

2. going native



NOTE: The following is a chapter from Going Native, a retrospective novel about the agonies and the ecstasies of the 1960's. The story should be more or less self explanatory, but the reader ought to know that the frame action takes place in Hawaii in about 1971, while the inner story goes back to the Berkeley, California of 1966. The scene opens in the Japanese garden of the University of Hawaii East-West Center. Jason has recently broken with his wife, Becky. The "Florentine" and the "Mediterraneum" are Berkeley coffeehouses. Telegraph Avenue is the local Boulevard St. Michel.

Jason's watch said ten till two-it was almost time. He crumbled the last bits of cheeseburger into his palm and began to flick them into the water by his elbow. The surface boiled and the bits vanished. Then the golden backs massed together and the fat lips kissed the air, smacking and sighing. Carp of truth. Your bait of falsehood takes this carp of truth. They wanted more. He had the sense they wanted to climb out onto the grass altogether and take his lunch.

Inside East-West Center the rattle and roar of lunch hour lunch had sunk to a drone. Upstairs in the Great Hall some oriental student was playing "The Missouri Waltz" on the piano. The sun felt good on his bare shoulders, but he must put on his shirt. There were two lovers in the pagoda across the pond. The girl's heavy hair swung, flashing black. "Gift of the Republic of China, 1970" a plaque said at its base. Inside, in the sandwich line, Jason made out Rob through the reflections of the sliding glass doors. Wavering. Another kind of fish. Rob had not seen him yet.

Through the hibiscus hedge, down along Manoa stream, there was a shortcut to the counselling center. Jason passed the East-West Center guard in his little white house on the traffic island. Reading a comic book. Beyond Kennedy Theatre, blocking the view of Manoa Falls, was the new Lyndon Johnson Medical Building. Windowless gray cement topped off with another pagoda roof, like a coolie hat disguise. There had been rumors of germ warfare research in there. Who know what to believe. The Reverend Larry Jones talking about killer dolphins in his swimming trunks. The sense of obscure international forces hung over this end of the campus: Seato, Interpol, Amfac, The Pacific Rim Strategy, The Domino Theory, Counterinsurgency. The little men reading newspapers with their hats on in the lounge of Hale Hawaii, the

foreign students' dorm. They were always there, there now as he crossed from one door to the other past the eternal ping-pong game and out.

Relief. The sound of Manoa stream in its sunken bed again. He was in a forest of breadfruit and big kiawe with a scattering of ramshackle bungalows among them. The old campus: like early James Mitchner. He and Becky had walked here, in the early days. Had seen their first blooming banana bunch, with its drooping purple dong. Had watched the fruit bats at night darting like moths in and out of a ripe papaya they had hollowed. He had had his office here, before they had moved him five floors up that abominable elevator in Kuykendal Hall.

His grass shack office, presently the counselling center. They had completely remodelled it.

At first he had been disturbed by a certainty he was going to find Mrs. Bowman sitting at his old desk. Actually, all the desks were EWC modern glass and steel models. They had a lot of foreign students coming in with culture shock problems, Mrs. Bowman had explained. She was in John Trout's old office, the office where John Trout used to actually live, with breakfast cereal on his bookshelves...

"Could you shut the door please, we have our air-conditioning on." The cherry blossom secretary.

"Whom did you wish to see?"

Mrs. Bowman's light was on, red. That meant she was occupied. Lights, intercom systems, air conditioning. Government money. Jason sat down and began thumbing a magazine, wondering what he was doing here at all. He had started to come-to please Becky-not long after the Fiji trip. They had a "dialogue" together, as Mrs. Bowman put it. They had kept coming right on through the break-up: it was one small still-point of sanity. Then one day, Becky announced she thought it would be her last session for awhile. Awhile. He had kept on coming, hoping she would show. And kept on coming when he knew she wouldn't, when he knew of her pregnancy. She was still in the empty chair, he

was really talking to her, not Mrs. Bowman. He had never "submitted" to analysis before. She had tricked him into doing something he never would have done under other circumstances-seeing an analyst, particularly a middle-aged female analyst who wore white pantsuits.

"I know you're sceptical about talk therapy," Jason began, "and I know there's nothing to check my story against with Becky gone..."

"His-story rather than her-story," Mrs. Bowman frowned, looking at the ceiling.

"But I wanted to go back to the beginning and say how we first met. How I first started with her in Berkeley. I've been thinking about it again."

"Go ahead Jason, there's no royal road to a solution. Anything that works, anything that makes you feel better. Of course I'd rather have Becky here too. I'm a counsellor, not a psychiatrist. Under the circumstances it's too much as if you were trying to analyze yourself. I work best in groups. Maybe ought to think about putting you in a group pretty soon."

Why was she putting him off this way? Treating him as if he were a bore. "We" ought to think... He had tried to tell everything... to a white pantsuit that called itself "we".

"What I've been thinking about is how much Becky was tied up with David at first. That never struck me before. For example. The first time I ever heard of her was in a letter from David. I was home in Minneapolis, just back from my grand tour of Europe. My year in a garret. I was going back to Berkeley at the end of the summer, as a teaching assistant. But I was determined I wasn't going to be a good graduate stu-

dent. I was going to re-grow the beard I'd had in Paris and buy a motorcycle and hang out in cafes. Well, above all I was going to get laid. Twenty-six years old, and I blamed the Academy for my...retarded condition. I was going to... extend my researches a bit, like Dr. Faust.

"David said he'd taken this girl to Tijuana for an abortion. For a friend. Little by little he let on that the friend was Scott. He described the whole scene in detail. He wrote it up in a very cool style. It was a nice piece of writing, a little mannered. Chicago realism. He told how the girl had been working as a file-clerk in the city-San Francisco-living above Mike's Pool Hall on Broadway. She'd gotten pregnant by a wino nicknamed "John the Father." She told Scott when they went to bed the first time that he needn't bother with contraceptives.

"Scott rescued her-gave her the money for the operation. Only he claimed to be busy just then. He asked David to take her down for him. For David it was a paid vacation, a trip to the bullfights, material valuable for a writer who came from Oak Park, Illinois only a few blocks from where Hemingway was born.

"They went to a nice white clinic just outside of town. The offices of one Eros Orestes Gomes, very sanitary. Everything came off well, contrary to the stories you heard then. So well that David suggested they stay for a bullfight. She declined, she told me later. She said later that at the border she was afraid that the abortion would be discovered. Said it was as if she were smuggling in an emptiness where the baby had been. She always had a gift for expressing herself.

"Scott was my boss that year, 1966. Another English teacher. I was his T.A. at Cal for two years. Scott married Becky about a year after David's letter. We had a

mock marriage ceremony over at David and Beth's before they went down to Monterey for the real one. A happening. It seemed pretty sinister in retrospect. Scott had his old top hat. We dressed the bride in strips of toilet paper. David put ice-cubes, the hollow kind from the liquor store, on their fingers. They melted off. I think it was the same night Scott invited David and Beth to move into his old house on Arch Street. There was some \$20.00 a month rent on the downstairs, only a token. I used to ride over there for a family dinner on Sundays-it became a regular thing."

(He would slip on his satin-twill lined leather jacket, zip up the sleeves till they enclosed his arms in tight cones, draw his riding gauntlets wind-tight over the wrists and carefully kick over the new black Ducati "Diana." It sometimes kicked back with a Nine to One Compression ratio which, he had been told, could break your ankle. Sometimes the landlady would hear him out there, on a cold night, kicking and cursing, for up to ten or fifteen minutes.

But when it fired, he would rock it off its stand and fall with it into its springs, gripping the gas tank with his knees and bending into the cold blast. Down Ashby, passing the Co-op, porch lights flashing by, neon blurred in the fog off the Pacific, leaning right onto Shattuck, where the tall, cool white people in the billboards began to turn into tall, cool blacks, then flat out through downtown Berkeley, deserted, trying to catch his reflection flashing by in the big windows of Roos-Atkins like the image of death in a Cocteau movie.

Cutting the corner of the campus, he could smell the eucalyptus grove, lean into another curve, and scan the scene on the porch of the Florentine, beards under

the electric heaters, cylinder blattng against the car-park wall. Then left again, into respectable fraternity-sorority redwood shingled Berkeley, climbing from the flatlands treelined streets where there was probably a dog lurking, and down again almost as far as the Northside Co-op to Scott and Becky's house on Arch Street. There might be hot mulled wine, steamed on David's espresso machine, and he would wrap his fingers around the mug and cradle it as if it were a human heart. Probably they would all be sitting around the kitchen table...)

"I'd broken up with the girl I'd been living with for about a year. They all knew Jane. The whole story. Maybe they thought they were raising my morale by inviting me to dinner. I had to start refusing invitations occasionally in order not to seem like a charity case. But that kitchen was the center of my world. I was living on the Avenue then, and I used to tell them crazy stories about the "Telegraph Hilton." My underground life as a bachelor. It was the year of the Acid Tests and they thought I was in on all of that. They were a bit out of it over on Arch Street. I played up my advantages when I could.

"Scott used to play old nostalgia records for my consolation. He has a whole collection of wind-up victrolas. Hank Snow singing "Dear John," for example.

Now my love for you has died
Just like grass upon the lawn
And I'm bound to wed another,
Dear John.

He used to sing along, tenor with a kind of sneer.

"You could see the lights on the bay out the back window, but it seemed like a farm kitchen. Really, it was an old farm house. Scott said it reminded him of his

parents' place near Ithaca. He really thought of him self as the farm kid who'd been lucky enough to get into Cornell. When he bought it the first floor was pretty far gone with termites, and he'd had to move the kitchen upstairs into a bedroom. They did dishes in the bathtub. Scott had jacked the whole place up corner by corner and he was ripping out the old foundations and pouring a new one. Scott did it all himself. You used to hear him down there, bumping around in the cellar. Setting his life in order. Becky began to make jokes about being jealous of the cellar. She would yell down messages through the cracks in the floor for David and Beth to pass on...there were holes you could pass your hand through where the plaster had fallen away.

"David and Beth moved in about two weeks after the marriage. It was as if Scott never really wanted to be alone with Becky. He said he found the house too big for two people, though he'd lived there alone for almost two years. Downstairs it was all imitation Renaissance hangings and Valentino-era Arabian tapes tries and books.

"Upstairs were Scott's collections. He collected collections. Old beer trays, military muskets, Maxfield Parrish prints, roll-top desks, boot scrapers-Scott even had a collection of toilets set out on a row down in the David's bathroom, from a child's model on up to a kind of Victorian throne on a pedestal. He'd arranged it so their toilet-the working one-was somewhere in the middle.

"Scott was the master of "camp." He had Becky embroider a sampler that said 'Nostalgia isn't what it used to be.' He had reduced his life to a style--a kind of sarcastic kitsh where everything was inside

quotation marks. A dog was a 'dog'. Becky was 'my child bride.' He even swore in quotation marks-- 'zounds' or 'your asshole sucks vinegar jugs.' He spent most of his free time cruising local auctions, garage sales, the junk stores down on San Pablo, Saint Vee de Pee. He'd get up at six o'clock Saturday morning to be the first one at a garage sale. David went with him a lot, at first anyway.

"They'd bring back cases of sparkling Burgandy from the 'distressed goods' shelves in West Oakland. We'd sit around looking at the oil stains and burns on the label and wonder what sort of catastrophe our good cheer had passed through. Scott liked everything at a distance. There had to be a little wormwood in everything to please him. He preferred late Victorian writers of a certain kind--Houseman, Samuel Butler, Hardy. When he was drunk, he'd quote the Rubiyat. He was a Victorian eccentric, really, not a bohemian at all. He always had to hear the gears of fate grinding at the back of his pleasures.

"He had a collection of hats. There was an old silk top hat from a leather case he used to wear at our wine parties. It was perfect. The rich chuckle, the debonaire, ceremonious manner of a perfect host. He looked like the man on the Johnny Walker bottle, or Heathcliff, or Merle Haggard, or Dorian Grey. The noble profile, going a bit pouchy. Very attractive to certain kinds of young ladies. He was 39 then--almost ten years older than the rest of us. Becky was only 19, "Beckylamb," at the beginning.

"He dressed her up in the castoff military clothes he used to wear--army shirts, chino khakis, an old Marine dress tunic, desert boots. This was before the Beatles and Sergeant Pepper created that craze.

At first I didn't have too much of an impression of her, except that she was pretty and had blue eyes: and that she was listening, very carefully, to all the outrageous shit that we, the university people, were talking about. She was in his shadow, he was the patriarch, the landlord, the host. He got her to promise to stop smoking if he stopped, and then held the promise over her. He used to talk like some 18th century Deist, in quotation marks of course, about the 'fundamental moral principle of promise-keeping' and you thought he was kidding, but he wasn't.

"He went too far with his moderation: he thought he was being fair and rational, but he bullied her underground, into collusion with the Swensons. She used to smoke when he was away--Beth's brand, so there would be no evidence. And they made a joke of it, the two of them, or the three. It was more than just the smoking. Later it was as if they were all in league against Scott. The Swensons were having their own problems with him.

"Scott had always been a bit cool on Beth. He mistrusted "bluestockings," he said. He'd politely ask her how her thesis on Brittomart--the armored maiden in The Fairy Queen--was coming. He called her 'the noble Beth,' but he didn't quite approve. I think he considered her a bad influence on Becky. Beth was just learning how to smoke, and affecting a rather queenly style. Holding her cigarette at arm's length, as if it were in a holder. Blowing smoke in art nouveau patterns around her. I think he became suspicious of the number of Galloise butts he was finding in the kitchen ashtray.

"It was really the flirtation between Scott and David that had gotten the Swensons into Arch Street in the first place. In the early days they were a bit

crazy. They had a couple of routines, for example, they would do art parties. Scott would wear a second-hand white shirt--they would stage an argument and David would tear it off, strip by strip. Or Scott would leave a party by climbing out the bathroom window after locking the door. David tried it once and fell into a thornbush.

"By this time though they were no longer 'the boys'. There was a scene after dinner a couple of months after David and Beth moved in. Scott accused them of not wiping their feet before coming into the downstairs hall. Something like that. They thought he was being ironic, but he went on and on. At first they couldn't believe it. Later on David told me he figured Scott's reactionary sort of irony meant exactly what it said. Like pretending to think that the New Left was a communist conspiracy. He'd already forbidden the Swensons to smoke 'that vile weed' in his house. David did it on the sly. He was trying to write a stoned novel. He would put his head in a bag because of the cracks in the ceiling. The four of them went to a party once where pot was being smoked by strangers. Scott staged a scene over it as if David were personally responsible. Insisted they all leave. He was more than just eccentric. He used to squat on the toilet (he would never sit on it) and shoot a beebee gun he kept at a target on the other side of the hallway. He...well, he had played 'Dear John' once too often, maybe.

"There was a photo Becky carried away in her album --I didn't see it till we were in Hawaii. It summed up that period for me. Scott is in the foreground, the patron, like Count Dracula; Beth looks over Becky's shoulder -- tall and literary, with her alligator head purse. Becky looks like a depraved servant girl. David is lurking in the background.

Everybody seems to be looking at Becky. Beckylamb.
Like a bunch of wolves.

"David came over to see me one day at the Telegraph Hilton. He was jittery, furtive, speeding on Cannuchino. I remember he started talking about Stendahl. Asked me if Becky didn't remind me of Mlle. de La Môle. He was leading up to something...I said I'd always thought of Mlle. de La Môle as...'vulpine.' That was actually the word I used. I said I didn't think of Becky that way at all. I suppose I affected to think of her as an old fashioned girl--more like Mme. de Renal, really. He sat there drumming his fingers on his knees. Then he came out with it and told me that he'd been having an affair with her for the past three weeks. I warned him--I asked him if really he should be telling this to me. He said I inspired trust, or something of the sort. I could feel that cozy kitchen falling apart around my ears, but I listened. I was lapping it up. I was amazed, but I felt I knew all this already too, from some other life. David and Beth were about the first people I'd met when I came to graduate school. Fellow Midwesterners. They were like an institution. Everyone talked about what a good marriage they had and how much freedom David gave Beth. Each with their own desk and bookshelves. A bust of Shakespeare on his desk and a matching one of Milton on hers.

"He said one night Scott was off to some gun collector's show and Beth was at the library. He was supposed to be sick with the flu, and Becky came down with some hot tea. They got stoned together on the naugahide sofa. David was very specific. He said she was 'possessed.' He talked about her 'incredible mouth.' Ever since then, he said, he'd been hunting her, trying to find a time and a place. They had managed to

go off in the hills a couple of times, in Scott's microbus. Then he got poison oak. They talked about going off somewhere--Mexico--when he was better, but she had started avoiding him. Now he was pretending to be avoiding her. 'I have to stay one jump ahead of her,' he said.

"Therefore Mlle. de La Môle. She admired his reading, his brains. Therefore she wanted his head, he thought. She demanded that he be conscious all the time, he said:

"'I can hardly talk to Scott any more, but I have to keep up the role. I joke along and she's kneading my foot under the table.'

"He said he thought he didn't want to continue: I thought that rang false.

"In a way he almost seemed to be offering her to me. Mlle. de La Môle on a platter. It all seemed so cooked up. But after he left there was the smell of blood in the room--I had trouble sleeping.

"About a week later I was waiting around the phone to be invited to Sunday dinner. David called. He was proposing that I take Becky out for a motorcycle ride. I couldn't quite make out his tone, then I realized Becky was listening behind him. He was imitating Scott:

"'Do you want to speak to Mrs. Squires?'

"'Are you speaking for her?'

"'Yes, Mrs. Squires is very bored just now...'

"There was a scuffle in the receiver and then Becky:

"'Jason come and take me for a ride, please come. I'm going crazy over here. This is a madhouse. I want to smell the redwoods. The poppies are coming out, Jason. Scott won't be back till eight o'clock. The second day in a row at the fleamarket. You don't know...

I was there yesterday, sitting in the stall freezing to death. All day and he only sold two bayonets. Old men selling trays of nuts and bolts, collections of The National Geographic. Cotton candy and cold, soggy tamales. Everything pawed over and used. Shabby and stinking of someone else's life. Everybody so seamy and cold and sad. I told Scott I wouldn't go anymore. I suppose I'll take it back... but I hate that place, Jason. He loves it. You know he got my wedding ring there? Swapped for it. He plays "Second hand Rose" to me on the victrola.'

"She said she'd asked Scott if she could go for a ride and that he said he didn't mind. Didn't even seem to notice. She said David was driving her crazy.

"We went up to Tilden Park. I had a regular tour up there--the view of Mount Diablo, the sweep downhill into Canyon, the abandoned railroad tunnel. Finally Saint Mary's College. The whispering gallery in the chapel. Oh it was all very innocent. Very happy. We had a picnic. Didn't get back till late, but Scott was even later. She burned the calf of her leg on the pipes getting off the bike.

"'Now you've branded me,' she said.

"I wondered if she'd done it to make Scott jealous. The whole ride, I mean. And I couldn't make out of it she had persuaded David to call or whether he had persuaded her to go. But really it didn't matter. All that paranoia--that was David's trip. He saw her as sort of disembodied female will. The cheerleader, the baton twirler he'd never been able to screw in high school. He carried on about 'Becky Western,' the archetypal American name.' Becky Western Squires de La Môle. He'd gotten his myths crossed up. I thought I understood her much better--after that ride. Dif-

ferent girls take hold on a motorcycle in different ways. Some strangle you, others hold on to the seat. I walked around for days feeling her like a warmth behind me, hearing her voice in my ear. I felt as if I'd been chosen to be her cavalier, as if we were the ones to be escaping together from that warm kitchen. And all the time I knew that she had been fucking David, and she didn't know that I knew.

"One day I told her, more or less, what David had told me. I was in a redemptive mood, I felt smothered by the secrecy. Inhibited. I wanted to clear the air. It wasn't a very good strategy. I could see she was very angry and deflecting it onto David. I'd never seen her anger before, maybe there was a flash of Mlle. de La Môle at that. She said she would tell me the whole story some day. Said David distorted everything. She had come downstairs to give him a hot guggle-muggle and he had taken advantage... Only once. She had thought about Beth the whole time. She went out on the bus, she said, to set him straight, and he had started to grope her and call her a 'P.T.' at the same moment.

"A couple days later I heard that Scott had taken her to the emergency ward the night before. She had started gasping and choking. I went over to Arch Street, worried. She was propped up in the big brass bed reading the Madame Bovary I'd lent her. She was queening it over the house like a sick little girl. I was charmed. The doctors at Kaiser had diagnosed enoxia, given her some tranquilizers, and sent her home. David and Beth were making her cappuchino on their special machine. Scott had written her a poem--he hadn't writ ten one for years. We were alone for a minute and she told me about it.

"Enoxia is when you gasp so hard for breath that

you can't breathe. Isn't that perfect, Jason? Breathing so deep that you suffocate yourself. It's the only time... I don't want you to think this happens to me all the time. I felt like I was inside a room that was getting smaller and smaller, or I was getting bigger. I wanted to smash through the walls, but the bigger I got the weaker I was. It's a vicious circle. Like Madame Bovary.'

"She looked at me sharp over the back of her hand in a way she had...only her eyes, the rest of her face hidden. Like a kid looking over a windowsill. I was relieved she was taking it in such good spirits. I'd been afraid that what I'd said--the guilt of it--had scared her back to Scott. That she had regressed out of reach. That what I'd told her had made her think that I was after her in the same cynical way as David. That I was interested because David had offered her to me. I don't know... I thought nothing could be fals~~e~~r than that.

"It was this time, I think, that Beth came into the Mediterranean one day. David had switched to the Florentine. I used to study on the balcony on the off-chance Becky would drop by on her way home from Merrit College. Beth started talking about her thesis: I think the argument was that Brittomart was a father-figure. Well I smelled that kind of blood again in the air, and then she was telling me that she had been screwing her teaching assistant for the last two months and that she was in love with him, she thought.

"'I'm four or five inches taller than he is. We make a ridiculous couple.'

"I wanted to say, stop; I wanted to say, why me. But I wanted to know, really, wanted to know all the details. That Jack was short and dark and stocky. A

New York Jew. That his wife was working in a bank to put him through Grad school, that he smoked Gaulloise and that was the reason she had started smoking. She couldn't imagine how David would take it. I didn't say anything. I thought maybe she knew about David's affair and was sounding me out.

"You know we've been married seven years, Jason. I was a sophomore when we married, David was a junior. Babies. My father had just died. David wanted to get out of his frat house. Midwestern rosy-cheeked babies. Lately David has been saying we should have a 'French marriage,' but I think he would be shocked if I told him I've actually gone and fallen in love. He seems to sense something. You know he bought me a pair of fifty dollar boots for my birthday?"

"The snakeskin boots. I didn't tell her, but I'd been with him when he'd bought them in a frenzy the night before her birthday. We made a frantic hunt through Berkeley and Oakland for the right thing. David was cursing, beating on the steering wheel.

"With a couple of words, I could have broken the spell that was over both of them. I could have disabused them... I began to have fantasies of telling both secrets at the kitchen table as if I expected everyone to kiss and make up. Fortunately I kept my mouth shut--for a while at least.

"So I was in the middle of these secrets...his, hers, theirs, my own. It was getting hard to keep the stories straight, or remember who knew what. Neither David nor Beth nor Scott knew they were being cheated on. Becky thought she was wrecking the Swenson's marriage. Scott was totally unaware of what was going on, absorbed with his own secrets down in the cellar or at the flea market. On the one hand the secrets kept proliferating and getting more complex. Like dam

behind dam on a river, and you had keep up all those walls by a mental effort. But water wants to find its own level... With a couple of sentences I could have wrecked two marriages. It was odd feeling all the power I had come by involuntarily, simply by listening. A bit like being God, or a sorcerer. I knew combinations of sounds that would have the force of a spell... I imagine it's rather like that, being a counsellor...

"I think it was Christmas time that I went over there alone. David and Beth were off somewhere, and Scott and Becky had driven up to Washington to visit her mother. Scott gave me the key to the house and encouraged me to use it. My room had no heater and Telegraph Avenue felt like St. Petersburg. He even told me to make free with the wines. Really he wanted me to pick up the newspapers outside and make the place look lived in. He had a horror of 'vandals.'

"It was Christmas day in fact. I'd been meaning to go down to Robbie's for a turkey sandwich, but even Robbie's was closed. Berkeley was a tomb. Then I remembered the key in my pocket. It was funny being in that house alone, with all the ghosts of Christmas past. I took my books into the kitchen, closed the door and lit up the gas heater. It was freezing, and the palm trees were waving outside. I made a tuna sandwich for Christmas, and started to read Liaisons Dangereuses for my qualifying exams.

"Well I started feeling a little sick. It got too hot and there was a smell of gas. I opened the doors and started walking from room to room, looking at all the objects, just in themselves, without the distraction of people. It was weird--maybe I was feeling the gas--but everything was so physical. The towels of their

shelves, the medicines, the stacks of The American Rifleman. I felt like a ghost in comparison. All these dead things seemed more real than I was. The material evidence of that marriage seemed to be squatting on my chest. Maybe I had a touch of enoxia myself.

"I remember going into their bedroom and looking at the big brass bed, the two pillows, the grif fenclaw feet, each gripping a ball. Then I remembered something David had said--about Scott keeping a pistol under his mattress. I looked: there wasn't one. Their clothes were hanging in the closet--his side and hers--it looked like so many Scotts and Beckys pressed together flat, like the pages of a book. I don't know what it was I was trying to find...

"I ended up opening Scott's desk to look at his collection of topographic maps and I found a collection of letters between him and Becky from about a year earlier when they had almost broken up. Scott was so anal that he actually kept carbons of all the letters he sent...

"I had never really been sure what had happened then. They'd been sleeping together for about a year, and then she suddenly went back up to Seattle and lived with her mother. She started taking courses at the University of Washington--it looked like the break was permanent.

"She wrote about her drama course--how she was managing the lights for Hedda Gabler, crawling around in the rafters of the theatre 'like Ariel or the Phantom of the Opera.' It was very witty. But I remember David told me she had confessed screwing her drama instructor in the loft--there was none of that in the letter. She was trying to get Scott to come up and rescue her. She was only pretending to be the 'god

ness of light,' she said. I was reading between the lines...something fascinated me. Her duplicity and her innocence all tangled up. I caught the mood of that motorcycle ride again. I think I fell in love with her literary style.

"It was as if I could hear her voice in my ear from behind. The letter seemed to have been written to me: I was the one who was going to rescue her. I understood. Not Scott. Not David. We would tell each other everything.

"I remember that house seemed to melt around me. That whole weight of property and promises and accumulated past was suddenly less real than my fantasy that she was my long-lost sister. I remember cranking up the victrola and putting on 'Dear John' just to celebrate.

"I kissed her one day in the upstairs hall. Scott was at the fleamarket and I was supposed to take her there. She had on the rebel-without-a-cause jacket that Scott had bought her to wear on the bike. He didn't think of me as serious competition... It was just as we were leaving. We were all bundled up--maybe that's how I found the courage. It surprised both of us. I remember the tongue in her mouth. Looking close into her eyes and seeing them coalesce into one big blue eye, like a Cyclops. We kept saying we had to go and then kissing again. I remember looking over her shoulder into the bedroom and seeing the bed there and then behind it the closet mirror. It was as if I was sitting on that bed looking out at the lighted hall--at the silhouettes of a man and woman kissing. She looked at me incredibly happy and pressed herself all long my body and said, 'We fit.' And I said, 'We do.' It was a kind of marriage. Afterward we had to sham it with Scott- it was awful. We were on the motor

cycle again, but it was no abduction. I wanted to take her to Big Sur, San Blas, the source of the Amazon: all those phoney romantic paradises to the south, always to the south. I had to deliver her to the Alameda flea market, through that tunnel under the bay and pretend that everything was normal while I was still spinning down that pipe. I remember telling him about the old guns I'd collected as an officer's kid in occupied Germany. I could feel her eyes touching me and I was going on about Flintlocks and cased pairs... It was like she and I were being carried away on some logjam, and she was standing on the bank, unaware, talking in a voice that was getting fainter and fainter about Tower muskets and proofmarks and double-set triggers.

We told ourselves we were people of honor and we wouldn't string out that game any longer. She was going to move out of Arch Street as soon as possible.

"Well, there was an interruption. Scott and Becky were going to travel again in a few days to Southern California--it was the February break. And David, Beth and I were going to Ensenada to a place we know. There was some chance we might connect with the Squires in Mexico. I know David noticed how eagerly I was looking around in the restaurants. But the owner of our little hotel said they had been there two nights before. In the same room we three had to put up in.

"We had such good times at Natchita's before... this time it was anti-climatic, a farewell to the whole Mexican scene. The cantinas, the busted side-walks, the dead dogs, the vultures, the little boys selling chicklets, the whole sad business. We were all somewhere else. David had started screwing one of his students and was planning to meet her in San Diego.

Beth wanted to get back to Jack. I was thinking about what had happened in the upstairs hall. They didn't understand each other's abstraction, but at a deeper level they seemed to know. They were tender and touching with each other. Babes in the woods. Again, like at the beginning. They talked about how they would move out of Scott's when they got back.

"One evening Beth was reading--David invited me to go for a walk down by the docks. He asked if anything had happened between me and Becky, and I lied, I said no. From the way he looked at me I thought for a moment Becky might have told him. But he began a kind of confession. Something about Beth's 'selfishness' in love. I didn't know what he was driving at. He was talking with a kind of staged anger. Like the night of the boot-hunt.

"'The noble Beth,' he said. And he helped up two boney knuckles jeeringly, his fingers clenched white.

"'She says that I'm too big for her, that I hurt her. Then she says it's her fault for being too small. He made a fist again.

"'She likes me to finish her off like this. I don't know...It's all the result of what some fool doctor told her before we were married.'

"It wasn't a very pretty gesture. It wasn't very nice to listen to this and know what I knew. I remember he went out the next day and bought a little Day of the Dead clay figurine. A death's head popping out of an egg. The skull trembled on the end of a spring. He would set the thing up next to the break fast coffee and glare at it. Beth and I were getting pretty restless. Well he said he wanted to stay alone and write. Beth and I left him, and drove up to San Diego, where she took the plane to Jack. I imagine

David was a couple of hours behind us.

"It was on that long drive up alone, passing all those oil pumps that look like hobby horses, rocking and sucking, that it struck me maybe I didn't know so much after all. That maybe David or Beth or Becky hadn't told me everything at that. But I felt a crazy excitement that all the bits were beginning to fit together and that I would Know soon. I had the sense too that David and Beth were dying, were being sacrificed for me and Becky. That she and I were drawing strength out of the others, and that whatever the secret was that had blocked them--well that we could go beyond it because we would have no secrets.

"What more is there to say? I ran into Becky in the Med when I got back. We were speeding on Cappuchino. Went to my room, there was some game about examining each other's tonsils. We made love. It was something like possession after all. Afterwards I found the ligament at the base of my tongue was torn. The membrane was ripped and bleeding. I wondered if my tongue wasn't maybe a couple of centimeters longer now...

"In about two weeks she moved out of Scott's-- she was being as honest as she could. The week before David and Beth announced they were leaving. Scott didn't know what was happening--he couldn't have been more surprised if the new foundations had given way under his old house. Becky moved in with a classmate from Merritt, a divorcee. She had to cover her tracks. Well the next morning she came into my room while I was still groggy, and she said she had just had a 'lesbian experience' with Violet. She said it was like hugging herself, only a fat, squat self. Physical_lly, she said she couldn't stand Violet. But she said

she had come almost without being touched. She called it 'shameful,' and moved out the same day. Of course I appreciated her honesty. I made love to her. I felt I had to. I pulled her down on the bed as if I could return to whatever dream I'd been having--but my erection was gone. I ate her out, pretending to be Violet. She came, she battered my mouth. I think it scared us both. It put me into a crazy state. None of us could fit back ever into that Arch Street kitchen--everything was spiralling faster and faster.

"The idea came back to me that if we got rid of the secrets everything would come right. In the general collapse Becky and I at least would get free. And the others--those who had a morbid hold over us--well, it was time for them to level with each other and take the consequences. I remember actually running out of the Telegraph Hilton full of what I thought was benevolent love to convert Becky to this idea.

"Then I found David in the Florentine writing at the back table, and I laid the whole story on him. Beth and Jack. 'The truth will make you free.' I didn't stay around to watch the effects.

"I rushed off to catch Beth in the Med, and found her with Becky, who had just confessed about David. It was funny. I felt betrayed. I had a flash of Violet again. Beth, I'm sure, felt I had betrayed her,"

Mrs. Bowman raised her finger towards the electric clock:

"Jason, this is very interesting, very Berkeley, and you seem to have it well under control. That's part of the problem. Why don't we consider putting you in a group from now on? You need more inter-action. I think it would be counter-productive to go any deeper into individual analysis. There are some very interesting people in group right now--young insctruct

ors from your own department."

"There's more to tell," Jason said, "David and Beth's secret, for example."

"But what about you, Jason? What about your secrets, your feelings. You talk about Scott, Becky, Beth, David...I can't make out from this the way you feel about Becky at all."

"What I'm trying to say is that the way I feel about Becky is all tied up with these other people. That's what I'm saying. Are you sure you don't want to hear about the orgy? There was..."

"Jason, do you want Becky back again? Becky not as she was but as she is now?"

"I can't separate the two," he said. "I don't know."