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4. Digressions On A Recurring Dream

6,898 words, 4 percent passive, 71 percent reading ease.

It is blistering elsewhere, yet not here as two-dozen friends gather poolside. A hazy skyline shimmering a mirage fogs via remote control dreams of glassy, urban sophistication. The illusion resonates pulp, swimming the couple's trust in a cultivated hereafter.

Do you Jonah, take this woman, Linda, to be your lawful wedded wife?

A family court judge and ace trombonist is presiding. He's sixty and serious, calmly leading the couple through the ritual, just as they'd rehearsed it, with the about-to-be newlyweds standing nude on the diving board, hovering over the deep end. Neither can swim, but their naked friends have rehearsed saving them.

I do.

And do you, Linda, take this man, Jonah, to be your lawful wedded husband? If so, answer I do.

She looks over Jonah, realizing she's given up hope for someone sexier. Expectations duly lowered, she imagines the one who ditched her standing in Jonah's place. He, for his part, cannot fathom his good fortune. Linda's much younger than he,

more attractive, even sexy once you get to know her. She's also mysterious. He feels, much to his obvious excitement, that she's reading him like a book, her eyes perusing every fold, every gray hair, each blemish and scar—from the inside-out through his eyes. Eye-to-eye exposure is plainly titillating him.

I do, she answers, at last, having finished the run-on sentence fragment of material phenomena called fiancé, now husband.

I now pronounce you legal mates. Let the screwing begin, the judge declares, raising his trombone to his lips for a sonorous, sliding blow.

As practiced, Jonah and Linda wrap their arms and a leg around each other and jump into the water—a two-person cannonball setting a pool splash record.

They sink to the bottom, choking on the rush of water overcoming their kiss. The impact of two-dozen naked bodies cannon-balling into the pool reduces their panic, as they know damned well they're about to be rescued.

At least that's the way it's been rehearsed.

She's standing about twenty feet away on the other side of the serving table, bathed in blue twilight, beautiful: Blonde, tall, slim with a sweet bubble butt; young and nubile, musky with a quivering athletic body soft to touch. Arriving together on their first date, they separated to make their rounds—he to tell his friends how hot she is for him, her to tell hers how sensitive and even smart he is.

The news surprises each set of associates, who begin eyeing each other in preparation for the natural pairing up. Such is the philosophical activism of the adolescent mind—ruled by hormones musk tricks it into perceiving everything in a warm, bruised haze, alienating it from the cross of its upbringing.

Being gainfully employed at Arby's, where he's unallowed to make decisions at his minimal wage and experience, his parents feed him lots of flesh (beefening, they imagine, his football future), while praying he'll perform as desired.

If you're allergic to cows, how can you eat so many hamburgers? she's asking him in study hall. He's eating his third Big Mac, smuggled in via his voluminous sweatshirt pockets. His nickname is Beefshit, and he's proud of it.

They find themselves back where it started, at the high school, under the stars by the tennis courts.

I'm saving myself for college. If I were to stop doing that, the guy would have to be really special.

He hands her a sheet of folded up paper.

I wrote this for you.

She unwraps it and reads Tomorrow's Such A Long Time.

She recognizes the lyrics: her parents' favorite love song. Leaning forward, she kisses him on the cheek. Turning his head, their lips meet, then their tongues. His hand finds her breast, a sweet cupful, and they begin writhing about on the ground, limbs entwined, echoes From Here to Eternity sans ocean and war, vibrating under the stars.

His other hand goes for the button of her jeans, but she brushes it away...seaweed.

An image appears above and behind each student as she or he speaks, implying his or her life in the present. Part crystal, part flame, suggesting unyielding interior anxiety despite the apparent stability of their superficial forms, the yin-yang of these images seem to be offering their associate pupils with crude alternatives, defined and

acted upon by each student's mind, language being their only means of grappling with the friction of reality. Since words are their only tool, they view problems as enabling semantic obstacles that thwart mutual understanding. Through precise communication, however, and looking at language as a whole within specific cultural contexts, they imagine themselves the architects of a meaningful, intertextual future for America's numerous cultures. They are, after all, about to become middle- and high school American English teachers; and being young and longing to work with children, they worship mainstream progressive ideals with all their hearts. Except for two, anyway, whose souls are older and hearts younger than the rest, who alone see these images from opposite sides of their sunlit, encircled classroom.

They're discussing Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*, led by their professor, a sexy Piaget protégé, who's holding the attention of the room's heterosexual males and ambitious, closeted lesbians, while somewhat alienating her younger—but no less attractive—competition. The professor, wearing a snug, knee-length denim skirt, is sitting cross-legged on her desk in front of the blackboard. With a deep breath, she swings her light brown hair so it brushes over each of her pink cardigan shoulders; her posture, erect, softens as she luxuriates in a thrilling, thoughtful *hmmmm* before responding to each remark.

Are you sure? she asks, seeing a potential philosopher in each undergraduate who, according to their test scores, is deemed capable of educating themselves and others for the rest of their lives. The professor, like most of her students, is also an optimist.

I mean, we can't forget that Bettelheim hurt children and committed suicide. If your work doesn't make you stronger, and doesn't consider the developmental stage of your middle student, how efficacious is it? Bobby?

A young, dark-haired woman dressed in black—who's a bit heavy and wearing a brush cut, hoping to land a job in a West Virginia parochial school because they need her down there—looks hungrily at her professor while groping for the right words. A white hare, meanwhile, is chasing a freaked-out black bull around a high noon corral with nuns and cowboys whooping it up and laughing on the rails around the translucent bubble's perimeter, which is spinning above and behind her head. Three Chinese railroad workers in tattered clothes occupy the center of the ring. Their eyes are round with terror.

I think Bettelheim's problem was that he failed to teach to the middle and didn't take children's individual needs into consideration. For instance, not every little girl, especially the normal ones, will see themselves in the role of Little Red Riding Hood the way Bettelheim does. They won't see the wolf as their sexy father, a shape-shifting transvestite who's lusting after his mother, their grandmother. They don't feel the least bit jealous of grandma. If the folk tale was really Freudian, wouldn't she be going home to her parents? This is all nonsense. Why are you making us talk about it? I mean, this has nothing to do with any of the children I've ever known. For instance, when I was little, I loved my mother way more than my dad. I was jealous of the attention she gave to him. That's the opposite of what Freud's talking about, right? And besides, nowhere in the text does it suggest that Little Red Riding Hood has any animus toward her grandmother. In fact, she loves her grandmother. Bettelheim sees what he wants to see

and loses focus of the text itself. I don't see where this is at all useful. We'd get hung if we taught any of this stuff to a minor, especially in West Virginia where I'm needed.

Hmmmm, the professor responds. I see your point. Anyone care to comment?

I think it's all about supremacy. The wolf represents masculine puissance and the protagonist feminine authority. I think the wolf is a seducer, much like Satan in the Garden, or Milton's Comus. His mythical role is to seduce and dominate...consume...the feminine power of the universe, said a young black man, who is always conservatively dressed, perfectly groomed. His classmates refer to him as *The Preacher*.

Above his head float two faces—one, presumably his mother's, the other a white man's. Both of them are speaking angrily, abusively. A ring of ever-wilting red and white roses is spinning around the talking heads in a counterclockwise rotation, leaving an acid-like trail forming a pink swastika as it's being sucked to the center. The interstice binding the black and white faces, upon closer inspection, is a squiggling line of marching red ants, the leader pursuing an ever-lengthening trail of honey into the unknown.

Little Red Riding Hood is really a tale about the black man, and how the black man ain't gonna take it anymore. He's not only bigger and badder, but he's trickier too, he says. *The wolf, O.J., is the protagonist. The Juice is loose.*

Some snickering from the two other black students in the class.

So you see it as racist that we typically paint the wolf as the antagonist, and the little white girl the protagonist? asks the professor, leaning forward to reveal some cleavage to *The Preacher*. *Remember, this is a white folk tradition. There weren't many black people in Germany in those days...Hmmm? Was race an issue then, and if it wasn't, is it appropriate for us to project contemporary meanings on traditional tales?*

Of course it is. You said it yourself, "a white folk tradition." That's exactly what I'm going to teach my students. That the white man's stories aren't our stories. That racism is inbred in the white...

The Preacher drifts off, then mumbles: Jesus was a black man. They lynched him.

*Jesus was a Jew, contends a young Palestinian woman, whose mandala contains two gardens—one green, the other blue—spinning leftward, like *The Preacher's*, about its Maypole axis, strung together by spitting red flames discharging from its center, scorching the earth of each plot before being overrun by the verdant libido of the anti-soul it's attempting to consume.*

*The wolf is the oppressed Jew out to reclaim his homeland from its Roman conquerors. Except this time, he defeats them, or at least their women. It's sweet revenge and seems to me, metaphorically speaking, a lot like the second coming in the Book of Revelations. In the modern context, of course, the wolf is the Palestinian man, the suicide bomber. He kills himself, like Christ, to free his people. We all know too well that the wolf will not, and cannot, live happily ever after. He is a martyr. He will be hunted down and killed for being nothing more, nothing less, than a wolf. Preacher, you're right, the wolf is also the black man, the threatening mandingo out for the white man's woman. I see *Little Red Riding Hood* as an inspirational story with tragic implications...*

Down by the creek, in the woods, projecting crescent moons, they spoon, naked, in the mosquito hum.

I need a break. Just a few minutes and I'll be ready for more, he pants into her ear.

No problem. Don't worry about it, she whispers. Cradled in his muscular arms, she feels his cock, raw, moistened, resting in her butt crack. His scrotum, pressed flat against the base of his dick, is exposing his perineum, allowing it to rest gently, touching her soft ass as he regains his energy.

You feel good.

Thank-you, she says, swatting a mosquito on her thigh.

In the bar, she's behaving haughtily, drinking shots and talking about the married men she's fucked. The wives she's stared down. The one who beat her up. How that wouldn't stop her. She is unafraid.

His friend buys them another drink.

What are you doing Saturday?

Going with him and his friend to the Drive-In, she says, nodding at the man, his boyhood chum, now married, who's just bought them drinks.

You fucking traitor! You knew I was going to ask her out!

He throws him against the wall.

Now, down by the creek, he's regaining his strength and begins fucking her again, doggy style, slapping bugs off her back as they buck.

His knees are bleeding with pebbles sticking in the wounds. He grinds on, however, believing someday he'll get what he wants...

I think you're all nuts, she's saying, grabbing the other old soul's interest from across the room. The class is silent.

Children that age don't think politically, nor do they view their parents sexually. The wolf is death. It comes in many forms. It takes the young and old. Your parents can't protect you from it. In fact, her parents, being absent from the fairy tale, are already dead. Children must learn to overcome their fear of death if they are to mature properly, become responsible adults. It's not the morals that speak to children, but the natural laws. Bettelheim understood something very controversial, that terror—when properly contained by folk tales—has a role in turning children into adults. Those who never learn to cope with their gravest fears become self-destructive, either directly or indirectly, because of their undiagnosed phobias. The grim fact is children must become equipped to deal with the real world, which is full of wolves. The lesson is, for children, you can't trust someone just because they look like grandma. It is a cautionary tale about child predators. Pedophilia and other forms of child abuse didn't start yesterday. It's been around as long as we have...

Over her head, he sees a grown man inappropriately fondling an infant whose diaper he's changing. Superimposed on this image is an angel, flipping the world the bird with a big smile on her face. She also has an erection poking through her robes.

He can't help but laugh. The class, startled that someone could respond to her critique this way, is staring at him. He rises from his seat, naked, and strolls across the classroom to the beautiful girl, the smiling impudent angel, and disappears into thin space, passing through the other visionary, who joins him, genitally, heading elsewhere...

Bye-bye baby bunting, Daddy's gone a hunting, for a little rabbit skin, to wrap his baby Raybie in. The infant is struggling for each breath, wheezing through constricted

bronchial tubes while his mother, awake at 3 a.m., is singing and rocking him, keeping her boy composed enough to breathe.

You're my chosen one...my little baby Jesus, she's cooing in his ear, squeezing her struggling son cradled in her arms. The smell of her sweater, the calm way she's speaking, the warmth of her loving body allows him to relax. The attack eventually subsides, and he drifts off to a fitful sleep...

Clutching the red transparent cliff—a wall of limpid, breathing flesh—he hears the under machine milling, its stainless steel gears teething a visceral hum. Even asleep, he must cling to the life that's his for all it is worth. But he is slipping, traction in this world is not yet his...

Your mother and father were college students. Their parents were teachers. They were poor and loved you so much that they gave you up for adoption. They knew we could give you a better life. We were older and had more money, but they picked us as like to like. We were educated Lutherans and they knew you'd be brought up in a home just like theirs.

So when can I meet them? You're not my real mommy?

I'm your real mommy. I love you more than other mothers love their children because I really wanted you. And I chose you out of all the other babies. A real mommy is the woman who raises the baby. Not the one who had sex and couldn't take responsibility for it. You're my baby.

Doesn't she want to see me? Didn't she love me?

A long silence. The boy, three years old, is dressed like Marshall Matt Dillon. He also has a soldier's outfit and an official Superman's cape, which he wears in regular

intervals, depending on which show he's most recently seen. Bowling for Dollars, a local TV game show, blares with the sound of crashing pins in the background. The woman, in her late thirties, her hair gooped up with Dippity Doo and her face covered with cream, searches for the right words to tell the child, fondling Dr. Spock with nervous fingers, anxious to find the explanation for the one she loves more than life itself.

I'm sure she would want to see you, honey, but she's dead. She died in a car accident with your father shortly after you were born. I'm the only mommy you've got. But yes, she did love you. She loved you so much she was willing to give you up so you could live a better life. You were a much loved baby Moses, set adrift by your mother knowing a life with her was worse than death itself. So she gave you up. She loved her son so much she gave him up for adoption. And I chose you.

The boy, now haunted, quietly goes outside to shoot his air rifle at imaginary Indians who would rape and kill his wife and mother and steal his three kids if he let them. The afternoon will be spent seeking revenge in the weeds, consumed by the field behind his country home.

Mrs. Brady sits behind the wheel wearing a moustache and man's dark business suit. She is arguing with Shirley Partridge, who's riding shotgun and wearing that Partridge family outfit with the ruffled white blouse, black suede vest and snug fitting velvet short shorts. Sitting in the back seat, he listens with aroused interest as his parents argue about which way to go. The 1969 Buick Sportwagon is packed to the gills with camping gear, yet hasn't left the city.

Why don't you ask someone how to get to the Thruway? asks mama Partridge, wide-eyed and innocent.

Shut up, be-otch. You were supposed to be reading the map. One more word out of you and you'll get the back of my hand.

Mrs. Brady fumbles in her left breast pocket for cigarettes. Withdrawing one, she ignites it with her Zippo then snaps the cover shut and quickly replaces it in her right side pocket.

How much longer before we get there? he innocently asks from the back seat. *I'm hungry and I have to go to the bathroom.*

The parents fall silent for a moment. Mrs. Brady snatches the map from Shirley Partridge's lap, revealing the thighs that made Mr. Kincaid stand at attention.

Take him over there and let him piss in the weeds, says Mrs. Brady.

But I have to poop, the boy says.

Reaching across the front seat to Shirley Partridge, Mrs. Brady tears the white ruffle from her blouse, exposing her beautiful breasts, the ones Danny too often ogled, enhanced by a black lace Victoria's Secret bra.

Wipe your ass with this, says Mrs. Brady, tossing it into the back seat. Shirley Partridge, tears welling up in her tender eyes, gets out of the car and leads Raymond to the weeds at the far end of the urban parking lot.

It was his want of inciting a catfight for his affection between the paternal twin sisters that, once exposed by the weaker party—his now ex-girlfriend—that had perverted their relationship, bringing it now to this poisonous brink teetering on her doorstep.

The first thing he notices is that she's put on a couple pounds in the ass. And he likes it.

What are you doing here?

I came to say I'm sorry. I'm fucked up. My head's all messed up over this adoption thing. I think one way and feel another, then when I start feeling the way I was thinking, I start thinking differently, then I feel different, and my thinking has to catch up. I don't know what I'm doing here, but I am here, so...

She steps aside and he enters her one room apartment.

I just started working at the bank. My goal is to get out of here and leave all this shit behind, she says.

He notices her strength. It wasn't there before. He reaches out to it.

I need you. Wherever you are I feel at home.

She recoils, feeling occupied.

Well, I don't need you.

It is his turn to cringe. She uses his disengagement as a chance to gain ground, throwing herself at him, wrapping her arms around his neck stiffened by anxiety and desire. She kisses him deeply as he probes the newfound folds of her tighter fitting jeans. They cease osculating and, shoving him through the door, she whispers, *Good-bye...*

Putting down his favorite book, *Curious George*, he looks up and spies her approach over the lawn. A large truck transporting mysterious substances rumbles by vibrating the bay window separating him from the outside world. She's wearing her favorite Monkees t-shirt, the one with the boys silly walking arm-in-arm down the beach.

He's got a real hard-on for his babysitter. Mom's going to go get her hair done, and Curious George will play the adorable little Monkee to the loving fat girl, doing his best Davey Jones. A beetle, crossing the windowsill, meets its demise under his thumb. The crunching sound, the feeling of dominion, entices him to sing:

Hey, hey we're the Monkees, and we like to monkey around.

She knocks on the door and he listens to his mother's thunderous steps.

Hello, dear. Come on in. I'll only be gone a little while. I'm not getting it colored today.

Mother leaves and he attacks her, grinding and humping her plump pubescent thigh, an innocent puppy not yet fixed.

Unnerved by the light's unshakable extraction, his slide toward self-reliant bondage and a liberating death begins. Fighting every millimeter of the way, he's nine pounds of rage rebelling against this sudden upheaval, this suction toward the machinery and light—which is cold.

The machines are too real to imagine ripping at his flesh, removing what remains of his prior world with industrial efficiency, cleansing him of everything he's ever known.

Thus aborted and assigned his number, he falls into an anxious sleep in a new reality, dreaming of the elsewhere that's rejected him.

A blonde and two brunettes, occupying separate spaces in time, each inhabiting a unique situation—in his mind—are accosting him in intervals to varying degrees; each addressing peculiarities only known to their victim.

I saw you picking your nose.

Everybody does that.

What? Watch you pick your nose?

No. Pick their nose.

And eat it? Like you?

He says nothing.

I watched you. So don't act so big.

Noticing they're on the school playground, he feels the derisive presence of invisible classmates, mocking him with fingers up their noses...

Free skate Friday night, the pubescent boy is asking the second brunette if she'd like to skate with him. He's been fantasizing all week. *I Believe in Miracles (You Sexy Thing)* by Hot Chocolate, is their song the lad believes. Unfortunately, the way he hears it is somewhat different from prevailing interpretation.

I'd love to skate with you Ray, she says, batting her eyes at him and taking his hand. They make their way awkwardly on their skates onto the ice in the indoor arena, cluttered with kids of all ages skating in counterclockwise circles to the local Top 40 radio station.

He's not a strong skater, but plays a bit of hockey and can get by well enough to lead her around the rink. Of course, she's skating worse than usual, depending on him. She stumbles a bit, and he catches her. The young teens find themselves embracing each other as their friends skate by, singing *Raybie and Katie, sittin' in a tree...*

Their song comes on, and *Raybie*, elated by the timing, feeling himself the man he hopes to become, begins singing along.

I believe in milk call, you sexy thing, you sexy thing you.

Katie straightens herself and pushes him away. Regaining his balance, he slides forward, hands outstretched before him, still singing, and she socks him in the jaw with a Jerry Korab right cross, staggering him.

Things are going terribly wrong.

What did I do? he whines, their peers skating back against the grain to encircle them, obstructing the path of the ice monitor by grabbing hold of each other's jerseys, slowing the official who just happens to be the high school hockey coach, a man who Raybie longs to impress. Attempting to straighten himself, he can't help sliding toward Katie, again, who immediately grabs his Sabres hockey jersey and pulls it over his head. The next thing he knows he's being pounded repeatedly on his left temple with wicked right hooks. He can hear the others roaring their approval. The beating seems to not be slowing in any manner when, suddenly, he's released and allowed to crumple to a heap in a puddle of his own freezing blood. As he regains his sight, he discovers his savior is an older retarded boy, Clyde Strong, whom he's be-friended on the school bus.

Raybie, beaten up by a girl and saved by a retard! You're a fuckin winner, dude!

He's not sure who said it, all he knows is the hockey coach heard it as he helped him to his feet...

After several strenuous "dates" and insane e-mails, she's finally invited him to dinner, making it seem as if he's now endured enough and should somehow be rewarded with greater intimacy. He, on the other hand, is lonely, maturing, and at a strange point where women his own age make him feel old. They seem to be aging faster than he, even

if their health is much better. So Raybie often finds himself situated with a much younger woman he's trying to woo. Of course, being strange, mainstream chicks are out of the question. He thinks he wants, in the words of Leo Kottke, a hippy chick. Not that he's a hippy, nor an anti-hippy, it's just that he finds their laid backness much easier to deal with. He believes they tend to be less bitchy. What he's discovering, however, is that they tend to be strange, that birds of a feather flock together, and all that. At least he's no longer dining with fat chicks.

Schizophrenia's difficult to deal with. Medications only last so long and then you've got to switch them. Each has their own side effects.

They're dining on linguine and clams smothered in extra virgin olive oil. It tastes disgusting, but he's pretending it's really good. Without warning, she farts and bounces in her seat.

Ooh, shit. Diarrhea's one of those side effects, she announces, giggling. I've got to go change my pants.

She leaps from her chair and skips away down the hallway, not caring that the dark wet spot is easily viewed by her watchful dinner date, whose bowels begin gurgling, perhaps triggered by the foul aroma, and the memory of pert, liberated breasts with large nipples pressing against the thin cotton fabric of her favorite t-shirt evaporated from memory. Gulping the oily clam he had in his mouth, he gingerly makes his way to his car, heading for a nearby bowling alley to take a dump of his own...

He'd asked her to go see Jaws during their confirmation class' field trip to a professional basketball game. They sat next to each other the entire time, rubbing knees

and touching fingers, whether in the stands or on the bus. She was new, beautiful, and affectionate. She hadn't heard of his ice-time humiliation, and besides, since then he'd become something of a hulk. His first victim was Katie's big brother. It was intended to send the message of what I'd do to you now, be-otch. It worked, they'd become friends, but Raybie maintained his superior tone, often citing her father—a dainty, alcoholic chemist—as *next*. He still believes the words to the song *are I believe in milk call*. No one dares argue with him these days. Especially Katie.

Arriving at his Sunday School seat, he's greeted by a sheet of paper with Emily loves Raybie written all over it. Feeling confused, he takes his seat, turning the sheet over. On the other side is a nude self-portrait of the artist as a young girl. Now he's scared and crumples the sheet of paper as she enters the classroom, proudly swinging her hips and taking long strides in his direction. Reaching his side, she embraces him and rubs her nose on his ear lobe. Now he can't stand up. If he were wearing jeans, it would have been feasible. But not in his Sunday suit. Miss Pritchett has yet to arrive when Emily yanks him to his feet and leads him out of the room, down the hall, swiftly passing other parishioners, and into the broom closet, where she opens the door, shoves him into the darkened interior, follows him, closing the door and pulling the light string hanging from the ceiling.

Emily throws her arms around Raybie's neck and kisses him. Her tongue darts out of her mouth and meets his teeth, licking them and the inside of his lips. Repulsed, he shoves her away and she falls into a stack of boxes, making a commotion. The door swings open and it's the reverend and Miss Pritchett, surrounded by their classmates who've led them to the broom closet.

He was raping me! screams Emily, inciting the religious mob—which now includes his mother—gawking at Raybie’s boner.

Objects for which he had yet to acquire referent symbols, known here as trees, are moving by at high velocity. Whether or not it’s he who’s actually moving doesn’t occur to him until he stops, and feels a jolt of karma agitate his tender, newborn system. His caretaker, a woman, is taking him somewhere, a new island perhaps, another consciousness, elsewhere.

Awareness fading, he drifts off...

All alone am I ever since your goodbye/All alone with just the beat of my heart/People all around but I don't hear a sound/Just the lonely beat of my heart...

After calling her house numerous times, insulting her father, being short with her sister, accusing her mother of lying, all because they wouldn’t get her to come to the phone, he’s now sitting in his car down the street from her house. It’s 3 a.m. and she’s yet to return. Parked under a tree, his car being dark, it’s difficult to notice he’s even there. He’s toying with the .45 caliber automatic pistol in his lap, the one he’s borrowed for self-protection since the murder of his friend. He doesn’t know what he’ll do when she comes home, how he’ll respond if she’s been with another guy.

A car passes, slowing, then moves on. He fidgets with the weapon, loading and unloading the cartridge stocked with 10 rounds—in and out of the pistol’s butt. A car turns the corner up ahead, its headlights, luckily for him, go out during the turn. It parks several doors away from her house, and nothing happens. No one gets out. He slams the

cartridge into the butt for the last time and releases the safety. As he's reaching for the door handle, the occupants of the other car get out. It's her and she's with a guy. A large man dressed like a Republican. They walk arm-in-arm across the street, and as they enter the light cone emanating from the dim street lamp, he can make out that look on her face, the one she'd worn on their first few dates, when the sex was still good for her. The pair, acting goofy, does a funny walk, reminiscent of the Monkees, while they traverse the light cone. Upon reaching the shadows, he lowers his hand and slides it into the back pocket of her tight fitting jeans.

He opens his car door and takes a knee, using the wedge between the door and the windshield frame as a brace, he steadies his aim and begins to regulate his breathing, softly closing his left eye to give the right one full influence over targeting.

His prey move up the steps, now her hand is in his back pocket too, causing a momentary shudder in his steady grip. She puts her arms around his neck as he embraces her around the waste. They engage in their goodnight kiss, and he begins slowly squeezing the trigger. The porch light, however, goes on, and her father yells at her for being out so late, tells her the man stalking her in the shadows has been calling incessantly, that he's worried and a decent young man.

You should treat people better, he says, then, looking at the young man, *You should be careful getting involved with a woman who treats men badly, unless that's what you want. I did. Look what it got me.*

Grabbing her arm, the father pulls his daughter inside, slamming the door behind them. The porch light goes out and the hulking figure descends the porch steps. He has a beat on him, but as he enters the light cone from the street lamp, he breaks into a jog as

Raybie squeezes off a round in his direction. The shot rings through the night. Her date stops in the center of the light, looking around for the source of the sound. The porch light comes back on, and the girl's father comes out onto the porch.

What was that? the young man says, calling from the middle of the street as more lights ignite the windows of neighboring houses.

For chrissake boy, that was a gunshot. Gitchyer ass in here. Jesus.

The young man, sprinting to the house and bounding up the now darkened steps, disappears into the house.

Fortunately, a side street provides a dark exit. Raybie climbs back into his car, puts it in neutral, pushes it down the conveniently shadow-ridden alley, and hears a distant siren as he starts the motor, pulling away into the night.

He loves visiting his elderly neighbors, Professor Carlos and Consuella Bardaxa, who are none too popular in these parts. Folks say they're *devil worshiping black magickteers*. Yet, whenever he can, Raybie sneaks away—as now—to visit them.

Dressed like Daniel Boone with a plastic knife in his teeth, he's crawling toward them, slithering on his belly through the weeds. The professor is wearing a gypsy's dress and bandana, with make up on his face. Carlos, appearing thus a woman before the young Dan'l, somewhat stokes his sympathy. Senora Bardaxa, on the other hand, is wearing a Pancho Villa costume. She's speaking brazenly to The Professor, who's down on all fours in the garden, puffing on a corn cob pipe, making him an even more masculine woman. Pancho Villa, however, being soft and beautiful, is still a bit rough around the

edges but nonetheless more feminine than the pipe-smoking indigenous bi-spirit on the ground before him/her. Young Dan'l, of course, is totally confused.

Being deeply disturbed by what he's seeing, he creeps closer, plotting how to bring these deviant strangers into line. He'll have to be careful, for if the young braves nearby detect his presence, he won't be able to reach these medicine folk, whom he needs to persuade to use the white man's medicine to treat and save their people.

¡No planto remolachas! ¡Y esto es final! shouts Professor Carlos, clenching his pipe between his dentures and digging his freshly manicured nails into the stubborn, clay-ridden soil of their backyard garden. It hasn't rained for months.

Si hay un cielo, déjeme ponerse allí, sighs Consuella Villa, staring upward into the midday sun. Roaring crickets are drowning out all other sounds, becoming the true force consuming the awareness of anything else. Young Dan'l, sweaty, is undeterred. He's reached the edge of the field. The pair of bi-spirits are glowing cocoons of awareness inhabiting a universe consisting of the seminal trace of locusts everywhere. The dream is a moving bi-spirit system producing weed, mushrooms, peyote...all of which Master Boone has imbibed, imitating the elderly medicine folk...his dream shifting shapes as it passes through a wormhole, bypassing the church of freedom as an unnecessary stop on the road to bliss. The four spirits confront young Dan'l, striving to maliciously entrap him.

For the moment, there's a ray of hope, as he's not yet close to being caught...

Before making his morning cancellation, he gets out of his car and enters town, walking as slowly as he can. It isn't his drifting toward the mouth of a narrow vein

mainlined to the core, but his loss of the wrong place for the woman to mother him as a child.

As the sun rises, he forgets those marginalized items lurking in the shadows of the ever-present ditch. He's imagining his mother there, spewing guilt on deaf ears, opaque as ever, vanishing into impossibility as everything cums at once...

Moonlight never mixed so well on human skin as it is now. Imagining he's with a Jiggs girl, a centerfold for sure, Raybie's thwarted by his inability to unbutton her jeans. She agrees to remove her fuchia blouse. He reaches out to touch one of the breasts, and she pushes his hand away, going instead for his belt buckle, which she expertly undoes. Popping open the button, she unzips his jeans and drops them with his skivvies, shoving him back onto the bed. With athletic agility, she dives on him, baffling his virgin cock between her humongous pubescent ta-tas. He ejaculates instantly, and before he can even begin thrusting, his dick begins shrinking from the task. Giggling, she swirls his jism around her nipples.

Don't worry, I won't tell anyone, she says, smiling.

Raybie thinks that's odd, as his intentions are to tell everyone. He didn't even have to lay a hand on her.

He begins swelling with pride as they leave the upstairs bedroom and return to the party. Grabbing a beer he tells the first person he sees.

I titty fucked her, he says, nodding in her direction. *Her tits may be big, but my cock was still big enough for her to blow me as my head poked through the other side.*

Raybie's got his index and forefinger pressed together, as the forefinger of his right hand slides between them, its tip poking through beyond the base knuckles.

Grace O'Reilly, a tall, Rubinesque, strawberry blonde cheerleader overheard the star outfielder's claim and joined the two varsity players.

You like sophomores? she asks, accusing Raybie of robbing the cradle. *Fifteen 'll getchya twenty*, she says, smirking at him. *You big enough to try on a real woman?*

He can't believe his good fortune, and neither can his friend. Grace is one of the most sought after, and thus feared, girls in high school. She's not particularly beautiful, but much has been made about her lust for wild boys, especially among the wild boys. She's taller than every kid in school with the sole exception of her stepbrother, who's fond of telling locker room tales of crawling into bed with her.

Chain chain chai-eeen, a chain of foo-ools.

The cheerleaders have chosen Aretha to dance to, and the jocks are leaning back against the counter in the kitchen, watching their gyrations. Grace takes Raybie by the hand and leads him outside to her car. They dive into the back seat, begin wrestling for space and position. A 1975 Grand Prix offers little freedom. She kicks the passenger side door open, her leg draped over the front seat, and they spill from the car onto the lawn. She rises to her feet and hoists Raybie with her, nearly carrying him as they jog half-naked to the vacant lot across the street. In the darkest corner furthest from the road, she lays down, spreading wide her well-worn teenage legs. Raybie falls onto her, humping away for a full fifteen seconds—longer than it takes him to run a hundred yard dash.

Proudly ejaculating for the third time tonight, and the second time ever with a girl, he jumps to his feet, pulling his pants up with one motion.

Thanks, he says, leaving Grace for the party.

His friends are never going to believe it: *I'm Fred Garvin, male prostitute. I'm Rock Quarry, do you want my auto-graph? Baa-baa-baa, baa-baa-baa, Baarb-a-rino, Vin-nie Bar-ba-rino!*

The other boys marvel at Raybie's hopeful grin as the girls knowingly giggle at his return. The future, for some, is plain to see.

He feels her breath, damp in his ear, and is uncertain about what he's done. Confused, the sound of smacking lips and a brief snort stir him from the foot of his bed. His erection, meanwhile, is compelling him to grope his way into consciousness, grinding his compliant mate until their eyes open.

She's exquisite. They're married. And this is wrong.

But who cares?

Why?

Trust Me

Fiction by Chuck Richardson

She wants you. No doubt about it, dude. She's all over you. Ain't no denyin it. Take this shit. It's 10:15 at 10:30 you'll be done. Then you'll go. She needs a carton of cigarettes. And paper. Reams of it. That'll take an hour. I hate it when this shit doesn't crumble. It don't burn well that way. At 11:30 you'll be there and wake her up. She's hard waking up. Writing all night. Stoned. You'll need gas, too. So make it 11:45. What the hell, smoke a bowl and add 15 minutes. She's not on a real schedule anyway. You'll wake her at noon. More likely 12:15. That means she'll be out of bed at 12:30. After you shake her you'll make the coffee. By 12:30 the last drops should be dripping into the pot. She'll take some, turn on CNN and smoke a cigarette. When the coffee's gone she'll go take a crap and you'll hear her grunting as she pushes it out. You'll turn on the computer then and check for updates, then run a virus scan, adware scan, clear the cookies and files, run a disc scan for errors, defrag the hard drive and restart. By then she'll be smoking the joint you just rolled. It's 10:28 and time to wipe. It should be about 1:00 then.

So what if she's older than you. She's your boss. You're getting paid. You do what's necessary to keep her writing. Who cares who signs the check. What's that got to do with anything. By 1:30 you'll be arguing with her about some triviality. Often it's

about the way you clean the coffee pot. She wants it crystal clear and squeaking from the rinse then hand dried before you put it back. You'll deconstruct her which will make her deconstruct you and she'll win because she's the boss and that's your job. Getting her all fired up. At 2:30 she'll hand you a list of things to do and a hardcopy of what she wrote last night, as well as tell you what she wants for dinner which she wants served at 7 sharp. At 8 friends are dropping by so you'll have to clean up quick and leave. At midnight you'll return and make sure her friends get out. She'll be all worked up so you'll strap your dick on and fuck her. That'll settle the old broad down so she can pound out more words all night. At 2 you'll leave her to her witchcraft. Go to Denny's and go to bed at 3. Time to get her cigarettes.

You know how many trees it takes to publish one of her books. You can't deny that her logorrhea's a form of ecocide, that her imagination is killing the planet, depriving us of oxygen and CO². What the hell, she's got a tight cunt for 43 and it pays well. She's got lots of experience but she's lazy or too distracted most of the time. It always serves some purpose in her mind or to alleviate some urge of her body. Shit that had to be done to clear the airwaves for the old writing. Your dick does it for her. You should be proud. You dress well, you're well-educated with rough edges. You're a goddamned handsome *man* for 35. You could be in better shape but shit she's 43.

I'll take a carton of Lumberjack non-filter. Hard pack.

You'll take the change and forget to think for yourself. You'll let her think for you. When I was a kid it was a dollar ninety five.

Twenty-three dollars.

Yup, she'll pay it. She gave you the money from her cookie jar when you left last night. Its 11:00. The paper's heavy, three 500 sheet packs. She don't care about your back and don't forget the gas. The Dakota needs gas. Her nipples get hard when you drive her to book café. The windows are tinted so you can lick her off before she goes inside. It clears her head. You'll pick her up later. You'll drive around the city for two hours listening to Bob Seger smoking cigarettes trying to get that taste of her clitoris off your tongue, that unique flavor that's but a memory to the tip but a long-term bath at the base of your mouth. Your smoking will only make it ranker, but you won't listen.

Sixty bucks, she's gonna like this. You'll have to get 10 from her. You'll have to start shaking her down when you shake her awake. By the time you leave early tomorrow morning you'll have to ask her one last time. She'll give you the money, complain about the price of gas and return to work on her masterpiece. It's 11:15. You can smoke a joint and go eat lunch. Or you could eat first and then get high. No you'll get high, eat and get high again. You'll listen to Freebird, search through the channels, grow disgusted that the only options are static, xylophone jazz and O'Reilly. You'll use the automatic wash on the windshield like that will somehow make things clearer for you. It won't and it will be noon, but it's 11:19 right now.

I'll have an extra large bacon double cheeseburger combo meal. You forgot to hide the bowl at the window and she saw it. Go down the road to another lot and eat. Keep your eyes open. It'll be past 12 by the time you light the bowl. And you'll have to drive around the outskirts of town where folks ain't likely to see you. As if they could behind tinted windows but you'll be stoned stupid and paranoid. Guaranteed. You won't get to her house until 1 o'clock. You won't wake her until 1:15 an hour late and she'll be

pissed. Nothin worse than a pissed off old lady. They make you feel small, don't they. You shrivel up inside as if her eyes carry some contagion. Finish the cheeseburger and get out of here. The cops are across the road.

You drive around for two hours procrastinating the bitch-out, happy to find Zeppelin. Commercial breaks line up with Dylan and Lou Reed on other stations before you'll resume getting your Led out and you'll feel the universe in sync with the groove you feel you're digging. It's true. Admit it. It's happening right now and you know it. Life's too short to be a wage slave she says. Usually when she's drunk and talking about the bad old days of temp jobs and no sleep and depression and pills and dope of various types, some legal as church that she grew in her garden. The guys she sucked off in parking lots for 20 bucks a pop to keep the lights on her computer going and writing. Only when she became more famous than her work could she afford you. A personal assistant is the dream of every writer and you're it. The great one's dream. So why aren't you happy. She can do things for you. Advance your career. She said she liked the Daredevils of Niagara Falls, that it only needed a tweak here and there and it would be a very good book. She said she envisions it on coffee tables all across America then hugged and kissed you warmly like a big sister. It was a rare moment for you wasn't it. Basking in her. That was three years ago and you're still feeding from it. Why what's wrong with you. Forget it now you're there. 12:50. Not bad. You'll wake her right away and say you've been trying since noon. You were ready to call the ambulance. You really were. If she's asleep. You'll see.

I was wrong. Why can't you wake her up. Call 911 then administer first aid as needed.

911.

You'll need to send someone to 37 Berkshire right away. Miss Emily Stone is unconscious. Well done. Enough said. You're remarkably calm. One cool cat. So why won't she wake up. Look around the room. Someone kill her. No she's breathing. No electrical cords or pills. That's good. Now check her breathing. Shit. What about her heart. Calm down. You remember how to check a pulse. Right under the jaw there. She's cold. It's 12:55 and you were the last one to see her alive. You've been alone since then. There was the drive thru, but that was a little while ago and she saw the bowl. Are those sirens. Where's her sternum. You've got to get busy. They'll only be more suspicious if you're just standing around like some cool bystander. You better be sweating *boy*. Muster up some tears. That's it. One two three four and breathe. Again you son of a bitch, you bastard. One two three four breathe. Those are sirens. Don't stop crying you pussy. You wanna get busted. Check for a pulse. Is that her manuscript on the nightstand. It looks like it. She said she was close to finishing. She even said she might try to finish it last night. She's still not breathing and you better not be happy about it. You've got to get through this clean. Grab the manuscript. The main thing is that you're working on her and seem tired when the medics burst in. It's 12:57. Where are you going to put her manuscript. In the truck. Go put it in the Dakota, quick. Running will make you seem tired. It will work up the necessary sweat and panic. Go. The sirens are loud. They're almost at the end of the driveway. Shit. You're not going to make it. No sound is funny in the hills. Doppler's all fucked up. Just keep running. Done. 12:58.

Go to her *son*. Run. One two three four breathe. Now they're here. Why the fuck are they ringing the door bell. In here. Come on. One two three four. The one looks

familiar. Is that Joe. Haven't seen you since high school. They'll be gone in 10 minutes. Small world isn't it. You're not a relative. You're her assistant and you'll follow them in the Dakota. I told you so. You'll be on your own with that manuscript by 4 at the latest. Good thing for you she was coy, keeping her work close and not talking about it, except with you. No agent or editor has no idea that she's got an 800 page novel. So what if it sucks. You'll be in possession of it and that'll be worth something. I guarantee it. 1:15 and the hospital's in sight. Forty-five minutes ago you thought you'd be waking her up about now. Funny isn't it. And you're baked you fucker. Don't forget to not take your bowl inside. Leave it in the truck. It's time to act sad. Think about it, you'll never fuck her again. Get rid of that taste in your mouth. 1:16 and it's time to park.

Wait a minute. How can she be waving at you. She was dead. How could they do that. Now you've done it. That's gonna cost her a bundle. Bitch deserves it. Leave the Emily Stone business card under the wiper blade and be done with it. No forge her signature on it and say you've been admitted to the hospital. Shit how many times has Ms. Emily had you pay the bills and sign her name. She couldn't handle those distractions and you just took care of them. This won't be any different. Plus you're upset and in a hurry and overjoyed that they revived her en route. Now get in there. It's 1:18 already. If she's OK there'll be no cops or press and you'll get out quicker. You'll go put the manuscript back where it was and hit the Holiday Inn for the lunch buffet. Pig out until happy hour, get drunk and forget about it.

Who are you.

Her assistant.

She suffers from sleep apnea. Her snoring got her rhythms out of whack. If you had been late today she would have died.

She was late.

No I wasn't. I was there at noon.

Don't tell her that you fucking ass.

You were there at noon. What time did you call 911.

No, you're right Ms. Emily, I was late. I knew you planned to work late and wanted you to get some sleep. You push yourself too hard and this proves it.

Atta boy. Now you're talking.

Did you finish the manuscript.

Now you've done it. You've crossed the line now. Only she is allowed to breach the subject of literature, especially hers. It's your job to be quiet and estranged from that. Hands off.

I'm just asking because if you did I could store and secure it for you until you're out of here.

Good recovery. It's 1:23 no 24.

Yes dear I finished it and it's on my nightstand. You can bind it and put it in my left desk drawer. You're a sweetheart.

If you hadn't performed CPR she would have been a vegetable most likely. Good job, honey. You preserved Ms. Emily Stone for her millions of fans around the world. You're a heroine.

Bullshit. Even I don't have to tell you to ignore an asinine doctor. You're out of here. Fried chicken and mashed potatoes will wipe this taste from your mouth. Wash it down with long necks for three hours and the toilet will be flushed many times over.

Burn a fatty. Trust me.

Chuck Richardson is a life-long resident of Western New York. His nonfiction has appeared on more than fifty web sites, including Dissident Voice, The Beast, Z-Net, Smirking Chimp, Uruknet, Jihad Unspun, Alternative Press Review, Selves & Others, Buffalo Report and Countercurrents. His essay, A Devil Who Writes to Be Lived: Creative Perception as Existential Endurance, has been included in Mauro Nevi's The Kafka Project <<http://www.kafka.org/index.php?id=199,305,0,0,1,0>> . Selections of his work are posted at www.wherestheomelet.com <<http://www.wherestheomelet.com/>>