



Back in the year nineteen seventy-one, when I enter the bedroom, Anne is sound asleep. I put my yellow cap on top of the dresser, take my wallet and comb out of my back pocket and lay it next to the cap. On my side of the bed, I take off my shirt and pants, and hang them on the chair.

Crawling into bed, I put an arm around Anne and snuggle my pelvis into her soft warm body. I reach a hand for a breast. Anne pushes my hand away. 'Not now, I'm trying to sleep,' she tells me. I feel the emptiness of my hand for several seconds and then move it to Anne's belly. I let it rest a couple seconds feeling the beat of her heart, and then begin moving slowly downward. 'Come on, I have to get up at seven,' she says and turns over.

It's all a question of timing, isn't it? Whether you're in or out of time, I tell myself and think what a complex phenomenon time is.

It is thought that has made it so, says a voice inside my head. Time exists but not in the way that most of us imagine. Time, space, and thought are all the same thing. Time is the space between chirps as a bird lays a path for its mate to follow. Time exists in the rippling of the wind through a field of sparse headed barley. Follow the rippling and the chirping in the flow of time. Follow to a knurled, dark, leafless winter tree. See that empty space does not separate but joins the branches one to another, to the sky, to the birds, to all that exists. Watch a pair of red-breasted sparrows slit from branch to branch, from tree to tree, from sky to sky in the unity of empty space. Time is the mode on which we travel. Not- time is an ever-flowing infinite expansion with no beginning or end. Words have beginning and end, not eternity. Eternity is beyond the material mode in which language must mold all of its compression.

I lay on my back and think, Time is yesterday, today, and tomorrow. It is the word that separates us from the cosmos. It is the word that binds time in linear construct, straight lines which have become so all important. Man, creator of the word, the only rational creature in nature, the only creature who disobeys nature's laws, the only animal that worships a straight line. The line that can be measured in time. Nature is inclined to the circle, the circle with no beginning or end.

I roll over on my stomach and think some more. Man is a part of the eternal circle, an infinite part of the All. We are joined to every other living thing through an infinite ever-expanding timelessness. In the timeless circle all life joins hands.... The spirit that gave life to my body as germ cells joined did not come into existence with my conception. Before I came, Life was there waiting to breathe existence into the cell. The life force always was, and I always am also. Jesus knew what he spoke of. His Truth lives on though words distort it. Time is the chopping up of life. Our rotation, revolution, and cosmic whirl though space happens in time creating night and day, and the seasons. Bit life is a never ceasing expansion. The Earth doesn't tick off seconds, minutes, hours. The earth doesn't wail of days, weeks, years, millenniums. It sings.... Sings of the eternal....

I turn over on my back. It's we who do the slicing and the marking. We try to verbalize it all. We lock time in watertight compartments. We measure her with precision instruments at Greenwich. We lock ourselves in our words, myself tells me.

I need more time! Time is up! Time has flown away! I'm late.... I'm late.... All the stars are falling down falling down falling down....I have to get away. I need some time off!!!! Why can't you ever be on time???? I ain't got time to mess w/you.... Time has gone and passed me by.... It's the wrong time.... I wasn't born yesterday.... Yesterday! Yesterday! Yesterday! And, Tomorrow! Tomorrow! Tomorrow! Just wait 'til my ship comes in!

*Time.... Time.... Time.... Tick.... Tock.... Tick.... Tock.... Tick ... Tock.... Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick. Tock. Tick Tock Tick Tock Tick Tock.... Tick tock tick tock tick tock.... Tick tock tick tock tick tock. Ticktochticktockticktochticktockticktochticktockticktochticktockticktochticktock. It's time! If only we had the time. Quit wasting time. Time on my hands. What are you going to do with your leisure time? In the sweet bye and bye... in the sweet bye and bye. We will meet our precious Jesus in the sweet bye and bye. It's time again! Ancient Time... Medieval Time....Modern Time.... War Time and Peace Time.... Your Time and My Time. One Time and Two Time.... Time on a Dime.... Take Time and Lose Time.... No Time like All Time.... Rum Time and Ball Time.... Coffee Time and Tea Time.... You Time and Me Time.... And, I Gotta Let Be Time.... Slow Time and Fast Time.... First Time and Last Time.... And, there's No Time Like the Present Time.... I roll back on my stomach and think of the growing in time that Howell describes in his book *War Dance*, a growth which is all inclusive and ever expanding. The seed uses time in its metamorphose from dead fruit to fruit of the earth. In it's time there is sleeping and waking. It grows in wind, rain, and warming sunshine. It takes its nourishment from the sun and returns it to the earth. *Am I any different from the seed?* I ask myself*

Are we separated by anything more than the words we utter? myself answers.

A little quirk in time that must be noted, I tell myself here in 2008 as I write the final revision. The words that I thought about time were not thought as I lay in bed at the end of my cab-driving shift in 1971. I remember thinking those words at my typewriter in the backroom of the hundred-year-old ranch house that we rented from Milligan. We had been living on the sheep ranch in Byron for at least a year when I wrote those words in 1974 or '75. I remember Alex telling me that he really liked that section on time.

And, today in the year 2008 we are not yet done with time. Remember Krishnamurti's description. It takes time to go from here to there. Time separates. Truth is beyond time. Time and the word are one. Time-space has purpose in the material world, but time-space has no place in the psychological world. Let me quote from him, 'Thought is bound by time and time is petty; it's this pettiness that prevents 'seeing'. Seeing is always instantaneous, as understanding, and the brain which is put together by time, prevents and also perverts seeing. Time and thought are inseparable; put and end to one, you put an end to the other.'

And another 'I' inside my head adds, *The dreams that I dreamed were not dreamed as I lay in my bed in Walnut Creek. The dream must have come from seventy- four or seventy-five recorded around the time that you wrote about time. Time is very tricky... trick trick trick trick tricky....*

It is early morning. The sky is dark, but a pale glow of light washes River Road. The birds are still asleep in the broad-leaved trees as I jog toward my foster mother's house two miles away. There's a young black athlete running in front of me. He's wearing a purple flowered shirt and a pair of corduroy cutoffs. I remember seeing him on other early morning runs, and that I always slow down to let him turn off the road. Today instead of slowing down, I make a definite decision to speed up and jog beside him. I pull up on his right hand side and we run in silence step for step. 'You play basketball?' I ask as we slow to a walk in front of his mother's house.

'I taught Kareem Abdu Jabbar,' he tells me. We make a date to play tomorrow afternoon.

'I'll bring a number,' I tell him and take off in an easy jog.

I look to my right at the dark green shrubs and the narrow gray tree trunks. It's not light enough to see the river, but I can sense its presence. I turn to my left and see a row of widely spread white wooden houses. A girl emerges from the closest house, and jogs by my side. I look into her face. Rosy cheeks brighten her lightly tanned skin. Our running motion blows her finely textured blonde hair away from her face. I focus on the sparkle of her big blue eyes. She looks into my eyes and says, 'Are you sick? Aren't you feeling well?'

Her words hit me like a stick of dynamite. My feet brake to a stop. The girl stops beside me. 'You look so pale,' she says in a soft friendly voice.

I turn to look at the river and tell myself, *This can't be. I'm in the best physical condition of my entire life.* I turn my head back to the girl and find that she is gone.

Setting out to look for the blue-eyed girl, I find myself in a strange house. The spacious rooms are crowded with middle-aged people dressed in suits and long dresses. I peer from the center room and see that all the other rooms open on to it. *It's just like the De Jung Museum in San Francisco,* I tell myself. There is an air of expectation in the conversation as I walk from room to room. I look for a friendly face, but recognize no one. I am a complete stranger. I glance at my right hand, and see a large white number smoking between my fingers. I lift it to my lips and take a long hard hit. I hold my breath for a near minute and then take another hit. When I'm finished, I put the number in a blue ashtray that I see on top of a brown table. As I eye up the strangers that stand in groups of two or three a heavysset matron in long evening gown and expensive jewelry emerges from an archway, She begins to usher everyone towards the center room. 'The company of singers is coming. They will be here at any moment,' she says with a touch of excitement in her voice.

The center room is crowded with onlookers. There is a small stage in the front. On stage is a group of musicians in Spanish costume who crowd around a girl with long black hair. She is dressed in a long pink gown that is drawn in tightly at her slender waist. The chatter in the room stops as the musicians move to the rear of the stage. The girl takes center stage. In the silence you can hear the beating of hearts. The musicians begin to play a Spanish love song. The girl sings and the music becomes background. Her voice captivates the entire audience. No one is more captivated than me. Time stands still as I hang on to each note. I lose all sense of self as I become one with the music. It is not until a burst of applause rises from the crowd that I return to myself. I take up the applause and continue longer than anyone else.

The black haired girl comes off the stage and walks toward the rear of the room. The audience parts to form an aisle for her. I find I'm standing in its center. The girl comes toward me. Our eyes meet. She pauses for a moment, smiles, and continues to the rear exit. I turn to watch her climb into a horse drawn carriage. Through the glass-less window of her coach, I see her sitting with several ladies in waiting. 'He's mine. All mine. I've won him with my voice,' she tells the others.

I catch sight of the blue-eyed girl who jogged beside me. Her head rest on a window frame in the next room. In her eyes and smile I read her thoughts. *He's not yours at all*, the blue-eyed girl is thinking. As the carriage pulls away I smile in agreement with the blue-eyed girl and wonder when we will meet again.

I walk back to the table with the blue ashtray. The room is crowded. Voices are buzzing in praise of the singer. I wonder how I will be able to get the joint off the table without attracting attention. *There may be a narc in here wondering who left it*, I tell myself. I edge closer to the table and glance at the people around. No one is paying the least attention. I casually put my hand over the ashtray, scoop the joint up in cupped fingers, and knock the ashtray to the floor. As I sweep up the ashes with my left hand, I keep the number cupped in my right. I am very pleased with my cleverness as I return the ashtray to the table.

I walk up stairs to look for a bathroom where I can take a couple hits. I open a door and walk into our farmhouse kitchen. The farmer's four daughters are gathered around the kitchen table. 'Look, we taught Tony a new trick,' the oldest girl tells me. Their brown and white pony is standing on the kitchen table. There is an up turned peach basket on the floor; Tony stands with all four legs together. He stretches a hind leg out to steady the basket. The next thing I know, he has both hind legs on the basket. He moves his rear and fore legs from basket to table and back again in rapid succession, I'm amazed at his performance.

'He's added another trick to his repertoire,' says the oldest daughter.

The alarm clock is ringing in the distance. Anne rolls over and shuts it off. 'Time to get up,' she says in a sleepy voice. I feel her lift out of bed, and I relax and drift back toward sleep.

Before I reach sleep, Anne is leaning over to kiss me good-bye. 'I reset the alarm so you'll get up in time to take Stoke and Vickie to the baby sitter. Remember, Mrs. Hundui expects you there by ten-thirty,' she tells me.

'I'll be there,' I say and drift back toward dreamland. Before I reach it, another bell bursts in my ear. I sit up for a second and listen. *God damn it*, I tell myself figuring it's a late call from the substitute secretary. Then, I remember it is summer, and smile. I leap out of bed and rush through the living room, dining room, and into the kitchen. At the far wall, I grab the phone off its hook.

'Hello?' I ask.

'Dis you, Jackie?' comes a voice that I don't quite recognize.

'Yea, this is me,' I tell the voice and search for a picture.

'Yea, this is Willie. Your ole brother, Will.'

'Hey, how's it going? You calling from Philly?'

'No, I'm calling from California. I got a job over here in Pacifica. Pacifica, California.'

My foster brother, Willie? I ask myself.

'Yea, we jus' got into California 'bout a week ago. I found dis job over here. We got us a apartment. Too dammed expensive sleeping in a motel.... Too dammed crowded sleeping in de car. We tried it one night in de car, but it didn't work out.'

'What, your two buddies come out wid you again?'

'No, I bought my two bothers and my sister Sally and the kids wid me dis time. Wid the wives and kids and everything dere's nine of us.'

'Nine of you came out?'

'Yea, my brothers' been bugging me to bring dem out to California. I found dis job wid a painting outfit in Pacifica. I guess we're gonna stay here and all find jobs.'

A moment of dead silence follows. I can't think of a thing to say. 'Well, how's things going wid you, Jackie. You found dat teaching job, yet?'

'No, not yet. I should be getting into Mt. Diablo before school starts. There's two or three openings. I subbed at all three schools, so I should have a really good chance. I had an interview for an eighth grade position last week....'

'You still driving cab?'

'Yea, I decider not to go back to the cannery dis summer. I'm beginning to enjoy driving cab. I even hate to give it up when I get my teaching job.'

'You still living in de same place?'

'De same house, but we moved up to the bigger front part. De other couple moved out. We got a little more room now,' I say and give a little laugh.

'Yea, well, I don't wanna bother you or nothing.... I jus' thought I'd see how yer doing. I was thinking I might take a run over dere after we get settled a little....'

'Yea, sure. You still remember how to get here?' I ask without too much enthusiasm. All the time I'm thinking, *Nine of them. Nine of them. And dere probably dead broke. How's he gonna take care of nine of dem? His brothers have been living off him since he went back to Philly. Dey probably won't find jobs here either. What if Willie loses his job? How could I feed nine of dem? Suppose dey want to stay wid us?*

'Hey, Jackie, I was meaning to ask ya,' Willie's voice breaks into the nagging of my mind. 'You don't got an old T.V. around you're not using?'

'Yea, we do got one out in the garage. It don't work, but you could probably fix it. Must need a new tube or something.'

'See we ain't got no T.V. or nothing yet. We dis came out wid what we could fit in de car. I was thinking if you had one, maybe I could borrow it for awhile.'

'Well, it ain't working, but you're welcome to it.'

'Yea, well I could probably fix it alright. I rebuilt my color set back home. Dere not as hard to work on as ya think.'

'What hours are you working wid de painting outfit?' I ask wondering if he'll come by himself or bring the whole gang.

'We usually start at eight in the morning and go to four-thirty. I'm laid off today. Probably get called back tomorrow though.'

'Yea, I leave for work around three myself,' I say and wonder if I should invite him over. *Shit, if he brings them all over. I wanna get some writing done. I could tell him I'm off tomorrow,* I tell myself.

'Well, I gotta get going, Jackie. I gotta run Jimmy and Eddie over to the unemployment office. Maybe I'll get over to see you on Saturday.'

'Yea, come on over. I gotta work Saturdays, but I don't go in 'til around three thirty. You could stop over in the morning. You still remember how to get here?'

'Yea, I can find it alright. We always sleep late on Saturdays. Dat's when we're not working over time. Dey ain't working no over time over here, yet. I'll try to make it around noon or so.'

'Yea, I'll probably see you then.'

'Well take care of yourself, Jackie. See ya later, den.'

'Yea, O.K. See ya,' I say and listen to the click of the phone.

The second I hang up the phone, I'm cussing myself out for being a dirty bastard. *What the fuck's wrong with me? I ask myself. He isn't coming over Saturday. He wanted a definite invitation.* I think about his brothers and sisters and tell myself it serves him right. *I can't afford to feed nine of them. I have my own family to think of. Maybe he'll call again. I could invite them over for lunch.... What the bell, if he loses his job though?*

I pour myself a cup of coffee and sit down on the front room couch. *He still hasn't learned,* I tell myself. *Those brothers keep hanging on to him. What's he doing back in California again? How long is he gonna stay this time?* I prop my feet on the coffee table and think about his last visit. *It was over a year ago,* I tell myself. *We were still living in the back part of the house. Yea, I must'a been subbing over in Pittsburgh.* I remember coming home around three o'clock. Anne tells me Willie dropped by around noon. 'He and a buddy from Philadelphia. He said he'd be back tonight to see you.'

'How's he doing?' I asked.

Anne told me he only stayed for an hour. She made breakfast for them. They ate and Willie told her about the trip out. He explained how they got stuck in a snowstorm in a small town somewhere in Montana or Colorado. Spent a whole week in a local bar, drinking and playing pool, but mostly just drinking, drinking and laughing it up with the town folks, drinking and watching the big snow flakes fall, drinking and counting their money, drinking and trying to dig their car out, drinking and watching the snow fall harder, and harder, drinking and counting the little that's left. They came to blows with a couple locals, and got hustled out of town as soon as the first snowplows went through.

He told Anne that his two buddies are brothers. Their father lives in Richmond. They hadn't seen him for over ten years. They came out with Willie especially to see their old man. They arrived at his darkened door around midnight. At first they were not sure if they should knock or not. The new wife opened the door. She's not much older than the brothers. The father greeted them like long lost heirs. They broke out the bottles and began to celebrate. Everyone got roaring laughing drunk. The brothers were out in the kitchen filling their glasses. They got into an argument over an

earlier slight. Danny picked up a butcher knife and stabbed his brother three times before he came to his senses. Willie drove like crazy to get the bleeding boy to the hospital. At emergency, they patched Donny up just enough to stop the bleeding. Because they had no money and no medical insurance, the Richmond Hospital wouldn't admit the boy. They had to speed off to the county hospital in Martinez.

'He looked like he hadn't eaten in a week,' Anne told me. 'That friend of his didn't look like much. Anyone who would stab his own brother. He never said a word. Just laughed and nodded in agreement to everything Willie said. They came from visiting the brother in the hospital. He's in critical condition.'

'Billy gonna stay out here dis time?'

'He said they're looking for jobs. There's no work for painters back East in the winter. I told him he could stay with us 'til he finds something. He's such a nice boy. He couldn't thank me enough for the bacon and eggs.'

'He gonna stay?'

'He said he didn't want to put us out. I told him he could sleep on the couch 'til he finds something. I'm not sure if he's coming for dinner or not. I told him we eat around five.'

Anne holds back dinner until five-thirty, but Willie doesn't come. While we eat, I tell Stoke about his uncle Willie and listen with one ear for his car. His coming gets me thinking about the past. *He wasn't any bigger than Stoke, when I went to the foster home*, I tell myself. I think back to my foster parents' farm. I remember a couple days after my arrival; I was pulling Willie in his red wagon. Somehow, I got a little too close to the edge of the porch. He and the wagon toppled over. He fell to the ground screaming in fright. My foster mother came running from the house. She picked him up and hugged him to her breast. 'If his arm is broken, I'm sending you back to Mrs. Murray,' she screamed at me. I was not number one any more, Willie the youngest was.

After dinner, I sit in front of the T.V. with one ear on the news and the other on the front driveway. I see how small the room is. How crowded the four of us are. I think about squeezing in one more body. I wonder if Anne told Willie that I'm driving cab. I think it's lucky it's my night off.

'I'm going outside for awhile,' I tell Anne as Stoke changes the channel for his six o'clock show. She nods yes from her dishes at the sink and tells Stoke to turn it down a little. Vickie throws a rattle from her high chair. I stoop to pick it up and we play a little, laughing and making faces at each other.

Outside, fall is in the air. The aroma of burning leaves drifts into my nostrils. I sit on the cement walkway that runs around the house and rest my head on our living room wall. I can barely hear the noise of the T.V. I remember that it was the outside which convinced us to rent this converted four room back of a larger house. I think back to our return from Philadelphia. *Dat was jus' four months ago?* I ask myself. I drove all the way back certain that I had a teacher's job. I knew that the history position was just made for me. I remember looking for houses in Hayward, San Leandro, and Oakland, trying to find a place that was centrally located to where a job would come up. I learn that Mt. Diablo is the largest district in the whole Bay Area.

Looking over the back fence that separates our yard from the neighbor's orchard, my vision stretches to the foothills some twenty miles away. I listen to the wind break like surf in the branches of the walnut trees. It grows peaceful and quiet inside me. I close my eyes and watch the color flow from dark black to red and then to orange yellow. Opening my eyes, I see a dark sparrow flit out of a tree. I follow the lace like pattern of the branches. There are still a few yellow-green leaves scattered about. Black clothed walnuts stand out clearly against the background of blue-gray sky.

Stoke come outside with his football hugged in his arms. 'Wanna catch?' he asks. We line up on opposite sides of the yard and toss the ball gently back and forth. I throw an easy spiral and watch its pattern.

Hey, that's really neat, I tell myself. I remember that Willie and I use to play like this the first couple of years that I was with my foster parents. *You even think of Stoke as being him sometimes when we're out like this*, I tell myself. 'Good Catch,' I tell Stoke.

'How do you make it spin like that?' Stoke asks.

I toss an easy spiral to Stoke's outstretched five-year-old hands. He watches and returns one to me. 'See the pattern it makes in the air?' I ask. *I never saw the ball spiral when I played catch with Willie*, I tell myself.

How many years did Willie and I play together like this? I ask myself. I remember when we moved to River Road we shared the same small bedroom for a couple years. We didn't talk too much though. I was in high school with an after school job. He was in sixth or seventh grade. We both had our own friends. I remember I traded my black leather jacket to him for a tire when we split for Alaska. The tire blew out before we were even out of Pennsylvania.

'We got a new kid in school today,' Stoke tells me. 'His name is Bobby. Him and me are building a gigantic fort. He got no teeth in front.'

'What are you gonna do wid the fort?'

'Tear it down.'

'What did you learn in school today?' I ask with one ear on our conversation and the other cocked for Willie's car.

'Ahh... we didn't learn nothing. All we ever do is play.'

At eleven thirty, my ear is still cocked for Willie's car. I lie in our bedroom and listen through the bathroom that separates us from the kids' room in front. I feel the closeness of the rooms pushing in on me. I picture the couch that Willie will sleep on against our bedroom wall. *Dat's not the same couch we had on Chetwood Street when Willie made his first visit to California is it?* I ask myself.

No, that one folded into a bed, myself answers.

I remember Willie came to visit our flat on Chetwood Street with his first wife and their new baby. The navy had just transferred him from a base near Portland to one in San Diego. The first night of their visit they stayed in the Motel Five a few blocks away. I figured they wanted a bed to sleep in. The second night they slept on our studio bedroom floor. We talked and laughed away most of the night. Anne got up for the feedings of the little boy. Anne was five months pregnant with Stoke when we poised for Willie's camera next morning. She slipped three new dresses to Willie's wife when we helped them load up their car. I led Willie's fifty-three Ford across the Bay Bridge to One-O-One and waved good-bye at the L.A. turn off.

It was almost a year later that I received his collect call from San Diego. Everything was going good he told me. He had a nine to five office job at the base. Took a second job at a gas station near where they lived. Making extra money to give Frannie all the things she wanted. Came home early a couple nights ago and found Frannie in bed with a couple of his navy buddies. They beat him up and kicked him down the stairs. Somehow he managed to get back inside and grab his little boy. He drove through the streets of San Diego with blood dripping from his face and the kid crying. Bought a pint of Four Roses to deaden the pain. Crashed into a parked car. Cops locked him up for drunk driving.

'The navy got me out of jail, Jackie,' he told me. 'I explained all that happened to the lawyer guy. They're gonna help me get custody of my kid.'

'You gonna press charges against the guys who beat you up?'

'Naw, Jackie, I tol' myself the heck wid it. I jus' wanna get my kid and get out'a here. I'm out'a the navy in another month....' There's a moment or two of silence then Willie says, 'Say, Jackie, I was wondering. Is dere much work around Oakland? I got a year's experience pumping gas....'

'Work's kind'a tight around here in the winter. Though, usually you can get on at a gas station. It's a lot better in the summer when the canneries start up.'

'Yea, I don't know. I jus' might go back to Philly. I kind'a like it out here in California, though,' he said with a weary whine in his voice.

It was the whine in his voice and the lateness of the evening that made me hurry up our conversation. I knew he wanted some direction from me his older brother. He wanted me to invite him out here to Oakland, to help him find a job. At the very least he wanted me to tell him what to do, to go back to Philadelphia, to stay in California. I did none of those things. I didn't want to get involved. I didn't want the extra burden. I had all I could do just to get my ass through school. *It be different if I was teaching, if I had a steady job,* I told myself after I hung up the phone.

In the morning, my ear is still cocked for the sound of Willie's car. I look for his car in the driveway when I get home from my day's subbing. 'I guess we could let him stay wid us 'til he finds something,' I tell Anne as she prepares dinner. 'Though, he might want to stay wid his friends in Richmond.'

'He seemed like he wanted to get away from them. They must fight all the time from what he told me,' Anne answers.

Just as we're sitting down for dinner Billy arrives. I'm happy to see his friend isn't with him. He explains that they didn't make it yesterday because they were in Frisco looking for work. This morning, the cops picked up Danny and took him to the county jail in Martinez. They charged him with assault with a deadly weapon. The brother is still in critical condition. 'Donny ain't gonna press no charges, but they're gonna hold Danny 'til the hearing comes up,' Willie tells us.

It's over four years now since Willie left San Diego. He has a lot to fill us in on. Though dinner, he explains how he returned to Philadelphia. Moved into an apartment with his two brothers. A year or so later he got his divorce from Frannie. Married a girl that was already six months pregnant. She lived with him for about a year and then ran off with the guy who knocked her up. In the mean time, he got a job as a house painter. Made good money. Supported his brothers and his sister Sally. Acquired a new car, color T.V., and stereo. Got married again. This time the girl was a practical joker. 'You wouldn't believe it, Jackie,' he tells me as he takes a second helping of meat loaf and mash potatoes. 'She use ta loosen de tops on de salt and pepper shakers. When ya go to shake it you'd get a big mess a salt all over yer plate. She use ta scramble de eggs wid hot pepper in dem. I nearly burned my tongue off a couple times....' Willie laughs and tells us how he had to gulp glass after glass of cold water. I watch him run a hand through his short brown hair. *He looks just the same as when be was sixteen, only a little heavier,* I tell myself.

'She'd wait 'til I was in de shower, den she'd turn the cold water on full force. I'd be in dere getting scalded ta death. She use ta stick mousetraps in de dresser drawers. Hide 'em in my underwear or socks.... She's jus a little bit crazy, I'll tell ya.'

He's actually relieved when she leaves him about a year ago. He tells us how he got a new apartment with his brothers and sister. How he's become an accomplished house painter. He explains how he nearly runs the business himself. 'De boss is drunk all de time. Dead drunk. He can't paint or nothing no more. Jus' lines up de jobs. Got as many as six men on de crew in de summer. We usually finish off half a six-pack before lunch. Finish off the rest wid lunch, and den start another one. I can paint jus' as good when I'm little sauced as I can stone sober....'

After dinner, we learn Willie's real reason for leaving Philadelphia this time. For the past three winters he's been driving an oil truck through the icy streets of his hometown. 'See de painters ain't got no work back dere for at least four months in de winter. I got tired of collecting unemployment,' Willie tells us. He explains how a month ago he skidded in the ice. Hit a pedestrian. 'Killed him. Died before he got to de hospital. It was only a nigger dat I hit. I don't see what dey got so excited about. It's not like I killed a white man or something,' he says with a tiny laugh.

There is a manslaughter charge against him. His lawyer says that the worst he'll get is a year's easy time. It was an accident. Willie doesn't want to do any time. He figures they'll never come all the way to California looking for him. 'Besides, my case doesn't come up for six months. I can always go back. I jus' don't see why dere making so much fuss over a nigger. It be different if it was a white man. Den I could see it. Besides, it's icy, cold, dirty, and ugly back dere in de wintertime. It ain't like California, Jackie. California is different. I'll tell ya, back dere de niggers is taking over. Dey don't know dere place no more. Dere even going around wid white girls. But, ya know any white girl who goes out wid a nigger ain't nothing but a whore anyhow!'

I'm not sure how much Willie told us was bravado and how much was real. He was kind and considerate while he stayed with us. He offered to help with the dishes, played with Stoke and Vickie, told us about his own two kids who were living with his brothers. He only stayed a couple days. The Red Barn told him he was too short to fill the counter man opening. The painters' union was all filled up. They wouldn't accept his card from the Philadelphia local. I told him I could maybe get him on with the cab. He explained that he didn't know the streets well enough for that. Then, he confessed that he was still in love with his first wife. He wanted to go to San Diego before his money ran out. He wanted to look her up, make sure she was all right. He told me that they had been in touch off and on. He had sent her money on several occasions. The last time was about nine months ago. He had sent her three hundred dollars to fly back and see little William. He hadn't heard from her since.

I didn't tell him to forget her, when we said good-bye in the driveway next to his late modal Olds. I didn't tell him to go back and face his manslaughter charge. I didn't tell him that African- Americans are human beings just like him and me. Instead, we talked about the old days when we lived with our foster parents. We talked about the fun we had growing up on the farm, the chores that we did. We talked about how he, the youngest, was the favorite, how he could fool our foster mother every time.

'I remember when we lived on River Road. I would go into de bathroom and turn de water on. I'd pretend I was washing up for school while I'd smoke a cigarette. De couple a times I almost got caught, she thought it was you dat was smoking. She never even knowed dat I smoked 'til I moved to Philly,' he told me.

He opened the car trunk and showed me the case of firecrackers they picked up on their way out. He gave me a couple boxes for Stoke. He told me about the time he and a couple buddies were out drinking. They jumped in to the canal to get away from Morgan, the police chief. Morgan pulled them out and carted them off to jail soaking wet. He remembered how I had told him that Morgan should have something better to do than bother little kids.

He told me he couldn't believe how our foster parents had aged in the last couple years. I told him about our short visit with the foster parents on our trip back East last summer, how I recognized the wallpaper after eight years like I had seen it yesterday. I described my walk down to the river and up the towpath with our foster father. I told him how our foster mother sat in her favorite chair; how we said our good-byes knowing we would never see each other again.

Willie and I shook hands and promised to keep in touch with one another. We promised not to lose contact.

Now, after almost a year, his phone call is our first contact. *God damn it, instead of inviting him over, instead of a warm welcome, I completely cut him off. What the fuck's wrong wid me?* I ask myself. Instead of answering myself, I pour another cup of coffee, and walk into the bedroom for my writing folder. I sit down at the dining room table. *I got my own problems, my own family. I'm trying to write, trying to find a teaching position. I can't be solving other peoples' problems. Besides, I couldn't help anyhow. Every man's got to do it for himself,* I tell myself.

Stoke comes in and turns on the T.V. 'Do I have to go to the baby sitter today,' he asks when I tell him good morning.

'Sure, what's wrong wid de baby sitter?'

'There'd nothing to do over there. No one to play with. I could stay at Collin's house. His mother 'll be home all day.'

'Naw, I'll be off tomorrow. You can play wid Collin den. Maybe we'll take a ride over to Palo Alto and see uncle Alex.'

'Why can't we wait 'til you go to work?' Stoke asks as he flips the channel.

'Because, I need some time to write. Besides, Mrs. Hindu wants a full day's pay....'

'Colleen's mother won't mind if I stay over there. She told....'

'Vickie comes out of the bedroom rubbing the sleep from her eyes. She sees me and a big smile lights up her face. 'Pick me up, Daddy. Pick me up,' she says as she runs over with out stretched arms.

I feed the kids their breakfast, and drive over to Hindu's small two-bedroom apartment. As I park in the black top lot, I see that there is not a tree or a blade of grass in sight. Inside, the Hindu's four small children and the other two children that they baby-sit are crowded in the tiny front room around the T.V. set. There's a strong smell of curry in the room. The one small window is heavily curtained to keep out the shine light. *No wonder they don't want to stay here*, I tell myself. I say hello and good-bye to Mrs. Hindu. *What de fuck, three days a week. Dis is good for 'em. Let 'em learn a little about how other families live*, I tell myself.

It's near ten-thirty when I settle down to write. As I get into my days work, I forget all about Willie's phone call. As I try to recall my cab driving experience of yesterday, I forget all about today. As I squeeze out the words on paper, I lose all contact with the worry in another part of my mind.

Even as I drive to work, I'm writing in my head the surface events. I realize how deeply I'm into my writing when I stop at the light and look around. *I'm on Grand Avenue*, I tell myself. *I don't even remember getting off the freeway* The four P.M. sun is shining off the asphalt. I blink an eye and listen to a loud crashing noise from my left hand side. *Someone else isn't paying attention*, I tell myself as I see the late modal car that has bumped bumpers with the car in front of it. The driver is a longhaired beat looking guy. He peers from behind the steering wheel with a puzzled look on his face. The guy that he hit, a hip looking young executive type with mustache, shaped hair, and wide neck tie, leaps from his car his face twisted with hate and hostility. 'What the fuck's wrong with you,' he shouts. 'Just look what the fuck you done to my car!' I sit with eyes agape. From the far lane there comes the sound of booming laughter. A young black, his Afro head and shoulders hanging from the window of his car, is laughing his head off at the anxiety expressed by the two white dudes who bumped fenders. His ringing peals of laughter are infectious. I can't help squeezing out a small laugh myself.

The light changes. I swing right on Grand and give another quiet laugh. *When I can laugh out loud like that black dude back there, then I'll be free. Then I'll have thrown off all the shackles*, I tell myself. I speed up to catch the light on West and find that I'm holding the steering wheel in a death like grip. *When did I learn to hold on to the wheel like this? Why am I trying to squeeze it to pieces? The tension I fee in my back and shoulders. Where is it coming from? My inability to laugh out loud, my constant holding back, what is it that has me in its grip? What part of me is in control?* I ask myself.

How difficult to change the habits of a lifetime, to break through the conditioning, to change ones life long behavior. *Do I compromise too much? Where do you draw the line?* I ask myself.

The problem goes a lot deeper than you realize. It's not enough to just want to change. Wanting to change, in fact, can get in the way, myself answers.

Alex was right, I tell myself thinking of our conversation from a couple weeks ago. I park two blocks from the garage and lock up the car. I remember Alex saying, 'You still react to situations like you are the same person you were ten years ago. You still think of yourself as a nobody. You let your ass-hole aspect take control.'

I felt the pressure of Alex's aggressive truthfulness as I answered him. 'That's what I'm talking about, Alex.' I pushed back my plate and refilled our empty wine glasses from the bottle of Charles Krug. I glanced at the girls on the couch having their after dinner smoke and saw that their glasses were still half full. 'That's the reason for the inner struggle. I know that different aspects of myself are in control at different times. But... the inner struggle, the introspection that I do.... I t seems to be so much more important than anything else. I know that I don't relate well to outer situations.... I spend most of my energy trying to get into myself. But, that's where I'll find an understanding of my total being....'

'Granted, Jack, this introspection is important, but you can over do it. You have to live in the world outside yourself. To be fully integrated, totally aware you have to know what's going on in your relationship with other people. You have to listen to your own voice, feel your posture, know exactly where you are coming from. At the same time, you have to listen to the voice of the person that you're relating to. See his posture, the way he holds himself. Know where he's coming from. You don't relate, man. You withdraw, hold back. You act like you are the same person that you were ten years ago. Like you are still in high school. You've acquired a deep inferiority complex that you've never shaken off. Then, you lived with foster parents. You were no good at sports. The in groups didn't accept you. I know, man. I had it the same way. You're a complete zero in your own mind.

'So, what happens, then? You respond to relationships with half hearted thrusts. You don't want to get slammed down any more. Instead of facing life, you withdraw inside your shell. Not to learn like you're doing now, but for self-protection. You got programmed out of real relationship and you're still reacting to the old clues. You're not relating to

the world from where you're at now. You recognize your attributes. You know you're above or equal to any man you meet. Why do you continue to be so meek? Why do you appear so disinterested, so unenthusiastic in your relationships. Why are you so afraid to show any emotion?

Instead of showing how deeply I was stung by his words, I said, 'What you say is true.... But, if you've locked yourself inside yourself in chains of self-protection all your life, you don't burst out all at once. It's a long slow process. Even recognizing where you are at any given moment is an accomplishment. Letting go when you've been holding on for dear life all your life is no easy thing. Just to see the need is a big step. The rest will come, but it takes time. It has to come from within. You can't force it.'

'You're separating inside and outside, Jack. You can't do that. Just like you can't separate mind and body. There is no separation. To recognize who you are you have to see yourself in relationship. You have to hear your voice, to be aware of your posture, be in tune with others.'

'I know what you are saying is true. I agree with you. I'm jus' saying you can't force it. It takes time.'

'You don't have to force it, Jack. You can be a little more enthusiastic without forcing anything,' Alex told me. I thought I heard a little anger creeping into his voice. I thought how he was into Gestalt, now, and wondered if wasn't identifying with Fritz Perls. 'You can be more alive in your relationship,' he continued. 'It takes time is just an excuse. You have to get into what is and stop worrying about what should be. You have to experience the what is fully. Man, you are burning up so much energy worrying about your inner self that you don't have anything left for living. For example, man, you have a really nice physique. But, you carry yourself like you are still a hundred and ten pound weakling. You're not aware of your physical assets so you don't use them. A lot, most of the relating you do with another person is with your body. You have to be aware of it. You have to be aware of what is outside your skin. This world is just as real as the inner world where you spend all of your time.'

I nodded in agreement with Alex's statement and divided the rest of the wine between us. Anne and Michelle had gone outside to gather the kids. I wondered if they'd be leaving soon, and thought how I had to get up early tomorrow for the interview with Mr. Bellumina. I nodded at Alex's words that you need to listen to your voice, about how much a person's voice tells about the person, how difficult it is to disguise the feelings in your voice. I nodded that I was listening and thought about the interview I had eight months ago with Mr. Rader. *How close he was to Alex's critique*, I told myself.

'I mean like right now, instead of reacting to my criticism what are you doing? Your mind is probably on the interview you have tomorrow. You'll work it over inside your head instead of reacting to the actual situation,' Alex told me.

We laughed and talked about the interview. We talked about how good my chances are to land the job. Alex reviewed the interviewing techniques that he learned at the two-week training course with the drug company. The kids were in bed. We had our after dinner coffee in front of the fireplace. All the time my mind was on the interview I had with Rader. *He said almost the exact same thing as Alex*, I told myself.

At the check out stand, I nod to a couple of drivers and wait for my trip sheet. The hip looking black guy who carries a Bible with him comes in to the little shack. I eye up his beard, leather jacket, and short boots. He has his Bible with his clipboard. We say hello and talk about Monday nights and how slow it is at the end of the month. 'That Miller you carry around. Is he any good?' he asks.

'Henry Miller? Yea, I'd guess he's the best American writer living today. Best writer I ever read.'

'Yea, there's another driver that reads him. He tells me that he's very philosophical, spiritual in his writings.'

'I think there's a lot of the same kind of stuff in his works as in the Bible. I've been meaning to ask you about your views on religion. Miller, I think, is very Christ like in a lot of ways.'

'Yea, well we'll have to get together and talk. Maybe we'll run into each other on the street tonight,' he tells me just as the check out man calls my number.

The man behind the bullet proof glass gives me a late again look with my waybill. I go off to look for my cab with my thoughts sill on the interview with Radar. *What, I put my application in with the district office when I was still up in Willows? Dat's right. I interviewed with the superintendent during Easter vacation.* I remember that I didn't hear a thing from them until almost two years later. It was last November that I got the letter from the Cal-State placement office notifying me of the vacancy for a continuation high school position in San Leandro. I set up the appointment with Rader wondering if I really wanted to take the job. When I drove in the November rain to his office, I was still wondering. *It's an all white middle class conservative district. Shit we'd have to live in Hayward or nearby. We couldn't find a duller place. You're getting involved with the Peace Movement in Walnut Creek, getting to know Oakland and Berkeley. Why get tied up in the same kind of district that you left in Willows?* I asked myself.

And in another part of my mind, I remembered running in the pouring rain across the Claremont Hotel parking lot. I took off my blue National Guard raincoat and brushed the water off my wrinkled dress pants. I found the real estate office and hesitated in front of the clear glass door. I eyed the expensive furniture and watched the water drip from my raincoat to the deep blue carpet. A young sharp looking secretary led me to Mr. Keller's inner office. He

explained that they have their own school, that I could attend the classes at night as soon as I paid the five hundred dollar tuition. No need to quit my present job. Lots of ex-teachers selling real estate. Handsome profits to be made. A business with a future. I'm too embarrassed to tell him that I haven't a penny for tuition. I stammered that I would think about it and backed my way out the door stumbling over my feet as the secretary waved good-bye. *You gotta land dis job. You gotta land dis job*, this part of my mind told me.

I parked my Buick a half block from the school and gave thanks that the rain had stopped. As I walked up the wide steps of the nineteen thirties high school, I wondered if I should search out a restroom and comb my hair. I glanced at my watch and saw that I was seven minutes late already. It was quiet and dark in the halls. Most of the lights were out to conserve energy. I eyed the drab dark brown walls and thought of the bleakness of my own public schools. A wave of fear and self-doubt engulfed me. I peeked into an open room. A couple of high school boys stared at me and challenged my right to intrude. *Dey might be my students in another week*, I told myself. My footsteps echoed through the empty halls as I followed the arrow to the main office. An elderly gray haired spinster directed me to the principal's den around the corner.

When I opened the door to answer his, 'Come in,' my heart dropped to my feet. He was an exact replica of my junior high school principal, Mr. Gilbert. The same bushy eyebrows over dark horned rim glasses, the same protruding nose, the same dark suit jacket and black tie, the same hefty paunch, the same commanding voice. I was as frightened as a schoolboy. I didn't see the man who sat before me. I was in the principal's office. *What did I do? What's gonna happen to me?* ran through my mind.

I sat in front of Mr. Rader like a frightened child as he made a couple light introductory remarks. 'What special qualities do you have that will make you a good continuation high teacher?' he asked.

I hadn't the slightest idea of how to answer him. I didn't even know what subject matter I would be teaching. I only knew that I would be teaching a ninth grade class. The seconds rolled by as I groped for something to say. I pictured some of the dropouts I met at the job-corps camp outside of Willows. I pictured faces from my remedial eighth grade class. The memory of a confrontation with a big dumb junior at a high school in Pittsburgh flashed through my mind. I thought how difficult it was to work with the remedial students there.

'Well, what do you have to offer us? What makes you think you can teach at our high school?' he asked with a slight show of impatience in his voice.

'Ahhh... Well, I guess my best quality as a ah teacher is de way I relate to kids,' I told Rader, and paused for a second to look at the wall behind his desk. The bookcase was filled with darkly bound books on the theory of education, and green bound district directives. 'I grew up in the same kind of environment dat most of dese kids come from. I worked at de same kind'a jobs dat dere parents work at, de same kind'a jobs dat they'll have to work at .You know, factory jobs, non-skilled laboring, I think I can really get into what dere feeling. Really communicate wid dem. I mean, I come from the same lower working class background dat most a dese kids come from. I think I can really get into what dere feeling. I 'll know jus' where dere coming from,' I said and looked at he small round hole that had suddenly appeared in the sole of my shoe.

'Why those kids would eat you alive in the classroom,' Rader said in answer to my long pause. 'You can't even look me in the eye. You look over my head or down at your feet. You don't show a spark of enthusiasm. How can you provoke any interest in your students if you are not enthusiastic yourself? Even Mr. Shields in the district office could see your lack of projection and he's been out of the classroom for twelve years. He marked on your application,' Rader said shifting his eyes to my file at the side of his desk, 'Some question as to how he would perform in a classroom situation.' I can tell by the way that you relate to me that he was right.'

He looked to my file and back to me. 'Your papers showed that you resigned from your last position in Willows. Why I can just imagine. You must have been miserable there.'

'No, that's not why I left Willows,' I whispered to myself.

'Here it is mid-November,' Rader told me. 'I have a position to offer you. A position that you desperately need. You have a family to support. Yet you don't sell yourself at all. There is a huge surplus of teachers today. If you can't compete in the job market, if you can't work up enough enthusiasm to earn yourself a teaching position, how are you going to get up an enthusiastic classroom approach?'

'I think you can relate to kids without a lot of outward show,' I said while my feelings made me doubt the truth of my words.

'Your students have to hear you before they can learn anything. The learning process requires that you get their attention. Today's classroom student needs a very stimulating and sophisticated prototype to identify with. The student needs to be charged with enthusiasm to learn. I'd think you would know. You've been out of work long enough. In today's market you need good interviewing traits to acquire a teaching position. With a wife and family to provide for I'd think you'd be able to create a little more spark in yourself. There are numerous good books on the subject,' he told me.

'Well, it's very difficult for me to project something that I don't feel. I suppose I could work a little harder at it, though,' I told Rader.

'You don't have to apologize to me. You don't owe me anything,' Rader returned.

His words hit me like a slap in the face. I knew he was right. There I sat apologizing for not being the man he thought I should be. I bowed my way out of the office like a child who had been given just one more chance. *What de fuck's wrong wid me?* I asked myself. *Why didn't I tell him what I really feel? The dirty fucking bastard. Why didn't I tell him to shove de fucking job up his fucking ass? Why didn't I tell him dat it's his phony kind'a thinking, his phony enthusiasm dat has fucked up de whole fucking system? Fuck his god dammed job. I wouldn't work for dem if it was the last job on earth,* I said in one part of my mind.

But in another part of my mind I was saying, *He's right.... He's right. I couldn't even look him in de fucking eye....*

As I drive through the wash rack, I realize that it's some eight months later and I'm still thinking about that interview. I'm still afraid to laugh. Still squeezing the life out of my steering wheel. *What de fuck's wrong wid me? What de fuck's wrong wid me?* I ask myself.

I stop at the phone to call in going out. The dispatcher sends me to an address in the West Acorn Project. I turn out the garage down the weed flowering street and try to get into this summer night. The traffic whizzes by on the Cypress Street Overpass while I wait for the green. *Why do I have to play dere games? Why can't I jus' be content to drive de cab and do some writing? Why do I have to find a mother fucking teaching job?* I ask myself.

The light changes. I drive in the shadow of the overpass toward my fare's address. *Why do I continue to play de games? I answer dere questions. I say de right things. I still don't fake enthusiasm, but I don't level wid dem either. I draw up short, hold back. Dat's the thing, holding back. I hold back wid my foster brother. I hold back wid Alex. I hold back with de principals and assistant superintendents. What does it take to quit holding back? Why can't I tell de mother fucking assholes what I really believe? I tell dem that communication is the key to teaching. You have ta know the kid. He has ta know you. You have ta let 'em know dey can trust and depend on you, love you. But, I don't tell dem dat being honest is being honest. Being honest wid yourself. How can anyone love you, trust you, if you tell them half lies? And how can you tell the truth if you don't know it yourself? How can you communicate with another human being if you haven't examined the depths of your own soul? Can a student depend on someone who lies to him about life? Can he trust someone who pretends that God and sex doesn't exist? Can he love someone who pretends that knowledge is more important than understanding? Can he love you if you teach him that getting ahead is more important than seeing where you're at? Can a stuffed shirt bake an apple pie?*

I laugh and tell myself, *I'm right. Henry Miller is right. The things they tell me mean so much don't matter!* I feel it in my bones that I'm right where I ought to be. *This is the place for me, driving cab, being a writer.*

I park in front of a yellow and green concrete building that looks just like an army barracks, and look for my address. The smell of dinner cooking assaults my nose from every direction. Half of the silver plastic numbers are off some doors. I can't find the number I'm looking for. I knock at a torn screen door and peek into a kitchen that looks a lot like the one that I grew up in. *That's funny I thought that this was the front of the house,* I tell myself. A small brown skinned five or six-year-old girl peeks through the screen.

'What you want?' she asks. I tell her I'm looking for an address. 'What number?' she asks.

I give her the number. Her older sister comes to the door. She opens it and steps outside. She's wearing a pink fluffy bathrobe. She points to a door across the street and tells me that's it. 'Mrs. Bowen call for de cab a half hour ago,' she tells me and slips back inside.

When I knock at Mrs. Bowen's door, I'm at the front of her house. *Dat' s a funny set-up,* I tell myself. No one answers my knock, so I knock a little louder. Still no answer. I knock again.

'She already done left. Henry took her,' says a voice from behind the door.

'O.K., thanks,' I tell the voice. *Dirty fucking bastard,* I tell myself.

At the Greyhound, the stands are filled. I circle the streets of downtown Oakland looking for an empty stand. The streets are crowded with white-collar workers, and young executives hurrying to the bus stops and parking lots. Traffic is bumper to bumper. I wait at the light in front of Capwell's and watch a swarm of sales people burst from the wide glass doors. There's a cab on the stand there. There's one at Trailways too. I turn right toward the Lake. *Christ, it will take forever to get around the block. You'd think wid all dese people someone would want a cab,* I tell myself as I step on the gas to cut of a guy coming out of the lot in front of me. As I turn off Twentieth on to Franklin, a flood of secretaries comes from the Kaiser Building. I take a long look at short skirts, long legs and laughing faces, and let two late modal cars slip in front of me.

There's a cab on the Limington stand when I turn on to Nineteenth. I decide to spot second out. *Might catch an airport or a trip to the city,* I tell myself. I spot, and peek out of my windshield at the first out cab. He's an older day shift driver waiting for his last trip of the day. I decide to stay in my cab and watch the crowd pass by. The first out driver gets off with an order. *He got the blonde beaded salesman from Capwell's,* I tell myself and spot first out. I reach for my copy of *Nexus* on the dashboard, but before I can open it the dispatcher gives me an order for a medical building on Pill Hill. *Shit, I gotta fight my way in all dis traffic for a buck fifty fare,* I tell myself.

Watching the sunlight reflect from the Kaiser Building as I wait for the light at Lake Shore, I lean my head out the window and see white puffs of cloud blow from the west. Behind is a deep blue sky. The breeze picks up. It feels good to be alive and out here on this summer night.

I stop at an older building just below Broadway. As I walk toward the lobby swinging my hat in my hand, the door opens. An elderly lady wearing blue bedroom slippers, and faded pajamas under a cloth coat is being helped outside by a middle-aged nurse. The old lady's blue-gray hair is curled tightly against her head. 'You be sure to put a warm water bottle on when you get home,' the nurse tells her.

'Don't ever get old,' my fare tells me as I help her into the back seat. Our eyes meet for a minute. A look of surprise flashes over her face. Though her face is worn and yellow, there is a sparkle in her eyes.

'I got a long ways to go, yet,' I laugh as I head to my side of the cab.

'I imagine you do by the looks of you. I'll be seventy-five day after tomorrow,' the lady tells me.

'Have you lived in California all your life,' I ask after getting her address.

'I came out from Buffalo, New York forty-four years ago. I haven't been back since though I've been told it's not the same anymore. When I settled in Pasadena, Los Angles had under a hundred and fifty thousand population. I came to Oakland fifteen years ago for my daughter's graduation. She got married and left me all alone. I'm alone these past eight years since Harry died.'

All alone.... Preserve your memories, flashes through my mind. *Forty years away from home,* I tell myself. 'What ever made you leave Buffalo?' I ask.

'You know,' she says as a smile lights up her face, 'you're the first person to ever ask me that. No one else ever asked my why I left home. I came to California to write. I wanted to write for the movies. Frank Lloyd was the top Hollywood director then. He took one look at me and said, 'You weren't meant to be in motion pictures.' He wouldn't allow his daughter to become involved in Hollywood either. Before I left Buffalo, my dentist pulled two teeth and cut out the tumor without taking ex-rays. What a horrible experience. I got married and then the children came along. Leave the writing for someone else, I thought.'

'So, you wanted to be a writer?' I answer turning to take a closer look at my fare. 'I'm trying to do some writing myself.'

Writing is *writing*,' she tells me. I don't want to sound Gertrude Steinish, but it's true. I know.'

How true... how true, I tell myself. *Haven't I found that out in the last few years? You learn to write just like you learn to do anything else, by doing it. You have to invest your time, your apprenticeship. Anything else is just so much bullshit. There are no short cuts. No magic formulas. Good or bad, you just keep writing....*

'Yea, I know what you mean,' I tell the old lady.

'I've always been an inspirational writer, myself. I wrote only when the Lord inspired me,' she tells me.

'Have you ever read Henry Miller?' I ask. 'He writes about the inspiration he got for his *Tropics*. How it came from within somewhere. How at times he couldn't turn it off. I get the same kind of thing with my watercolors. I've only been doing them since Christmas. When I do a good one, it's like someone else is in control. I can't believe that I really did it when a good one is finished. That's just what I'd like to be able to do with my writing....'

'What kind of writing do you do?' my fare asks.

'Well, it's hard to say. It's autobiographical, and philosophical, I guess. I'm writing about myself. You know, one man's struggle to find the truth, or wisdom, or whatever you want to call it. I'm writing about myself and discovering myself at the same time. It's kind of fun. You know, the times are not very supportive of a quest to discover more about the human condition. It's a struggle...and an adventure finding out who you are.'

'I read a lot of philosophy when I was young. I was interested in discovering life,' the old lady says. She pauses for a moment to look around. I watch the light change from green to orange and hit the brakes softly. 'Dr. Frank Slaughter is a very good author. He writes novels as well as histories, both equally good....'

I drop my fare off at a well kept older looking home off Grand Avenue and kick myself for not listening more to her. *Why should I have been telling her my story? I should have been listening to hers,* I tell myself.

Your story and hers are not that much different. You and she are part of the same myth, myself answers. My mind flashes to what Jung says in his autobiography. We each have our own myth. A myth is a man's total life story. It is created in part by his physical environment, both inner and outer, by the spirit of his time. We are tied together by our time, and separated by our predilections. Jung's myth is different from mine. He grew up in pre First World War Europe. He is steeped in the tradition of two thousand years of European history. His dreams and visions are colored by strong tradition. My myth is of the new world, a world of freedom and independence from tradition, a world of westward movement and individuality.

In another part, the myth is created by the metaphysical, the forces from the dark mysterious unknown. Even the unknown is shaped by the spirit of one's age. It is brought to light in the terms we know. Jung is tied to the more scientific academic flow. For me the unknown comes from a more romantic bent. Our dreams, visions, and revelations come from a different evolution. And, still, there is the deeper level of dream, the deeper level of reality that rarely comes to light. Can this level be individual? Or does this deeper stream flow beneath all mind?

Every man's myth is different. And yet, each man's myth is the same. The old lady's story, the myth of the writer searching for meaning to life. How is her myth different than mine? How is Jung's myth different than mine?

Each man must live out his own myth in order to further the life of the universe, myself tells me.

Live out your own myth? I ask myself.

To find that unique self which is you; you must discover what other people are doing to that self to shape it into the image though which they see you. Your parents, your teachers, your playmates, and lovers each shape you into the specific image that they want to see, an image that is distorted by the lies that they take to be their own image. To know oneself in naked wholeness is the only task that one need under take. Your myth is a part of your evolution. It is not separate from your day-to-day existence. Consciousness expands as we grow in time and so does our unconscious. We add to our myth, which is the story of the universe in time as we each live out our unique existence no matter what that might be! myself tells me.

The voice of the radio breaks into my thought. He calls for a cab around Grand. I call in going to Two-O-Two.

'One-Five-Eight, a fare at the Safeway in front,' he tells me.

When I pull into the lot, I spy a heavysset black woman waiting at the curb. I park at the yellow lines and jump out to open the trunk. She pushes a cart filled to the brim with brown shopping bags.

'Been waiting long?' I ask, as I begin to pack away the bags she hands me.

'Not too long tonight,' she says and heaves a sigh as she hands me the last bag. 'Some nights I waited as long as an hour.' I take a peek at the Danish nut roll in the last bag, and think of the driver the other night who told me he made his own tips by taking the most choice edibles out of the bag and leaving it in the trunk.

'Put on near ten pounds in the past two weeks,' he told me.

The lady gets in back and gives me an address about four blocks away. We ride in silence and I wonder what her myth might be. I shut the meter off at ninety cents and help the lady to the porch with her groceries. She gives me a smile and a quarter tip. *'What might her myth be? What might she say if she opened her mouth?'* I ask myself as I ride toward Two-O-Two.

There are two cabs on the stand when I reach Two-O-Two. The radio is silent. I park third out and fill in my weigh-bill. *Might as well wait here as anywhere else,* I tell myself. Getting out of my cab to stretch my legs, I look at the two older drivers up front and decide to get an ice cream cone. I think of my first few months driving cab. I remember the stand in front of the California Hotel. How I was introduced to the prostitutes and pimps and the crowd that hangs around there. How they were in and out of my cab two or three times a week, the faces constantly changing but the action always the same. I hurry across the street toward the Baskin Robbins and think how I was just a means of transportation for the whores and pimps and confidence men. They were in and out of my cab, barely touching my life and yet they left an indelible imprint. I carried the girls to their steady customers, to motel rooms, apartments, and houses, and back to the street. Watching them poise in front of the hotel I had one ear cocked to the radio, and the other ready to escape. I saw the pimps take command, sweet talk, and make promises.

And it wasn't just the Hotel California. The action spread from one end of San Pablo to the other. At the Hound, I'd watch the young bad asses. I'd see them pick their targets and make their hits. I'd watch the cheap hustlers work their tricks. I listened to their jive and chuck. Pimps, prostitutes, hustlers, service men and regular working stiffs, I carried them from the Hound to the S.P. station at Sixteenth and Wood, to the Army Base off Maritime, to the Navel Air Station in Alameda, to the neighborhood bars on Fruitvale and East Fourteenth, to Grove, Alcatraz, Ashby, and University. I saw them at work and at play. I saw their homes and families.

The double pull, the double pull of excitement and fear... I felt it back then, and I feel it even today, as I lick my double dip of banana-nut. *Scared as I was I stayed with the cab, didn't I? What is it that keeps me here?* I ask myself. I think of the strangers that entered my cab and taught me the streets of Oakland. I think how they told me their stories when they were alone, how they acted them out when they entered my cab in twos and threes, how their stories seeped under my skim.

I get back into my cab and turn on the radio. As I listen to the static, I try to remember when the pull of excitement began to out weigh the pull of fear. The first out driver gets off with a radio order. I check in second out and tell myself, *Some of the girls were really beautiful weren't they?* A picture of a longhaired white girl floats in front of my closed eyes. *I wonder what ever happened to her?*

I remember the first time I picked her up at the Hotel Five. It was still daylight, nearing six o'clock. I found her room number and looked in through the open door. She got up from the bed before I had a chance to knock. She was wearing a light trench coat. Her long black hair fell in waves over her collar. 'Cab,' I said waving my yellow cap. She smiled and I looked into a pair of sparkling green eyes. I figured she must be the motel owner's daughter or something. As she followed me to the cab, I smelled her lightly perfumed body. I opened the back door and watched her coat slide up slender thighs.

'The bus depot on San Pablo,' she told me.

'On the other side of Macarthur?' I asked nodding my head towards the covered A.C. Transit. She nodded her head, yes, and settled back in the seat. I watched her close her eyes and saw the peaceful look of relaxation on her face as we pulled out of the driveway. We didn't exchange a word on the short trip to the bus stop, but I watched as she

boarded the express to San Francisco. I tried to figure out who she might be and why she was making a bus trip to the City.

The next couple times I picked her up the door was open. There was a different black dude in her room each time. At first, I couldn't believe she was a prostitute. She was so innocent looking, so refined. She never said more than where she was going, most of the time to the bus stop but a couple times to the Hotel California's Zanzibar. She always brought a warm sexy feeling into my cab. I continued to see her once a week or so for several months. I wasn't able to break the ice between her back seat and my front seat. We exchanged smiles each time she paid her fare, but nothing more. The last time I saw her she had a small curly haired boy with her. They boarded the bus together. I wondered if the boy was hers. *Did she get pregnant? Is her paramour helping to support him? Are they going to the City to see her mother?* I asked myself.

Few of the girls matched the beauty of that one, but they all stayed in my mind. I remember the pair of female impersonators that I picked up one night outside the Hound. Even in the dim light of my cab I could see their hairy arms and legs, their bulging muscles. But, I went along with their game. I reacted to them as if they were the girls that they pretended to be as we cruised passed the California Hotel and they practiced their dialogue on me. I had been driving cab for over a year by the time I picked those two up. I had seen countless numbers of muscular legs parade passed the Hound in tight mini skirts. I had watched them wiggle a phony ass and give the come on with a pair of falsies. As I listened to those two talk, it didn't take long to figure what their game was. They were going to pick up some drunk ass mother fucker, take his money, and beat his fucking brains in. if he was lucky, they might even shove a dick up his ass, or maybe a rusty corn cob.

The only reason I wasn't scared to death with this pair in my cab was that it was still early, y not quite nine o'clock. There was still some traffic on the street. But, I was a little scared, and my girls knew it. They started talking some bad shit just loud enough for me to hear. They told each other how they ain't had no young white ass for at least a couple days now. 'How you like to do dat dude up front,' I heard one ask the other,

'He look like he gots a tight little ass, don't he?'

'We circled the California Hotel a couple times and the girl on the right tells me to take them to the Aloha Hotel on East Eighth Street.

'The Aloha?' I asked as my heart stopped beating.

The Aloha was the hotel where a driver made his last pickup. Some time around three A.M. Traffic Seven found him slumped inside his cab with a bullet in his head. The girls knew right away what reaction the mention of the Aloha would set off in my mind. Everyone at the Hound had been talking about the murder all night. He wasn't the first driver to be murdered after picking up there. One of the drivers told me at least two other cabbies had been knocked off by some fucking animal out of the Aloha. 'Dey ought'a go in dere wid machine guns and wipe dem fucking niggers out'a dere,' they told me.

When we stopped in the shadows of the three-story building, my knees began to shake. The girls were laughing in the back seat. I switched on the dome light and turned to face them. From the corner of my eye, I saw the dimly lit lobby. There were a half dozen or so blacks standing around a couple of faded red couches.

'What we owe you, honey?' the girl behind me asked in a deep throaty voice.

'Two-twenty,' I said pointing to the meter. She pulled a ten from her purse.

'You holding quite a little money in yo hand, honey,' she told me as I counted out her change.

'Shit, mother fucker.... You oughts to know better'n to pull out a roll like dat. How long you been driving cab?' asked the taller of the two.

'Mother fucker, you got near twenty dollar there. Come back for us later when you gots forty,' from her friend.

'Come back 'round three A.M. '

'Now, get your narrow white ass out and hustle up some bread fore you come back,' the first one said as they exited my cab.

I knew they were just jiving me. I wanted to laugh with them and let them know that I was hip to what was going on, but I couldn't bring myself to join in their game. I just wanted to get out of the shadows of East Eighth Street to the safety of downtown.

The double pull, the double pull was always there. I want to join in the game, but I'm scared to death. Every night of the week it was there. I remember another night; dead heading out to the Port near quitting time, sitting on he back up stand all by myself. Traffic Seven came out and told me the last flight had left. He told me there was an order at Scotty's. He knew that ninety percent of the drivers would turn down an order from Scotty's after dark. He knew that I was scared to even drive passed Ninety Eighth and Edes after dark. He was so reassuring. He told me he would follow me over. 'Them fucking niggers in dere is animals. They'll slice a man's throat for a couple bucks. Bleeding heart mother fucking judges let dem right back on de street, again. You gotta look 'em over good. I'll wait outside for ye,' he told me.

We made a U on Hesperian and headed for Edes. I pushed it up to thirty-five and tried to remember where the turn off was. Traffic Seven went flying by. I pushed it up to sixty and I was still losing ground. I slowed for the turn off

and squealed tires passed the Holiday Hotel. The only lights on the empty East Oakland Streets were Traffic Seven's receding taillights. I pushed it up to seventy.

Scotty's bar was almost empty as my shaky legs carried me inside. It was the first time I'd walked through the dark stained doors. A couple heads turned and watched me walk to the bar. The bartender told me, 'The dude that called for a cab left an hour ago, figured it be quicker to walk.'

'Fucking animals,' said Traffic Seven when I returned to his car. 'Dey call for a fucking cab, and if it's not dere right dis minute.... Dey wouldn't think ta call in and cancel.' He pulled off a radio order for a couple blocks away.

I got back in my cab with a sense of relief. Traffic Seven followed me to the front of a fairly new hundred dollar a month apartment building. A young black man opened to my knock. I saw a young black girl on the couch crying. *Dey must be newly weds*, I told myself. *Probably dere first fight*. The guy complained that they had been waiting for near an hour. When we got in the cab, he told me downtown Oakland. A surge of joy ran through me as I gave Traffic Seven the high sign and headed for East Fourteenth.

The girl sat in the corner behind me. I heard her trying to hold back her sobs. 'You said we'd go out tonight. You said jus' the two of us,' she told him.

'Yea, baby, we can do dat. Les jus' take a little ride downtown. She what's happening,' he answered. She insisted that he promised that they would go out together. She covered her face and began to sob again. We rode to East Fourteenth in silence. A few blocks down East Fourteenth and he gave in to her silent treatment. He told her that they would stop at the Caravan. She leaped out of her corner and put both arms around him.

When I stopped in front of the bar, he told me to pull up a little bit. I kept pulling up until we couldn't see inside. He told her the place must be closed. 'There's no one inside,' he said. She knew he was lying. It was just passed midnight. She moved back to her corner and covered her face.

'Dere's lots of places downtown. Where do you wanna go?' I asked the guy. He told me he'd let me know when we got there. We rode the rest of East Fourteenth in stony silence. It wasn't until he directed me to Tenth and Market that I realized that he was her pimp. He told me to park across from a bar and handed me a hundred dollar bill for the fare. I explained that I didn't even have change for a twenty.

'Dey change it inside,' he told me pointing to the bar. I grabbed my hat from under the seat and hoped that I could make to the bar and back without getting held up. Inside, I told the bartender that I was a cab driver. I was surprised when he changed the bill without question. When I hurried back to my cab, the girl was already on her corner.

The first out cab gets off, and I pull into his position. I scan the parking lot shoppers as I finish off my ice cream cone. The memory of the Greek girl from Grand Avenue flashes through my mind. She asked me to wait a minute or two while she finished getting ready. I sat down on the couch and looked around her warm well-lit apartment. It was nicely furnished with just the right touch of books, plants, and prints. She was wearing a long dark skirt with slits that showed off her lightly tanned thighs, and a low cut white cotton blouse. I watched her flow to the other side of the room. She brushed her long black hair and asked me what I did. 'You're not a regular cab driver,' she told me. I told her I was looking for a teaching job. She asked me if I had ever been to Zorba's.

'Yea, I heard about the place. I been gonna stop in,' I told her as I watched her up turned breasts and stroking brush.

'I'm a dancer there. It's the hottest place in town. They almost closed us down the other night,' she told me.

I pictured her belly exposed and writhing in sensuous rhythm as she came over and sat next to me on the couch. Her hands searched in a big brown bag as I inhaled the smell of her body. She told me that the best time to come is after twelve. 'That's when everybody starts to loosen up. The customers get really involved after they've had a few drinks.' As she went back to the mirror to put on her eye make up, I felt my heart beat pick up a couple paces. I thought how I've always loved everything Greek, Greek poetry, Greek philosophy, Greek history. I thought about Miller's description of the islands, the water, the bigger than life people, the Gods that still linger there. I thought about my dreams of one day visiting there, the application I put in for a teaching job in Thermopile.

'Are you Greek? Are you from Greece?' I asked the girl.

She told me that she was from Athens. She said that she went back to visit last year. 'It's not the same. Everything has changed. Everything is so American. The old and the new don't blend. The new looks sleek and plastic. It's not made to last. But, the sky is still there, the sunlight, the white washed buildings. Everything is blue and white,' she said as she finished her eye make up.

'How do I look?' she asked as she whirled around in front of me.

'Beautiful,' I told her as my heartbeat picked up another notch. We smiled at each other and headed for the stairs.

On the way to Alameda, we talked about her homeland, its natural setting on the Aegean Sea, the Minoan Civilization on Crete, Knossos, Homer, Athens, Sparta, Socrates.... I asked her if she had read Miller's book on Greece. She told me that she had heard of Miller, but that she had never read him. I explained his description of what Greece was like in 1939, how the old and the new were interwoven, how the peasants and shepherds live in the same world that

their ancestors lived in, how time has not separated them from the Gods of nature, how from peasant to king they are still bigger than life, still growing and pushing back new frontiers.

The girl told me that she would have to get Miller's book. 'We'll have to get together to talk about it. I'm off on Monday and Tuesday,' she told me as we stopped at a small house on Santa Clara. 'Be sure to come and see me at Zorba's' she said as she got out of the cab. 'Come after midnight.'

I nodded goodbye, and told her I would stop by. Her middle-aged friend walked out in his stocking feet to pay the five-dollar fare.

The girl's big brown eyes and long dark hair fades from sight as a small black hand taps on my window. I jump from my cab seat and open the trunk for a mother and her two kids. 'One Five-Eight out,' I tell my radio. I help unload the groceries and decide to dead head downtown.

As I make my way around the Lake, I remember a night in Oakland's little China Town. The streets were still wet from an early March shower. I was headed for One-O-One when these five kids hailed me down. It was a college aged hippy looking group. They were dressed in far out clothes, laughing and playing in the street. Two couples squeezed into the back. The guy that climbed in front gave me an address on the other side of Grand. The kids in back were talking about their chop suey dinner. I turned to get a look. The girls are longhaired, small breasted, and slim. The guy up front asked me where I was going to school. I explained that I was an unemployed schoolteacher. We talked about how hard it was to find a teaching job in today's market as he directed me toward a narrow street. I thought how I had been driving cab for some six months and this was my first time on this street. 'It's the next to the last house on the block,' my fare told me as I listened to the kids in back light up a number. I heard them suck in their breath as they passed it down the line and giggle.

'How about a hit for the driver?' I asked when the number came back to the guy behind me.

'I didn't think cab drivers smoke dope,' the kid said and passed up a fat loosely rolled half joint.

'Only when their fares do,' I answered and took a long hard hit. I pulled to the curb, held my breath, and passed the number behind my shoulder.

'Keep it,' the kid said. We got plenty more where that came from.'

'That'll be our tip,' the guy up front said as he counted out a dollar sixty. 'Watch it though, that's some dynamite shit.' I thanked him for the joint and watched the kids laugh their way up the stairs of an older house.

Take just one more bit, I told myself and reached into my rain coat for a pack of matches. I watched the orange and blue flame creep toward my fingers as I sucked in deeply. I shook out the flame and held my breath. *One more bit?* I asked myself. The radio called for a cab around Four-O-Five.

'One-Five-Eight going to Four-O-Five,' I said in a flash. The dispatcher gave me an address as I carefully butted out the number in the ashtray. *Save it for after work*, I told myself and carefully stuck it in my raincoat pocket. I rolled up the coat and set it carefully on the seat beside me.

When I had driven the four or five blocks to my next fare, I was telling myself I shouldn't have pulled off the order. *Dat number must'a been laced wid something*, I heard in my head as I felt the engine vibration in my steering wheel. I watched two black figures come out of a yellow splashed doorway. *It's a mother and daughter*, I told myself as they climbed into the backseat. The mother gave me an address about two blocks away. I pulled from the curb and watched parked cars on both sides slide passed my windows. *Holy shit!* I told myself.

I'm looking down on my passengers and myself from the dome light of my cab. I listen to the small talk that I make with my fares. *What the fuck am I doing?* I ask myself. *We're not communicating. I'm a big fucking phony. I'm not being honest wid dem.* From overhead, I watch the girl turn and whisper something to her mother. I listen to each letter in each word as the sound floats up to the dome light. The words circle round and round going into one ear, coming into the other, vibrating in my head, pumping through my body. I hear myself say, 'Hope the rain holds off for the rest of the night.'

'We've had enough rain to last us a while,' the mother tells me.

'It rains in the summer time in Philadelphia,' I tell my fare. My wheels hum on the black pavement. I watch the street dip and curl. My headlights reflect yellow beams that bounce off my windshield and explode against parked cars. Long city blocks stretch out one after the other. Doorways blink shadow and light as they pass one by one on both sides of the street. Orange and white peeks from behind green curtained windows. The music of the wet puddle streets mixes with a song in the back of my head. *I gotta get out'a here*, I'm telling myself.

I count out the change for my fare with trembling hands. *Dat dope must'a been laced wid something*, I'm telling myself again. I watch the mother and daughter disappear behind a dark doorway. I'm alone on the street with the steady vibration from my cab. The dispatcher's voice comes slowly and far away. I'm floating around the dome light again. I watch myself put the cab in gear and ease away from the curb. *Take it easy. Take it easy*, I tell the frightened figure behind the wheel. A loud drumming noise inside my head keeps time with the vibration of my cab's engine. A light mist rises from the still wet streets. The self above the dome light floats though a crack in the window and rides away with the mist.

I park behind the Hof Brau on Grand Avenue with a sigh of relief. I figure I'll come down if I have some coffee and something to eat. I look at my yellow parked safely at the curb and wonder if I should waste the high. 'You could walk around and take in the sights,' I tell myself.

Yea, but what if Traffic Seven finds you parked here? What if he finds the number in your raincoat? a voice inside my head asks. I walk toward Grand and feel the pavement buckle beneath my feet. In slow motion, I bob and weave with the give of the rubbery paving blocks. Neon lights merge with the red and green of the traffic lights and converge upon my pupils.

It's like a movie acid trip, I tell myself as I slow step through the front door of the Hof Brau. The noise hits my ears in a heavy buzz. *I gotta control myself,* I think as my eyes flit from table to table. I expect to see every head raised and staring in my direction. I relax a little when I see that no one is paying the least attention, and head for the restroom downstairs. *Take a piss and splash some water on my face,* I tell myself. The wooden staircase wobbles beneath my feet. Each step vibrates in tune with a rumbling in my ears. *It's as if I was on a ship, like the vibration of a ship's engine,* I tell myself. The wooden floor of the restroom begins to shake and rumble. *What's wrong?* I ask myself. I'm afraid the floor is going to tear apart as I hold on to the cold porous urinal. A man opens the door and comes inside. He walks with an unsteady gait to the brown door of a toilet. I wonder if he can feel the vibrations. The floor steadies a little as I walk to the sink. I look into the mirror and laugh.

I'm sitting on a stool at the next to the last counter with a hot roast pork sandwich, macaroni salad, and coffee. I smile at my reflection from the wall mirror. Warm sweet coffee trickles down my throat. My taste buds light up to the French bread and roast pork. I watch a patron walk to the wall telephone. He examines his face in the mirror while he waits for the number to ring up. He bares his teeth and examines them closely. He says hello into the receiver and pulls out a tooth pick. *It's his mother,* I tell myself as I listen to his talk. *He's being the dutiful son,* I'm thinking. I look down at my macaroni when the man turns to see if anyone is watching. Looking up again, I see him picking his teeth in the mirror as he nods his head up and down to the phone. *He's not the least interested in her. He's just fulfilling his duty,* I tell myself. I watch him examine his teeth more closely. He has a full stomach, a clear conscience. The world is his. He examines the circles under his eyes and says a few words into the mouthpiece. I think that this would be a perfect setting for a play. The actor is talking on the phone to his mother in front of a larger mirror. While talking, he examines his teeth. He looks into his own eyes. He sees the mother inside his head. He begins to talk to the psychological mother as he fades into the mirror. A man sitting at a counter sips his coffee and observes. He picks up his own reflection in the mirror and returns the smile.... I gotta get back to work, I told myself.

The double pull. The double pull; duty and self-development, excitement and fear, play and work. It's always there. I tell myself as I pass the State Building on Twelfth. *It hasn't been all that bad has it? Maybe that's why I stay. Where else can I find so much adventure and excitement? Material for my novel? What better place for a writer to be?*

For a writer to be? I ask myself and laugh. *Dat's right, I'm a writer. I'm not just an unemployed schoolteacher, a cab driver anymore.* I look at the hurrying traffic, late commuters wending their way home, and laugh. *I'm no longer a part of the nine to five crowd. I'm out on the streets seeing it happen,* I tell myself

I slow for the cross traffic at Jackson and spot a really sharp looking black girl waving from the curb. I pull over and she hops in the back. She gives me an address in Middle East Oakland. 'Oh, I'm so lucky. I jus' got outside,' she tells me and flashes a big smile. I turn from the rear view mirror and smile back at her.

'Jus' getting off work?' I ask as I pull from the curb and make my way to the left hand lane.

'Over time again tonight,' she says and gives another big smile. She's wearing a light tan pants suit and matching blouse. I breathe in a light perfume and figure that she can't be more than twenty or so. There's a glow from her light brown skin and a sparkle from her eyes. Her radiance fills up the back seat and flows into the front. She tells me she feels really good vibes in our cab and asks if I believe that people send off body vibrations.

'Sure,' I say turning to look across at her. 'I'm picking up good vibes too. I think it's the inner self we all carry. When you're in touch with your own inner spirit, you can pick it up in others. I think that's what sets off the electricity that you feel.' I turn back to watch the lake traffic and listen to the girl's reply.

'In myself it's Jesus that I carry. I guess it doesn't have to be Jesus for everyone. There's a friend of mine at work. He tells me he's an atheist. Yet, there's certainly something inside him. He gives off good vibes that you can feel a block away. I can walk into the lounge and tell that he's just left. I can tell what chair he was sitting in. Not just me, other people too. He changed offices about a month ago. You can walk into his old office and still feel his vibes. You believe that can happen? That body electricity can be stored in inanimate objects?'

'I don't see why not,' I answer. 'I never really thought about it, but I'm sure it could. When you're in tune with the universal flow you do give off an energy surge. Scientists can even measure it. If you're really sensitive you can feel the flow when you wave your hand in front of another person's body.'

When we stop in front of her mother's house off Fruitvale, I flick off the meter and cut the engine. I turn to the back seat and catch her eye. We hold each other's gaze for a minute. She leans forward and smiles. She tells me about the change in her life since she found Jesus a coupe months ago. She tells me her life is more spiritual now. 'But, it's more than that. I have a whole new feeling of confidence, a whole new flow of energy, a new way of seeing the world.' I

can feel what she's talking about. I know that she is in to something more than the Jesus bag though I wince at the simplicity of some of the things that she's saying. 'Jesus is the way, the truth, and the light.... Anyone can open his or her heart to Jesus.... Unless you are born again....'

I tell her that I'm not into Jesus in the same way she is. I explain that I had thrown out all of my religious beliefs when I began to read, that I had rejected the real Jesus with the false teachings. But, that now, I look at Jesus as one of the highest aspects of human evolution. 'I feel that he shares a cosmic consciousness with men like Buddha, Socrates, and Walt Whitman. I know his words are true. It is just the structuring of them by the Church that has turned them into lies....'

We agree that there are many different paths to the truths that Jesus spoke, that the actions of a man count more than the words. I tell her that she should read Krishnamurti, him and Henry Miller too. She has me repeat the names and tells me she'll look them up. We sit in silence a minute or so before I get out to open her door,

'Maybe we'll see each other again,' she says as we smile our good-byes.

I think of the girl and Jesus and what it means to be a writer as I point my cab toward the stand on Fruitvale and East Fourteenth. I run off a couple of short orders and head toward High Street just as the sun is setting. Calling in going to Seven-O-Nine, I get a radio order for a local bar. I walk inside with my hat in my hand. A young sort of shabby hip looking guy turns on his stool. 'I'm for the cab,' he tells me and gets off the stool. He says good-bye to the bartender and follows me outside. As he climbs in back, I notice that he has a mustache just a little smaller than mine. He's carrying a dark brown leather jacket. His pale face has a two or three days' growth on it. I write down his destination and try to figure where it's at. 'It's my lawyer's place. It's up in the hills on the other side of Macarthur. We might have to take a trip to Santa Rita too unless she loans me her car. She's a damn good lawyer, I tell you,' my fare says.

I try to figure what a fare to Santa Rita would be. *It could be a fifteen or twenty dollar trip*, I tell myself. As I congratulate myself on my good luck, my fare settles back in his seat and begins to mumble more to himself than to me.

'The mother fuckers just wont leave you alone. They got to keep fucking wid you all the time. I wouldn't mind getting busted, but the mother fuckers....'

'You jus' get busted?' I ask.

'Yea, and I wouldn't mind it so much, but I jus' been out for seventeen days. I mean, the cock suckers don't leave you alone. They don't give you no time. Then they got to take my mother fucking car keys. Bust the mother-fucking door down. They didn't have to do dat....'

'They took your car keys?'

'Yea, the mother fuckers, they took over two thousand bucks I had in cash. Over two thousand reds, a pound of smack. They took it all the mother fuckers. They even bust the mother-fucking door in. Tear the fucking place apart. You know it's gonna cost a couple hundred bucks to fix the door. The lady we rent from is a friend. We take real good care of de place. Party every night, but we take real good care of de place. Since I got out, man, we party every night 'til dawn....'

'They knock your door right in, huh?' I ask as my pale-faced friend directs me to make a left off Tompkins Avenue.

'Yea, the mother fuckers had a no knock warrant. They come busting right in while we're asleep. Hassle us out'a bed.'

'They can do that?'

'They can do it. Someone has to witness dey seen some dope in your place. I got a good lawyer, though. She got me right out on bail. My old lady's still in Santa Rita. That's what I'm going over for. To get her sprung. She's taking the ride for dis one. We got everything in her name. She might have to do some time, but not de kind I'd have to do.'

He directs me to make another turn and we ride a half block or so in silence. I wonder how it is that he's out of jail a couple weeks and dealing dope already. 'So you jus' get out and they bust you already?' I ask.

'Yea, the mother fuckers jus' don't leave you alone. Like when they busted me the first time. I wouldn't have minded so bad. I mean, I know I take a risk. Dealing dope ain't legal. Getting busted is part of de game. But, dem mother fuckers have to shot me in the back. I mean I 'm lying on the ground. The fucking cop is standing over me wid his piece in his hand. The cock sucker empties it at me....'

'They were shooting at you?'

'Yea, I was making a buy. I'm jus' leaving de place wid a half pound a smack in my pocket. They're doing a fucking state out. They yell for me to stop. I got to get rid a de dope so I take off running. I got my heat wid me. I get off a couple rounds jus to slow 'em down. I mean, I don't wanna waste nobody. Not even a cop. I jus' wanna get rid a' the shit. The mother fuckers start shooting back. Jus' as I get rid a' the shit, I take a hit in the arm. It's a fucking shock, man. I never knew it hit you so hard. I take the hit and next thing I know, I'm laying flat ass on my stomach. I try to get up and I see dis fucking pig standing over me. The mother fucker steadies his fucking wrist, and starts shooting at me. I'm still on my hands and knees on the fucking ground. I dive flat out and jus' lay there. I feel the fucking bullets going into de dirt. I must'a lost my fucking mind. I'm on my knees emptying my fucking piece into his belly. A couple more

pigs run up and start shooting at me. I mean, my fucking gun is empty. They never say a word, man. Jus' start emptying their pieces at me. I take a couple more hits. Like I said, I must'a went out'a my mind. There's this chain barrier at de end of the road. I get to my feet and stagger over to it. I pull the two by fours that's holding de chain right out'a de ground. I start swinging de chain at dese two pigs. They're still emptying their pieces at me. More pigs is joining them. I put three in de hospital and one in de morgue. My attorney cops a manslaughter plea. I get one to fifteen. Seven years and I'm off wid good behavior. The mother fuckers are out to get me, man. I'm out seventeen days and they're busting my door down...'

'Didn't you expect to get busted again if you're back into dealing?' I ask.

'Yea, I expected it. Like I said, it's part of de game. But, they didn't have ta fuck wid me so soon. They didn't have ta bust my door, take my car keys. I found out who de fucking stoolie is. We saw a copy of de warrant. A no knock warrant got to be signed by de one who sets you up. De mother fucker bought himself a pair a cement shoes. The cock sucker signed his death warrant,' my fare says as he directs me to turn into a dead end street.

'You're gonna kill de guy for turning you in?' I ask. I'm sure the guy is putting me on just a little.

'Yea, we'll get him. We'll waste the mother fucker. He deserves it. He's taking the same kinda risk as me. He knows what happens if he gets caught. Normally, I don't wanna waste nobody. It's like I said wid them pigs, I went out'a my mind. Yea, you must'a read about it. The story was in all the papers. I was almost eight years ago dis month. They had de trail and everything in de papers. It ran almost six months. You must'a seen it. The fucking prosecutor wanted me to get de chair. My attorney gets 'em to buy a manslaughter charge. Like I said, she's a good one. You must'a read about it...'

'Naw, I don't remember reading it...'

'You must'a read it. It was in all the papers. Eight years ago...'

'I was going to school back then. I didn't have time to read the papers.'

'You can look it up in the old newspaper files,' he tells me and pronounces his last name a couple times for me to remember.

'Yea, I will. I'll look it up at the library on my day off,' I tell him. He points out his lawyer's driveway at the end of the dirt street.

'Leave the meter running. I'll be back in a minute,' he tells me when I stop in the driveway.

I watch him disappear around the back of the house. *What if he's a run out?* I ask myself. *Naw, he can't be,* I answer and try to figure what a trip from here to Santa Rita will be. *It might even be a round trip* I'm thinking. I wonder how much of what he told me is true and how much is made up. I figure I'll have to look up his story in the paper for sure.

The meter clicks three times before my fare returns. He tells me his attorney loaned him her car. I shut off the meter and collect for the four eighty fare. He hands me six bucks and tells me to keep the change. 'Thanks for waiting,' he says and waves good-bye. I watch him disappear around the side of the house as I back out the driveway.

For a guy who deals hard dope and wastes people, he sure has nice manners, I tell myself. I make my way back to the lights of MacArthur and wonder what kind of a person he really is. He's letting his wife take the rap for him. He's more worried about his car and busted door than any human pain that he might cause. He's talking about killing the guy who turned him in. Yet, I didn't pick up any bad vibes from him. He seems like a regular guy. A little self-centered, but not all bad. *You can't label a person a criminal and forget that he's human too,* I tell myself. *The guy is just like everybody else.*

By the time I reach downtown, it's almost eight thirty. *If I spot on One-Three-Seven, I can run inside for a sandwich and get in line for the nine o'clock phone,* I tell myself. The Hof Brau comes in sight and I see a cab on the stand. There are two cabs on the Trailways stand on Telegraph. I circle the block and decide to head for the 'Hound. On San Pablo, I see one cab on the stands. I pull in second out and shut off my engine. It's beginning to get just a little chilly outside. I get my blue windbreaker out of the trunk and slip it on. Through the center of the tall tan building, I can see a bus unloading in back. I sit on my fender and watch for the fares. The first out driver stays in his cab. In a minute or so, passengers begin to file through the center doors. They're greeted by a couple blacks that are hustling watches. An elderly woman with a brown paper shopping bag and a worn suitcase brushes by the hustlers and hurries to the first out cab. A young longhaired girl comes out of the doors, and races to a double-parked car behind me. A middle-aged heavysset book salesman shies away from the watch sales men and hotfoots it to another waiting car. A half dozen more Greyhound fares come out of the doors and disappear in different directions. Then, there is just me and the two watch sales men on the street. I jump off my fender and climb behind the wheel. *Might as well climb out and take a piss,* I tell myself as I pull into the first out position and spot. I hurry toward the doors telling myself that I can hang around for the next bus, or maybe catch a phone order. Just as I reach the door, one of the hustlers steps in front of me. I've seen him a couple times from the cab, but have never been this close to him. He's a mean looking mother, big, black, with a growth of brush like stubble on his chin. My eyes drift down to his open shirt collar and suit coat. I glance at his baggy trousers and brown and white summer shoes. His partner is at the restaurant door looking over the sparse crowd for any newcomers.

'Hey, man,' the hustler says as he pulls a nice looking gold watch from his pocket. 'I got to get up the fare for a

bus ticket, man. I got this hundred dollar gold watch. I'll let you have it for thirty, man,' he says turning the watch over and holding it up for my inspection.

'Man, I don't have any thirty dollars for a watch,' I tell him thinking of my own watch safe at home on the dresser.

'How much you got, man? I can let you have it for twenty. I jus' got a phone call. My old lady is in the hospital. I got to get home to L.A.'

I glance at the restaurant and see three or four white faces among the half dozen or so inside. 'If I had twenty dollars, I wouldn't be working tonight,' I tell the watch salesman and give a nervous laugh. I catch his eye and smile.

'Yea,' he says and gives me a look so mean that I have to turn my eyes away. 'You'd be working mother fucker... You'd be working cock sucker... You'd be working...,' he tells me.

What the fuck's wrong wid me? I ask myself as I head for the restroom. *Why couldn't I jus' tell him I was on to his game? Tell him I've seen him working the bus crowd a dozen times?* Inside the spacious dimly lit Men's Room, the old black shoeshine man is working on a pair of shoes that a customer left him. I stand at the tile urinals on the wall across from his stand. There's just the two of us. 'How's it going tonight,' I ask as I zip down my fly.

'Kind'a slow. Kind'a slow,' he answers and pauses his brushing of a pair of empty shoes. 'How's it going with you?'

'Ahhh... pretty slow. No long trip, yet.' As I wash my hands at the sink that he keeps clean, I ask him about the young girl I saw him with the other night.

'Oh, that young lady. That was my daughter,' he says and laughs. 'You know I wouldn't mess wid any young stuff like dat.' We exchange laughs and bid each other good night.

Back in my cab, I watch the two hustlers go back to work as the next bus empties. Two old timers pull in behind me. A skinny red-faced guy in kaki pants and long sleeved shirt ambles to my cab and opens the front door. 'Can you take me to Treasure Island?' he asks.

'Sure can,' I answer and flick on the meter. *At least a five-dollar trip,* I tell myself and thank my good luck.

He throws a small over night bag over the seat and climbs in up front. 'What a fucking day,' he tells me stretching out long legs.

'Long trip,' I ask as I pull into the left hand lane and hang a U.

'Long, hot, and boring. All the way from San Diego. And would you believe it, I end up on a fucking local.'

'You stationed at T. I.?' I ask.

'Yea... We must'a made a hundred stops before noon when we left down there. That's not bad enough, but I have to get some old drunken smelly bitch sitting next to me. You wouldn't believe it, man. She's after my ass the whole fucking trip. Old enough to be my grandmother, too. I actually have to push her away a couple times. She got her hand inside my leg. She's pulling on my crank. Pushing her ass against me. She's got to be over fifty. I tell her if you want to give me a blow job that's all right. But, I tell her I don't want non a' her fucking ass. It's all dried up and dead by now. I tell you man, it's disgusting. The whole way from San Diego to Stockton she keeps after me. Playing with my leg, grabbing my crank. I already had enough ass on this trip to last me a month. Hell, man, I got laid four times the night before. Two different broads. I don't need no ass from this old bitch.'

My fare keeps up his monologue as we approach the toll plaza. I study him in the light as I turn to look at the traffic. He's not the least bit handsome. His over eager manner makes him a bit repulsive. I watch him fidgeting with his hands out of the corner of one eye as I pay my half dollar toll. *What the fuck's his game? I ask myself. I'm letting him fuck wid me jus' like the watch hustler. He's making up every other word. What is he some kind'a queer or something?* Instead of confronting him, I decide to draw him out a little more.

'How come it's always the old ugly ones that you get stuck wid on de bus?' I ask him as I ease back into traffic.

'It wasn't so bad a little further down the line,' he tells me. The wind is whipping off the black metal of the bridge. I zip up my jacket and roll my window tighter. Back up to sixty, I listen to my fare. 'This really young chick gets on. She's really hot to go. Really hot to go. I almost got her in the rack. Almost got her in the rack. I had her talked into getting a motel, but she chickened out at the last minute. I guess her logic overcame her passion. At first, though she was really hot to go. I nearly had her in the rack. Nearly had her in the rack. If I had another half hour before Stockton, I could'a talked her into it. I would'a got off anywhere along the line wid her. Anywhere along the line...'

I decide he's just a storyteller and listen to my fare lament about how she got away. Traffic is brisk and not too heavy. I look up at the geometric girders of the bridge and feel just a touch of excitement. *I'm on the Bay Bridge halfway to the city,* I tell myself and think about what that signifies, my dreams of San Francisco, North Beach, City Lights, beatniks, and jazz musicians, Kerouac, Ferrlinggetti, and Ginsberg, docks and dives, and low hanging fog. Fog blocks out the lights of the city as it caresses the orange lights of the bridge. I cruise at sixty miles and listen to heartthrob of the bridge.

'You got to stop for a pass before you drive through the gates,' my fare tells me.

'Yea, I know,' I answer and work my way to the left hand lane.

I sign the book and pick up my pass at the Military Police Office at the right of the gate. Outside my cab, I look at how the road circles up behind us. *What a view of the underside of the bridge*, I tell myself as I watch the fog rise from the water. *What would Vance think if he saw me here, driving cab, getting into the City, seeing the bad parts of Oakland, digging the under side of the Bay Bridge?* I ask myself.

As soon as we drive through the guards' gate, my fare begins to tell me about how bad his life is in the Coast Guard. He tells me that this is his third enlistment. Going to be his last one, too. He describes how they're fucking with him. How they keep passing him up for the promotion that he deserves. 'It ain't what you know, it's whose ass you kiss,' he tells me.

He tells me how impersonal everything is. 'They think we're jus' a bunch of numbers. The enlisted men are jus' as cutthroat as the officers. Everybody is out for them fucking selves. They'll do anything to get a step ahead a' ya. Nobody knows what the fuck's going on. You can't do a fucking job the way it's supposed to be done. Everything's got to be done by the book. Everybody wants you to do it dere way.... It's no way ta fucking live. Dere's not a soul you can trust. No one you can get close to....'

I stop the cab in front of a block long barracks. The wind sweeps softly across the empty street. A shadow from a single light over the porch door waves back and forth. My cab engine hums quietly. I take six bucks from the Coast Guard man and bid him good night. He walks towards home with his shoulders slumped and his head down cast. *He didn't have to reenlist*, I tell myself as I hang a U. But, I know he had no choice. *He's signed up for the rest of his life*, I tell myself.

I decide to check out the bus station before I leave the base. There's no one inside, just dark empty benches and tall metal vending machines. On my deadhead back to Oakland, I wonder if I shouldn't be more honest with a fare like the Coast Guard man. *Should I confront a guy like that, or, jus' listen?* I ask myself. I hear the phone orders go off over the static of my radio. *Can you project your true self into every relationship?* I ask myself.

Can the other person respond with less than their true self if you are honest? myself asks me.

I know the answer to that, I tell myself. *I've never seen it fail yet. If I really take an interest in another person, really be myself with him that person always opens up. He always reveals a more honest aspect of himself. An honest relationship always frees you from the fear and conditioning....*

Coming up on the light at Cypress and West Grand, I turn up my radio and listen for the action. Hearing a blast of static, I switch to channel two, and listen to the same static. Returning to channel one I tell myself I might as well deadhead back to the 'Hound.' *No sense checking in deep West.*

There are four cabs at the 'Hound' when I turn on San Pablo. Before I can cut into the left hand lane, a burst of bus riders hits the middle doors. The first two cabs get out and I pull in third out. I watch seven or eight bus people move out in different directions. The watch hustlers are gone. The pavement in front of the terminal is empty. Cars whisk by in both directions. The traffic light on Twenty-First blinks yellow and red. *Should I wait here and try to catch a ninety-three phone?* I ask myself as I catch up on my weigh bill. The first two cabs pull off the stand. *Might as well have a coffee and burger*, I tell myself and spot at the first out position.

Drifting black clouds cover the deep white light of a full moon. I wolf down my burger and sip my Greyhound coffee as the clouds burst open and let the moon light escape. A flood of light bathes the Catholic Church across the street. Shrouded in the fog the moon bathed church is beautiful, the stonework, the stained glass windows, the red tiled roof. It breaks the monotony of the early forties architecture of this section of San Pablo. It strikes a cord of Europe, of knights and dragons, and beautiful young maidens.

I get out of my cab to view the church more closely. *How many hours have I spent here looking at the church?* I ask myself. Daylight when even during the week people climb the wide stairs in twos and threes or by themselves. Often waiting at the curb after the service for a car to pick them up. Sometimes waving for a cab. Twilight, the pigeons returning to roost. Shadows of black falling over the steps. Hurrying Catholics disappearing through closed doors. Traffic speeding homeward out of the city. Dark time, the high wooden doors locked tightly from the troubled night people. No sound or light escaping into the street. The stonework itself standing sentinel.

Not a soul on San Pablo as I finish my coffee and return to my cab. I climb inside just in time to get a radio order for the phone. There are seven or eight cabs waiting for phone girls when I pull into line. There are five drivers gathered around the first out cab. I check out the other cabs, but there is no sign of Ralph. I join the drivers at the first out cab just as the girls start arriving. Back at my cab, I luck out with four phone girls heading to Berkeley.

Three pile in the back and the fourth climbs in up front and hands me the voucher. As I pull away from the curb, and into the right hand lane, a black and white pulls along side me. The driver wearing shiny lieutenant bars on his collar is pointing at his hat. I look at him for several seconds before I realize what he's telling me. Reaching under my seat for my Yellow Cab hat, I grab it and slam it on my head. The lieutenant smiles and drives away.

'Why did he do that,' the longhaired slender Berkeley looking girl up front asks.

The girls in back pause in their discussion of tonight's gossip. 'If you don't have your hat on it's a distress signal. I guess he was checking it out. He may'a thought I was in trouble,' I tell the girl up front.

'How could he think that of a car load of phone girls,' from one of the girls in back.

'I guess he was new. I got stopped a couple weeks ago with a girl up in Tilden Park. She was from Fruitvale. Lives up in the hills above the Warren Freeway. A park ranger put on his lights and pulled us over. It was pitch black. I don't know how he could see that I didn't have my cap on. He had his red light flashing and the whole bit. The girl said the same thing. 'How's a phone girl going to hurt you?'

'Well, I certainly can understand him stopping you up there,' one of the women in back says. I turn on to the Warren Freeway, remove my hat, and slide it back under the seat.

'How come if driving without a hat is a distress signal, most drivers drive without their hats like you are doing now,' the girl up front asks.

'Mostly, it's just fallen out of use. Most cops don't bother to stop you anymore 'cause most drivers don't wear their hats. Once in awhile a new cop will pull you over. When I first started driving a couple years ago, I got stopped pretty often. One night I got stopped by this rookie cop in East Oakland. It's pretty funny, now when I think about it, but it was scary back then.

'It was a really dark foggy winter night. Cold and damp. I picked up this middle aged, middle class white woman at the airport. I was a little miffed 'cause I had been at the 'Port for over an hour and she was only going to somewhere above MacArthur, a four dollar trip. I figured I'd get her home as fast as I could and dead head back to the 'Port. I'm speeding down San Leandro. I slow down to make my cut off at Sixty First Avenue. You know, there's nothing but vacant lots and factories. All the streetlights are shot out or broken. The fog is so thick that my headlights barely cut through it. I can see about two car lengths ahead as I turn on to Sixty-First. I'm doing about ten miles an hour. I jam on the gas to get back up to speed, and catch sight of this black and white with red light flashing. He's got this little red spot's car pulled over. I wonder if they have some black dude cornered down here. I turn my head and give a long hard look,' I tell the girl and turn my head to illustrate.

'More likely they have a police officer ambushed,' from one of the women in back. 'Did you read in the Trib.? The black militants are drawing the state police off the Nimitz. They speed passed them and lure them off into the East Oakland streets. Then, they open fire. Machine guns and everything....'

'My eyes and the eyes of the cop meet for a second.' I continue ignoring the woman in back. 'It couldn't have been more than a thousandth of a second. When I look in the rear view mirror, I see him running for his car. He peels out and burns rubber all the way through his U. The red light is flashing and he's bearing down on me. I jam on my brakes and at the same time realize that I'm not wearing my hat. I make a frantic grab under my seat, rip it out and pull it down over my ears as I slide to the curb. I jump out of my cab and walk towards the black and white. I can hear his shaking voice on the radio. He's saying something about a cab driver in distress and giving our location for back up. He looks up, sees me, and realizes his mistake. He cancels his call for other units as I walk up to his open window. I can see that he's more than a little up set with me. There's not a sound on the street but the purring of our engines and the cop's heavy breathing. He takes a couple of gulps and begins chewing me out.

'You know there's a fifty dollar fine for driving without your hat. You are putting your life, my life, my partner's life, and the life of your fares in jeopardy,' he tells me.

'I explain that I had been sitting at the airport for a couple of hours, had taken off my hat and forgot to put it back on. He tells me he should write me up for all the trouble I caused, but says he'll let me go this time if I promise to wear my hat even when I'm sitting on the stand. I give him my solemn promise and he lets me go. His partner tells me how lucky I am that he let me off so easy, and so did my fare when I told her the story.'

The girl up front laughs and says, 'Well, I'll bet after all that you wore your hat for awhile after that.'

'No, I only wore it until I dropped the girl off. That's the funny part. I decided to take one deep East order before deadheading back to the 'Port. The radio had been calling for cabs deep East all night. I got a call for East Fourteenth. I'm racing toward it when I see my rookie friend coming around the corner. I grabbed my hat, jammed it on, and left it on my head the rest of the night,' I tell the girl as we both laugh.

I drop off the first back seat girl and the second out girl directs me to her house a few blocks away. She tells me to be sure to wait until she is safely inside. 'The driver last night pulled away before I even reached the steps. I don't know why they hire some of those black drivers. The telephone company is paying good money to get us home safely. Some of those boys just don't know a thing,' she tells me.

I assure the woman that I'll wait until she is safe inside. Two dim streetlights flank the empty block. The houses on both sides of my fare's house are trimmed with nightlights. Her window throws off a dim brown shadow on the pavement as she hurries up the stairs.

'I don't understand why a girl as small as you should need to fast,' the remaining girl in back tells the girl up front.

'It's not that I need to fast. It's that I want to. I'm fasting to cleanse my system. Fasting is....'

I lose their conversation as I turn toward Shattuck and try to remember where Carleton is. When I stop for the light at Dwight, the girl in back tells me that I passed up her street two blocks ago. I hang a U and wonder if she thinks

I'm trying to run up the meter. I laugh and tell her I was going to take her out to Albany and show her the short cut back to Berkeley. She smiles and tells me she is too tired for a tour tonight. We find Carleton and she tells the up front girl and me goodnight.

'So you're fasting?' I ask the girl up front as I turn west on Channing. She nods her head yes. 'I'm been going to fast for the past year. I worked wid this guy at the cannery in Hayward last summer. He was trying to lose some weight. He fasted all day at work and jus' ate his evening meal. I did it wid him a couple times. I gave me a really high feeling.'

The girl tells me she's been fasting for fourteen days now. Drinking hot tea in the evening and nothing else all day. 'I'll probably go a couple more days this year. It's the third year I've fasted this way,' she tells me.

Wow, she must really get some kind'a high, I tell myself.

'What does it feel like when you've fasted that long? It must be a really high feeling,' I tell the girl.

'Well, I wouldn't really call it a high feeling,' she answers. We turn and catch each other's eyes. Her eyes have a bright sparkle in them. The kind of sparkle you see in a little girl's. Her voice is soft and a little hurried. 'I'm much more in tune with my feelings when I fast, especially my sense of smell and touch. I don't get so upset over little things. There's a sort of peaceful feeling that goes with it. It slows you down a lot. You ought to try it.'

'Yea, I'm going to,' I say and nod my head up and down. I turn to watch my path passed empty cars on the side street. 'Do you have enough energy for work and all you have to do?' I ask.

'Well, we don't really need use that much energy at Ma Bell's. And, when I fast, there doesn't seem to be as many things that I have to do. I'm more content to just get in touch with what's around me.'

'Yea, I know what you mean. I got sort of a spiritual feeling with the little fasting that I did. Do you smoke dope when you've fasted dis long?'

'No,' she says shaking her head. Her breasts rise slowly as she breaths in. 'That's the last thing I want to do. Well, maybe not the last thing.... But, the whole purpose is to cleanse out your system. To get rid of all the poison you take in every day....'

I nod my head up and down and drive with one eye on the street and the other eye on the girl's breathing. Our eyes meet again and we exchange smiles. She points out her house and I pull to the curb. I'm sure she must live alone when I see the old wooden Gothic looking building, the kind that's divided into a kitchen and studio room. As I fill out the voucher, I'm wondering if I should shut my engine off. I wonder if we might not share a cup of tea together. Our hands touch as I pass her the pen and voucher. A tingle of life jumps from her fingers and runs up my arm and down my chest. She returns the voucher and pen, and opens her door. 'You really ought to try fasting,' she tells me and flashes a large smile.

'Yea, I will for sure,' I say as we exchange smiles again.

'Maybe you'll get me again some night,' she says as she slides out of the cab.

'Yea, I sure hope so,' I say and wave good-bye. I watch her climb the wooden stairs to her front door. She searches in her purse for her key, finds it, and then disappears.

With the last out girl gone, I get back to business. I grab my mike and T. C. downtown Berkeley.

Heading for the Shattuck Hotel, I figure I'll wait for the midnight phone. When I spot on the stand, I figure I'll have time to use the restroom. I've never used the restroom at the Shattuck before and I'm not sure where they are. I walk through the glass door and see a middle aged sophisticated lady sitting outside of a counter on a barstool. There is a distinguished looking middle-aged man behind the counter. Their heads turn my way as I look passed them to a red sign beyond the elevators. I pass the counter and strain my ears to hear one of them whisper, 'The nerve of him walking straight to the restrooms without even asking.'

When I return to the glass door, I realize that they can't see my cab from where they are stationed. I don't have my hat in my hand. I pause at the door and yell back, 'If anyone needs a cab, I'll be right outside.'

Turning on my key, I find radio silent. I flick my mike button and hear it break the airwaves. Not a soul on the streets. Summer city sounds float into my open window, the shush of passing cars from surrounding streets, the jolt of changing traffic lights, bursts of rock music as patrons enter the club up on University, the buzz of electric lights, the scurry of paper down the sidewalk. A motor sound works its way down Shattuck. I listen to the spray of water from a yellow street cleaning truck.

I lean back and close my eyes. Time slows to a near stop as a summer night from some thirty years ago enters my consciousness. The air around my bed is stale and dry. I turn on stomach and kick the damp sheets from my feet. The itching won't go away no matter how hard I grit my teeth. The clank of another trolley car rolls by. Steel wheels grind on steel tracks. A loud cursing vibrates through the night. I squeeze my eyes and clench my teeth tighter. My ears strain for the sound of tip toes and broken glass. I hold my breath and pray for sleep.

The alley along side our house is run over with broken bottles and summer garbage. Several rats chase and corner a large gray cat. He bares his teeth and backs to the wall. In a flash, they hit him from three different directions. Blood spurts from his throat, his eyes, and the back of his neck. Rat teeth tear and gnash and crush to the bone. A

scream of terror racks the neighborhood. I jump to a sitting position, and listen to the soft breathing of my brother, C. C. 'You awake, C.C.? You awake?' I ask.

Running feet climb the cement stairs outside our front room window. A dozen yellow men in pale green uniforms and visored caps peer in my window. They are mounting a machine gun on the top stairs. Their screams break the glass and a burst of hot bullets splat into the wall behind me. Wild-eyed warriors clamor through the empty window. They draw long swords and breath out fire. A burst of bullets light up the room. I anticipate smashing rifle butts and bamboo splinters, the pain and the torture. A frantic cry for mercy slips from my lips. The bullets rake the room, but stop short of my bed. Everyone is dead and gone. I can't take it anymore. I leap from my bed and dash into the line of fire. Bullets bounce off my chest like drops of water. 'No...no...no.... Let me die! Let me die! Let me die!' I cry as screaming Japs rush toward me.

I open my eyes to the friendly Berkeley streets. Mannequins smile from a bright display window across the street. 'One-Two-Seven, Berkeley Phone at twelve midnight,' the radio tells us. I listen for my number second out. The radio sends out a quiet static.

God damn it, I tell myself. Dere's only one twelve o'clock phone. Son of a bitch. I wonder why the dispatcher even spotted me here and figure there must be empty cabs all over Berkeley. *No sense waiting for the twelve thirty,* I tell myself and reach for my mike. 'One-Five-Eight going home,' I tell the dispatcher.

'One-Five-Eight going,' he answers.

Dark streets flash by as I hotfoot it to the garage. When I reach the one-way alley that leads home, I spy at least seven cabs waiting to check in. As I circle the block, I see another cab coming off Peralta. I try to beat him to the cut off, but he's even more anxious than I. He pushes it over sixty as he crosses West Grand and passes inches in front of me. I park behind him and turn on my overhead light. The darkness glares back at me as I check the locks on my doors. *It musta been around this time that George got shot,* I tell myself. I wonder, again, exactly how it happened and tell myself for the hundredth time that I have to look it up in the back issues of the Oakland Tribune. *Working for an independent, a bandit outfit, he got all the orders that we leave behind,* I tell myself. I'm certain that George was a lot less careful about who he picked up after dark than I am. As I finish off my weigh bill, a cab pulls in behind me. I feel a bit easier as his headlights light up the night a little. I check no on the question 'Have you had an accident today?'

Well, you made it through another day. No bold ups. Not even anyone bad mouthing me, I tell myself. My foot hits the little lead safe that's bolted to the floor above the gas pedal. *Lot a good that does,* I think as I count out twenty-six dollars and twelve dollars on the two vouchers. With two dollars in change, I'm ten dollars over my thirty-dollar book.

The line moves up one cab at a time, and I feel the after midnight weight lifting from my shoulders. My face lights up in a smile. *No work tomorrow,* I tell myself. *I'll have time to write, be home to greet Anne when she returns from work, eat dinner in my own house. Yea, and after dinner I'll be able to sit and relax, listen to some Simon and Garfunkle, some Dylan....* Another cab moves off the gas pumps. I think about a shrimp salad with oil and vinegar, cherry tomatoes, red onions, an avocado, a little cucumber, some lettuce, a sprinkle of radishes, a couple hands full of shrimp, lots of salt and pepper. Add a loaf of French bread, some white wine.... I linger in the smoothness of tomorrow while the next couple cabs pull up.

When I'm three cabs from the pump, I get out to stretch my legs. I hurry across the two-lane drive through to the coffee machine at the rear of the cabby shack. As I push the button for extra sugar, I remember that it has been a while since I bought Old Stan a drink. I dig out another fifteen cents, tell myself, hot chocolate, and push the button.

'You seen Ralph tonight?' I ask Stan as I set his chocolate on top of the first pump.

'No, I ain't seen him. He ain't come through tonight, I don't think,' Stan calls back at me as I hurry to my cab. There's a one-cab gap between me and the cab at the pump. Before the horns start blowing I catch up to with one foot hanging out the door. Jumping back out, I take a look at the cabs behind me. *Don't look like Ralph's here,* I tell myself.

Back in my cab, I watch the second cab pull away from the pumps. In a couple of minutes old Stan is pumping gas into my tank. I lean back and sip my coffee while he goes to work under the hood. He swings out with a wet dipstick, and wipes in twice across the oil rag that he has tied to the pump handle. His head disappears back under the hood. He retreats from a steaming radiator cap and returns with the water hose. Slamming the hood extra hard, he quick steps to shut off the gas pump. His head pokes inside my window. 'Six point five on the gallons. Oil is good. Everybody coming in at once tonight,' he tells me.

'Yea, I should'a come in half an hour ago. Nothing out dere but cabs.'

Stan's head leaves my window. He returns with his luke warm drink and takes a sip. 'Thanks,' he says tipping the cup toward me. 'First time I stop in over an hour. Dey been coming in faster'n I can count 'em. Des the first drink I had seen lunch break. I ain't even had time to take a smoke.'

'Dere's at least seven cabs behind me and dere still coming.' I return remembering Ralph saying that he knows a guy at work who deals a little. *Dat could be old Stan,* I tell myself.

Suppose to be off in fifteen minutes. Ain't no sign of dat graveyard man, yet. I hope he don't call in sick again tonight. I be here 'til three in the morning....'

'Say,' I say as Stan pulls his head out and take another sip. 'Someone told me you might know where I could get a little grass. I got dis friend....'

'Don't know who might'a told you dat,' Stan says jerking his head back. 'Well, dey wrong. I don't have no truck wid dat stuff. Even if I did, I wouldn't tell no nice young man like you. Dat stuff only get a man in trouble. Fog up a man's head....'

The driver behind me races his engine. 'Gotta go,' Stan tells me and backs away.

'See you later,' I tell him and reach for the starter. While I look for a place to park, I wonder if Stan is jiving me, or really feels that way. *You felt that way yourself not too many years ago*, I tell myself. I think back to the Trivia days and remember my first contacts with grass. *What, we called it tea then. Tea and Mary Jane*, I tell myself. I remember how Cal Weinstein asked Vance to spend a day in Philly with him. 'Yea, we can go down to the gym, work out a little, smoke a joint,' he said. Tommy Booze comes in one-night eyes all red. He's acting really mean and picking fights. Scenes from high school dope fiend movies flashed through my head. 'If dat's what smoking tea does to you I don't want no part of it,' I told Vance. Couple of black dudes come in and try to establish a contact. We decide that we don't want no dope dealers pushing dope in our coffee house. Work with the Trenton police to try and catch one guy. He lays a ten-dollar bag of chopped weeds on us, and never comes back. Later, two detectives stake out the place. Instead of waiting until the guy deals, they bust him as soon as we point him out. Naturally, he doesn't have any weed with him. They get him on a back alimony rap. He spends six months in jail and comes out looking for us.

I find an empty space in the very back of the lot and slip my cab between two others. *Vance and I never did smoke together did we?* I ask myself and remember one dude laying a couple joints on Vance while I was asleep in the back room. Vance hid them in our Buick. We decide to smoke on my day off from the airport. We tear the whole back seat apart trying to find the joints and figure one of the guys from the Triv. must have got to it.

As I quickstep through the dark lot, I remember another guy who slips Vance a joint in a magazine. 'A stick a Tea,' he told him. We hide the stick in the back room planning to smoke it when no one was around. The high school information still in our heads we figured we would need at least five hours or so to come down. We never did find the time. On his way to Atlantic City with Gore, Booze, and a bunch of girls Vance said, 'This is what I think of your Tea, holding the number for all to see, and then throwing it out the window. The brakes slammed on. Booze and Gore were down on their hands and knees searching for it.

When I reach the cashier's window there are four drivers ahead of me. I step behind to wait my turn. 'Do any good,' the guy in front of me asks.

'About ten over book,' I answer.

'I booked over fifty,' he tells me and begins to recount all of his long trips. I listen with one ear and catch the eye of the cashier looking out from his cage. *He's not the regular*, I tell myself and remember that it is after midnight. *He's the one that I should be seeing every night*, I think and give a little smile as I remember the dirty look I get from the swing cashier when I check in early every night. I nod my head at the driver's next story, and take another look at the cashier's window. *He's just breaking in*, I tell myself as I watch how slowly he counts and double checks everything. *God damm it. It's gonna be after one A. M. by the time I get home*, I tell myself. I look at the cashier's face and remember seeing him on the street a couple times.

When it is my turn at the window, I push in my weigh bill and add a quarter tip. 'Slow night,' I tell him as I hurry his counting. He nods his head and fingers the adding machine. I see that my cash checks out as he makes his notation.

'Say, didn't you go to Cal-State, Hayward?' the cashier asks.

'Yea, I finished my master's there in sixty-seven.'

'I think we had a couple history classes together.'

'Yea,' I say as I screw up an eye and try to place him. 'Smith's class in early American history?'

The man behind the bulletproof glass window nods his head in agreement. 'There's not too many companies that can brag about having two Cal-State, Hayward graduates on their payroll,' he says and gives off a laugh. 'And from what I hear, we're two of the lucky ones.'

I nod my head and join his laughter. 'You a history major, too?'

'No, social sciences, but my core was history. No one told me how flooded the history field was either.'

'Did you plan on teaching?'

'No, actually, I didn't really know what I was going to do. I mean, what does a social studies major prepare you for? I guess I figured on taking the civil service test. Get on with the government. Went into business for myself instead....'

I nod my head watching him set up for the next driver as he talks. I strain my eyes again trying to remember him. His white short sleeved shirt and tie set off a healthy looking body. Short hair, a clean-shaven face, efficient manner, slow half smile doesn't ring a bell. *How could I have had classes wid him and not remember?* I ask myself. The guy behind me shuffles his feet and cranes his neck.

'Put too much time into it. Sold the business and came in here about a month ago,' he tells me.

'Fast promotion,' I tell him nodding my head to the cage.

'A degree from Cal-State, Hayward stands for something,' he laughs as we wave good nights.

Leaving the light of the cashier's window, I think for a minute of my plans to teach at a junior college. *Gonna get my thesis published, and become the great American historian, the Homer of our times*, I tell myself and think how far I've gone astray. The light from the waiting cabs weaves a path for my feet to follow. One more quick glance for Ralph to no avail. Darkness envelops me as I turn the corner. A block to go for my car. *Hope it 'll start*, I tell myself as I fish out my keys and quicken my step. Behind the wheel with the engine purring softy, I'm finished my Tuesday night shift and heading for home.