf woman. I thought it just leapt right out of your inner self before you could stop it, and it was probably the truest thing you could say. So I went with it, and then it was hard to stop, like a bet or a dare. But I can stop it now. No big deal, if it's a problem for you."

I shifted my weight on my feet. I looked away. Carolyn went on, "I really care for you, Joe. When a woman looks like I do, she goes through life like a magnet through a junkyard. Every guy wants to stick to her. She gets surrounded by pretty boys, and that scares off the decent guys. I'm tired of dull, humorless men who buy cars they can't afford and worry about their looks. There's something about you I just picked up on right away. Hard to spell out exactly. You're a Gemini, Joe. I've got a feeling that there's a twin inside of you. Someone you think you can't let anyone else see. Someone you can't see very clearly yourself. Your twin is wild and spontaneous and trusting and fun, and I've had a peek at him, and I want to bring him out. I think I could love him."

She put her arms around me, and we stood rocking back and forth beside my car.

God, there's been a lot of times since then that I wish I knew where Carolyn Fleming was.

I heard the power drop on the airplane's engines, and I opened my eyes to see Jack's hand on the throttles, reducing power for the descent. I pulled off my headphones and rubbed my sore ears. I sat up tall and stretched as much as I could in the tight little cockpit. Jack looked over at me and smiled. He said, "I bet that felt good."

Little did he know. I felt like a kid coming out of a theater, slowly piecing my

world back together. Carolyn fading from sight.

It was fairly dark now, and I could see the rotating beacon of the Rarotonga airport up ahead on the horizon. Here and there to the south, lightening set the clouds aglow. Jack nodded toward the storms and said, "For a while there we were racing a squall line to the airport, but it looks like it's veered off to the south."

He sounded like the archetypal southern airline captain, with his calm country drawl. "Been there a thousand times, son. Trust me, it ain't nothin'."

We tied the airplane down and had it fueled for another flight tomorrow, in case Ray felt up to going out. I asked Jack how long he could stay on the island, and he said he'd stay as long as there was hope that we could find his brother alive.

When we got the plane taken care of, I drove Jack back to his place. We found the family sitting down at the fire-pit by the beach. Ray, Stephanie, Flo, and Kevin. The fire was burning down, but Ray got up and threw in some charcoal. Nobody asked how the flight went, they knew we'd have been talking a mile a minute if we'd seen anything. I just stood there stretching my back, looking up at the bats and the stars. Stephanie surprised me, she came over and gave me a big, long hug. "Thanks," she said. "I'm glad to know that Martin had a good friend in the end. Sometimes I wondered if he was just some sort of lonely hermit living up there in the California woods like he did."

As far as I knew, Martin didn't really have any other friends, but I lied and said, "No, he kept a low profile, but he had a few friends. People seemed to like him. And I *need* to look for him. It's as much for me as it is for him. I just hope we can make it work."

Jack handed me a beer, and I dropped down into the sand and sat looking out at the lagoon with my aching back against a log. The sea had that quiet night-time sound. Little waves that broke in the last six feet seemed to respect our need for peace. Now and then a branch of lightning backlit a shaft of rain on the horizon to the south. The distant thunder was barely audible. More felt than heard.

Stephanie put some fish on the barbeque for Jack and me. After while we ate. I could feel the nourishment bringing me back to life.

Everybody seemed more pensive than usual. Once in a while someone spoke, but mostly we just sat there looking at the fire or out toward the lightshow at sea.

I asked Kevin what he'd done all day, and he said he'd bicycled around the island with Winston, and tomorrow maybe they would go diving again after they worked on *The Tangaroo*.

Flow said, "That Winston's about the nicest kid I ever met. What's a boy like that going to do with himself on a pitiful little island like this?"

"He wants to be a doctor," I said. And that reminded me that I hadn't been working with him on his math and science like I had promised. Just one of the things put on hold when Martin disappeared.

Ray said he'd take the flight tomorrow, and Jack volunteered to go out with him. I felt like I ought to give Jack a break, but he insisted on going.

It was going to be an early day for Ray and Jack, so we put out the fire and said our goodbyes.



## So Long, Isaac

I'm usually a light sleeper, but I woke up around eight, and Ray was long gone. I just lay there for a few minutes luxuriating in the yellow morning light, in the freshness of the moist morning breeze that lifted and dropped my curtains with a tap, in the officious sounds of the birds outside. I made some coffee and went out on the patio to sit in the sun. The healing warmth was magical.

For the first time in a while, there really wasn't anything I needed to do. Maybe I'd go down to *The Tangaroa* and look for Winston. Work with him on his algebra and geometry. Help him get ready for the college entrance exams. Winston is a good student, and we both enjoy the study. It reminds me of what I hoped college teaching would be like when I first started. And it reminds me too of why I finally quit. I sat there in the tropical sun and thought back to those days in Montana in 1983, at the end of my incarnation as a math professor.

I remember sitting in my office at the university, door closed, reading an article in a math journal on dynamics. There was a sharp knock and the door swung open far enough for one of my students to poke her head in. "Dr. Claypool," she said, "I wasn't sure you were in here. Can I see you for a minute?"

I recognized her as an occasional attendee from my first-year calculus course. I couldn't remember that she had ever spoken in class. She generally just sat there with a sullen expression, avoiding eye contact. I closed my book and moved toward the door so I could prop it open once she got in the room. She skirted past me and took a seat. I walked around her and sat back down. "What's up?"

She dug through her backpack and pulled out a test. "Well, it's like my grade in this class. Like, when you are talking I totally understand everything you are saying, but when I take this test I do really crumby. I mean, I think you're a really good teacher and

all, I mean like I was talking to my room-mate the other day and she was all, ‘Like, who should I take for calculus?’ And I was all, ‘Take Dr. Claypool, he’s totally cool.’ But look at this. Why is my test so bad?”

I took the test and pretended to be studying it carefully, but it was obvious in seconds what the problem was. She got a 38 out of 100. She could make use of a few simple rules for taking derivatives, but nearly everything else was a mess. All but the simplest questions on limits were wrong, and the derivations were either blank or contained a few near-meaningless or irrelevant expressions—nothing that approached the methodical deduction of a proof.

I handed the test back. My expression as blank as a Monday morning blackboard. “What math did you have in high-school?”

“I had algebra one and two and geometry. And I got, like, A’s.”

I looked at her. Still expressionless. “Did you do proofs in geometry?”

She rolled her eyes. “I guess, but not like you want.”

“I don’t see you in class a lot.”

“Well, like I work. And I am pledging at Chi Delta. And I’m taking eighteen units. I’ve got some personal things going on. It’s not like I got a lot of time.”

I gave a noncommittal nod. “This stuff can take a lot of time. You weren’t born knowing calculus. Neither was I. This is going to take some work. I can’t open your head and pour it in.” I looked at her. Was I seeing frustration in her eyes, or was it embarrassment, or maybe anger?

“Maybe you think I’m stupid, but I’m not.”

I leaned back in my chair. “No, I don’t think you’re stupid. You wouldn’t be at this university if you were stupid. All I am saying is that it is going to take time and effort for you to learn this material. How long did you study for this test?”

She looked at the ceiling and then back at me. “A couple hours.”

“What did you do to study?”

“I got together with Bree, the girl that sits next to me, and we looked through the

chapters.”

“Did you work the problems at the end of the chapters?”

“No.”

“Did you try to reconstruct the proofs on your own and check them against the book or class notes?”

“No.”

I spread my hands, palms up. “That’s what it takes. I remember when I first learned this stuff. I would take a scratch pad and sit with the book for hours doing problems, reconstructing proofs, drawing figures. When I was finished, there was balled-up paper all around me. It looked like I was sitting in a blizzard. I am talking about four or five hours a day for several days before a test. That’s what it takes.”

She wrinkled her face and shook her head as if she had just bit into a bad grapefruit. “I never, you know, had to study like that in my life. Like, no way. If it takes, you know, like that much work, something’s got to be wrong. Somebody’s not teaching it right.” She arched her back and stretched, nearly splitting her blouse with her enormous, perfect breasts. I had seen this maneuver a thousand times, and I tried to fix my eyes on hers, but, as always, my eyes slid down past her moving lips, over her chin, along her neck and onto her breasts. I couldn’t win. It was a force stronger than gravity—maybe the missing fifth force. The secret to a unified field theory. She was saying, “I learned in my gender studies class that men and women have different, you know, like, learning styles. Maybe you’re like teaching this for men, and it’s just not, you know, appropriate for me.”

I idly picked up my book. I closed it and put it back on the desk. “Now there’s something I’ve never thought of. All this time I thought I was teaching it for human beings. Teaching it the way it has been taught for centuries. Handed down from one person to another.”

She stared back in obvious anger. “One white male to another, you mean.”

“That is *not* what I meant, and I am not going to argue about it. If you want me to help you understand this material, you can start coming to class and you can come in

here with specific mathematical questions. I'll give you all the time you can use." I stood up and walked to the door.

She gathered her things and left without a word.

I closed the door, then sat back down and looked around my cramped little office. The shelves were dripping with math and physics books, science journals splayed open on the desk, photocopies of papers from colleagues around the world tossed here and there, library books piled on the floor. Memos under a sediment of tests and letters. It was a chaos that bore witness to a history of activity. My eyes fell on some reprints of my own articles that were piled on top of the file cabinet next to my desk. I picked up one of my old articles and flipped through it. It was the first major paper I had published. It got me tenured and promoted. It was a good paper. Beth and I had a little party when it was accepted for publication. Even nine years later, it was still cited in other papers on the subject, and I was still proud of it. But what did it all amount to? I had set out to unravel the secrets of the universe. Now and then I had felt that I got a glimpse of something never before seen, but my focus was so tight. My field of view so narrow. I felt that I moved through a dark and nearly impenetrable jungle with nothing but a match and a magnifying glass. I would need five hundred and ninety lifetimes before I could even begin to scratch the surface with my research. And the teaching. It was fresh and fun in the beginning. And the students seemed better back then, especially the returning Vietnam vets in school on the G. I. Bill. They were serious. They had perspective. It was a joy to give them the tools that would let them move on in life. And now? Sure, there were some good ones, but things seemed different. Expectations had fallen. Mine, theirs, everyone's. I left the office in a funk. I drove home and had a couple of beers before Beth got home, something I couldn't remember doing before.

At the college the next day I found an article in my mailbox with a postit on it. The article was entitled "Isaac Newton Was a Misogynist." The postit was a note from a woman's-studies professor offering to enlighten me whenever it might be convenient. Under the article was a memo from the under-assistant dean of students. The memo said

there would be a meeting of the “ad hoc student centered learning policy” committee on Friday at three. I groaned. “Those who can, do,” I said to myself. “Those who can’t do, teach. Those who can’t teach, become administrators and waste everyone else’s time inventing buzzwords and holding meetings.”

I told my secretary I was ill. I threw the material in the garbage and drove home. Beth was sitting at the dining room table going over the city budget, researching an article for the newspaper.

“I’m quitting,” I said.

Beth looked up absently from the budget. “You’re what?” She focused on me. “You’re quitting what?”

I took a jar of olives and a block of cheese from the refrigerator and sat across from Beth. “I’m quitting at the college. I’ve had all the crap from that place I can stand. I’ve given it eleven years of my life, and that’s more than enough. *Way* more than enough. I’m sick of it. With my book and the stock profits, we don’t need the money. Fuck it.”

I cut a piece of cheese, stuck it on the end of the knife, and passed it across to Beth. She took it and looked at me. “Did something happen?” she said.

“Yes and no. It’s the whole package. The students don’t give a shit, most of them. My colleagues are a bunch of politically charged ideologues who are afraid of the real world, most of them. The administration is in the business of spewing out buzzwords, most of them.” I spooned some olives onto the overturned lid of the olive jar and set it where Beth could reach it. “I’ve been there eleven years, and I have never, not once, had an administrator come to me and say, ‘What can I do to help you communicate more effectively with the students?’ Never. It’s a self-justifying bureaucratic mess. They invent buzzwords, write memos about the buzzwords, ask us to take time out from our teaching and research to explain how we comply with the buzzword of the month. It’s bullshit. I’m sick of it. I don’t need it. I quit.”

Beth took an olive and chewed it slowly. “What about the pursuit of truth? What

about your passion for figuring things out?"

I sat quiet for a moment. Beth and I never talked about this sort of stuff. She didn't have any patience with the "big philosophical questions." It's like she thought, *Okay, we're here, nobody's going to figure out why, now let's get on with it.* And to her, "getting on with it" meant paying an awful lot of attention to school bond issues, city politics, and the like. There really was a huge gulf between us in terms of our outlook on life, and we both steered clear of that rocky shoal. But I felt like trying to explain myself, and I said, "Well, the big question is this: Why is there anything at all, why not just nothing? Why is there a universe? Why a single electron?" I cut a piece of cheese and bit off the corner. "I've been working on tiny pieces to that puzzle, and it's interesting stuff, it's all part of the big picture. I'm glad I know what I know. But I gotta confess, I'm not making much progress with the ultimate question, and lecturing to a bunch of bored and horny nineteen-year-olds or writing memos to bureaucrats isn't getting me much closer. I can still read the journals when I want to, or research an interesting problem, but I don't need the college for any of that."

Beth put down her pencil and sat back in her chair. "So what'll you do? I know you're not just going to sit around the house."

I got up and went to the refrigerator. I took out a bottle of red wine and poured two glasses. "I'll fly. Ever since my book came out, I've had lots of opportunities to fly, but I've been too busy at the college to follow up on them. I can fly charters, night cargo. Maybe get a type-rating in a Lear or something and do some corporate flying. People are always inviting me to go off to wherever to give lectures or personalized lessons." I handed Beth a glass. "It will be a change, and I feel like I need a change."

Beth raised the glass and took a sip. "Change can be good," she said. "If that's what you want, I'm not going to try to talk you out of it."

My quitting at the college set in motion a chain reaction of further effects. The most important was that since I was no longer tied to the college, I was also no longer tied to Angel Falls, and we began to think about moving. One of my charters took me to a

little airport sitting on a ridge above the Sacramento Valley in northern California. I landed on a beautiful day in April, and when my passenger left in a cab, I walked to the ridge and stood looking out at the green valley below. I felt like Moses looking into the promised land. Back home, Montana was colorless and cold. Bent-over brown grass, mud, dirty snow. Here things were warm and green and alive.

I went home that night and told Beth all about it. The next day we flew back together, rented a car, and drove all over the area. Beth was getting tired of Montana, too. The cold, the remoteness, the short winter days were all getting to her. She too must have felt the need for a change, and she seemed to love northern California immediately.

Four months later we moved to Echer Heights, California. I found work as a pilot, and Beth started writing for the local paper.

It wasn't long after we moved that I met Martin. Oddly enough, it was Beth who got us together. I remember sitting in my study and hearing Beth's car pull into the garage, then her footsteps down the hall. She stuck her head in the door and said, "You ever hear of Martin Landry?"

I thought for a moment. "Yeah, he's the ex-baseball player who sang 'Who Done It?' I've even got the CD around here somewhere. Picked it up in the oldies section for \$3.99 a long time ago. Still listen to it once in a while. Why?"

Beth sat down on the little sofa, "He just wrote a book called One Hit Wonder, and the paper asked me to go over to Woodford Glen, up in the hills near Mendocino, and interview him."

I brightened up. "Really? That sounds cool. He must have an interesting story. He was a pretty good baseball player, but he quit during the Vietnam War because he got a lot of crap from the fans over his anti-war ideas. Then he made a dynamite album that must have made him a zillion bucks. There was another album after that, but it didn't turn out so well. I haven't heard much about him since."

"Yeah, I did a little check in the biography file, and after that he had some drug and drinking problems and moved up to Woodford Glen. Kind of dropped out. I just

picked up his book.”

“When are you going?”

“Next Monday.”

“I’ll see if I can find the CD. Maybe you could have him sign it for me.”

“I’ll ask. I want to listen to it before I go, too.”

I dug up the CD and played it loud while Beth and I fixed dinner. I said, “I remember spending hours listening to this. It really is good. There is something there that the other rockers from that era never touched.”

“Maybe it’s his New Orleans background. I read a little bit about that already.”

“I don’t know, but this still sounds good to me. It’s like finding something I lost now that I listen to it again.”

The next Monday evening Beth came home and dropped her purse and notes on the counter. I went out to meet her in the kitchen. Our little boxer, Sinbad, was doing a tap dance and turning in circles at Beth’s feet. “That was worthwhile,” she said. “The guy has had an interesting life, all right. Oh, and here’s your CD. He signed it for you.” She bent over toward the dog, “High, Sin, how was your day?”

I picked up the CD and said, “Cool. Thanks. What was he like?”

Beth took off her coat and tossed it on a chair, then she plopped down on a stool at the kitchen counter. “A neat guy, really. Kind of funny. Philosophical. He’s been through some hard times. And he must have said ‘fuck’ a thousand times. He said he went to an all-boys high-school, and he just couldn’t break the fucking habit. I told him you went to a Jesuit school in Seattle, so I understood how that worked. Turns out he went to Jesuit in New Orleans.”

I picked up the CD and looked at the inscription. It said, “To another fucked-up Jebbie. Martin Landry.” I laughed, “So we’re both recovering Jesuits, eh?”

Beth got up and poured herself a glass of wine, sat down again, and kicked her shoes off. “Yeah, and he asked what you did, so I told him you were a pilot. That really interested him. He said he used to fly and loved it, but it had been a long time.”



I took a beer out of the refrigerator. “Tell him I’d be glad to fly with him. That would be great.”

“You tell him. I’m sure he’d jump at it.”

Two weeks later I taxied my Bonanza up to the transient parking area at the little airport at Woodford Glen, California. A black lab sleeping by the gas pump raised his head, gave the Bonanza an indifferent look, and then put his head back down between his paws. I recognized Martin sitting on top of a picnic table over near the gate to the parking lot. I got out of the plane and waved. Martin got up and walked over to the airplane.

We shook hands and introduced ourselves. Martin ran his hand along the wing and said, “Hey, man, it’s cool of you to do this. Your plane is fucking beautiful. I used to have an old 1956 G model. Great airplane. What’s this one.”

I turned toward the plane. “It’s an A36. It’s also a Bonanza, but it’s stretched and has a conventional tail instead of the V-tail.”

“Like a big Beech Debonair, right? My brother had one of those.”

“Yeah, that’s right. So, shall we go fly it.”

“You bet your ass. Great day, man, where do you want to go?”

I said, “It’s clear over on the coast. You want to fly up the coast to Shelter Cove and have lunch.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

We got in the plane, and I started the engine and taxied to the end of the runway. I turned to Martin and said, “You comfortable doing the takeoff?”

“Man, I’d love to, but you better watch close, it’s been a while.”

Martin hadn’t lost his touch. The plane rotated smoothly, lifted off, and climbed out over the coastal range toward the Pacific Ocean. “Wow!” said Martin, “This is so fucking cool. I’ve got to get back into this. Is it okay if I just cruise around for a while?”

I know the feeling. I nodded and grinned. “That’s what I came over here for. Have fun.”

Martin flew over toward a ridge line, dropped down to the ridge height, and watched it go by at 190 miles per hour. He pulled up over the last hills of the Coastal Range and dropped down toward the ocean, then turned north about a half mile out to sea and followed the coastline at five hundred feet above the water. The seas were fairly calm, with just a low swell from the northwest breaking on the rocks. The hills, green and gold, stood several thousand feet above us sticking into the clear blue sky on our right. “This is so fine,” said Martin.

I looked over at him and said, “Yeah, even though flying has gotten to be kind of like work for me, I still love it when it’s like this.”

“Good work, if you can get it, aye?”

“Not like being a rock star, but pretty good.”

Martin watched the kelp forests zip by under the wing. “I’ll tell you about that later.”

I said, “Have you ever flown into Shelter Cove?”

Martin shook his head, “No.”

Pointing to the chart, I said, “The airport sits on a little plateau just a few hundred yards inland. The runway parallels the coast. That’s it on that point about ten miles ahead.”

I directed Martin a little further out to sea, and we maneuvered to get into position to land. On final approach I said, “Go ahead and do the landing. I’ll follow you through on the controls and keep us out of trouble.”

“Great. This is fucking beautiful. We’re going to come in right over the ocean and land.”

Martin set the plane down deftly and let out a war whoop. I grinned and relaxed. We rolled to the northwest end of the field, turned into the transient parking area, and shut the engine down.

Martin jumped off the wing and did a little dance. I hopped off behind him and shoved a wooden chock in front of the right main tire. “Thanks, man,” said Martin, “That

was so cool.” He spun around. “And look at this place. Gorgeous.”

I faced into the light northwest wind and looked out to sea. “To me the neat thing is that one minute you are in one little world, like Woodford Glen, then you fiddle with the airplane, and the next minute you are in a totally different world. So many worlds. Dumb as it sounds, that still astounds me.”

Martin slapped me on the back, “It’s the people who don’t get astounded that you’ve got to watch out for, Joe. The people who think everything is ordinary.”

We walked over to the bluff near the end of the runway and stood looking out at the rolling water. Martin said, “I used to have the coolest sailboat, The Spirit of Orion. Man, I’d love to be out there in it now. Or even to see it sitting out there at anchor.”

I stared out at the water. “Yeah, I read the first part of your book, One Hit Wonder, last night. Sounded like some good times and some bad times on that boat.”

Martin looked at me. “What can I say, kimosabie? I fucked it up pretty good.”

I turned inland. “Let’s hike up the hill there and have lunch. You hungry?”

We got a picnic table on the deck of the restaurant and sat looking out over the airport and the ocean. We were the only ones there. I said, “It’s a long hard drive from the highway over the hills to this place. I bet most of the business comes in by plane.”

Martin was about to speak when the waitress came up. She was stunning. Long reddish-brown hair luffing in the sea breeze. Sparkling gray eyes, like aluminum foil in the sunshine, with little spokes of green as bright as spring grass. Heart-melting smile. Her name tag said, “Laura.” Laura told us about the specials, and Martin asked a few questions, but I didn’t hear a word she said. When she walked back inside, we looked at each other and rolled our eyes. “I don’t know how He does it,” I said. “I don’t know how the Creator thinks up so many different ways to make a beautiful woman. I think He’s playing with us.”

Martin put his hand between the buttons of his shirt and moved it to mimic the beating of his heart. “No shit. If I was a woman, I think Laura could turn me into a lesbian.”

We both laughed. I took off my baseball cap and set it on the table. "Jesus, what did you do to your head?" asked Martin.

I put the hat back on. "I bashed it into a sharp piece of metal in an airplane, dumb shit that I am."

Martin winced. "Ouch. Looks like a mean one." He looked out at the ocean, then back at me. "Your wife, Beth, is a pretty neat lady. She cut right into me, I'll tell you."

I looked up from my menu. "What do you mean?"

"I mean she bored in with some fucking tough questions. Made me think I was back in Mother Superior's office."

I laughed. "You don't have to tell me about that, I've been living with her for twenty some years."

"Neat lady, though. Real bright." Martin gave an evil wink. "Kinda cute, too. Twenty years, you're a lucky guy. Any kids?"

I put my napkin on my lap. "No, no kids. What did she ask you about?"

Martin picked up his fork and started fiddling with it. "A lot of stuff about my ex-wife Stephanie and my son Kevin. About whether I still write songs. If I wish I had stayed in baseball longer. She went right to the core, I'll tell you."

That sounded strange to me. "Did you see the review she wrote?"

Martin was still looking at his fork. "No. What did it say?"

"Interesting. She barely mentioned that stuff. She kinda went through the highlights of your story, said your book was interesting, soul-searching, honest, funny, a little profane. It was all real positive."

"Nothing about how I fucked up with Stephanie and Kevin?"

"Nothing much."

"That *is* interesting."

Laura appeared to take our orders.

I looked at her and said, "I'll have the boiled yak."

Martin laughed and shook his head. Laura smiled and said, "Sorry, I just ate the

last one.”

I grinned. “Really, how was it?”

Laura played along, “Kind of tough, must have been an old one.”

I laughed, “Yeah, the old ones can be tough. Helps if you back over them in the car a few times before you toss them in the pot.”

Laura smiled. “I’ll tell the cook. Now what’s your second choice?”

My heart broke. I ordered a shrimp salad sandwich.

Martin smiled at Laura and said, “What would *you* get if you were sitting right here next to me?”

Her eyes gave a sparkle and she said, “I’d get up before the boss saw me.” She laughed.

“Ooo, you’re quick,” said Martin. “I better get the shrimp, too, and re-group for a minute.”

She took the menus with a smile and went back inside.

Martin was grinning, “What the fuck was that all about, ordering boiled yak for christsakes?”

I laughed and traced a circle in the tablecloth with my fork. “I’m weird, I guess. It’s kind of a litmus test I sometimes give people. I’ll say something ridiculous and see how they react. If they get right into it, then I know they’re bright and they’ve got a sense of humor, so I take an interest in them. If they act like I’m nuts, which maybe I am, I blow them off. Saves a lot of time and trouble.”

Martin brightened up. “Okay, that’s kinda cool. Different, but cool. Weird, did I say weird?” He looked off toward the sparkling ocean, then back at me. “Does it work?”

I felt my face redden, “Not very often. But every once in a while...”

“Joe, you sly dog.”

I changed the subject. “So, what brought you to Woodford Glen of all places?”

“Well, my little-big brother Jack took me up to Canada and dried me out a few years ago. And when we came back, he kind of insisted that I get out of L.A.. I got in my

car and started driving up the coast, just waiting to find a place that I could call home. I wandered inland, and I drove the shoreline, and I checked out the hills, and went up the valleys, and when I got to Woodford Glen, things just seemed right. There were views from the hills, the ocean just over the ridge, and the redwoods, man, they are something else. When you get a bunch of them together, it creates a sort of cathedral. It's so open at the bottom. And the top is so high. Smells a lot better than a cathedral, too." Martin laughed. "Just seemed right, that's all."

"And what did you do when you got up here?"

"Well, I got that from Jack, too. I asked him what he did all that time he was locked up as a POW, and he said that he built houses in his head. First he'd drive around New Orleans in his head and pick out a lot. Then he'd start thinking of a look for a house to go on that lot. And then he'd start laying out the rooms and thinking about the windows and the lighting and the materials and a million other things. And then piece by piece, he'd build it in his head." Martin took a sip of water. "Form, function, light, materials. Sanctuary, repose, perspective. It kept him sane, and I thought it might help regain my sanity. So I went up to Woodford Glen, and I shopped around for a little house on a killer piece of property. And when I found it, I bought it, moved in, and started walking the land and thinking about a site for a house, and then the look of the house, and then the design and all the details. Then I built it. It's the house I'm in now. When that was done, I bought another piece of property, and did the same thing again, only this time I put the house up for sale when I finished. When that sold, I did it again. It's one of the coolest things I've ever done. I've built seven houses. Each one is very different, and today everybody living in one of my houses is a good friend." He looked out to sea and smiled.

"What a cool story," I said, "and do you still play music?"

"I keep a guitar around and bang on it now and then. Actually, I guess I play at least a little bit most days, but I haven't written a song in I don't know how long. I played at the volunteer fireman's fund-raiser picnic in Comptche a couple of years ago. Did a

few old tunes with a garage band full of silverbacks like me. Nothing much.”

“Not like the good old days, huh?”

Martin sang, “Those were the days, my friend, we thought they’d never end.”

“But things are okay for you now, right?”

“Yeah, I shouldn’t complain. I’m sober. I didn’t totally fuck up my health. And at least I managed to hang onto some money. A lot of the people like me, people who had a hit or two and made some quick bucks, ended up pissing it all away on drugs or jet planes like it would last forever, or they got their pockets picked by wives and managers. That kind of shit.”

“So, what’s up with you now? What are you working on? What are you doing?”

I could tell by the change in Martin’s expression that he saw the waitress walking toward us. He picked up the napkin and spread it on his lap. “I promised the publisher that I would do a little book tour to promote One Hit Wonder, but other than that I guess you’d say I’m open.”

Laura set the sandwiches down. I smiled at her and said, “You picked a beautiful place to live here. But kind of off the beaten track.”

She let the remark sink in a minute, then she smiled at me, folded her arms across her chest, looked out at the water and said, “Yeah, I think I’ll stay off the beaten track for a while, too.”

There was a pause. She turned and left.

We looked at each other quizzically. “Jesus, you can bet there’s a story there,” said Martin.

“Worlds within worlds,” I said.

We dug into the food and looked out at the scenery for a while, then I asked, “Do you have any urge to get back into music?”

Martin took a sip of water and stretched. “Back when the music was working for me, those were the best days of my life. When I was writing the songs that went on the first album and the first few for the next album, I felt so alive. It was unfuckingreal. I

could somehow put myself in this place, in this mood, just kind of open up and the music would come over me. I'm not saying I was divinely inspired or anything, I mean it was nothing spooky, it's just that the music seemed to flow right out of me back then. Maybe it was a combination of a lot of things. I was living in a cool place with my wife and kid. I had this magic boat, man, The Spirit of Orion, and the music gods could find me on that boat. When they had a song to give out, they knew I'd be there waiting. And there was a lot of stuff to sing about back then. A lot was going on. I felt like I had something to say. Lyrically and musically. We really listened to the songs back then, right? They were our telegraph. Now, shit, do you listen to the radio? I don't feel like throwing anything on that shit pile. So let's say I'm a realist. I don't feel very inspired, and I don't think it's going to happen again."

"It must have been amazing, having the music come to you like that. I can't even imagine. But if you could do it *then*, you could *still* do it. There's still stuff to write about, to sing about. You've been through a lot, got a lot of miles on you now, and that could give you a perspective you didn't have then. I don't know why you couldn't be better than ever."

Martin shrugged and looked out toward the water.

"I read about how you lost your boat," I said. "Do you know where it is now?"

"I have no fucking idea, man. Wish I knew."

I changed the subject, "There's still good music coming out. What do you listen to these days?"

"Yeah, there is. David Crosby. The guy is incredible. He's actually getting better all the time, and he was fucking amazing thirty years ago. James Taylor, same story. Jackson Browne, Toots Theilemans, old Beatles, Byrds, Jude Cole. You're right, there really is still a lot of good stuff coming out. And female country singers. Don't tell anybody, but a lot of them drive me nuts, their voices are so good. Trisha Yearwood, some of Wynonna Judd." He looked out at the ocean and nodded his head. "Yeah, there's good stuff. I take it back."



I swiped my mouth with my napkin. “Yeah, but there’s crap, too.”

“Always was, man.”

“And you had that New Orleans twist you put on things. What’s with that?”

“Oh, New Orleans, man. Back when I was a kid in New Orleans learning to play, there were some fucking amazing rock and roll musicians down there. I used to just stand in front of Deacon John, watching that cat play. The music shooting out of his Fender Super Reverb like a hot wind, man. Over me. Through me. To me. You know what I mean? And Antoine Peoples, the guy that played all that raw, edgy stuff on my first album. He was my teacher, man. The best. The fucking best.”

The waitress brought the check, and Martin grabbed it. “Where y’all fly in from?”

I started to answer, but Martin cut me off. “Are you from New Orleans? You sound like New Orleans.”

She brightened up, “Yeah, how’d you know? You could tell from my accent, I guess.”

“Me, too,” said Martin. “Jesuit High, LSU.”

Laura seemed surprised. “But you don’t sound like it at all.”

“It’s been a lot of years. But you put me back there for a day or two, and I’ll sound like all the rest a y’all.”

I asked her how long she’d been in California.

“Just a couple of months. I drove out of New Orleans one rainy night heading west, and five days later I found this is about as far as I could get.”

Martin motioned toward the bench next to him and said, “Sit down with us, can you?”

“No, I shouldn’t do that, but it was nice chattin’ with y’all. My name is Laura. Y’all come back.” She smiled and turned away.

Martin stood up and when Laura was back inside he said, “Yes, sir, I’ve got to get back into flying. Broaden my horizons, so to speak.”

Walking down the hill to the plane I said, "Life is so strange, man. Someone like that floats by. You barely touch at the fingertips, and they're gone. If the string of choices and coincidences that put you where you are had been just a little different, you could have a whole life together."

Martin grinned. "Couple of hours could be good, too. Maybe a weekend in Kauai. Peaches, man, my favorite."

I looked at Martin quizzically, "Peaches? What are you talking about?"

Martin grinned, "Her breasts, man, they were the size of peaches. You know, there's plums, there's grapefruit. She had peaches. Perfect peaches. My favorite."

I smiled and shook my head. "No wonder women think men are such dicks."

Martin patted me on the shoulder and continued, "Yeah, I hear you, Plato, life is strange stuff alright. I ought to tell my brother Jack about her. He used to make a hobby out of beating the shit out of guys who gave their women a hard time. Come to think of it, I'm kind of surprised he never beat the crap out of me."

I grinned at Martin. "Is he an asshole, too?"

Martin laughed and cut a longish fart. "No, no, he's a great guy. Saved my ass a time or two. You'll have to meet him. He's a Delta Airlines captain. You'd like him." We walk miles, just like that. Pretty cool."

Martin was impressed. "No shit. I used to fly around dragging my finger along a chart and identifying towns by looking to see if the railroad tracks veered off to the east just north of town and shit like that. Fun, but you really had to stay on top of it. I got lost doing that in the mountains of Montana one time, and it's a damn good thing I had a lot of gas."

"Yeah? I used to live in Montana."

"Neat place. Is it okay if I do the takeoff again?"

I was beginning to trust Martin's flying. "Sure. I'll keep us out of trouble. Left turn at 500 feet and follow the coast back south."

"Roger Dodger."

On the way back Martin played with the airplane, doing turns and pull-ups, shooting close over the tops of the uninhabited hills and then down into the valleys. “This is a little heavier than my old bird, but it sure feels great. I’ve got to thank you, man.”

“My pleasure, thanks for lunch.”

Forty minutes later we landed at Woodford Glen and shut down. I walked with Martin over toward his Blazer. “If you want to do this again, maybe next time I’ll bring my guitar and you could show me one of your tunes.”

“You play guitar? I didn’t know that. Sure. Bring your axe and we’ll jam a little. Give me a call anytime.”

When I got home, Beth was in her study writing something on the computer. I stopped at the door and peeked in. She said, “How did it go?”

I said, “What a character. Little piece of America. It was fun. This could be interesting.”

“Kind of strange,” she said.

“What do you mean?”

“Just that he lived up there in Woodford Glen all these years and didn’t do much of anything.”

“He wrote a book. Decent book, even. And he built some houses.”

“Houses? I didn’t hear about that.” She looked back at her monitor and put her hands on the keyboard.

“I’m going to bring my guitar over there and jam with him sometime.”

“Fine. Whatever,” she said. The keyboard started clacking.

I shrugged and stepped out of the doorway and headed down the hall toward the kitchen.

I heard Beth call from inside her study. “I don’t suppose you care what I did today.”

I sighed and turned back toward Beth’s study. The sunny images of the day were burning up in a ball of acid in my stomach. It was getting like that around the house. It

had been building for years. Edgy comments, offense taken where none was intended. I said, "I was going to get you a glass of wine and sit in there with you for a minute." I looked in the study and saw Beth typing. She didn't look up from her monitor. I said, "So tell me, what did you do today?"

"Nothing," she said. "I just thought it would be nice if you'd ask once in a while. I'm going out with Barbara and some of the girls tonight. There's stuff in the refrigerator from last night for you."

I waited in the doorway for a moment and then turned back toward the kitchen. I took a beer out of the refrigerator and stood at the counter slowly pouring it into the glass and watching the foam gather at the top. I stood at the counter for a few minutes thinking Beth might come out, then I walked over to the stereo, grabbed the headphones, and put on "Who Done It?" I closed my eyes and floated into the music.

Twenty minutes later I heard Beth bashing the dishes around in the sink. I took off the headphones and looked over at her. She tossed the towel on the counter and said she had to leave. I got up, but she went down the hall and out the door to the garage without looking back. Something cold went up my legs and through my stomach.

I stood at my window in the study and watched her car go down the driveway. I looked away and my eyes fell onto a file-folder sitting on my shelf. I'd always wanted to go to the South Pacific. My father fought there in World War II, and maybe I thought I could go out there and join him. Maybe we'd be buddies and fly B-24s together. Anyway, the folder was full of South Pacific stuff that I had gathered over the years—articles cut from *National Geographic* and other magazines, travel brochures I'd picked up here and there. Kind of a dumb little hobby, I guess. I sat at my desk and flipped through the folder, trying to imagine myself into a better place. I happened to open to a brochure from Avarua Tours. At the top of the page was a beaming Polynesian man standing knee-deep in clear green water holding up a fish. Further down there were pictures of beaches and palm trees and sailboats and quaint little streets.

I scanned the text. "Avarua Tours is located right here in the town of Avarua in

the Cook Islands....” The brochure said that the company booked tourists for scuba trips, sightseeing tours, Island Night feasts, and so forth. I scanned through the article and my eye was caught by the words “The Spirit of Orion.” Martin’s old boat. I couldn’t believe it. I read: “The ultimate in luxury sailing adventure and romance! Come aboard Captain Terry Tuapotu’s fabulous yacht, Tangaroa. Book an unforgettable sunset cruise from Avarua. You’ll feast on the finest island food. You’ll be serenaded by your native crew. Or get the ultimate Pacific experience by arranging a longer trip to the incomparable out islands of Aitutake or Atiu. Accommodations on The Tangaroa are fit for a king (and his queen!). This forty-four foot yacht was once known as The Spirit of Orion, and was the ultimate toy of ’60s rock star Martin Landry....”

I went to get my copy of One Hit Wonder. I looked at the picture of The Tangaroa in the brochure and compared it with the picture of The Spirit of Orion in Martin’s book. They looked to be the same. I shook my head at the coincidence and stuck the brochure in my guitar case.

## The Sin We Both Loved

I could tell from the sound of his voice on the phone that he didn't have good news. He explained that with the passage of time and the uncertain effects of the winds and the currents, the search area had expanded to unmanageable proportions, and the probability of finding Martin alive had dropped too low to justify further search. Lt. Riverton offered his apologies and asked me to give his condolences to the family. The search for Martin had been suspended.

I closed my eyes and a hundred little scenes flashed before me. Real and imagined, past and future. It was as if I fanned a stack of snapshots, glancing for a moment at each one. I saw Martin doing his joyous little dance at the wing of my airplane when he told me of his plan to reclaim The Spirit of Orion. I saw the family getting off the plane here in Rarotonga just a few days ago. I saw myself giving the family the news of Lt. Riverton's call. I saw myself meeting Ray and Jack at the airport tonight. I saw Martin alone at sea in an odd-looking dinghy with a red sail.

I drove over to their little house and gave them the news while I was still too numb to soak up its full impact. Fortunately, Kevin was already gone with Winston. I knew they had been expecting the worst, but the actuality of the suspension of the search still seemed to hit them like a body blow. Flo fell into the couch. Stephanie sat beside her, holding her hand. We sat in silence for a long time. The birds sang their mantras in the wet grass. I asked if they wanted me to go find Kevin, but Stephanie just shook her head, "Let him have some fun today. I'll tell him when he comes home."

"What are we going to do?" said Flo.

Stephanie raised her hands and dropped them at her side. Her head swivelled slowly back and forth like a gimbaled compass seeking north. "I guess we just go home," she said. "There's nothing more we can do here."

She looked at me and shrugged. I looked back and gave a weak smile. I couldn't think of anything to say.

I took the long way home, driving around the east side of the island. Watching life go on, just as it will when the rest of us pass on. I saw a dog sleeping in the doorway of a small store. A man coming out of the store stepped over the dog. The man appeared to say something to the dog. The dog raised his head for a moment and then dropped it back into the dirt. I saw a brightly dressed native woman carrying a sack of groceries along the road. She had a four-year-old boy by the hand. He was smacking the ground with a stick as he walked. I saw a father with a teen-age son dragging a small boat across the sand to the lagoon. The wind was up, and the trees struggled to stay upright. There were whitecaps beyond the reef.

I wanted to stop and see Marie. I wanted her to hold me to her breast and fill me with a vision of the goodness of life. I wanted to, but I didn't. I didn't know if she would want to see me, and I couldn't stand the thought of watching her eyes darting about as she looked for an excuse to get me on my way again. Maybe she wouldn't do that, but maybe she would, and I couldn't chance it.

When I drove into my yard, I was absently humming a line from a new song that Martin was working on the last time I saw him: "Here I am/alone and so out of reach/a tiny shell/on this windswept beach/waiting for a child/who could see me shine/lift me up/and say that she is mine." That about summed it up for both of us, I guess.

The house was still. I sat inside and flipped through some magazines. Happy couples in the ads, falling into each other's eyes. Clothes and cars that made you everything you needed to be.

I picked up a book and went outside. I looked at the words and turned the pages, but my head was someplace else. I was back in California. It was about a year ago, the day the shit finally hit the fan for Beth and me.

I remember it was late in the afternoon and I was sitting in my study working on a chapter for my new book on long range flight. The light was fading in the room, but it

didn't matter. I was lost in thought. With just my face lit up by the glow of the computer screen, I probably looked like a disembodied head suspended in space.

The overhead light came on, and I squinted as I looked over toward the door.

"Joseph," Beth said, "we've got to talk."

I turned back to the screen. "Let me get this idea down, and I'll come out in a minute."

"No, I've got to do this now."

I swivelled my chair away from the monitor and faced Beth. I tried to hold onto the idea I was about to write down when she came in. "Okay, what's up?"

She took a long slow breath. Something flipped over in my stomach. Like I'd swallowed a goldfish, or maybe more like a trout. "Things aren't going well for me...for us," she said. "I feel like I'm stuck, like I can't move. It's like..."

It was like she couldn't figure it out. I tried to help her focus. "Stuck in what? Where do you want...?"

"Just let me say it. Let me try to get this out. No questions, okay?"

There was a tightness in my throat now. "Alright," I said.

She sat at the edge of the little sofa and crossed her arms over her chest. "I was just a kid when we got married. I hadn't really done anything on my own. I didn't know what I wanted or who I was. Now I feel like I have been waiting to live...like I've been all tied up. I want to control my own life. I want to be able go somewhere and not have to explain it to you when I come home." She paused. I nodded, but didn't say anything. "I want to have lunch with a guy from the paper and not worry that you'll think I'm having an affair. I want to play the stereo loud at 3 a.m. and not worry about waking you up. I want to cook with curry and not have you tell me it smells up the house. I want my friends over here without you criticizing them later. I want to *feel* more. I want to think less. I want to talk with people about the things I feel. I want to wear the beret you hate. I just want to be myself without worrying about what you'll think all the time."

Beth slid back into the sofa and put her face in her hands. I waited. When she



looked up her eyes were red and puffy. “It’s not that I hate you. Not even that I dislike you, not really. Things were usually okay between us. I still want to see you. Still do things with you. But not all the time. Not constantly. I feel the need to run. To just break loose. Maybe just for a while, I don’t know. Am I making any sense?”

My heart was pounding in my neck. My face felt warm. What could I say? My cold calculating part told me that you can’t talk your way out of stuff like this. “What exactly do you want to do?” I said. “Are you moving out? Do you want *me* to move out?” I felt weak. I felt as if I were hearing someone else talk. Like I was seeing this in a movie.

Beth leaned back in the couch and looked at the ceiling, folding her arms across her chest again, “I don’t have an exact plan. I am not going to try to force you to move out. I don’t have any place picked out for me to go, but maybe I’ll start looking. At the moment, maybe, I just want to...I don’t know...disengage. I don’t know how to put it.”

I nodded. “Disengage,” I said. “That’s clever. Maybe we should announce our disengagement in the paper.”

Beth shot out of the couch and disappeared through the door. I closed my eyes and exhaled slowly. I got up and left the room looking for Beth. I found her standing at the French doors in the family room looking out at the back yard. Beth said, “Don’t make a joke. This is not a joke. I’ve needed to say this for a long time. It’s deadly serious.”

Sinbad, our year-old boxer came to the door and looked out. He stood rigid, ears straight up, looking at something in the yard. Old Sinbad was a kick. He was the kid we never had. He seemed to run on adrenalin and testosterone. Like most dogs, males especially, he had a totally screwed-up threat warning system. He’d dive through a plate-glass window to get at a kitten walking across the yard, and yet he’d greet anyone who came in the front door like a long lost friend. One time somebody came in the garage and stole my bicycle in broad daylight while Sinbad slept on the little sofa in the study and I worked on my first book.

I looked at Beth. “No, it’s not a joke,” I said. “I don’t feel like laughing at all. I feel like throwing up.”

Sinbad pawed at the door. Beth slid it open, and Sinbad went through the opening like he had been launched by a catapult. Carpet fuzz hung in the air behind him. Beth said, “Maybe I should just move out. At least for a while. I don’t want to stay here and argue about it. I don’t want to watch you pout over it. I don’t want to feel guilty about what’s going on with you. You’ve got a flight tonight, right?”

The dog ran straight toward a broom that was leaning against a lawn chair. He came to a skidding halt about five feet from the broom and barked. “Yeah, I am flying Martin down to San Francisco for a book promotion thing in about a half hour. Coming back tomorrow.”

Sinbad crept up to the broom and touched it carefully with his nose. The broom started to fall over, and Sinbad’s catapult fired again. By the time the broom hit the patio, he was doing forty miles an hour and leaving a roostertail of grass in his wake. He flew an elliptical pattern and returned to the broom. Beth laughed and wiped at a tear. “I’ll find a place while you’re gone. Someplace right in town.”

Sinbad approached the broom slowly. Head down. Spring-loaded for a quick retreat. I said, “Why do we have to split up? I don’t care if you wear your beret or cook with curry.”

Sinbad took the broom in his mouth and tried to run with it, but he grabbed it too close to one end and it wouldn’t balance. He drug it a few feet, let go, and snuck back toward it. Beth turned to me and said, “It’s not the *curry*. I can’t explain it to you. I just need to be by myself for a while. I don’t know. Just give me a week and then we’ll go have dinner or something. But we’ll let loose of each other a little bit. Okay?”

Sinbad found the center of gravity of the broom. He picked it up and began racing through the yard with the big broom in his mouth. We both laughed. Maybe things wouldn’t be so bad after all. Sinbad ran once around the pool and went to warp speed on a beeline for the open patio door. We both screamed. Sinbad jumped toward the door from eight feet away. Eyes wide like pie-pans. He sailed toward the opening, proudly holding the broom. A three-foot door. A five-foot broom. Exuberance met reality.

Martin and I flew to Oakland that night and rented a car. Martin dropped me at the hotel and went on to his book promotion function. I checked in and rode the elevator up to my room. I slid the plastic key in the lock, got a green light, turned the knob and went in. The door closed with a thump. The artificial freshness of the deodorizer made me gag. The room was dark except for the city lights coming in the window. There was the sound of the elevator moving and a door closing far down the hall, otherwise the room was still. I just stood there.

I walked between the beds. Tossed my stuff on the bed by the windows and sat on the other bed facing the light. I remember looking at the telephone on the stand between the beds. For the past I-don't-know-how-many years, every time I got to the hotel on a trip like this I would call Beth. Though it was never spoken, the message was simple: "I am alive." Tonight there would be no call. I felt hollow inside. Skin three inches thick. No one cared.

I thought back through the years with Beth. Good times, bad times, hard times, easy times. Random scenes replayed in my head. Her eyes were closed and her mouth was moving slowly as she sat naked over me in my car as we re-invented sex all those years ago in Seattle. She cried like a child when she burnt a pumpkin pie the first year my parents came over for Thanksgiving. She did a little dance, cute as a pixie, when she told me she got accepted into UC, Berkeley. She threw a math book through the living room window one night in Montana when she was so mad at me that spit was dripping off her chin as she screamed, "Come out of your little world and *do* something with me."

Taking it all in, from beginning to end, there was no mistaking the slow draining away of the affection between us. Our lovemaking was mechanical, careful, choreographed, predictable. It was as if we were on a highwire, and every movement had to be just so, or we'd would fall from the wire into an abyss. Every argument, was another brick in the wall. Every slight, real or imagined, recorded and stored for possible future use. Every frown was a pound that we put in a sack, and we drug it around until we

were immobilized. Not long enough to forget. Not strong enough to forgive.

Maybe Beth was right. Maybe life would be better for both of us if we didn't feel that we had to crawl over each other just to get on with our lives. Maybe not.

Maybe we could gather some perspective while apart, and that would revitalize our lives together later. Maybe not.

My head hurt. My neck was stiff. I called room service and ordered salmon and two Becks. Normally I'd have a book and some CDs with me, but I left in such a distracted state of mind I had forgotten those things. I turned on the TV and flipped through the channels watching uninteresting people insult each other as an audience laughed hysterically. I felt alienated, literally, like a stranger in this land. *My God*, I thought, *am I from the same place as them? Is this really my tribe, or was I mistakenly shipped to the wrong planet?* I found PBS and ate while I watched the incredible Stephen Hawking outline the deep mysteries of physical creation. *Thank God for the giants*, I thought, *the musicians and scientists*. I took three valerian to help me sleep and then I filled the tub and lay empty-headed in the warm water until I was drowsy. I dried off and collapsed into bed. Asleep in minutes.

The phone woke me at ten the next morning. It was Martin. "Good morning, beautiful!"

I tried to find myself. I was warm and thick with sleep. "Hey, fuck, what time is it?"

"Time to make tracks back to Woodford Glen, my friend."

I rolled over and looked at the clock. I was a little dizzy. "Meet me downstairs for some coffee, and I'll try to re-join the human race."

Martin said, "We're looking for a few good men. I don't know if you'll qualify."

"Twenty minutes," I said, and I hung up.

I turned on the shower, brushed my teeth, and then stepped into the steaming water. I felt strangely vacant. I watched myself closely.

I met Martin in the restaurant downstairs. I drank coffee and sat staring blankly at the people hustling by on the street outside. I was still groggy from all the valerian I had taken. Martin said, “What did you do last night, man? You look like a fucking zombie.”

I had a quick internal debate and then announced, “Looks like Beth and I are splitting up. She’ll probably be gone when I get back.”

Martin looked stunned. “No shit. Wow. I don’t know what to say. I’m surprised. I’m sorry. I mean, is that the right thing to say? Sometimes people split up and you think, ‘Wow, they needed to do that for a long time. I’m glad they finally did it.’ But with you guys, I don’t know. I mean, listen to me, I’m not making any sense. I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry. How are you doing with it?”

I tied my napkin in a knot. “Okay, I guess. It’s a little early to tell. There’s going to be a big delta here, a big change. I don’t know how it’s going to go exactly, but I’ll survive.”

I watched a pretty young waitress cross the room behind Martin. She came up the isle behind Martin and passed by our table. I watched him as she went by. He looked wounded. He shook his head and said, “Well shit, man, if I can do something for you, just let me know. I mean, we could think of something to do for laughs. You don’t need to mope around in that big house of yours.”

“I don’t even know if I’ll keep the house. I don’t know what’s going to happen next.”

“No shit. Divorce, you know that’s Latin for ‘pull-your-balls-out-through-your-wallet.’ “

I faked a laugh. “Money’s not the issue. She can take half, I’m okay with that. Just leave me a chair and a lamp and a few books.”

Martin looked across the table at me. “And a house and an airplane and a car and a bunch of guitars.”

I exhaled slowly and looked up, shaking my head. “I hope this doesn’t turn out

to be a lawyer thing. Fuck, I would hate to see that.”

“Gets expensive. I can tell you. Been there, as you know.”

“Whatever will be, will be, but I’ll try to keep it civil. I don’t hate her. I’m not going to make it any worse than it is.”

Martin looked out the window. “Do you want to patch it up?”

I watched a bubble spinning on the surface of his coffee. “I don’t know. I want things to go well for her...and for me. Things haven’t been that good. Maybe she’s right.”

“Well, don’t look to me for advice. I managed to fuck up a pretty good thing way back when, you know.”

I didn’t know Stephanie back then, so I didn’t know how good or bad his “thing” was, but I said, “Yeah, I know. How did it go last night, anyway?”

“It was like most of those sorts of affairs. A bunch a graying ex-hippies wanting to connect with their pasts.”

It was a cheap shot, I suppose, but I said, “Hey, don’t knock it. That’s why you wrote the book isn’t it?”

Martin nodded and smiled, “I guess you’re fucking right at that. Thanks, Aristotle.”

I couldn’t sit there anymore. I stood up. “Well, let’s head back. I need to find out how much shit is clinging to the fan.”

As the garage door opened, I could see that Beth’s car was gone. I entered the house and wandered from one quiet room to another. I found a note on the kitchen counter:

Joseph,

I am staying at Barbara’s for the time being. I couldn’t take Sinbad with me because of her cats, so he’s at the vet. I’ll keep you posted about where I go from here.

Think of this as an experiment, a search. Like I said, I don’t hate you. Let’s have

dinner when you get back.

Call me.

Beth

*Barbara Schmeldt, she left me for Barbara. Jesus.* Secretly I called Barbara “Slogan Woman.” She was a 40-ish, pudgy, prematurely gray friend of Beth’s who lived alone except for her three cats—Freud, Jung, and Clinton. She had spent the last twenty years struggling to get her life to conform to a few dozen nearly meaningless slogans that had been dropped into the American consciousness by a determined band of self-deluded “experts” on “soulcraft.” She had fought to the point of emotional exhaustion trying to “stay within the moment,” “be here now,” “tame her gremlins,” and so on *ad absurdum*.

She even tried to run with wolves, though figuratively, of course, since she nearly had a coronary every time she went up our three front porch steps. The battle had cost her a totally decent husband and a seventeen year old son, who had both run screaming into the night within a month of each other about four years earlier. Back when she thought she could see an aura around everything but a phone bill. I liked to lead her on some and torment her good naturedly, if that’s possible, but Beth saw her as a kind soul, which she was (sort of), and had no patience for me on this point.

Barbara preached a nebulous sort of peace and love. I’m sure she thought of herself as large-souled, but as far as I could tell, she was brimming over with hate and self-righteousness. She hated all men (except for a few murderers on death row), all young women still dumb enough to like men, all Republicans of either sex, and anyone who ran a successful business. Though she hadn’t been in the woods since a bad experience with a chipmunk at summer camp in sixth grade, she imagined that she loved exotic forest creatures and was “one” with them. The whole gig seemed beyond bizarre to me, but really, I told myself, this is just one of the gentler manifestations of the collective insanity of the late twentieth century. At least she isn’t trying to make atomic bombs out of common garden chemicals.

*Barbara, I thought. She'd rather live with Barbara and her cats than with Sinbad and me. I must be a bigger asshole than I ever imagined.*

I drove over to the vet to pick up Sinbad. Standing in the lobby I could hear Sin coming down the hall. Breathing like a steam engine, toenails scratching on the floor as he tried to accelerate to mach one. When Sinbad saw me, he tried to jump, but the slick floor and the attendant's poorly-timed pull on the leash dumped him over onto his back. He struggled to his feet in a drum-roll of toenails as I took the leash. "Hey, Sin-good, did you have fun at playschool? Be cool, buddy. Show's over. Let's go home."

Once in the car, Sinbad jumped in the passenger's seat and then onto my lap when I sat down. He put a paw on each of my shoulders and licked my face like it was a gravy pan. I laughed and squirmed, twisting my head to keep my mouth away from the flashing tongue. When things settled down, I pushed Sin aside and drove home talking non-sense to the dog. "You should have gone with Beth, knuckle-head. She went over to Barbara's, and Barbara's got *cats*." I said it slower, "*Cats*." The word was in Sinbad's vocabulary. He stiffened and sat erect, head turning quickly from side to side. Veins bulging like ropes in his neck.

Back home Sin ran from room to room looking for Beth, then pawed at the door and ran out to patrol the fence line. I stood at the window and laughed thinking about Sin's short flight with the broom. And then I felt as if I'd been punched in the stomach as I recalled why I was standing at the window with Beth when Sinbad did his broom trick.

I left the patio door open and went into the family room and collapsed on the sofa. I was exhausted. Felt like I'd been up all night. I looked around the room. It was a beautiful room, with light coming in from a dozen large windows. Cottonwood trees and rose bushes sitting happily on the rolling yard in view outside. But the room was so quiet, I could hear the blood rushing through the veins in my ears. Odd, I always wanted it quiet so I could read or write, and I was never bothered by solitude, but now the silence hung



like a presence in the room. Like an accusation. I doubted that I could ever shake the sadness that hung over me because of the split with Beth. It's strange that people have this innate need to be appreciated, to be truly known and valued, to be loved. We crave this, and yet nearly all efforts to make it happen end in frustration and failure.

Something's always missing. Something's always wrong.

I closed my eyes and put my head back on the sofa, wondering what the next few days would bring. I heard Sinbad skid across the patio outside, bang into the door, and tear toward the family room. I smiled and opened my eyes just in time to see him flying through the air straight at me. Ears back. Eyes closed. Paws tucked up in front. A perfect canine leap. Guided like a smart-bomb to my balls. It was one of those moments where you know it's coming, but you just can't react for some reason.

I howled and doubled over. Sinbad darted to the corner of the room and sat shaking apprehensively. Looking at me sideways. Ears flat. Tail wagging hopefully. The pain made tears well up in my eyes, but I couldn't help laughing at Sinbad's antics.

The phone rang. I struggled to get up and cross the room. "Hello."

It was Martin. "Hey, man, I should have thought of this earlier. Grab a guitar and come on over. We can play some tunes, maybe fly up the coast and see how that waitress, what's her name, Peaches, in Shelter Cove is doing. What do you say?"

"Laura, her name was Laura. I don't know. I've got to think for a minute. No, wait, I'm supposed to have dinner with Beth tonight. Maybe tomorrow. How's that?"

"Dinner? You guys are civil. A model California split-up."

"I hope so. I'm really not in the mood for an emotional shit-storm."

"Well, good luck with it. Come on over tomorrow around noon. How's it going, anyway?"

"I'm surviving. Sinbad just did a flying leap onto my balls. Now he's sitting in the corner looking kind of tentative, hoping I'm not going to shoot him."

Martin laughed. "He cracks me up. Give him some of that godawful Alpo horse pâté that he likes, and he'll know you still love him. So I'll see you tomorrow, right?"

“Yeah, I’ll be there. Or I’ll call if something comes up. Adios. Thanks for calling.”

“Bonita alfredo, amigo.”

I hung up and sat by the phone for a second. I was smiling as I thought about Martin. The guy was turning into a real friend at just the time when I could most use one. Life is strange. Who knows what’s around the next corner. I looked over at Sin, who was still sitting in the corner eying me nervously. “Where’s your leash, Sin-good?”

“Leash.” Another word in Sin’s vocabulary. He sprang to his feet and jumped in circles. “Oh, shit. Hang on. I’ve got to call Beth first.”

Sinbad ran to the front door and danced from foot to foot, while I looked up Barbara’s phone number. I cringed when she answered. “Hey, Barbara, this is Joseph. Is Beth in?”

“Just a minute, I’ll see if she wants to talk to you.”

*Jesus, I thought, now I’ve got to deal with a gate keeper.*

“Hello, Joe.”

I sat down. “Dinner tonight, is that the plan?”

“Sure, if you want to, but you don’t have to.” I tried to figure out what the words and the inflection amounted to.

“No, that’s fine. Let’s do it,” I said. “Where do you want to go?”

“How about The Heron at eight?”

“Fine. I’ll see you there.”

“Wait,” she said. I thought maybe she was going to say she was sorry and that she’d made a big mistake leaving, but she said, “Did you go get Sinbad?”

“Yeah, in fact he’s pawing at the front door. I just told him to get his leash, and he’s all fired up.”

“Okay then, I’ll see you tonight.”

“See you.”

I took Sinbad up the hills into the park. We walked up to where we could sit

looking over the town. I was hoping for some sort of revelation, some unexpected insight, perspective. As if by analogy, geographical perspective would translate to the psyche. It didn't come. After twenty minutes, I walked back home feeling vaguely defeated.

I didn't want to sit around the house, so I put Sinbad in the back yard and got my bike down from the rack in the garage. Maybe a ride through the rural neighborhoods near the house would do me good. I'd always loved moving through the country on a bicycle. The sounds, the smells, the solitude, the detachment, the pace at which things went by.

The sun was getting low as I turned onto the country road. Simple wooden houses sat at quarter-mile intervals in the almond and walnut orchards. By 7 p.m. the air was cool and clean and felt like silk against my skin as I rode. I stopped and sat by a small creek for a while and listened as the frogs and the crickets made a frame for the silence. I looked across the valley floor toward the foothills. When the sun began to drop behind the Coastal Range, I headed back, still feeling somewhat vacant and lost.

Going by a small white house on the right, I saw a big black lab playing with a deflated basketball. He was running around the yard tossing it and shaking it. The dog had a smile from ear to ear. A little girl of about eight was chasing him and laughing. The girl loved the dog. And the dog loved the girl. And gliding past in the fading light, I realized that I loved them both. And everything else on this crazy planet. For some strange reason, it was a feeling that brought instant peace to my shredded emotions. I felt like a tiny peppercorn in the incomprehensible and wondrous stew of life. There was a feeling of mixing. Of the sharing of flavors. Of belonging. Of significance. And of insignificance.

Beth was a good person. She deserved good things. If I wasn't the person she needed, then so be it. I resolved to treat her well, and hoped that she would do the same for me.

I made it to The Heron right at eight. Beth was already sitting at a table. I took

the seat across from her. “Am I late?”

She shook her head. “No, I’m a little early.”

“Couldn’t wait to see me, huh?”

Beth smiled weakly. “I was trying to finish something up at the paper, and the computers went down at 7:30.”

I picked up my salad fork and pretended to study it. The waitress appeared and took my drink order. When she left, I said, “Let me say this while I’ve got my ideas in order, okay?”

Beth nodded. “Go ahead.”

“If you think you’ve got a better chance at being happy without me, then you’ve got every right to go for it. I know I haven’t been the right person for you, and I’m sorry for that. Let’s just, please, try to be decent to each other in the process of going our separate ways. I don’t hate you either. I don’t want this to get ugly. Is that possible?”

Beth took a deep breath. “It is possible. I’m staying in town. You are staying in town. We’ll see each other. Maybe things will be different in the future, I don’t know. But right now I need, Joe, I mean it, I really *need* to just be by myself for a while.”

The waitress set down my beer and took our orders. When she left, I looked up at Beth. There was a time when my heart was weightless when I looked at her. There was a time when her eyes held sonnets for me. I felt suffocated thinking that was now an irretrievable lifetime ago. I said, “So you are not going to stay with Barbara?”

Beth looked back at me, “No, in fact I found a house to rent today. It’s vacant now, and I’m going to start moving some stuff in right away.”

I took a drink. “Where is it?”

“It’s a cute little two bedroom place with the back yard up to the creek. Kind of like the first house we had in Montana.”

The waitress set down the salads as I thought back to those days in Montana when we were first out of school and making it on our own in the world as adults. I felt as if a knife had passed through my throat. “I’m going over to Martin’s tomorrow, so I can’t

help, but take whatever you want. I don't want to fight over stuff. Or money, for that matter. Why don't you take half the checking account and open your own account now, and then we'll work on the rest of it later."

I looked across the room at the tropical fish suspended in the tank. Two angelfish hung motionless, facing each other on either side of a column of bubbles rising up from the bottom. I looked back at Beth. She said, "I already did that. I needed to put a deposit down on the little house."

I nodded slowly. There was a long pause. The waitress brought the food.

We ate in silence for a few minutes. My thoughts bounced through time. I watched Beth eat, and I remembered a moment, maybe fifteen years earlier, when Beth was showing the first signs that she wouldn't look like a young girl forever. We were eating breakfast in the kitchen. The morning light was sharp and yellow on the tile floor. The conversation was tense. Mostly silence, really. But the body language was brutal. We had a party at our house the night before. Beth's friends. The usual suspects. I had long since lost interest in getting to know them. Carolyn was there. It was one of the first times I had spoken with her. We had the conversation that prompted her to write that strange ad for the personal section with my name on it. Then we had that unreal affair where she pretended she was deaf. I could still feel her incredible body twisting hell-bent against mine. "Grapefruit," I said to myself, thinking again of Martin's fruity visualization of women's breasts. From time to time I still missed Carolyn's honest and goofy affection for me, and I often wondered what became of her. At the party that night I had milled around and listened to other conversations. The business and political types talked excitedly about local political intrigue, hidden agendas, secret alliances and cabals. I stared at them like they were exhibits at the zoo. "You don't like my friends," Beth had said the next morning. And then with a little sarcasm she added, "Except maybe Carolyn. Now there's a fertile-looking woman." She stared at me wet-eyed. I remembered that I flushed slightly and said, "You invited her, not me." I had paused, then continued, "Your friends are like waterbugs, skating around on the surface tension. Like Plato's cave

dwellers, mistaking shadows for reality. Small-time game players.” Beth had said, “It’s *life*. They’re involved in the things that people *do*.” I recalled that Beth had taken an angry bite of toast after she said that. There was something in the movement of Beth’s mouth as she chewed that morning that reminded me of her mother. Her mother had never approved of me, and the animosity grew sour over the years. After that moment when I first saw her mother peeking out from inside Beth, I could never quite see Beth the same again. Sitting in the restaurant years later, I could even remember what I was thinking in the kitchen back then: *Love*, I had thought. *It’s just looking at a stranger through a steamed-up shower door. What you think you see on the other side is only what you want to see. Then one day a window opens, the steam clears off, and you wonder where you ever got all those crazy ideas.*

The waitress paused at our table. “How is everything?” she asked.

“Good,” I said.

She smiled and left.

“What were you thinking?” asked Beth.

“I was just thinking about flying with Martin today,” I said.

“What’s new with you and Martin?”

I put my fork on my dish and pushed the dish away. “Nothing. He did some book promotion thing last night. I just hung out at the hotel.”

“How’s his book selling?”

The waitress came by and picked up the dishes. I studied her ass as she walked back to the kitchen. Can’t help it. “Okay, I guess. I didn’t ask. How’s Barbara?”

Beth shook her head. “Don’t pretend you care about how Barbara is. Really, all you’ve ever done is make fun of her.”

I nodded. “Okay, you’re right.”

“Maybe one of the benefits of the new... arrangement is that you don’t have to pretend you’re interested in stuff like that. I always knew anyway, but now you can be more honest about things.”

There was more than a little truth to all that, but I was not prepared to get into it at that moment. “Have you got a place for Sin at your new house? I won’t always be able to leave him at...my house...our house...the other house.”

The waitress brought the check. I took it and pushed my chair back. Beth got up, saying, “Yeah, he’ll be okay over there. Part of the yard’s fenced. Looks like the last people there had kids, and they needed to keep them away from the creek.”

We left the restaurant in silence. Beth stopped by her car and said, “I’ll leave a message on your phone machine with my new number. Call me anytime.”

I started to say something and stopped. I nodded and turned toward my car.

Back on Rarotonga, I fiddled around most of the morning doing meaningless little jobs that needed to get done. Paying a few bills. Going to the grocery. Things like that. Around five I got a call from the air traffic control tower at the airport. Jack and Ray were due back in twenty minutes.

I went down to meet their plane and give them the news. Turns out they already knew. They had talked with the Royal New Zealand Air Force P-3 Orion crew as it was called back from the search site.

The mood in the car was glum as we drove over to Stephanie’s to drop off Jack. When we got to their little house, things seemed more charged up than usual. Stephanie explained things to Jack, “I called Air New Zealand. There are only two flights out of here every week. There are seats on tomorrow’s flight, but if we don’t go tomorrow we’ll be here until a week from Thursday. You can go back in the jump seat whenever you want, but I think it’s best if Kevin, Flo, and I get back. I’ve got a husband back there, and Flo needs to see her ophthalmologist. I hate to just give up, but there doesn’t seem to be anything to be gained from staying here. Kevin’s upset about this. What do you think we should do?”

Kevin broke in, and Stephanie closed her eyes with a look that somehow seemed to show both exasperation and sympathy. Kevin said, “You *can’t* just give up on him. He

could be out there now sitting on some little island waiting for us. Odysseus was missing for twenty years, and his son, Telemachos, didn't give up on him. You *can't* just go home."

Stephanie turned to Jack. "You talk to him, Jack. I've said everything I can say."

Jack sat on the arm of the sofa. The fatigue was evident in his face. He looked up at Kevin and started to speak, but Flo spoke up instead. She said, "Kevin, I don't know if you believe in God or not. I'm not even sure it matters at this point, but I am as torn up over Martin's loss as anyone. He was my son. I watched him take his first step. Someday you'll know what that means. But you can get through this, believe me. If I can do it, so can you. It comes down to simply accepting your lot in life. Have you ever heard these words? 'God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as the pathway to peace.' That's the serenity prayer. Maybe it can do you some good."

Kevin was animated. He said, "Yes, grandma, I *know* the serenity prayer, and that's my point. Courage to change the things I can. That's what I'm talking about."

"But Kevin, you *can't* change this," said Stephanie. "It's out of your hands."

Kevin kicked at a wastebasket and stormed across the room to the patio door. He threw open the door and turned back toward us. He said, "When Odysseus returned to Penelope after all those years, Homer said, 'her tears flowed while she listened. As the snow melts on the mountain tops, which the west wind has brought and the southeast wind has melted, and as it melts the running rivers are filled, so her fair cheeks melted and the tears ran down in sorrow.' Why don't you feel that way for my father?" Then he turned out the door and was gone into the darkness.

The five of us stood there eyeing each other.

After a few seconds Ray spoke up, "Maybe I shouldn't even be here with the rest of you folks. I hardly knew Martin, but I'm willing to continue the search. Who knows, he could still be out there. It's not such a burden for me to keep looking."



Stephanie ran her hand through her hair. She said, “Ray, I can’t thank you enough. You’ve done so much already. I think part of Kevin’s problem is that Winston’s father just invited him to work with Winston on a charter cruise aboard The Spirit of Orion, or whatever they call it now, for the next few days, and Kevin really wanted to go.”

Nobody said anything for a minute, then I said, “If it’s okay with you, I would be glad to have Kevin stay with me when he gets back from the sailing trip. Then I could put him on the plane back to the states. He’d be fine. You know the boat, and I know the skipper. He’s as good they come, believe me. And I know they are just going to do a leisurely sail around the island with an older couple. It’s not a major ocean crossing or anything.”

Flo said, “It could be a great little trip for the kid. Kevin will remember it forever.”

Stephanie looked over at Jack. He nodded and said, “The boy’s eighteen, Stephanie. Maybe he ought to spend a little time out here if he wants to. He’ll be in good hands. And it would be good if he brought a little something positive back from this trip, a few good memories, at least.”

Stephanie bit her lower lip, “He’s hardly been away from home in his life.”

“Then maybe it’s time,” said Flo.

That seemed to settle things. It was decided that Stephanie, Jack, and Flo would take the morning plane back, and Kevin would stay for a few weeks. Ray offered to take everyone out for dinner, but we elected to go down to the beach for one last barbeque. Ray and I ran off to the store to pick up some things, and when we came back, the family was down at the water.

All the imminent goodbyes put a warm knot in my stomach. For a while I sat by the fire drinking a beer and adding my two cents to the quiet conversation. I had the feeling that we were all carefully avoiding the central issue, which seemed to me to be whether or how we would formally give up on Martin and have some sort of service to

mark his passing. We talked about their long flight home, about life on the islands, about Kevin's lack of definite plans for the future.

I still had a bit of hope for Martin at that point. It had only been thirteen days. In the warm climate down here, plenty of people have survived that long at sea, but I wasn't sure how the family felt, and I didn't want to be the one to bring up the thought of a service.

In her unique way, somehow both pointed and oblique, Flo brought up the subject. She said, "Did I ever tell you about when I picked up Sid's ashes at the crematorium?"

Kevin smacked his forehead with the palm of his hand and said, "About a million times, Grandma, but..."

Flo cut him off, "Well, maybe Joe and Ray would like to hear about it."

I wasn't really very up for the subject, but I nodded my assent anyway.

She said, "Sid was from Illinois, and he always said that the thought of being stuck in one of those above-ground tombs in New Orleans gave him the creeps. He made me promise that I'd have him cremated when he passed on. Back then this wasn't done very often, especially by a Catholic, and we didn't know much about it. But when he died, we did as he asked. I remember going down there to pick up his ashes with Jack and Martin." Flo took a long drink and turned to Jack. "You remember that, Jack?"

Jack was sitting in the sand with his arms around his shins and his chin resting on his knees. His head nodded almost imperceptibly.

Flo said, "They brought out his ashes in this little box about the size of a one-pound coffee can. I don't know what exactly I was expecting, but I know I was shocked by how small that box was, and I said something like, 'What did you do with the rest of him?' "

I kind of smiled thinking of Flo in that scene, though I've been there myself and I know there's nothing funny about it.

Flo said, "That crematory guy gave me the willies. I can still see him. Skin so

thin and waxy you could practically see through him, remember, Jack? Anyway, the crematory guy said, 'That's all there is, ma'am. People are mostly water. I guess the rest of your husband has been turned to steam and let out into the air.' Well, I thought, that ain't half bad. Maybe right now he's falling with a light rain on Mobile. Think about it. That ain't half bad at all."

We all fell silent after that, and I guess I had to agree with Flo on that one. Later on Stephanie got up and started messing with the food, and Jack got out another round of beers.

That feeling in my stomach made it hard for me to think about food, but I forced myself to eat what I could and then I walked out into the lagoon for a night-time swim. It felt good to step out of the gut-wrenching matrix of emotions. I swam out about twenty yards, rolled on my back, and looked up at the gorgeous tropical night sky. There was half a moon and Avogadro's number of stars. Shadows moved by the fire on the beech. I could barely make out the quiet voices rolling across the water, covered as they were by the white noise of the distant breakers on the reef. After while Kevin came out with a waterproof flashlight. We swam around looking down the beam of yellow light as it pivoted through the underwater darkness. Now and then a fish darted by. I had an odd weightless sensation, as if we were adrift in an infinite, centerless space.

When we swam back to shore, they were talking about the early flight and gathering up their things to leave. The talk about what we'd do in the morning let us put off the goodbyes, which was a relief to me. But as we were getting ready to walk back across the road toward their house, Flo did something that stopped us all cold.

She asked Kevin to help her walk down to the water. He took her arm and led her to the shore. She waded out until the water was at her knees, and then she just stood there with Kevin at her side. I couldn't imagine what she was doing. After a minute she bent over and put her hands in the sea. She stayed like that for a few seconds and then she stood up with some water cupped in her hands. She turned toward Kevin and said something, and then she opened her hands. The water dripped out. For just a moment,

there was this shadow of a woman and a boy. Then a shower of diamonds between them in the moonlight. Then there was just the woman and the boy walking back out of the water.

We said a quick goodnight, and Ray and I headed for home.

## The Seed

Ray and I picked them up at 5:30 a.m. the next morning. Their plane was leaving at 7:15. That warm knot in my stomach was getting tighter. Luckily there was a lot of commotion at the airport, which took some of the edge off things. Little native families clustered around their America-bound relations. Tourist families snapping the last of their pictures. We stood around mostly making small talk. Stephanie, of course, had a lot of motherly things to say to Kevin. Be careful, call if you need anything, and so on. I think we were all a little relieved when they started boarding the plane. There were quick hugs and handshakes, promises to call if anything changed, pledges to stay in touch. And then they went through the little terminal door and out toward the waiting airplane.

Ray and Kevin and I waited around until they had gone up the old-fashioned stairs and into the 747, then we went down to The Tangaroa to drop Kevin off. Ray and I hung around for a while as the crew readied the boat for the cruise, and then we headed back home.

The big silver 747 roared over our heads and into the morning air as we were getting into the car.

I'll never adjust to the pace of the passage of time. According to the clock, time passes smoothly from one instant to another, but it seems to me that it stops for a while and then lurches ahead again. Like a car that gets rear-ended at a stop light. Or like my college friend Donny going through the rapids, then into a calm pool, then into another rapids. One minute you are sitting peacefully, and the next you are hurtling forward toward god-knows-what. And then what seemed long and slow when you were stopped collapses to an instant when it ends.

I sat on the porch drinking some coffee in the early morning air, thinking that it

was only moments ago that the family arrived, and now they are gone already. And yet while they were here, we existed together in a little world outside time, a world that seemed like it always was and always would be. Yet it passed, with the lurching of time. Gone forever, like all our little worlds.

And speaking of “gone,” Ray took my car and went back to the airport. He wanted to catch an inter-island flight up to Tahiti for a couple of days to talk with some exporters there. He’s always wheeling and dealing.

I sat there on the patio watching The Tangaroa sail out of the harbor, and I thought about how Martin and I had gotten started on this South Pacific adventure. With everyone gone for a while, maybe I ought to just spin out the whole story.

Things got rolling soon after Beth moved out. The day after I had dinner with Beth, I flew over to Woodford Glen to see Martin like we planned. He picked me up at the airport, and we drove up the hill to his house. It was a gorgeous structure. Reminded me of Frank Lloyd Wright’s Falling Water, though it wasn’t as big, and there wasn’t a stream flowing through it. Just decks jutting out at pleasing angles. What was it that Wright used to say he was trying to achieve with his designs? Perspective and solitude, something like that.

We went out on the main deck looking over the hills and the redwoods. I set down my guitar case, and when I opened it, I caught sight of the travel brochure I had put in there for Martin several months earlier. “Oh, shit. Look at this. I meant to give this to you last month, and I completely forgot.”

I handed Martin the page.

“What’s this?” asked Martin.

“It’s a brochure from a tourist place. Looks like your old boat is still in the Cook Islands.”

Martin was stunned. You’d have thought I hit him in the head with a bat. He stared at the picture of the boat, and he read the text out loud to me. Then he sat down

and continued to look at the page. “Son of a bitch. The Orion is still out there. My boat is still cutting through the waves. I don’t know why, but I had just given up on her. This is unfuckingreal, man. Look at her. As pretty as the day I met her. Holy shit.”

I started tuning my guitar. “Yeah, neat looking boat. I thought you’d get a kick out of seeing it again.”

“There’s more to it than that, man. It’s like seeing that your wife, or your kid, or your dog is still alive when you’d given them up for dead. This is heavy shit. My boat is where my songs came from. It’s where my good times were. It’s a big part of my life.”

I played through a chord, checking the guitar tuning. “Maybe you could buy it back.”

Martin stared at the picture and nodded his head slowly. “Maybe I fucking could. Maybe it’s even still mine. I never really sold it or anything. I vaguely remember getting stuff in the mail about the boat back then, legal stuff, but I was way fucked up at the time, and me and reality weren’t exactly on speaking terms, if you know what I mean.”

I looked up at Martin. “That would be cool. ‘The Return of The Orion.’ Sounds like a movie.”

“I’d love to see that movie, man. I want to be the fucking star. I am going to look into this.” Martin took the paper into the house and came out a few minutes later with his guitar. He and I tuned to each other.

When we were finished tuning I said, “I was up most of last night, and you’ll never believe what I did. I wrote a song. The words aren’t quite finished, and neither is the music, but I’ve got a little something. It’s called ‘Zero,’ and it’s about how there’s such a huge difference between losing most of something and losing it all. And don’t give me any shit about my crummy voice.”

I played a very open-sounding E chord and began to sing, just barely loud enough for Martin to hear the words. Martin set his guitar in a chair and listened.

I studied math in high school  
just hard enough to learn  
about the fall from here to zero  
and how it makes you burn.

And I've seen this rule in action  
in the stories of my life  
and it steals my breath  
like a punch to the chest  
each and every time.

My mother hung from wires  
to hands and feet and head  
a tiny sleeping spider  
with a web stretched from her bed  
She couldn't move a finger  
or even blink an eye  
as she hung there close to zero  
and I sat there at her side.  
Though she hovered north of nothing  
she was still there with us all  
'till that line went flat  
and there was no goin' back  
and it shot right through my soul.

It's not a process of division  
of finding smaller parts  
its abrupt, complete subtraction



that rips right through you heart.

I studied math in college  
long enough to know  
that the fall from here to zero  
can also make you grow.

'cause me and that girl Jenny  
could talk right through the day  
and laugh at next to nothing  
with the world so far away  
but she was bound to her world  
and I was stuck in mine  
and the two mixed at the boundary  
a lot like oil and wine.

It's not a process of division  
of finding smaller parts  
its abrupt, complete subtraction  
that comes with each new start.

I study math at home now  
and marvel at the minds  
that start with almost nothing  
and then away they climb.

Its more than just division  
or finding smaller parts

its reason pushing outward  
from a small but solid start.

Martin clapped. “Heavy shit, man. I like it, really. The Jesuits would be proud. Very cerebral. I didn’t know you wrote songs.”

I felt myself blush. “Neither did I, really. I was just playing the guitar, and it sort of fell out. I’ve done a couple others, but they are all pretty stiff, if you know what I mean. Not enough intuition, too much right brain, or is it left brain?”

Martin picked up his guitar. “Right brain, left brain. Beats the shit out of me. Let’s work on it some later.” He looked at me and affected a British accent. “Might I be so bold as to offer one little tip?”

I grinned. “Sure. What is it?”

“Don’t get me wrong, man, you know I like you and I want to help you out, but you gotta learn how to loosen up a little. You’re kind of tight-assed, like you’re thinking too much. Sometimes I feel like I could stick a nickel up your ass and pull out an E-string, you know what I mean?”

Martin was always coming up with shit like that. I just grinned and shook my head.

“You are pretty good on the guitar,” he said, “but you play it so soft, it’s like you don’t want anybody to hear you. Like you’re not having much fun, like you are ashamed of it or embarrassed or up-tight or something. People have fun when they listen to someone they think is also having fun. And you could sing a little louder, too. Let it fly, man.”

I looked at my feet and nodded. “I’ll give it a try.”

Martin changed the subject. “Speaking of hitting zero, how did things go with Beth last night?”

I sat with my arms folded across the top of my guitar. “Not bad, really. Not the screaming screech puke I’d always been afraid of. Actually we talked more than we used

to when we went out to eat.”

Martin played a short bluesy riff. “Life is weird shit, isn’t it? You live in the same house, and you’ve got nothing to say. Then she tells you to jump in a lake, and you jabber like magpies.”

“Well, we talked about where she’s moving to and stuff like that. Not exactly like long lost friends.” I answered Martin’s riff on the guitar. “But life is weird, I’ll give you that.”

Martin looked at me. “You know what you’re going to do now?”

I didn’t look up. “What do you mean?”

“I mean, you going to keep flying charters, stay in your house, get a goat, join the foreign legion, or what?”

I shrugged. “I don’t know. I don’t have any big plans.”

Martin continued to look at me. “What would you *like* to do? What have you always *dreamed* of doing? Maybe now’s the time, man. Go for it.”

“What have I always dreamed of doing, huh?” I looked out at the redwoods and stopped fiddling with the guitar. “My ultimate trip would be to get a big seaplane and re-trace my father’s routes across the Pacific back when he was flying B-24s in World War II. To see the world through his eyes. How’s that?”

Martin nodded and smiled. “You think big, I’ll tell you that. But that sounds like a very cool trip to me. Have you ever been out in the South Pacific?”

I shook my head. “No, the closest I ever got was Hawaii.”

“There’s definitely good places in Hawaii, but lots of crowds and K-Marts and shit, too. I haven’t been to the remote Pacific islands in a long time, and maybe they’ve changed, but I’ll tell you, they are spectacular. Imagine the finest beach in Hawaii, and you’re the only fucking person there. That’s a trip. And seeing how the islanders live, that’s a fucking trip, too.”

I played the lead-in chords to “Who Done It?” and said, “I’m sold. Now all I need is a few million bucks to re-fit an Albatross, or some other seaplane, and I’m there.”

Martin started playing along with his old song. “You’re a rich guy.”

I stopped playing. “Not that rich, I guarantee you. I’ve seen planes done like that though, and they are something else. The interior is done up like a yacht with kitchens and bunks and bathrooms and big comfy chairs. Ultimate rich and famous trip.”

Martin was insistent. “Then don’t think on such a grand scale. Find some other way. Now’s the time, man. You owe it to yourself. Don’t just mope around in your house.”

I looked up from the guitar. “I’m not doing that bad. You don’t have to worry about me.”

“I know you’re not suicidal or anything, I’m just saying, if you’ve got something you’ve always wanted to do, you ought to go for it. If not now, when?”

“I’ve been to Australia a couple of times and met some Bonanza and Baron pilots who fly their planes over the ocean all the time, like it’s no big deal.”

“So there you go. You could do it in your Bonanza.”

“Yeah, there’s a place in Oakland that can put long-range fuel tanks in it, but I’d rather have two engines out there over all that water. I mean, I can swim pretty good, but it would take me a while to swim a thousand miles.”

“Look into it. It’s not impossible. And if you need a co-pilot, let me know. Sounds like fun.”

“You’re right, it’s not impossible.”

Martin strummed through an E chord. “Play your new tune again, man. I’ll look for a harmony or maybe a second guitar part.”

“Let’s do it later,” I said. “I’ve got a better idea. Go get your electric guitar and show me some of that New Orleans stuff. I want to kick it up a little, and my new tune is kind of a downer.”

Martin set his acoustic guitar back in the chair. “Hey, man, it’s real. Life has its ups and downs. But we can kick it up some first, if you like.”

A few minutes later Martin wheeled his amplifier out onto the deck and then

came back with his electric guitar. He plugged it in and sent a volley of notes echoing across the valley. He grinned and said, "I do love rippin' on my guitar out here in these hills. Nobody gives a shit about the noise or anything. I came out here on the deck one night a couple of months ago. Did I tell you this already?" I shook my head. Martin became more animated and continued. "Man, the moon was out, it was eighty degrees, just a tiny little breeze blowing. I wheeled my amplifier, old Mr. Super Reverb, out on the deck, plugged it in, got my Strat, took off my clothes, and just let it all hang out. I fell into a groove and must have improvised guitar leads around 'Screamin' in the Distance' for thirty minutes. Man, the spirits were with me that night. Bats circling around between the trees." Martin tilted his head back and closed his eyes, then he turned toward me. "When I finished I could hear howling from across the valley. I still don't know if it was a coyote or some old silverback hippie, man. Cool, cool shit. Sent a chill up my spine." He paused and sent another riff across the valley. "Right at that moment I'd have given anything I had just to get my band from high-school days back together. To just stand on this deck with them and wail. Me and Jack and Ace. Man that was good shit back then, and it just slipped right by while I was waiting for something better to happen. Waiting to be a major league baseball star, waiting to be married to Stephanie, waiting to be rich and free." He looked hard at me. "Son of a bitch, and I had it all right there in my hands and didn't know it."

I nodded. "Oh, Yeah. I can hear all that. I had good times, too. Not all good, but generally pretty fucking good."

Martin fired off another volley. "Well, yeah, it was pretty sweet."

I said, "I'm amazed that teenagers are pissed off all the time. I mean, think about it. They are young and healthy. They *know* they are going to live forever. Their parents are still kicking. They don't have to worry about money...."

"And they are getting laid by other teenagers. I mean what's wrong with that? And that night on the deck, man. It was a spiritual experience, I tell you. I closed my eyes and I could just feel the vibe from those days in '63 or '64 playing with my old band.

You can't imagine what it was like back then, bro', playing in bars when I was sixteen. Hearing those fabulous New Orleans rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll musicians. I'll tell you more about that someday." He strummed a chord, and sang: "Sometimes it all comes back so clear I'd swear I was still standing there. It's three a.m. September '64."

I cocked my head, trying to place the song. "Cool, what's that?"

"I don't know, it's the first time I ever heard it."

"Do it again." This time I played along on my acoustic guitar, and when Martin's line ended I added: "And my Fender's in my hand, you know I play here with the band."

Martin smiled and sang, "In south Louisiana Cajun bars."

"Hey, we're hot. Let's pull this thing out."

We sat on the deck tossing lines back and forth for an hour or so, with Martin filling in little stories about his teen years, and me continuing to inject the idea that things can look better over a distance of thirty years. In the end we came up with this. I sang the stuff in parentheses, kind of like a Greek chorus arguing with the hero.

Sometimes it all comes back so clear  
I'd swear I was still standing there  
It's three a.m. September '64.  
And my Fender's in by hand  
you know I play here with the band  
in South Louisiana Cajun bars.

We play Otis Redding tunes  
you know those Cajuns dig the blues,  
and we drink that Dixie brew until the dawn.  
We'd played everything we knew  
until our fingers could not move

and the Cajun's surely danced to every song.

(Were you really happy then?)

Oh, to just go back again.

(You'd find the pain you left behind.)

No, those were the best of times.

(So are these I'm sure you'll find  
when once they're gone.)

Yes, it all comes back so clearly now

(Are you sure it's not the years somehow?)

You left the bad times far behind,

and isn't hindsight partly blind?)

We sang it through one last time and laughed. Martin said, "Well, we're not Lennon and McCartney, but that was kind of fun. I couldn't tell you the last time I pulled a song together."

I grinned. "Yeah, that was a kick. Man, I told you that you could still write music."

We sat on the deck until dark swapping songs from the sixties and seventies and trading lies about our youth. Martin wanted me to stay, but I said, "Thanks, no, I ought to get back. Beth may need a hand getting her stuff out of the house."

"You sure you want to be there when she's doing that?"

"I just feel like I ought to be, and like I said, she's not acting like she's pissed off."

"Well, okay, grab your shit and I'll run you down to the airplane."

On my way out I saw that brochure on The Orion taped to a cupboard door in Martin's kitchen.

Driving through Woodford Glen, I said, “Would you mind pulling into the Burger Butt, I’m starving and there’s nothing in the house when I get home?”

Martin turned into the drive-thru lane and paused at the speaker. I said, “Get me a burger and a seven up.”

He said, “I can’t believe you’re going to eat that. It’s got like 6000 percent of your daily fat allowance in it. Of course, I love them and eat them all the time.”

“Well, this once won’t kill me.”

Martin turned to the speaker and said, “I’ll have the chicken McLugNuts and my brave friend here wants a deathball and a seven up.”

He was playing my game with the waitress. I cracked up, and Martin turned to me grinning. “How’d I do, coach?”

You’ve got to love a guy like that.



## A Sprout

A couple week later, I called Martin on the phone. “You remember me telling you I’d like to fly the Pacific Islands like my old man did, and you told me to go for it?”

“Sure,” he said, “what’s up?”

“Check this out. I wrote a friend in Australia. A guy named Ray Stanley. This guy is an entrepreneur. He’s into aircraft sales and a million other things. And he’s flown planes from the U.S. to Australia dozens of times. I wrote that I was thinking about flying the Pacific. Get this, he just called and said he’d bought a Baron sight unseen in the U.S. and was planning on coming over here to get it and fly it back, but he’s real busy. Now, here’s the good part, if I will bring it to Australia for him, he doesn’t mind if I tour around some on my way out there. So the whole deal could be practically free. It’s perfect. It solves his problem, because he doesn’t have to come over here and get the plane, and it solves mine, because it provides a great plane for almost no money.”

“A Baron, huh? So you get the two engines you wanted.”

“Yeah, it’s a nearly new Pressurized Baron. Two engines, turbo-charging, pressurization, radar, Loran, the whole bit.”

Martin was excited. “That’s shit hot. You need a co-pilot?”

“That’s why I’m calling, man, do you want to go?”

“Fucking right I want to go. When are we leaving?”

“Probably in a month or two, the plane is getting new engines and props put on it now. Once that is done, I would want to fly it around a little bit and make sure everything is working right. And I’ll need to get the long range fuel tanks put in down in Oakland and round up all the survival gear. There’s plenty to do, but no reason we can’t do it.”

Martin was excited. “This is starting to sound pretty cool.”

“Yeah, what I was thinking is that we could spread the maps out and get started

with a plan. We're going to have a lot of choices, and there is a lot to learn, so a couple of months is actually going to go fast."

Martin said, "Maybe we could visit the Cook Islands and check out The Spirit of Orion. What do you say?"

"I'll look at the charts. Why not?"

"Why don't you gather up your maps and a guitar and your jammies and come over here, and we'll play some tunes and fly around and start getting into it?"

"I'm supposed to have dinner with Beth again tonight, so how about tomorrow?"

"Manana, bro', call me when you're ready to leave, and I'll meet you at Woodford Intergalactic Spaceport."

"Deal."

I had never seen Martin act so jubilant. At the Woodford Glen Airport, he danced out to the airplane like a drunken fairy, tipping his hat and bowing as I jumped off the wing. "What's up with you?" I asked, "looks like you was whooped with the happy-stick."

Martin wrinkled up his face and smiled evilly, he affected the accent of a Disney pirate and said, "Good things, matey, good things."

"You look like the cat that just ate the canary. What's up?"

Still being a pirate, "I've been in touch with a certain gentlemen far across the briny sea. 'Tis a plot we have. Aye, a plot is brewing, matey."

I picked up my guitar and started walking toward the car. "Snap out of it, man, what are you talking about?"

Martin dropped his act and put his arm over my shoulder as we walked toward the car. "Here's the scoop. I called a lawyer friend of mine in L.A. and talked to her about The Orion. She gave me the name of a lawyer she knew in New Zealand who might be able to help me, since the Cook Islands used to be hooked up with New Zealand. I called

the guy in New Zealand, and he gave me the name of a lawyer in Avarua in the Cook Islands....”

“And he knew a guy, who knew a guy, who once met someone whose cousin.... Out with it, man, what are you dancing about?”

We climbed in the car and started the short drive up the hill to Martin’s house. “So I called this lawyer in Avarua. His name is Devon Duncan. He seemed to know all about The Orion and the guy that’s got it now. I told him we were coming down there, and I asked him if there was any way, any kind of legal hocus-pocus, that might get me *The Spirit of Orion* back. Now dig this. He said that he always thought there was something kind of fishy about *The Orion* deal, and that maybe there was a way to get it back. He didn’t promise anything, but he said he would start looking into it and that it would certainly be worth my while to go see him when I, or *we*, get to Avarua.”

I watched the giant redwoods go by. The smell here was about as good as it gets. Damp and fresh. “So let me get this straight. We might fly to Avarua, and you might get your boat back when we’re there?”

Martin turned into the driveway. “Is that cool, or what? You could take the plane on to Australia and come back to Avarua, then we could sail some of those remote islands and then back to the U.S.. Maybe I’d get my son, Kevin, and my brother to come out.”

I thought about it as we walked into the house. “Wow. The ultimate trip is starting to sound even better. I’d still like to fly to the islands my father visited, but we could make this work. You and I could go to Avarua, get the legal ball rolling, check out the boat, then take off for the flying like we planned, then deliver the plane to Australia, take the airline back to Avarua, get the sailboat, and start phase two.”

“Farfuckingout, man. This can happen.”

I carried a handful of charts over to Martin’s dining room table and spread them out. They were huge charts on a 1:5,000,000 scale. An inch was a hundred miles, and the charts were six feet long. We both bent over the table. “Okay, how about something like

this?" I ran my finger over the chart. "We leave Oakland for Hawaii. That is the longest over-water leg we will have."

Martin was still bubbling with excitement, "Ever been to Kauai? We could spend some time on the North Shore. Un-fucking-believable. Hanalei Bay, very fine."

Moving my finger straight south along the map, I said, "Okay, from there we go south to the Cook Islands and get things rolling for you and the sailboat. Then, I don't know, something like straight to Vanuatu, the Gilberts, the Marshalls, Truk, New Guinea, and down to Australia. The beauty of having our own plane is that we can play it by ear. If the weather sucks in one direction, we can go another. Or if we hear that someplace we are going is really fucked up, we can skip it, or add some new place."

"Then when we come back for *The Orion*," said Martin, "we could visit some of the places closer to The Cooks that we flew over on the way to Vanuatu, like Tonga and Fiji. That's where we were planning to go on my big trip years ago when I lost the boat, so this will sort of pick up where that left off. It's poetic."

I nodded, "This is already starting to do me some good. I love studying the charts and tour books and pictures. This is almost the best part."

Martin flipped a tour book open to a picture of a pristine stretch of white sand beach. Palm trees leaned over toward the water. He reverted to his pirate mode, "Aye, almost, but not quite, matey."

We spent the afternoon looking at the books and maps, exchanging ideas, taking notes, building a trip in our heads.

That evening we sat on the deck barbequing chicken and playing guitar. Martin played a slow, moody version of "Who Done It?" It really took me back "That is the coolest song," I said. "I remember that song coming out like it was yesterday."

Martin smiled, "Thanks, man. That song has been very good to me. You know if I hadn't written that, I'd probably be driving a fucking bus right now or something." He paused and looked out at the valley. "But you know what else? I never really got the words right."

I flipped a chicken leg on the fire. “What do you mean?”

“I mean the song says that almost everybody had a part in King’s death, but still, somebody had to take a bullet, put it in a rifle, aim it at King, and pull the trigger. You and I might not have been perfect, but we never did that. There’s like degrees of guilt. I did some things I am not proud of, and you probably did too, but we didn’t pull the trigger. And never would. And I shouldn’t have blended everybody up quite so much. It kind of diminishes the pure evil of the moment of decision when somebody actually pulled the trigger.”

I sat down and picked up a guitar. “It’s just a song, you know. It’s not the Bill of Rights.” Martin looked a little crestfallen, and I added, “Still a great tune, though.”

Martin flashed an evil grin and said, “Tell me if you ever heard this one.” He strummed an A chord and affected a country accent as he sang:

If I sit by the phone  
maybe she’ll call  
or maybe she’ll stop by and see  
if I’m doing well  
if I’m gettin’ along  
‘cause surely she’s thinkin’ of me.

I sang all the sad songs  
that I could recall  
and I drank ‘till I barely could see  
and I howled at the moon  
and counted the stars  
but still she ain’t back here with me.

Once this was a happy home

now I live here on my own  
wishin' I could find a way  
to get that girl to come  
back and stay.

I sing all the sad songs  
that I can recall  
and I drink 'till I barely can see  
and I howl at the moon  
and count all the stars  
but I don't think she'll come back to me.

I clapped my hand on my thigh. "Yee, ha. Sure, I've heard that, one of those I-was-a-fool-wish-she-was-back country songs."

Martin bent over and whispered in a West-Texas drawl, "I'm gona let ya in on a lil secret, podner. Mebe six people in the whole world know this, and if you say a word about it I'll have you strung up by your bells."

"What? What's the big secret, Tex?"

"The secret is the songs from 'Just Like You Were There' weren't my last songs, 'Maybe She'll Call' was my last one...no, it was my next to last one. I was drinking and feeling sorry for myself when Stephanie didn't come back, and I just kinda wrote this country song by accident. Tom Robbins says, 'Even cowgirls get the blues.' Yeah, well even rockers get that sorry country feeling. I wrote it under an alias, and it made me a ton of money." Martin laughed at his own story and continued. "I swear I'll kill you if you repeat this one, but right after that I thought, what the fuck, I'll write some more off-the-wall stuff. I wrote a tune called 'I Just Want to Sniff It' for this wasted, smacked-out Seattle band called the Pubes. I won't even repeat those lyrics. Come to think of it, the little shits still haven't given me a dime for that one. Amazing, huh?"

I grinned. “Yeah, that is amazing. Next thing I know you’re going to tell me you discovered cold fusion.”

“Cold fusion? Is that a heavy metal band?”

I started to explain what cold fusion is, and Martin cut in, “I know what cold fusion is, professor. I’m not a complete fucking idiot.”

I shrugged apologetically, “Hey, we’ve got to bring a guitar on this trip.”

Martin nodded. “Does the pope shit in the forest? Did Jimmy Carter invent those little liver pills? Absolutely. A guitar is required equipment. Goes in right before the life raft.”

I said, “In a sense, it is the life raft. It’s what you cling to when you’re sinking. At least I do.”

“Ah, the things we cling to. Speaking of which, how did it go with you and Beth last night?”

I looked up at the early stars, “Curious. I told her about the trip. I’m excited about it. It’s on my mind. I could tell she wasn’t very happy about it.”

“Why’s that?”

“I’ve thought about that some, but I really don’t know what the deal is. She moved out. She didn’t want to be around me. Now I’m going off somewhere, and she doesn’t like it. I don’t know. Maybe she thinks I’m going to have too much fun, and I don’t deserve it.”

“Maybe she didn’t really want to split. Maybe she wants you to drag her back.”

I pondered that for a second. “You think?” Then I shook my head. “No, I don’t think so. *I* didn’t split anyway, *she* did. And if you had seen the look on her face when she first told me she needed to be alone, you wouldn’t say that. That look would have scared a pit bull out of a butcher shop. No, that’s not it, but I can’t figure it out.”

Martin shook his head in agreement and played a little blues run. “Women? No way, you’ll never solve that one, professor.”

I answered the blues line with one of my own. “I remember when I was a kid,

my father used to joke with his friends about how nobody could understand women. I thought they were kidding. Sort of a running joke. Little did I know.”

Martin nodded. “Yeah, they’re from somewhere else, alright.” He played a complex, jazzy chord and asked, “Are you going to start dating again, or what?”

I exhaled with a whistling noise and ran a string of notes over Martin’s chord, “Man, I haven’t thought that one out yet. The very idea kind of makes me itch all over. Small talk. Mind games. Boundaries. Fault lines. Weak spots. I’m not ready for that yet.” I stared off into space, shaking my head at the whole idea, then asked, “So what’s your status with women these days?”

Martin scratched at his chin. “Well, back when I was playing music on the road, things were pretty wild. I used to be able to just pick one out of the front row, I shit you not. But that was a long time ago, and things are different now. I’ve had a bunch of…” He shrugged, “I don’t know what you ought to call them…girl friends, maybe. Women I’d hang out with for a while. Go places with. But something always seems wrong about it. Just not *quite* right, you know? Sometimes they want to hang on a little too tight. Sometimes I get interested, and they don’t. Or they get interested, and I don’t. Or they’re playing some kind of game, like catch and release. You know what I mean?” Martin set his guitar down. He picked up a pinecone and threw it off the deck. “And then there’s the age thing. I mean I’m well past forty here, and I’m not all that interested in women my age. They’re starting to show their mileage, you know what I mean?” He looked at me for an answer, but I just shrugged. He picked up another pinecone and started pulling the little tabs off of it. He said, “Why do women get ugly when they get old, anyway? I think maybe the creator doesn’t want us messing around with the older babes,” he said. “What do you think, professor?”

I shook my head, “Yeah, they look better when they’re younger, no doubt about it. But they lack, I don’t know what exactly, perspective.” I looked up at Martin and continued. “I started fooling around with this dispatcher at my charter company a few years ago. She was maybe twenty-six. One day she says, ‘Why don’t I book you out for a



charter and you and me can go someplace. Have a little vacation.’ I said, ‘Yeah, that could be fun, where do you want to go?’ You know what she said? Get this, she said Disneyland. She wanted to go to fucking Disneyland. Like a little kid.” I smiled and looked off down the valley.

“What did she look like?” asked Martin.

I looked back at Martin. “Oh, God, she was gorgeous. Golden delicious. You’d have loved her.”

“A fucking babe in Disneyland, man, sounds good to me. Did you go?”

I shook my head. “No. I pictured her skipping around Frontier Land with a hotdog in her hand and me sitting on the bench rubbing my sore feet.”

Martin laughed. “Well, see, man, you got the wrong attitude. Something I learned in sports a long time ago, you’ve got to develop a positive visualization. I’d picture us back at the hotel, both wearing those goofy mouse ears and nothin’ else. Let’s fuck like a couple of rats, you know what I mean?”

“Yeah, I know what you mean,” I said. “Could have been fun. But she was such a *child*, I just couldn’t get into it.”

Martin shrugged. “You know there’s another facet to this younger woman thing. Now these younger women are of a different *age*, so to speak. A different set of references. A different epoch. A different world almost. We’re not talking about Harriet Nelson or June Cleaver anymore. Things are *different* now, man. A lot of women seem to be really pissed at men in general, and if they don’t fuck you around a little, they feel like they’re surrendering their power or denying their true selves for the sake of the alpha male or some such shit. It gets to the point where some of them lack common decency. They mistake the slightest accommodation for subservience, and they fight it like the fucking plague. Brutal, man, they can be brutal. I’ve backed off. I feel like a dog that used to love to chase cars, but now that I’ve been run over about a dozen times, I’m starting to see things from a whole new angle.”

I nodded and smiled. “The view from the porch is looking better all the time, eh,

Rover?"

Martin rubbed his hands together and looked down at the deck. "Man, I don't get it, and I've lost a lot of interest in trying to figure it out. Sometimes I think the muff toxin is beginning to wear off on me." He looked over at me, and I smiled back. Martin continued, "But then I'll see somebody like that waitress in Shelter Cove, and I think, okay, I'm still a guy, and women can still look *reeeeeeally* good to me."

I smiled. "Sure would like to chew on those tires, huh? Maybe just one more chase."

"Woof," said Martin.

I laughed again and said, "Who was the famous writer who got to be around eighty and one day realized he wasn't horny all the time anymore, and he said something like, 'Whew, what was that all about?'"

Martin laughed and nodded.

"So anyway," I said, "the young ones can be dazzling, but a little perspective is a good thing, and you don't have to be twenty to be good looking. Beth still looks good to me."

Martin looked hard at me for a minute. "So why don't you stay with her?"

"You keep forgetting," I said, "*she left me.*"

Martin just looked at me, as if he were trying to form a question.

"I don't know if I can go into this right now," I said, "but I just can't connect with her like I should. It's like at the center of her existence is a huge hurt, and I'm the one who put it there. And it's a hurt for me, too, and I just can't get near it. So I guess this doesn't make much sense to you. I'll explain it sometime, but I just don't want to get into it right now." I looked off down the valley and then back at Martin.

Martin smiled and nodded. "It's okay, man." He stood up and stretched, saying, "You know what, man, I'm fucking beat. I'm going to crash."

Martin walked over to where the deck dropped off about fifteen feet to the sloping hillside below. He unbuttoned his fly and stared up at the stars as he peed off the

deck. "Pissing outdoors is a sacrament," he said, "a ritual that unites us with the generations past. And pissing outside on a clear night is a holy deed indeed. I think women know that, and they feel cheated. Just between you and me, I think that secretly, that's why they hate us." He buttoned up his pants and turned back toward me saying, "I've got the room downstairs fixed up for you. You know where to go?"

I said, "Yeah, thanks. But I'm going to sit on the deck for a while and count the stars. See you tomorrow."

Martin looked up at the sky one last time and belched. He gave me a pat on the shoulder and turned toward the house. "Ave Maria, amigo."

I sat under the stars and laughed to myself as I thought about Martin. At 12:30 I got up, walked over to the edge of the deck, and took a leak. Then I went to bed.

## Details

I was busy for the next few months. I was in constant contact with the shop, keeping up with their progress changing the engines and props on the Baron. I rounded up all the charts I would need in the Pacific. I went down to Oakland and visited the shop that would install a 275 gallon fuel tank in the fuselage. The standard wing tanks in the Baron were only sufficient for about 1100 miles, and the trip to Hawaii would be more than twice as far. And while I was in Oakland, I talked to a few ferry pilots about the trip, taking notes on their suggestions regarding survival equipment, hand-held backup radios, routes, and dozens of other things.

The engines were installed in the first week of November. I had the shop fly the plane to Oakland and leave it there to get the fuel tank installed. The shop that did the fuel tank handled all the FAA paperwork for the modification. When that was finished, I picked up the plane and flew it back to Echer Heights.

With an unfamiliar airplane and so much new equipment, I wanted to run it for a while before setting out over the endless ocean. At a minimum, I wanted to fly the airplane at high power until the engines were broken in and the oil consumption stabilized. I figured that would take about twenty hours of flying, and at two hundred knots, or two hundred thirty miles per hour, that was four thousand miles of flying.

Martin couldn't take the time to go with me. He needed to get his own affairs in order for an extended absence, and then he took a week off to visit New Orleans. I'm sure he told me about his trip when he got back, but I didn't know Stephanie and Flo and Jack and Kevin at the time, so I didn't get really understand what he was up to. Looking back on it now, I guess he was trying to make better contact with Kevin. That must be when he talked to Kevin about coming out to join us on the sailboat for the trip back to the west coast.

Always content with my own company, I happily set out alone. With nothing better to do, I decided to make a loop, flying to the places that had been significant in my

life, while throwing in some sight-seeing and visiting along the way. The itinerary became Seattle, Angel Falls, Boulder, Phoenix, San Diego, Echer Heights.

In the third week of November I launched out of Echer Heights for Seattle. It was raining in Echer Heights when I left, with a cold front laying over the first half of the route. It gave me a good chance to check out the systems on the airplane, steering around the worst of the precipitation with the radar and using the de-icing system in the cold, wet clouds over the Trinity Alps and Siskiyou Mountains. I broke out on top of the clouds at 22,000 feet just south of Medford and flew into improving weather toward Seattle.

I spent a night in each of the cities. I'd rent a car and drive slowly past the places I had lived or places I used to have good times visiting. In Seattle I parked the car on a road near the house where I grew up. As I walked past the house, I had the strangest feeling—a nearly irresistible urge to run up the steps and through the front door. To find my mother in the kitchen and my father in the den. To double back through time to a love that once covered me like a blanket. But now had vanished. Why does time have to grind everything to dust?

I walked through the woods to a cedar standing tall on a bluff. I climbed the tree and sat near the top, staring out at the airport and the mountains and Puget Sound. I felt that I could almost touch something. But not quite.

In Angel Falls and Boulder I sat in front of the houses that Beth and I had lived in. Remembering the good times and the bad. The growing self-confidence and pride as we made the transition into the adult world. The affection we shared, or at least that I thought we shared. The years I spent lost in my own head, playing with equations. And the tension as Beth tried to drag me back.

I came back from the trip feeling confident in the airplane. The only significant problem I had was an oil leak on the wastegate controller of the left engine, and I had that fixed at Boeing Field in Seattle. The shop in Oakland had wondered if I wanted to add a system that would allow me to add oil to the engines in flight. I had hoped that the engines would run well enough that I could avoid doing that. It turned out that oil

consumption had stabilized at a quart every ten hours and the engines were running very well, so I passed on the supplemental oil system. The added fuel tank was working as it should, and the radios and other systems were nearly flawless. I did have a short list of minor squawks when I returned—there was noise in the intercom, and the high frequency radio was intermittent—but I would get those fixed in Oakland immediately before the flight.

I called Martin on the Saturday I returned, and we talked about a departure date. We decided to go to Oakland on Monday to get the radio work done and to leave as soon as the repair was complete and the weather was favorable.

The most important weather factor was headwinds. If the wind was blowing against us too strongly, we would not have sufficient fuel reserves, or in the extreme, we wouldn't be able to make land at all. I wanted fifteen knots of headwind or less. Upper wind reports were available from the airlines crossing the Pacific, but they were only suggestive, since those planes flew some twenty thousand feet higher than I planned to go. So I gathered those reports and watched the satellite shots of the clouds over the Pacific.

The radio work was completed late Monday afternoon, and I brought the airplane over to Executive Air to get it fueled for the trip. There were compromises to be made in the fueling. The tank would hold more fuel than we needed. Extra fuel would be good to have at the end of the trip in case we met unforeseen headwinds, or in case we had a total electrical failure and needed to search for the Hawaiian Islands—a scary thought that brought Amelia Earhart to mind. But fuel meant weight, and if the plane were too heavy, it would be impossible to keep it in the air if an engine should fail in the first few hours.

For this, the longest leg, I elected to put the whole 275 gallons (1650 pounds) in the new fuel tank. That would put the airplane at a weight where, for the first four hours, it would be unable to stay aloft after an engine failure. After it had burned about four hours fuel, it would be light enough to stay out of the ocean even with one engine dead.

Such are the compromises in flying airplanes of this sort.

When the fueling was complete, I went through the airplane with my checklist making sure that all of the necessary gear was in place. Then I did a careful pre-flight and went back to the hotel. I found Martin in the room eating a cheeseburger and reading a book. The weather channel was on the TV, but the volume was off.

“How’s it look for tomorrow?” I asked.

“You’re the skipper, but I believe it looks okay.”

A shot of anticipation and apprehension ran through me. I looked forward to being in the islands. I looked forward to the satisfaction of completing each leg of the trip, seeing the runway rise up to meet me as I landed. But there were very real risks, and there is no fear quite like that of a pilot in the grip of an airborne emergency. And the middle of the Pacific promised to be a lonely place.

I called Flight Services and checked the weather. The report was good. While I was still on the phone I gave Martin a thumbs up, faking more enthusiasm than I really felt. Martin returned the gesture with a grin.

When I hung up I said, “Looks like we’re running out of excuses. I filed a flight plan to leave tomorrow at dawn.”

Martin was excited. “Alright! I’m coming *Orion*, baby.”

I called room service and got a light dinner, and the two of us sat flipping through the TV channels. Around midnight I noticed that Martin had fallen asleep. I turned off the TV, set my alarm, and lay down. I was asleep in a few minutes.

I awoke to see light coming in the window. I got out of bed quickly and walked over to look at the weather. It was pitch black outside except for a bright, unnatural light in the parking lot. It was 3:15. I lay back down in the bed, but sleep wouldn’t return. I pulled at the starchy sheets and turned my pillow, but I couldn’t sleep and couldn’t shake a nameless dread. Maybe it was the fear of being afraid. Fear of fear. Jesus.

As I lay there sleepless, I thought back to a night many years ago when I was a child of nine or ten. I was curled up with a pillow and a blanket behind my father’s chair

in the living room. My parent's friends were there, and the men were in the living room after diner talking, as always, about flying. My father was re-telling the story of the cargo flight he piloted from Honolulu to San Francisco in a DC-4. He was flying non-scheduled cargo trips back then just after World War II, back before he got on with the airlines. Everything that could go wrong on this trip had gone wrong. The forecast tailwind evaporated early, and as they approached the point of no return, it was a tough call about whether to proceed or turn back. I had heard the story so many times over the years I could still hear my father's voice echoing through time.

"I was flying with Walter van Essen," he said. "Best damn navigator in the air."

The other men seconded the comment.

My father continued. "He was giving me position reports and estimated time en route forecasts every few minutes. I asked Walter if we could make San Francisco. When he said 'yes,' I said, 'Well then, that's that. We'll carry on.' No use stewing over it, I thought, we might as well enjoy the view. Two hours past the point of no return, the propeller on engine four went into overspeed, and I had to shut the engine down. 'How goes it now, Walter?' I said. He says, 'It's going to be tight, but we'll do it.' So Emmet Deacon, the flight engineer, leaned those big radial engines until he couldn't stand it any more, and then I leaned them a little more, and on we went. No choice at that point. Turns out a hurricane was strengthening off northern Baja, and we started picking up a headwind. Old Walter, who is not the nervous type, was working his E-6B sliderule so fast I thought it was going to catch on fire."

They all laughed. One of my father's friends cut in. "That guy Walter was a fucking legend when I was in the Navy with him. They thought he was some kind of mystic. They could be out on a twelve hour patrol over nothing but blue water, and he'd say something like, 'Turn left to a heading of two-thirty-one degrees. Eniwetok will come over your nose in forty-seven minutes.' They'd check their watches, turn the airplane, and sure as shit Eniwetok would rise up out of the water forty-seven minutes later. I think he went through the whole damn war without ever having to buy himself a beer."



They all laughed, and my father continued. “Yeah, that was Walter, all right. So when he said that we probably ought to call air-sea-rescue, the rest of us kind of sat up real straight for a while.”

My little ten-year-old body squirmed thinking about my father fighting for his life over the cold Pacific. I imagined how life would be without my father around, and I found the thought too horrible to contemplate.

“The Coast Guard met us about four hundred miles out, and we flew in formation toward San Fran. Turns out the weather all over the area was down in fog. Air traffic control wanted us to swing around over the Bay and turn back west for the instrument approach. No way we had gas for all that, and I knew damn well that if we did it that way and then didn’t find the airport, we’d run out of gas climbing out over the city on the missed approach. I told them to get everybody the hell out of the way, ‘cause we were going to be coming straight in over the hills from the west, and if we didn’t see the runway we were going to descend straight ahead and put it down in San Francisco Bay. We came over the shore, crossed over the hills in and out of a lot of layered wet clouds, and let down to the minimum altitude for the instrument approach. Down at minimums we were still *above* the low fog layer. Hadn’t even gotten *into* it yet. Well, that bird was going to come down real soon anyway, so I just kept on descending toward the airport and went into the fog at about a hundred and fifty feet above the ground. You know how you usually see at least a half mile of lead-in lights before you see the airport? Well, the first lights we saw were the green threshold lights right at the edge of the runway. No lead-in lights, nothing. The runway flashed under us, I pulled off the power and set her down. As I turned off the runway, the engines started quitting one by one. I guess we closed the airport for about an hour while the tug groped around in the fog trying to find us and drag us out of there, not that anybody else was going to land in that fog anyway.”

The men laughed and shook their heads. I tried to picture the scene in the cockpit during that flight. Were these guys visibly scared, or were they the heroic, competent, confident men that were gathered around me now?

I could remember crawling out from behind the chair and sitting in front of my father. “How did you feel, Dad? You must have been really scared,” I’d said.

The rest of the men looked back and forth between my father and their drinks. They each had a far-away look and a thin, wistful smile. One way or another, they had all been there before. My father said, “Scared? Yeah, I guess I was, Joey. But I was busy doing everything I could to get things to work out right, and I always believed that we would make it. If we went in the water, I figured the Coast Guard would get us.” He looked over at his friends, “but when we came over the shore in the descent toward the airport, I could have lifted an Oldsmobile off the ground between my butt cheeks.”

“Amen,” said one of his friends, “an Olds 98.”

My father smiled and took a drink. “Big blue station wagon. Full of buckshot.”

At 4:45 I woke Martin. We got packed quickly and grabbed breakfast in a sleepy all-night diner across the street. I stared bleary-eyed at the menu, wishing I’d taken something the night before to help me sleep. I thought about making a joke out of it and ordering eggs benadryl, or something stupid like that, but there were a lot of miles showing on the waitress, and I didn’t want to complicate her morning. Martin jabbered on about his boat and Kauai, but I just stirred my greasy hashbrowns and wished I was asleep. We caught a cab for the airport.

Flashlight in hand, I did another pre-flight inspection and climbed aboard. Martin followed me inside and shut the door. I checked that Martin had all the charts and set them on his lap. I gave Martin a clipboard holding a spreadsheet I had made giving the headings, distances to various navigation fixes, expected fuel burns, and so forth. We put on our life vests and reviewed the ditching procedure, then I went through the airplane checklist and started the engines. We got our air traffic control clearance and taxied to the end of runway 29. The airport was already busy with outbound cargo flights.

I was always a little amazed that you could take something as complicated as an airplane and convince yourself that it was actually ready to fly. You could look at a bolt

and see that it had a nut at the other end, but were you sure that there wasn't a crack through it? You could look at the engine instruments and see that everything read normal, but were you sure that the number six exhaust valve wouldn't stick in the next five minutes? Every takeoff was a leap of faith, to say the least. But it was a leap that I had made many thousands of times.

With light just beginning to show over the Oakland hills, I pushed the throttles forward, and the plane began a slow acceleration. I left the airplane on the runway much longer than normal, since the heavy airplane needed more than the usual amount of speed to fly. But when I pulled back on the yoke, the airplane came off the ground and seemed surprisingly eager for the flight to Lihue.

We flew out over the Golden Gate Bridge and took up a heading of 239 degrees as we climbed. Forty minutes later we were level at 8000 feet making 180 knots, or 207 miles per hour toward Lihue.

“Are we there yet? Are we there yet?” asked Martin.

“Damn near,” I said, “only eleven hours and seven minutes to go at this rate.”

“Not bad. And this is the longest leg we'll have, right?”

“Yep. This is the longest stretch by far where we are out of sight of land.”

Martin looked at me and grinned. “Man, you are going to love Hanalei Bay on Kauai. Fucking beautiful.”

I stared out at the broken undercast clouds below us. I tried to guess the speed and direction of the wind down there by watching the cloud shadows. Martin took off his life vest, arranged his coat as a pillow, put his head back, and went to sleep.

I could feel that fatigue was beginning to set in. I really hated motel rooms and the fitful sleep I always seemed to get in them. I stared at the clouds on the distant horizon and checked the radar. All seemed well. No threat in the sky immediately ahead. I checked the heading against the navigation display. There were 1800 nautical miles remaining to Lihue. Ground speed was 181 knots, for an en route time remaining of just under ten hours. I scanned the entire instrument panel, giving every switch and

instrument a moment of attention. Everything was in place.

I folded my hands on my lap, put my head back into the headrest and closed my eyes for just a second. Just long enough for the burning in my eyes to quiet. I opened my eyes and looked back at the instruments, at Martin sleeping in the seat next to me, at the ocean passing beneath the broken clouds below us. I guided myself toward good thoughts. I remembered good times I'd had in airplanes over the years. The lessons I took from my father when I was fifteen and still working on my private pilot's license. In all my years of flying since then, I had never flown with anyone who radiated the confidence, competence, and calm that my father possessed. He seemed so totally at home in an airplane. Catching one of my bounced landings and setting the airplane back on the ground with a chirp. Like being in the hands of God. I could see him smiling and giving the plane back to me. Telling stories about the war as I looked for checkpoints on my cross-country flights. Stories about how, late in the war, the Japanese Zeros would intercept his bomber over the Pacific, and rather than attack, the Zeros would do little aerobatic routines safely out of range of the formidable guns on the B-24. After I got my license, my father and I would take little trips, switching off the flying like an airline crew. We'd go to Westport and buy live Dungeness crab right off the boats for a dollar a piece, and then fly home for a feast. Or we'd bring my mother, Ruby, and go to the Oregon coast for a weekend. And years later, after my father retired, there were the flights in his SNJ, doing aerobatics over the Hood Canal with the Olympic Mountains rolling and spinning out the window to the west. I remembered the look on Beth's face—pride, relief, and excitement—when she taxied up to the ramp after her first aerobatic demonstration with my father in the big blue warbird. My Dad had an honest affection for Beth, you could see it in everything he did with her. He probably figured she came along at just the right moment to steer me back on course. And she probably did.

Try as I might to avoid the painful thoughts, I followed my father's timeline to its dismal end. I remembered that cold clear October day when I sat in my father's hospital room, reading aloud from Lindbergh's book, *The Spirit of Saint Louis*. I had

been reading the book for weeks as my father alternately listened and nodded off. On that cold blue day, I finished the book. Guts, brains, and character had gotten Lindbergh to Paris, and now the great adventure was over. I set the book on the bed and looked at my father. I watched his artery flicker in the yellow-bright light of the room. I watched as my father's heart gave its final beat. I remembered going to my mother's house and sitting outside in the chill, neither of us able to speak.

Soon after my father's death, I talked my mother into going back to Nebraska at Christmas to see her sisters, hoping the change of scene would cheer her up some. But when she came back in January the chronic indigestion she had complained about was so bad she went back to the doctors and insisted that they give her a thorough checkup. The news from the exam was about as bad as it gets—cancer of the pancreas. She was brave. She was dignified. She would try the surgery if they thought it would help.

After the operation she rolled in and out of consciousness. Like waves running up onto the shore and then disappearing into the sand. She lost her grip on time, speaking of World War II or the influenza pandemic of 1918 that killed her sister as if they happened yesterday. I sat in her hospital room day after day. Bleary eyed. Numb. I remember sitting there watching the news. Endless, bloody racial wars in Africa. Emaciated children wandering shell-shocked and clueless through a man-made hell. I looked away from the TV and saw that my mother was watching. "There's a lot about this place I'm not going to miss," she said. Two days later she was dead.

I went into a tailslide. A void seemed to open beneath me. I lost my grip and tumbled through nothingness. Most troubling of all was the slow realization that the whole sad story seemed to be at odds with my unarticulated world view. At my core I was an optimist. I believed that the stuff of the universe was created by an ultimate spirit. And I believed that man lived in an "in between," between pure lifeless physical stuff and pure spirit. Spirit embedded in stuff. That's us. Pulled by spirit, but stuck in stuff. I believed that man's task was to form himself and to grow in alignment with his spirit part. I saw each person as a sculptor chiseling his true spirit self out of the stuff. And the

chiseling came from the experiences and mostly the decisions made by the person. My universe was an ordered, rational, benevolent place where you grew in character and insight and spirituality at your own pace and according to your own effort. It was good, and it was fair.

But how did my father's life and death fit into that? Or my mother's? It seemed to me that genetic accidents had robbed my father, at least in his later years, of his ability to keep growing. In fact he seemed to lose ground, rather than grow. What he had built himself into melted away, as if it were the ice sculpture in Martin's old song. Where was the sense in that?

All this together with the simple sadness and loss seemed to eat away at the ground under my feet. Every night I would collapse exhausted into bed and instantly fall asleep only to awaken before dawn, enveloped in a hopeless crushing sadness. At dawn I got up still exhausted and dragged myself like a corpse through joyless days. I looked forward to nothing. Food lost its taste. Jokes quit being funny. My guitar gathered dust. I looked back and wondered how I'd ever found the energy to do the things I'd done, the school work, the flying, the writing. How could I find the energy to do those things, when simply getting out of bed was so hard? For hours I'd just sit staring at nothing, unfocused.

This went on for months until something deep inside told me it was time to gather my forces and get going. But it was difficult, I seemed truly stuck, since I really did not want to *do* anything. I didn't want to strive to be richer, that wouldn't change anything. I didn't want to go anywhere, since all places were the same. And I lacked the energy to interact with people. Yet I knew that other people got through such periods, and knew I needed to pick myself up. Ultimately, I figured that I might not be able to control how I felt, but I could control what I did, and maybe if I started to do the right things, my feelings would sooner or later catch up.

What I did is I dragged myself down to the local pool and swam a few laps. I had been an above average competitive swimmer from childhood through high-school, but I had given it up in college and never cared much for exercise after that. In the

beginning I could only swim a few laps, but the water was the first thing that seemed good again. The feel of the water going over my skin as I swam and the play of the sunlight on the bottom of the pool gradually brought me around. After a few weeks I was setting little goals for myself. A half mile today, next week a thousand yards. Within a few months I was designing short workouts, watching the clock for my times, and training with a goal of beating my high-school record. And it worked. I gradually found the pieces of my old self and put them back together into something resembling a normal functioning human being. And music helped. I even remember listening to Martin's music back then. Strange world.

I stared out the window at the endless panorama of clouds and shook off my ruminating over the past. "It really *is* beautiful," I said to myself. "This will be the trip of a lifetime."

As Martin slept, I busied myself with the flying chores—position reports, fuel consumption records, small heading changes.

"How goes it, captain?" It was Martin waking up from his nap in the co-pilot's seat.

"According to the Loran we are 980 nautical miles out of Lihue doing 191 knots over the ground, which ought to put us at the airport in five hours eight minutes. We've got about eight and a half hours fuel left, so unless I figure out a way to fuck things up pretty soon, we'll probably make it. How's your nap?"

"Good, except I can't seem to shake this crazed dream I had that I was three miles up over the middle of the ocean at the mercy of a fucking lunatic."

"That's fucking amazing, I fell asleep up here and had the same dream. Why don't you drive some, while I stretch out for a bit?"

Martin took the controls, and I put my head back and fell asleep.

I probably just slept for a few minutes. When I woke up Martin was reading his

book and the autopilot was flying the airplane.

“You’re a fucking optimist,” I said. “Who’s minding the store?”

Martin looked up from his book. “Let George do it. Mechanical Mike here can fly better than either of us.”

I just shook my head and motioned that I was taking over. “What you reading, anyway?” I asked.

Martin held the book up so I could see the cover. It was Bernard Moitessier’s *The Long Way*. Martin said, “This guy is something else, man. He was in this sailing race around the world alone. He left his wife and kids and took off for the Southern Ocean. He got the shit knocked out of him. Storms and winds and a collision with a big boat off Africa. But he loved it, man. He loved it. When he came around Cape Horn and headed for home, he couldn’t stand it, so he turned back for the Cape of Good Hope and just kept going. Dig that, he couldn’t quit. Listen to this.” Martin opened the book to a placemaker he had set, and he read: “The wind, the calms, the fog, the sun are all the same, a single huge presence in which everything mingles and blends into a great light that is life.” He closed the book and grinned. “Heavy shit, huh?”

It was still daylight when we landed in Lihue, but it was getting dark by the time we threw our suitcases onto our beds at the little hotel on the north coast. We were both stiff from the confinement, but energized by the new surroundings and by the completion of what we expected to be the hardest leg of the trip. The tension gone, I was ebullient. I had done it. It was a big deal for me. I said, “Damn, this tropical air feels good. This is so cool. My prescription for getting the kinks out is an evening swim. Grab your sea horse and let’s drive back to the beach on Hanalei Bay.” Martin protested, but went along with the plan.

With just a trace of silver in the sky to the west, we walked out onto the beach, alone save for a mother and child sitting quietly by a fire a hundred yards down the shore. We walked into the calm, warm water beneath a near-full moon low on the horizon. The



moon peeked through breaks in a high broken sky. Waist deep in the water, I pulled down my goggles and swam away from Martin. The water was inky-dark beneath me. The back-lit clouds and yellow moon flashed like a slide show as I rolled my head to breathe. Moon, sky, and air above. Unmeasured depth and darkness below. Me gliding on the border.

I felt the anxiety and fatigue of the trip drop away. I remembered my father's words about flying in the Pacific during World War II. My father had said that he was not really afraid, that he was fatalistic. He didn't want fear to invade and pollute the uniqueness of the experience. To erase the unimaginable palate of a blue-green tropical lagoon. The rising and falling of the wingman's airplane in a morning sky. Even the arcing red parabola of a glowing tracer bullet, rising from a darkening enemy-held island into an evening sky of graying, spent cumulus clouds. My father was brave and clever and committed to what he was doing, and once the commitment was made, he simply refused to let fear in. He did everything he could to ensure his safety and that of the crew, and then he was prepared to accept the cards as they were dealt. Easier said than done, perhaps, but I saw the wisdom in his outlook, and I resolved to try to follow my father's lead.

After the swim we grabbed a quick meal and collapsed into bed for a deep, ten hour sleep. The next day we decided to hang around and see the island and not even check the weather for the flight to the Cook Islands. All things in good time. We snorkeled around the rocks at the beach at the end of the road, walked the north trail, and cruised through town. Late in the afternoon I drove back to Lihue and prepared the airplane for the next leg of the trip. Everything looked great after the crossing from Oakland, though I was surprised that I needed to add two quarts of oil to the right engine. I had expected that one would be enough. Maybe the sloping ramp created an error in the dipstick. I bought a couple of extra cans of oil and put them in the nose baggage area in case I would need them at the fuel stop on Christmas Island. I checked the weather for the next day at the office at the airport, and it looked good—generally fair weather except for

several hundred miles of thunderstorms in the intertropical convergence zone on either side of the equator.

I turned in a flight plan to Christmas Island, which sits about half way between Lihue and our next destination, Rarotonga in the Cook Islands. Late the next morning we left Lihue for Christmas Island. The trip was uneventful except for the need to dodge rain showers for the last two hundred miles. I studied the radar and led us through the gaps between enormous storms. We made small talk. Martin asked me if I had ever had any scary experiences in airplanes. Yeah, there had been a few, but I wasn't in the mood for war stories. I said, "A few tense moments now and then, but nothing too frightening. Mostly just hauling boxes and people around."

"Any interesting people?" asked Martin.

I thought for a moment. "The most interesting passenger I ever had was a human head packed in dry ice." Martin gave me a strange look, and I continued. "The cargo rats, the loading agents, asked me where I wanted it. I told them to put it in the seat next to me."

"Let me guess," said Martin, "two heads are better than one."

"There you go," I said. "Apparently the head was the critical part of a murder victim going down to San Francisco for some further forensic work. Talk about coach fare, they wouldn't even send his whole body. We had a nice little chat, me and Yorik."

Martin smiled. "You're fucking strange," he said. "Did I ever tell you that? A stellar human being, but very strange."

I grinned.

We landed on Christmas Island at dusk, and spent an hour getting refueled from an ancient truck that carried fuel in rusty 55 gallon drums. We planned for an early morning departure to Rarotonga.

At sunrise the next morning we lifted off for Rarotonga, the first of our exotic South Sea destinations. I was comfortable, relaxed, and confident. The talking-to that I

had given myself in Hanalei Bay had sunk in. I had a good airplane and good weather, and I was determined to enjoy it. Martin was like a kid on Christmas morning. “*Orion*, baby, daddy’s coming. Don’t you worry.”

## Avarua

As soon as we arrived in the Cook Islands and got settled in our little A-frame cottage, Martin set up a meeting with the lawyer, Devon Duncan, at his office in Avarua. He and I showed up at the appointed time and were met by Duncan's receptionist, Marie, a Polynesian woman of about thirty. She was staggeringly beautiful, with straight black hair and dark brown eyes. Absolute calendar girl of the South Pacific. I fell in love with her right away. By the time Martin had explained who we were, Marie and I had three perfect sons, and we lived in total domestic bliss on a small banana plantation on the hillside above town.

Martin and I sat in the outer office for about fifteen minutes. Martin didn't like to wait for anything. He'd look at his watch and roll his eyes. A couple of times he asked Marie if Devon was in. I was okay, I watched Marie stick papers in files while I taught my new sons about the stars. We could hear someone whistling in the back office. It was that ornate, trilling, warbling sort of whistle that you hear people do every now and then as if they were making a gift to all mankind. It always made Martin nearly insane to hear people do this. And this together with the wait seemed to put him on edge.

After about twenty minutes the whistling grew louder and Devon Duncan appeared at the door behind Marie's desk.

Duncan was a small man, five foot four and a hundred ten pounds. Carefully dressed. He was about forty with just a trace of gray sprouting at his curly temples. Mostly Polynesian, with a hint of something else, perhaps Chinese. He had small busy eyes and a quick, unconvincing smile.

His little hand stuck out as his eyes darted from Martin's watch to my shoes. "I am Devon Duncan. I am very pleased to meet you, Mr. Landry. I've been a fan of yours for years. And Mr. Claypool. Welcome. Please come in, sit down."

He led us to his office, which had an orderly, deliberate, and ostentatious feel to it. Meaningless, expensive-looking art objects here and there. Pictures of him all over the

walls, shaking hands with other well dressed men.

Martin said, "Let's get right to it, Mr. Duncan, what's it going to take for me to get my boat back?"

Duncan deemed to draw back. "You are very direct," he said as he watched Martin take a pen from his pocket and begin writing notes. "I like that. Please, call me Devon." He smiled for a second, and then looked more serious. "Well, your old boat now belongs to a Mr. Terry Tuapotu. He has had it for years now, and he is presently using it for charters and tourist trips, that sort of thing. He bought the boat in an auction, when the city seized it for delinquent mooring fees."

"Is there a way for me to get it back? You mentioned on the phone that there may be an angle to play?"

Devon joined his hands as if he were going to pray. "Well, there are always angles, and we could *try*, but this will not be easy. I can check into the details of the seizure and the sale, dig up the old documents, look for irregularities. I can check with the bank to see that Mr. Tuapotu has been making his payments on time. I may even be able to use some influence, to call in some favors, to conjure up an irregularity. There are often ways to accomplish things here, ways that someone like you, coming from another world, might not understand."

Martin leaned forward in his seat and said, "Okay, it doesn't matter to me how you do it. That is your business. I just wonder if you can *do* it and what it is going to *cost* me." I realized that I had never seen Martin conducting business with a stranger before. I was seeing an edge to him that I didn't know existed.

Devon picked up his pencil and stared at it saying, "I am willing to do this on a contingency basis. I will take up your case and work to get your boat back for you. If I fail to come up with a clear title to your boat, you owe me nothing. If I get your boat back, you can pay me one-third of its present market value."

Martin sat back. "What do you take its value to be?"

Scribbling on his legal pad, Devon replied, "About three hundred thousand

dollars.”

“Three hundred thousand New Zealand dollars?”

“No, three hundred US.”

“There is no way that boat is worth three hundred thousand US dollars. Shit, I paid seventeen thousand for it in 1965.”

Duncan didn’t look up. “That was a long time ago, Martin. And have you seen the boat?”

“No, I would need to see it before I agree to anything, and even so, I would rather do this on an hourly rate. One hundred thousand for getting a boat back seems excessive.”

Duncan looked up at Martin and smiled. “You are free to hire whomever you please, of course. But I don’t think you will find anyone else who can get the job done.”

Martin couldn’t argue that point, though he could check into it later. First things first. “Where’s the boat? I’ll take a look at the boat and get back to you.”

“I anticipated your wanting to see the boat, and I checked into its schedule. It is due back in port tomorrow morning. If I might make a suggestion, perhaps you could book it for a short trip. Use an alias, pay cash. See what you think of your former boat, and get to know its present owner. When you see the quality of the boat and learn what we are up against from Mr. Tuapotu, you might see things differently. After all, you may be getting a three hundred thousand dollar boat for a hundred thousand. Quite a bargain, wouldn’t you say?”

Martin stood up and stuck out his hand, “Thanks, Devon. This has been informative. I’ll check into things and get back to you.”

When we passed Marie on the way out, she was bent over a file cabinet, and I nearly fainted.

Out on the sidewalk, Martin was talking a mile a minute, but I was barely listening.

## The Tangaroa

Martin walked up the dock toward the boat. “Man, this boat is fuckin’ beautiful. It looks better now than when I had it years ago. The decking looks new, and the brightwork is buffed up to perfection. Unbelievable. Oh, hello, baby.”

“It’s a gorgeous boat, for sure. Your pictures didn’t do it justice at all,” I said.

A Polynesian boy of about seventeen poked his head up through a hatch. He smiled angelically and said, “Are you gentlemen going with us on this cruise? Welcome aboard. Please step over this way. I am Winston, my father is Terry Tuapotu, the owner and captain of this boat.”

We exchanged greetings and went aboard. Winston took us below and showed us to our rooms, which were small but beautifully done in teak, as if they were carved from solid block. Martin’s head was on a swivel, taking in every detail. He tossed his stuff on his bunk and surveyed the galley.

“All the navigation gear is updated, and the galley is new. Somebody has really done an incredible job with this boat.” He leaned toward me and whispered, “For a hundred grand, it’s a steal.”

We heard voices from above. Martin led us up the companionway and onto the deck. A thickly built man in his mid-forties was quizzing Winston. “Did you pick up the motor oil and flashlight batteries like I told you to? How much water is aboard?”

Hearing us come up on deck, he turned and smiled. He was about five foot ten and two hundred pounds. Built like a fullback, with unusually large hands and feet. He had a broad, intelligent face with active dark eyes and jet-black curly hair. “Good morning gentlemen, I am Terry Tuapotu. Welcome aboard. Are your rooms satisfactory?”

He stuck out his hand and gave Martin and me a firm handshake, looking each of us in the eye as he did. “We are waiting for the first mate,” he said. “Once he is here, I trust we will be ready to go. The plan is to sail all day and night to arrive in Aitutake sometime tomorrow morning. Once we are there we will move from place to place as

your interests and the sea and weather conditions dictate. This is Tuesday, I plan to have us back on Saturday. The weather is good. This should be a fine trip.”

“Your boat is stunning,” said Martin, “absolutely beautiful.”

“Thank you. The mate and I started working on this boat about fifteen years ago. And Winston is finally beginning to show some interest now. One day it will be his.”

Winston said, “Here’s Sonny.” He pointed toward a tall, thin Polynesian man walking up the dock with a duffel bag over his shoulder and a box under his arm. Sonny walked with an athletic grace that held just a hint of a dance, gliding like an ice skater above the dock as he moved. He greeted Terry and Winston as he climbed aboard and then stood smiling, waiting to be introduced to the two of us. His name was Sonny Orovaru, the first mate.

Once Sonny came aboard things started happening. Terry asked Martin and me to please have a seat out of the way while the crew prepared the boat, and then he stood near the wheel at the stern and gave instructions to Winston and Sonny. Sail covers came off, lines were attached, the engine was started and left at idle to warm up. When all was ready, Terry gave the signal to Winston and Sonny to cast off from the dock.

Using the throttle and the wheel, Terry began to move The Tangaroa away from the dock and out toward the mouth of the harbor. A hundred yards or so past the harbor entrance, Terry turned into the wind and started giving orders to raise the sails. Winston and Sonny seemed to be a step ahead of Terry the whole time—always ready for the next move. In short order the sails were up, the motor was off, and The Tangaroa was turned on course and in her stride.

Martin had been absorbing every motion of the captain and his crew. He leaned close to me and said, “This man is a master. I feel like I’m watching someone dance with my girl and she’s digging it big time.”

Terry motioned for Sonny to take the wheel. He told Sonny to steer to keep the end of the jetty lined up with Tere’s Bar. Then Terry moved to the stern and stood quietly holding the backstay alternately looking aft toward the harbor and forward at the heading



of the boat. Martin watched as Terry stood silently in the stern for several minutes.

Winston was busy putting the fenders into their lockers. After a few minutes, Terry said, "Winston, which way is the current running today?"

Winston closed the locker and stood facing his father. He shut his eyes for a second and took a slow breath, then he walked back to the stern. He stood beside his father and looked back at the harbor. His father looked at the boy, glanced back at the harbor, and waited. After a few minutes Winston said, "It is from the east. About two knots."

Terry nodded his approval and his son beamed. Terry took the wheel from Sonny. He continued looking over his shoulder at the harbor.

Winston went forward to gather the docklines, and in a few minutes he came back and placed them in a locker by the wheel.

Martin moved closer to Terry. Small talk always seemed to come easy to him, but he must have felt some awkwardness from the surreptitious nature of his mission, and that did seem to cramp his style.

"Is there a meaning to the name 'Tangaroa'?" Martin asked.

Terry looked back at the island and swung the wheel slightly more to starboard, "Yes, in our mythology, Tangaroa is the creator and the god of the sea."

Martin fiddled with the top of a pop bottle. "Both the creator and the god of the sea? Interesting."

Terry stood on a small platform above the wheel. He held the backstay with one hand and steered the boat with his right foot. He followed the path of a frigate bird that glided left to right above the top of the mast. "Doesn't your western science say that life evolved from the sea, Martin?"

"Well, I think so, yeah. We can ask Joseph, he's the professor."

Terry studied the sky ahead. "Professor? I thought he was the pilot."

"Well, he's kinda both. He used to be a professor of mathematics, but he gave it up to fly airplanes."

“Interesting,” said Terry. His tone of voice caught Martin’s earlier comment about the dual nature of Tangaroa and reflected it back into the conversation with an ambiguous spin.

Martin fell silent and pretended to look out to sea. The hint of a smile crossed Terry’s face. After a while Martin got up and walked to the bow, where he sat alone for over an hour watching the island fall below the horizon.

After while Martin came back and sat quietly with the rest of us as Terry steered The Tangaroa. A small ice chest was at our feet with beer, wine, and juice, and a tray was on the deck with cut-up coconut, papaya, and pineapple.

“Would you like a glass of wine, Martin?” asked Terry.

Martin shook his head. “Thanks, but no, captain. That stuff nearly killed me once, and I’m not going to give it another chance. But I’ll grab some juice, and the papaya here is tremendous. Best fruit in the world.”

Sonny went below and came back up carrying a short, stout fishing pole and some tackle. He fixed a large lure to the line, tossed the lure in the water, fed out the line, and set the rod into a rod-holder in the stern. Then he sat down with the rest of us.

The mood was relaxed and quiet. I was hypnotized by the freshness of the breeze and the soft rolling of the boat. I turned to Winston and said, “Winston, are you still in school?”

His eyes dropped to the deck for a moment, then darted to Terry before he looked at me and said, “This is the summer break. I should have finished high-school last month. In fact I really did finish, but I am going to go back and do the last year again. You see, I took the examinations to go to the University of the South Pacific in Suva, but I did not pass. I’d like to become a doctor. Our island will always need another doctor. It is good work, don’t you think?”

Terry checked the wind in the sails and said, “Winston has always been good at school. He loves to read. He did well in that part of the test. But a few years ago the

teacher of mathematics and science at our little school quit. People who know these things go to New Zealand or Australia and make big money. Winston had trouble with that part of the test. But he is determined. He even works in his spare time with Dr. Ritoa. The old doctor has shown him a lot.”

Winston lit up. “I love working in the office with Dr. Ritoa. He has shown me a great many things. I have helped set broken arms. I’ve removed stitches and even watched an appendectomy.”

I turned to Winston and said, “It takes a lot of guts to stick with your goal like that, Winston. I hope you make it.”

Martin looked out at the flashing lure and said to Sonny, “Is Rarotonga your home island, Sonny?”

“No, I was born on Aitutaki. I used to run a little boat across the lagoon for the tourists. Make them lunch. Let them play on the beaches of the uninhabited motus, or islands, as you say. I met Terry in Avarua. His mate had just quit, because he couldn’t stand the work re-building this boat. But I loved the boat right away and have been with her ever since.”

Martin picked up a piece of coconut and said, “Terry, you’ve had this boat for fifteen years, is that right?”

Terry looked at the dropping sun and turned the wheel slightly with his foot. “Yes, about that. It wasn’t as fine a boat back then. It had been neglected. Actually it used to belong to a famous American, a singer. He sailed it down here with a bunch of his worthless friends. They had no respect for anyone. The men would be drunk in town, and the women would go naked on the beaches. I remember them visiting our church one Sunday to hear the singing. They were dressed like bums, talking, laughing, and taking pictures. The owner had some kind of accident, and they all took off in a big hurry by plane, leaving the boat here. It was moored to a buoy for months with nobody paying attention to it. It began to take on water, but no one seemed to care. In a storm one night it washed up toward shore and broke the rudder. I towed it back out and pumped out

some of the water and watched after it from then on. After a year or so it was seized by the city as a derelict and hazard. I took more interest in it then, and I know the city sent many letters to the US about the boat. Finally it was sold at auction in Avarua. I borrowed money from my family and the bank, and I got the boat. No one else even made a bid. I guess they thought that since I had taken such an interest, I ought to get it. Or maybe they didn't want to have Terry Tuapotu and his cousins to deal with."

That night Martin told me that Terry's statement hit him like a hammer. He had never given much thought to how his fun-loving antics had affected the everyday lives of "normal" people back then, he just rolled from one good time to the next.

The fishing pole bent over hard, and the drag sang out. "Fish on!" shouted Winston.

Sonny jumped up, grabbed the pole and set the hook. "It looks like a nice yellow fin tuna."

He held the rod up and turned to Martin and me. "Who wants to reel in the dinner?"

Martin grinned and raised his hand. "I'll do it."

Sonny handed Martin the rod saying, "Just keep the rod tip up and bring the line in when you can. Try to keep all the slack out of the line with the reel."

Martin stuck the butt of the pole in his belt and struggled to bring the fish toward the boat. "Joseph, see if you can find my camera and get a picture of this."

The fish jumped and fought for a few minutes, but it was no match for the rod and reel. Martin brought it along side, and Sonny gaffed it and lifted the wildly flopping fish onto the deck. Winston handed Sonny a hatchet handle, and Sonny whacked the fish on the head three times. The two and a half foot fish lay motionless at our feet. I maneuvered for a picture. "Well done," said Winston.

Terry said, "Sonny, why don't you clean the fish while Winston gets the grill ready. I'm sure our guests would like some fresh yellow fin."

“Where I come from,” said Martin, “if you catch it, you clean it. Maybe Sonny could just show me where to go with it, and I’ll do it.”

Terry nodded at Sonny and said, “If that is what you would like to do, that is fine, but we don’t make our customers clean their own fish on The Tangaroa.”

Sonny retrieved a large piece of plywood and led Martin toward the side of the boat. Martin picked the fish up by the gills and set it on the board, while Sonny went below and came back with a filleting knife. Sonny said, “Hold it by the head and press it against the board. Then put the knife behind its head and cut down toward the backbone.”

Martin grabbed the fish and did as Sonny suggested. As he started to put pressure on the knife, the fish flopped wildly.

“Oh, shit!” Martin yelled. He dropped the knife and let go of the fish. He clamped his right hand over his left and bent over screaming. “Oh, fuck! Jesus, I cut the shit out of my hand.”

Blood was pouring out between the clenched fingers of Martin’s right hand. Sonny took the knife and stuck it through the head of the still-moving fish, pinning it to the plywood. Winston dashed below and came back on deck with the first-aid kit and a couple of towels. Winston turned to Sonny, “Go below and get some fresh water.”

He bent over Martin and said, “Let go for just a second and let me see the cut.”

Martin moved his right hand away from his left. Blood flowed freely, revealing a deep two-inch gash on the back of his left hand. It ran from the knuckle of the index finger down toward the thumb. Winston picked up a towel, folded it, and pressed it hard onto the wound saying, “Hold it tightly, Martin.”

“Damn,” said Martin, “I thought that fish was dead.”

Sonny said, “Oh, Martin, I am sorry. I thought I had killed the fish.”

“It’s not your fault, man,” said Martin. “It was a rookie mistake. I’m the one who used the knife.” He continued to bend over, pressing his right hand over his left.

A few minutes later Winston peeked under the towel again. Blood was still flowing from the cut, but not as quickly as before. “We are going to have to clean this

and stitch it up. The only pain killer we have is morphine.”

Martin took a slow breath. “Just do it. I’d rather have the pain for a few minutes than take morphine.”

“Let’s leave the pressure on for a few more minutes, and then we’ll do it. Let me look at your fingers.”

Martin held out his hand and Winston examined it. “Can you wiggle all your fingers?”

Martin wiggled his fingers. “No problem.”

“Good,” said Winston, putting his hand on Martin’s shoulder. “Your hand should be fine. But if you haven’t had a tetanus shot lately, you might get one when we get to Aitutake.”

Martin winked at Winston. “Yes, doctor.”

I asked Winston if there was anything I could do.

“No, this is not such a big problem. Just messy, really.”

Terry said, “Sonny, will you finish up with the fish and clean up the deck?”

Sonny got busy.

Winston picked up the water bottle that Sonny had brought up. “This is going to sting, but not for long.” He motioned for Martin to remove the towel, then he poured some water over the cut. Winston then dipped a cotton probe in a bottle of disinfectant and turned to Martin. He pulled back the flap of skin and cleaned the tissue with the swab. Martin flinched but didn’t say anything.

“It’s a clean cut, and no major vessels are involved. I will stitch it and bandage it, and then we will be done. You are very brave, Martin.”

“What you ought to say is that I’m stupid, but thanks.”

Winston poured some disinfectant on a clean towel and told Martin to press it against his wound while he prepared the needle for the sutures. “I’ve seen Dr. Ritoa do this, but I have never done it myself. You are my first real patient.”

I said, “Aren’t you going to ask him about his health insurance?”

Martin laughed. Winston looked up. "I don't understand."

"Never mind, I'm thinking like an American."

Winston had Martin put his hand on the deck, and then he began stitching up the cut. It took twelve stitches, which Winston did deftly. Martin watched and remarked, "It's not as painful as I thought it would be. Mostly just a shock from the cut and all the blood."

Winston put on the bandage and said, "You should be fine. Just keep it clean and dry and see a doctor in a week or so to take the stitches out."

Martin took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Thanks, man. You're a real pro."

Winston beamed as he packed up the first-aid kit. "I am glad I could help. Wait 'til I tell Dr. Ritoa."

I was sitting by the wheel. Martin got up and moved over by me saying, "Shit can happen so fast, man. Unreal. One minute you're having the time of your life, next minute you're bleeding like a pig."

"Sounds familiar," I said.

By now the sun was low in the sky and the towering cumulus to the east were taking on an orange-gold hue. The five of us sat quietly, recovering from the drama and drawing in the last of the light.

Terry broke the silence, "How does grilled yellow fin sound to everyone? Winston, will you get a fire going?"

I said, "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"You are our guests," said Terry. "You don't need to help."

"Honestly, I'd feel more at home if I did, if you don't mind? And I promise I won't cut my arm off."

"Alright, if you'd like to help, I am sure Winston can find a job for you."

Winston got me started cutting up some fruit, and then he lit the grill and began preparing the fish.

I asked him if he remembered the sorts of problems he had trouble with on the entrance exam.

“A lot of them were about triangles and circles and solving for  $x$  in long equations. I had seen some of that in our books, but I couldn’t make much sense out of it.”

I stopped cutting and looked out at the rolling sea, “I used to teach those sorts of things in America. I’d be happy to help you with some problems and show you what I can.”

Winston smiled broadly and dropped a piece of tuna on the grill. “I would be very grateful, Joseph, thank you.”

When the food was prepared, Winston carried two plates on deck—one for Martin and one for me. It was clear that the two of us were to eat first, while the Polynesians waited. No amount of protesting by Martin or me would get them to change their minds and eat, so, feeling very awkward and self-conscious, the two of us ate while the three Polynesians carried on with other shipboard duties. In fact it was dark before the three crewmen finally ate.

After everyone had eaten, we again sat around the wheel, with Terry standing on a small platform behind the wheel looking out to the sea and stars and steering with his feet. Martin told me later that he watched the compass and noticed that Terry’s heading never changed by more than a degree or two. “The guy’s a master,” he kept telling me.

Sonny came up from below with an old guitar. He sat on the cabin roof idly tuning the instrument. When he was satisfied, he began strumming a chord with a soft rhythm. Terry and Winston swayed slightly with the tempo, and then with startling force, Terry sang a Polynesian phrase with a huge, round, baritone. He was immediately answered by Winston and Sonny in a higher, softer harmony. From there the voices wound around one another in an intricate and beautiful fashion. At times the two higher voices would stop, and Terry would sing a few bass notes and then hold the last one, while the other two came over the top with a harmony. At other times Terry would come



up an octave, and the three would sing a close harmony.

Both Martin and I sat transfixed, stunned, the hair on our arms and necks standing straight out. When the song was finished Martin said, "I think I'm in heaven. That's the most beautiful thing I have ever heard. I didn't know humans could do that. Blown away, man, I am totally blown away."

All I could do was nod my head and smile. I was thinking, *this has got to be one of the best moments in my life. Incredible fresh fish and fruit, this beautiful boat under an infinity of stars, guided by this mythic Polynesian, and now this music. God, could I just stop the time for a while?*

Sonny said, "You like that, aye? Nothing like that in America?"

I nodded, "Like that? No. Nothing."

Sonny continued. "I like American music, but it seems to come from the head and the lips, and not from the soul."

Martin said, "You're onto something there, man. That sound was as real as a grisly bear. I could put my arms around it. I could get inside it. It had life. How'd you guys do that?"

They all laughed, and I asked what the song was about.

Winston said, "It's about a young boy who lost his way at sea and washed up on an unknown island, where he fell in love with a beautiful princess. But the queen did not like the boy and turned him into a dog."

"So does he end up marrying the princess?" asked Martin.

"No, he's a dog," said Terry, looking over the bow and moving the wheel slightly with his foot. "Why would a princess marry a dog? The moral is: Don't get lost."

I rubbed my hands together and looked down at my feet trying not to laugh.

Martin began to say something, then stopped. A moment later he said, "Speaking of getting lost, Terry, I notice you haven't done a star-shot with a sextant or anything, how do you know where we are right now?"

Terry looked from side to side, then over at Martin. "I am looking at the stars

and the pattern of the swells. They show the way. If we steer like this we will be near Aitutaki in the morning. We will start to see the frigate birds about ten hours before we sight land, and later the boobies. They fly straight from their home island to their fishing grounds at sea. If we see them in the morning, we will steer in the direction they came from. If we watch them in the evening, we will follow them home. They will show us the way. This is a short and easy trip. My ancestors could travel back and forth from Hawaii to Tahiti.”

I said, “When my ancestors still thought the earth was flat, yours were navigating vast distances by the stars.”

Terry said, “That’s right. But the art of navigation is dying with our young people now. None of them want to learn the old ways.” Terry turned to Winston and said, “What is the star path to Aitutake, Winston?”

The boy sat down next to me. He smiled at his father and said, “When Merak stands above Dubhe, we steer beneath them.”

Terry nodded and smiled. He said, “That’s right, but Merak and Dubhe are the Western names. What would your grandfather have called those stars?”

Winston looked thoughtful for a second, “Dubhe is Ana-Tipu. Merak...I don’t remember.”

Terry called down to Sonny, who was in the galley, “Do you know the name of that star, Sonny?”

Sonny called up from below, “No, captain, I don’t remember anymore.”

Winston said, “You know, father, if you bought a Loran, it would tell you the course and distance to anywhere. Day or night. Rain or shine. You don’t have to do it the old way anymore.”

Sonny was just coming up the companionway with a tray of fruit. He heard Winston and paused half-way through the hatch. He looked across at Terry, then smiled and shook his head. Sonny handed me the tray and said, “Maybe you better tighten your hat, because the wind is about to blow from the father to the son.”

Terry said, “Your ancestors could sail a thousand miles and find a tiny island just by reading the sky and the swells, the sun and the birds. In those days the navigator was superior to the king. These are the things a father passes to his son. Are we to throw all that away now because a little radio makes things easier? The modern world will come and go, but our people will be here forever. Are we to discard the knowledge that has made us great?”

Winston shook his head and lowered his gaze. Sonny went back below, and Winston followed him.

I was puzzled by the description of the starpath to Aitutake. I thought about it, and then after a minute I said, “Merak and Dubhe are the two stars at the end of the Big Dipper. They point to Polaris, the North Star. When Merak is above Dubhe, they lie due north, pointing down toward Polaris. But you can’t *see* Polaris from this latitude. It’s below the northern horizon.”

Terry said, “That’s right. We can’t see the pole star, but we navigate by it nevertheless. In fact we have a name for the unseen star. It is called Ana-Ni’a.”

Martin was amazed by this. “Ana-Ni’a,” he said. “That is so cool. You can’t see the star, but you navigate by it anyway. Unreal, man, that is totally unreal. You just made this whole trip worthwhile for me.” He turned to me and said, “It’s like faith. Belief in something you can’t see. They steer by something that is invisible.”

I agreed. It is amazing. And thinking about it now, it’s no wonder Martin was attracted to his new boat, The Ana-Ni’a.

Later that night, Martin asked Terry if he had a sextant. “I’d like to take some star shots just for the hell of it, if you wouldn’t mind.”

Terry had Winston bring up the sextant. He said, “I didn’t know you were a sailor, Martin.”

“It was years ago,” said Martin. “I just wondered if I could still do it.”

Winston, Martin, and I took the sextant up to the bow and started sighting in

stars and talking about the night sky. I'd never been south of the equator before, and I was fascinated by the souther stars.

I told them about how things were for me as a kid. My situation was something like Winston's. My father was a celestial navigator. I remember he would take me outside on cold winter nights and point to the stars with a flashlight. I'd stand there shivering, my boney knees banging together, and he say, "That's Betelgeuse, that's Deneb," and on and on. Seemed like he had a story for each one. Some Greek mythology, some war stories from his days as a pilot in the Navy in WWII. And he had some good stories. Things I'd love to hear again now. Stories about being out over the Pacific, five hundred miles from land, caught beneath an overcast and needing a star-shot to find the way back to some impossibly small island. I remember him telling me about a break in the clouds that let him get a shot at Rigel with his sextant. It was enough to establish a course back to Eniwetok. "It's amazing we weren't all killed," he used to say. I'd love to have had him on that boat with us.

I said, "Do you know that if you hold your hand out, the area behind your thumb covers a thousand galaxies, and each galaxy has about two hundred billion stars?"

Martin held his hand out to the sky and squinted. "That is absolutely mindfucking," he said.

Winston stared up at the sky and said, "Do you think there are people on those other stars?"

"Odds are there's life out there alright, but nobody knows for sure," I said.

We stood quietly on the deck for a good long time. Water splashing on the hull. I felt sleep overtaking me and announced that I was going below. Martin followed me aft. We said "goodnight" to Terry and Sonny, went below, and collapsed into our beds. The boat held us like a mother in her arms and rocked us off to sleep.

We arose early the next morning to find Sonny at the wheel and Winston sitting by his side. After sunrise Terry had gone below for a nap leaving instructions to be

awakened when Aitutaki came into sight. Martin and I poured some coffee and sat like lizards in the morning sun. I hadn't slept that well in weeks. The sea was like molten glass. No one spoke for a long time. Sonny smiled and pointed to a pair of brown boobies flying low over the water. We were steering in the direction from which they came.

## Aitutake

A little before noon Sonny said, “Martin, look at the cloud just above the horizon up ahead.”

Martin looked.

Sonny said, “Do you notice the greenish color on the bottom?”

Martin raised his sunglasses. He squinted at the cloud and then looked at another cloud to make a comparison. “Yeah, it’s a little greener than the others. What’s up?”

Sonny said, “That is the reflection of the lagoon at Aitutake.”

Martin smiled and thumped me on the back. “Unfucking real,” he said.

Forty minutes later Sonny pointed and said, “There is Maungapu, the big hill on the main island.”

Winston went below to get Terry, while I asked Sonny about Aitutaki. “What’s your home island like, Sonny?”

“Well, it is the most beautiful place in the Pacific. Almost everyone lives on the big island on the northwest corner of the atoll. Then there are many uninhabited motus, little islands, strung like pearls around the lagoon, which is maybe five kilometers wide and ten kilometers long. The people grow coconuts and bananas or work for the hotels and restaurants or little businesses. It’s a good place. You will like it.”

Terry came on deck and wished everyone a good morning. He asked Martin about his hand, and Martin told him that his hand felt fine. Terry looked at the island and checked the sea and wind with a sweeping glance.

The passage from the open ocean into the lagoon is done at Arutanga, and it is narrow and tricky, with large waves breaking on the reef all around as the boat slips through. Martin watched Terry bring the boat in with consummate skill. Once inside the lagoon, they motored over to a buoy near the Arutanga wharf and tied up.

Shutting down the engine, Terry said, “We’ll stay here tonight, and tomorrow

we will sail the lagoon and visit some of the beautiful motus.”

That evening, Martin and I took the dinghy ashore, picked up some food at Big Jay’s, and had dinner sitting by the wharf listening to the small waves lap up on the shore and watching the light change in the western sky.

“Man, I love those guys in the crew,” I said. “What characters. I had no idea it would be like this.”

“I’ll tell you one thing, Terry can handle that boat. I would sail anywhere with him at the wheel. I’ve never seen anyone so at home on the water. Steering at night with his eye to the sky and his foot on the wheel like that. Unfuckingreal.”

“And that music,” I said. “Celestial. And Winston, what a cool kid. Did you pay attention to how calm he was when he stitched you up? Giving orders to Sonny and all. You can tell he respects his father completely, but at the same time I think he is trying to set off on his own course, being a doctor, needling his old man to join the twentieth century. And I’m not sure what Terry thinks about that. It would be pretty cool if the kid pulled it off, though. His heart is definitely in the right place.”

“He did a number on my hand, I’ll tell you. Dove right in, man. Never flinched.” Martin held up his hand and turned it around. “To tell you the truth, I can hardly feel it now.”

“Yeah, that was neat. You should have seen Terry watching while Winston did that. He was surprised. And he was proud of that kid.”

“And Terry is a piece of work, man. You can tell he is smart as a whip and doesn’t take shit from nobody.” Martin dropped his voice an octave, imitating Terry, “Why would a princess want to marry a dog?” Martin laughed and mocked himself, “Jeez, yeah, I guess I dunno, Terry. Probably not, huh?” He shook his head. “Fuck, I felt like a three-year-old.”

When Martina and I got back to the boat, Terry, Winston, and Sonny were gone. They had left a note saying that they would spend the night ashore with Sonny’s cousins.

Martin and I sat on deck listening to the music drift over the water from the Rapae Cottage Hotel.

The night sky was stunning. Martin brought a cushion up from the salon and lay on his back in the cockpit looking up at the stars. I'd been thinking all day about the way my father and I used to stand out in the yard looking at the stars. I had a phrase rattling around in my head that sounded like a song. I went below and got Sonny's guitar, then I sat in the cockpit with Martin trying to get the words to fit with some chord changes. Martin took an interest as I pulled it together. After a dozen false starts, I had this:

With a light in his hand  
and a spark in his eye  
he pointed at Rigel and smiled  
He said, "That fine star  
once brought me home  
to a tiny island  
in a phosphorous foam."

It was a star in a broken sky  
at the foot of the hunter  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man  
in flight.

Martin liked my song. He told me to work on it. To tell my story. I got a pencil and paper from below and wrote down what I had so far, but I was too tired to get it to move any further forward. After a while I gave up, and the two of us just sat together



listening to the harbor sounds and watching the stars arc into the western ocean.

We awoke the next morning to the sound of strange voices on deck. It was Terry, Winston, and Sonny together with two other young Polynesian men and four tourists. When Martin and I came up on deck, we were introduced to a pair of tubby, sunburnt, middle-aged women, who were teachers from England, and a young French couple that either couldn't or wouldn't speak English. The teachers were a good natured, giddy pair. They were loudly dressed and obviously in awe of their Polynesian-god tour guides. The French couple was lean, tan, and carefully dressed, like they had just stepped out of a magazine picture. They oozed a cultivated, practiced boredom. The plan was for all of us to sail down the lagoon to One Foot Island for the day.

As we sailed down the lagoon, Terry played the role of tour guide, lecturing on the history and mythology of the islands to the tourists gathered around the wheel. At the same time Sonny prepared some fishing lines to troll the lagoon for lunch. The ancient myth has it that warriors from Aitutaki stole the top from the mountain on Rarotonga and brought it to Aitutaki. In the more recent past, Captain Bligh visited Aitutaki in 1789 just seventeen days before the mutiny, and the U. S. was there in World War II building the airport and the wharf. The English ladies were captivated by Terry and asked a lot of questions. The French couple, carrying their boredom like an anvil, wandered off to the bow and stretched out in the sun.

“Was there fighting here during the war?” asked one of the ladies.

“According to my father, all the fighting was between the drunken Americans and the Aitutaki men,” said Sonny. He pushed a chunk of fish onto a fishhook and threw the line over the stern.

The little motus bordering the lagoon are places of unparalleled, idyllic South Sea beauty—coconut palms grow to within ten feet of the water, the sand is like powdered sugar, the water is clear, warm, and, in places, full of life and color. We anchored off Tekapua and rowed ashore four at a time in the dinghy. On Tekapua, Sonny

gracefully climbed a fifty foot coconut tree, knocked down a couple of coconuts, and had them opened and parceled out to the group in the blink of an eye.

The French couple watched this stunt with some interest, and then the French woman said something in French that prompted a short conversation between the two. She was laughing, and he waving his arms and talking quickly. The Frenchman got up brusquely and stalked into the jungle. Terry watched out of the corner of his eye and smiled.

I couldn't resist the water. I put on a mask and snorkel and swam out into the lagoon. The water was perfect—blue/green, clear, and eighty degrees. I began to swim away from the shore and fell into a perfect pace. I hadn't had any exercise in days, and the exertion together with the stunning beauty brought on a rush of well-being. I swam and swam, unwilling to let the feeling go. When I finally stopped and looked around, I was well out past The Tangaroa and the view back toward the little islands, with the beautiful boat lying at anchor in the foreground, was remarkable. I paused to paste it into my mental scrapbook and then swam around the boat and back to the group on the beach.

They were sitting around a small fire, with the crew just finishing preparing lunch. Winston had been watching me in the water.

“You're a great swimmer, Joseph. One minute you were here, and then I looked and you were way out past The Tangaroa.”

“I couldn't stop. I've never been in water so beautiful. But I didn't see much life. I expected there would be more fish.”

Winston said, “That's because you were swimming over a sandy bottom, and there is nothing for the fish to eat and nowhere for them to hide. After lunch you might walk to the other side of the motu and look there. You will be amazed.”

One of the English ladies said, “Did you see any sharks?” And turning to Terry she said, “Are there sharks in the water here?”

Terry smiled and said, “Oh, yes. There are lots of sharks. You should never swim outside the reef within two weeks of a big storm, because then the sharks are in a

feeding frenzy.”

The lady from England screwed up her face in a way she probably thought was cute and asked how the sharks know there is a storm coming two weeks ahead. Terry stopped cutting papaya for a moment. He looked unfocused out into the lagoon, and the shadow of a smile crossed his face.

Just then the Frenchman came back into the group and sat down by his wife. There were long scratches on his chest and a little blood. She seemed somewhat sympathetic, but unable to hold back a laugh. He got mad and walked down the beach alone.

Terry handed me a plate of fruit, rice, and barbequed fish. He said, “It isn’t easy to climb a coconut tree.”

I looked down the beach at the retreating Frenchman and laughed. Even Terry dropped his hard-assed stance for a minute and grinned.

Martin, who hadn’t been paying much attention, asked what was going on, and I told him that it looked like the Frenchman had scraped himself up trying to climb a coconut tree like Sonny had done.

Martin seemed nonplused. I said, “Well, I guess you had to be there.”

“I *was* there, asshole.”

I was still laughing. I said, “Well, you was and you wasn’t.”

I was beginning to see Terry as a high priest in a cult that is dedicated to condescending and sadistic indifference toward outsiders, which seemed to include almost everyone except his 2000 cousins. That really just made Terry a misanthrope who has granted a few exceptions, and I could definitely relate to that.

As Terry picked up the dishes and put out the fire, one of the English ladies asked what kind of fish they had just eaten. Terry might have sensed that he now had a sympathetic audience in me and said it was “sea fish.” There was not even the hint of a grin. Later he explained that the sharks there were “sea sharks.” All of this tickled a little giggle in me, and Terry and I began to pass a secret laugh between us.

After lunch Martin, Winston, and I walked across the little island. Winston and I were going to snorkel along the coral walls inside the reef. Martin was going to sit on the beach. Three hundred yards off shore, the ocean was dark blue and foamy, but inside the reef it was tranquil and green. As soon as we slipped into the water, we entered another world. Fish of every imaginable shape and color and pattern moved busily about. Some in schools, some alone. Some moved confidently through the open water. Some had backed into tiny caves and peeked out at the passing world, only to dart out of sight with every passing shadow. The two of us cruised along the walls pointing to the endless sights.

When we got back to the lunch site, Sonny was bringing the dinghy back for us, and everyone else was already aboard The Tangaroa ready to sail back to the wharf. By late afternoon we were once again tied to the buoy at Arutanga. Martin and I stood on deck offering a half-hearted farewell, as Sonny's two cousins loaded the four tourists into the Boston Whaler. As the little boat idled toward shore, Terry shouted, "La prochaine fois, je te montrerai comment grimper a un arbre."

The couple look at each other in shock, and the man yelled, "Il n'y aura pas de prochaine fois!"

I looked at Terry and said, "What was that all about? I didn't know you spoke French."

Terry said, "You didn't ask, and neither did they. I worked in Tahiti for a year and learned some French. I told them that I would give them a tree climbing lesson next time, and they said there won't be a next time. That sounds good to me. The damn French are a plague on the Pacific."

Terry seemed steamed, and neither Martin nor I wanted to explore the subject any further at that moment.

The plan for the night was for all five of us to go down to the Rapae Cottage Hotel for the "Island Night." So after we cleaned up, we rode the dinghy ashore and then piled into Sonny's Toyota pickup for the brief ride up to the Rapae Cottage. Terry suggested that Martin and I have dinner across the street at Ralphie's Bar and Grill,

which we did. True to form, I instantly fell in love with the twenty-year-old waitress. I tried to order peanut butter and jellyfish.

By the time we got over to the Rapae, the joint was jumpin', as they used to say. The Island Night is a regular Friday night event on Aitutaki. There is a buffet of fabulous local food, a wide-open noisy bar, and a band on the stage playing anything from rock 'n' roll to gorgeous traditional native *a capella*. The crowd is an even mix of locals and tourists. Brightly dressed local matriarchs seated at the picnic tables in the open-air hall, presiding over the assembled children, grandchildren, cousins, aunts, and uncles. Beautiful young Polynesian women who float through the crowd like apparitions and then drift to the stage as if on a whim and sing or dance like goddesses. Sullen, muscular Polynesian men sitting in small groups drinking beer. Pink-faced tourists in starchy-new Hawaiian shirts. Dollar-a-day hippie-wanna-be campers up from their sand-filled sleeping bags on the beach for their once-a-week splurge. Rich clean American families with the perfect parents exposing the perfect kids to the rest of the world.

Martin and I found an out of the way corner where we could see the stage and watch this strange human gumbo come to a slow boil. We were both completely captivated by the native music. At one point the stage nearly filled with Polynesians of all ages, and they performed a couple of songs from a native play. Two of the children, with voices as pure as ringing crystal, sang the lead together in an unbelievable wandering harmony, and they would be joined at various times by all the rest singing with the power and range of an orchestra. It was other-worldly. With the soft tropical air drifting through the hall, the summer sky still holding a hint of silver to the west, and the little native children spinning in small groups on the dance floor, both Martin and I felt as if we had floated free from the world we once thought we knew.

When the play ended, the band came back on stage, and the drummer began to lay down a funky rock beat that instantly brought a crowd out to the dance floor. The bass player jumped in for a few measures and then the guitar, playing an angry, snarling improvised lead. Something in Martin clicked, and he rose up onto his tiptoes. The guitar

player and another singer went to the mic, and with sweat dripping into their eyes and veins bulging in their necks, they sang: “Was it him/with the gun in his coat/or was it you/when you laughed at that joke...” It was “Who Done It?”, the song that Martin wrote the night of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination. The song that had started it all so many years ago. Martin’s jaw dropped. He stood transfixed. There must have been a torrent of memories and emotions coursing through him. It wasn’t my song, and even I could feel it. Not sentences, but feelings. Feelings of the sheer energy reaching through time and space from Martin on the night he wrote the song to the people here now. Feelings of a creation that bursts right through you from nowhere, but surely from somewhere. Feelings of nostalgia and longing for a world that didn’t really exist, but maybe could have. Feelings of the flow of time.

I looked at Martin and sensed the power of this moment for him. It’s not easy for me to touch people, but I moved behind Martin and squeezed his shoulders with both hands on either side of his neck. When the song ended, Martin asked if I would mind going back to the boat.

On the way out, a drunken native stepped in front of us and stood deliberately blocking our way through a crowded door. He stared malevolently for a moment and then stepped aside. As we passed, he said, “Fuck you, tourist motherfuckers.”

We pretended not to hear and walked in silence back to the wharf, hoping there wouldn’t be any further trouble.

There wasn’t. At the wharf, we untied the dinghy and rowed out to The Tangaroa.

I went to the ice chest and got a bottle of wine. I stood in the cabin and drank two large glasses as fast as I could, while Martin sat up on the deck. Then I peeled off my cloths, walked up to the deck, and dove into the lagoon. I swam parallel to the shoreline for a few hundred yards and then rolled on my back and floated in the buoyant water staring up at the countless stars. After a few minutes, I swam back toward the boat, keeping my head up so I could take in the sights and sounds and smells.

After putting on some shorts, I went up on deck and sat next to Martin, who reached his arm out and said, “A thousand galaxies behind my thumb. Is that what you said?” I nodded. “Fucking amazing, isn’t it? Kind of makes things shrink down to size, don’t you think?”

I didn’t respond.

Martin went below and came back with Sonny’s guitar. He tuned it to a double-dropped D and began strumming a minor chord. I sat in silence and listened to the birth of a song. In thirty minutes, Martin had it roughed out and sang it through.

I sit on the deck in the dead of the night  
with my arm stretched out to the sky  
amazed to think that behind my thumb  
a thousand galaxies fly.

Your trouble can look so small  
when you think of the scope of it all.  
And it makes you feel so tall  
to know you’re a part of it all.

Each one of these galaxies  
has 200 billion stars.  
And here and there around those suns  
spins a world like ours.

Your trouble can look so small  
when you think of the scope of it all.  
And it makes you feel so tall  
to know you’re a part of it all.

I can't imagine the point of it all  
is to hold the perfect job,  
to make all the money to buy the toys  
or to find the perfect love.

And I can't imagine the point of it all  
is to elect the best man king,  
or invent a TV with a million channels  
that all say the same damn thing.

And I can't imagine the point of it all  
is to see the Dodgers win,  
or to save the trails or free the snails  
given the space we're in.

It makes me feel so small  
to think of the scope of it all.  
And it makes me feel so tall  
to know I'm a part of it all.

When Martin finished, I said, "I like it, Martin, really. Maybe your songwriting days aren't over after all. It's got such a cool flow to it, too."

"Thanks, man. Must be the magic boat."

"Well, it's something else," I said, "but I don't think it's the boat. One thing though, the environmentalists aren't going to like the bit about the snails."

"That's too fucking bad. They need to listen to the words. The point isn't that saving a trail or a snail is a bad thing, anymore than having a job to provide for your



family is a bad thing. It's that you can't start thinking that these things are your whole life. You need wonder. You need to strive for the bigger picture."

"Amen, brother."

We sat in silence for a while. I fumbled around trying to come up with a new verse for my song, but I didn't get anywhere. Feeling the soporific effect of the wine, I decided to turn in. Martin followed shortly, and we both fell off to sleep with the sound of the Rappae Cottage Island Night drifting over the water and the feel of the slow rocking of The Tangaroa in the changing tide.

I awakened the next morning to the sound of Terry, Sonny, Winston, and Martin laughing on deck. My head hurt from the wine. I came up from below in my underwear yawning and scratching.

Martin walked up close to me and grinned. "Hey, fuckhead, how do you feel? Terry's got a cool plan. What do you say we go outside the reef right away and do a scuba dive, then head on back toward Rarotonga?"

I rubbed my head. "I just need a minute to throw up and I'll be ready. Two glasses of wine and I feel like shit. I must be getting old."

"I guess a person's got to learn that lesson 500 times, amigo, and you're only at 490," said Martin.

As this exchange was going on, the crew was bringing The Tangaroa through the passage in the reef and getting out the dive gear. A southeast wind was pushing water into the south end of the lagoon, and the water was then flowing quickly out the passage to the west. Once we were caught in the current, it carried us along at five or six knots, and large coral obstructions passed by quick and close. Sonny told us that many a boat has gone down there. Again Martin watched Terry's deft touch with *The Tangeroa*. Once through the passage, we motored to a nearby dive site and dropped anchor.

Sonny stayed on deck, while the rest of us got into the scuba gear and went into the water. The boat was anchored in about 50 feet of water on a coral shelf that sloped

downward toward an underwater cliff that dropped off into a trench about 5000 feet deep. Over the coral shelf, the colors were green and white and yellow, but looking toward the drop-off, it was purple/blue. Visibility was about 150 feet.

Terry and Winston seemed to think that Martin and I wanted to look at the coral and the little fish, but we were attracted to something else. We swam to the rim of the underwater cliff and stared over the edge into the deep blue abyss. What a sensation to float weightlessly at the edge of such a thing, feeling like angles maneuvering in zero gravity. We waited in vain for some kind of monster to swim up from the depths. Nothing came, and we returned to the surface.

## Back to Rarotonga

Back on deck Martin and I rinsed in fresh water, dried off, and got dressed, while the crew got the boat ready to set sail for Rarotonga. After a few minutes The Tangaroa was heeled over in a fresh breeze and cutting nicely through a low rolling sea. When the work was done, we gathered around the wheel. The sun felt good after the chill from the deep water.

It took Martin a few minutes to muster up the courage, but he finally asked, “Terry, could I have a few minutes at the wheel? It’s been a long time, but I used to sail, and I’d just like to feel it again.”

“Go ahead, Martin, give it a try,” said Terry, getting up and holding the wheel for Martin. “You see how the swell is coming from the starboard quarter?”

Martin looked off to the right and then nodded at Terry.

“Just hold your course so it stays this way.”

Martin took the wheel and checked the compass. He was heading due south. He looked up at the taut, full sails and out at the approaching swells.

“What sort of boat did you have, Martin?” asked Winston.

“Well, it was...a lot like this one, but not as nice.”

Terry stood looking off the stern, judging the current. “What kind of work do you do back in America, Martin?” he said.

“I used to be a baseball player,” said Martin. “And I wrote a book once, or helped somebody else write it actually. Now I guess I don’t work at all.”

“You played baseball for money?” said Sonny.

“Yeah, for the Los Angeles Dodgers.”

Terry sat down in the cockpit. He took a papaya out of the ice chest and began cutting it up. “My cousin went to Los Angeles once,” he said, “and he went to a baseball game. You should hear him tell the story. He never saw so many people at once before.

When they cheered, he said it sounded like a hurricane. But after a while it started to rain. They stopped the game, and everybody went home. Very strange, he thought. How could the players quit, when so many people had come to see them? Were they afraid of the rain? Why did the people see them as heroes when they ran inside like children? I used to play rugby, that's why my nose looks so strange. We'd play in rain so hard you couldn't see across the field. Mud up to our ankles."

Martin told me later that he was thinking, "Who is this guy, and why is he breaking my balls like this?" But he said, "I remember my father trying to get me to relax before a big game. He would say, 'Do your best, but remember it's only a game. They don't even play it in the rain'."

"A wise man, your father."

Martin nodded. "Yeah, he was a wise man. And you're right, it is strange that they quit when it rains. I only played for a few years, and then I gave it up. I was 25 years old and I had played the game for 20 years, it was time to get on to something else."

I broke in, "Terry, what was going on between you and the French couple yesterday?"

Terry finished cutting the papaya and stuck the knife in the cutting board. He looked at his big hands as he rubbed them together. "Maybe I was unfair to them. I don't really know what sort of people those two are, but I confess that I don't like the French nation. The French government has no right to be in the Pacific. They test their nuclear bombs in the Tuamotu group, even though the native islanders from everywhere have begged them not to. How would they feel if I tested a bomb in France? Not so good, I bet. They set off underground explosions and dump their nuclear waste in Moruroa, and it is leaking into the ocean. They have no respect for land or sea or people. So-called 'French Polynesia' is their dump and also their playground. Any Frenchman can come and go as he pleases, the native islanders can not even say who can come or who must go. And their behavior in New Caledonia is an outrage. There the French took 90 percent of the land to steal the nickel, copper, and cobalt. The natives work like slaves to pay their taxes

to the French and are massacred if they try to throw the French out.” He pulled the knife out of the cutting board and stuck it in again. “Don’t get me started on this subject, it is a nasty one for me.”

I asked, “How are things on your home island?”

“Better than most, I must say. We were under New Zealand law until 1965. Since then we have been self-governing, though we are still citizens of New Zealand, which is fine. And the government of New Zealand contributes money. The New Zealanders are not citizens here, so we can say who comes and who doesn’t. Things are better here than most Pacific islands.”

Martin said, “How do you feel about the tourists?”

“I’ve thought much about this,” said Terry. “And I really have a hard time knowing what I think. It would be nice if the islanders could live here in peace, without the tourists. This is our home. We belong here by ourselves. And some of the tourists show no respect for our ways or our history. But also I have met some fine tourists. I have shown them my home, and I have learned about theirs. These are good things. I know that. And the tourists bring money to the islands, and we need the money to survive. Without the tourists like you, I would not be doing what I am doing now. I love what I do, and I love this boat.”

Martin shook his head without comment then stood up and motioned Terry back to the wheel saying, “She’s all yours, captain.”

Terry moved to the wheel and checked the angle of the approaching swells, “You don’t seem to have forgotten how to handle a sailboat, Martin.”

We fell silent for a time, with the five of us sitting around the wheel. After while Martin said, “I loved my old boat. Some days I’d leave the house and go down to the harbor to sleep in the boat, just to be with it. To look at the woodwork. To polish the brass. To roll the charts out on the chart table and dream. To spend the night in the cabin with Stephanie and wake up to the gulls.”

Terry nodded. No one spoke.

After while I said, “Winston, what do you say you and I go below and look at some of your mathematics?”

Winston looked pleased. “I though you might have forgotten, and I didn’t want to disturb your vacation. But if you’d like, maybe we could go below and I’ll show you what I was doing.”

I followed Winston down and took a seat at the table. Winston brought a pencil and paper and sat down next to me.

I asked, “Do you remember the sort of problems you were having trouble with?”

“Triangles, circles, circles inside of triangles...those sorts of things.”

I drew a triangle and said, “If this angle is 90 degrees, this side is 3, and this one is 4, can you tell me what the length of the hypotenuse, the longest side, is?”

“I remember that. The square of the hypotenuse is equal to the sum of the squares of the other two sides.” He scribbled with a pencil for a minute and said, “Three squared is nine. Four squared is sixteen. Nine and sixteen is twenty five. And the square root of twenty five is five. So the answer is five!” He was beaming.

“Perfect,” I said. “You have learned some things. Now, do you know *why* that is true? Can you show me why that formula works?”

Winston shook his head. “I don’t understand.”

“You just used the Pythagorean theorem, an ancient formula that says that the square of the hypotenuse equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides. But how did Pythagoras know that? How did he figure it out? How did he convince other people that this formula was exactly right and would work with any right triangle?”

Winston turned his head to the side and smiled. “I don’t know. Can you show me? I’d love to know.”

Echoing my father’s words to me all those years ago, I said, “It must have been incredible to have lived in Greece back then. To see those giants like Pythagoras or Euclid discovering these sorts of things. Drawing in the sand with a stick. These men were brilliant. They were giants. We stand on their shoulders. When you use that formula

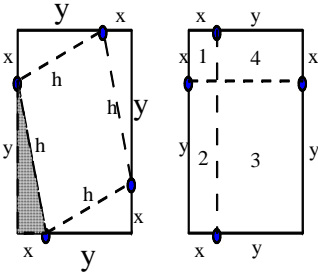
to figure the length of cable you need to fix the top of the mast to the bow, you stand on their shoulders.”

I drew two squares side by side and said, “Suppose these squares are the same size.”

Winston nodded.

On the left square I marked four points, one on each side of the square as you see here, and I said, “Suppose each point is placed so that its distance is  $x$  from one corner and  $y$  from the other, like this.”

Again Winston nodded.



another.”

Winston leaned over and studied the figures. I watched the expression on his face. He looked up and grinned, and I went on.

“Now we will connect the points with these dashed lines like so. Notice on the left we divide the large square into four right triangles with a square in the middle. What do we get on the right?”

Winston looked at the figure on the right and said, “Two squares and two rectangles.”

“Exactly. And are the areas of the two large, original squares the same?”

“Yes, the big squares are the same, we just divided them up differently.”

“Excellent, Winston.” I shaded the little triangle you see in the picture on the left. “Now what is the area of the shaded triangle on the left?”

“Now let’s arrange the points on the right square just a little differently,” which I did, saying, “again each point is distance- $x$  from one side and distance- $y$  from

Winston studied the drawing. "It is one half x times y."

"Right. And how many triangles like that are there in the left figure?"

"Four."

"So the areas of the four triangles on the left add up to what?"

Winston smiled as if he were waiting for the punchline to a joke. "Two times x times y."

"Right. And all the rest of the area of the large square on the left is where?"

"It is in the small central square that is tipped slightly."

"Yes, and its area is what?"

"It is h times h, or h squared."

"So the area of the large square on the left is ...," and I wrote:

$$\text{area of left square} = h^2 + 2xy$$

I said, "Now look at the square on the right and tell me how its area is composed."

Winston studied the right figure and said, "It is x squared, and y squared, and x times y twice."

I nodded and wrote:

$$\text{area of right square} = x^2 + y^2 + 2xy$$

"Is that right?" I asked.

Winston's eyes gave a flash, and he took the pencil and said, "Yes, and since the two areas are the same, it must be that..." And he wrote:

$$h^2 + 2xy = x^2 + y^2 + 2xy$$

Winston continued, "Now if I cancel the 2xy on each side, I get hypotenuse squared equals the sum of the squares of the other two sides."

I spread my hands and said, "There you go, Winston, your mind just touched the mind of Pythagoras." The two of us sat at the table grinning at each other as if we had just discovered a pearl at the bottom of the chowder.

Winston said, "This is a beautiful thing you have given me, Joseph. Thank you."



I nodded. "I didn't invent it, you know. I'm just passing it on. And did you notice, Winston, I didn't exactly have to teach you anything. You already knew all of the pieces of the puzzle, I just helped you put them together."

"Yes, but without your help, I could never have done it."

Winston looked back at the figures, retracing in his mind the steps of the proof. Smiling.

I watched. Also smiling.

Winston said, "This is perfect. Let's do more."

I stood up and stretched and said, "We'll do more after I get a bite to eat. What do you say you bring your father down here and show this to him?"

Winston's face lit up, and I said, "I'll send him down here."

Up on deck I said to Terry, "Winston's excited to show you something, can you go below?"

Terry wrinkled his face with a question and said, "Sure. Martin, why don't you take the wheel again?"

When Terry had gone below, Martin said, "What's up, kimoswaby?"

I was still grinning, "It's the coolest thing. I just showed Winston the proof of the Pythagorean theorem, and it really jazzed him up. You can tell he's a bright kid, and he's learned some stuff in school, but he hasn't been pushed as far as he can go. Now he's showing it to Terry. You better watch out, 'cause you're probably next."

"Sounds like you're the one whose jazzed up, Lipshits. And I am not going back to high-school. I passed geometry once, and that was more than enough. The statute of limitations is up on that shit."

"Okay," I said, still smiling, "but if the kid wants to show you, try not to be an asshole."

We sat on the deck munching papaya and watching the birds gliding overhead. Now and then a flying fish would leap into the air and soar in ground effect for a surprising distance before diving back into the water. My experience with Winston took

me back a lot of years. I sat there watching the ocean and thinking about growing up in Seattle. Maybe this seems strange, but my favorite memory from that period is sitting on the sofa doing geometry with my father. He was not a man who showed a lot of emotion. I can't say that I ever remember him giving me a hug or pat on the back, but I can still feel the warmth from his arm where we touched as we sat side by side doing geometry.

I remember sitting there with him paging through the geometry book at the start of my sophomore year. "Geometry is the most beautiful thing the human race ever created," he said. "We stand on the shoulders of giants. People like Euclid and Pythagoras and Newton and Einstein. You know Euclid's *Elements*, his book on geometry written in 300 B.C. or so, is the second best selling book of all time? We've got to keep their brilliance alive, honor it, and pass it on. You've really got to appreciate what your teachers are doing for you, helping you to understand this stuff."

I loved those moments, when my father would show me how the world looked through his eyes.

"The amazing thing about geometry," he said, "is that you start with so little, just the definitions of points and lines and such, and then using nothing but logic, you build up this amazingly intricate and beautiful edifice. And the things you learn are so true and solid and reliable. You can prove them beyond a doubt, you can know that they are true in a way that you almost never know anything else in life."

My father closed the book and took off his reading glasses. "I took a history class from a very famous guy in college, Professor Josh Davis. He had studied the Civil War all his life. One day he was gone to a meeting or something and another well-known historian came in to give us a lecture. He asked the class what Dr. Davis had said were the causes of the Civil War, and we told him that Professor Davis felt it was all about slavery and state's rights. Our visiting professor said, 'That's bull. It was economics, pure and simple. Let me tell you...' I remember saying to myself, 'Here's two bright guys that have studied this all their lives, and they can't agree on anything. What's the point of studying this?' But if you study the proof of the Pythagorean Theorem for a few minutes,

you will know it, really *know* it, in a way you almost never know anything else. So beautiful, so solid, so true, and so useful. And we are able to slowly put it together one small logical step at a time. Like a puzzle. I wonder if there are beings on other planets with brains so big they don't need a 500 page book to prove all this stuff, they don't need to creep along one baby step at a time like us. Maybe when they think of a line and a point, the rest of geometry arrives in their brains all at once in a flash as an inevitable implication of the assumptions. I wonder if there are brains that big out there."

There I sat. Fifteen-year-old Joseph Claypool trying to imagine Martians doing geometry. And I'm sure I racked my brain for a question that would keep my father at my side just a little while longer.

After fifteen minutes, Terry came back on deck. I was apprehensive about his reaction to the tutoring, but Terry was beaming.

"I didn't understand it all. You know I didn't spend much time in school, but I can see the power of the thinking, and I can see that he is excited about it and that he can do it. Maybe he *could* be a doctor. I haven't pushed him that way, because I was afraid it would be too hard for him if he failed, but maybe he could do it."

Winston came on deck carrying the paper and pencil. "Martin, can I show you something?"

Martin waved Terry back to the wheel and sat down. He grinned at me and turned to Winston saying, "Did you know that Pythagoras believed that the soul had fallen from heaven and was condemned to the body as if it were a tomb?"

Winston squeezed in next to Martin and said, "Tell me about that later, right now I want to show you something."

Martin took the challenge and followed Winston through the proof. Terry smiled to see his son's excitement and pride. I listened to Winston to see if he really had the proof down, which he did. When Winston had finished, Martin shook his hand, saying,

“This *is* cool, Winston. Good job. I wish Father Benjamin had laid it out like that back at Jesuit. Maybe I wouldn’t be such a dummy now.”

Winston beamed. “I’m going to go below and make a good copy of this. Thank you, Joseph.”

The four of us sat in silence, feeling the wind and absorbing the cadence of The Spirit of Orion as it moved through the water.

After a while, Terry said, “Who wants to catch dinner for tonight?” With that, the mood swung around toward fish and fishing until dinner was done. After the meal, Winston and Sonny went below to clean the galley and Terry called me over to the wheel. “Do you think Winston could really become a doctor?”

I nodded and said, “Terry, he amazed me. He remembered all the rules about triangles that he had learned, and he caught onto the logic of the proof immediately, even though it was new to him. He’s a very bright kid. Sure, he could do about anything.”

Terry looked up at the sails then back at me, “If he had a teacher, you mean.”

“Yeah, well, that would sure help, but there are books for this sort of thing. Some people get through this just studying at home. That’s a very successful program, home study, back in America. When I get back, I’ll find some books and send them to you.”

Terry nodded and continued, “I’ve always expected that he would give up this dream and work with me on The Tangaroa. Learn the star paths, the ways of the sea. One day this boat could be his. One day it *will* be his. But he has stuck to his plan, and he has worked hard to make it into the University. And I am beginning to hope he makes it. It would be wonderful for him and for the whole island.”

“I agree with you, Terry. I hope he makes it, too. For a while I couldn’t guess how you felt, but I’m glad you are behind him.”

To the west the sun was falling into the ocean and the clouds took on a translucent golden aspect. Martin walked back and sat by the wheel just as Sonny and

Winston came up from below. Sonny was carrying his guitar. We sat in silence watching the vanishing light to starboard as Sonny strummed idly at the guitar.

Martin said, “Terry, what are some of the other tricks for navigating in the open ocean?”

Terry smiled, “It could take you half a lifetime to learn about this, Martin. And you know there aren’t many teachers left to pass it on.” He looked over his left shoulder and pointed to a star just a few degrees above the horizon. “You see the bright one there?” Martin turned to the star and nodded. “You could steer for that, then when it rises too high to be useful, pick another below it, then another. That is the *kaveinga*, the star-path to Tahiti. Maybe with time we could make you a star-path navigator, Martin. Sounds like you need a job.”

Martin grinned as he repeated Terry’s words, “A star-path navigator. God, I’d love to learn how to do that.”

Terry nodded, “In the old days, the place of the master navigator was above that of the king.”

Martin looked back at the star and then at Terry, who was now looking up at the sails.

A few minutes later Martin turned to Sonny and said, “Do you mind if I play your guitar for a while, man?”

Sonny looked surprised, “For sure, I didn’t know you played.” He passed Martin the instrument.

Martin played through a couple of chords and fiddled with the tuning. Then he began fingerpicking an introduction that I recognized instantly. It was one of the songs from Martin’s first album, one of the songs that I had listened to over and over, flat on my back with the speakers pulled close to my ears. It was a song I had come back to time and again over the years, whenever circumstances called for a strong dose of peace, beauty, faith, and hope.

*If Martin sang it now, I wondered, would it blow our cover? Would Terry figure*

*out who we were? And what would happen if he did figure it out?* I looked at Martin, wrinkled my forehead, squinted, and tipped my head slightly as if to say, “What’s up?”

Martin began:

Even in the rising air  
the bird must spread her wings  
to float above the timid crowd  
to soar above the kings.

She’ll never rise above it all  
just waiting for a gift.  
Without the will to spread her wings  
there’d surely be no lift.

It’s a risk.  
It’s a chance.  
It’s a choice.  
It’s a dance.

I know that I must hoist my sails  
and gather up the wind  
leave the safety of the dock  
and trust the strength within.

It’s a risk.  
It’s a chance.  
It’s a choice.  
It’s a dance.

Winston clapped enthusiastically, and the others followed. “I had no idea you could do this,” said Winston, “Please, play another.”

“I swear I’ve heard that before,” said Terry.

Martin stared into the guitar sound-hole. “Yeah, it was on the radio some back in the ’70s. I always liked it. I just seemed to be in the mood to play it tonight for some reason. Now you guys play some of your stuff, and maybe later I’ll play ‘Lighthouse’ by James Taylor. If you liked the last one, you’ll love that.”

For the next hour or so, Martin and the Polynesians swapped songs, though Martin didn’t play anything else of his own.

I thought I was in heaven. Out on this beautiful boat on the rolling ocean. Hearing Martin at a moment when the music seemed to be coming from his heart. And also hearing the gorgeous native songs. At the same time, I felt this gut-wrenching tension coming from the fact that I wanted to take the guitar and play something myself, and yet I knew I couldn’t compete with what the others were doing, and I didn’t want to spoil the mood or embarrass myself.

“It’s a risk/it’s a chance,” I said to myself as I reached for the guitar.

I said, “I hope I don’t spoil the mood here, but I’ve just got to play something.” Looking at Martin and then the others, I said, “I’d give anything if it weren’t true, but I’ve got a voice like a goat. Now I’m going to teach you a song, and then as soon as you can sing it, I’ll back off and just play.”

I played the introduction to David Crosby’s “Carry Me,” and then feeling like I had a baseball stuck in my throat, I began to sing the first verse, tentatively and weak. I never know what’s going to come out when I try to sing. Sometimes my voice is passable, but sometimes not.

At the end of the first verse, Martin gave my shoulder a squeeze and whispered, “Let it go, man. Sing it out.”

I closed my eyes and sang it from the heart: “And I once loved a girl/she was

younger than me....” It was still the raggedy sound of a man without the gift of a silken voice, but my voice was strong and sure, and it carried the beautiful tune as well as I could hope.

Martin smiled and joined me for the third verse. Then we taught the crew the chorus. “Carry me, carry me, carry me above the world...”

After a couple of tries it was spooky good, with the Polynesians drifting naturally into a South Pacific harmony that gave an already beautiful song an almost angelic lift. And though we went on to other songs, every now and then someone would pass the guitar back to me, and we would do it again. It sort of became the theme for the night. And we sat there together until nearly dawn. The eastern sky grew silver as the chorus drifted one last time over the indifferent ocean. It was a night I’ll remember forever.

When we were all musically spent, Sonny carried the guitar below, and Martin and I followed him down for a few hours sleep.

I fell into a death-deep sleep, dreaming that I could move freely through the air, simply by will, and faith that I could do it. It was a dream I’d had hundreds of times since I was a child. I woke up about nine, feeling the energy and optimism of a six year old, and I went on deck to see the hills of Rarotonga rising over the horizon ahead.

Martin was sitting alone in the bow. I walked up and sat down beside him.

I said, “This has been an incredible trip, man. I am beginning to feel like I’m in touch with what’s happening in the Pacific. Your boat is so fine, and these characters are unforgettable.”

“No shit, man, I told you, this boat is fucking magic. Good shit happens on this boat. It’s where I make contact with better things, if you know what I mean.”

“Yeah, well, something was working for me last night, but I don’t think it was magic.”

“ ‘Carry Me?’ Yeah, that was cool. Isn’t it an amazing feeling when the music pours out of you.”



“Amazing, yes. I wish I’d had more of it in my life. Do you know how lucky you are to have been able to sing and play the stuff you have?”

“Yeah, lucky Martin, the self-destructing wonder.”

Winston and Sonny were making their way up the deck, getting ready to bring down the sails at Terry’s command. About a hundred yards out the engines were started, then we turned into the wind and the sails were brought down. The whole group seemed to turn inward to transition to the end of the trip.

Martin and I helped furl and cover the sails. It was time for goodbyes.

As the boat pulled into the harbor, I said to Winston, “I am going to send you some books that will help you get through the math on your own. You might take them to your teacher and see if you can get some help. I know you can do this, Winston. Stick with it. The next time I’m in Rarotonga, I’ll be visiting Dr. Winston Tuapotu.”

I felt like giving the boy a hug, but I just couldn’t seem to move my arms.

Winston said, “Thanks for your help, Joseph. I’m going to work harder than ever now.”

Martin was sitting by the wheel with Terry and Sonny when I walked up. I heard him say, “I really envy you guys. Out on the water in this beautiful boat, slipping from one tropical paradise to another. If you ever need an able-bodied seaman, let me know.”

Terry was studying his rate of closure with the dock. He motioned for Sonny and Winston to step onto the slip and secure the boat. “This trip has been better than most. There are times when we spend days in high seas and driving rains. Sick tourists wishing they were dead and clinging to the rails. Does that sound like fun?”

Martin said, “It’s just part of the price you pay, I guess. It’s worth it to you, though, isn’t it?”

Terry put the engine in reverse for a second, then let it idle in neutral. The boat eased up and kissed the dock. “Yes, it’s worth it. It’s worth it for the trips like this.”

Neither Martin nor I had the stomach for a long goodbye. When the boat was secure, we went below and rounded up our things, then we went up and stood awkwardly

on deck for a few minutes before shaking hands with the crew and stepping onto the dock. We walked down the dock, and at the end we looked back and waved. Winston was watching and waved back. Terry and Sonny were at work on the deck.

We got back on a Sunday morning, and not much happens in Rarotonga on a Sunday. The busses had stopped running, and most of the stores were closed. I didn't have a car yet, and we had several miles to walk back to the hotel, so we stuck out our thumbs whenever a car went by. After a few tries, a red Mazda pickup stopped for us. In the front seat was a young couple sitting with their daughter between them. They were all dressed up for church.

“Where are you going?” asked the driver.

“Back to the Whittaker Palm Lodges.”

“We're going as far as the church in Titikaveka. Do you want a ride that far?”

We jumped in the back and the truck bumped down the quiet road. When we got to the church, we thanked the couple and sat down outside on the low, freshly whitewashed coral wall in front of the church. Martin said, “I think this is the same church I visited years ago. Remember Terry talking about the drunken American who used to own The Tangaroa. Looking back on it now, I guess we acted like a bunch of assholes. Let's sit outside here for a while and listen to the singing.”

We sat in the sun, smiling at the arriving churchgoers.

After a while Martin said, “I've been sitting here trying to remember my trip here years ago, and the truth is I can hardly pull it together. I have images of clear water and swaying palms, a small town, a walk in the jungle, naked women laying on The Orion's deck, and then the shock and unbelievable pain after the fall. But I can't remember anything from the hospital or the flight home.”

I looked at Martin and nodded. I still carried a buzz from my deep sleep and my flying dream. I could feel a strange openness. A sense of fresh possibilities. I sat happily in the sun reconstructing the images of my dream—arms together over my chest, showing

off to my marveling friends that I could float around in the room, then suddenly outside rising magically to the top of a lamp pole, and drifting back down. Only if I believed.  
Peter Pan.

Inside the church, one of the men started a song by singing a line at a startlingly high volume. On the last note, a seemingly spontaneous harmony was formed by the others. The men sang a loud and deep bass with many harmonizing parts, and the women soared in the higher registers. The whole church seemed to vibrate. “I think the coins in my pocket are rattling,” said Martin.

“And I just rose up off the ground.”

After a half hour or so we walked out to the edge of the road and quickly got a ride to the Lodges. Back in the room, Martin threw his stuff in a heap and collapsed into his bed. Within minutes he was snoring loudly. I put on a swim suit, grabbed a mask and snorkel, walked down to the beach, and dove into the lagoon.

I was instantly in another world. A world that was indifferent to my hopes and dreams and frustrations. A world that didn't expect anything from me. I took long, firm strokes in the buoyant water and watched this other world pass beneath me. What a great feeling. The stretching. The exertion. The water moving against my skin. I decided to swim for a mile or so and then walk back along the beach. I nearly choked as I laughed to myself thinking of the English woman asking Terry how the sharks knew that there was a storm coming. Terry was a great individual, I thought. And what would happen to Winston? Good things, I hoped, whatever they might be.

When I got back to the room, Martin was up looking through the refrigerator.  
“How does boiled scrod and green beans sound, matey?”

“Sounds like a winner. Why don't you go burn the fish on the barbeque, and I'll stir-fry some noodles. Maybe I'll even sneak a beer, if that won't make you crazy.”

We both knew that we were avoiding talking about what our next move ought to be. There was some rather deep-running ambivalence on both of our parts, but neither of

us had faced up to it yet. When we sat down to eat, I said, “So what’s your plan for tomorrow?”

“I guess I’ll go into town and talk to that asshole Devon. See if we can work something out. The boat is a killer, man, no doubt about it. For a hundred thousand, it’s a steal.”

“Well, in that case, I guess I’ll go with you and see if Marie wants to marry me.”

“Dream on, shitheals. You can come, but try not to trip on your tongue.”

“Seriously, I could be the best thing that ever happened to a woman like that.”

“Seriously?....The best thing? I wonder about you. What’s it like in the little world you keep inventing? How are the taxes there? Good weather?”

“Okay, so what do we do if you give Devon the go-ahead?”

“I’ve been thinking about that. Maybe I’ll call Jack and have him come down here and get the boat and sail it to...I don’t know...show me a map.”

We unfolded a map and bent over it. “...to Niue. We could get in the plane, go see the fucking sights for a while, then meet him in Niue. He could even bring Kevin, if his mom will allow it. Then you could take the plane to Australia and fly back to Niue commercial, and we’ll all take off in the boat. That could be a killer trip. Go dive the sunken Japanese ships in Truk lagoon. That’s one of the things you want to do, right?”

“Yeah, that could work. Maybe we could do a long flight out to Vanuatu and then island hop back toward Niue. We’ll keep checking with Jack and Devon on the phone. If the deal looks like it won’t work, we’ll go to Australia and come up with plan B.”

The next morning, we rode the little bus into Avarua and dropped into Devon’s office unannounced. When we walked in, Marie looked up from her desk and smiled. My heart melted. I could feel it dripping down over my liver.

“Is Devon here?” asked Martin.

A second later Devon walked through the doorway. Big smile, eyes darting around the room. He stuck out his hand and said, “Mr. Landry, is the boat everything I said it was? Beautiful isn’t she? Come back in my office, let’s talk.”

Feeling awkward all of a sudden, I felt like a fifth wheel not being invited back into Devon’s office. I said, “I’ll just wait out here for you.”

Marie looked up at me and smiled again. “And you are the pilot, is that right?”

I didn’t know whether to stand or sit. I stuck my hands in my pockets and stood there. “Yeah, that’s me.”

She put her elbows on the desk, folded her fingers, and propped up her chin. Still smiling, she said, “I saw your airplane down at the airport. It must be frightening to fly such a little thing over the ocean.”

*Frightening? Frightening? Yeah, but should I admit it?* “Well, we’ve had a good trip so far, but it sure could get frightening if things went wrong. Sometimes I can feel the eyes of a million sharks looking up at me.” Her smile fell away, and I continued, “Still, it’s so beautiful to fly up to an island like this, to see it rising up in the distance, after all those hours over the sea.”

She looked out the window. I followed her eyes and saw a foothill stuck into the low cloud deck, “Yes,” she said, “it must be beautiful. I’d love to see that sometime.”

I looked at the cloud, then at Marie. “How about this afternoon? I’ve got to go out there and check into the fueling, I could give you a ride around the island, if you like.”

Marie got up and walked over to the window. She looked absently down the street. She didn’t speak for a few seconds, then turning, “Sure, let’s do it. Can you meet me here at 4:00?”

“This is great. I’d love to. We’ll just circle the island. You can be the tour guide. Then maybe a quick trip to California, and I’ll show you around.”

She gave me an odd look. A second later we heard Martin coming back down the hall. That saved me from flunking the smalltalk test so soon after my success in

getting a date, of sorts. Martin went for the door. I stuck out my hand to Marie. She seemed surprised, but took my hand with a grin. “Four o’clock,” I said.

“I’ll be here. Goodby, Joseph.”

Once we were outside, Martin said, “What’s that all about? Did you get her to step into your dreamworld?”

“No. I’m just going to give her a plane ride this afternoon when I go down to the airport to get us fueled. You are still thinking about leaving tomorrow, right?”

“Yeah, well, I tried to get Devon to come down some from his thirty-three-and-a-third percent deal, but the little fucker is dug in, and I don’t think its going to happen any other way. I told him we were leaving town, and I’d think about it and call him back. Maybe he’ll loosen up, maybe not. But I’ll probably go ahead with it anyway. Don’t tell Marie that, though, you peckerwood.”

I swatted Martin in the shoulder. “You think I’m stupid?”

“You’re not stupid,” he said, “you’re horny, though the distinction can be subtle. Especially with someone of your...complexity.

## The Arrival in Paradise

Martin was shaking my shoulder. “Hey, man, you better get shakin’ if we’re going to get in the air today. What the fuck time did you get back last night anyway? I crashed at around midnight, and there was no sign of you.”

I pulled the pillow over my head and said, “Gee, Mom, I was here. Maybe you just didn’t notice.”

“Yeah, right. Pack up and I’ll call a cab.”

I blinked my eyes and looked out from under the pillow. I gradually focused on a four-foot-tall carved wooden statue staring back at me from near the door. It was a squatty figure with an enormous head, slanty eyes, short legs, and a huge penis that hung to the ground. “What the fuck is that?” I said.

“You mean, *‘who the fuck?’* That is none other than Tangaroa hisself. I call him the king, King Dong.” Martin walked over to the statue. He stood beside it with his arm around its shoulder. “I got him at this cool little shop downtown yesterday while you were out courting Lady Marie. He’s a beaut, ain’t he? Our new mascot.”

I slid out of bed, walked over to the statue, and gave it a close look. “The lad’s hung, I’ll give you that.”

“Fertility god, man. Hey, a credit to our gender.”

I gave the statue a little push to check its heft. “Jesus Christ, what does this thing weigh?”

“Oh, yeah, that’s another story, man. I had to get the sales lady’s brother to help me get it in here. I dunno, I guess maybe a hundred and fifty pounds.”

I shook my head and turned for the bathroom. “What are you going to do with it?”

“Thought I’d put him on my deck back home. Give him the place of honor he deserves. Show him the good life.”

I stopped at the bathroom door. “No, I mean what are you going to do with him *now?* You going to ship him home somehow, or what?”

Martin grew animated. “Oh, no, I thought we’d bring him along. Kind of a good luck charm.”

I looked incredulous. “A good luck charm? Didn’t they have one you could put on a keychain or something? This fucker is nearly bigger than you, and we need to watch our weight for the flight.”

Martin shrugged, looking apologetic. “Yeah, I know. But that sales girl started going on and on about the legends and myths of Tangaroa.” Martin’s eyes opened wide and his hands moved like birds as he spoke. “His father, Ranganui, was the sky, his mother, Papatuanuku, was the earth.” Martin dropped his act as quickly as he had picked it up. “The sales lady said, dig this, ‘He came from back when time dreamed in darkness.’ Now isn’t that a cool line? ‘When time dreamed in darkness.’ And she was so cute, I mean, what’s a guy to do? I couldn’t buy some pissant little statue you could put in a shoe box. Plus, he’d really be perfect out on my deck. God of the sea. Fertility god. Wavin’ his dong at the redwoods, man, it’s perfect.”

I nodded. “So why didn’t you ship it?”

“Well, we talked about that, but she said it would get all beat to shit on the boat going over there, and then we’d have to take an extra day to pack it all up and arrange everything, so I figured we’d just bring him along. Check him out, podner, maybe he’ll be a good way to meet chicks.”

I winced. “Man, I don’t know if we can fit him in the airplane. It’s going to take some scrunching around. And the weight, I don’t like the extra weight at all.”

“Shouldn’t we be okay for weight. We got out of Oakland alright, and we don’t need as much fuel this time.”

I gave Martin a sheepish look. “Yeah, well, I wasn’t paying much attention yesterday when I was out there at the airport with Marie getting us fueled up, and they filled the fuselage tank to the top. We’ve got all the fuel we had back in Oakland, plus King Dong here and all the other stuff we’ve picked up along the way.”

Martin sat on the bed. “So what do we need to do?”



I threw up my hands and went into the bathroom. “Well, it’s going to fly like a pig for a while, but a couple of hundred extra pounds shouldn’t make *that* much difference. Not unless we lose an engine.”

“Hey, with the King on board, nothing bad can happen, right?”

An hour later we were hefting the King into the aft cabin and jockeying him around to fit. I did a pre-flight, while Martin crammed the rest of our stuff into all the available spaces on the airplane.

We had a flight plan on file to Pekoa Airport on Espiritu Santo Island in Vanuatu. The route took us close enough to Niue that we decided to overfly the island, and from there we would cross some of the northern Fiji Islands before reaching Pekoa.

As I walked up onto the wing to enter the airplane, I said. “So, the good news is, we’ve got lots of gas.”

Martin stepped up onto the wing behind me. “And you can’t have too much gas, unless you’re on fire, right?”

I shook my head, “Or trying to stay in the air on one engine.”

Martin looked concerned. “Do you want to off-load some fuel?”

I took a long breath and looked at my watch. “They probably don’t have the equipment here for that, and we’d end up siphoning it into a 55 gallon drum or something. It would be a mess and take forever. It will fly like this. I’ll run the engines at high power and burn the fuel down quicker.”

I slid into the pilot’s seat, and Martin came in behind me and closed the cockpit door. “Okay, Magellan, if you’re happy, I’m happy.”

A few minutes later we were lined up on the runway and cleared for takeoff. I looked back over my shoulder at the over-stuffed cabin and saw the King’s stubby legs sticking up through the suitcases and stuffsacks, and between those legs stood the giant penis, poking into the ceiling. I smile and shook my head.

The acceleration down the runway was slow, and I was careful not to try to make the airplane fly before it was ready. I squirmed as the plane wallowed coming off

the ground. Its initial climb rate was poor. I watched the engine condition instruments warily, an engine failure would mean a sure and quick trip into the ocean.

As we passed over Avarua, I looked over Martin's shoulder at the quiet little town. *Was Marie down there at work this morning? Would she look up and see the airplane? What did she think about yesterday, about me?* But this was not the time for those thoughts. I began a shallow left turn out over the ocean and on course for Vanuatu.

Two hours after takeoff, we had struggled up to 16,000 feet. I moved my eyes slowly from instrument to instrument. Airspeed indicated 158 knots, which was about right. I gave the right rudder pedal a small push and let it go as I watched three instruments at once. The ball skidded left, and the turn co-coordinator and attitude indicator tipped right as the heading swung around slightly clockwise. There were no warning flags on the heading indicator, and it matched the compass, as it should. The course pointer was set properly according to the Loran, and the indicator showed us on-course. Both altimeters matched, and vertical speed pointed, as it should, to zero.

Looking at the engine instruments, I noticed that the left engine showed slightly less intake manifold pressure than the right. Engine power correlates with manifold pressure, and pilots of piston-powered airplanes set their power by reference mainly to manifold pressure and rpm. The pressure is measured in inches of mercury. You might takeoff at 36 inches manifold pressure, climb with 34 inches, cruise with 30 inches, and so on. The right engine showed 30 inches and the left showed about 29 inches. Sometimes the vibration in the airframe will cause a throttle to back up, and that explains the power loss. I gave the left throttle a slight push and tightened the power-lever friction knob to keep the throttle from creeping further, then I continued my check. Fuel flow and exhaust gas temperature were good, and rpm was right at 2400 with the engines in sync. Engine temperatures and pressures were good. The fuel quantity looked more than sufficient, but I would check it with my calculator in a few minutes. Cabin pressurization was working. The electrical loads on the two alternators were balanced and looked about

right, as did the electrical system voltage. Everything seemed to be humming along just fine. *Gotta remember to stay on top of this*, I thought.

Martin fell asleep in the right seat. I looked over and smiled, then I looked over my shoulder at the King. *Looks like the King is excited about the flight*, I thought to myself. I stared out the window at the endless Pacific and thought about how this must be the way the world looked to my father all those years ago during World War II when he flew patrols out here in a Navy B-24.

The water took on many colors. Shimmering gold and bright where the sun reflected. Deep blue, almost purple looking straight down. Gray in the distance. Whitecaps here and there in the swells that rode in from the northwest. Dark cloud shadows from the puffy little clouds below gliding east.

I forced myself to scan the instruments another time. Again the left engine's power was about an inch below that of the right. Looking at the manifold pressure gauge, I pushed the left throttle forward slightly to match the power of the two engines. When I had the power matched, I noticed that the left throttle was now three quarters of an inch ahead of the right throttle. *That's curious*, I thought, *there must be some slippage developing in the throttle cable*.

Martin woke up and stretched as I adjusted the throttle. He pointed at the throttles and said, "Anything wrong?"

"Probably just the cable slipping. Everything else looks right. You think you could grab the water bottle for me, pal?"

As I reached to get the water from Martin, the sound of the airplane changed and it yawed and rolled toward the left. *Oh, shit*. Since I had experienced this many times before in training, and even a few times for real, I knew instantly what was happening. I pushed the power up on both engines. I leveled the wings and stepped on the right rudder to hold his heading constant. I moved the left throttle back and forth, but it had little effect. The left engine had failed, or at least partly failed.

I glanced at Martin. His eyes looked like two white dinner plates with an olive in the center of each. “What the fuck’s going on here?”

I was thinking, *Don’t fuck up. Don’t rush this. Figure it out.* I tapped the fuel flow, exhaust gas, and manifold pressure gauges and said, “We’ve lost some power in the left engine, but it is running. The fuel flow is down, and the manifold pressure is down. Maybe there’s a problem with the fuel pump. I’m am going to switch fuel tanks and try the electric fuel boost pump.”

I switched tanks with no effect, and when I turned on the electric fuel pump, the fuel flow went up and the left engine quit cold. “Jesus P. Christ,” said Martin.

I immediately turned the pump off, and the engine re-started, though it still ran only at partial power. *Okay, think. It’s getting all the fuel it can use, but it can’t use much. It’s not a fuel problem. Mags check normal. It could to be the left turbocharger. This is not good.*

My mind marched quickly through the options and alternatives. Years of training and study had led to this moment. I looked out the window at the engine. There was no obvious sign of fire, but that didn’t mean much. We faced a serious dilemma. If I left the engine running, I would drift down to seven or eight thousand feet and carry on to Nadi in Fiji, IF the problem didn’t start a fire. If it did start a fire, it would likely be catastrophic. But if I shut the engine down, the airplane probably would not be able to stay aloft at its fuel-heavy weight. At the light weights on a typical cross country trip back home, the airplane could maintain six or eight thousand feet with only one engine running. But at the present weight, with the King and the extra fuel on board, there may be no way to keep it out of the Pacific with one engine shut down. *Fire or water*, I thought.

I reached down and shut off the fuel to the left engine. I pulled the mixture and throttle controls back for the engine, and then pulled the prop control back to “feather” the prop. The engine shook as it came to a stop with the propeller blades turned into the wind for low drag. *First things first*, I thought, *a fire could do us in real quick.*

Martin was beside himself, squirming in the seat, “What the fuck did you do that for? What’s going on?”

I said, “If I don’t shut this off, we could have a fire. It’s the only sane thing we can do at this moment. The other engine isn’t powerful enough to keep us up here at 16,000 feet, but it gives us enough power for a slow descent. We’ll drift down at a couple of hundred feet per minute to begin with, and then if we’re lucky we may be able to level off and maintain altitude at a few hundred or a few thousand feet. I’ll check the performance charts in a few minutes. Meanwhile, let’s run through the engine shutdown checklist and see who we can raise on the HF radio. I’ll explain more later.”

“Can you dump fuel?” Martin asked.

I shook my head. “No. There is no dump valve.”

“Sounds like catch-23.”

“At least. But, hey, it could be worse. We could be out over the Pacific, with an engine out, slowly descending toward the shark infested water.”

“We are, asshole,” said Martin, who smiled and shook his head. “Fuck, but we’re havin’ fun now.”

The plane stabilized in a two hundred and fifty foot per minute descent, so nothing too dire was going happen for an hour or so. We tried with no luck to raise someone on the HF, but we did get a response on the emergency VHF channel from an overflying eastbound Qantas flight. Thanks to the Loran, we could relay our exact position along with our intentions. How odd and yet strangely comforting to be so far from effective help and yet be able to speak so casually to someone in an entirely different circumstance. As the Qantas flight got to the edge of radio range, the captain said, “I’ll pass all this on. And the best of luck to you, mate.”

“Thanks a bunch,” I said.

“So why did you have to shut the engine off?” asked Martin. “Even if it was only running at half power, seems like that’s a lot better than nothing.”

I looked things over for a second and said, “Okay, I can explain it now. Here’s the quick version of Turbochargers 101. Turbochargers are added to some airplane engines to increase horsepower, especially at high altitudes. An engine needs both fuel and air to develop power, right?”

Martin nodded.

“Okay, it’s easy to give it lots of fuel, all you need is a fuel tank, a big enough hose, and maybe a pump. But getting lots of air is another matter. For low altitudes, the simple solution is to build a big engine, so it sucks in a lot of air with each revolution. But as you climb and the air gets thinner, the available horsepower drops off. That’s where the turbocharger comes in. The way it works is it puts a sort-of paddle wheel in the outgoing exhaust. The exhaust turns the wheel. And then hooked to the wheel is a shaft that drives a similar wheel in the air intake line. This second wheel compresses the outside air and shoves more of it into the cylinders to maintain power as the airplane climbs. When it works, which is most of the time, it is wonderful.”

“And you figure the turbo failed?”

“Yeah, or the plumbing around it.”

“So why not just run the engine anyway, if we need it?”

“Well, the problem is that the first wheel operates in a very hostile environment. The exhaust gas is about 1600 degrees Fahrenheit. In some airplanes you can look at the turbocharger through the engine cowl at night and see it glowing cherry red—and there are lots of fuel and oil lines running nearby. If something breaks in the turbocharger plumbing, you might have super-hot exhaust gas blowing out onto fuel and oil lines, electrical wiring, and what have you. When the turbo fails, the engine does not die, but its power drops way off. If you get the symptoms of a turbo failure, you really don’t know if hot gasses are about to start a fire or not. Maybe they are, but maybe also the turbo system failed in a more benign way, and all the hot gas is still passing harmlessly out the exhaust pipe. If a fire is about to start, you need to shut off the fuel to the engine. If you

knew that a fire would not start, you could continue to run the engine, but you wouldn't get as much power from it as before."

Martin nodded and looked out at the water. "So if you run the engine, you might start a fire, and then we'd die."

"Right."

"And if you don't run it, we might crash into the ocean and die."

"That's the size of it."

Martin looked back at King Dong, and then out the window at the whitecaps. "Fuck," he said.

I began thinking about the possible forced landing in the water. I looked out the window at the direction of the swells and checked the movement of the cloud shadows for a clue about the wind direction. I talked with Martin about the cabin door, which was on Martin's side, and which we would open before the ditching. We both put on our life vests, and I reviewed the vest inflation procedures. We talked about how we would get the raft out and inflated and about how to operate the EPIRB, which would signal search and rescue craft.

I was going to go into the water only as a final option. There were far too many things that could go wrong in a ditching. At best, we would hit the water at about ninety miles an hour. Maybe the plane would stay together and float for a few minutes while we got out, got the raft, inflated it, climbed in and told jokes for a day or two waiting to get picked up. Then again, at 90 mph, water has the consistency of concrete, and if we went straight into a swell, it would be all over. Or maybe Martin would be incapacitated, and I wouldn't be able to crawl past him to get out as the plane sank. With the plane jammed like it was, there was no other way out except over Martin. "Fear is the mind killer," I said, recalling a line from Frank Herbert's *Dune*. "Let's think of ways to keep this thing dry."

I began to consider some alternatives. As the plane descended into thicker air, the sink rate would gradually improve. Our rate of sink was initially 250 feet per minute,

but at nine thousand feet, we were dropping at only about 150 feet per minute. Maybe we would quit sinking before we ran out of altitude, if so, we could carry on to the nearest large airport at Nadi, Fiji. In fact as we got lighter, the situation would improve. But what if the plane kept sinking? Maybe at a thousand feet I would restart the left engine and use it to climb for a few minutes and then shut it off again. But I would hate to risk the fire. A water landing would be better than an uncontrollable fire. Maybe if the sink rate was slight enough toward the end, “ground effect” would be strong enough to keep us aloft. There’s an interesting theory.

Descending through 5000 feet, we were sinking at 100 feet per minute. If we kept sinking at this rate, it would be 50 minutes until we ran out of altitude. The Loran told us that the nearest airport was 170 nautical miles away at Taveuni in Fiji. Since we had slowed down to get optimum glide performance, our ground speed was only 121 nautical miles per hour. So Taveuni was an hour and 24 minutes away. If things improved just enough, we might make it.

With 135 miles to go, we were down to 3500 feet. We were now down below the bases of the little puffy white clouds and the air was slightly bumpy. Sometimes we would catch an updraft and show a slight climb, but then we would enter a downdraft and we would drop at four or five hundred feet per minute. If the clouds were a little bigger, I would try using sailplane techniques and spiral upward in the updraft beneath the cloud, but these clouds were so small I felt the effort would be counterproductive. Still it gave me something to think about.

Time seemed to stand still. I leaned my head back against the headrest and tried to relax my shoulders, tried to summon the presence of mind that would get me through the next few minutes. As I put my head back, I had a strange vision—I saw myself as if from the co-pilot’s seat two feet off my right shoulder, and my mind jumped laterally to a picture I remembered vividly, though I hadn’t seen it since I was a kid. It was a picture in a book called *I Took the Sky Road*, written by Norman Miller, my father’s commanding officer in World War II. The picture showed Miller sitting in the exact same pose that I



was in now. Miller was nursing a shot-up B-24 back to Eniwetok from a raid on the South Pacific island of Puluwat. Miller struggled over the Pacific for seven hours to keep the plane aloft in spite of his own wounds, which I could remember seeing in the picture. Miller and his crew found the tiny island of Eniwetok by celestial navigation and dead reckoning, and they landed with a shot-up hydraulic system and no brakes. And here I was, moving through that same sky, over that same unblinking ocean.

And thinking about my father, my mind slid back eight years to the scenes in the hospital in my father's last days. The old man had been weakened by a series of strokes, he slipped in and out of consciousness. In and out of time. Sometimes awakening in the present. Sometimes in 1945.

Every day for weeks, as my father gradually sunk from the land of the living, my mother and I would go to the hospital with a copy of Charles Lindbergh's *The Spirit of St. Louis*. We would read a few pages out loud as the old man lay in his bed.

Through the early chapters, as Lindbergh meticulously planned his trip, I could read a few lines and then catch my father before he slipped off to sleep, prodding him to stay awake with questions about his war-time or airline flying experiences.

By the time Lindbergh was over the Atlantic, I gave up and read straight through, waiting, sometimes in vain, for my father to come around on his own. About that time something changed in the sound and the pace of my father's breathing. The breaths were shallower and less regular, and there was a dry crackling sound. The signs were bad. The nurses would not look into my eyes.

And there the old man hung, one day after another as I turned those pages and Lindbergh made his way toward Paris.

On the first cold clear day in October, with only a few pages left, I entered the hospital room alone. I felt as if I were wrapped in an airless cocoon. I took a chair by the window and sat looking across the sterile room at the wreckage of my father. The sky was a sharp autumn blue, and the light was brilliant and yellow in the room. I sat motionless looking at my father. Caught in a thought with no words, a feeling of gratitude

and loss and sadness beyond expression. A quiet screaming out to the gods, “Why does it end like this? Why does it come to this?” After maybe fifteen minutes I began to read, not daring to look up. Lindbergh was in Paris. The great adventure was over.

In a few minutes I finished the book, closed it quietly, and set it on the bed. I sat back and looked again at my father. A vortex of dust filaments swirled through a lightshaft between us. Maybe my father had listened to the end of the story. Maybe not.

In the brilliance of the room, I could see the dance of the carotid artery as it beat in his neck. I watched it flicker...thousand-one, thousand-two, thousand-three. Then it stopped. A few moments later there was a slow exhalation, and then my father lay there motionless.

Down the hall there was the sound of a metal tray falling onto the tile floor. My bones seemed warm and soft. There was the feeling of a hot crowbar caught in his throat.

In spite of the long-standing lack of hope, in spite of the excruciatingly slow withering away of the essence of the man, the finality of his death, the presence of it, the actuality of it, hit me physically like falling ten feet onto a concrete floor. For the longest time I simply couldn't move. A nurse peeked in and quickly left.

I arose. I took my father's still-warm hand. I bent and kissed him on the forehead and said, “Thanks, Wes. I couldn't have asked for more.”

I drove to my mother's house feeling warm and weak. I sensed the rest of the world as if I were under water. My mother heard the car and met me at the door. She knew that her husband was gone, and she cried softly for him, and for herself, and for me, and for this sad, sad place where such things happen to everyone. Everyone.

For a long time we just sat in the sun in the yard, not saying much. The squirrels and the birds went about their business. When the shadow from the walnut tree finally covered us, and the cool October breeze came up, we shivered and moved into the house. The cold and the movement brought us back to ourselves, and we went into the kitchen to look through the refrigerator. In time we were talking softly of the phone calls that would have to be made.

That night I fell asleep as soon as I closed my eyes, but then awoke at three or four in the morning. Pieces of a broken dream hung disconnected in my fuzzy consciousness. My father as a younger man. Still vital and sharp. Sitting on his heels by a creek, holding the hand of a boy of five or six. Not me. A blond boy. The boy who often visited my dreams. The boy who never drew a breath. The boy who never felt the grass between his toes. Who never felt the hand of his own father. The boy with those haunting, god-like blue eyes.

Laying there awake that night, my thoughts hopped like birds from one uncomfortable perch to another. Practical thoughts about what my mother should do. Burning sad thoughts about the struggle and dignity of my father's life.

I looked out at the blue water and brought myself back to the moment. I took my eyes off the racing ocean for a second and looked quickly at Martin. There was a ball of sweat gathering at the end of his nose, and his lips were drawn tight and white near the edges. Martin looked back and managed a weak smile in my direction. He said, "It's been a wild ride, brother, from start to finish."

We crossed the ninety mile point at 1700 feet, and several lifetimes later we descended through 1000 feet with 65 miles to go. At 500 feet and 45 miles the ocean seemed to be reaching up toward us. We could smell the salt air. A minute later land came into view over the nose. Because of the vertical motion of the air, we would go for a minute or two without sinking at all, and this would get our hopes up, and then we would hit a little bump and shortly find the plane sinking at 200 feet per minute. But there was no doubt that the trend was still down.

I decided not to risk re-starting the engine. We were now close to inhabited islands, so if we survived the ditching, we would probably be picked up promptly. And what a drag to get this close and then explode in a fireball after re-starting the sick engine.

I looked at the engine condition instruments for the right engine. The high power and low airspeed had pushed the temperatures on the right engine up near the red lines. The high temps and high power were accelerating the oil burn, and now the oil pressure on the right engine was dropping. I felt a prickliness to my skin as I looked at the low oil pressure. *How long would it run like this without developing problems of its own? No time to worry about that now. Think about the water landing.* With the flaps up, the plane would stall and fall out of the sky at about 85 knots, and with flaps down it could keep flying down to a speed of about 75 knots. As the water drew closer I decided that I would bring the plane down into ground effect at about 15 feet above the water and see if the ground cushion would keep us aloft. If that didn't work, I would raise the nose, extend the flaps and put it in the water. I gave Martin a simple explanation for what I was going to try. I said that the wing works by shoving air downward, but when the plane is close to the ground, the downwash creates a sort of cushion, called "ground effect," that holds the plane up. As the plane neared the surface, I would see if the cushion would keep us aloft.

With thirty miles still to go, the airplane entered ground effect. The nose seemed to pitch down a little on its own. I eased in some nose-up trim. My mouth was dry. I said, "Martin, I've got to look outside and keep this thing just above the water. You call out my airspeed every few seconds. If we start losing speed, I am going to have to put it in. If it comes to that, things are going to happen fast. Tighten your seat belt as much as you can and get ready to open the door."

Martin said, "Tell me this isn't happening, man." He wiped at the sweat on his chin. "Speed is 115...114...113...113...come on, baby...114...115."

Earlier in the glide, I had studied the charts for the Matei Airstrip on Taveuni in Fiji. It sat on a slight ridge at the north end of the island, and the strip ran northwest to southeast. We were coming toward the island from the southeast. I figured we would have a better shot at it if we went northwest of the strip and did a left turn to land toward the southeast.

I turned to look over at the island and then back at the water rushing under our wing at over a hundred miles per hour. I said, “We’ve got a problem, Martin.”

“Yeah,” said Martin, “yeah, I’d say we do. We’ve got an overloaded airplane, a dead engine, the other one’s running hot and losing oil pressure, and we can’t get any higher than ten feet off the water. That does sound like a problem to me.”

“That’s not what I mean,” I said. I tossed a map onto his lap. “According to this chart, the airport sits on a little ridge 110 feet above sea level.”

Martin looked at the map and then at me. “Can we climb up that high?”

I looked back and forth from the water outside to the airspeed indicator. “That’s just it. I can’t climb up that high and *stay* there. All I can do is pull the plane up a couple of hundred feet, but then the speed will bleed off and we’ll sink right back down again. Kinda like tossing a baseball. I can throw the ball up, but it will come back down.”

Martin shook his head in disbelief. “So what are you going to do?”

I glanced at Martin, then looked back outside. “I’m going to stay down here on the surface until the last minute and then pull the plane up and, hopefully, come over that ridge and land it on the air strip.”

Martin took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “Then we won’t even see the airport until you pull up, right?”

I nodded. “That’s right. We’re just going to get one shot at this.”

Martin rolled his eyes and looked away from me. “Holy shit.”

For just a second, I wondered what was running through Martin’s mind. I looked over at him and said, “It’s not over yet, man, I wouldn’t try this if I didn’t think we could do it. Now hold the chart up where I can look at it, will you?” Martin held it up. I stole a quick look and then looked back out the window at the island. “Okay, there’s the town, there’s the three little islands northeast of the airport.” I pointed out the left window. “The airport must be right in there. I need to maneuver out here over the water to get the airplane lined up with the runway, but when I turn, one of the wings is going to dip down closer to the water, and we are going to lose lift and a little speed in the turn. I’ll have to

make wide, shallow turns. You keep calling out my airspeed, and read me the heading and distance to the airport from the Loran.”

Ever so delicately I began to bank the aircraft to the right to initiate the turn. Martin called out the speeds, “114 knots...112...”

Martin was twisting around in the co-pilot’s seat, he looked at the nav display and said, “It’s 196 degrees and 3.1 miles to the airport. How the hell are you going to know just when to pull this plane up? Either too soon or too late and we’re fucked. One of these days I’m going to have to sit down and figure out just how I got onto this fucking thrill ride.”

I gave a quick smile. “This has got to be the ultimate Imax.”

“Imax, how can you think about Imax at a time like this?”

“Give me the heading and distance,” I said.

“The airport’s 130 degrees and 1.9 miles.”

We raced just above the calm waters of the Somosomo Strait toward the ridge that hid the airport. I wiped my wet palms one at a time on my shorts. I held the yoke in my left hand, and the throttle for the one good engine in my right. I scooted back in the seat and sat up straight, taking a slow, deep breath. The ridge grew rapidly in the windscreen. “Okay, Dad, if you’ve got a suggestion for me, I want to hear it.”

“What’s that?” said Martin.

“Nothing. Tighten up your seatbelt. What’s the distance now?”

“1.1 miles and 132 degrees.”

Martin tightened his belt and put his hands on the glareshield. The windshield was filling with palm trees. “Fuck, man, is this going to work?”

I looked out at the passing scene. A beautiful sight, really. Yellow/green coconut palms waving in a gentle breeze. Gorgeous white beach reaching out to the blue/green water. The reefs and rocks, dark below the surface. Two women in a canoe staring up at us with hands shading their eyes against the sun. A dark man standing alone on the reef holding a spear.

In the space of just a second, my mind's eye swept over a scene from 1964. That was the year my father taught me how to fly, the year I soloed on my sixteenth birthday. That's one of those moments that no one ever forgets.

I remember my father opening the right-hand door of the little Cessna airplane and unfastening his seatbelt. Cool, moist air swirled through the cramped, noisy cabin. He leaned over toward me and said, "Remember, with my weight out of here now, it's going to be a little quicker to come off the ground on takeoff, and it will float a little longer on landing unless you reduce your approach speed by a few knots. The tradition for a first solo flight is three takeoffs and landings. Do them to a full stop and taxi back for each takeoff. Use the checklist before you takeoff and be sure to double check the killer items."

I nodded, "Yessir."

My father grinned and patted me on the knee. "And don't crash, or your mother will be pissed at me all day. Besides, I don't have any other way back to Seattle. You're ready for this. Enjoy it. Happy birthday."

My father stepped out and slammed the cabin door. He banged on the fuselage twice and gave a thumbs up. I pushed the throttle in slightly and then backed it out again as the little Cessna began to roll forward. *Don't want to blast the power up too high and look like a total rookie*, I thought.

I was elated as I taxied away from the ramp. I felt like I was as big as a house. I remember I kept looking over at the empty seat next to me and smiling. *Hot damn, solo and my sixteenth birthday.*

I taxied to the end of the runway and ran through the pre-takeoff checklist. Then I set the list on the seat and scanned the cockpit. *Check the killer items one last time: Gas, mixture, carb heat, flaps, seats and belts, trim.* I made a radio call, looked for other airplane traffic at the little Kitsap Airport, checked the windsock, and taxied onto the runway. I brought the power up smoothly, and the little plane was light on its feet by the

time the throttle was all the way in. A little back pressure on the yoke and the plane popped off the ground. *The old man was right, as usual*, I thought. I pitched up until the end of the cowl just kissed the horizon, and the Cessna climbed like I'd never seen it climb before. Alone in my little aluminum world, I watched as the earth just fell away. I leaned my head back and yelled at the top of my lungs, "Yaaaaa!"

I looked out to the right and saw Puget Sound, Vashon Island, and Seattle. With each second, I climbed a little higher and the perspective improved. I continued to climb in my crosswind turn, then reduced power and leveled off as I turned downwind, flying a box-pattern around the airport and back to the runway. I felt completely in control. Totally present and exhilarated. *Power back abeam the threshold, carb heat out, little bit of flaps, needs some trim, check for traffic, speed's okay*. When I turned final, I saw my father crouched down fifty feet off to the side of the runway. *On the runway center line, speed's good, sink rate is good, more flaps, a little trim*. Ten feet above the runway, I squeezed off the last of the power as I raised the nose. The plane rose just a little, *oops*, then settled back to the runway with a chirp. *Perfect...almost*.

I braked, turned onto the taxiway, and headed back for another takeoff. My father was standing now, in the grass at the side of the runway smiling, nodding his head, and giving me a thumbs up. I grinned back and returned the gesture.

I did two more takeoffs and landings and then taxied over to the ramp and shut down. My father was standing behind the wing on my side when I got out. He had a grin from ear to ear. He stuck out his hand, "Nice job, Joe. Welcome aboard. You're an aviator."

I took my father's hand. It was warm and strong. "Thank you, sir."

We walked out from under the wing, and my father came as close to hugging me as I can remember—he put his arm over my shoulder and squeezed my trapezius. More like a pinch, really, but my feet felt an inch off the ground. I was still as big as a house.

We got a coke and sat in the sun critiquing other pilots doing takeoffs and landings. My father said, "You can take tremendous pride and satisfaction in flying when



you do it well. The challenge is to fly a perfect flight. All the right actions, all the right decisions. I haven't quite done it yet myself." He drained his coke and belched. "Now you did well, but don't get cocky. Airplanes are not forgiving." He tossed the coke bottle ten feet into a trash can. "But in a way, that can be the beauty of flying. Aviation is a place where competence is everything, and bullshit, swagger, and emotion are nothing. Flying is art, and it's science, skill and knowledge. The sky doesn't care who loves you or who hates you. It doesn't care how you feel." He nodded toward the airplane. "Let's go home and let your mother know you're still alive. One day you can do this for your son."

The postcard blue Pacific whizzed by under me. With just a few hundred yards to go, I pulled the nose of the plane upward and extended half flaps. The pull-up robbed the airplane of speed, and without sufficient speed, it wouldn't fly. The plane began to shudder, and I relaxed my back-pressure on the control yoke. "There it is!" Martin shouted, pointing slightly to the left. I eased the nose down further and banked slightly toward the dark, cindered runway. All out of energy from the zoom upward, the plane began to sink back toward the ground. I can throw the baseball up....

The ground rushed up at us.

"Shit," said Martin, as he lowered his head.

We flashed over the boundary fence with no more than ten feet to spare, as I lowered the landing gear and reduced power on the right engine for the landing.

As often happens in these moments of high stress and total focus, the landing was unbelievably smooth. No sensation at all other than the rumble of the gravel under the airplane's tires. I drank in the moment. I didn't touch the brakes, I just let the airplane slowly decelerate as it rolled down the runway.

And I felt this strange new place with every fiber. There were the high palms on my right swaying in the breeze. There was smoke from a small fire at the edge of the runway and a man in an unbuttoned blue shirt standing by the fire leaning on his rake and

looking at the airplane. On the left were the backs of small brightly colored tin-roofed houses with wash swaying on the clotheslines. Half-naked children and dogs were running out of the yards toward the airplane. The smell was earthy and good.

I rolled to the end of the runway, turned left, taxied onto the grass at the edge and shut the engine down.

It was Martin who broke the silence, “This is heaven, man. We landed in fucking heaven.”

I smiled and said, “I’m going to have to buy the owner a new seat cover. I think I chewed this one to shreds with my asshole.”

“You think you’ve got a problem, I bet I look like I sat in a peanut butter sandwich.”

We got out of the plane and walked over to the left engine. I opened the cowl with a screwdriver and found the problem instantly.

“Look at this,” I said, pointing to the exhaust stack. “It split open right here at the weld. Hot exhaust gas was blowing out like a torch. It’s a good thing we shut it down.”

Martin gave the engine a sober look, then turned and hugged me, pounding me on the back. He stepped away and said, “Can you fix it?”

I shook my head. “I really shouldn’t mess with it. We’ll need a mechanic to take the exhaust out and get it fixed or replaced and then put back in. Looks like we’ll be here for a little while.”

Martin looked around. “It could be worse. This place looks cool to me.”

I looked at the engine and nodded. “Oh, yeah, it could be worse alright. It could be much worse.”

A native wearing shorts and a Sunflower Airlines shirt walked up and asked what was wrong. I explained the problem, and we talked about how it could be handled as we walked up toward the little open-air terminal building. A few phone calls later we had worked out a deal with a mechanic at the international airport in Nadi, about 200

miles away. The mechanic would order a new exhaust from the U.S. and then fly out to Taveuni and install it.

With luck the whole operation could be done in two or three days, so Martin and I had a little unexpected time to kill. We asked the Sunflower Airlines agent about places to stay, and he did some calling around for us. There were only a dozen or so little resorts on the island, and with no reservations it was a struggle, but he got us into the Madurai Hideaway, and within a few minutes we were rattling down a dirt road toward our new home.

## Taveuni

About a half mile from the airport we turned left and climbed the rutted drive into the Hideaway. The grounds were gorgeous—four or five acres of lush green lawn dotted with coconut palms, lemon trees, wild roses, mango, papaya, and exotic flowers of every imaginable color and shape. We were warmly greeted by the proprietor, an East Indian named Chad, as we got out of the cab. Chad led us over to the little tin-roofed house that would be ours for a few days.

The house was clean and had a happy feel to it, though it was anything but elegant. Bare light bulbs hung from exposed wiring that was tacked across the ceiling and down the wall to the switches. Thin curtains hung in the doorways. The floor was covered with a half dozen different colors and patterns of linoleum. There was a cold-water shower and a simple kitchen. Chad explained that the power came from a generator which was turned on from sunset to about 10:00 p.m.. We carried in our suitcases and Martin's guitar, and then we collapsed onto the old couch.

The events of the past few hours had exhausted us emotionally and physically. I said, "I probably shouldn't tell you this, but I'm dyin' for a beer."

"That's a bad sign, buddy. You need to fight it." He reached over and opened up the guitar case and handed the guitar to me. "Try a little music therapy."

I took the guitar and fiddled with it for a minute or two, but I wasn't in the mood. I put it back in the case and walked into the kitchen. I needed to think through the flight. I told Martin I was going to lie down in the next room, but I actually just needed some quiet.

The breeze from the open window blew over me as I lay on the bed with my eyes closed. *What had I done that had almost killed us? Should I have spotted the exhaust problem during the pre-flight inspection in Rarotonga? No, there probably wasn't anything visible at that time. Did I do the right thing when I shut the engine off?*

*Probably, but it is impossible to say whether or not a fire would have actually started if I had left the engine running. My mistake was that I took off with too much weight. I let Martin talk me into bringing the statue of Tangaroa, and I didn't off-load the excess fuel. With less weight, we might have been able to maintain a less hair-raising altitude. Why did I let Martin bring the statue? Peer pressure. Wanting to be a 'good guy' instead of a responsible aviator. Why didn't I off-load the fuel? It would have taken some time, and I felt like we couldn't spare the time. Why? The truth is we had nothing but time, yet I still felt like we had a plan and needed to follow it. Also, off-loading the fuel would have amounted to a confession of having made a mistake with the loading. If nothing had happened to the engine, the mistake would have seemed minimal, and both Martin and I would have forgotten it. But I'd have felt like a dope, and Martin would have bugged me about it forever, if we needed to take the time to drain the fuel. The lessons were obvious: Safety before ego was one. And the other might be to avoid allowing myself to feel boxed in by my initial plan. Just because we had planned to get in the plane and go, it was not a sign of failure if things didn't work out exactly that simply.*

*And why was the plane over-fueled in the first place? Marie. Oh, yeah, Marie. It seemed like a lifetime ago already, and yet it was only a day. My mind drifted off toward the last night in Rarotonga, and I gradually slipped from a daydream to a deep and motionless sleep.*

I awoke two hours later to the sound of Martin playing the guitar. I felt like I was returning from the dead. My skin felt a foot thick.

As I walked into the room, Martin looked up and said, "Hey, kimosloby, I was about to leave you here. Man, I'm fuckin' famished. Let's go find some food."

We walked down the driveway and onto the dirt road leading back to the airport and the town. The island and the water were every bit as beautiful as Rarotonga, but it was much less prosperous on Taveuni. Many of the houses were little more than huts

constructed from corrugated metal nailed over large tree branches. Half-naked children ran with chickens in the yards. Clothes hung everywhere on lines.

We passed the airport and a few three or four-unit hostels with roughly made hand-painted signs out front. There were a couple of little restaurants, a small general store, and then things started thinning out again. *Was that it? Was that the town?* We asked a local where the town was, and he pointed back the way we came.

We turned around and walked back to a restaurant named “Mary’s.” It was a small but pleasant A-frame that was beautifully paneled in a local wood that looked like teak. The lobby of the restaurant resembled a used book store. There were hundreds of worn paperbacks on shelves along with seashells and little carved boats and masks. A sign by the books said, “Mary’s book exchange. Take one, leave two.” A woman came out from the kitchen, grabbed a couple of menus, and led us out to a plastic table on the deck looking over the blue/green water.

Mary was an ex-patriot American of about fifty. She wore a bright flower-print native dress. “When did you guys get in?”

“We flew in from Rarotonga this morning,” I said.

“Oh, you’re the ones. Charles, the local sheriff, or whatever he is called, was in here a little while ago telling me about all the excitement. He said he had to make a million phone calls about customs and all.”

Martin said, “Yeah, that’s us. We had some calls to make, too, flight plans and stuff. It was pretty hairy for a while there. I’ll tell you we were damn glad to see this place. So, what is there to do around here?”

Mary shrugged. “Most people come here to scuba dive out in the straight, or maybe just to lay around in a beautiful, quiet place. Really, there’s not much going on as far a tourism goes. The activity on the island is mostly just the natives trying to make a living, and they don’t try very hard.”

I said, “So, how long have you been here?”

“About six years. I sold real estate in New Jersey for years. When my daughter finished college, I left my workaholic husband at home and took a trip out here with a girlfriend. I loved it. I needed a change. I called Ben and told him he could come too if he wanted, but I was staying no matter what. He came out, and it drove him nuts. Not enough going on to suit him. Too quiet. He said he felt like he was waiting for something, but he didn’t know what. He was gone in three weeks. Now I lease this place and run it. I experiment cooking with the local foods. I slowly get to know the natives. I read. I write. I’ll never go back to the hustle and confusion. Do you want to try the vegetarian lasagne? It’s my current favorite.”

“Sure,” said Martin, “And bring my friend a beer.”

“Two beers?”

“No, one beer and an iced tea, please.”

We sat quietly on the deck looking out at the little uninhabited islands offshore, both of us still sorting through the events of the past day.

I said, “Are you going to be willing to get back in that airplane?”

Martin shrugged. “Sure, why not. The mechanic will get it squared away, and anyhow, now we know it will stay in the air even after some love-starved idiot overloads it with fuel.”

I twisted in my seat. I could still see the water racing just a few feet below the wing. “Are you going to call Devon?”

“Yeah, I’ll get to that, but not right now. Let the little fucker squirm for a while. I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

Mary brought the beer and the iced tea and sat at the empty table next to us. “You probably ought to go to Mbouma and then hike up to the falls while you are here. That’s real pretty. And maybe take a canoe out to one of these little islands. That’s fun.”

Martin asked, “Is there some place we could hear the native music? That really blew us away in the Cook Islands.”

“Yeah, every once in a while my gardener and his family play here at dinner time. If you want, I can set that up. I just add a few dollars to the meal price, so I can give them something. Maybe tomorrow night?”

“That would be great, sure.”

The sun was getting low as we walked back to our little house. Martin took his guitar out onto the porch, and I sat inside reading a book I had brought on Fermat’s last theorem. Around dusk Chad started the generator, and the lights came on. Geckos played tag on the walls, and black spiders the size of tarantulas patrolled their webs on the ceiling. At about ten the chugging of the generator stopped, and the lights went out.

I tossed the book onto the bed and shut my eyes, feeling that sweet burning relief from the darkness. I’d been overloaded by the events of the day, and a good night’s sleep would be a godsend. I called out to Martin, “Night, Mom.”

“Goodnight, John-boy...no, wait a minute. Come out here and look at the sky.”

Martin was staring straight up when I walked out. He said, “What the fuck do you suppose that is?”

There were three greenish/yellow stationary lights forming a roughly equilateral triangle about a fist’s distance apart and more or less straight up. They were very bright. I said, “Shit, I don’t know the southern sky, but that’s got to be something man-made, those aren’t stars or planets. Have they moved?”

“Not since I’ve been watching.”

At about that time, the light on the bottom right shot through the sky and out of sight at incredible speed. “Holy shit,” I said. The other two lights remained in position for a few seconds, and then the light on the left sped out of sight the same way. The brightest of the three hung motionless for a second and then started shooting out green and yellow tracers through an arc of about forty-five degrees. There was no noise. This went on for a few seconds, and then the last object arced across the sky and disappeared.

Somewhere down the road a dog barked.



“What the fuck was that?” said Martin.

“I have no idea, but it sure wasn’t a natural phenomenon.”

“Swamp gas.”

“Weather balloons.”

“Close encounters of the coolest kind.”

“No shit, farfuckingout.”

“Farfuckingup.”

We just sat there looking at the sky, and after a while Martin said, “Do you ever get the feeling that maybe you’re missing something?”

I didn’t know what he was getting at. “Missing something?” I said. “Like missing out on something, you mean? Like other people are having all the fun, and I’m missing out?”

Martin grew animated. “No. Like, I don’t know, like you don’t quite have a handle on what’s going on here. You go through your day, and time races on, and you do this and you do that, and who knows what it all adds up to, or whether you’ve got the picture at all. Shit, I don’t know. I feel like if somebody a little more advanced could just sit me down and say, ‘Look, it’s like this. Forget all that crazy shit, this is what’s important.’ Fuck, I can’t explain it. I just feel like I can’t fit the pieces together. Like the clues are laying all around, but I can’t get the picture. Does that make any sense?”

Now I knew what he was talking about, but it seemed hopeless to try to express it. Instead I made a lame joke. I sang a line from an old movie, “What’s it all about, Ralphie?”

With that pure clean voice of his, Martin sang back, “Is it just for the moment we live?”

I felt kind of bad about cutting off the discussion the way I did, so I sort of half-assed put the topic back on the table saying, “In a lot of ways I think our father’s generation had it easier. What they had to do, what was expected of them, was a lot clearer. The standards were a lot clearer. They struggled through the Depression as young

adults, fought through World War II, then came out and built the houses and the cars and the schools and the factories that everyone needed to live in the modern world. What a man needed to do was clear. And they did it. And they could go to sleep at night knowing that they were doing it. What it meant to be a man was clear. Now, fuck, I don't know, everything's up for grabs."

Martin nodded. "Amen, brother."

"It's like we've solved the economic problem, and we just don't know what to do with ourselves. It's not enough to be safe and comfortable, you've got to be a millionaire, then it's not enough to be a millionaire, you've got to be a billionaire."

Martin stood up and stretched. He offered his guitar, and I took it. He stood looking at the sky and rubbing his stomach with both hands. "Makes me think we've been born with this big itch, but without the sense to figure out where to scratch." He turned toward the door and said, "Well, that's about all I can squeeze into a single day. A quick trip to the sandbox and I'm into the sheets."

I sat down on the porch with the guitar and looked at the sky for a few minutes, then I remembered the song about my father and I that I'd been working on back in Rarotonga. I fiddled with it for a while and came up with a new verse.

With a light in his hand  
and a spark in his eye  
he pointed at Rigel  
and smiled.  
He said, "That fine star  
once led me home  
to a tiny island  
in a phosphorous foam

It was a star in a broken sky

at the foot of the hunter  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man  
in flight.

Well, I stood in the yard  
and shook with the cold  
a boy of just nine  
or ten,  
and I thought of his plight  
his aluminum flight  
in the dark between  
ocean and cloud.

It was a star in a broken sky  
at the foot of the hunter  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man  
in flight.

I wanted to go back in  
but I stood there and shivered  
while the truth  
sank in

you can turn from the haze  
and surrender  
or stand in the storm  
with a sextant

It was a star in a broken sky  
at the foot of the hunter  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man  
in flight.

When I finished, Martin called out from bed, “Hey, that’s coming along good, man. I like it. Buenas noches, amigo.”

I stumbled through the unfamiliar, pitch-dark house trying not to smash Martin’s guitar. I set it in its case and tumbled into bed. That night I dreamed that I was stuck in the back seat of an airplane. It drove me crazy that I couldn’t reach the controls. The plane was roaring along just above some city streets. Ducking under power lines that were dense overhead. All of us in the cockpit were looking for a spot to pull up into the safety of the sky. I squirmed. Finally there was a gap in the lines overhead and the plane shot upward into clear air. I relaxed. The co-pilot turned and smiled. A young man, nearly a boy. Blond hair and blue, blue eyes.

The next morning we walked down the hill to the beach. It was another perfect tropical postcard setting. Clear calm water changing from white to green to deep blue as we looked out. Camel-colored sand combed flat by the receding tide. Palms that reached out toward the water. A little native boy running on the beach with a dog. The native

crew of a dive boat assembling their gear near a row boat that would take them out to a bigger craft swinging on a buoy a hundred yards out.

I waded out to my waist, put on my goggles, and dove in. Once again a visitor in an alien world. I swam straight out past the dive boat into the deep blue water and turned to parallel the beach. After a few hundred yards, I turned back toward the island and swam toward Martin. When I got back, there was a group of native kids playing in the waist deep water. I took off my goggles and put them on one of the little boys. The boy dove in and popped up a few seconds later yelling excitedly to his friends. The kids took turns with the goggles as I walked up and stood dripping near Martin.

Martin smiled at me and said, “I don’t know how to break this to you, Kimoslimey, but one of the guys working the dive boat just came over here and told me you were a fucking idiot. Number one, don’t swim near the black rocks. They are full of little black and white snakes that are more venomous than a cobra. And two, don’t go past the reef, ‘cause some guy got bit in half by a shark out there two weeks ago.”

I sat down. “No shit? You know, it’s weird. When I’m not in the water, I worry about stuff like that, but when I’m out there, it just doesn’t seem to matter.”

“That’s because you’re fucking insane, man, think about it.”

“How am I going to think about that if I’m fucking insane?”

“I don’t know, but I’ll think about it.”

“I thought I was supposed to think about it.”

“Shut up, asshole....You know, I’ve been thinking about this. I don’t want to give that creep Devon a hundred grand.”

The kids ran up to me and handed me the goggles. They were grinning and laughing at each other, but shy about approaching. One of them said, “Thank you,” and they all giggled, turned, and ran back into the water.

I said, “Those kids are so neat. What’s life got up its sleeve for them, I wonder?”

“Work the dive boat. Have more kids. Probably just like their parents.”

I thought of Winston. *Wouldn't it be cool if he could get through med school.*

“Let’s take that bus to Mbouma and see the falls.”

We went back to the little house and made lunch, then we waited until 1:15 for the 12:40 bus to arrive. We could hear it straining up the hill from a half mile away. It was a brightly painted open-air bus that was probably on its last legs in the 1950’s. It was crowded with natives, but Martin and I managed to find a place to sit in the back. Now and then someone would turn back and smile at us, but for the most part we just lurched along in silence watching the island roll by.

The ride to Mbouma took about forty minutes, and we both found the scene mildly upsetting. On our left was absolute tropical splendor, picture-perfect beaches, little palm-covered islands off shore. But every few miles we would come to a scene of abject third-world poverty. Naked children playing in front of a falling down corrugated metal shack. Women sitting in groups washing their cloths in the stream. Tiny little open air stores with nothing on the shelves.

When we got out of the bus at Mbouma, we walked for a half hour through the warm jungle to the falls, and then both of us took off our shirts and dove into the clear, chilly water in the pool below the falls. Native kids jumped from a low cliff into the water. An East Indian couple sitting nearby offered us a drink from a half-gallon bottle of beer they were sipping.

“What time do you figure the 4:30 bus leaves?” asked I.

“I’d guess sometime between 3:45 and 6:00, but since that’s the last one all day, we probably ought to get back and wait for it.”

“Roger that. It would be a fucking long walk, and I don’t think we passed a car the whole way out here, so hitchhiking isn’t going to work.”

The ride back only reinforced our earlier impression, and in spite of the natural beauty of the surroundings, we fell into a somber mood. When Mary’s came by, we jumped out and ran into the restaurant to tell her we would be back for dinner. She was pleased to see us and told us that the music had been arranged.

An hour later we were sitting with a small group of tourists at Mary's looking through the menu. Mary was clearly in a party mood. The tables were decorated with flowers and candles, and colored lights were strung through the awning overhead. The off-shore breeze was beginning to pick up and the air felt like velvet. People talked in hushed tones, so the sound of the little waves breaking on the sand below could be heard above everything else.

Midway through dinner, Mary rang a wine glass and introduced Timothy Mavana and the Mavana family. A smiling man of about forty came out with a guitar. He was followed by his cousin, his mother, his wife, his sister-in-law, and four little kids carrying rolled up mats. The cousin carried a large tin bowl and a huge pitcher of water.

"Have you seen the kava ceremony?" It was Mary bringing me a glass of wine and sitting at our table with a glass of her own.

"No, what's it all about?" I said.

"Just watch."

The cousin set the large bowl on the floor and filled it about half way with water as the family spread out the mats and sat down. Timothy spread a small colored cloth on the floor and poured a gray powder onto the cloth. The powder was ground up Kava root. The edges of the cloth were pulled around the kava, so it formed a ball about the size of a fist. Then Timothy took the kava and swirled it around in the bowl. The water turned grey. After a few minutes of swirling the mixture, Timothy took a cup made from a coconut shell and dipped it into the water and swirled some more. When all was ready, Timothy clapped once, dipped the cup into the bowl, and drank the contents. He then set the cup down and everyone, including Mary and any others who knew what was going on, clapped three times.

Mary said, "Now they are going to offer it to everyone. If you want some, just go up to the bowl, clap once, drink the whole cup, hand it back and clap three times."

Martin said, "What is that stuff?"

“It is the root of a pepper plant. It is a mild soporific. It will make you kind of groggy and numb your lips.”

“I think I’ll El Paso on that one, thanks,” said Martin.

Mary said, “That’s alright. They won’t be offended.”

I asked what it tasted like, and Mary said, “You’ll see.”

“Okay, I’ll try one. When in France...”

Following Mary, I went up to the bowl, clapped once, drank the kava, clapped three times, and returned to my seat.

Martin leaned over and said, “Well?”

“Tastes like a balsa wood milkshake, with just a hint of topsoil. And my lip and throat are a little numb already.”

Martin said, “If the numbness doesn’t spread to your nuts in the next twenty minutes, I’ll give it a try.”

I looked at him and winked. “How are you going to know if my nuts are numb?”

“Asshole. Maybe the question ought to be, How are *you* going to know?”

“Touche.”

“de jour.”

Mary choked on her wine. She laughed and said, “You guys aren’t normal.”

Simultaneously, we both said, “Thanks.”

Timothy started to strum the guitar, and a few seconds later the four kids sang a phrase in Fijian. Timothy answered, and the whole group replied. I smiled over at Martin, who rocked back in his chair and rolled his eyes toward heaven. The music had a presence that made the hair on our arms stand up.

For an hour or so, the Fijians played, and at the breaks between songs various member of the small audience joined the musicians at the kava bowl. I had been up to the bowl twice more when Martin said, “Well, numbnuts, is it safe?”

“Yeah, go ahead.”



Martin followed the ritual and tried not to let on that he found the taste awful. Back at the table, just loud enough for me to hear, he imitated a snobbish wine connoisseur and said, “Sassy, but not insolent, with a slight goat turd afterblow.”

The remark cracked me up and drew a scowl from Mary, which straightened us up some, since we really didn’t want to insult the Fijians or offend the other guests. About then the band took a break, and Martin and I soaked up the postcard perfect atmosphere. The palms moving with the light wind. The moon on the water. The uncountable stars. Orion high overhead.

Martin said, “You want to know something weird? I feel like playing my new tune. You think these people would like it?”

“I don’t know. Let’s ask Mary.”

I motioned her over to the table and said, “Do you remember a song from years ago called ‘Who Done It’?”

I looked at Martin. He was drawing circles in the tablecloth with his finger.

Mary nodded, “Yeah, great song.”

“Do you remember who recorded that song?”

Mary thought for a minute. “Rock trivia is not my best game, but give me a minute and I’ll come up with it.”

Martin looked up. “It was me, Martin Landry.”

Mary looked both excited and a little embarrassed. “No, really? I loved that song, very powerful. In fact I got your album, too, if I remember right. Hard to get a clear picture of those days now.”

“That’s no shit, but thanks.”

I said, “Martin’s got a couple of new tunes, would it be okay if he played a little during the break?”

“I’ll ask Tim, but I’m sure he won’t mind.”

Mary left and came back in a minute. “Sure, Tim says it’s fine.”

Martin sat on the mat and picked up the guitar. He re-tuned for the new song and began to fingerpick. Every time you play a song, you do it differently. You see it from a different angle. You push it through a different filter. Often you are as surprised as the next person by what comes out. This time it was a little softer and spookier than I remembered it. He sang, "I sit on the deck of my new friend's boat/with my arm stretched out to the sky/amazed to think that behind my thumb/a thousand galaxies fly..."

The little audience was with him. They stopped talking and seemed to fall right into the mood. At the end of the song there were smiles and nods and applause. "Thanks, I just wrote that the other day. First song I've written in years. I'll do one more maybe you'll recognize." He started "Who Done It?" This time the applause came right away. When he was finished he set the guitar down, stood up, bowed with a flourish, and headed for the table. Mary intercepted him before he got there and gave him a warm hug.

When he sat down I said, "How did that feel?"

"Fucking fabulous, man. It has been too long."

"You sit on the deck of your new friends boat? What's that all about?"

"What?"

"You said, 'I sit on the deck of my new friend's boat.' Where did that come from?"

"Did I say that? Really?"

"Maybe it was the kava," I said.

"Please, no more of that shit."

I was starting to feel pretty groggy. "You know what, that stuff is making me sleepy. Do you think it would be rude to take off?"

"Let's listen to the next set and then go. I should thank Tim for the guitar."

The Mavanas came back and played for another half hour, and as they rolled up their mats at the end, Martin and I said a quick thank you to Mary and set out on the road back to the little house.

I was feeling strange, like my skin was leather and my head was full of rags. My

feet seemed to carry me down the road as if on autopilot, and I couldn't feel them at all. Martin was talking about playing music, now and years earlier, but I couldn't follow the story very well.

When we started up the driveway we saw a Coleman lantern burning under the lemon tree by Chad's house, and we heard voices and saw shapes moving around up there. Martin yelled, "Goodnight, Chad."

Chad shouted, "Boys, come up here a minute. There was a call for you while you were gone today. I must tell you about it."

We walked up into the harsh, hissing light and saw Chad sitting with a group of five or six men around a kava bowl. Chad motioned for us to sit down and share the kava. Both Martin and I had another drink.

"A man called from Nadi. He said he is going to come out tomorrow and fix your airplane."

I said, "Oh, that's good news, Chad. Thanks. That probably means we will stay tomorrow night and then leave the next day, but we'll let you know for sure tomorrow."

Chad gave us a vacant smile, and his eyes swam around like two gold fish in a tank. I looked at the other men. Some sat with their heads hanging as if they were asleep, some simply stared with painted smiles at Martin or me. One was stirring the kava with the coconut shell cup. Martin said, "We are going to have to be at the airport early, gentlemen, so goodnight to you."

When we got back into the dark little house, Martin said, "Those guys were seriously fucked up, man. Did you notice?"

I felt groggy. "Can we talk about it in the morning, dear? I am so fucking tired I can hardly move." I stumbled toward my room. "I'm signing off, man."

Martin took out his guitar and sat on the arm of the couch. "Hey, man, I wanted to talk to you about something."

I collapsed into my bed in the other room and said, "You can talk if you want, but I don't think I can listen. What part of Kansas is this, anyhow?"

“Alright, goodnight, Dorothy.”

“Night, Auntie Em.”

I felt thick and warm as I lay in the bed. I heard Martin pick through a jazzy, sad-sounding chord sequence. He was experimenting with another new song. I tried to follow the words, but it was too much of a struggle. As I slipped off to sleep, Martin sang:

Here I am  
feeling so out of reach  
a tiny shell  
on this wind-swept beach.  
Waiting for a child...

He stopped and then started the last line again.

Waiting for a girl  
who could see me shine  
lift me up  
and say that she is mine.

There's something here  
that I need to show  
a tiny spark  
a sacred glow.

He experimented with the chords for the bridge, tried a key change, then abandoned the idea. He sang:

There'd be a mirror in her eyes

that reflects the good in me  
and shows me that it's real  
but where, where, where can that woman be?

I slept until ten the next morning and woke up to hear Martin playing the same jazzy song I had struggled to listen to the previous night. I lay in bed and listened as Martin continued to work the rough edges off the lyrics and the melody. After a few minutes I got up and walked into the main room. Martin said, "I was beginning to think you was dead."

"God, I think I was. I don't know when was the last time I slept like that. And weird dreams, man. Snake dreams. Flying dreams." I closed my eyes and stretched. When I opened them again, I saw a huge brown spider bouncing in his net above me. I looked back at Martin.

He put the guitar in its case. "Speaking of flying, we ought to get down there and see what's going on with the airplane."

When we got to the airplane, we found a small honey-skinned man working on the engine. Like half the people living on Fiji, he was East Indian. He smiled warmly and introduced himself as Anirudh.

Anirudh said that I had described the problem perfectly, and that he had brought all the right stuff to fix the engine and the little bit of wiring near the exhaust. The job would take most of the day, and Anirudh hoped to get the 4:45 flight back to his home in Nadi. Martin and I hung around for a while exchanging small talk with Anirudh and watching the engine come apart, but when it was obvious that we couldn't be of any help, we decided to walk down to Mary's and get breakfast.

When we walked in she said, "Hey, it's Elvis and Colonel Parker." She gave Martin a hug and said, "Martin, thanks for playing last night. You should have stuck around, everybody thought it was great."

“Thanks, I would have, but Sleeping Beauty had to get home.”

“It’s the kava, I should have told you. We don’t call it grog for nothing. I can only drink one or two.”

Martin said, “Yeah, when we got back, Chad and the boys were pretty far gone.”

Mary wiped her hands on a towel and said, “I hate to say it, but that’s almost a daily thing around here. You guys want some lunch?”

“Whatever your special is, we trust you.”

“Vegetable soup and fresh rye bread.”

“Perfect.”

Mary disappeared and Martin looked out to the water and said, “You know the people we met on the Cook Islands really have their shit together. I mean, Terry is a tycoon compared to most of these people.”

“Tycoon Terry. Yeah, that’s no shit. The guy is pretty squared away, but there must be guys like that here, too.”

“No doubt, but he was something else, wasn’t he?”

“Yeah, I loved his sense of humor. I mean, he *was* trying to be *funny* wasn’t he? Remember, ‘Why would the princess marry a dog? Just don’t get lost.’ That was cool.”

“Or that number he pulled with the French couple. I don’t think that guy takes shit from nobody.”

“No, I don’t think so either, but he’s not an asshole about it. I think he’s a great guy. And his son, Winston, that guy haunts me, man. What a cool kid. Are you going to call Devon?”

“Yeah, I guess. Let’s bring Anirudh a sandwich and then I’ll walk back to the store and use the pay phone.”

Anirudh was surprised and very pleased by the sandwich that Martin and I handed him. “Thank you very much. That is most kind of you. Shall we sit right here in the shade of the wing?”

Martin had brought some soft drinks, too. I passed them out and we sat down. I said, "How's the work going?"

"Ah, everything is as it should be. The new exhaust part is fitting in just as it should. And I found where the throttle cable was slipping and fixed that, too. I am confident I will finish in time to be on the 4:45 plane. Where are you gentlemen going, if I might ask?"

I looked to the west and said, "We were on our way to Vanuatu when the exhaust split open."

"You were very fortunate to find this island."

"Yes, and lucky to find a mechanic who could get us going again so fast," said Martin. Then standing up, Martin looked toward me and said, "I'm going to shag back into town and make some calls. I'll stop back here in a little while."

When Martin had gone, I asked, "How long have you lived in Fiji, Anirudh?"

"I was born here, as was my father, his father, and his. My great-grandfather came here from Bengal to pick the sugar cane when Fiji was a British colony. He was an indentured worker."

"Really, I had no idea."

"Yes, now there are about as many Fijian Indians as Fijians."

"How do the Fijians and the Fijian Indians get along?"

"Well, it's mostly alright, but everyone is different, you know. Even among the Indians, there are Hindu and Muslim, city dwellers and country dwellers. Our big problem is that we can't own land. So we get involved in the small business, and then the Fijians sometimes think of us as money-hungry merchants. Or we lease the land to grow sugar cane or crops, and then if we are successful, the Fijians raise the rent."

"Trouble in paradise, huh?"

"Well, it's bad and it's good. The land must stay with the Fijians, so life here can stay simple. If the land could be sold, Fiji might fill up with big hotels and never again be like it is now."

Anirudh stuffed his soft drink can and sandwich paper into the sack and got up.

“I’d better get busy if I am going to make the 4:45 plane.”

I said, “When Martin comes back, tell him I am at the little house, will you, please? It was a pleasure to meet you, Anirudh, I really enjoyed having a chance to talk for a while.”

“Thank you, Mr. Claypool. Have a very safe trip.”



## The Song of the Pouring Rain

I stopped at Chad's house for a few minutes and then went back to the little house Martin and I rented. I opened all the doors and windows and lay on the bed with the sea breeze blowing through the room. Curtains luffing in the steady wind. I lay there thinking about the last time I saw Beth. I had gone over to her new house for dinner a couple of days before Martin and I left for Kauai.

We sat on her back porch looking out at the creek behind her yard, while the chicken hissed on the little brick grill behind us. We watched a fisherman working his way up stream, casting a fly into the pools behind the rocks. Sinbad didn't like the fisherman. I could see that he wanted to charge down to the creek. I told him to lay down, but he sat instead. A compromise, I guess. He was coiled up tight, muscles rippling under his thin fur as he continued to eye the fisherman suspiciously.

We had dinner outdoors on the deck. There was no animosity or tension, but the conversation seemed guarded and light. Sparse. A little too deliberate. A little too careful. Beth wondered about the details of my upcoming trip. I welcomed the chance to have something to say, so I got the globe and ran my finger from Oakland to Kauai to the Cook Islands to Truk to Australia. I told her what I knew of these places, which, in retrospect, wasn't much. She talked about her job. About her new house.

After dinner we sat on the steps of the deck and looked out at the yard and the creek as the sun got low and sky turned to frosted glass. The bats came out and darted wildly between the cottonwoods. I was putting off my exit. Something seemed unfinished. Beth brought out some scotch. Sinbad was laying in the grass by the old rusty swing set left behind by the previous renters. Head between his paws, eyes open, watching us. Listening. His ears turning like radar dishes. There was a noise down by the creek and Sinbad was instantly on his feet. He stood stiff for a second, then sprinted toward the water. He ran straight toward the swing set and at the last moment flew like a

deer between the chains reaching down to one of the swings. Beth and I laughed. One of Sin's back feet caught the swing as he flew past. It swung empty behind him as he disappeared into the stand of low cottonwoods by the creek. We both watched the empty swing, and the smiles fell from our faces. I watched as the oscillations of the swing died down. I thought about how I could write the equations of the swing's motion, a simple matter of sines and cosines, but I couldn't seem to get a grip on what I was feeling right then. I don't know how I found it in me to just blurt it out, but after a moment I said, "You never could forgive me for talking you into getting an abortion, could you? You blamed me for the infection that meant we couldn't have kids." There wasn't a hint of accusation or self-pity. It was a question of fact.

Beth crossed her arms over her stomach and doubled over until her eyes were just above her knees. After a few seconds she sat back up. "No, Joseph, that's not true. I knew what you wanted, but it was my decision. Looking back on it now, I wish things had worked out differently. I wish I'd have had the baby." Beth looked at me. I was nodding slowly in agreement. She continued, "But maybe what I really should wish is that I hadn't gotten the infection, and we'd have had children later, because we really weren't ready at the time. But none of it was any more your fault than mine. The problem is that we never really dealt with it, never talked it out together. We tried to bury it, but it didn't work. We tried to ignore it, but it was always there, at least for me." She paused.

The swing was nearly still. Friction in the rusty hinges. Drag from the air. "Me, too," I whispered. I cleared my throat and went on. "In the beginning I'd stop and stare at babies in strollers, later on I'd watch three-year-olds in the grocery. Watch how they acted and how their parents acted. I was sort of keeping track, I guess."

Beth looked hard at me and said, "I had no idea. You never said a word."

"It was too painful," I said. "I didn't want to bring it up. I felt like you blamed me for everything."

Beth said, "No. My biggest problem is that you retreated into your own little worlds... your math, your music, your flying, and I couldn't get in there with you. I never

knew what was going on in there. It was like you didn't want to *feel* anything. Like you were shut down. I didn't know if you were blaming me, or blaming yourself, or not even thinking about it. I lived with that, but I didn't like it. Maybe I thought it was the cross I had to bear. Once you started flying, you were gone a lot. And then when you were home you were always working quietly on some project. This may sound weird, but there were times when I'd be home and I would forget if you were even there or not. Gradually it got to the point where the silence was suffocating me. I had a lot of friends, but I lived with you and at the same time I was somehow shut out of your life. I finally had to try to make a whole life of my own, rather than stay with you and have all these missing pieces."

I nodded. "Is it working?" I said.

"Too soon to say," she answered.

Laying on the bed in Taveuni I thought about how I had put my hand on her knee, and she laced her tiny fingers through mine. "Life is so long," she had said, "and so short."

A tropical rain shower moved inland, and it rained steady and very hard for a few minutes. It was like music on the lemon tree outside the window. On the tin roof. Somewhere beyond the coconuts and mangos a rooster crowed.

There was a rightness to it all. There was a "presence" to it. A feeling of belonging in this giant web of life.

I dreamed that I floated face up at the bottom of a deep well, with just a tiny circle of blue sky visible far above. I could hear people laughing and talking in the sunlight above, but I couldn't make out what they were saying. If only I could believe, I would be able to drift right up to the surface. Maybe if I struggled, maybe if I concentrated, I would rise up. Or maybe if I just relaxed. But it was too hard. The trick seemed to involve forgetting. And remembering. There are the voices again, I hear them. And the face of a young man. Strong and sure. A smile. And those cobalt, god-like eyes.

“Dad’s home. Joey, where are you? I’ve got something for you.” It was Martin coming through the door. I raised my head and saw him walk toward the kitchen carrying a brown paper bag. “Wake up, man, look at all these goodies.”

I felt like all the blood had been drained from my body. I wanted to get up, but I thought a few deep breaths would be better. “What ya got?”

Martin stuck his head through the doorway to my room. “I stopped at the store and picked up dinner, man. Let’s go down to the beach and barbeque some tuna. I got some bread, papaya, spinach, and look here, cookies from New Zealand. Best in the world.”

I sat up and looked out at the dripping lemon tree. “What time is it?”

“Six fucking fifteen, man.”

“Did you see Anirudh?”

“Yeah, the plane’s done. Looks great. I paid him. He was going to get on the 4:45 flight and split. All is right with the world.”

I got up slowly, walked over to the big kitchen sink, turned on the water, and stuck my head under the faucet. I pulled my dripping head out, walked over by Martin and shook like a dog saying, “What makes you so chipper?”

Martin darted backwards. “Jesus, asshole, you’ve been out in the wilds too long. No, look I’ve been thinking. Let’s go down to the beach and have a pow-wow.”

I stood in the doorway looking outside. The world seemed scrubbed and fresh from the rain. The sky was clearing and the clouds turning golden with the low sun.

“Yeah, I could use a swim. I’ve got to wake up.”

Martin was turning the fish on the fire when I walked out of the water and up the beach toward the barbeque. Martin threw me a towel, and I said, “I am finally beginning to feel like I’m back on earth.”

Martin said, “Okay, let me get this out, I’ve been thinking. Maybe you ought to sit down.” He took a deep breath and waited for me to pay attention. “I can give Devon a hundred thousand bucks, and he can get my boat back, right?”

I rubbed my hair with the towel and then stopped. “Well, he *might* not be able to get it, but okay.”

“Alright, so that little shit Devon gets a hundred grand. I get a beautiful boat. And Terry gets fucked. Right?”

I nodded. “That would be the size of it.”

Martin flipped the fish over. “I’m not going to do it. It ain’t right. Fuck Devon. That scheming little prick with his cufflinks and his shiny shoes. Why should I do anything for that asshole? I can take the hundred grand, buy some other boat, and let Terry live in peace.”

I sat on a fallen coconut tree. “But I thought Orion was the magic boat and all. Symbol of your redemption...talisman...channel to your better self...Orion, the hunter who steers you home.”

Martin shook his head. “Symbolic bullshit. I don’t believe in magic. It’s just a boat. A great boat, but just a boat. I fucked it up and walked away from it. Just like I did with a lot of other things. Terry picked it up and kept the faith. He deserves it, I don’t. Simple as that.”

I grinned. “I don’t fucking believe it.”

Martin cringed. “Don’t be pissed, man. If I don’t do the right thing here my karma is fucked. And you don’t want me screwing Winston’s Dad around, do you?”

I shook my head. “No, no, that’s not it. You want to hear something strange?”

Martin shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. If *you* think it’s strange, it’s going to be pretty far out there.”

I looked out at the water and then back at Martin. One of those birds that dives down to get a fish just popped to the surface and flew off. “No, listen. When I came back to the house this afternoon while you were in town, I called Avarua. I talked to the

principal of the high-school there and asked if I could help out with math and science next year. Told her I had a Ph. D. and stuff. She was overfuckingjoyed, man. She said maybe I would just be an unofficial tutor or something, because of the paperwork, but shit yeah, I could sure help out. I told her that would be fine, because I didn't really need the money anyway."

Martin looked relieved. And amazed. "Son of a bitch, that's cool. You are going to help Winston, after all."

I nodded. "Winston and anybody else."

"So we are both shifting gears here."

"Looks like it."

"But what about flying to all the islands your father flew from and seeing the world through his eyes and all?"

I stirred the sand by my feet with a little stick. I drew a triangle and then rubbed it out with my foot. I said, "Yeah, I know. I wanted to see the world through his eyes. But they were *his* eyes, and I will never be able to do it. And besides, it's a different world now." I looked out at the water and back at Martin. "And I wanted to be his friend. But I was not his friend, I was his son, which is more, though in some ways also less. I wanted to be his contemporary. But time is real." I looked down at the sand and scribbled with my stick. "I wanted to break through the wall that seemed to be around him, but maybe it was around me, maybe the same walls are around everyone." I broke the stick and tossed it aside looking up at Martin. "Maybe with all his interest in math and flying, he led me into an emotional wasteland, I don't know."

Martin gave a puzzled look. "Emotional wasteland? No, man, I don't think so. Sounds to me like he was a very squared away man of his time. He just wanted to show you the things that he valued."

I shrugged. "Maybe so." I ran my foot over the sand-doodling again. "What was your father like, Martin? I bet he got a charge out of all your successes in baseball, in music."

Martin flipped the fish over and tested it with a fork. “What was Sid Landry like? Well, he was a hell of a guy, really. The kind of guy who didn’t take a vacation in fifteen years and never complained about it. The kind of a guy who would donate two pianos to the high-school, when he had to struggle to make a car payment. The kind of guy who would give some poor black musician a new amp and tell him to pay it off whenever he could.” Martin blinked and stepped out of the smoke from the barbeque. “Funny how the damn smoke can follow you around when you stand by a fire.” He wiped at his eyes with the back of his hand. “You know he’s been dead for twenty-five years or so, and I still feel like I’m getting to know him.”

I looked at Martin and then looked away. “He must have been proud of your career with the Dodgers.”

Martin turned his head back and forth slowly. “No, he never lived to see that. He knew I made the collegiate all-American team, though, and I know he was proud of that.”

“Well, shit, that’s something.”

“Yeah, that’s something, but you know, I don’t think he had the same respect for my baseball playing that he had for my brother’s wrestling. He seemed to just sort of take it for granted that I would do well in baseball. I mean, he was pleased, but he sort of figured it was just a fucking gift. You know what I mean? Like I didn’t earn it or deserve it, the ability was just given to me, where my brother worked his ass off and really showed some guts to do what he did. Dad never made a big deal of it or anything. Like he never put me down. And you know, the truth is, he was right.” Martin turned the fish again.

I said, “Your old man doesn’t sound like the sort of guy who would have screwed Terry out of his boat. I bet he’d have been proud of you for not doing that.”

Martin looked up and then back at the fire. “You’re probably right. What about you? Did your old man respect what you were doing?”

I picked up another stick and drew another triangle in the sand. “Well, in a way, I guess. He was always interested in math, and I went a long way with that. When we did

that book together, he was kind of blown away with the way I could sort things out with math, and he always paged through the math journal articles I'd write and marvel at all the hieroglyphics." I drew a square coming off each of the sides of my triangle. "But I don't think he ever gave up the idea that real men were pilots. Military pilots. Airline pilots. I was a pilot, but not like him. I didn't fly into combat like he did, and I didn't fly through hurricanes to plot their position like he did, and I didn't fly with the airlines in the early days like he did. I think he would have thought that my life was just sort of dull, like I never really *did* anything."

"Well, you saved our asses coming into this place the other day. That was something. Scared the shit out of me, but you just hung in there and brought us home."

I cleared off the sand with my foot again. "Yeah, but don't forget I got us into that jam in the first place."

Martin said, "What were you thinking when we were flying into here the other day and the engine was dead and we could have crashed and all?"

I pondered that for a second and said, "I was debating whether or not to restart the engine. I was thinking about the pull-up at the end."

Martin said, "No, I mean besides that. Where you thinking of anything besides that? I mean like did your life flash before your eyes or any cool shit like that?"

I thought for a minute. "Yeah, actually, I was thinking about back when my father died. Thinking about his life and mine. How we were kind of similar and still way different."

Martin nodded and said, "Yeah, that's what I mean."

I said, "What about you?"

"Well, I was thinking about bending over and kissing my ass goodbye." I looked over and saw him grinning. I didn't say anything. He got a more serious expression. "But I was also struck by the beauty of this place," he said. "I just sort of soaked it up. And I thought about my last trip to New Orleans, just before you and I left for Hawaii and Rarotonga. How I went down to the bars and listened to that fabulous music. How I ate



all that great food. How my mother seemed so old all of a sudden. Sitting all day in that stuffy old house of hers with the blinds pulled. And I thought about how I went over to see Stephanie to talk about Mom, and her new husband, Rob, suggested that Steph and I pick Kevin up at school and take him out for an early dinner before I left. Did I already tell you about that?"

I shook my head as if to say no. It seemed like Martin wanted to talk, so I just shut up and let him go. He looked out at the water and back at me. He seemed to have this little scene on his mind, and he wanted me to see it. "We sat in front of Jesuit High waiting for Kevin to come out, but he didn't show. One of Kevin's friends saw the car and came over and told Stephanie that Kevin got P.H., and he should be out around four. P.H. stands for penance hall. I wish I had a dollar for every hour I spent in there, copying pages out of the phone book or adding long columns of phone numbers. Or Jack, Jesus, he could retire from the money he'd have made like that."

I knew all about P.H. from my own high-school, but I just sat quiet letting Martin tell his story. "So we sat in the car and watched the kids gather in groups outside the Banks Street door. Shouts and waves. Blue and white school bags loaded down with books. It all came flooding back to me. Nothing had changed from when I was there. I said to Steph, 'What a wild man Jack was. Fucking amazing he did so well in school.' She said, 'He's an amazing guy, your brother.' I told her that if she was smart, she would have married him in the first place, not me. She just shook her head and looked back at the kids coming out of school. She said, 'It's always so odd to see you. This time, I don't know, it seems even more strange. Maybe because you are taking off on this long trip, I don't know. I just feel like I've got the need to sort of square things somehow.' Then she said something like, 'I spent a lot of years mulling things over and looking for some perspective about those...those turbulent times with you. After while I had to just put it all away and get on with my life. Still, every once in a while it catches up with me, and I know I'm not finished with it yet.' "

Martin fell silent. It's strange how conversations can jump around. I waited for him to continue. "Football players were coming out of the locker room, heading for the blue and white bus that would run them out to practice in City Park. My mind wandered back to my football days. Stephanie said, 'Here's the way I see it. When my mother and little brother were killed in the car wreck, I was eight. That wreck not only cost me a lifetime with those two people, it also cost me a normal childhood. I don't know why I gave into it, but I accepted a very adult role after my mother died. Cleaning, cooking, planning, staying on top of my brother's and sister's problems. Even taking care of my drunken father. Your mother, Flo, was such an angel, and I guess I just naturally gravitated over toward your house when I needed to feel like a kid. And you and Jack were so full of life and full of fun back then, who wouldn't want to look forward to a life with you? Back in high-school my girlfriends used to think that I lived a dream-life, with a cute boyfriend who's a star athlete, guitar player, Mr. Charisma. And it *was* great. I loved to see you play music, and I loved to see you walk out to the batter's box knowing you could bring fifty thousand people to their feet. That was heady stuff. And I loved L.A., some things about it anyway, at least at first. Everything was so fresh and exciting when we moved there. And then all of a sudden everything fell apart. People hated you for your stand on the war, baseball fans especially. Then with your incredible luck, it looked like we might build a new and even better life around music, but then when Jack was shot down and you started drinking more, even that fell apart. I couldn't stay and watch you go down the tubes. I couldn't let Kevin see you like that, or even let him ride in a car with you. And I couldn't seem to help you, so I grabbed Kevin and Maddie and went back to New Orleans.' Well, I knew the whole story," said Martin, "but I hadn't thought much about it from her angle. I sat there in the car with her and watched as a football player came out of the locker room. Cleats clicking on concrete. A tapdance of testosterone. I don't know why, but when I looked at him, I felt like I'd been punched in the gut. Strangest fucking thing. Doesn't make any sense at all. He was carrying a football. Spinning it in his right hand like a real hotshot. He called to a group of four or

five players ahead of him. They turned as he lofted a pass in their direction. They all went up for it, arms extended, shoving and butting each other for position. One of them rose above the others and caught the ball. As he touched down, he spun and tried to dart away, but one of the other boys grabbed him, and all the others swarmed around. Stephanie was still talking. She said something like, ‘I had heard rumors since I was a kid that Dad was drunk when we had the wreck that killed Mom and my brother Kevin, but it took a very long time for the reality of that, even the *meaning* of that, to sink in. Looking back on it now, I know that I ran from you because I had a vision of a replay of that wreck. But I also know that I didn’t do enough to turn you around. After all, Jack managed to get you to give up alcohol, why couldn’t I do it? People can succeed at this, and I just gave up too soon.’ They gang-tackled the boy who caught the ball and slammed him to the grass. They were shoving each other and laughing as they all got up. The boy who caught the ball tossed it back to the passer, then strutted toward the bus. Laughing, dusting off his jersey. Number 81, my old number. Stephanie was saying, ‘Years later, when that dawned on me, I gave myself a very hard time because I couldn’t get you to sober up, but now I see that I was under huge stress at the time, and I have forgiven myself. After all, I loved Jack at least as much as you did, and I was missing him, too. Plus I had a new baby and lived in a strange town. So I don’t know, maybe that’s just the way it was meant to be.’ The door to the team bus closed, and I watched it turn from Banks Street onto Carrollton Avenue. I sat quiet in the car for a long time. Then I asked about how things were going with Kevin.”

When Martin was telling me this, I didn’t know Kevin yet, and for some reason I pictured a frail little kid. Odd how wrong a person can be about things and have no clue about how wrong he is. Martin went on, “Stephanie seemed surprised by my question. She said that Kevin had his problems, but mostly he was okay. He drives too fast. He’s in trouble down at school too much. He’s too good looking and too charming for his own good. But then she said that deep down...deep down, she really didn’t know what was

going on with him. I told her that I knew it was hard growing up without a father. I knew that, and I didn't feel good about it."

Martin looked at me, then looked away. He said, "Stephanie said that Kevin was luckier than a lot of kids these days. Both Rob and Jack are really there for him, and he knows that, but still...still I'm not there. I told her that maybe some day she could give him my book to read. Not that it will excuse me for my fuck-up as his father, but so maybe he could at least see what was going on with me back then. And now. Stephanie said that Kevin already had the book. She said she found it under his mattress. Hidden like a copy of Playboy."

Martin kind of laughed, but when our eyes met, his smile dropped away. He said, "I asked her if Kevin said anything to her about the book, and she said no, not a word." Martin looked out at the water, then back at me, "I really fucked it up, man. I owe that kid so much. When I get this new boat, him and I are going to get to know each other."

I couldn't bring myself to speak.

Martin took the fish off the fire. He said, "So what do you want to do now? I mean where do we go from here?"

"I haven't figured out all the logistics yet. Maybe I'll fly the plane on to Australia and then go back to the Cooks on an airliner. Maybe I'll just call the Australians and have them come get the plane. What do you want to do?"

"I don't know either. I could go back to the U.S. and look for a boat, or I could go to Australia and get one and then get you and Jack and Kevin to come out and sail it back through the islands, kind of like we planned."

I nodded. "We could both take the plane to Australia, then you could stay and look for a boat there while I come back and work at the school. When you get a boat, Jack and Kevin could fly out and the three of you could sail around for a while and then pick me up in Avarua for the run back to the U.S.."

Martin nodded slowly, but didn't speak for a while. A few minutes later he said, "You know, maybe there's something I need to do before we all jump on the boat together." I gave him a quizzical look, and he continued. "Did you ever sail anywhere by yourself?"

I said, "Yeah, as a kid I sailed around in Puget Sound on my own. No big deal."

"Did you ever go out in the ocean? Out of the sight of land all by yourself?"

I shook my head. "No. Puget Sound was more like a big lake, really. At least when I was out on it."

Martin said, "I don't know why, maybe it's the Moitessier book I've been reading, but I just feel like I need to make an ocean passage on my own. All my life I've had people pitching in to help me get stuff done. With baseball. With music. I need to do something on my own. I don't know. And I want to be out there on my own. With no distractions. Like a long meditation. Just me and the sea. I want to watch dolphins gliding in my bow wave. Just me and them. I want to feed the sea birds on a calm moonlit night. I want to be followed by an albatross. I want to get through a storm, man. I want to do something real on my own. Something I'll remember forever. You know what I mean. You did it when you flew us here. Am I right?"

"Yeah," I said, "it was something I guess I needed to do. But are you ready for this?"

Martin said, "I don't know. We'll see. But I've crossed from LA to The Cooks via Hawaii, and I've been out there with Terry. I mean I've seen other people do it. Now I just need to do it on my own. And by God, I'm going to do it."

I said, "So you'll sail from Australia to Rarotonga, then join up with me and Jack and Kevin for the trip back?"

Martin brightened up. "That's starting to sound like a plan. Man, I'd love to show them around Rarotonga and Aitutake. Show them what Terry showed us."

"And have them meet Terry and Winston."

"Oh, fucking right. That would be so cool. This way we can be friends."

“Yeah, maybe that’s the best part.”

Martin nodded. “Yeah. Telling Devon to get fucked is also going to be fun. He’s such a jerk.”

I grinned, “I got this theory. I call it the conservation of affection.”

Martin looked quizzically at me, and I continued. “You remember the theories of conservation of energy or conservation of momentum from high-school physics?”

Martin shook his head, “Not really, professor.”

“Well, in any reaction, the amount of energy before the reaction is the same as the amount after, though the energy might be in different forms. Or if two billiard balls collide, the total amount of momentum is the same before and after the collision.”

Martin smiled and waited for the punchline, “Yeah, so?”

“I think there is a sort of conservation of affection, or conservation of attention, or whatever, that applies to people. The more attention you pay to yourself, the less anyone else gives a shit. The more carefully you try to get things to go your way, the less anyone else cares about how things go for you. Like with Devon. Marie told me he hasn’t got a friend in the world. He’s conniving to pull some shit so he can make an easy buck, and the harder he works at it, the happier you are to screw him.”

Martin nodded, “Yeah, well, and I was about to screw Terry, too, wasn’t I?”

I looked at Martin, but didn’t answer.

Martin nodded. “Did I ever tell you about my conservation of hair theory, professor?”

I laughed. “No, what’s that all about?”

“Well, it’s like the more hair you have on your chest, the less you have on your head. You ever notice? The ape-men with hair all over their chests and backs are always half bald.”

I laughed again.

Martin gave an evil wink. “So you are going to stay in the Cook Islands, huh? What’s all this got to do with Marie, if I might ask?”

I smiled and looked at my feet. “Maybe nothing, maybe something. I don’t know. I will want to see her again, but we don’t have any plans. I didn’t even call her. I mean, she probably forgot all about me by now.”

I didn’t look up for a second. When I did, Martin was waiting for eye contact. “But you can give it a shot,” he said.

I smiled, “I can give it a shot.” I looked back at my feet. “I may even call Beth. She might like to see the islands.”

## Where Water Meets Sand [or it's there]

Martin and I sat quietly together on the beach. I was putting wood on the fire, and Martin was absently playing the chords to “Down this Road,” a hauntingly beautiful tune with otherworldly cascading harmonies that he had recorded in 1969. I was thinking of the “feel” of my life back then. The pressures from the draft. The losses from Vietnam. The torrent of emotions between Beth and me. The uncertainty that enveloped everything. Back then I felt like I was on a runaway train.

Martin sang the chorus: “Down this road/with my head held high. Down this road/the wind in my hair. Down this road/steering from stars above. Down this road/though I don't know to where.”

I was thinking about how strange life is. How that song meant so much to me back in 1972. How I'd sit in the dark and play it over and over back then when Beth and I were just starting out. And about how I now sat on the beach and heard it from Martin himself. I wanted to sing the harmony when Martin got to the chorus. I could feel it inside me, but I knew I'd mess it up if I tried to sing it, and I didn't want to wreck the moment.

Martin finished and looked out at the water. I said, “I used to listen to that song and think you knew the secrets to the universe. Think you had it all figured out, but just weren't quite willing to write out the exact equation for the rest of us. Just a few hints to keep us guessing, you know?”

Martin looked over at me and smiled. He handed me the guitar and said, “Me? No, I'm the biggest asshole on the planet. If the truth be known, I'm definitely as fucked up as the next guy. Especially back then when I wrote that tune. Think about it, I was about to self-annihilate.”

I started finger picking through a set of soft chord changes I'd been fooling with. Martin took interest. Out of nowhere I sang: “If the truth be known, I'm as lost as you.”

Right away Martin answered: “Though I've sailed this ship through a storm or



two.”

We looked at each other and smiled. Martin said, “Stay with it, man, something’s coming. The theme is that we’ve got a few miles on us here, and we don’t have it figured out, but we’re learning that we can have a little confidence in the process, we’ve got a trust in the process, we’ve got some strength. Start over.”

I added a soft wandering minor-key introduction then nodded and Martin sang: “If the truth be known, I’m as lost as you/though I’ve sailed this ship through a storm or two.”

Less tentative than usual, I sang: “And I’ve found my way through some fearsome tides.”

We grinned at each other.

In the gathering darkness over the next forty minutes we wove a song from the dominant images of our lives—navigation, sailing, flying, wrestling. Like chapters in a book. Now and then we would stop and quiz each other about the meaning of a line. Martin explained that the ‘clerk of course’ is the deity responsible for the winds on the ocean. And when he asked about the canyons in the clouds, and I told him about a stormy night flight.

It was a song of trust in the underlying goodness of things, of strength, of faith in our ability to get through.

## IT’S THERE

If the truth be known  
I’m as lost as you  
though I’ve sailed this ship  
through a storm or two  
and I’ve found my way  
through some fearsome tides

with a few good friends  
and the will to fight.

It's there  
somewhere deep inside.

It's there  
a star in the broken sky.

It's there  
a fighter who just won't quit.

It's there  
a compass in every ship.

Now there's miles to go  
before I'm through  
and the clerk of course  
has a trick or two  
and these calm seas  
can turn to foam  
but I trust this ship  
to see me home.

It's there  
in the smile of a yearling child.

It's there  
in a canyon that's carved through cloud.

It's there  
in the amber waves of grain.

It's there

in the song of the pourin' rain.

## Epilogue:

### Through the Eyes of an Angel

Ray came back from Tahiti the same day Kevin returned from his cruise around the island with Winston. It was eighteen days since Martin was lost at sea.

I was glad for the solitude that let me write out the last few chapters about my trip with Martin, but I was also glad to have some people around me again. Ray was successful in lining up suppliers for his flourishing chain of South Sea Island Shops in Australia. His boundless energy seemed to rejuvenate me. And Kevin seemed to have had a blast working on the old *Spirit of Orion* with Winston, Terry, and Sonny. He came back bubbling with stories about the fishing and diving they had done.

I asked him what he thought of Terry, and he said, “That is one awesome dude. Fucking sea-god, a regular Polynesian Poseidon.” He pointed to a shark’s tooth he was wearing around his neck and said, “He gave me this. Cool, huh? Oh, and he was telling me about how my father was fascinated by the ancient navigation, the birds and the star-path. I told him about how the Greeks did it too, about how Homer had Calypso tell Odysseus to ‘keep the bear off your left hand as you make your way over the wine-dark sea.’ Terry thought that was pretty cool.”

I asked him what else they did on the boat, and he started telling me about their music. He really brightened up when he described the Polynesian songs. “They taught me a cool tune,” he said. “Do you want to hear it?”

I’d bought an old Gibson acoustic guitar a week or so ago, and Kevin picked it up and started to strum it. I’ll be damned if he didn’t sing out the first line of that song about the kid who gets lost at sea and turned into a dog by his girlfriend’s mother. And his voice, my God, it was every bit as strong and pure as Martin’s ever was. A chill ran up the back of my legs and right on up to the top of my head. It was spooky. That kid could sing.

That afternoon I showed him some of the songs that Martin and I were working on last month, and he just fell into them as naturally as your hand goes into your favorite glove. Ray and I sat there stunned listening to him. Will life ever quit amazing me?

Ray took us out for dinner that night, and he kept pestering me good-naturedly to continue the trip I had originally set out upon, that is, to visit the islands that my father had flown from in World War II. He said that he had been to several of them and wouldn't mind visiting some more. Kevin also thought that would be fun, and before you know it Ray had cooked up a plan that had all three of us making the trip. He wanted us to island hop through the South Pacific and ultimately fly back to Brisbane, where Kevin could stay for a month, or a year, or a few days and then head for New Orleans. I, too, could stay as long as I wanted and then fly back to Rarotonga to finish my tutoring mission with Winston. It did sound like fun. Sort of a fresh start and a completion all rolled into one.

The next morning Kevin and I called Stephanie and believe it or not, she went along with the plan. We got ourselves in gear and were ready to go the next morning.

Winston came out to the airport to say goodbye to Kevin. It was a touching scene. Kevin gave Winston a hug, then stepped back and said, "Oh, Lord Zeus, grant that Winston may be happy in this world, and may he gain all that his heart desires." A line from Homer, no doubt.

Still, I felt a lump in my throat. Here were these two guys who woke up in such totally different worlds. They touched for a moment, and then spun on through the haze. Seems like the way it goes between any two people.

I shook Winston's hand and told him to study up, I'd be back in a few weeks and we'd start hitting the books again. I fidgeted around the airplane hoping Marie might show up, but she didn't. I gave up and loaded Kevin into the aft seat, then I climbed up onto the wing and into the airplane.

We had a formidable trip ahead of us, but I'd done this so many times by then, I hardly gave it any thought. Ray climbed into the co-pilot seat beside me, I fired up, and off we went.

The early morning weather couldn't have been better. A few more's tails high to the north, but otherwise perfectly clear and calm. It was one of those days when you felt like you could get out of the airplane and stand in the sky.

I leveled off at twelve thousand feet and watched the miles tick off toward Niue, our first fuel stop. It seemed like we had crisscrossed this area a thousand times looking for Martin. It felt like ages ago already, though it was really just a few days.

I stared out at the tranquil blue water, and my mind wandered to my Navigator song. It still needed a verse or two. To pass the time, I sang it through in my head, and somehow went right on to a conclusion.

With a light in his hand  
and a spark in his eye  
he pointed at Rigel  
and smiled.

He said, "That fine star  
once led me home  
to a tiny island  
in a phosphorous foam

It was a star in a broken sky  
at the foot of Orion  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man

in flight.

Well, I stood in the yard  
and shook with the cold  
a boy of just nine  
or ten,  
and I thought of his plight  
his aluminum flight  
in the dark between  
ocean and cloud.

It was a star in a broken sky  
at the foot of the hunter  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man  
in flight.

I wanted to go back in  
but I stood there and shivered  
while the truth  
sank in  
you can turn from the haze  
and surrender  
or stand in the storm  
with a sextant

It was a star in a broken sky  
at the foot of the hunter  
on a cloudy night  
against all odds  
a sign from the gods  
and a gift to a man  
in flight.

It's been forty years  
since then  
I still stare at the sky  
and think about him.  
So glad for that man  
with the light  
his blood's in my veins  
on a winter's night.

He said, "Someday you will be a navigator  
adrift in a trackless sky  
you'll need hope and purpose  
guts and brains  
and keep an eye to the broken sky."

I found a clean sheet of paper on my knee board and wrote out the new words before I lost them. Ray looked over my shoulder and smiled.

It was Kevin who spotted it. He pointed out his window at the ten o'clock position and said, "There. What's that?"



We were about twenty miles south of Niue in our descent. I sat up tall and looked out over the left engine. The Pacific was a purple-blue below us, here and there a whitecap. But there without a doubt I saw a small red sail above an orange dinghy. I turned to Ray and grinned. He pounded my thigh with his open hand. I banked the airplane and reduced the power in order to begin a descending turn toward Martin. Once we were below five hundred feet, we could make him out sitting in the boat. Tiller in hand. Waving casually, as if he'd just crossed a tiny lake on a carefree summer sail.

Maybe it was only a coincidence, but Niue was just over the horizon, and Martin was on a direct course toward land.

Ray got busy transmitting our position on the emergency frequencies. I overflew Martin at two hundred feet and did a teardrop turn to pass above him again at mast height. I aligned my second pass to point toward Niue.

As it sometimes does at odd moments, my perspective shifted, and I saw this scene as if through the eyes of an angel. A pair of terns winging their way on a beeline from Niue toward their morning fishing ground. A small boat with a red sail. A blue and white Baron shooting past, rocking its wings and pointing the way toward land. Six souls. Six navigators finding their way on this spinning blue jewel.