

A Madwoman's Diary

by Jill Emerson, 1938-

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13 February—Saturday

Tomorrow is Valentine's Day. It is also Sunday, which means that no mail will be delivered. But Monday's mail will bring me no valentines. I have sent none. I will receive none.

My twenty-seventh Valentine's Day. On my twentieth Valentine's Day I got a present, a silver chain bracelet from the boy who would marry me four months later. On each of the next two Valentine's Days he gifted me with candy.

I never liked candy. Hate gifts of it. *Here*, the box shrieks. *Here, eat me and get fat! You might as well. No one cares if you're fat or lean.* No one.

Typical of Gary. So anxious to please and so incapable of it. Never flowers, which I would have loved. But candy, which I hate.

Typical, too, that I never told him. Two of us under a roof for two years and three months, neither of us ever able to take the clothing from our minds.

No one ever sent me flowers.

No one ever sent me a valentine.

I found the silver chain bracelet while packing things. On the floor in the back of the dresser. Tarnished, which seemed symbolically correct. *Always—Gary.* Always Gary, but not always Arlene's Gary. Gone now four years and five months. Gone forever, and good riddance to both of us.

Is this going well? I wonder if this is going well. I wonder, for that matter, if it is in fact going. Or if I am going anywhere but mad.

Mother is almost a month dead. (All of this preoccupation with time. Mother is a month dead, Gary is four years and five months divorced, Daddy is—what?—twenty years dead, Arlene is twenty-six years old, twenty-seven in September. Time, time, time.)

Mother is dead and the store is sold and the apartment above it, home for all my life but for those years and months of marriage, quite vacant now. Mother is dead and in the ground, and she and Brooklyn join Daddy and Gary in the limbo of past time. Once part of my life and part of it no longer.

So I sit at a new Smith-Corona Electric Portable in a new apartment in a done-over brownstone on West 19th Street. I like this typewriter, so much faster and smoother than the rickety old Underwood, somehow sleeker than the Royal Standard in the office. And I like the apartment, clean, starkly clean, fresh, compact, looming with possibilities. And I like Chelsea better than Brooklyn.

But Arlene is the same Arlene. Mirrors tell her she's pretty enough, dark of hair and fair of skin, long of leg and slim of waist and round if not protrusive of bosom. Pretty enough, mirrors say, but no one seems to notice. Arlene passes not merely in crowds but in near-empty rooms. Arlene turns no one on, and no one turns on Arlene, and she dreams her waking dreams of aching lust in secret. And does her finger exercises, the nightly ritual of lazy-fingered masturbation while her mind has her doing things that Arlene, poor thing, would never, never do.

Is this working?

A new typewriter and a fresh ream of bright white bond paper. Thick, twenty-pound paper, twenty-five per cent rag content. Crisp, clean paper to be covered by the tale of an idiot, full of sound and fury and loneliness and frustration.

I have kept diaries before. I never typed them. Almost invariably I began them with the new year, buying one of those lockable red diaries with the pages edged in gold. I never kept one for a full year.

And never wrote anything real in one.

They were the jottings of an utterly imaginative record keeper. Books I read, movies I watched, subjects in school, marks on tests. Never an entry that meant anything. Because I have always been so secretive a person that I could not reveal anything that anyone might someday find.

But now for the first time in my life I am alone. I have always been alone in many ways. Now I literally live alone, and no one but I shall ever be in this apartment. It seems unlikely that a burglar would read this diary, or care what he read. (Interesting, though, that the remote prospect does bother me. But I can chance it.)

I have no one to talk to. I have never had anyone to talk to. So I talk to my typewriter, and to myself.

I am alone and hate being alone and have always been alone and will always be alone and will always hate it. I am pretty and look plain and dull. I am bright and think of clever turns of phrase and never send my brightness past my lips, so everyone thinks me dull and witless.

I am passionate. Alone, in my mind's eye, I am passionate. Obsessed with sex. Driven.

When anyone is near me I freeze.

Plain dull witless Arlene Krause. How I hate her. I even hate her name. *Arlene*, plastic and sprayed hair and no brains and boring. *Krause*, stolid and solid and thick and stupid, fat ankles and pimples and colds all winter.

The beautiful and bright and passionate Me has another name. Her name is Jennifer Starr and she has large breasts and tawny skin and a golden mane, and makes unbridled love with men and women, romping guiltless and shameless and joyous through my fantasies.

When I touch myself, and close my eyes and ears, and get slightly and briefly out of myself, it is never Arlene Krause whom I see behind my eyelids.

It is Jennifer Starr.

I think I shall go to bed now. Jennifer will be whipped tonight, I think. Ankles and wrists lashed to the X of a Saint Andrew's cross. She will be beaten by a man and woman, and at first the pain will seem more than she can bear, but as the whipping continues she will find pleasure in the pain, and Jennifer will eat the woman while the man fucks her brutally in her asshole. And she will come gloriously, over and over and over.

I have never typed these words before. I have read them often, in deliciously filthy books that fuel the fires of fantasy. And I have occasionally written them. A dozen years ago there was a time when I would write every dirty word I knew, making meaningless obscene lists in pencil on ruled white notebook paper, then tearing the list into confetti lest anyone even suspect I knew those words.

I never talked to my mother. I don't care that she's dead. I never knew her. I don't miss her. I am not glad that she is dead. Neither am I sorry.

I'll probably throw all this shit away in the morning.

14 February—Sunday

Hello.

Hello, Smith-Corona Electra 110.

I didn't throw all this shit away in the morning. In the morning I got up and made myself instant coffee. I went out and bought the Times and lugged it all home and read most of it. I did most of the crossword puzzle. There was no Double-Crostic. Just a pair of diagramless puzzles. I've never understood how one does them. I've a feeling no one in the world really knows how.

Then what did I do? Went out for a walk. Had beef lo mein at a Cuban Chinese restaurant on Eighth Avenue. Walked some more. Came back. Played the radio. Let disc jockeys talk to me. Didn't talk back. Didn't even listen.

It is now somewhere past nine o'clock in the evening of my first full day in my new apartment. So far today I have spoken perhaps ten words to the waiter in the restaurant, all of those words having to do with my dish of beef lo mein and my eventual desire for the check. I did not have to say anything to the news dealer. I picked up the *Times*, handed him a dollar, took my change. He may have thanked me. I don't remember.

If I were to get up from the typewriter right now and cut my wrists, no one would know until the smell of my rotting corpse scurried under the door. They might miss me at the office—and they might not miss me at all—but they do not know that I have moved, and I left no forwarding address in Brooklyn.

There is a phone. I don't know why I had them put it in. No one will call me, and I shall call no one. But there is indeed a phone. Its number is unlisted. No one could get my number from the telephone company. They take this trust as seriously as the Swiss take numbered accounts.

I pay extra for my unlisted number. Why? Who would want to call me? And what makes me so anxious not to be called?

Not that I would ever cut my wrists, or otherwise put an end to myself. It cheers me to realize that I have never found suicide attractive. It has no charm for me. Death would be even more boring than the life I lead. And would last longer.

I feel less depressed than these words would suggest. I feel oddly elated and cannot entirely understand why. There is a sense of liberation in this total solitude. There is a sense of liberation in being alone in a new place with no ties whatsoever to the past. A new living situation suggests the possibility of a new life.

Yes. Thus the elation.

I feel—how to explain it? I feel that I am en route to something. That I am about to grow. That the bud of me is swelling and preparing to flower.

I thought of something wonderful to do. Go out and buy a dozen valentines. Send them, unsigned and with no return address, to a dozen strangers selected at random from the Manhattan telephone directory. Or sign each with the name of one of the others, and put on the appropriate return address.

Too late now. Next year, perhaps.

15 February—Monday

It is impossible to see anything interesting from my windows. There are two apartments I might be able to see into but they always keep their shades pulled. I have checked compulsively since I moved in, and the shades have always been drawn. Perhaps they will be up in the heat of the summer. Some people keep their shades drawn in cool weather but leave them up in summer. Neither of the windows in question sports an air-conditioner, so there's hope.

I have always yearned to watch people fuck.

No, there's more to it than that. To watch them do anything at all. To be unobserved while observing. When I was a child I dreamed of being invisible. It is a dream I still entertain occasionally in fantasy.

I did not tell anyone at the office that I have moved. So no one knows I live here. And no one will ever know.

Tonight Jennifer and her husband, a swarthy stevedore, will initiate a younger couple into the pleasures of wife- swapping and group sex.

That's always been a good one.

16 February—Tuesday

I am incapable of action.

Why?

Hell.

This afternoon on the way home from work I saw an underground paper at a newsstand. Screw. I have heard of this paper and have read about it but never saw it before. I don't believe the Brooklyn newsstands carry it. At least I never saw any of them displaying it.

I wanted to buy it and I couldn't.

What is the matter with me? The news dealer does not know me. He does not even look at the people who buy the papers from him. Or remember their faces. Why am I incapable of buying a newspaper called *Screw*? Why, when I am so desperately anxious to read it?

17 February—Wednesday

I bought *Screw*.

Not from the newsstand where I first saw it. I passed that stand again, and hesitated, but could not do it. Instead I walked almost home. At Eighth Avenue I took a bus to 42nd Street and walked around Times Square.

I did this several times when I lived in Brooklyn. Rode in on the BMT and walked the same blocks over and over again. Oddly elevated every time, frightened yet exhilarated. The book stores, the movie houses, the black girls whoring on Seventh Avenue, the midnight cowboys draping themselves against 42nd Street store fronts.

Men can go to these places. Buy the books, see the movies, move at ease through this world of peep shows and model studios and a thousand forms of tawdry sex. And I yearn to do this. I read the books we carried in the candy store, spirited them upstairs when Mother was not watching, tucked them back into the pockets of the rack when I was done with them. I don't suppose the books on Times Square are any more candid than the ones I read in my room with the door locked. But it would be good to be able to know. It would be good to be able to see the movies.

To be invisible. Because a woman would have to be invisible to do this, wouldn't she?

I wonder.

I suppose a woman could go to a book store or a peep show or a movie without being bothered. The men who go there do not seem aggressive. She would be

noticed, though. She would be stared at. Violated in the mind, raped by eyes and brains.

Arlene could not go. Jennifer would go, and be picked up, and enjoy herself, but Arlene extends herself merely by walking apprehensively down those mean and bitter streets.

The schemes that grow up in my mind. I could wear men's clothing and hide my hair under a cap. Frigid, unapproachable Arlene in butch drag, walking with a sailor's rolling swagger, buying books and sex toys, dropping quarters in a peep show machine, sitting in the darkness of a grubby theater between rows of panting onanists.

Years ago women wore men's clothes in order to be served ale at McSorley's. Arlene in male garb, liberating the world of pornography. Arlene in drag, invisible at last.

With my luck I'd be taken for a male hustler, latched onto by some Long Island closet queen who'd want to suck my nonexistent cock.

But I bought *Screw*. Went there to buy it and stalked three newsstands. Settled on a blind man, delighted to be invisible in his eyes.

How can I be so fully aware of the dimensions of my neuroses and yet so utterly their victim?

Bought it. Picked an issue off a stack. Had the right change, two quarters sweat-dampened in my palm. Dropped them in the blind man's hand. And said, "*Screw*."

Screw, blind man. Screw, Times Square. Screw, fuck, shit, piss, damn, cunt, cock, prick, whore, bitch, hell. Screw!

Folded it small as if to stuff it into a fortune cookie. Crammed it into my purse. Back downtown on the Ninth Avenue bus past shuttered meat markets and produce stalls and tenements. Near empty bus. Visions all the way of my purse springing open and *Screw* leaping out, unfolding magically on its way to the floor. And every eye turned on me, staring with lust and contempt at her who would purchase filth.

Home, and dizzily proud of myself for buying it. Such a pathetic act to generate pride.

And sat reading it. Reading it over and over and over.

And now sit staring at the typewriter looking at the last sentence and unable to go on. I have to write about all this but I can't. Maybe tomorrow.

18 February—Thursday

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Was buying *Screw* that step?

Oh, I don't know. Don't know, either, where the journey might lead me. Or if I want to go there. Or if that projected thousand-mile jaunt might not end prematurely, end with that single step.

Things are so much simpler for Jennifer Starr.

21 February—Sunday

No entry since Thursday. Sat down prepared to write and made a mistake. Read through what I had written so far.

Embarrassment at my own words. Not shame. No shame for either the self-revelation or the occasionally forbidden words. Nothing on these pages I haven't previously shaped in thought.

What I felt was not shame but exposure. Arlene sprawled naked on the neatly typed page. Thighs wide apart, holding her labia open for the camera of her own inner vision.

Felt a great urge to destroy these pages. Like selling the store and fleeing Brooklyn. Running from the past. Satchel Paige—"Don't look back, something might be gaining on you." Don't even *think* back lest you sense the pursuer's presence in your wake.

Think this verbal diarrhea may be important. Read one of a series of articles in tonight's *Post* on group therapy and encounter sessions. Read something last week on Women's Lib and their consciousness-raising sessions. Couldn't handle any of that. If I were invisible, if I could watch and listen, but not to function in that context, not me, never.

Think this may be serving a similar purpose for me, and safe because it is between me and me, with the typewriter as silent permissive nondirective therapist.

I block even now. Wrote nothing yesterday, and so resolved to place each entry where it will be safe not merely from intruders but from my own eyes. The radiator has a cover with a hinged top. Beneath the top is a tray, slightly coated with rust, which one may fill with water to raise the humidity on arid winter nights. I've turned off that radiator, turned it off when I moved in. The one in the bathroom is enough to heat this little place. Yesterday I put my dozen pages of typescript in that tray, face down, and closed the hinged top. When I finish this, these pages will be added to the stack.

I wish I had written something yesterday. If only a line, a description of the weather, anything. I'll try to do something every day from now on. It irks me, having missed the 19th of February.

Did today's Double-Crostic in less than an hour. They're so much more gratifying to solve than the usual puzzles. It's a matter of cracking a code, of using the definitions to get words in the text and vice versa, until there is a sudden breakthrough with everything falling together, revealing itself. At the end it becomes a matter of filling in the last blanks as quickly as one can move the pencil. I always finish them, though.

I'm very good at them. I'm a clever person, logical and intuitive, with a quick mind. Though no one knows it.

And I am still not writing about Screw. It's funny that I still can't.

22 February—Monday

Worked late at the office. Just got home and too exhausted to bother with this, but I just yesterday resolved to do a line a day at least. It seems too soon to break a vow.

Mr. Karlman left me virtually nothing to do all day, then called me in for two dozen rush letters that had to go out tonight. Didn't even leave for dinner. He called Smiler's and they sent over corned beef sandwiches and coffee and we ate at our desks.

He wanted to drive me home. Would have driven me all the way out to Brooklyn but I insisted he drop me at the Union Square subway stop. He let me talk him into it. No one really wants to drive to Brooklyn in the middle of the night. I walked a few steps down into the stairwell, let him drive off, then took a cab home. \$1.90 on the meter so I gave the driver \$2.25. All to keep him from knowing I had moved to Manhattan.

Next time I'll know better. Make a fake phone call, tell him I'm staying over with a girl friend rather than traipse to Brooklyn late at night. And have him drop me around the corner from where I live.

Why am I so devious when there's nothing to be devious about?

Happy birthday, George Washington.

But today isn't a holiday. The holiday was a week ago yesterday. And it was not a holiday at our office. We all came in, and got an extra day's pay as a bonus.

Who cares about this? Not I. Just wasting time to avoid what I can't write about.

Mr. Karlman is a flirt. I don't know if he does anything about it or just wants to. Never flirts with me, though. Senses the futility of it, or else I don't turn him on. Or both.

Came closer than ever last night. En route to the subway. Said, "I hate to go home alone on a night like this. My place is so much more comfortable when there's someone in it with me."

I said something suitably dumb about what a boon television is for lonely people. Purposely missing his pitch entirely. Caught a glimpse of his face, eyes turned heavenward in an attitude of *God-what-a-simpleton-this-one-is*. And will surely make no passes again at Arlene the Machine. At Krause the Mouse.

I suspect Jennifer might have handled things somewhat differently.

24 February—Wednesday

Bought the new issue of *Screw* today. Went to Times Square for it, which is silly, and sought out my blind news dealer, which is also silly. But bought it directly, walking straight from the bus to the stand, placing two quarters in the outstretched palm and saying, "*Screw*," saying the word without hesitation. Carried a larger purse which accommodated the paper easily. It's probably even easier to buy the Post and tuck *Screw* inside it, but I'd worry about it falling out.

I read the new issue all the way through. I am still shaky. I have been drinking coffee all night long and cannot be sure how much of my shakiness is from the coffee and how much from what I've read.

It is not like dirty books. Some of it is funny and some of it is tasteless and some of it is off-putting but all of it is real, vividly real. It is obsessed as I am obsessed, and it is about all of the things that I am about, and it is real.

It excites me but does not make me want to masturbate. I do so every night before I go to sleep, and the scenarios I write for Jennifer often grow from what I have read, but it gets me hot when I read it in rather a different way. It makes everything real and awakens me to possibilities, possibilities not for Jennifer in fantasy but for Arlene reborn as Jennifer in real three-dimensional life.

The ads.

I knew about the ads. I was not positive *Screw* carried them but knew they existed in underground sex tabloids of this sort. And in the bulletins of

correspondence clubs. They sell those bulletins in the Times Square book stores; if I dared enter them I could buy one. They also sell them through the mail. The addresses are printed in *Screw*, if only I dared write for them.

(I knew all of this from the books I read. About swingers. About the sexual underground. People who meet each other through the mails. I read about it in nonfiction paperbacks, in cheap novels. And drew up fantasies along these lines. But it is wholly different to read ads placed by real people and know that they exist, that they are only a phone call or a letter away.)

I read the ads over and over, over and over. I know some of them by heart now. I play little games with myself, deciding which ads I would answer if I had the courage.

What am I afraid of?

Getting fucked? I have been fucked. I was fucked regularly by Gary, though less regularly toward the end of our marriage. I never hated it. I partly enjoyed it. Sometimes I had something that seemed vaguely like an orgasm. Never a real one. Just the frigid woman's equivalent thereof.

It was never me that got fucked. It was something that happened to the body I was wearing at the time. That cock in my cunt never touched *Me*.

I don't want to be fucked, or touched, or in any way open to anyone. I want to be an invisible watcher at an orgy. I want to be Jennifer.

I don't know what I want.

I am so sad.

25 February—Thursday

My favorite ad has appeared in both my issues of *Screw*. Wednesday, when I pay fifty cents to a blind man for a third issue, I'll be anxious to see if it still runs. As always, I'll read the paper through from the beginning, skipping nothing, tantalizing myself like a child eating the cake first and saving the frosting for last. And I'll even resist the impulse to skim the classifieds. I'll take them in turn, hoping to stumble on his ad.

UNSATISFIED WOMEN—Why miss out on the best part of life? Divorced sensuous man, 42, attractive, athletic, will make sure your needs come first. Your pleasure is my aim. Tireless French expert, specialist in frigidity cures. Absolute discretion and understanding. Any race welcome, but you must be between 18 and 40. You needn't be beautiful, but if you're fat, please see Weight Watchers before you see me. My ex-wife was fat and it turns me off. Remember, if you can't come, call Bill. TOTYG-13.

Bill. 868-9413. That's what the TOTYG-13 is all about, a phone number coded with letters. 868 is a Manhattan exchange. In Zone One, below 59th Street.

He could live in this neighborhood. In this building. My exchange is 691. Are all the phones in a building on the same exchange? Bill.

26 February—Friday

I went to a chamber music concert on Barrow Street. I walked around the Village after I left the office and passed a music school where they have free weekly concerts. There was a sign advertising one tonight. I bought a souvlaki sandwich and ate it in the park and then went to the concert. Some violin sonatas with

piano accompaniment. I don't know enough about music to say if the performers were good or not. I enjoyed the concert.

A man with a very neatly trimmed beard tried to make small talk with me as I was on my way out. I managed to exchange a few words with him about the music. He invited me to have coffee with him. I said I had to meet my husband but thanked him. He said something pleasant about maybe some other time. I don't know if he noticed that I don't wear a wedding ring.

Perhaps I ought to wear a wedding ring.

27 February—Saturday

I wonder what Bill looks like. *Attractive, athletic.* I don't know if he's tall or short, young or old for his age. He is divorced and his ex-wife was fat. I am not fat, nor am I under eighteen or over forty.

Is he handsome? Does he have long hair? Is he bald? Does he have a beard?

I see men on the street and wonder if they might be Bill. Pointless musing.

The man who spoke to me at the concert was no more than thirty-five at the outside. So he couldn't have been Bill.

Today is Saturday, and has twice the usual number of hours in it. And tomorrow is Sunday and the last day of the month. Next year will be leap year with an extra February day to endure.

I hate all weekends, and month ends most of all.

28 February—Sunday

Twice this afternoon and once tonight I picked up my telephone and dialed 868-941. And each time, after a greater or lesser period of hesitation, I cradled the receiver without dialing the 3.

I have almost twenty thousand dollars on deposit in a savings and loan around the corner from my office. I live on my salary. I don't need that money for anything and so it sits there gathering unnecessary interest. The proceeds of Mother's insurance. Never would have guessed she carried any.

I could take that money and do something with it. I could find a psychiatrist, a good one, and I could go to him once a day five days a week and give him a chance at straightening me out. It's not as if I needed the money for anything else.

Or would it be easier to force myself to dial Bill's number?

Well, I did it. Got up from the typewriter and dialed 868-941 and, after the usual pause, dialed 3. The phone rang three times. I thought, after all this toe-wetting, he was not in. But he answered after the third ring.

"Hello ... hello ... hello ..."

Krause the Mouse, careful to keep her breathing inaudible.

"You know, there's really nothing to be afraid of. If you can't talk now, call me back when you're ready."

I hung up.

His voice is like his ad. He sounds honest, sympathetic, sincere. The adjectives on the page are banal. But he does. And he sounds very self-confident, a deep and strong voice. A person who could put other persons at ease.

No Double-Crostic today, and the crossword puzzle was a bitch.

1 March—Monday

I went to the phone a few minutes ago. Put my finger in and out of the 8 hole, then dialed NERVOUS and let a recording tell me the time. My watch was two minutes fast. I always keep it two minutes fast. I dialed NERVOUS because I am.

I think I could come with Bill. I think if I lay back and closed my eyes while he ate me, and let my mind wander as it does when I touch myself beneath the blankets, I think I could come. If I were sure that he would be content with that. His ad gives that impression.

Perhaps he would expect to fuck me afterwards. I would not want that, and if I had to worry about the possibility it would keep me from relaxing, and thus from coming. It would be necessary to get everything straightened out beforehand.

I'll buy *Screw* the day after tomorrow. A promise to myself—or a promise of Arlene to Jennifer: If his ad is still running, I will call him.

2 March—Tuesday

I will have to find out just what is involved in getting a Post Office box. There are things I would like to order from advertisements in *Screw*. Various books and pictures. Also some sex devices. Dildoes and vibrators. I don't know if I would enjoy them or not but I would like to find out.

They sell them on Times Square, but even if I dared walk into one of those stores I could not possibly purchase a rubber cock for myself. I don't even apologize for my reticence. How many women, however liberated, could do this?

I won't order things through the mail with my own name, or to this address. I could take a Post Office box in the name of Jennifer Starr. And I could pay for my orders with money orders in the name of J. Starr, and whoever filled my order would not even know I was a woman.

Do you need identification to get a Post Office box?

3 March—Wednesday

His ad appeared in *Screw* again. There are also other ads that interest me. Couples who want to meet single girls. Other things. But Bill's is the only ad I can imagine myself answering.

I stalled all night, dialed his number a few minutes ago. Was so relieved when it was busy. It's getting late now, and I can no doubt convince myself that it's too late to disturb him.

Perhaps he's taken the phone off the hook. Perhaps as I type these lines his tongue is nibbling at a pink young clit.

I swear I'll call him tomorrow.

4 March—Thursday

Came right home from the office and called him immediately, fully prepared to talk to him. I won't tell him my name or address or phone number. He won't be able to see me. There is nothing to be afraid of and I am not afraid.

Called him at a quarter to six and every fifteen minutes since then and it's almost midnight and I'm giving up. The bastard isn't home.

5 March—Friday

I just finished talking to Bill. I don't drink, but if there were liquor in the apartment I would have a drink right now. It's late and I'm sure the liquor stores are closed.

I don't really need it anyway.

I want to put down the conversation as well as I can remember it before it slips away. I called every fifteen minutes from the time I got home. This time the line was constantly busy. I'm sure he took it off the hook. I kept calling because I knew sooner or later his guest would leave and he would hang up the phone. Unless she stayed all night.

Around eleven I got through.

Bill: Hello.

Me: Hello. Is this Bill?

Bill: Yes, it is. I was hoping you'd call.

Me: But you don't, I'm not someone you know.

Bill: I was still hoping you'd call.

Me: I called a few days ago. But I couldn't talk. I sat there and couldn't talk and finally hung up.

Bill: Happens a lot of the time. Do you feel like talking now?

Me: I think so.

Bill: It's a little scary, isn't it? The unreality of two voices coming at each other over the wires. Why don't you tell me a little about yourself?

Me: Like what?

Bill: Anything.

Me: Uh. Let me think. My name is Jennifer and I live in Manhattan. I'm single. I live alone. I'm twenty-six years old. I—

Bill: What's your sign? Me: Uh, Virgo.

Bill: I'm Leo, Scorpio rising, moon in Pisces.

Me: I don't know the rising and moon part, just the sun sign. I don't pay much attention to it. I used to read my horoscope in the Post but I usually don't bother.

Bill: Uh-huh.

Me: I'm five foot seven and weigh one-twenty-eight. I have dark hair and brown eyes. I'm not beautiful but I'm not ugly; I don't think. I wear glasses for reading. My skin is good. I never had pimples or blackheads. I'm clever but no one knows it because I'm so timid. I suppose I'm the shyest person in the world. For days I kept dialing the first six digits of your phone number and hanging up. Or I picked up the phone to call you and called the time bureau instead. I do Double-Crostics in half an hour.

Bill: In pen?

Me: Pencil.

Bill: Show-offs use a pen. I live on 35th Street near Fifth. Would you like to come over?

Me: You mean now?

Bill: Sure.

Me: No.

Bill: Okay.

Me: I would like to but I can't. I'm too nervous. I have to, I would want to, know in advance just what would happen. And I can't even say what I want because of

my nervousness. I'm shaking. I'm looking at my hand right now and the fingers are trembling.

Bill: Would you like to give me your number and I'll call you back in a few minutes?

Me: No. I don't want anyone to have my number.

Bill: Would you like to call me, then?

Me: I would tense up and not call. No. This is important to me. Oh, God, I'm surprised you put up with this hysteria instead of just hanging up. Just give me a minute. I want to get a cigarette.

Bill: Take all the time you want.

Me: Hello?

Bill: I'm still here, Jennifer. Is it Jennifer or Jennie?

Me: Jennifer.

Bill: You sound more relaxed, Jennifer.

Me: I am, a little. Just let me plunge in and say this. I am a passionate person. I am, I am. But I cannot let go. When I am with someone I freeze. Your ad. Something about it gives me hope. Oh, I don't know. If I could believe you, trust you.

Bill: All I want is whatever you want, Jennifer.

Me: Just to be—I can't say it. Why can't I say it?

Bill: Take your time.

Me: To be eaten. There. I said it. To lie back and drift off and be eaten. But nothing else. And knowing you wouldn't want anything else and wouldn't be disappointed.

Bill: Fair enough.

Me: And that I could walk out afterward and never see you again if I didn't want to. And that you wouldn't try to find out where I work or where I live or my phone number. That you won't even ask those questions.

Bill: Understood.

Me: You must think I'm crazy.

Bill: No.

Me: You ought to. I know I'm crazy. Being so obsessed with secrecy when there's no one to keep secrets from. No one knows me. No one knows who I am.

Bill: We all have our hangups, Jennifer.

Me: Including you?

Bill: Christ, yes.

Me: I guess I trust you.

Bill: Good.

Me: I would like to see you.

Bill: When?

Me: Not tonight.

Bill: All right.

Me: I'm too keyed up and it wouldn't be good. And it's late. I have to get to work in the morning.

Bill: You work Saturdays?

Me: Oh, tomorrow's Saturday. No, no, I don't. But even so. I couldn't come tonight.

Bill: Let's set a date, then.

Me: Sometime tomorrow?

Bill: I'm afraid I'm going to be busy tomorrow. Are you free Sunday?

Me: I'm always free Sunday.

Bill: As soon as you finish the Double-Croctic.

Me: In pencil.

Bill: Absolutely, Sunday afternoon?

Me: I, oh, yes. Sunday afternoon. Around two o'clock?

Bill: That's perfect. Do you want to take down the address? 98 East 35th Street. That's between Fifth and Madison. It's apartment 3-J. The last name is Cubbins. William Cubbins, known to the world as Bill.

Me: Jennifer Starr.

Bill: One "R" or two?

Me: Two.

Bill: That's a beautiful name. Jennifer Starr. I think it fits you. Two o'clock. And if something comes up—

Me: I know. *If you can't come, call.*

I looked him up in the phone book. Cubbins, Wm, 98 East 35th Street, 868-9413. I don't think I'll be able to sleep tonight. But I hardly ever have trouble sleeping. Even when I'm like this. I get into a fantasy and the orgasm works like a Nytol commercial.

Sunday afternoon. I shall bathe just before I leave the house. And soap my pussy until it is squeaky clean. And perfume myself. I'll buy perfume tomorrow. Something musky. And dress as prettily as possible.

Should I get my hair done tomorrow? Not much to be done with it. It's long and straight and suits me this way.

I can't write any more now.

6 March—Saturday

All Saturdays are long but none so long as this. I should have gone to him last night. I think I knew as much the minute I hung up the phone. I should have gone to him directly to save myself this waiting.

I play our scene tomorrow over and over in my mind, writing dialogue for both of us. For Bill Cubbins and Jennifer Starr.

Time rushes and crawls, all at once. Tomorrow's entry should be more gripping than today's.

7 March—Sunday

"Hello."

"Bill, this is Jennifer."

"So it is."

"I don't know what to say."

"No problem."

"I feel terrible."

"Don't be silly. Things happen. I'm glad you called, though. I'm about ready to have dinner and I didn't want to go out and miss your call."

"I don't know what to say. I was all ready and I couldn't leave the house. I couldn't bring myself to do it. And I felt so embarrassed and guilty I couldn't call you. And that made me feel worse, the thought of you sitting and waiting and wasting your day waiting, and finally I had to call. I'll promise that you'll never hear from me again."

"Don't do that. Call anytime you want. Even just to talk. I'd rather you do that than disappear on me completely."

"You're a strange man."

"No argument there. Your average run-of-the-mill Nicholas Normal doesn't advertise in *Screw*."

"And Nellie Normal doesn't answer ads in *Screw*."

"Not as a general rule. There's nothing wrong with being a little weird. The thing is being able to live with your weirdness."

"I feel so guilty."

"Well, you've got every right. I turned down a date waiting for you."

"That's what I was afraid of."

"Nothing to worry about. You're sorry you didn't come over, aren't you?"

"Of course. I was sorry yesterday that I didn't see you Friday night. I always miss my chance and I'm always sorry afterward."

"You could come over now."

"I don't think I can, Bill. I'm afraid to say yes because I couldn't stand myself if I stood you up again, and I'm afraid that's what would happen."

"Well, maybe some other time."

"Maybe. I don't know. What are you going to do now?"

"Have dinner."

"I mean after that. You had the expectation of having sex with me and then you didn't get to. You must be, I don't know."

"Frustrated? A little."

"Will you call someone else?"

"I don't think so. Not tonight. I'll probably just jerk off."

"Are you joking?"

"No. Why?"

"Will you really do it?"

"Probably. Why?"

"Do you often?"

"Not often. I used to. Now I usually have something better to do, but if I'm in the mood and there's no one handy. Don't you ever do it?"

"Every night."

"Then—"

"Do it now."

"Huh?"

"Do it now. Over the phone. Do it and talk to me while you're doing it. Tell me what you're doing, what you're thinking about. How it feels."

"Sure."

"God. All at once I'm so hot. So fucking hot. The strangest thing. Tell me what you're doing. Are you naked? Do you have a hard on? Is it big and hard? Are you touching it? Tell me, tell me."

The most extraordinary thing. I was completely out of myself. He told me everything he was doing. He said he had my image in his mind as he played with himself. He said he could feel my lips around the end of his cock. He told me how his excitement was peaking, and when he was going to come, and he moaned and cried out when he came.

I came without touching myself. A full and honest orgasm seconds after his.

He enjoyed all this. Said it was freaky and kinky and he liked it. Got real pleasure out of the scene that he would not have gotten masturbating by himself. But we didn't talk much afterward. I was drained, couldn't talk. Went and soaked mindlessly in the tub. Dried off, sat down, typed this.

I'm to call him tomorrow. There are things we can do, he says. Things that will thrill me without frightening me. Things that will let me remain an outsider. His word for it.

Why it worked, maybe: I was watching him jerk off. And I was invisible. A fantasy realized.

For the first time it seems faintly possible that I am perhaps gradually and tentatively becoming Jennifer.

8 March—Monday

I called him after work. He told me things about myself that I probably knew before. That I do not want to have my flesh touched because I do not want to have myself touched. To have myself *known*.

Knowledge. Adam knew Eve. I do not wish to be known, in the usual or in the biblical sense. (And the point is that both meanings of the word are identical. To fuck is to know, to be fucked is to be known. I am secret and invisible and not to be fucked.)

I had been thrilled yesterday, hadn't I? Yes, I said, of course. His acts thrilled me, didn't they? And I could enjoy them because I was not a participant in them, couldn't I?

Yes, of course.

He asked if I would like to watch him in person. If I would like to see him naked. He would enjoy masturbating in front of me. He will not touch me, will demand nothing from me. I can watch. I can touch myself or not, as I please.

It is a quarter after nine now. We arranged that I would come over to his place at ten o'clock. I went out to dinner and bought a bottle of Scotch on the way home. Filled a water glass half with whiskey and half with water. I've been sipping it. It's almost gone now.

I don't much like the taste. Maybe it would be better with bottled spring water. The tap water is terrible and I can taste it through the whiskey. I ought to use bottled water all the time. The tap water makes awful coffee. It seems irksome, though; to have to pay for water when you can get it free from the tap.

If the whiskey affected me at all, I haven't noticed it yet. I'm not nervous but wasn't nervous before. Excited but not nervous. I trust him. I trusted him before but not down inside as I do now. I feel safe with him because I truly know now that it is my response that turns him on, my enthusiasm and excitement that delights him.

Time to end this and go. I should have something very interesting to write tomorrow. I'm almost afraid to find out what he's like in person. I have a picture of him, vague in definition but real to me. Suppose his appearance turns me off? What then?

A cover, I guess, for my real reservation: Suppose *my* appearance turns *him* off? What then?

9 March—Tuesday

We did not turn each other off.

It's been raining all afternoon and evening. There was still snow at the curbs from the other day, and the rain at least is washing it all away. But it's been a gloomy day and it's a gloomy night.

I had a drink tonight when I got home from the office. I was right—it tastes much better with bottled water. I picked up a jug of Great Bear water. It was cheap enough, really. I made coffee a little while ago and the difference was remarkable.

I don't think one drink a day when I get home from work will do me any harm. Or any good either, probably, but it seems a nice and civilized custom. I'm sure I'm in no danger of becoming a real drinker. I don't get that kind of a kick out of it.

10 March—Wednesday

We did not turn each other off.

I believe I started yesterday's entry with that sentence, and then I lost the handle and started bitching about the weather. It's better to do that, though, than to skip a day entirely. I have to make this diary an absolute part of the routine or it will become easy to rationalize skipping first a day and then two days and then abandoning it entirely. I must at least put something down, if I do nothing more than type the notation that I am in no mood to write anything. Or else this diary will fail its purpose.

Whatever its purpose is.

And whatever good it may be doing.

Something is doing good. Or doing harm. Something is either making my life improve or opening the gates to ruin. I am on either the right or the wrong track, and while I am none too confident which it is, or confident at one time but not consistently, I still think...

Oh, hell. Better to be on a track, for better or for worse, than to live out one's life on a siding. Better twenty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay. Better to have failed one's Wassermann test than never to have loved at all. Better to be rich and healthy than to be poor and sick. Better bitter batter butter biter bit.

Get down to it, dammit.

Things Bill is not: handsome, dynamic, charismatic. Things he is also not: disquieting, upsetting, nervous-making.

Things he is: pleasant in looks, voice, manner. Better-looking clad than unclad, slightly potty at the belly, skin white with New York pallor. The concentration on appearance is because one expects dramatic beauty, mentally endows him with these features on the basis of a telephonic relationship. It was not that I was disappointed. Adjusted at once to the new reality.

And reality is the key word here. Yes, definitely. Eyes on him as he drew the door ajar, welcoming smile on his face, eyes blue and bright and alert, and he became real. Scary, that. Talking to him while seeing him, hearing him directly with no phone wires between us.

His eyes are his best feature, a benefit unexpected; the fantasy I'd evolved to complement the telephone voice had less reassuring orbs.

But the scariness of reality. We were together in his apartment and a drama was to be enacted, and unlike my midnight finger-thoughts I could not write this script. I could play a part in it, but only one of two parts, and one I'd have to improvise. And yet my part was essentially minor in certain ways. He had to direct this production, but it would fail unless he directed it along my lines, and I could not tell him my requirements; he had to intuit them.

And did so perfectly.

I want to reconstruct this and get it right. I'm tempted to leave it for tomorrow but each day the experience slips further into past time. The edges of memory are already slightly blurred. I wanted to type it out Monday night when I got home. It was late, and sounds travel in this building, and too I had already typed out one entry for Monday and one a day ought to be a maximum as well as a minimum. (*Arlene's Rules for Diarists*, Ch. 3.)

Sat in an Eames chair in his apartment, a single very large studio room furnished as tastefully as possible considering its *Playboy* influence. Cunning lamps, travel posters, a large white fake fur rug. A king-size water bed, electrically heated to body temperature and swaddled in royal blue satin sheets.

He sat on a couch across from me. I complimented the apartment. He said it looked like what it was, a place to fuck in. It lacked subtlety, he said, but he was interested more in sex than subtlety.

And began talking sex. Eased in with brief mention of his marriage, a bad one which dragged on for the sake of the children, then ended when he couldn't take any more of it. An affair which almost led to marriage on the rebound, then broke off when he discovered that what he wanted, at least for the time being, was extreme sexual variety. His sex life had atrophied during his marriage.

"I found I can make women happy, turn them on, thrill them. Something within me needs to do this. I can recognize it as neurotic, a hangup. Overcompensation for a virility anxiety. Need for the admiration of females. Granted, all of that. So I live out my anxieties, act them out, and the result is that I have a life style I can groove on. Getting older, of course, and fighting it the way every man fights entering his forties. Again, granted—but by God I'm having fun."

Then talked about a woman he had seen recently. Described her physically, especially the sexual details. "She had a plump cunt. A skinny girl, almost bony, but a lot of meat on the pubic mound. And abundance of pubic hair, and very silky..."

I didn't have to say anything. I could simply listen. He described a sexual encounter in detail, using all the right words, talking in very straightforward and matter-of-fact fashion. Just the right attitude for him to take, just the right way for him to have gone about it.

Called me *Jennifer* throughout. Does he think that's my name? If not, he's perfectly willing to go along with my game. Not even a hint that he knows my name is something else.

More conversation along those lines. Then, patting the front of his pants familiarly, "You know, this conversation is kind of getting to me. As a matter of fact, I think I'm getting the beginnings of a hard on."

He looks at me. I meet his eyes, avert mine, then meet them again. Wanting to reply, feeling called upon to reply, but can't form the words.

"In fact, I think this conversation is getting both of us worked up. You're getting hot yourself, aren't you?"

Of course I'm hot, but can't say so. I do manage a nod.

Cunt throbbing and can't even say so.

"And it's more than the conversation. You're getting me hot, Jennifer." Touching himself more openly. "You're a very exciting woman. Because you're passionate and untouchable at once, and I'm simultaneously touching you and not touching you. You have beautiful skin. Are you the same perfect complexion all over? On your legs? Your ass? Your tits? Is your cunt hair the same color as the hair on your head?"

All so casual, so relaxed, and yet all so intense. Talking about his cock and its rigidity. Talking about my heat and my flesh, the heat of my flesh, the delicious heat of my flesh. Standing up, unbuttoning his shirt, taking it neatly off, kicking off deerskin slippers, unbelting his slacks and letting them drop to the floor.

No underwear. A shock because I had expected underwear and instead the pants fell abruptly and I was confronted with the sight of his erect penis. Fully erect, thrusting upward, engorged with blood.

I am at all times such a confusion of contradictory wants. I ached to fall on my knees in front of him and suck that magnificent cock. Ached alternately to have him grab me, strip me, rape me violently.

And felt an unbearable tension at the back of my neck from fear that he might expect the first or attempt the second. How can such passion and such fear coexist? How can I want what I dread and dread what I want, and experience both emotions to so great an extent?

He sat down. Talked about how he could feel my eyes on his cock. Wrapped his hand around the base of his cock and moved it up and down as if it were my cunt moving up and down around him, and he said that his hand was my cunt in his mind, and I watched him, stared wet-eyed at him, and my cunt felt—felt—as if that monster cock was sliding in and out of me, in and out, in and out.

"I want to see you naked, Jennifer. I want to look at your body while I come."

I got undressed. Very timid but did it anyway. Fear was that I would disappoint him. Fear that he would look at me naked and see not Jennifer but Arlene. Watched his cock while I stripped, not only out of fascination with it but from inability to meet his eyes. Almost afraid to watch the penis, either; afraid that the cock would droop when my body revealed its Arlene self to him.

But it didn't, and when I was quite naked I raised my eyes to meet his. Read excitement, joy in them. And stood and then sat down again while he worked his hand on his cock and told me how hot it made him to see my body. Talked about all the parts of me. How beautiful I was. How he could imagine his hands on my

breasts, his mouth on them. How he would like to fuck me between my breasts and come all over my neck. How he would eat my cunt, how he would lick it and suck it.

(Heating me again to write this. Too much detail—I am indulging myself, heating myself purposely. I shall enjoy this again tonight in memory. I did last night. Unable to type it, I acted it out in bed and tore a sweet coming out of myself.)

“Show me yourself. Open up your cunt for me. Play with yourself. How hot you are. Play with yourself, I want to see you come.”

And I did all of these things. Staring at his cock, his beautiful cock, adoring it with my eyes, tasting it in all the parts of myself, I did what he wanted. Just as I felt it coming on, his muscles went rigid and he sobbed, and his seed jetted forth from him. Shimmering silver arcs like a leaping salmon.

How beautiful my coming, how complete, how divine. I reenacted it last night and will do so again tonight, but the memories are shadows of the event.

Edited shadows at that, as I rearrange the lighting to cast them where I wish. Monday his seed spawned upon the rug a few feet from me. Last night it took wings and splashed my body in fantasy. And last night that entire interlude was followed by true coupling, multiorgasmic fucking and sucking that endured for hours.

When in fact the aftermath was something quite different, and less the stuff that dreams (mine, anyway) are apt to be made of.

11 March—Thursday

I rented a Post Office box today in the name of Jennifer Starr.

You don't need identification to do this. You have to give a name and address, that's all. I gave an address on East 83rd Street. I don't even know that there's a building with that number. They don't check these things. It's just something for their records.

One of the girls at the office today was talking about her husband. There was nothing suggestive in the conversation but for one reason or another I got the impression that the two of them, she and her husband, had recently had sex together. Last night or this morning before she left for the office. And I found myself imagining the two of them in bed together. I had them doing rather unusual things in my mind. Got very excited at the image. Not I-want-to-masturbate excited. Just I've-got-a-secret-thought excited.

I have been doing this sort of thing more and more lately. Walking down the street and noticing people. Looking at men, trying not to stare at their crotches, and wondering what their cocks are like. The shape of them, the size of them, whether they are circumcised.

Bill is circumcised. Gary was not.

Interesting block—I cannot remember what Gary's cock looked like.

After we both came Monday night, Bill handled things very well. (As he had handled things well before, in all senses of the phrase.) Just slumped in his seat exhausted at first, but then sucked in a deep breath and got to his feet. Told me very convincingly that I was beautiful and desirable and exciting, and that I had brought him great pleasure, and that he wanted to take a quick shower and would be back in a moment. Gathered up his clothes and went into the bathroom.

Sat wondering what sort of cue this was for me. Thought at first I ought to have the consideration to be gone when he returned, and that this might be his intention, a way to give me a convenient exit. Decided no, something in his tone that suggested he expected me to be there when he emerged. But naked or with clothes on?

I got dressed. Smoked a cigarette and waited while he showered quickly. He emerged wearing his clothes, which made me glad I had put mine on.

He made drinks and we talked. Mostly he talked. Essence was that he had had a good time, that my unique qualities more than compensated for the fact that we did not touch each other, that he could use my body only from a distance.

He told me things about me. That I am a voyeur. A Peeping Jennifer. That I can fight it or indulge it, and that if I fight it it will always be there, but that if I indulge it it may lead somewhere, and even if it doesn't I'll have a good time on the way.

I admitted a few things. Desire to look at movies and pictures. Desire to watch people screw.

"I can help you, Jennifer."

Afraid to believe it, but I think perhaps he can. Help or not, he can give me things I need now. Or things I think I need.

He has pictures. He has films and a projector. And he hinted at other things. Hard to be sure what he meant, but the impression was that I might actually be able to watch people together. That he could arrange it.

Just before leaving I turned to him, unguarded. (I do not have to guard myself with him. Of this I am quite certain. My pleasure is his. His hangup, his neurosis, he calls it, but I call it one healthier by far than my own.)

Turned to him. "But won't you feel cheated? Wasting your time in kids' games with me? When you could be having a fuller thing with some other girl?"

"Were you excited tonight, Jennifer? And fulfilled?" "Yes."

"And was I?" Hesitation on my part.

"Jennifer, you saw my passion. And my culmination. I rarely get as much pleasure fucking." Does this mean that he's an exhibitionist? He must be, to an extent. My observation thrilled him. Not merely my passion, not merely my presence, but that he was doing this solitary thing for a receptive audience. I'm seeing him Saturday afternoon. Can't wait.

12 March—Friday

Went to another of the Barrow Street concerts tonight. Thought the man with the beard might be there. I wonder if I did or didn't hope he would try to pick me up.

Moot point. He wasn't there.

An all-Chopin program tonight. A female pianist, very attractive.

Attractive to me?

Jennifer has always been bisexual, although sometimes she has to be forced into it. I know I get hot reading lesbian scenes in books, and would like to watch two of them together sometime.

I've often thought I could relax with a girl as I cannot with a man. Worried about being gay, a lesbian. I don't honestly think I am. Or could be. I don't honestly

think I could shed with a girl any of the inhibitions and reserve I cannot shed with men.

I have no friends, male or female. And have never had a close friend of either sex. If my withdrawal was just from men I might believe it of myself, but it has been from men and women equally. I keep myself a secret from both, and feel as uncomfortable with either.

The bisexual voyeur. Attracted to both sexes, attracted to anything sexual, and desiring only to watch.

I would find myself less impossible to believe if I encountered myself in a psychiatrist's casebook than I do facing myself in real life.

Real life?

Whatever the hell *that* means.

13 March—Saturday

I'll have to write about Bill tomorrow because I haven't seen him yet today. It was one-fifteen the last time I looked at a clock and I'm supposed to go over there about three or three-thirty. I just got back from shopping, picking up a few odds and ends, and there's nothing I feel like reading so I thought I would do the day's diary-keeping, get it out of the way now.

Oh, I am so full of shit.

Lying to a diary is contemptible. Why is it harder to put on paper the truths which one already recognizes? Because print has a more permanent quality than thought. Because it is somehow more concrete, less ephemeral.

I am typing because I do not want to type after I get back from Bill's place. After having decided that it is important to lend immediacy to these entries by recording experiences as soon as possible, I am copping out by making today's entry in advance. My own rules—one entry a day, no more and no less, will then make it impossible for me to type anything more later on.

But it is true that I do have the desire to write now, and maybe that's a real part of it. I left something out last night. The reflections on lesbianism were prompted by more than the faint appeal of the girl who played Chopin.

I believe a lesbian tried to pick me up.

I am unsure of this, and prefer to believe that my own uncertainty about the precise circumstances of the perhaps-pickup played a part in my failing to mention it. I think that's probably true.

Let it be said—one of the reasons for this diary, one of the very important reasons for making these entries, is because I occasionally fear madness. Fear a particular form of madness. Fear that I will reach a point where I will have trouble separating fact from fiction, fantasy from reality. I have had this thought before, and have possibly put it on paper before. I can't remember. But it is a real fear, and thus to one person, to Smith-Corona Electra 110, I must be true.

Perhaps a conversation last night was only an attempted pickup in my mind. But it still belongs here, with the preface that it may have been innocent.

Woman about thirty-five, my height, a little heavier. Can't remember what she was wearing. Dark hair in a pony tail. Strong features. Beak of a nose. Walked alongside me on the way from the hall.

Said I looked familiar. Had I gone to Barnard? No, I said. Brooklyn College, I said. Wondered, as she would have been at least eight years ahead of me in school, and did I look that old to her that I might have been her classmate? Answered my unvoiced question—she was an instructor at Barnard, thought I might have been in a class of hers. “But I knew the minute you spoke you weren’t the girl I remembered. You’re prettier, and you have a much better speaking voice. I suppose a lot of people comment on your voice.”

No one had ever said anything about my voice.

Did I have time for a cup of coffee, or was my husband waiting for me? Not married, I said. But I had to help my mother and was already later than I’d planned. Did I live at home? I said I did.

More chat, but nothing vital. The fact that I lived at home seemed to lessen her interest, although this, too, may have been my imagination. Maybe she simply didn’t believe me, and was turned off by my lack of interest.

I’m positive she was a dyke. And I *was* easier with her than I would have been having the same conversation with a man. But I can explain that. I was naive. Didn’t think there was any sexual overture in her conversation at first. (Does seem unmistakable in retrospect.) In any conversation with a man I am aware of sexual interest on his part and guard against it. I am less inclined to suspect it from a woman. And thus was more open to talk with her, even saying where I went to school and that I was unmarried.

Complimenting me on my voice. Did she learn that one herself or read it somewhere? A dead giveaway. No one has ever said anything about my voice.

If she’s a dyke (and I’m beginning to think it matters less and less) it’s interesting she tried to pick me up. No one ever did before. And unless I am imagining it (which is possible) more men are looking at me on the streets.

Perhaps I’m getting prettier.

Perhaps something shows in me. In my eyes, in my walk, in my face. The excitement of Monday night, and the excitement I hope will happen this afternoon.

I have to end this and get over there. It’s a shame, not that I have to go because I am anxious to, trembling with excitement about it. But because this is one of those times when I am really enjoying this diary-keeping. I could go on typing for hours.

Think of the paper Bill is saving me.

14 March—Sunday

Nothing happened today.

Much happened yesterday.

I feel on the threshold of so many things. I sat around not typing this all day and all night, alternating between joy and sorrow. Perched precariously on something high, with joy on one side and sorrow on the other, and afraid to fall in either direction. Read sections of the *Times* I normally discard on the way home from the newsstand. Read about a species of bird facing extinction and found myself weeping. Read some story of heroism, don’t even remember it, and got weepy with joy at the beauty of humanity.

I'm in no condition to write about yesterday. Chalk up this Sunday as a fat zero. A day at the office should make me a little saner, or flip me out altogether, and I'll get all of this together tomorrow night when I get home.

15 March—Monday

All day at the office I sat around wanting to be home so I could type this. And Mr. Karlman had to pick tonight to keep me late. I wanted to invent an excuse but couldn't bring myself to do it. I can't blame him. The work runs this way, with sudden peak times when everything had to go out at once. Sometimes during the day I sit around for hours with virtually nothing to do, and sometimes it's necessary for me to work late. They're very good about overtime pay, and he always pays for my dinner, too.

This time we worked right through instead of ordering sandwiches from Smiler's. We finished at ten and he insisted on taking me out for dinner. I really didn't want that. I tried to get out of it but there was no way. It would have been impossibly rude.

I may leave that job.

Isn't that stupid? Because he was decent enough to take me out for a good dinner?

We went to an Italian place in the Village. The food was very good. I had...

Oh, Christ, the hell with what we had for dinner. I got the impression he wanted to go on the make but didn't believe he had a chance. I tried to encourage him in this belief by being boring. Which comes naturally. He didn't go on the make but evidently decided that boring girls make good listeners and talked endlessly about his problems. I was expecting intimate revelations, something tragic like Mrs. Karlman won't blow him. But it was mostly crap about business and sometimes he wonders if it's worth it all, because in a sense he's successful and secure, but when he was in college he wanted to be a poet, and what happened to that poet's soul that once beat in his breast?

Not that corny, the phrasing, but it might as well have been.

At least I had the presence to fake a phone call to my nonexistent girl friend, so I didn't have to take a cab home this time. He dropped me around the corner, and I walked here after his car pulled away. Mood he was in, he'd have absolutely insisted on driving me clear to Brooklyn, and that would have been too much of a hassle altogether on a night like this.

Just don't have the strength to type this. Quick summary of the afternoon with Bill—we looked at dirty pictures, he gave me a dildo for a present, and we watched each other masturbate.

Maybe I'll feel like rendering the unabridged edition tomorrow night.

16 March—Tuesday

I almost bought a plant today.

Walking home past a florist I pass every day and I noticed the plants and flowers. Tubs of daffodils. Looked at them and thought that something like that would brighten the apartment.

Was going to get daffodils, a bunch of them, and then I thought it might be nice to have a plant, water it every day, watch the new growth appear. Just a fifty-cent

philodendron, something like that. Nothing grand. I wouldn't feel equal to one of those magnificent split-leaf jobs.

Then I caught myself. Remembered something I read, a case of a man who was unable to relate to people and his psychiatrist started him off small, had him grow a sweet potato vine, then had him get a pet turtle, the idea being that he could eventually work his way up to human friends.

Have to keep fighting that kind of impulse. I do not want anything in this apartment for which I will have to be responsible. Don't want anything that needs taking care of. Enough trouble taking care of Arlene.

Krause the Mouse.

Why?

Not sure.

Too many ways to interpret it. Don't think I want to bother, either.

Don't want to bother writing about the day with Bill, either. Wonderful time, wonderful, and I felt wonderful afterward, felt wonderful all day yesterday, too, and would have written about it last night if I hadn't had to work late for Karlman the Cocksucker but too tired to type so I just summarized it.

Don't feel wonderful now. Depressed. Down. Don't know why.

17 March—Wednesday

Still depressed.

Down in the dumps all day and God knows why. Arlene doesn't know why.

Does Jennifer know why?

Maybe there is no Jennifer.

I can't get out of this fucking mood.

I didn't even feel like buying *Screw* after work today. But I bought it anyway because I thought it might shake my mood for me. Started to go up to Times Square as usual and decided this was foolish. Walked a block to a newsstand I don't usually pass and bought it and a copy of the *Post*. The news dealer wasn't blind and somehow I didn't care. I don't know if this is progress or just that I was too down in the dumps to give a damn one way or the other.

Put the sex paper inside the other paper and came home and tried to read the articles, but they just seemed cheap and obscene. Read the ads and had even more of a down from them. Thinking that all these people are perverts and I'm a worse pervert than they are for wanting to do the things they're actually doing.

And for not being able to do them.

And I've had that fucking Post Office box for a week and not done anything with it, and I guess I won't, because a couple of times I have started to order things and always copped out, and a couple of times I have tried to answer ads besides Bill's, and chickened out, and I'm beginning to think that I'll never do the things I want to do, and that maybe I don't want to do them in the first place, and I don't know where I am tonight.

I just got up from the typewriter and called Bill. The line was busy. I guess that means he has a girl over there and is sucking her or fucking her or playing some desperate little game with her. Probably getting her hot by telling her about Jennifer Starr, the crazy pervert who comes over once a week to watch him jerk off.

It doesn't matter to me and he can say whatever he wants because there is no Jennifer Starr. All there is is Krause the Mouse and maybe she doesn't exist either.

I don't even think it does any good to put all this crap on paper. I had a drink when I came home and it was scary how good it tasted. I'm going to have one or two more. In fact I might even get good and loaded, and why not, because no one in the world gives a fuck.

18 March—Thursday

"Bill? This is Jennifer."

"Hello."

"Hello. I just felt like calling."

"Well, how's everything?"

"Uh, fine."

"Glad to hear it."

"Is there someone there? That you can't talk?"

"No, I'm alone."

"You sounded different,"

"You sound different yourself. Is something the matter?"

"I don't know."

"Huh?"

"I thought, oh, that maybe I would come over tonight. If you weren't busy."

"I don't know if that would be a good idea."

"Oh."

"Today is what? Thursday? We'll be seeing each other Saturday."

"I just thought, oh, it's not important."

"Is something wrong, Jennifer?"

"No, nothing's wrong."

"Then I'll see you Saturday."

"Maybe I'll be busy."

"I hope not. I'll look forward to it. Look, I'll explain some things Saturday."

"What do you mean?"

"Saturday, okay?"

"I guess so."

No comment no comment no comment no comment no comment no comment...

19 March—Friday

I guess it went away, whatever it was.

I think I know what it was.

I was starting to play games with myself. I was starting to think Bill was something other than what he is. I must have known all along I was in danger of doing this. I was making him a central figure and that is dangerous because he does not want to get involved with me and I honestly do not dare get involved with him or anybody else. I was selling myself something and it did not go down well and it made me sick.

I even got sort of drunk the night before last. And wanted to get drunk last night, after that telephone call, but I guess I knew better. Because that doesn't solve anything.

I wrote half a dozen letters tonight. All of them signed Jennifer Starr, and all of them with my Post Office box as my return address.
To Screw advertisers.

Dear So-and-so (s):

I am an attractive young woman in her early twenties with a problem. One which will either turn you off or turn you on, and you may be the judge of that. For a variety of reasons, I am incapable of having a genuine sexual relationship. I am unwilling to touch or be touched but get a tremendous thrill out of watching the sexual activity of others. I will undress and excite myself while watching but will not otherwise participate. If my kinky tastes interest you, perhaps we can get something going. But I would not want to get involved unless it is understood that my privacy will be respected, and that you will not be put off by my refusing to join in and will make no attempt to change my mind.

If at all interested, reply with phone number and tell me what you're all about. Photo appreciated but not necessary. This isn't a gimmick, and I'm a little nervous about putting this in the mail, but I feel I have to.

Sincerely, Jennifer Starr

"A little nervous" indeed. I'm terrified, and not at all certain I'll mail the letters. Or check my Post Office box for replies. Or call any of the people who reply, assuming anyone does. Or go through with any of it.

Two of the letters are to single men looking to swing with women or couples. Ads similar to Bill's, but the singleminded sincerity of pleasing the woman isn't there, or doesn't come through as strongly. One's a bisexual male. Another is a bored housewife, or so she describes herself, who wants to swing with another woman. And the last two are couples who want threesomes with single girls.

I can't offhand imagine why any of them would be interested in having me around, but it's possible.

Main thing—it's something to do. It's something to get my sex life (such as it is) headed in a direction that is independent of Bill.

I want very much to see him tomorrow, and I will see him tomorrow, but I can't focus everything on him. I think that's what he was trying to tell me over the phone. Just as he cannot attempt to get in touch with me, I can't get in the habit of feeling I can call him whenever I'm in the mood. I'm sure that's what he was telling me, but of course I was too depressed to hear it in his words.

But the thing is that unless I start striking out on my own (and I have the horrible feeling I'll just be striking out in the baseball sense of the term) I'll tend to call him every time I get depressed, or at least feel like calling him whenever I get depressed, and that would be the worst possible thing to do.

Bill and I can be of use to each other. That's coldblooded, put that way, but it's true. And it's all there is. We can do each other some good, provide each other with some pleasure.

I never provided anybody with any real pleasure before. There's joy in that. Not as much joy, I must though admit, as in receiving pleasure from somebody.

And no one ever gave me pleasure before.

But all we can be is of use to each other, is pleasure for one another. That is enough, but trying to make it more will ruin what it is.

The stupid fantasies I have.

Oh, put it down, girl, put it down. You have been thinking it and ought not hide it from your typewriter. It says nothing you have not said to yourself.

Fantasies of love and marriage. (Aches me to type the words. Hurts, hurts, hurts!) Fantasies of getting caught up in each other, of him being the teacher and I the pupil and he gradually works on my neuroses and delivers me at last to the Promised Land of fucking-and-loving-it.

Dreams.

These are dreams I must avoid. Or must dream them as I dream Jennifer's rougher fantasies, her sadomasochistic trips which would turn me off in anything other than fantasy. (Or would they? Let us say for now merely that I much prefer to think so.) By using these fantasies as fantasies I can defuse them. If it lends agility to my under-the-cover finger fucks to think of Bill as a potential husband, to dream fucking him and marrying him, let me do so—but let me not forget that it is fantasy and only fantasy, evaporating with the morning mist.

I'm going to that concert, and if that dyke is there I'm going to let her buy me coffee. And tomorrow I'll see Bill before I write anything and my diary entry will be about what happens with him.

And I'll mail those letters on the way to the concert tonight.

And I'll brush my teeth before I go to bed, and say my prayers, and wash behind my ears, and lick my fingers clean after I finish playing with myself.

If it weren't that I decided not to cross anything out, I think I would cross out that last paragraph. But the hell with it.

20 March—Saturday

"Hi, Jennifer. I wasn't sure you were coming."

"Am I late?"

"No, but after the conversation the other night—"

"I'm embarrassed about that. The mood I was in."

"I was working out hangups of my own on you. I'll tell you about it later. One thing, I have to make a call. An old friend called earlier and I said I thought I had a date but wasn't sure. I said I'd call her back."

"If you want me to leave—"

"No, don't be ridiculous." Turns to the phone, turns back to me. "Something occurs to me."

"What?"

"Let me show you her picture."

A tawny blonde, skin like warm honey, large firm young breasts. She is tied spread-eagled to what I recognize as a water bed, well-muscled thighs wide apart. Bill kneels at her side poking a large dildo in and out of her.

"Wanda. She had to be tied up."

"Who took the picture?"

"I did. A Polaroid with a cable shutter release. You said you'd like to watch me with another girl."

"Won't she mind?"

"She would if I told her about it. You could stay in the bathroom until she's tied up."

"I thought you don't like to do things that people don't like."

"She'll like it. All part of her scene. She'd object to it if she was given a choice beforehand, but she'll be thrilled when it happens and be glad afterward."

"You've done this before?"

"Not with Wanda. But similar things."

My knees shake. "Call her."

"And tell her what?"

"Tell her I didn't show up. Tell her to come over right away."

She must have lived nearby. In very little time she was climbing the stairs. I went into the bathroom and locked myself in. And waited for hours of subjective time, unable even to think. Trembling.

Until finally he knocked. I froze for a moment, unable to open the door. Scared again and wondering what it was I feared.

"Open the door, Jennifer."

Unlocked, opened it. Saw Wanda on the bed, posed as in the photograph. Startling sensation—the identical pose, as if what had been unreal pornography was brought magically to life. Wanda on the bed a few feet from me a reenactment of the two-dimensional Wanda of the photograph.

Much more beautiful in the flesh. Soft down on her arms and legs. Huge doe eyes fixed on me in wonder. Not fear but wonder. Tied and helpless, but no show of fear in those eyes. No more than twenty years old.

"Wanda, this is Jennifer. She likes to watch people. She doesn't do anything. She only watches. Do you mind if she watches us?"

A negative head shake.

"Do you want her to watch?"

Hesitation. Then a nod.

"Get undressed, Jennifer."

I get undressed. Wanda watches me with her constant expression of uninvolved but interested innocence. Her eyes move over my body and I can feel them on me like hands, like a tongue.

Then he begins.

Long lazy oral lovemaking. His mouth moves dissolutely over her body. He grazes on her, nibbling nourishment first here and then there.

For me, as always, there is a point where it becomes real. A point where the voice inside my head no longer has to comment on the reality of the moment because at last the rest of my head knows it's all real, it's all happening, and I can relax and become a nonpart of it. It is as if a film, thus far improperly projected, suddenly slips correctly into focus. Past and future time leave my frame of reference. The immediate now is everything.

I have been waiting for this to happen, and when it does I recognize the moment and rejoice in it. And very shortly after I tune in, Wanda herself seems to come

alive. Before she has been lying utterly inert, eyes open, a warm corpse receiving oral caresses but seemingly indifferent to them.

Now she begins to respond.

Her breath comes faster. She begins to flex her hip and thigh muscles, rocking as industriously as her bonds will permit, and the water bed rolls in response to her movements. His face is between her thighs now. He eats her diligently, licking and sucking and nibbling.

No idea how long this goes on. Seems eternal. I move around the bed, looking now at Wanda's face, now at her breasts with their turgid nipples, now moving to peer closely at her pussy while he eats it. I have a look at him, his cock rigid, fully erect but seemingly with no need to relieve himself. He eats her with single-minded devotion.

She comes, but there is no let-up; he continues his caresses and, after the briefest of pauses, she resumes her rocking and moaning response. Soon she comes again, and the pattern repeats, and he goes on until she is caught up in serial orgasm, coming again and again, thrashing, unable to stop, her voice a thin piercing wail. Finally she hits a high note and her entire body goes slack. I look at her eyes. They glaze over, turn opaque. The lids fall shut.

For several minutes everything is frozen. None of us move. Then Bill gets to his feet, walks around the bed, and kneels beside her head. Wanda turns to face him, her red mouth open in an O.

Her eyes are huge and damp. He leans slightly forward and her mouth fastens around the very tip of his cock. She closes her eyes and begins to suck him.

His own hand grips his cock. He begins to pump the shaft up and down while she sucks the tip. I am at his side, also kneeling.

The next part happens involuntarily. Not against my will but simply in its absence. I act literally without will, without thought.

I touch his hand, push it aside. I replace it with my own and curl my fingers around the shaft as I have seen him do. And I duplicate the motion he has been using, to and fro, to and fro, maintaining his tempo of strokes as I jerk him off into her greedy mouth.

I am not physically excited. I am excited in a new way, and to a new degree, but there is no feeling of impending orgasm for me. I am not moving in that direction, have no desire in that direction. My hand has become his hand and it is manipulating his cock into her mouth which is my mouth, we are all each other, and I feel that cock twitch and sense its climax—our climax—approaching.

I feel the flood of semen through the tube along the base of the shaft, feel him thrust in automatic spasms, and my hand, so utterly alive, pumps him in perfect rhythm as Wanda drinks down the treasure I have conveyed from him to her.

I was him. I shared his coming.

It was more like watching than doing. I touched him, shared in it, but it was more like watching, observing, than acting, participating.

He said I surprised him. And he took my hand and kissed its palm, then offered it to Wanda who kissed my fingertips. Wanda said it was beautiful and she loved him and she loved me and I could do anything I wanted to her. I said there was nothing I wanted to do.

“Did you come from that, Jennifer?”

I told her I didn't. In a sense, I had come—in that his coming was mine by proxy. But I did not tell her this.

“Let Bill eat you, Jennifer. You'll come, darling. I know you will.”

“No.”

“You will, though. Oh, try it. I can't stand for you not to come.”

“I don't really care about coming.”

They talked me into trying.

Funny that I can't write descriptively about this part. No, not funny. I know why.

Because it was not real for me.

Paradox: the observation was real, the participation was false.

I assumed Wanda's position, but without benefit of bonds. Lay there purposely inert. Froze for a moment when he began, then relaxed and let it happen. No gradual game this time, no attention to various parts of my body. He moved at once to my clitoris and began to tongue me.

It felt good.

But that was all. Of course it felt good, it would have to feel good, and my body knew that it felt good, but it was as if it was happening to someone else. When he did it to her, it was as if it was happening to me. Now, when it actually was, it was as if it wasn't.

I couldn't get out of my head. Not into it but thinking thinking thinking about it.

Wanda told me to go with it. Forget what was happening. Let fantasy take over. I started to, and after a few moments tried to mime passion with body movements, then stopped abruptly and started to sit up. Her hands, large hands for a girl, eased my shoulders down.

“It's not real,” I said.

“Then think of something that is.”

“But I don't want it that way.”

“*Try* it this way.”

I did. And it worked, I suppose. You would have to say that it worked.

I had an orgasm.

It was like masturbating. It was like jerking myself off with someone else's lips and tongue, and it was infinitely less satisfying than doing it myself because I could not suit the rhythm of his lovemaking to the rhythm of my fantasy, an improvisation on the theme of Wanda spread-eagled on the bed while I squatted on her face—Jennifer, not Arlene—and Bill fucked her. I thought of this, carefully blinding myself to the reality of his mouth on me, and I did ultimately come.

In the course of this Wanda touched my breasts. This merely got in the way. It did not bother me that she was touching me. I noted the fact and felt warmth for her, gratitude for her kindness, but it got in the way, as did his mouth on my cunt.

Afterward she said, “I told you you could come.”

And I said, “I know, but it wasn't good that way. It was better before, when I didn't come.”

She didn't understand, but Bill did. I caught an unguarded glimpse of his face. Deep sadness, made me very sorry I had said anything.

When Wanda left Bill told me something very interesting, something odd.

21 March—Sunday

Couldn't type this part yesterday. Don't know why. Maybe just worn out from so much fast and furious typing; by the time I finished the day's entry I felt as though I had run a race and couldn't move another step.

What he told me: The reason he had been abrupt with me on Thursday.

"I have to be careful not to see you too often, Jennifer. You could far too easily turn out to be a preoccupation of mine and that wouldn't do either of us any good. You're a special sort of challenge. We excite and fulfill each other and yet I don't touch you at all."

More in this vein. I felt a rush of *deja vu*. Then recognized it. He feared involvement with me for the same reason I feared it with him. He, too, saw that we could be good for one another, but only if we kept each other at the proper distance. We had to avoid making one another actors in a fundamentally unreal drama.

A reassuring rush for me. Confirmation of my own decision. And more—the realization that we were equal partners in this charade we have devised, that involvement is equally possible and equally frightening for him as for me. No need now to feel that my role in this is exploitative. He wants me (if for unhealthy reasons) just as I want him (if for similarly unhealthy reasons.)

A lazy Sunday again. Either today or tomorrow is the first day of spring. The weather is right for it, mild with showers that cannot make up their minds whether to pour in earnest or give up the whole thing.

I feel bittersweet. Glad that I went through all of it yesterday. That I let him go down on me, and that I let myself use the moment to come.

A breakthrough of sorts, I suppose, in that I had never come before through physical contact with another person. Yet I could only do so by willing him and Wanda out of existence and yielding entirely to fantasy. The fantasy I employed was so gripping I might as easily—or more easily—have come by myself, untouched by anything, my own hands included.

22 March—Monday

I bought some daffodils today. Came home and found I had nothing to put them in, and walked all over the neighborhood looking for a pretty vase. The thing I ultimately found looks more like a cocktail shaker, but the flowers are pretty.

When they die I can throw them out. Flowers are nice. No responsibility. They look pretty for a few days and then wither, and you throw them into the garbage.

Metaphorical of what?

23 March—Tuesday

Checked my Post Office box today. Nervous, this the first time I went to it. Half convinced I would no sooner draw out my mail than a hand would fasten on my wrist and a Postal Inspector would arrest me for obscene use of the mails. I don't believe the letters I wrote, the six of them, constituted any real obscenity. It's hard to remember I what I wrote. I think I typed a sample letter into this diary thing but it's impossible to remember afterwards what I wrote and what I merely thought about. And I have stuck to my resolve not to look at any previous entries.

Any easy resolve to stick to. I fear the embarrassment of encountering old thoughts on a typed page as much as I fear anything.

An interesting thought: What will I do with this diary when I finish writing it? Just leave the pages forever in the radiator's humidifier tray? Or burn everything unread? Or I present the whole mess to a psychiatrist to save the time of telling him all of it?

Or will I ever finish doing this? Pepys and Evelyn were lifelong diarists, talking to themselves in notebooks. I've read both their diaries. Evelyn never wrote a thing he could have been uncomfortable having anyone read (although I doubt he felt that way about it himself). So impersonal in so many ways. What the minister said at services. Details of his various business transactions. Summaries of papers read to the Royal Society.

Pepys a different sort, easier to identify with. Wrote in a cipher so that no one discovering his diaries could readily crack the code. And yet was careful to leave his work with the foreknowledge and evident desire that the cipher would be broken and the work published after his death. An interesting compromise between the need for privacy and the desire for immortality.

I might go on doing this every day forever. (However long my version of forever chances to be.) Or I might give it up tomorrow.

Tomorrow—a date with Bill. We have formalized things, an outgrowth of the mutual realization that we both have the same desires and the same forebodings about our relationship. (Semantic query: Do we relate enough to dignify this thing we share with the term *relationship*?) And so we save ourselves phone calls and uncertainty by meeting every Wednesday evening, no more or less frequently. I am to call him every Tuesday around dinner time to tell him whether or not I can make it, and to learn whether some appointment or obligation has come up on his end. And I'm to call him again Wednesday before going to him to make sure things are still on. For example, I occasionally have to work late; if this happens I'll call him from the office.

How would it feel to call him from the office?

He asked for my phone number but I refused. He didn't say anything but looked at me oddly. I'm sure I could trust him to call only in an emergency and not to take advantage of me by trying to learn more about me. Especially because he gets a kick of sorts out of my secrecy. Still, I'm uncomfortable at the idea of his having my number.

In that same conversation we outlined what our Wednesdays would do. He will extend the boundaries of my experience. He knows what I require and will enjoy supplying it. I don't have to do anything that I don't want to do. We both understand this. Yet I'm not worried about that sort of thing with him. Touching his penis was a giant step forward, more significant by far than letting him go down on me. (And more thrilling.)

I think I'd probably let him fuck me if he wanted to. I could probably do something like that. I never refused Gary, even sometimes encouraged him. And because he wouldn't expect me to enjoy it I would be less inhibited than otherwise.

Better way to put this. Could let him fuck Jennifer. Not me but Jennifer. (It was Jennifer's hand on his cock.) Could perhaps even enjoy it through his excitement while feeling no excitement of my own.

He approves of my letter-writing. Very relieved to hear about it. Didn't specifically say so, but was as apprehensive of my becoming overly involved with him as he was of becoming hung up on me.

The one question I can't answer is whether I am getting progressively saner or progressively crazier. I'm making good time but wonder now and then if I'm Wrong-Way Corrigan, flying to Los Angeles and landing in Ireland.

It's a nice trip, though.

24 March—Wednesday

Two letters in my Post Office box.

Took them out of the box and checked to make sure they were truly addressed to me. Both addressed to Miss Jennifer Starr. Odd flash—*Oh, they're not addressed to me, they're addressed to Jennifer.* Buried them furtively into my purse and hurried home.

A fetish quality to the letters. Turned them over and over in my hands before opening them. When I borrowed dirty books in secret from my mother's store, I did much the same thing before opening them, savoring them in anticipation like a child with a piece of especially good candy which he has been saving for the occasion.

Always hated candy—Gary's inevitable gift. Odd how I automatically select the traditional metaphors of other people's childhoods.

Opened one envelope and out fell a glossy polaroid photo of a muscular young man with a crew cut, no sideburns, a nose once broken, tattoos on both biceps, and last but surely not least, an impressive erection. He was squeezing his buttocks tight and thrusting his hips at the camera as if to fuck it from a distance.

A short hand-written note. Won't bother to type it now, though I could almost quote it from memory. Ill-chosen words to the effect that I may think I just want to watch, and he wouldn't mind my watching him, but if I don't like to fuck it's only because I've never been fucked by him, God's gift to women. And a lot of specific detail on the size of his cock, its length and girth; the measurements he cites are not quite supported by the photo introduced in evidence, for while it's obviously a sizable one, it can't be the ten inches long by six inches in circumference he claims for it.

He is certainly involved with his own cock, this young man.

I'm to call him afternoons at a midtown number. Bet he's married and his wife doesn't know about this.

I won't call him. I like his picture, but I'm sure I wouldn't like him. He wouldn't be happy until he'd fucked me with that treasured shaft of his, and would certainly hate me if I failed to adore every moment of it. He assures me he can sustain intercourse for an hour or two with ease, assures me too that he is willing to eat a girl for as long as she wants. Mr. Willing-and-Able, willing to eat and able to fuck. More power to him, but no thank you, sir. I won't call, nor will I answer his letter. The other has more promise.

Dear Jennifer Starr,

We cannot help wondering if you are real. If so, please don't be offended by our suspicious natures. But if you are a Postal Inspector returning to the old

entrapment policies or a male or female crank anxious to receive erotic letters under false pretenses, I'm afraid we'll be disappointing you.

We are a couple in our early thirties who have made some tentative ventures into modern social life. We both feel most comfortable in those situations in which a female friend joins us for a pleasant evening. If your own interests are exactly as you describe them, we think we might enjoy your company; the presence of an extra girl, even as a bystander, seems likely to add to our enjoyment. Should you wish to play a more active role, we would be pleased to accommodate you. But the choice is yours.

If this sounds like what you are looking for, you may get in touch with us at 688-9970. As we both work days, a call any evening between 6 and 10 would be best. Our children are young, and go to sleep early in the evening.

For obvious reasons we are not enclosing photographs or last names. If our phone conversation warrants it, we could arrange to meet on neutral territory to decide whether we find one another simpatico. No strings at any stage of the proceedings, on your part or on ours. That's to be taken for granted.

We look forward to hearing from you—if you exist. If you're a phony, that's your business, but please don't annoy us with obscene phone calls. We really don't enjoy them.

Wayne and Maureen

PS—Forgive the tone of this. We are considerably warmer people than this letter indicates. And Wayne is a lawyer, and is inclined to sound much stuffer in print than in person. We do look forward to hearing from you!

I'll call them tomorrow. Definitely. Must end this now. Just called Bill and the coast is clear. I have just about enough time to get there.

Mr. Karlman asked me to have dinner with him tonight. I told him that wasn't something I could do. He looked disappointed, said it wasn't a pass or anything, just that he had enjoyed talking to me the other night, that he felt I was someone who could really listen. It is the preliminary to a pass, though I'm almost willing to believe he doesn't recognize it as such. Either way, it's the last thing I need. I just hope I can handle things cleverly enough so that I won't find it necessary to quit my job.

Must end this.

Almost hate to. Feel like speculating about Wayne and Maureen. My reactions, my image of them. Don't know any married couple named Wayne and Maureen. If those are their names, and they might not be.

What if either or both of them turned out to be someone I know?

Oh, worry about it later.

Bill's waiting.

25 March—Thursday

Another letter in my Post Office box. The bored housewife who wants to get a lesbian thing going. A whole word trip about how I am a voyeur because I can't relate to men and a relationship with a female could open me up. But I don't want to be opened up, you dismal dyke! Suggest we get together and have a drink and

get to know each other. No need to have sex, but it would probably be good for us to talk about things.

Enclosed a picture. A facial snapshot from one of those booths where you get three poses for a quarter. A very hard-faced woman, wide jaw, bitter expression. Utterly uninviting. But that doesn't mean anything. Nobody ever gets a decent picture out of one of those machines.

I won't call her.

I will call Wayne and Maureen, but not before I type this.

Last night with Bill.

I knocked on the door and he called out for me to come in, that the door was open. I opened it and walked inside. The room was dark, with a small ultraviolet lamp providing the only illumination in the apartment.

Didn't even see him at first. Then saw him on the water bed, his pale body glowing white in the black light, glowing fiercely upon the royal blue satin sheet.

He was naked and motionless. His eyes were closed. His penis was in repose, small and defenseless. It is so small when relaxed, less than a fourth of its size in full erection. Just a tiny unintimidating thing.

I closed the door and bolted it. I said, "Bill?"

No answer.

I walked closer to him, looked down at him. He was almost expressionless but when I said his name again he had to fight back a smile. This reassured me. For a moment I had thought he might be sick, or in a trance, or (except that I had just heard him invite me inside) dead.

I understood then. He was there, naked, inert, at my disposal. I could do whatever I wanted. Nothing at all, if I wanted. Or absolutely anything.

For a while I just watched him. Lit a cigarette, walked around the bed looking at him, butted the cigarette after two or three drags. Then took off my own clothes, watching his face to see if he opened his eyes. But he didn't, his only motion the rising and falling of his chest as he breathed slowly and regularly.

I put my hand out and touched his arm. Just touched him. Then drew away like a child touching a live coal, then took a breath and touched him again.

He did not move.

I touched him, read his body with my hands like a blind man reading a face. I am trying now to recall how I felt. It is hard to say. Like an explorer, I think. I was touching another person, able to do so because of his passive immobility, and I was discovering the novelty of another's flesh beneath my hands. That, I think, was the initial pleasure.

It became something else. After a few moments of touching him I became at ease with his body. I had not yet touched him intimately, and...

A particularly stupid euphemism. My touch was quite intimate, could not have been more so by virtue of touching his cock. I did touch him intimately, but had not yet touched his cock.

(Although I was not scared to. I was looking forward to it, but had simply not yet done so.)

At ease with his body now, with my hands on him, and the impulse to discover changed to the impulse to excite. He was passive and receptive and immobile, his penis tiny and limp, and it was my task to make that penis grow, to make it

lengthen and widen and grow rigid as blood filled it, and to further provoke it until it disgorged its seed.

I took my hands from him and got to my feet. I stood at the head of the bed, my feet on either side of his own head, and I squatted slowly so that my cunt was positioned just over his face. He kept his eyes closed and did not see me, but I hovered over him like that, not touching him, and felt my own juices begin to flow. I stayed like that, not minding that the posture was uncomfortable, and watched as he inhaled the perfume of my sex.

I watched his penis grow. Just fractionally, adding perhaps a half inch of length. But I had done that. My smell had done that.

This dizzied me.

I straightened up, gulped air. Went again to his side and sat down, this time on the edge of the water mattress. My weight made waves and his body rolled on them.

I took his penis in my hand.

I played gently, gently, gently with him. The tips of my fingers on the smooth skin of the shaft, then rubbing at the different texture of the glans. I cupped a hand and took his balls in it and felt their weight.

Watched him grow, felt him growing in my hands. Teased his asshole with the tip of my forefinger. Probed at the base of the scrotum where the prostate gland is hidden. Gave his balls gentle squeezes.

His body remained utterly still. Only his cock moved, growing a little at a time, emerging from its sleeping self like a cobra rising to a snake charmer's flute. I kept shifting position slightly as I stroked him, not squirming with passion but doing so deliberately so that the bed would continue its wave-like action.

When he was as hard as a bar of steel I began to jerk him with one hand while I felt his balls with the other. I felt his excitement rise, then deliberately changed the pace of my stroking to keep him from reaching his orgasm. The sense of power that came over me was enormous. I could excite him, I could diminish his excitement, I could do anything I wanted with him.

I lowered my face slowly toward his cock, moving closer until it filled my vision. I held one hand tight around the base while the other remained cupped around his scrotum.

I took him in my mouth.

Just the tip at first, sucking the velvet tip. As Wanda had done. And then, unlike Wanda, I lowered my mouth and let the hot hard cock slide deep into my mouth. Filling my mouth, almost making me gag, but I slid it in and out, my mouth jerking him as my hand had done, and the gagging reflex went away.

I cannot call all of the rest to mind. Cannot make the detail sharp. It was too immediate, too totally involving at the time for it to be properly etched in memory. I think it lasted for a very long time but I cannot be sure it was long at all.

Never tasted male seed before.

Wondered, when Wanda drank his gift, what it tasted like. What she felt.

Felt some revulsion. Almost took my mouth away just as he was coming, but wanted the experience more than I was repelled by it. Sucked him as he came. The taste—indescribable, but I remember it perfectly.

Liked it.

Didn't want to swallow, but it seemed impolite to spit. Swallowed it.

Felt as though I had sort of come. As when I jerked him into Wanda's mouth, but far more intensely so.

Felt like laughing aloud. Felt sinfully proud of myself. And proudly sinful.

I can close my eyes now and picture him lying there, glowing with satisfaction. I sat watching him, glowing myself, and saw his eyes open and the beam of a smile spread on his face.

"You surprised me."

"Surprised myself. What did you expect?"

"Didn't. Oh, a hand job, maybe. Or that you would turn and leave the apartment."

"Did you really think I would do that?"

"Let's say I conceded the possibility. How do you feel?"

"Good."

"You have a natural talent. Unless you've had lots of practice."

No answer from me. We don't discuss what I have done' or haven't done. I have no past in his apartment. Was his suggestion a hint, an attempt to find out more of me?

Actually I yearn some times to tell him everything. But the yearning is never as strong as the compulsion to hide from him. To hide Arlene from him, and leave Jennifer a creature of present time.

"A drink?"

"Fine."

I wanted and didn't want the drink. I thought of it as something that would take the taste of him out of my mouth, out of my throat, and I did and didn't want this to happen. I wanted to erase the taste and yet wanted to savor it, to retain it.

I drank the drink, sipped it, and it did not utterly wash away his flavor.

He talked, I listened. His talk was of other women. Things he had done, things they had done. I wondered as he spoke whether he was talking literal truth or whether he was carefully building scenes he thought would excite me. I was interested, as I am always interested in hearing sex talk, but it was not exciting me.

"Is there anything you would like me to do for you?"

I shook my head. "I would like to lie on the bed."

"With me?"

"Alone. You can watch me. But don't touch me."

"All right."

"Please don't."

"All right."

"Something I thought might work and wanted to try. Call it an experiment."

"Call everything an experiment, Jennifer."

I stretched out on the satin sheet. Lay as motionless as he had lain for some time. And then began to play the scene we had just enacted, an instant replay of it in fantasy. With one change. My role was performed by Jennifer, a Jennifer who looked not like me but as I have always pictured her, a somewhat sleeker and more knowing Wanda, with higher cheekbones and no innocence in her eyes. I was the Jennifer in the fantasy. I wore her body but I was her. And there was a girl

off to the side watching us. The girl was Arlene, I'm sure, but in my fantasy her face and figure had no definition. She was merely a voyeuristic presence.

As the fantasy took hold I began to move involuntarily and the bed moved beneath me. It rocked me, and while it was my muscles which caused the bed to move, it was as though the bed itself was moving and I was being tossed limp upon it. Rocked in the womb of darkness, rocked on the waves of my fantasy. Jennifer sucked him in my mind, and a faceless shapeless Arlene watched us, and the bed rocked me.

I did not touch myself. I did not move my hands at all. My arms lay limp, flaccid, Venus de Milo arms of which I was barely aware. I did not touch myself at all but let the rocking and the fantasy bring me unassisted to an intense, shattering, extended orgasm.

When it was over I waited a long time before opening my eyes. Waited first for the effects to wear off while I savored disinclination to meet his gaze.

We talked for awhile. He said it had been fascinating to watch me, that the image that kept recurring to him was one of a witch locked in sexual union with the Devil.

"What would you call what I did?"

"Call it?"

"Was it masturbation?"

"Oh. I don't know exactly. You didn't touch yourself, rub against anything."

"No. It was all mental."

"Fantasy tripping."

"Yes."

"What was the fantasy?"

"Don't want to say."

"Fair enough. I don't think it would fit my concept of masturbation."

"Is it better or worse?"

"Than masturbation? I don't know. Did it feel better or worse? Do you feel better or worse about it now?"

"I don't know."

I just stopped typing long enough to call Wayne and Maureen. Funny. I thought it would be easy talking to them after what I have done with Bill, the changes I have gone through. It was not as impossible as my first conversation with him, the business of dialing the number and hanging up, all of that, but neither was it as routine as I had somehow thought it would be. I was nervous, had trouble getting words together.

Maybe it is new with each new person and you have to go through fighting the same defense mechanisms all over again. I'll have to think about this.

No point putting down the whole conversation. It was Maureen who answered. I have a feeling this is not her name, because when I asked her if this was Maureen, her voice changed slightly and she seemed to take it for granted that this was a sex call. I wonder if they always use the same false names or if they use a different one with each letter, so they can tell instantly who they're hearing from.

(That sounds too involved. I'm projecting my own elaborate compulsive furtiveness on others.)

Briefly—I'm meeting them Saturday at a cafe on West 72nd Street. I am to take a table in the outdoor garden and will be reading a copy of *Swann's Way*. (Doubt I'll be reading it. I've had my copy for years and never managed to get through the first chapter.) And Maureen will sit with me and we can talk. Wayne will be baby-sitting. If I want to see him too before committing myself, or if he wants to see me, I'll wait there while she relieves him as a baby sitter.

Complicated but sensible. They must be rather experienced at this.

I think I'll go to the concert tomorrow night.

A thought—there are hundreds of concerts and plays and lectures every night in New York, yet the only one I consider going to is the one on Barrow Street. Because I went twice. And thus am comfortable with it, and unwilling to try anything new in its place.

Same as being easy in Bill's company but nervous with Maureen?

Enough.

The daffodils still look quite nice. I thought they would be dead by now. Bought them Monday and they still look good Thursday night.

If I could save some money I probably ought to furnish this place a little better. It's comfortable, but it wouldn't be hard to improve it a little. I sometimes think it shouldn't matter as no one but me ever sets foot inside it. But all the more reason to make it perfect, as it is the only place where I am always perfectly alone.

26 March—Friday

I went shopping on my lunch hour and spent most of my paycheck on clothes.

I was sitting at my desk this morning trying to decide what to wear tomorrow. I began to feel a little apprehensive at the thought of meeting those two tomorrow night. The whole idea of meeting at the cafe and having Maureen give me a once-over, and if she likes what she sees she can have Wayne give me a once-over. Makes me feel like merchandise on display, which is irritating, but also makes me feel as though the merchandise has to be displayed to best advantage.

Went through my wardrobe mentally and decided nothing was really that exciting. And nothing is. I have just never been an exciting dresser. I automatically pick blah clothes. As if I want to make sure I don't stand out.

(Though something must show now in my face or my walk or something. I always used to slouch. I began to get over this in college but never quite stood right, I don't think, and maybe my posture is better now or maybe it's something in my face, but whatever it is, men are looking at me more frequently on the street. It can't all be my imagination, or my noticing things I haven't noticed before. I just must be prettier than I used to be. What a good feeling that is, the feeling that one is getting prettier. That one is becoming a more attractive person.)

Never occurred to me to dress for Bill. To dress especially for Bill. Because he made it so obvious he would take me as I am, I guess.

Also the idea that it's Maureen who will see me first. And women judge you that way more than men do.

Went to a few of the Village boutiques. Cashed my paycheck at the bank and spent almost all of it on two skirt and top outfits and a one-piece hot pants and top. I never would have bought anything like them before. Short skirts, hot pants, bold colors, sharp patterns—not my kind of thing at all.

Couldn't wait to get home and try them on again. Tried them all on and struck poses in front of the mirror. Took the last of them off and struck nude poses in front of the mirror. And stood there giggling inanely.

I think I'll go to a beauty parlor tomorrow afternoon. I like my hair the way it is but I can get a wash-and-set. Shouldn't cost much. I've got enough in the bank to cover the rent easily enough.

Funny thought—no sooner do I think about saving money for furniture than I wipe out the savings in advance buying clothes.

Of course I won't wear any of the new outfits to the office.

The concert tonight? I have time. I think I'll go, but be just as happy not meeting anyone. In fact I don't want to meet anyone, or at least I think I don't. You know what it is? I want to think to myself that I'm looking to meet someone, but I also hope nothing happens.

What to wear? Not the hot pants. Maybe I'll wear the hot pants tomorrow night. Tonight—I don't know. I think my old blue A-line will do. No point in rushing things, is there?

27 March—Saturday

Actually the date is wrong, to be technical. It's past midnight so it's officially Sunday morning. Just walked in the door exhausted and no time to write anything. This is just a compulsive note so I won't miss a day.

28 March—Sunday

There was no one at the concert I recognized. A couple of men seemed to be eyeing me but I'm not sure. Unattractive anyway. One of them had no chin. Not his fault, but why doesn't he hide it with a beard?

Stopped for a cup of coffee on one of the crooked West Village streets afterward. Not sure precisely where I was. Sat alone and a boy asked if I minded if he shared my table. Long hair and a beard and hippie clothes, so it was hard to tell his age, but I would guess about nineteen or twenty.

Started a conversation with me. Asked if I had an old man. Seemed an odd question but I said no, my father died years ago. He said he meant did I have a husband or a man I was living with. Said I didn't.

Asked me if I would like to go back to his place. "Smoke, drink some wine, see if we can get it together." Perfectly straightforward. Said no, I didn't think so. He nodded and said it was cool and maybe he would see me around sometime, and got up and went and sat at another table.

Had this urge to flee the place immediately, but decided he was right, it *was* cool, and I sat and took my time finishing my coffee and smoked a cigarette and then paid my check and left. No one else approached me.

He was so open about it, so casual about it. I must have seemed incredibly square in his eyes.

I wonder what it would have been like if I went with him. Doubt I'll ever see him again. Doubt I could find that particular coffee house if I went looking for it.

Just as well I came home alone.

I got up from the typewriter and read the Times for awhile. I guess I don't feel like writing about Wayne and Maureen tonight or I wouldn't have already bothered

reporting on Friday night at such length. Wrote about the one because I didn't want to write about the other—why do I keep doing that?

No, more to it. Also had the conversation with the boy on my mind and wanted to get it down.

Wayne and Maureen.

No, I think I'll wait until tomorrow. There's no rush. And if I don't get to it tomorrow, or ever, that's all right, too.

The object isn't to put down everything. The object is to put down what I want to put down when I want to put it down.

If I can write sentences like that, today is definitely not the time to write about Wayne and Maureen. Now is the time to get into a nice hot tub and soak for a few hours and have maybe two drinks before dinner and another drink after and get to bed early. A good night's sleep would not hurt. Got so little sleep last night, late to bed and awake automatically at eight-thirty, and I have to face Monday morning tomorrow, never that easy to face but easier on a sound sleep.

Night-night, Smith-Corona Electra 110. I am turning off your little yellow light and putting you to bed.

29 March—Monday

Checked my Post Office box during my lunch hour. Nothing. Maybe I ought to call up that "bored housewife" and see what she's all about.

Not now, though. One calls bored housewives during the afternoon, when their boring husbands are not at home. Even I know that much.

Should I answer some more ads? Sent six letters, got three replies, two unsuitable. Did get to meet Wayne and Maureen out of the deal, and I'm glad of that. But it's highly unlikely I'll see them again. I enjoyed it and so did they, but they were not precisely what I was looking for and I was not at all what they were looking for. One suitable but imperfect meeting out of six letters, one meeting with no future in it, and in return I've sent Jennifer's name all over the place. Jennifer's name and not mine, but even so I feel a sense of exposure. Three people didn't answer my letters, gave nothing of themselves, and they know that there is a maniacal voyeur on the loose named Jennifer Starr.

Answer might be to run my own ad. Attract the kind of people who are interested in my thing.

Do I dare?

And putting Jennifer's name in the ad would be even more public, somehow. There must be a way around it. I can think of several but want time to decide just how I feel about it and just how much chance there is of things working out ideally in this fashion.

Wayne and Maureen.

Mr. Karlman asked me out to dinner again. Told him I couldn't accept.

"Then have a drink with me after work. The little place around the corner. Arlene, I'm a wreck these days. I just need someone to talk to. You listen good. What does a headshrinker charge to listen to your troubles? Twenty-five an hour? I'll keep you no more than half an hour and pay you twelve-and-a-half bucks. That's professional rates and you can be just like them and not say a word."

"Oh, you're joking, Mr. K."

“I’m dead serious.”

“Well, I couldn’t possibly take money for listening to you talk.”

“Then do it for free. Up to you.”

“I just don’t know.”

“I’m such an ogre it would turn your stomach to sit with me for half an hour in a public place? I know I’m not Paul Newman—”

“The thing is, if you told me something personal, then later on you might worry that you had told me too much. And then it might make you uncomfortable having me around the office every day.”

“You worried about your job?”

“I guess so.”

“You get a ten-dollar increase starting with this coming Friday’s paycheck. That’s if you have a drink with me or not. You had a raise coming, you’d of got one if you ever asked for it. What more do you want? You want a three- year contract, noncancellable? I’ll draw it up, I know enough law to draw it up. That way if I’m uncomfortable which I won’t be it’ll cost me twenty thousand dollars to get rid of you. You want me to draw it up?”

“Oh, I’m being silly about this. I’ll have a drink with you, of course I will. But I really can’t stay more than half an hour, forty-five minutes at the most.”

So I stayed for close to two hours. I really hardly said a word. Now I feel like a complete bitch for giving him such a hard time about having a drink with him. All he wanted was a listener, and he really needed one.

Poor bastard.

He loves his wife but he can’t stand her.

How does he love her? Let him, poor bastard, count the ways. He loves her because she is the mother of his children, whom he in turn loves without knowing, as one loves the purple mountain plains while singing *America The Beautiful*. He loves her because of all the impossible years the two of them have spent together, a bond of contrition the two of them share, like that shared by veterans of a given war, or concentration camp victims. He loves her because loving her defines him; she is his wife, and without her he is cut loose, an island, floating in a sea that terrifies him.

Poor bastard.

He doesn’t hate her. Doesn’t hate her at all, and this is fortunate in some ways and unfortunate in others. Unfortunate in that, not hating her, he is unable to foist any venom upon her—and thus must feel guilty for all the ways in which he does not love her.

And he has a girl friend. Mr. K., Mr. Karlman, has a girl friend.

Whom he also doesn’t love, but pretends to.

And who in turn pretends to believe it.

What a mess. What a truly total mess. The wife does not exist. The girl friend has been deluded, and has deluded herself, into feeling that she is loved. So she wants Karlman to divorce the wife and marry her, and Karlman knows he does not want to be divorced, and resents the girl friend as he has previously resented the wife, and hates himself for both resentments.

“Arlene, I look at myself and what do I see? A man who is young but not so young. You look at the word middle-aged and it’s an impossible word. What does it

mean? It means finished. A middle-aged man is someone cut down by a heart attack in what the obituaries call the prime of life, and when you read the obituaries you figure the poor bastard, he was done with life, middle-aged, he was over the hill, he was done with life.

“But I don’t feel done with life. I feel as though I’ve been waiting all these years, being a good person, being first a good son to my parents and then a good husband to my wife and finally a good father to my children, always waiting, always biding my time, always wondering when it gets to be my turn, and then all of a sudden I’m what they call middle-aged and there’s no future in it, no tomorrow in it, not even a today in it, and you’re suddenly supposed to sit around praying for a heart attack that will take you out of it.

“I don’t want to die. I don’t want it to be over. I don’t want to sit in front of God and he says, Karlman, you had your chance and what did you do with it? And I say, God, begging your pardon, I kept waiting for it to be my turn and all of a sudden it was over. I missed my chance, God, and I regret it.

“Arlene, I don’t want to regret it.

“Arlene, I don’t want it to be over. Arlene, I sit looking at my watch and it makes me want to cry. My watch makes me want to cry. Is that something for a grown man to admit? A successful man? An established man? That he looks at his watch and tears come to his eyes?

“The second hand. The sweep second hand. I watch it go around and it’s my life being ticked off. Each one of those seconds. I watch them go by and know they’ll never come up again. I’ll never see those seconds again. Once they happen, once they flash by me, once they pass me by, they’re gone forever, they’re over and done with. And I watch that sweep second hand and there’s nothing I can do about it and I can’t even stop watching it, my eyes are riveted to it and there’s nothing on earth I can do.

“My life passing me by.”

Mr. Karlman, you have to live it yourself.

“Arlene, why am I telling you this? What’s the children’s phrase—*Why am I laying this trip on you?* You know something? I’m taking advantage of you. I know it. I knew it all along. Telling you I would pay you for this half hour, which is already a good deal more than a half hour. I knew then that I would be taking advantage of you. But I can’t get past the feeling that you can listen, that you can hear me out. That you can do me some good.

“I don’t love her. This girl I’m seeing. I don’t love her, I don’t care for her.

“I’ll tell you something. I want to love someone. When I first started up with her, when I first got involved, I thought I loved her. Not from anything she did. Not from anything she was to me. But because this was a need within me. I wanted to love somebody and it was like a game of tag, I reached out and touched her and she was It. She was the one I decided to pretend I loved.

“And I’ll tell you something else. I believed it. For the longest time I believed it. Because when the two of us went to bed together it was magic. Forgive me for talking on the subject. Forgive me, but it was beautiful, it was magic. In bed together, the two of us, it was magic and I told myself that because it was magic it had to be love.

“I had to believe that.

"I'll tell you something, Arlene. Something I couldn't tell this person, this girl, that I have been seeing. It was never love. It was needing to be in love. It was being with someone who was not my wife. It was being with someone new and fresh and different. It was taking this good sex and believing this good sex could only happen with a beloved person, and putting the whole thing into love.

"So I look at myself. So I look at myself, and I look at this girl who I have been seeing for a few years, and I think that I owe her something. And I look at my wife and I think that I owe her something, too. And I can't give anything to either of them. Because if I divorce my wife and marry this person what do I have? I trade one person I don't love for another person I don't love, and all I do is make complications for myself. And I almost wish and hate myself for wishing that this girl will become upset with me for stalling, for telling her I'll get a divorce and not getting one.

"That she'll be so upset she will refuse to see me any more. Because I am afraid to break off with her. I want to break with her, and I am not afraid for the cheap reasons, that she will tell my wife, that she will expose me. I am afraid because I do not want to do anything bad to her. Because I feel very guilty about her. Several years now, and she was good for me, and what did I give her? I didn't, all I did was take from her, and I want her to leave me but I cannot bring myself to leave her.

"You know where I am, Arlene?"

"What I want I can't have. Well, all right. Everybody's like that, what they want they can't have. Everybody reaches and can't get his hand around what he thinks is out there.

"But also, what I have I can't want.

"And it drives me crazy. I look at myself. I say to myself, Schmuck, you have everything. You have a business that pays you a good living just putting in your time. You go to the office five days a week and you do the automatic thing and you make more money than you need. You have a wife who is always there, you have children that you know are your children and belong to you, you have this thing and that thing, you have your comforts, you name anything and you can go out and buy it if you decide you want it—Schmuck, what do you think you want of life that you don't already have?"

"Arlene, I *want*.

"I don't know what it is but I know I want it.

"I look at the future and I see a desert. A blackness. My future is all in the past. This is how I see myself, as a man with his future behind him. And I could live a good many years yet. I could also drop dead tomorrow, God forbid, but I could live a great many years. I don't feel old. I feel like a young man dressed up as an old man. I look at kids on the street, those crazy kids with the hair everywhere, and I want to call to them. 'Hey, I'm not like your parents. I'm like you. Where are you going? Wherever it is, I want to go along. Take me with you, I want to go along.' I have thoughts which if I said them people would point at me and say I was a crazy man. But which is crazy? To me it's crazy to feel this way and stay with the life I've been living.

"That to me is crazy.

"Arlene, there has to be Something. ~ "

I didn't think I was going to type all that. I really didn't. I started to put a little bit down and I could hear his voice in my head and just typed what my mind was hearing.

Poor Mr. K.

Is That All There Is? Stupid song that says all of it. A man reaching out to grab what he wants and his hand closes around it and he opens his hand and finds nothing inside it.

I was going to write about Wayne and Maureen but Mr. Karlman is more on my mind. Let me type something about Wayne and Maureen to get it out of the way. I met Maureen at the cafe and went directly to the apartment with her. Met Wayne. Maureen had offered to go back alone and have Wayne meet me in case I was turned off by him, but I said we could skip that part. She had already shown me a picture of him. From certain angles he looked a little like Gary, though not in the photograph.

Sat and talked with them, mostly them talking and me listening. How they got into swinging and their various experiences. Why they like threesomes. Very interesting stuff but no point in recording it.

After awhile they began necking a little. They wanted me to sit with them. Said I was comfortable where I was. Wayne wanted to kiss me, so did Maureen, but I said I couldn't handle it. Both of them disappointed but game.

More necking, and I got undressed, which seemed to please them. *Very* embarrassed undressing. I think largely because of Maureen. Her figure better than mine, breasts bigger. Didn't feel this nearly as strongly with Wanda at Bill's apartment. Wonder why? Maybe sensed that Maureen competes with other woman in threesome. Just a guess.

Watched them make love. Thought it wouldn't work for me at first but it did.

Later they made love to me a little. Couldn't get into fantasy and stopped trying. Went through the motions anyway. Did a variety of things with both of them at once. He wanted to fuck me but wouldn't let him. He didn't insist.

I guess I enjoyed that part of it, too. Never got at all hot. Found it exciting in a way. Mentally but not physically. The newness of it, the idea that I was extending myself, extending experience.

Also because of watching them beforehand and getting excited then, I seemed unbothered by not being excited when we all made love together. (Bad use of the term—whatever we may have made, love wasn't part of it.)

I think this means something. I don't really think there's anything I couldn't do now. Had no inhibitions about Maureen's being a woman, about having sex with a woman. Would have let Wayne screw me except for fear of getting pregnant. Maybe I'd better go to a doctor and go on the pill again. Or else I'll never know for sure if I have a hangup about it or not, and I feel I ought to know

I'll tell the doctor my name is Jennifer Starr.

Reminds me: Wayne and Maureen are not their real names. Told me as much the minute I walked in the door. Real names are Warren and Marsha. I never stopped thinking of them as Wayne and Maureen and referred to them that way all through this entry. I think in other entries as well. Of course I went on being Jennifer Starr for them.

30 March—Tuesday

Drunk and depressed.

31 March—Wednesday

I don't know exactly what went wrong yesterday. Nothing actually happened. I was evidently reacting to what Mr. K. told me. Both yesterday and today he acted as if nothing whatsoever had happened. I felt that he was uncomfortable around me but had no evidence for the feeling.

Projection—because I was uncomfortable in his presence, and assumed it worked both ways.

Not afraid he'll fire me. Not even afraid he'll *want* to fire me.

I guess I'm afraid he'll want me to go on being his shoulder to cry on.

Would that be so bad? In a way, yes, it would. I don't want other people and their problems. I really don't want all of this, and yet already I feel an obligation to listen to him if he wants to talk. He was so appreciative Monday night, kept telling me over and over again how much help I was to him by just being there.

And all I did was be there. Hardly said a word, just nodded in the right places.

I might as well put down what scares me.

I am afraid he is going to decide that he is in love with me.

He's looking for something and I have the feeling he'll make the mistake of thinking I'm what he's looking for. And if that happened I don't know what I would do. The one thing I'm positive of is that I would be very unhappy about it, and very upset.

I don't know what he should do. Go to a psychiatrist? That keeps occurring to me. Would it do him any good? I don't know. I'm no one to talk—I probably ought to go to a psychiatrist myself. Probably? Definitely. But I don't want to go and I won't.

I don't want to *be* a psychiatrist, either.

Drinking was a mistake last night. Made things worse and kept me from getting any of it out at the typewriter. Today was better. I was more relaxed at the office and feel now that the situation with Mr. K. won't be as much of a problem as I thought last night. I can probably handle him if he decides he loves me. And if I can't, it will be easy enough to find some place else to work.

Oh, hell. I should have left for Bill's five minutes ago and I want to change my clothes.

I'll wear the hot pants.

1 April—Thursday

Last night while I was over at Bill's, Mr. Karlman's wife died. This morning he came into the office and sold the business lock stock and barrel by making just one phone call. He sent all the other girls home and told me to stay.

When we were alone he looked deeply into my eyes and something clicked for us. I realized I was in love as never before in all my life. He took me in his arms and kissed me, and it happened just as it happens in trashy novels. Bells rang—I swear they did.

"Let me make one more phone call," he said, and I stood impatiently at his side while he called his girl friend and told her he never wanted to see her again. I

could hear her pleading with him over the phone, and he held the receiver to me so that I could listen while she wept. But I felt no sympathy for her. She had not fulfilled him and never would. Nor were those tears genuine, because I knew that no one had ever loved this dear kind man as I did.

I took the receiver from him and replaced it in its cradle.

“And now we’re really alone,” I said. “Just the two of us, now and forever.”

“My darling Arlene,” he said.

We kissed.

“I can’t leave you,” he said. “How can I possibly leave you, even for a moment?”

“But you must.”

“I must,” he agreed, hanging his head. “I have to be with my children now, at least for tonight. And tomorrow I absolutely must put in an appearance at the funeral. I know it’s foolish to let society dictate these things, but it’s better in the long run to be there.”

“Shall I go with you?”

“It wouldn’t look right, Arlene. I’ll go now. Tomorrow night I’ll be with you, and I’ll spend every moment with you for as many years as the good Lord gives me. We’ll travel all over. We’ll do everything together.”

“Will your children be with us?”

“Screw the little leeches,” he snapped. “Let them fend for themselves. If you want children, we’ll have some of our own.”

He turned to go. I caught his arm. “You’re not going anywhere until you fuck me,” I purred. And fuck we did, right there on the office floor beside the filing cabinets, fucking like crazy children, and I came again and again and again until I passed out exhausted.

When we were dressed, as he prepared to leave, I took his arm again. And put my lips close to his ear, and said, in the softest of whispers,

APRIL FOOL!!!!

1 April—Thursday

Well, let’s try it again.

I must really be flipping out completely. I got the basic idea for that last entry this afternoon in the office and went into a giggling fit right there at my desk. I sat down and wrote that the minute I got back here, and it kept getting more elaborate as it went along. I kept breaking myself up as I wrote, and when I was finished I read the whole thing through from beginning to end and kept giggling like an idiot.

Then I went over and lifted the radiator cover and added the pages to the stack. A rather thick stack it is, too. And I closed the radiator cover and sat around and laughed some more.

But what kind of a lunatic plays elaborate practical jokes on a typewriter?

I went out and had dinner and came back here, and realized I wanted very much to write about last night with Bill. But I had made a rule—no days without some sort of entry, and no more than one entry a day.

I can’t honestly believe I went through such a mental tug-of-war with myself over this point. I had to convince myself that the first entry, being a gag, was in a sense not a real entry at all, and that it was thus fitting and proper for me to continue writing. Then other questions came up. Should I throw out the gag

entry? Should I begin the real entry on the same sheet of paper that I ended the gag entry on? Finally I realized that I was playing idiotic mind games about nothing at all, so I made a cup of coffee and had a cigarette and let my head knit itself back together again, or as close to together as it ever is.

I wore the hot pants last night. Might not have done this if I had known Bill was going to take me out. Felt very funny wearing them in public.

Felt very funny being in public.

Met me on the sidewalk in front of his building. "Come on," he said. "We're going out for a change."

"Where?"

"To see a movie."

I was disappointed. Instant paranoia—he decided he didn't want to have any kind of sex with me, so he was taking me to a movie rather than sending me home right off the bat. Instead he got into a cab with me and we rode up to Times Square and went to a porno film.

"They have better films than the ones I have. I was going to show you one tonight and thought they would be so much better at one of the porno theaters. More attractive people, better production values, a big screen instead of a little screen. Unless you're nervous about seeing one in public."

"I'm terrified."

"Too terrified?"

"No. I think more excited than terrified. The times I've wanted to go, but a girl can't go alone."

"Ever try?"

"Do girls ever go alone?"

"I knew one who said she did. I think she was telling the truth."

"Well, this girl couldn't go alone."

Nervous to begin with, just walking with him in my hot pants outfit. Men really ogling me on the street, looking me up and down. I do get a kick out of this, though. I've thought from time to time that a voyeur has to be an exhibitionist as well. If you want to see you also want to show, although you may not have the nerve for it.

Thought I'd be apprehensive about entering the theater but Bill was so matter-of-fact about it that it didn't bother me in the least. Pitch dark in there. My eyes take their time adjusting to sudden darkness, and I couldn't see what seats were occupied and what ones were empty. Bill led me. We sat about five rows from the back of the theater. I don't think there were more than twenty-five rows in all.

When my eyes got accustomed to the darkness I could see the men in the audience. I didn't see a single woman. The theater was about half-full and the audience looked like a checkerboard. We were the only two people sitting together, as far as I could tell. Everyone else had an empty seat on either side of him.

Enormously exciting.

Not just the movies, although they were even more exciting that I had dared hope.

But even more exciting was the situation. Being there in the darkness in the midst of all those men. All those men seated like checkers. All those men with

their coats on their laps so that they could masturbate in relative invisibility. And I the only woman in the audience, and sitting not alone but with a man.

The pictures were ten-minute shorts. Some had no sound tracks and the theater played records as background music. Others had dialogue but they must have added it afterward, because one actress was supposedly saying something like “Oh, this is so good, this is so good,” and she had her mouth stuffed full of cock at the time and couldn’t possibly have done more than grunt incoherently.

After awhile there was a sameness to the films. I began to see the actors as actors. I wonder what a really great pornographic film would be like. One with a story and good dialogue and good acting and real characters and the same kind of hard-core fucking and sucking.

I think it might be fantastic.

When the films stopped being as exciting as they had been, I thought of something and decided I wanted to do it. I thought of all the reasons why it was an unwise thing to do, and they made me want to do it all the more. The element of danger was an added thrill.

So what I did was planned. I thought it over very carefully first. Unlike the time when I first took hold of his cock, when it just happened without thought or volition.

I put my hand on the front of his pants and touched him. He had a sort of half hard on. I gave it a brief squeeze, then opened his zipper and took his cock out. He drew in his breath sharply—I think I actually shocked him, and know for sure I surprised the hell out of him.

I played with him, and then with total abandon I put my head in his lap and sucked him off. Knowing that the men on either side could turn and watch us. Knowing, and actually hoping they would do it.

He came very quickly. I guess he was stimulated by the circumstances just as I was.

I came, too.

And swallowed, and licked my lips, and sat up straight again and looked at the screen. If anyone saw what I was doing, they stopped watching by the time I sat up.

I sat there looking at the screen and felt the most self-satisfied grin spread over my face. I felt like the cat who had swallowed—well, not exactly the canary.

After a few minutes I turned to Bill and suggested that we leave. He nodded and took my arm and led me out of there. Outside I asked him if he had gone to those movies with girls before. He said yes. I asked if any of them had ever done that to him before. He said no, and started to say something else, and then didn’t.

We didn’t go back to his place. We went to Howard Johnson’s for fried clams, established that the bit in the theater would be an impossible act to follow, and agreed to share a cab. He said he would drop me first. I said no, I would rather drop him first. Still not wanting him to know where I live. He looked at me and I thought he was going to be irritated, but instead his face showed mild amusement. What makes me so comfortable with him is that he treasures me for all the things that are so wrong with me. If I ever get rid of my hangups I suspect he’ll find me rather less fascinating.

I have tonight's bedtime fantasy planned. Jennifer is an innocent girl from Iowa who goes out to Hollywood to become an actress, and without realizing it she gets into a porno film.

Now there's one with possibilities.

As for today, nothing happened. Mr. Karlman didn't even come into the office today.

Horrible idiot thought I'm almost scared to type. Suppose he didn't come in because his wife actually did drop dead during the night?

I sincerely wish I hadn't just thought of that.

2 April—Friday

Mr. K. was at the office today. And last night's brilliant thought happily failed to come true. Mrs. Karlman is still among the living. At least she was when I left the office an hour ago.

I suppose it's possible she died since then.

I must stop this morbid bullshit.

3 April—Saturday

I was walking around the neighborhood this morning and made the mistake of looking in a pet shop window. There was a cardboard box that had once held two dozen bottles of Heinz ketchup. It now held four Siamese kittens, and I fell in love with them.

As a result, I am now the owner of a forty-nine cent philodendron.

The whole thing is so ridiculous. I decided I would never get a plant. But as soon as I realized that what I wanted more than anything else in the world was a kitten, it somehow became all right for me to pass up the kittens and get a plant.

Like feeling justified in putting out your eyes as a reward for having staved off the impulse to commit suicide.

It's a pretty little plant. It only has about three leaves.

Exactly three leaves. I just went and counted them.

It will get more, though. So said the florist. With the proper care it will grow like crazy. Just water it once a day and keep it where it gets daylight. Doesn't need direct sunlight but ought to be near a window. So it's on the sill now and I'm waiting for it to grow all those leaves the man promised me.

I already watered it once today. I don't know whether or not I was supposed to. In that I don't know whether or not he had already watered it, and somehow I couldn't bring myself to call him up and find out.

It shouldn't be that much trouble to water the thing once a day. I can do it every morning before I leave for work. That way I won't be in the position ever of having to be home at a certain time to water my plant.

I think I'm taking this thing far too seriously. I really do.

Do you give plants names? I suppose it's up to me, it being my plant. And no one would ever know that I was a lunatic who named her plant. I could even talk to it if I wanted to.

Anyone who talks to a typewriter is none the crazier for talking to a plant.

I wonder if it's a male plant or a female plant, or if there's no difference with philodendrons. I could give it a neutral name. Seems a cop-out, though. Maybe I ought to wait and see how I relate to it, whether I regard it as a boy or a girl.

I suppose I could always call it *Mother*.

I'm just in the silliest mood, rambling on and on like this. I feel kind of good in a weird way. I went downtown last night intending to go to the concert but decided I didn't feel like it. Wound up going to a movie. Not like Wednesday's movies. This was a Bogart revival on Eighth Street. *Casablanca* and *The Petrified Forest*. I wonder how many times I've seen both of them. Doesn't matter—they get better each time.

Sort of looked for that coffee house where that boy propositioned me, but couldn't find it.

4 April—Sunday

Bored to death.

Would call that bored housewife, speaking of bored, but not on Sunday when the source of her boredom is probably home. But I'm always working during weekday office hours. I suppose I could call her some lunch hour from a phone booth. If I really want to.

Feel almost like calling Wayne and Maureen. But I don't think so. The one time was novel for the three of us but a second time would be a bore for all three of us.

Bore. Word keeps coming up today.

Just stopped and called the single guy who is so proud of his cock. The one I decided never to call. No one was there. Of course not. I was supposed to call him afternoons, so that must be his office, and this is Sunday.

I'll have to write some more letters. I wish I felt like it but I don't.

There ought to be something I feel like doing.

I already watered the plant. It still has the same three leaves. I suppose that's something to be thankful for. It could have lost one of them.

What I should do is buy the kitten and let the kitten eat the plant and die of philodendron poisoning, and then I would be carefree again.

Ha ha ha, but actually I think it would probably bother me a great deal if the plant died. Which was one of the reasons and probably the main reason I was against getting it in the first place.

Something I read today. In the *Times Book Review* section, a review of...

No, forget it.

5 April—Monday

From yesterday's *Book Review* section:

In his introduction, the editor of Vagabond's Day-Book stresses that its author wrote it with the constant intention of its being published after his death ... But are not all diaries undertaken with the conscious or unconscious anticipation of eventual publication? I would tend to think so. That they are an assist to memory, that they provide a medium for dialogues with the self, does not sufficiently explain the compulsion to record day by day the events of one's life. Almost every long-term diarist is concerned with style. Matters are explained which he would not need to explain to himself; the explanation is surely for the eventual benefit of the assumed

reader or readers. I am sure many diarists would shudder at the thought that their private confessions would ever pass before eyes other than their own, let alone see print, and am equally sure many such diaries are deliberately destroyed out of that very fear. But unconsciously it would seem that the diarist does crave an audience for his thoughts and observations, the public and private details of his experience. A dual drive, the twin needs of secrecy and confession (and thus absolution?) would seem to motivate those diaries ostensibly “not for publication” to a greater or lesser degree...

6 April—Tuesday

Typed the date and have been looking at an otherwise blank sheet of paper for half an hour. Things to write but that fucking review is more inhibiting than arthritic fingers. Wish I hadn't read it.

Don't know if I agree with it or not. I can argue it both ways and would do so now but I'm sick of the whole thing. What the screaming fuck does it matter why I'm writing this diary?

I was doing beautifully until I read that crap.

7 April—Wednesday

Shit. Called Bill last night and told him I couldn't make it today. What a stupid fucking thing to do. I can't understand why I did it.

I know *why* I did it. Generally depressed, reactions to that crap in the *Times*. Self-conscious about the diary and then self-conscious about everything, everything in the world, and convinced I wouldn't want to see him tonight. But why in hell couldn't I keep my options open? Could have waited until this afternoon to see if I still felt the same way.

And of course I didn't. Woke up this morning regretting that phone call and wanted to call him this afternoon and tell him I didn't have to go to a bridal shower after all, but how? Tell him the engaged couple broke up? So I didn't call, and it's now just about the time I would ordinarily be leaving for his place, and I'm sitting here calling myself bad names and meaning every word of it.

Shit!

8 April—Thursday

WILLOWY SEX POT wants to watch you do your own thing. Singles or couples or groups, gay or bi or straight, this gal of 25 wants to be your audience. Will occasionally participate if vibes are right. Photo helpful, phone essential. Occupant, Box 771, Madison Station, NYC.

I think I'll run that in one issue of *Screw* and see what happens. Might add a sentence inviting them to describe what kind of a show they want to put on. I don't know. Might look as though I'm just interested in getting filthy letters.

I *am* sort of interested in getting filthy letters, actually. But I'm also interested in getting filthy.

So frustrated. Really was dying to be with Bill last night. Sat around torturing myself trying to guess what he might have had planned. And I won't get to see him now until next Wednesday. I could have tried to shift the date to another night,

but of course the way I felt when I called him I didn't think I would *ever* want to see him again.

The Sex Diary of a Crazy Lady.

I'm definitely going to run that ad. I won't even bother getting a money order. It's not worth the trouble. The rate is ten cents a word which comes to...

(Just a minute)

...which comes to \$4.60, so I'll put a five-dollar bill in the envelope and let them put the extra forty cents toward a Cadillac. It's supposed to be unsafe to send cash through the mails but it strikes me as generally safer than, oh, for example, than sucking a man's cock in a 42nd Street porno theater.

Just for instance. But not as much fun.

9 April—Friday

My plant is getting a new leaf!

I can't believe it. I also can't believe how excited I am about it.

I mailed the ad to *Screw*. It ought to be in not next week but the week after.

During my lunch hour I went over to the Post Office box on the off-chance that one of those people I never heard from might have finally gotten around to writing. No such luck. I didn't really expect it.

Deposited my paycheck. It's nice getting an extra ten dollars a week. And strangely enough Mr. Karlman has not changed towards me at all. He still acts the same as he did before.

I almost wore one of the new dresses to the office this morning.

Wonder why that is. Maybe I'm perversely upset not to have him falling in love with me. I honestly dreaded it, and now that it hasn't happened I'm beginning to feel rejected, which is the sort of stupidity I should have learned to take for granted from me.

Jennifer Starr has a 1 p.m. appointment Monday with Dr. Carmine Pecora, practice limited to obstetrics and gynecology. To get on the pill. Picked him out of the Yellow Pages. Because his office is just a few blocks from mine, and also because I like his name. It has a nice ring to it. Carmine Pecora, M.D. I like it better than Ben Casey, even.

I'm going to the Village tonight. Maybe to the concert, maybe to the coffee house (if I can find it), maybe to neither of those places.

I am going to have sex tonight, though.

10 April—Saturday

My plant's new leaf is the palest green. It emerges tightly rolled and pointed at the tip, phallic in my eyes, but phallicism like beauty is no doubt in the eyes of the beholder. It has grown noticeably since yesterday.

As far as I can tell, it will be larger than the three leaves already on the plant. I bought a little book on plants, a 950 paperback written in the general tone of one of those women's magazines they sell in supermarket checkout lines. If each leaf my plant grows is bigger than the last, it is a sign that I am doing something right. If, on the other hand, the new leaves are progressively smaller, the plant, while still healthy, is not doing its best. Thus it would seem that I am doing something

right, but I cannot imagine what it might be. All I do is water it once a day and look at it from time to time.

I also love it. I wonder if that makes a difference. Could my plant possibly know whether or not it is loved?

It rains today. Rained when I awoke this morning and hasn't stopped yet. April showers to bring May flowers, and Mayflowers to bring Pilgrims. I shall dangle my roots out the window and drink the rainwater and sprout new leaves.

I shall have to buy some Vivaldi records. They had a woodwind quintet playing last night on Barrow Street, an all-Vivaldi program. The bassoon player had his hair very long in back and very short in front, so that he looked like a hippie from the back and a hardhat from the front. *Tres* disconcerting. (Disconcerting at a concert? The lady should choose her words more carefully.)

Making love with another woman is almost narcissistic. When there are just the two of you in the room. Very strange. Feelings of competition with self. Thought for a moment that I could get out of the prison of my self, that I felt less threatened, less intruded upon. But the pattern proved to be the same. Nice, though.

I seem to have reached the point where I can enjoy sex even if it doesn't work.

11 April—Sunday

My phone started ringing today a little after noon.

Immediate reaction—fear. Intrusion. That Bill had followed me home and found me out. That the woman from last night had traced me. That someone from the office was calling me. Mr. Karlman, to tell me he loved me.

Anything.

Must have been a wrong number. Never know, though, because I didn't answer it. It stopped after perhaps a dozen rings and whoever it was didn't call back.

Must have been a wrong number, or some telephone pest calling numbers at random. Or a nuisance selling encyclopedias or magazine subscriptions or dance lessons.

Keep thinking I'm improving and then all this blind panic when my phone rings.

12 April—Monday

I now have this little folder three inches square with pills inside arranged in a series of concentric circles. Five days after my next period starts I am to begin taking them, taking one each morning until they rim out, then getting the prescription refilled.

Dr. Carmine Pecora is small and slender and looks sort of like a fag, but I don't suppose many fags become gynecologists. I would suspect the reverse might be true, that many gynecologists might become fags, perhaps out of a growing disaffection for the female apparatus. It must do odd things to a man to look at cunts day in and day out, all of them cunts at which one looks in a purely professional capacity, and an unhealthy proportion of them diseased or otherwise imperfect cunts at that.

Kept worrying I'd get hot while he examined me, or embarrassed, or something. Surprised myself. No reaction at all. He had his nurse stay in the room while he examined me. One of the homeliest young women I have ever met in my life. God dealt her bad cards to begin with, but she isn't helping herself any by letting her

moustache grow and by refusing to pluck the long black hairs from her two moles, one on her chin, one alongside her fat and large-pored nose. Some moles are called beauty marks. Hers will never be so described.

Also, she's fat.

Probably about my age, but she looks years older than me. Easily.

I suppose it's a character fault, but it's one I can't help: I never feel prettier than I do upon seeing a really ugly girl.

13 April—Tuesday

Got my period today.

I still can't get used to buying Tampax. Never had to in the past. Would go downstairs and take a box from our stock. Mother sold it, sold almost everything in that little store. Wonder if she wrote numbers or took bets on horses. Seems out of character but who knows? From what I've read, little storekeepers in Brooklyn and the Bronx are the backbone of the business. If she did it, I never would have known about it. The woman never told me anything she did that was legal, let alone anything illegal she might have been up to.

Worked late tonight. Me and Mr. Karlman. Sent out for sandwiches, ate them at our desks. Made the now-standard pitch about staying with friends in Manhattan for the night.

He bought me a drink before taking me home. Two of us sat over drinks waiting for somebody to say something. Then he went into a speech about how he hoped he hadn't embarrassed me or taken advantage of me by using me as a sounding board the other night. Said he guessed he was going through what every man his age goes through. As usual, I didn't do much talking myself.

Drove me home, or to the place around the corner where my alleged friends live. When he stopped the car he looked at me as though he wanted to kiss me.

But didn't.

I almost wish he had, and yet am glad he didn't. Very strange.

14 April—Wednesday

A line or two before I go see Bill.

Sunday I take my first pill. Wish I didn't have the curse now because I think I'd let him fuck me. Or do something, anyway.

Nice thing about our ridiculous relationship is that menstruation doesn't interfere with the normal course of things.

My ad was in Screw. Embarrassed me to look at it. Felt naked, exposed to the public eye. Jennifer Starr now a matter of public record. Thought it wouldn't be in until next week, but I guess the mails were faster than usual and that they have a late closing on the classified pages.

I don't expect much. If I get two or three replies I'll be happy.

I wonder what I expect to get out of all this.

That's easy.

Fucked.

15 April—Thursday

Checked my Post Office box. Nothing in it, which was to be expected. The ad just came out yesterday, and even if some pervert rushed straight to the mailbox, his reply wouldn't show up before tomorrow at the very earliest. I didn't really expect anything today, just went and checked because I had some time to kill on my lunch hour.

On the way home, I bought some cow shit for my plant.

If anyone had told me that the day would come when I would spend fifty cents on cow shit for a plant, I would have told him his head was on backwards. (As it happens, no one ever told me, so the world was spared that exchange of sparkling wit.) But I did. Spend fifty cents, that is, and for my money I got a two-pound bag, yellow with green lettering, of sterile dried cow manure. I suppose it's very important that it's sterile. I wouldn't want my philodendron to have a baby, would I?

I took a teaspoon and mulched my plant with cow shit. It smells sort of nice, actually. I don't know whether all cow shit has this pleasant open-air smell to it, or whether this only happens if they dry and sterilize it. At any rate, I mulched Mother with about a half-inch of the shit all around the base, and then I watered it so it wouldn't blow all over my apartment, and now I feel I have done my good deed for the day. Also for the month, as the plant won't need any more cow shit for at least that long. Judging by the amount I used, and the quantity I still have on hand, I'll be able to feed my little green darling for the next three years before it's time to run out and buy more cow flop.

I wish there were something to do with it besides feed philodendrons. Maybe I could mix it with water and drop it out the window on people's heads.

"Look, Ma. A flying cow just shat on me smack in the middle of Manhattan!"

Somehow I think not.

Last night I watched Bill with a girl.

Got there and he said another girl was coming over. I asked if it was Wanda again.

"Not Wanda. A girl I never met before. She called up in response to the ad. Very nervous sort. Married, and never had an orgasm. Married six years, I think she said. A couple of kids. Bought *The Sensuous Woman* and tried masturbating but she's too embarrassed to make it work for her. Husband just throws her an in-and-out three or four times a week. Pops before she can get in the mood. Thinks if someone would cat her for a month or so she might find the path to Paradise. Not that she put it that way, but that's what it seems to boil down to."

"You'll want me to leave, then."

"Not unless you want to."

"But—"

"Thought it might be kicks for you to hang around and watch, Jennifer."

"But she won't want that, will she?"

"Who's going to tell her? You squat in the closet, peep through the door. She won't know you're around."

"I thought you never like to lay a bad trip on a girl, all that rap about existing wholly for her pleasure."

“And so I shall. Her pleasure and yours, love flower. What she doesn’t know won’t cramp her style. She comes, she goes, and you keep quiet in there. Won’t hurt her a bit, will it?”

And so we play it that way. Terribly exciting. And dirty- feeling at the same time, because I am watching someone in secret, watching someone who does not want to be watched, who would not put up with it if she knew. Crouching naked in the closet, easing the door ajar a few inches after she and Bill begin to get acquainted. Dark in the closet, light in the room—no way she can see me, of course, but seems to me she would have to be able to hear my ragged breathing, the pounding of my imperfect heart.

Tall, big-boned girl about thirty. Not fat yet, but she will be if she doesn’t start having orgasms, because it looks as though she’s already beginning to search for them at the bottoms of cookie jars. Large Earth Mother breasts. Dimples in her bottom. Dark curls of twat hair reaching almost to her navel.

(Fantasy: I would like to eat a girl someday *sans* pubic hair. Either too young to have it—how perverse—or freshly shaved. Shall I perhaps shave my own? I wonder if the absence of hair there would be apt to turn men and/or women on or off? In pornography that I’ve seen they almost always have pubic hair. The men always do—I’m sure I’ve never seen a picture of a man who shaved there. And almost all the women. All the ones in the movies, and most of the ones in still photos I’ve seen. Though I do recall—quite vividly—a close-up of a shaven woman. Wonder whether it appealed to me in and of itself, or because it was so different from the unshaven ones, or on the third hand—look ma, three hands—because one could glimpse details otherwise obscured. But I would surely hate to cut myself shaving. Suppose it’s not that much different from shaving under your arms. Could become routine and automatic, something one does before dates—shave the pits, shave the crotch, put on lipstick and perfume, and off we go to the orgy like a well-brought-up young lady.)

Helen (her name last night) would have worn out a razor blade a day. Really a copious bush. This didn’t seem to turn him off. Nothing about her seemed to turn him off.

Interesting to watch him operate. She had come up specifically to be screwed, or in any case to be eaten, and they had established all this in front, and yet he had to seduce her. Not romantically, but he had to talk her into it. All of these stupid objections she raised. “Oh, I don’t know. Oh, perhaps I’ll hate myself afterwards. It would be terrible to hate myself forever for an act of adultery. Oh, if I could only be sure—”

Took him fifteen minutes, and then he played her gradually, romanced her physically, much kissing and petting and slow undressing, playing that genius tongue over those oversize breasts, getting the old hand between those plump thighs, fingers on safari through the jungle of dark curly shrubbery. Little sounds from her—“Oh. Ooooh. Ah, oh.”

Then abruptly she sat up, weight supported on arms extended behind her, eyes clenched tight.

“I don’t think this is working.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I can’t let go.”

“Just go along with it, Helen. Just be passive, just enjoy. Relax with it. Don’t think about where you’re going. Just think about where you are.”

“I don’t understand.”

“Just enjoy how it feels. Doesn’t it feel good?”

“Yes, but—”

“Isn’t it exciting?”

“But I’m not excited.”

“But it feels good.”

“Yes, but—”

“So lie back and enjoy it.”

Odd watching. Quite unlike a movie. Better and worse than a movie. Worse because crouching in a closet is far less comfortable than sitting in a plush seat, even the seat of a shabby Times Square porn house. And because one’s perspective from that closet cannot shift as the camera can, dollying in for close-ups, moving back and around to examine the problem from different points of view. One static shot, distance and camera angle never changing, and not all of the action visible from that fixed angle.

Had my eyes been a camera, the movie they would have recorded would have been a boring one. Vastly inferior to the general run of commercially available filth.

In that sense, worse. In another sense, better. Because these were not actors speaking written lines but people engaged in a real drama, and only one of them even knew I existed as the drama’s audience. And so I was able to get into the skin of Helen as I wouldn’t have been able to do had she been performing an identical role on a movie screen.

The identification was not total. I became Helen to an extent, felt what she felt, struggled as she did to lose self and to be overcome by flesh. But I also remained me, ARjenniferLENE, thrilled equally by my own peeper’s role, the visual input enhanced by a helpful finger on my clitoral nether-finger, trembling on the brink for the longest time but holding off, deliberately holding off, keeping my own culmination back in the hopes of synchronizing it with Helen’s.

He ate her for ages. Ate her while she thrilled to the newness of it, ate her past that point until her body understood it, then went on eating her until her body got out in front of her mind and she was able to respond for what was probably the first time in her life. At one point I knew she was going to make it and my heart thrilled for her. And she did make it, coming with loud cries and much kicking of feet, and I in my closet joined her in a more restrained fashion, coming in sedate silence and moving not at all and still enjoying it every bit as much as she.

While she was still reverberating with it, he sprang up and piled onto her, sank his cock into her, and began screwing away madly. I watched the rise and fall of his buttocks. The camera angle was particularly unfortunate for this scene, as it were; I was so situated that I was looking right up his ass and seeing little else. She cooled off a little and he banged away some more and she heated up and came again with a wall-piercing shriek and he collapsed on top of her.

There was more conversation afterward but I paid hardly any attention to it. Then the shower was running, and then she was putting on clothes and leaving. After the door closed behind her he came over and opened the closet door and grinned down at me.

“Enjoy?”

“Mmm-hmm. Must be an ego trip, making two ladies happy with one cock. Did you mean what you told her?”

“I told her a lot of things. I think I meant most of them. What?”

“That now she would be able to make it with her husband.”

“Oh. Sort of. It would help if she could train him to go down on her, and she’ll probably try. That or scout around for a lover. And she’ll get more of a kick out of playing with him, whether it’s her husband or lover, and she’ll have a better idea of what her body is supposed to do.”

“Good Doctor Bill.”

“Not quite.”

“Oh? I’m not so sure. You know what you are? You’re a sexual therapist.”

“That’s a nice thought.”

“It’s what you are.”

“And instead of fees, I get orgasms.”

“Didn’t get one tonight, though, did you?”

A stare of surprise. “You knew that? How?”

“I was right, wasn’t I? I just knew you didn’t come. I don’t know how I knew.”

“Too much concentration on getting her off, I guess. Too much holding myself in check to let go when the time came, and it didn’t seem right to make her hang around until I got it together. More of an ego trip for Doctor Bill to send her home properly glowing.”

Took his cock in my hand. Long but still limp, but it quivered a little as I handled it. I like the ease I have come to have touching him, my familiarity with his flesh and, through it, with all other flesh.

People still intimidate me, but their bodies are much less the vehicles for intimidation.

“I came good,” I said. “I owe you one. Bad time of the month for certain things, but there are other things, and I think we can work something out.”

“Forward little devil.”

“No. Shy and scared all the time, actually. But not scared of your cock any more. Scared of *you* in certain secret ways. But not of your cock. I want it in my mouth for awhile, but after that you can come anywhere you want. You can probably think of an interesting place.”

“I can think of several.”

“I was sure you could. Surprise me.”

And afterwards:

“You almost scare me, Jennifer.”

“How?”

“*She* didn’t know I didn’t come. Christ, it was her body that I didn’t shoot into, and she didn’t notice the difference.”

“Maybe she just didn’t want to mention it.”

“Maybe. But *you* knew.”

“So I’m psychic.”

Oh, Bill. I was there, Bill. In a way that Mrs. Big Tits wasn’t. I was both of you and felt what each of you was feeling. I almost scare you?

Hell.

I almost scare *me*.

16 April—Friday

Forgot to check my Post Office box. Think I'm getting a cold. Head stuffy and headachy all afternoon.

Time for an early-to-bed.

17 April—Saturday

Haven't been out of the house all day. Barely out of bed, just to make tea and toast, water my plant, and make very frequent trips to the toilet. I was going to take sick leave from typing this but decided to make an entry as much out of boredom as anything else.

Suppose I have a fever, but no way to check. No thermometer. Doesn't seem to matter. I'd act the same way if I knew for certain I had a fever. Do feel dizzy, and the less said about my gastrointestinal system, the better.

18 April—Sunday

Feel worlds better today. One of those twenty-four hour gimmicks, I guess.

I just spoke to the Bored Housewife whose ad I answered a few light years ago. It seems I always get the impulse to call her on nights and weekends, which are precisely the times when her Boring Husband is apt to be home. Decided the hell with it, there's nothing suspicious about a woman calling another woman, and I called. She answered the phone herself, said her husband was downstairs building a model train. If that's how he spends Sundays, I know why she's bored.

Problem is where to meet. I told her I live with my parents so my place is out. Her place is fine, but only during business hours when her husband is away, and those are the hours I work. She suggested maybe we could go to a hotel room or something on a weekday evening. I suppose it's possible but we didn't make any plans. Left it open—I'm to think things out, and so will she, and I'll call her back in a few days and we'll see how it goes.

I don't think I'll bother to call her.

I have a feeling there are letters in my Post Office box. Would have checked yesterday but how? Couldn't even leave the apartment. And today the place is closed. At least I think it is, and I'm not going all the way over there to check.

I'm sure it's closed. Maybe the main Post Office is open on Sundays, but the branch stations must be closed.

Nothing more annoying than the certainty there's a letter for you and no way to get to it.

Took my first pill today. Period just finishing itself up.

I can now fuck with impunity. Or at least without getting pregnant.

19 April—Monday

Eleven letters. Incredible!

20 April—Tuesday

Three more letters in the Post Office box this afternoon, making a total of fourteen. I really didn't expect this much of a response. I tried to work the ad to

make people answer it but I didn't think that many would be interested. Fourteen of them.

One I'm pretty sure is a fake. It's supposed to be from a couple that likes to do everything that is in any way sexual, but there's a tone to the letter that makes me think it was written by a guy who gets a kick out of writing dirty letters. On the one hand it's wildly obscene and excessively detailed, and on the other hand there's a lot of nonsense about not sending a photo of the two of them out of fear of exposure. They risk a lot more from the contents of the letter, assuming it to be true, than they could possibly risk with a non-obscene photo. And "they" (I'm sure it's really just a "he") go to great lengths asking me to describe just what sort of act I would like them to put on for me, and what acts I have enjoyed watching in the past, and could I please send a naked and preferably obscene picture of myself? No, friend, I could not. Your letter's a lot of fun, but don't expect me to reply to it.

The rest are all possibilities. And thirteen out of fourteen is a damned good average, I would think. Interesting how many of the letters include at least a phrase or two weighing the possibility that I am actually a phony of some sort, and then going on to say that they will presume I'm on the up-and-up, at least in terms of the first letter.

I should have done this ages ago. Placed an ad, that is. This way I get replies from people who want what I want instead of having to write blindly to people who are less than enthusiastic about my scene.

Jennifer, new worlds are opening up for you!

Surprising that I got that much response. I never would have thought there were that many people hot for having someone watch them. I guess it isn't a main kick for the people who answered me. They mention that they enjoy being watched, but it doesn't seem to be their major preoccupation. More that they're generally open to new things, and that the idea of having willowy me sitting around watching and playing with myself strikes them as more fun, say, than a hot poker up the ass.

My language has either loosened up or deteriorated markedly in the past two months. Depending on how you want to look at it.

I feel positively wealthy. I sit with my fourteen letters in my hands and ruffle through them, feeling like Scrooge McDuck romping in his money bin. What an abundance of riches! All but a couple of them have included photos and phone numbers. The photos are properly innocent things, head and shoulders shots, which I find reassuring; I would be a little put off at the thought of meeting someone sufficiently moronic to send actionable photos through the mails to an unknown recipient. I read the letters and look at the photographs and consider the phone numbers and realize that the possibilities are, if not endless, at least far less closely bounded than they were before. I could, at any moment, on any whim, call this one or that one or this one or that one—

Last night I read all the letters (there were only eleven of them then) and looked at all the photographs, and was immediately supplied with material for a hundred fantasies. Last night I delayed my own private coming far into the night, purposely postponing it so that I could let my mind (and Jennifer's fantasy-flesh) roam at free rein through realms of mental lust.

And tonight?

Tonight there is every temptation to do the same. So much temptation. What frightens me, what truly bothers me, is how appallingly easy it would be for me to use these letters and pictures as fantasy food until they fall apart without ever following up on any of them.

Oh, it would be so easy to do. So very easy. Right now it is easy to tell myself that I am meeting with Bill tomorrow—my usual Wednesday appointment, my weekly visit to my sexual therapist. And, because I am meeting with Bill tomorrow, it would seem that there would be no need to have active sex tonight. Better by far to let well enough alone and crawl into bed with a headful of ideas and a handful of fingers.

The bother is that I keep telling myself I am progressing and things like this make me wonder how true it is. I am more active. I am doing more. But the same hangups seem to be present and seem to push me in the same old ways.

Perhaps they never go away. Perhaps, indeed, they are not supposed to go away. It is one's hangups that define a person (I think I read that, or an equivalent thereof, somewhere or other) and removing them is like removing the skeleton from the body. Neuroses are the skeleton of the personality.

The trick, then, is to live as you want to in spite of your hangups. To have the urge to crawl into a solitary bed, but to recognize that urge for what it is and get up and out and do something about it.

Which, damn it to hell, is precisely what I intend to do right now. It's too late to call some of them, but it's not too late to call all of them, and if I make enough calls I should be able to find someone congenial who would like company tonight.

Goodnight, beloved Smith-Corona Electra 110. I have to make a couple of telephone calls.

Pleasant dreams.

21 April—Wednesday

It's terribly late.

(Why am I lying to my typewriter? It's not even midnight, and I just got back from Bill's, and I'm saying that it's terribly late because I want to get right to bed and don't feel much like writing anything just now. But it's not terribly late and I'm not terribly tired and I might as well do this more or less right.)

Went to Bill's. Nice lazy time. We got undressed and played with ourselves and with each other and told each other stories. He had more stories to tell but for a change I had something to contribute. Told him about the dyke in the Village the other week. Also about the two gay boys last night. I don't know whether or not I told him about Wayne and Maureen. I seem to remember thinking about them, but may not have gotten around to telling him about them.

Then he ate me for a while, and then I told him I was on the pill and that it was about time we actually got around to screwing, and he obliged.

I suppose it went all right. I don't know exactly. I was glad it was happening and it felt good but that was about all. Didn't get hot or come or anything.

Enough.

22 April—Thursday

Two more leaves on the philodendron.

Spikes, both of them, and soon one and then the other will unfold into angular heart-shaped leaves, large and bright green and beautiful, gradually darkening as they age, and other spikes will sprout and unfold, and this will go on and on, with the plant getting larger and larger, more and more and ever more leaves on it. Next spring it will be ready for a larger pot. I have read about potting it, repotting it—one removes it gently from its present pot, spreads out the roots, fits them into the new and larger pot, gradually tamps soil around them, waters the whole thing thoroughly, tamps more dirt, waters again, and lets the thing get itself together in its new home.

You get to do this every spring as the plant gets larger and larger.

And then I suppose eventually it dies. The book doesn't say anything about them dying of old age sooner or later, but everything does, doesn't it? Nothing is eternal, not even a philodendron.

Of course it could be eternal in a sense. You can take cuttings from the thing now and then, and root the cuttings in water and then plant them, and presto! you have a new philodendron plant, a son or daughter of the old plant, or an equivalent of the old plant, or whatever you want to call it.

You can fill up your house with philodendrons that way. Have the whole kitchen cluttered with glasses of water each containing a cutting or two. Litter the apartment with pots of plants, and repot each plant in the spring, and throw away the old plants when they die, and ...

Shit shit shit shit shit

Oh, what is the point of all of this, of any of this, for me or for all the philodendrons in the world? What on earth is the point of it all? Life goes on and death goes on and nothing adds up to anything.

I cannot look on the bright side because I do not think there is one. The bright side is done with mirrors, silvered glass, and is no more real than the world Alice found. Walk through mirrors and find a world with a bright side where things make sense, but on this side of the mirror everything adds up to nothing at all.

23 April—Friday

Called in sick today. Dear Mr. Karlman, please excuse my absence today on grounds of illness. I am sick, Mr. K. I am worldsick, dying of weltschmerz. I am a good listener, Mr. K., as long as I do not have to listen to the pounding of the surf within my own tired head.

Have to remember to get my paycheck on Monday. No problem, enough cash to last the weekend. Always enough cash when there's no place to go, nothing to do, no way to spend the money. Stay inside your apartment all weekend and what do you need but fifty cents for the *Sunday Times*?

I have to stop this.

Have to see someone tonight. Who? Doesn't matter. Bad phone conversation yesterday that started my bad mood, a letter answering my ad, and I called this man and he was nice enough, decent enough, but anxious to arrange everything in advance, to discuss carefully just who would do what and with which and to whom, and a feeling of—what?

I don't know. I should know but I don't.

Let us figure it out.

Of two sick and pitiable creatures mechanically arranging to lick each other's wounds. Joyless and personless, the meeting of two people who do not themselves exist. Would I be willing to urinate on him? Not that he insists on it, I am to understand, but if I could find it in myself to do so his pleasure would be complete. As for his part of the game, he would be glad to show me anything I would care to examine, to perform whatever little playlets I might require, to contribute to my fantasies as I contribute to his. Quid pro quo, this for that, do that ye might be done to.

Plummeting me into depression. "I'll call you back," I said, knowing I wouldn't. *Piss on you*, I thought, cradling the phone, and thought that the phrase should amuse me, and thought then that it did not, and that little if anything did in fact amuse me.

Made calls to two other correspondents and hung up before anyone could answer. Remembered sitting with my handful of fourteen letters dreaming dreams of fantasies now and forever fulfilled, and now those letters and the fantasies and dreams along with them turned to ashes in my hand, in my mind, in my heart. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, dreams to death and decay, for Jennifer, for Arlene, even as for every philodendron on God's imperfect planet.

The mood still there this morning, reinforced by sufficient physical malaise to make the sick call legitimate enough. Stomach upset, head aching dully. Sick and slick with night sweats and feeling bad head to foot. Bad dreams all night. Tossing and turning all night long, sheet damp with sweat.

Hell.

Do things, push yourself, take it step by step by step, and then you find out you're the same person stuck in the same hell. Orgasms with another person are nicer than orgasms all alone, and being able to bring a man or woman pleasure with hands or mouth or cunt is better than being terrified of so much as a hand on one's arm.

But still incomplete, still utterly alone. Still Arlene in one's heart however many beds Jennifer shares.

The hell of this is that I at once believe it and disbelieve it. Last night it meant enough to make me mostly wish for death, and this morning it was still strong enough to keep me away from the office, to keep me in bed with the covers over my head waiting for the day to go away. And now I still believe it but also disbelieve it, both at once, disbelieving strongly enough so that I do think it is important that the philodendron is adding leaves, do think it is important that I am growing in certain ways if not in others. And important to seek, and to grab at excitement and orgasms and snatches of pleasure.

Better to have the black moods, bad as they are, for the sake of having the good times when they come. Before, in Brooklyn, there were no good times and no bad times either. It was bad when I thought overly much about who I was, but these thoughts came less frequently and did not have so much impact when they did. The highs were lower, the lows higher, and life went on without anything happening, inside or outside of the prison of my self.

I am alive now in ways I never was. Better to be alive. Though it is this state of life that makes one think unhappily of dying.

The philodendron, eternal or not, does not know that it will one day wither. The Human Condition—knowing that one is born to die.

I am not good at philosophy. It is not my best subject, nor am I its best object.

I will call Paul and Gregory, my gay boys. I am not good at philosophy but I am strangely good at pleasure. Not so good at pleasure of my own but surprisingly good at achieving the pleasure of others.

Whores, I have read, are frigid, turned off, feel nothing. The better they are at satisfying men, the less the likelihood of their ever experiencing satisfaction themselves. They suck cocks magnificently while their heads buzz with thoughts of television programs and hair appointments.

Fantasy of some day picking a man up on the street and posing as a whore. Taking him to a hotel, bedding with him for money. *Pretending* to be a whore? If I did it, would it be pretense?

I'd never do that, though.

I could call someone new but not tonight. Paul and Gregory. Made a tentative date to call them tonight, though didn't expect I would keep it.

Why not?

24 April—Saturday

I wonder what I do for them, exactly. I wonder what it is that endears me to them.

Paul and Gregory.

Paul, tall and very slim. Must be six-four and slender as a reed. Close-cropped hair like a cap on the top of his round head. Flat buttocks, imperceptible hips. Looks like a penis, standing so straight and reed-like and tall, the round head, the tight cap of short straight limp brown hair. His penis also very long, very thin, but no cap of hair on its tip, not surprisingly. Capped, though, by a foreskin.

Gregory a few inches shorter but much different in build. Used to lift weights "until I got out of that whole muscle-boy bag and decided just to be a person." The muscle fetish routine may be immature and narcissistic and sick, but it does leave a man with an attractive body. The ones who overdo it turn me off a little. The supermen who bulge everywhere. I would have difficulty relating to that, I think. I'm surprised they can even relate to each other. Actually I don't think they can. "The muscle boys aren't really into sex," Gregory told me at one point. "They want to be admired, want to be adequate, but when you're in that number you don't really want to ball anyone. It's just the pleasure of being admired that's important, and admiring in turn someone who's better at it than you are. I like to stay in shape. It's a turn-off when a person doesn't stay in shape, but it's also a turn-off when you have a guy who spends all his life drinking protein supplements and lifting weights and never having anything more intelligent to discuss than triceps definition."

If I didn't know that a triceps was a particular muscle, what would I think it was? A three-wheeled septic tank, I suppose.

They are gay, are Paul and Gregory. But neither Gay Lib militants nor closet types. Both have made it with girls, and are capable of so doing. Only problem is that they are incapable of enjoying it.

Either Paul or Gregory speaking, hardly matters as they are both in very much the same situation here: “I can get off with a girl. It gets hard and I stick it in and move it around until the gun goes off. I can stay hard long enough for the girl to get there. No problem there. But it doesn’t mean anything. It isn’t real. It’s jerking off, fucking a hand or a pillow or a chicken.”

(Chickens!?!?)

“I can’t relate to a girl. I read lines instead of talking normally. I feel as though I’m on stage or on camera, being observed by some extraterrestrial intelligence. And the girl, whoever she is. Our minds touch but our bodies don’t touch. Another man is a duplicate of self. It’s easier that way. I’m myself and he’s himself and we can get it together. I’ve read about homosexuality being neurotic, immature. I’m far less neurotic and far more mature in bed with a man than when I try to get it off with a woman.”

Sex is dirty and women are clean. That seems to be part of it. Sex is a private male thing, and women are (a) likely to disapprove and (b) a challenge and a threat and (c) strange unknowable beings. I can’t understand all the rest of it.

Not that they want to straighten out. To get away from the gay scene. Not that at all. Paul insisted he could only have a long-term relationship with someone like Gregory. That he could live permanently or nearly so with Greg, while he would never consider sharing a roof with a woman. (Greg is somewhat less committed to this view, or seemed so to me.) The consensus: Being exclusively gay is a hangup and being exclusively straight is a hangup, and they would like to be able to function both ways.

Really function, as they can function physically with women already. But be as easy with women as they are with each other, which will take some doing, but which they seem to feel is important to them, sufficiently important to make them not merely willing but even anxious to waste their time with me.

And so, with me posing no threat, with me quite silent and motionless, they make love in my presence.

A project of theirs, suggested by Paul who has done some extensive if dilettantish reading in psychology and conditioned-reflex therapy. The idea being one that seems sensible enough to me, and that is, come to think of it, not that wildly different from my own sexual self-improvement project. To wit: by having me frequently present, and by on the one hand learning to relax conversationally with me, and to be naked both physically and emotionally in front of me, and on the other hand by so structuring things as to develop an association of my passive and unobtrusive presence and the whole idea of sexual excitement, they will gradually break down the barrier which keeps the two concepts of women and sexual intimacy (not activity so much as intimacy) mutually exclusive.

So I sit silently watching them stroke and kiss each other, and they pause occasionally to kiss me and perhaps touch my breasts and genitals. Their touches and kisses are essentially passionless. Exploratory, tentative, almost cartographic. They acquaint themselves with my geography without any need to make arduous trips over this *terra incognita*. And we chat while they do this, and then they kiss and pet and suck each other, and the game goes on in this fashion until it comes to a logical conclusion.

Hard to say whether I add to or detract from their passion for each other. We have not quite discussed this and I myself am less than certain. I do not seem to inhibit them, but then I've no way of knowing what they are like when I am not around. I have seen them twice, and they do seem more at ease with me now than when we first met, but that is inevitable in all such artificial relationships, is it not? I have noticed it myself. It is easier to take off clothes in front of those who have already seen you naked. Psychic clothes or cotton ones.

My own reaction to them?

Harder to pin down.

Obviously they interest me. Perhaps they do something more than interest me, as I find myself examining my feelings, not only as I type these pages but in other moments as well. As if there is a message written in their flesh that it would profit me to decode.

Do they excite me?

In a way of course they do. They are both extremely attractive men and it is exciting to watch two men together. A sort of excitement I had not previously had. The mainstream of pornography does not focus on male homosexual relations. (Inasmuch as mainstreams are inclined to focus. A chaotic metaphor, that.) The porno movies on Forty-Second Street show women tangled up with each other, but never men. When there is a group scene, two men and a woman or several men and several women, the men seem to me to go to great lengths to avoid touching one another. For the benefit of the males in the audience, no doubt; it is presumed that their own inhibitions in this regard would render such scenes a turn-off. Perhaps, too, the actors aren't into that sort of thing. Or perhaps they are, and go at each other hammer and tongues when the shooting finishes for the day.

No, it's not just the actors. All the dirty novels I've read are in the same category. Always some lesbian scenes, and never any faggotry. Except for the occasional scene in which some hapless queen makes a play for our hero, and our hero lays him out with a haymaker to the jaw. To prove, beyond doubt, that he (and the writer, and the identifying reader in the bargain, no doubt) is heterosexual as a John Fucking Wayne movie.

Of course they have faggot pornography. Books and pictures and movies and everything. They advertise tons of this stuff in Screw. But it's kept to itself, a gay ghetto. Bill tells me that the Times Square porn shops keep the gay stuff separated, give it one wall or bin to itself.

Strange.

How did I get off on this tangent?

Paul and Gregory.

I don't know. I guess I enjoy it. I don't come or anything. I don't get hot exactly.

I don't know.

Maybe it's the comforting feeling that they're as mixed up as I am, and that I'm having some sort of therapeutic function in my relationship with them. The reverse of my role in what I have going with Bill.

I suppose this might be worth puzzling out, if anything's worth puzzling out, but now doesn't seem to be the time for it. I'm not getting anywhere, not typing anything that hasn't occurred to me before, not coming up with anything I haven't been able to get together in more eloquent form in my private musings. I feel very

inarticulate at the moment, and less given to profound introspection than normally.

I think I'll wash my hair.

25 April—Sunday

It's raining.

I could open the window and let the rain water my plant, but I think the rainwater in this city is even worse than the tapwater. It gets filtered by all that pollution overhead and comes down positively black. If people in New York washed their hair with rainwater, it would fall out.

26 April—Monday

Had dinner with Mr. Karlman tonight. As an American lieutenant said recently in quite another context, it was no big deal. He dropped me at the subway and I took a cab back here.

We didn't talk about anything important. Had the feeling he wanted to talk about something more personal, but he never made any move in that direction.

I wonder what I would do if he made a pass at me. The funny thing is that I have gradually come to the point, almost without realizing it, where I could sleep with him without any real trouble.

At least I think I could.

It doesn't mean that much to me. I don't know that I could enjoy it, but I could go through with it and feel generally good about it, and good about doing something nice for him. As I do sort of like him as a person.

Reasons against sleeping with him:

(1) How he might take it. How he'd want to be closer with me, might think he's in love with me, might worry that I would be in love with him, all of that. Or that he would dislike me for taking it casually, or that I in turn would be crushed (though I don't think so) if he took it casually. If we could both just do it with no strong feelings on either side, just something nice to do for two people who sort of like each other, it would be fine. But how could that happen or how could one be sure it could happen?

(2) Jennifer could sleep with him but could Arlene? I am Arlene with him and Jennifer with others, and Arlene is still a virgin, still a prude, still all these things.

Sudden question: Is it Arlene or Jennifer who writes this diary? Arlene the obvious answer, but I am not entirely certain as I think about it. Could be that it varies, that sometimes Jennifer and sometimes Arlene sits at this typewriter. At the moment I am Arlene, I would say, but how can Arlene conceive of balling Mr. K.? For that matter, why would Jennifer be inclined to offer any objections?

Thing that occurred to me. Happened a couple of days ago in some context I no longer recall. Was musing on the nuisance of making it impossible for Jennifer's friends to get quickly in touch with her. Even the people that I see have to write to me at the Post Office box, can't call me on the phone, can't come to my apartment. Am still unwilling to change this, but thought came to me suddenly that I could move to another apartment which I would take in the name of Jennifer Starr. And have telephone installed in the name of Jennifer Starr. And quit my job and get

another job somewhere in the name of Jennifer Starr. And then all of Jennifer's life could be lived quite openly.

Astonishing that the thought could even occur, as the whole thing is completely irrational. Makes not the slightest bit of sense when considered for a couple of seconds.

Because what would I be accomplishing? Just a name change, really.

What I have now is two separate lives, the life of Arlene and the life of Jennifer. I am not even sure that it is schizophrenic, although I often regard it as such. In one real sense, however, I am always Arlene. Jennifer is the psychic makeup I wear when I let my life touch the lives of other men and women.

If I changed Arlene Krause's name to Jennifer Starr, I would be changing only a name. And if I were open to people, whatever name I chose to wear, it would be the same as if I gave out my phone number now, and had people to my apartment. If I were ever able to do that, I might as well do it as Arlene as go through the mechanics of a change of identity.

The only thing that fundamentally keeps me from sleeping with Mr. Karlman is that he knows me. My life touches his, and that is what will always stop me.

Why do I write sleeping with?

I have slept with no one since Gary and I separated. It is not that I am an habitual user of euphemisms in this compulsive exercise in meaningless automatic writing. It seems to me sometimes that no day goes by without the word *fuck* appearing in these pages.

Why the evident implication that I *fuck* these other people, these people who know me as Jennifer, but that I would be *sleeping with* Mr. Karlman? Obviously I would also fuck him, or be fucked by him, or both.

Make sense of this, child.

Guess: There is a special intimacy in the phrase sleep with, just as there is an intimacy in the literal realization thereof. I.e., I could not possibly sleep with any of the people I have been fucking. Could not close my eyes and drift off to unconsciousness in their various beds. Could not permit myself to do this.

But Mr. K., who knows me as Arlene, who knows one version of the Real Me (albeit not the other), unconsciously suggests a deeper level of intimacy to me.

All of this must mean something.

I think I have an idea what it means but I cannot fit words to my idea. This may be because I am unwilling to type it all out but it seems to go deeper than that. I think I am unwilling even to arrange the thought intelligibly in my head.

At this point, quitting my job and finding another would be either the best or worst thing I could possibly do. One or the other, certainly. But there is no way for me to be sure which, and I would rather put off doing the best thing than risk doing the worst thing. Postponement is easier to remedy than action.

I wonder what will happen.

27 April—Tuesday

I was thinking about Mr. K. all day today.

Nothing happened. He talked to me and had something going on in his voice, but no reference to dinner last night and no personal touch in anything.

It came to me that it would be interesting if I could merely push a button and the act of pushing it would have Mr. Karlman knowing all there is to know about me. The knowledge would merely leap into his brain. Telepathy, and in a total way; he would not find out about me as much as he would suddenly possess knowledge of me.

Why does this fantasy appeal?

I remember the old ethical question—suppose you were confronted with a similar button, and if you pushed it fifty thousand strangers in China would die painlessly, whereupon you would get a million dollars. Would you push it?

I wouldn't. Because I don't want a million dollars and wouldn't know what to do with it if I had it. But editing the question and designing it for me, it becomes trickier.

Push the button and the Chinese strangers die and you, the button pusher, get whatever it is that you want.

Let's put it that way. And let's leave out the corollary question of *What do you want, bitch?*

Would I push the button?

I don't know. Nobody can answer the question because nobody knows, do they? I am reminded now of two curses, and I think they are Chinese curses but I'm not sure.

(1) May you live in interesting times.

(2) May you get what you want.

I live in interesting times. Lord, do I ever live in interesting times.

I don't know, though, if I'm getting what I want.

Why did I get into this? To get away from Mr. K. and that other hypothetical button. I guess if he knew everything about me then I could have an affair with him, if he wanted one. But there is no such button, which saves me just as the other non-button saves the fifty thousand Chinese. And I could no more tell Mr. K. about the real me than I could go over to China and slit fifty thousand throats with a pen knife.

I must call Bill and confirm our usual date for tomorrow night.

28 April—Wednesday

No time. Just a compulsive note to say I'm on my way to Bill's and the philodendron is growing beautifully and I bought a new chair for the apartment during my lunch hour and now I won't have to write anything when I come home later tonight and that's just as well.

29 April—Thursday

I think Bill and I are beginning to bore each other.

I guess I'm still a challenge to him, but not a challenge that engages all that much of his interest any more.

I don't know what he is to me.

I think, though, that what he is becoming is an old friend. I had an urge last night to tell him any number of things I have never told him.

But didn't.

30 April—Friday

Dinner tonight with Mr. K.

I keep staring at that sentence. Wanting to amplify on it and not amplifying on it. Fuck it.

1 May—Saturday

Another month.

Started this in mid-February, day before Valentine's Day I think it was. Pissing and moaning that nobody sent me a valentine.

Next Valentine's Day I can send cards to all of Jennifer's playmates. I wonder if any enterprising manufacturer has developed a line of pornographic valentines. A lovely idea, that.

Could make my own. Get a Polaroid camera with a timer and take color close-ups of my cunt.

"Happy Valentine's Day. Wish you were here."

2 May—Sunday

The hell with it.

3 May—Monday

I suppose I'm going to fuck Mr. Karlman sooner or later but I don't know which it ought to be. Sooner or later. I guess I ought to do it because the sooner it's done the sooner I can stop thinking about it.

On the other hand, the longer I put it off, the more chance it'll never happen.

I suppose a first step would be to start thinking of him by his first name.

4 May—Tuesday

Saw Jeff and Claudine again last night. I had never gotten around to calling them after the last time I saw them, and then I got a letter from them saying how much they had enjoyed me and wanted to see me again, and I had had no particular reason not to see them, so I thought what the hell, and I called them and went over there and we spent a very enjoyable three hours.

Two-and-a-half hours, actually.

I don't even know if I have written about them at all. I don't seem to remember writing about them, and when I typed their names my fingers told me I was typing them for the first time.

Strange.

5 May—Wednesday

Maybe it's my imagination but I have the feeling that this is becoming less and less of a sex diary. At the beginning I seem to recall writing down everything sexual that happened to me.

And so very little did happen to me at the beginning. It was always on my mind but hardly anything ever happened. I was so afraid of it.

Now I'm not afraid of it, and three or four times a week I see someone, and I don't often write about it. I was thinking about this today at work, thinking about last night's entry when I mentioned Jeff and Claudine and realized I hadn't

mentioned them before. And after all of that I didn't say anything about what they are like or what it was like with them.

As a matter of fact, I have the feeling this is becoming less and less of a diary all across the board. I have to drag myself to the typewriter most of the time and just type out enough sentences so that I won't feel guilty about not having an entry for the day.

I'd like to read over what I've done so far, but it's more than my promise to myself that is stopping me. I'm literally scared to see what I've written. As though I am afraid to come face to face with the person who wrote it all.

And yet it all seems so futile. This typing, this communion with Smith-Corona Electra 110. What is the point of it, after all? To write about my clothes, and my fantasies, and my fucking, and my philodendron? Literary exhibitionism of the strangest sort, as I am unable to go whole hog and actually exhibit it to anybody, myself included.

Maybe that's the point. Keep the diary so that you evolve to the point where you don't need to keep it any more. Like eating so that you won't be hungry so that you can stop eating until you're hungry again.

No Chinese meal, this diary. I have the feeling I won't really be hungry to write more of this for longer than twenty minutes.

More like twenty years.

6 May—Thursday

I had a terrible dream last night. Often dreams disturb me but this was something else. A full-fledged nightmare. I woke up violently, sat up straight in the bed with my mouth open to scream. Didn't scream, but I must have been right on the verge of it.

Heart pounding fiercely, really hammering away. Body coated with chill sweat and the sheet damp beneath me.

I cannot remember the dream.

Been trying to. Been trying all day, then pushed it out of my mind, then tried to summon it up now while sitting at the typewriter. Just no way at all.

Never really cared much about dreams. About trying to remember them. Feeling now that the dream is a ghost which must be exorcised; it'll haunt me if I don't remember it, but memory won't summon it up.

They say you can recall dreams under hypnosis. I'm sure I could never by hypnotized. Some people can't. Won't surrender their will, won't let themselves go under.

Of course I would be like that. Refusing to surrender the self to a hypnotist just as I refuse to surrender self sexually.

A parallel there?

Probably. Can surrender Jennifer's unself to strangers because that reveals nothing of me.

I could not be hypnotized, I am sure of this. But carry it further—I could not even bring myself to test this hypothesis. Could not dare to go to a hypnotist on the offchance that I might be wrong, that he (or she) might be able to get me to go under. And the pure thought so upsets me that I would never put the question to a test.

Just as I won't have sex with anyone who knows me?

The dream. I can't get back any of it, except for one thing. And I feel it more than I remember it.

That, in the dream, I was about to die. Don't know how or why, but I was about to die, and I woke up at the instant before dream-death.

I read something somewhere about this. I think it was in a novel. Can't remember exactly. Something to the effect that people often wake up on the point of dying in dreams. And that if you don't wake up at that instant when the dream-self is about to die, the dreamer in fact dies.

Legend, it must have been. Because how would anybody know if it is true or not?

All I know is that I am afraid to go to sleep.

7 May—Friday

Couldn't fall asleep last night.

Expected it to happen that way. Stayed up until two-thirty dreading sleep, and finally got into bed exhausted, and couldn't sleep. Would be hovering on the point of sleep and would reach out and catch myself and make myself sit up and smoke another cigarette.

Dreading the dream.

Dreading death.

Finally fell asleep a couple of hours before the alarm rang. If I dreamed at all, I don't remember it.

8 May—Saturday

The quick brown fox jumped over the fucking dog.

9 May—Sunday

The quick brown fox fucked over the jumping dog.

10 May—Monday

The quick brown

11 May—Tuesday

Today Arnie was saying that he ...

Odd to type Arnie when I have never called ...

The quick brown fox jumped over the lazy dog.

14 May—Friday

23 May—Sunday

An odd feeling. Sitting again at this typewriter. Blank paper staring in accusation at me. Fingers remembering this particular keyboard. The rest of me remembering the feeling of pouring my head onto the blank paper, dirtying the paper while cleansing the mind.

Hard habit to break, this. Days, I forget how many, of putting off the moment of confrontation as long as possible, then rolling the paper into the typewriter, then

throwing meaningless words onto the page, slapping out the fragment of a single nonsense sentence, then stacking the page meticulously on the pile of pages under the radiator cover.

Feeling, as each page joined the pile, that I was paying some sort of curious dues. And feeling too that I was cheating, breaking the spirit of the rule while hewing to its letter, inventing ceremony for myself as meaningless as any I could devise.

Then a couple days off. And one day when all I typed was the date, and then no more entries. I don't know how long it's been since I even made an attempt at an entry. Over a week, though, because I think it was Tuesday when I could no longer bear the silent presence of the typewriter, sitting out here endlessly and gleaming like blood on Lady Macbeth's hands. Put it in its carrying case, closed it, tucked it case and all in the closet.

Out of sight and almost out of mind.

And now I take it out again for as little reason as I ever put it away. Things I want to get down but how to write them? I would say that I have lost the knack, that this recording process is now unfamiliar to me, but am surprised how quickly I am into it as deeply as I ever was. My fingers fly on these keys, throwing letters and words and sentences at the page without my thinking them over first. I have missed this, and realize now how much I have felt the omission, but if challenged I could still not explain what it is that this does for me, what it is that I require of it.

Feel a compulsion to fill in all the blanks now, bring the nonexistent reader up to date on all that has happened since I stopped putting my life on these pages. *Then I did this and then I did that and he said and she said and I went and I saw and I felt and I was and I am.*

No.

Wouldn't know where to start. Have to write it when it's hot, not seek to recall it after it's cooled off. No point to that. The pages are for my eyes only, and my own eyes will never play over them. It is not a book to be read but a book—call it that, the word seems to fit—a book to be written, an existential document, each page of which has served its purpose forever by the time it leaves the typewriter.

Could I then throw away each page after each day's writing? Could I write this diary as Penelope made her shawl, knitting all day, ripping out stitches all night?

I think not. There is a security in the growing stack of papers, and it would hurt as much to destroy them as it would to read them. Neither my eyes nor another's shall ever read them, and yet this does not mean they do not exist. Bishop Berkeley wondered if a tree falling in the forest could be said to make a sound if no ear was close, enough to hear it. That hearing might define sound, as reading defines writing. But I think not. Though I would be hard put just now to explain myself.

I am always hard put to explain myself. I write this day after day in an attempt to explain myself to myself, and the explanation is foredoomed because I never read what I have written.

And never shall.

I sat down tonight with something specific to write, but it shall remain unwritten until tomorrow.

I wonder why.

24 May—Monday

“I love you, Jennifer.”

“No you don’t, Greg. Or you, Paul. Neither of you loves me. Nobody loves anybody.”

“We all know that. Let’s lie and say we love each other.”

“Why lie?”

“It might not be a lie, Jennifer. There are ways I love you. Ways Greg loves you. Ways Greg and I love each other. The word doesn’t hurt when there’s no promise in it, no demand, no this-for-that. You know us and we know you. No woman ever knew me before. Love you, Jennifer.”

“Love you, Jennifer.”

“Love you, Greg. That’s a lie. Paul, I’ll lie and say I love you.”

“Lies or truth, we love each other. I must love you, you touch my stomach and it doesn’t tickle. My body knows you. The flesh on my stomach is the litmus paper of love, Jennifer. Love makes me unticklish. Kiss me. Oh, yes.”

“And we’re both going to make love to you, Jennifer. Paul and I, both at once, making love to you.”

“Yes.”

“Sharing you.”

“Yes, sharing you. Fucking you, you angel. Fucking each other with your good woman’s body.”

“Yes.”

“Oh, do. Ah, yes, yes. Ah, yes, do.”

Not tonight, not last night. A few days ago all this happened. Wonder how real the conversation is that I’ve typed. How much is as it happened, how much is as it has been filtered by my mind and worn smooth by time.

Ought to be close, anyway.

Sit here summoning up the memory of this incident and seeking to transfer it to the page, the pages, seeking to feed it into the typewriter and make it come out on the paper, and for an odd and I think new reason.

Not because the scene is so vividly in mind. Not because there are things about it I want to discuss with myself, or to record, or to understand. The incident itself was chosen carefully after several minutes of studying blank paper, and I picked it less for its impact upon me than for its pure erotic value.

I want to write something sexy.

Don’t know why, don’t care why. Doesn’t fucking matter. Want to recreate the episode in words and get the full absolute flavor of it in print. Odd, because not for me to read, no, not for anyone to read. Why is a question to ask later or never, and better never than later. Why is a crooked letter. Why is—bullshit.

Forget why. And forget all the other bullshit that clutters my head in the course of sex and my paper in the course of writing about sex. Concentrate purely on *what*, not why or how but *what*. Be a camera and tell what the lens sees. Nothing but a camera, a camera which records without interpreting, a camera not guided by a skilled director but mounted immobile on a tripod, taking it all in and making no comments on what it sees.

I am in a king-size bed, lying on my back, one leg straight out before me, the other leg bent at the knee, its toes resting on the calf of the straight leg, my thighs slightly apart. Paul is on my right. He lies on his side, facing toward me, his hand on my ...

No.

Get rid of I, get rid of me. Third person throughout. Just say what happens.

Arlene is in a king-size bed, lying on her back, one leg straight out before her, the other leg bent at the knee, its toes resting on the...

No.

Jennifer is in a king-size bed, lying on her back, one leg straight out before her, the other leg bent at the knee, its toes resting on the calf of the straight leg, her thighs slightly apart. Paul is on her right. He lies on his side, facing toward her, his hand on her shoulder, his mouth at her neck. Gregory, on her left, also faces her. His body is positioned slightly lower on the bed so that his head rests on her upper arm, his mouth a few inches from her breast. One of his hands rests on one of her thighs, the thigh of the leg that is bent at the knee.

Paul kisses her neck, small tentative nibbling kisses at first. Then he begins to let his tongue run over her soft skin. He pauses in his licking to tell her how soft she is, commenting again and again on the smoothness of her skin, the appeal of its texture. As he licks and kisses her throat, his left hand settles on her hip, rubs, strokes. His hand moves downward until it touches the top of her triangle of pubic hair, then reverses its direction and moves over her hip, across her abdomen, crossing the bottom of her rib cage and reaching her right breast. On the way a finger brushes lightly over her navel and she quivers at the touch. When his hand fits itself gently around her breast a small sigh escapes her lips. His hand is still for an instant, then gently begins to knead her breast flesh. Her nipple goes rigid against the palm of his hand and she sighs again.

On her other side, Gregory strokes her leg, down toward the knee, then upward toward her loins. The flesh on the insides of her thighs is silk-smooth and very sensitive. Each time his fingers move higher and the muscles in her thighs begin to work involuntarily, flexing automatically as his hand moves closer and closer to her loins, then relaxing as it halts and heads downward toward her knee. His head moves closer and his tongue darts out to touch the nipple of her left breast. She draws in breath sharply. The hand on her leg moves higher than ever and her hips give a tiny thrust, trying to meet it. But the hand draws away even as the mouth comes forward to reach for her breast. She feels his penis, hard and large, pressing against the meaty exterior of her thigh. With a silent sob she turns toward him, and his lips part to take in the tip of her breast even as his hand moves the final few inches to touch her loins.

She is on her side now, facing Gregory, clutching his head to her breast. He is sucking urgently at her nipple while he rolls her clitoris deftly between thumb and forefinger. Her juices flow. Still toying with her clitoris, another finger steals into her vagina and strokes her.

She makes small sounds and squeezes her eyes tightly shut. Her thighs lock around the invading hand, imprisoning it, unwilling to let it escape.

Behind her, Paul presses the full length of his body against her. She feels his hard cock in the cleft of her buttocks, his thin body against the length of her back.

His mouth is on her neck, the back of her neck now, and he is alternately kissing and biting, thrilling her with the sharp touch of his teeth, then the soothing moisture of his mouth. His fingers touch her ribs. She raises her body slightly in response, and his arm slips beneath her chest as his other arm moves over the top of her body. His hands fasten upon her breasts and grip them firmly. He holds the left one as Gregory sucks its tip, grips the right one and works its nipple with his fingers.

Her hips press backward and she feels Paul's cock like a bar of warm steel against her buttocks. She savors the touch, then thrusts her hips outward and feels the throb of Gregory's cock against her thigh. Her hands take hold of Gregory's head, urge him upward, and her mouth finds his. Her tongue probes into his mouth, then withdraws as her own mouth accepts his tongue in turn.

Paul's cock is the first to enter her. He moves off from her for a moment to anoint himself with K-Y jelly. Then she feels his hands on her buttocks, feels the cool moisture of another dab of jelly on his forefinger as he presses it into her anal opening. His finger works the jelly around the area, then withdraws. His hands clasp her buttocks and draw them apart, and the head of his penis takes the place of his finger and begins the process of intromission.

Several times he stops in answer to her gasps of pain. Her buttocks automatically, instinctively, close themselves to repel the assault, and it is work for her to will the instinct to subside, to will herself to open to him. He enters her half an inch at a time, moving in tiny fits and starts. Finally he is halfway inside her, and suddenly progress is easy; it is as if her anus suddenly relaxes and sucks him inside like a vacuum cleaner, and at once he is in her to the hilt.

They lie joined this way without moving. Throughout, Gregory has been kissing her mouth as he works her pussy with skilled fingers. But now, with Paul snug inside her, she is able to focus her attention on his kisses and his fingering. She feels the fingers move downward, slip behind her, to touch Paul's cock for a moment. Then they are back in place and he is playing with her as she sucks his tongue.

For only a moment he draws away from her, ending the kiss, losing the contact of his hand upon her loins. He moves down on the bed and presses his mouth to her cunt, the tongue racing over the clitoris, dipping into the moist musk pool, then retreating as he resumes his original position. He kisses her mouth and she tastes her own flavor upon his lips. Then his hands open her legs and she sighs again and his cock, so stiff and hard, so much thicker than Paul's but its equal in length, slides directly into her cunt. She is hot and wet and open, and in an instant he is all the way within her.

Paul in back and Gregory in front, and each of them in her to the hilt, and neither of them moving. Paul's hands around her to hold her breasts, Gregory's mouth on her mouth, and both of them motionless, herself motionless as well, as she savors the sensation of the dual assault of two penises. They are separated only by the thin membrane that separates anus and vagina, and she feels the two of them pressing together and knows they can feel each other through the instrument of her body.

Her flesh begins to sing.

It is Jennifer who first begins to move. A slow, gentle, rocking motion. Forward first, thrusting down on Gregory's cock, feeling his deeper penetration as she feels Paul's slight withdrawal from her asshole. Then backward, tasting slight sweet pain as Paul's cock rams into her ass again while Gregory slips slightly out of her.

She establishes the motion, sets the rhythm. And they pick up their cues from her and meet her thrusts with thrusts of their own.

"All at once," someone says, as the crises approach. "All come together, all, love, divine—"

But Paul comes first, shooting jets of hot sperm into her asshole, filling her with a sticky salty enema. And before his spasms end it is Gregory's turn, and her cunt grips him as he comes deep inside her.

And Jennifer follows a split second later, her cunt twitching spasmodically, her asshole rippling like a wheat field in strong wind, her whole body giving of itself and getting for itself as she is caught up in the delicious deathlike magical ecstasy of orgasm.

Bullshit.

All true except the very last.

Jennifer didn't come.

Loved it. Could hardly have loved it more if she had come. Could hardly have been happier and more fulfilled had she reached that dizzy orgasm.

But let us keep our facts straight.

Jennifer got close. She got hot, she got into it all, as she so often does.

But she didn't come.

As she so often doesn't.

What oh what is all of this about? What the value of writing it down?

Why the impulse?

It didn't get me hot to write about it. Sort of thought it would but it didn't. Perhaps because I was outside watching, but no sense in that because it is usually being outside watching that does it for me. Perhaps because too conscious of construction, too intent upon the technique of it, the mechanics of writing purposely erotic material.

Don't know.

Silly, all of this. Vaguely disturbed now by everything set in motion by writing this. And yet feel slightly better for having written it though don't know how.

Or why.

Funny, all of this. Funny, me. The word person that is ARjenniferLENE.

I don't think I'll see Paul and Gregory again for a long time. If ever.

Doubt they need me any more. Doubt I need them. Pleasure—they pleasure me, but I seem to want something beyond pleasure lately. I go seek situations that bring me less pleasure than other situations I have already been a part of. Seeking what's new to me, even though I doubt it will be that good, rather than what I have already experienced, regardless of how much I have already enjoyed it.

Extending myself?

Partly. More—what? More what?

Don't know.

Something more than pleasure. Something more than orgasm—have orgasms now and then, one way or another, alone or with help, but orgasm almost incidental. Not what I signed on this cruise for. Something, but what???

27 May—Thursday

Orgies are better in fantasy than fact.

A subjective judgment, this. Obviously. Because if everyone found this to be true, no one would ever participate in large group scenes.

And people do.

But I, in wisdom born of experience, in brittle sexual sophistication, have tested the orgy and found it wanting. So much fun to think about when masturbating and such a surprising down in real life.

Real *life*?

What the fuck is real *life*?

Two is nice and three is nice and four is nice and even five is sort of nice, but more than five is a crowd, is a mob scene, is a mess, and you lose track of who is doing what and with which and to whom and none of it matters much.

Even watching isn't any fun when there's a whole roomful of people. Just gets boring.

Like watching pornographic pictures for too long, when they're past the point of being exciting, and all you want to know is how long do you have to stick around before it's possible for you to go home without being roundly accused of party pooper.

What an appalling discovery—that orgies are a down. Like discovering that there is a Santa Claus, Virginia, and he's a dirty old man.

1 June—Tuesday

Another month.

Nothing I feel much like writing, actually, but it is another month, the First of June, and it seems somehow essential to celebrate the fact upon this poor unfortunate typewriter. A happy First of June to you, Smith-Corona Electra 110. And many more, if I don't pound you to pieces before another June First rolls around.

June.

About as good as months normally get in this city. June and October are usually the best months. June is sometimes too hot, but if every day is like this one no one will dream of complaining. Temperature around 65, less soot and crud in the air than usual, and the sky (visible, for a change) had a distinctly blue cast to it.

I like New York in June, how about you? I'm not sure I actually like New York in June, but I like June in New York. June and October, with a slight nod to October, but since June is here and October isn't, let's forget about October. New York in June and a Gershwin tune and ice cream and motor trips and how about you, anyway?

Actually everybody prefers October, but hardly anything rhymes with it. Except sober, which is less than a dynamite word in a song, and which is what I will

cease to be if I have one or two more drinks, which I intend to have as soon as I put this drivel under the radiator cover. If winter comes, can spring be far behind?

5 June—Saturday

Last night Arnold kissed me.

Not for the first time, but more seriously than ever before. Stopped the car and sat looking at me for a long moment, and I met his gaze, and I guess we got the tiniest bit lost in one another's eyes. Then he heaved a sigh—heaved it halfway across the room, chuckle chuckle—and leaned across the seat, arms out for me, and I went properly into his arms and caught his mouth with mine.

A long, warm, intense, both-mouths-closed kiss. Then a pause, with our mouths still close together, and then his arms tightening around me and another kiss and his tongue probing, testing the enemy's resistance.

I let him pry my lips apart. His tongue snuck inside, and I gave a sigh of my own and opened my mouth to accept him entirely, and we held that pose for perhaps a minute before I gently disengaged myself.

His voice was hoarse when he spoke. How sweet I was, and how warm, and how good it was for him to spend time with me. Nothing I hadn't heard before, but never this much strain in his voice.

A *Goodnight, Arlene*, from him, and a *Goodnight* from me. Not a *Goodnight, Arnie*, which is what I am to call him. I find it quite impossible to call him this. I cannot even think of him as Arnie, though I made the effort awhile ago. I think of him as Arnold but do not call him that, either.

As a result I call him nothing at all. Mr. K. in the office, of course, and Arnold inside my head, but when we have dinner together I do not put any name to him. Since there are only the two of us together on such occasions, names are not enormously necessary; he knows who I'm talking to.

Whom. To whom I'm talking.

He dropped me at Eighty-Fourth and East End. I was supposed to see them at ten o'clock and it was just past nine-thirty when he let me off, so I went to a bar on York Avenue and killed a few minutes. I could have been picked up if I had wanted to. I didn't, I was already set for the night, but it is very reassuring to know that you can be picked up. I suppose a woman can get used to that sort of feeling, and suppose it is a nice sort of feeling to get used to, but I am not yet used to it and enjoy it each time it happens.

Had a couple of drinks and walked back to their place. Nice plush apartment, expensive graphics on the walls. A Leger I liked, a Chagall I didn't much care for. Both of them in their forties and into bondage and light discipline, but I was merely to observe and assist, which I did.

Fun.

Won't see them again, of course. Never see anybody a second time these days. Almost told them as much but why do that sort of thing? Why make people feel bad? Let them think I enjoyed them, as in fact I did. Any explanation of why I don't see them again would merely leave them thinking they had somehow disappointed me.

Which they did not.

So I have dinner with Arnold and we talk and talk and talk, and it is not merely a matter of him talking and me listening, not any more. We both talk. The difference is that he pours out his heart to me while I edit everything I say, packaging it all to exclude the parts of me that are a secret from him. He is the only person on earth who knows Arlene Krause now. And he knows only the part of her that no one else knows. The rest of her is utterly concealed from him.

Dinner with Arnold, and then I go meet strangers and have some unorthodox form of sex with them with Arnold's kiss still on my lips.

And then home and to bed.

So strange. All of this, so very strange.

6 June—Sunday

Yesterday the anniversary of Bobby Kennedy's death, today the anniversary of D-Day. May you live in interesting times. May you get what you want. And God help you, my sweet...

9 June—Wednesday

"You never call me Arnie."

"I know."

"How come?"

"I guess I don't think of you as Arnie. I think of you as Arnold."

"Do you?"

"Yes. But I even have trouble calling you that. I guess because of calling you Mr. K. in the office, and it's hard to change after hours."

"I've never had trouble calling you Arlene. Oh, but then I call you that in the office, I call all the girls by their first names, I always did. You're the first one I ever dated."

"The first girl?"

"Nope. First one from the office. Well, wait a minute, that's not the exact truth. A couple of times over the years before you came to work for us I would take a girl out and give her a tumble. I think it happened maybe three times all told, three different girls that I was with one time each."

"You never saw them again?"

"Let them go. A big bonus and a beautiful reference so there was never any hard feelings, and an explanation that I wasn't a cheater and didn't want to get involved and it would be better for all concerned if we weren't around each other any more. Which it was, better for both of us, all parties, I mean. Those three times were each a case of breaking a personal rule of mine. Not that I would eat my heart out because rules are made to be broken, but I decided in the first place never to have anything to do with anyone who worked for me. You were afraid of that, weren't you? Remember you wouldn't go out with me?"

"I remember."

"And all I wanted was an ear to pour my troubles into. But you were afraid of losing your job."

"It wasn't that so much."

"Then what? Getting involved?"

"Yes."

“And what are we now? Answer that for me, Arlene. Are we involved?”

“I don’t know.”

“Lots of girls I’ve been to bed with, and the closest I ever came with you is a couple of kisses in the front seat of a car. And here I am feeling closer to you than I ever felt to anybody else. The girl I used to see, damn near living with her on week nights, and I never felt the closeness with her that I feel with you, and here we’re not sleeping together and what’s more I’m not trying to get us to sleep together, and you figure it out because I’ll tell you something, I can’t. Am I involved with you? Are you involved with me, Arlene?”

“Maybe we should change the subject.”

“Maybe we should. Arnold. I’m trying to think who was it used to call me Arnold. Nobody in more years than I can remember. That’s some name, Arnold.”

“Don’t you like it?”

“Hate it. As long as I can remember I hated it. Not that Arnie is such a blessing. Arnold Karlman. Arnie Karlman. That’s some sensational name to hang on a kid.”

“What would you like it to be?”

“What would I like what to be?”

“Your name.”

“That’s a hell of a question. What am I, an actor with a stage name? I’m Arnie Karlman. I’ll tell you something, that’s a funny question. That’s really a hell of a question.”

“I didn’t mean—”

“No, no, no. You want to know why it’s a hell of a question? Listen, I’ll tell you something I never told anyone before in my life. Though come to think of it, I’m always telling you things I never told anyone before in my life, so what’s the big deal now?”

“You don’t have to tell me anything.”

“So what am I saving this bit of precious information for? No, I want to tell you. I used to think—Jesus, this is a thought I’m sure I haven’t had in ten years. Maybe twice that length of time, I don’t know. I used to think what I would change my name to.”

“Did you have a name picked out?”

“Yeah, but you’ll laugh. No, I know you won’t laugh, you wouldn’t laugh. You got to understand it wasn’t that I was planning to change my name. This is something that never occurred to me. But it was a case of picking a name that I would like my name to be if I changed it, which I didn’t intend to. Which is why your question knocks me out, what I would like my name to be.”

“**Tell me.**”

“Jesus, but I feel so silly. When was the last time I even remembered having this thought? Well, not to keep you in suspense. Jeff Stern.”

“Jeff?”

“Jeffrey Stern, but I would never use the full name. Just Jeff Stern. Jeff is sort of light and airy, not bulky and cramped like Arnold. And Stern, I figured I would want a name that was obviously Jewish but one that had strength to it, a *shtarkeh* name. In fact I even thought of Stark which is a sort of a Jewish name but one that Jews changed their names to from something else, so I didn’t want it for that

reason. But Stern I like, Jeff Stern, and how come you're not laughing your head off at that one?"

"Why would I laugh?"

"Who wouldn't laugh when a man comes right out and tells you what a jackass he is deep down inside?"

"I don't think you're anything of the sort. I like the name."

"You do?"

"Jeff Stern. Jeff. Jeff Stern. Yes, I think I like it very much."

Jeff Stern.

Extraordinary, all of it. Jeff Stern and Jennifer Starr. Just beyond belief.

Ached to tell him my secret name. Really wanted to tell him. Not to tell him anything about Jennifer, just that it was my secret name for myself.

Couldn't, though.

10 June—Thursday

Thought of this yesterday but didn't even want to type it until I had a chance to check it out.

Checked it today. Went to the Marboro Book Shop on Eighth Street and thumbed through a German-English dictionary and confirmed by suspicion that Stern in German means *star*.

Jeff Stern and Jennifer Starr. Just a couple of falling stars, but falling where? Falling in what?

I don't understand any of this. I can't help thinking that I am attaching undue significance to stupid coincidence. For all either I or Arnold (dare I refer to him as Jeff?) know, virtually everyone has at one time or another selected a secret ideal name. But since he and I are each other's sole confidant, how would we know the universality of the habit?

Sometimes I think I love him.

I know he loves me. I'm just glad, very glad, that he never says so.

Yet.

13 June—Sunday

Another anniversary.

Today I begin the fourth month of this diary, and of course the fourth month of life in this apartment. It's odd that I tend to think more in terms of the diary when I measure time. As though it is more a yardstick of my new life than the apartment in which I live it.

Perhaps because none of the more obvious facets of that new life take place in this apartment.

Four months.

How greatly those months have changed me. They have even changed the apartment. The new chairs, the rug, the couch, the lamps. It would scare me to think of the money I have spent on this place in the last month, except that I can't help feeling it was money I should have spent months ago. Twenty thousand dollars sitting in a savings and loan association and doing me no good at all, merely drawing interest which would amount to more money which would do me no good.

So now I have two thousand less dollars in the bank and an apartment a decorator would be proud of, except that I did it myself so that it is my apartment and not some decorator's apartment. And if it does little good in one sense—since no one sees it but myself—it does more good than untouched money, which would be seen by no one at all, not even me.

Four months.

Glad I stopped making these entries a daily requirement. The diary was becoming too much of an obligation and I began lying to it, not lies of commission but lies of omission. By trying to put down everything, by setting that standard for myself, I was creating little game situations in which I cheated by skipping important things and prattling on about trivia merely to fulfill self-imposed requirements.

At least now I can talk to the machine when I feel like it and keep my fingers shut when I don't.

14 June—Monday

I stopped seeing Bill just about the same time that I began getting very close to Jeff.

(How I hesitated before typing his secret name! I do not really think of him as Jeff, have never called him that except jokingly. He is still Arnold to me. I guess he will always remain Arnold, as I sense that I cannot call him Jeff until he calls me Jennifer, and it is unlikely in the extreme that it will occur to him to do so, as I have not confessed about Jennifer and do not intend to.)

I stopped seeing Bill just about the same time that I began getting very close to Arnold. I suppose there must be a connection. I'm wondering what it might be.

It's impossible to say which happened first, because both were gradual matters. I gradually came to the end of the road with Bill, and gradually the perfunctory dinners with Arnold turned into something else. I don't think I mentioned much of this in the diary. The period while most of it was taking shape was also the period when I was avoiding writing in the diary, for one reason or another. There may be a cause-and-effect relationship there, too, for that matter, but I'm not going to examine it too closely.

Bill.

Funny how that wore itself out. In certain ways we got tired of each other like an old married couple gradually having less and less bedtime use for one another. He showed me things, took me on various sexual trips, and I went along with all of them, and bit by bit he tired of his role as I tired of mine.

What was my appeal for him? That of challenge, I guess. The Dark Lady of Shady Lane, coming to him each Wednesday, enjoying those evenings sexually but never delivering the proof of ultimate enjoyment that he could regard as evidence of conquest. My clitoris never became a scalp he could hang from his belt, and he constantly aspired to this conquest, and perversely enjoyed my remoteness, and as long as I remained the carrot just out of reach he would play the earnest plodding donkey.

But the donkey realized, somewhere along the way, that he would never get the carrot, and that it would not taste good if he did. And so he did as donkeys do when they come to this enormous realization. He stopped in his tracks.

And what did I realize?

Easier to attribute thoughts to another person than to tune in upon your own. What I saw, I guess, is that he was a constant in my life and had to mean more to me than a guide through uncharted realms, especially as we inevitably began to run out of such realms. If what we had was going to grow, he had to become a person rather than a role. And he could only become a person if I was willing and able to reveal myself to him.

And I was not.

Nor would it have done any good if I had. Because my mystery was a large portion of my charm—such as it was—and knowing more about me would only make him want me less. We were something important to each other at a particular point in time, and as each of us began to become more nearly real for the other, we simultaneously each became less of what the other wanted and needed.

(How I struggle to make these words make sense. And find myself telling myself, from time to time, that it does not matter whether or not the words make sense. For I am writing only for myself, and if I understand what I am thinking, it is not necessary for me to couch my phrases so that they would be intelligible to another. But I am not sure that's true. When man evolved, words must have preceded thoughts. The word, renowned as the father to the deed, is surely the midwife if not the parent of thought. One cannot think without the words to think in. And one cannot have one's mind straight on a subject unless one can fit the words to it. If it doesn't make sense, one has not yet become sensible about it.)

Bill and I, running out of each other, and hence running out on each other. It is clear to me that I could have made him privy to my secrets. It is something I could have done, and could have done so with the advance assumption that, if it ruined things between us, if it made either of us uncomfortable with the other, we could simply break off and see each other not at all. And, since we were already on the point of seeing each other not at all, there was nothing risked.

But I could not take off those clothes. And did not want to, whether I could or not

And so it stopped for us.

Not all at once. A little at a time. Evenings of mutual boredom, tedium, genteel sexual monotony. We performed, and as we were each of us more conscious in any instance of our individual roles of performer than of audience, we were technically adept enough about it. He tried to please me and I tried to give the appearance of being pleased. I tried to please him and he similarly played the gentleman, taking evident delight in my attentions. But there was nothing there, and in one conversation, less awkward than I would have thought it would have had to be, we agreed that it had been fun, dear one, but it was time to end it.

Another reason: I was becoming, at this stage in time, a creature who could only enjoy people once. Who had no repeat encounters. Bill, the one person throughout this time whom I saw again and again, the one sexual partner who enjoyed my company for more than a single evening, thus jarred with the new turn my life was taking.

Exit Bill.

Enter Arnold.

With whom I have no sex.

Weird, that.

Because the one-sidedness of my relationship with Bill is mirrored by the one-sidedness of my relationship with Arnold. I know he wants to make love to me, and I know that the only thing which prevents him from trying to make love to me is his fear that he will lose me. I wonder if this is true. How would I react?

I enjoy kissing him. I like his looks, feel a warm affection for his body. I suppose, insofar as I love, that I love him.

I oddly trust him.

And yet—

Thought: That our fears are identical. That each of us is keeping the relationship essentially as it is because what we have is too dear to us to be jeopardized. Better to have what we have than to risk it. Perhaps he would hate me if we slept together. Perhaps I would hate him. Perhaps we would, in some chemical way, turn each other off. Why risk what we have for the doubtful paradise of what we might have?

Indeed.

For what could we have? I don't want to marry him. He has a wife and children, and one set thereof is as much as any man needs. And I have been a wife, and do not want the role again, and prefer my philodendron (which grows in so gratifying a manner) to children (which generally don't). Better to play our present roles forever, looking but not touching, wanting but not achieving, than to get each other only to discover we did not honestly want each other in the first place.

Two lovers transfixed on a Grecian urn. Forever will Arnold love, and I be fair.

Or am I fair?

Sometimes I feel depressingly unfair.

15 June—Tuesday

It was her first time.

Marcelle, a slim and intense young thing. Very large eyes which she deliberately enlarges with pounds of eye shadow. Dark complexion, tiny ears, crinkly black pubic hair, the subtle scent of sandalwood. Had been with men but hadn't liked it. Preferred playing with herself. Was never with a girl, and did not consciously think she would want to be with a girl, but wanted—something.

Could we not be all girls together? Could we not get together and have a dirty conversation, and share verbal fantasies with one another, and perhaps we could get hot and play with ourselves, and it would be the special certainty of masturbation with the reassurance of sharing the experience, and do you understand that, Jennifer, or do I sound crazy to you?

Oh, I understand, Marcelle.

Seduced her.

That was what it was, although God knows she was ready for it, God knows she was anxious to be seduced and, consciously or unconsciously, expected it. But I could have left her untouched (except by her own dim long-fingered hands, soft fingertips on those hands, so soft). I could have played her game according to her script and she would have been happy enough.

Didn't.

Sucked those perky tips and kissed that spicy mouth and sucked that cunt and made her come however much she wanted not to. Felt like a man seducing a girl. Felt strong and capable, good feeling, strange feeling, me so accustomed to the role of ingenue and now playing the sophisticate. Ate her and made her love it, poor baby. And got her tongue inside of me and made her love that part of it as well. Oh, Marcelle, with your spicy mouth pressed to me!

Arnold was saying that he ...

17 June—Thursday

If you knew me, Arnold.

God. What would I be to you if you knew me? Would you hate me? I somehow think not. Would you still want me? And for what reasons? Would you perhaps only lust for me, so hot at the thought of Jennifer that you lose sight entirely of Arlene?

I wonder.

I would not want that last. It tempts me sometimes, Arnold. To become Jennifer for you and have to accept her even as you forget Arlene. But one of the things I treasure in you, Arnold, is that you know only Arlene and love the Arlene you know.

I seem to be writing this to you. Odd, that I am doing this. Odd and unfamiliar. All of this heretofore has been written to myself, or to my typewriter, or at least to some unknown and perhaps unknowable eye. I never wrote to Bill. I never thought of any of the persons Jennifer has met as being recipients of the thoughts unfolded here. And yet I find myself now, probably for the first time, addressing all of this to you.

Not that it matters. You'll never see any of this, Arnold, but I am thinking (and typing) these thoughts to you, messages never to be sent, let alone received.

Arnold and Arlene, Jeff and Jennifer.

If all of me knew all of you, if all of you knew all of me, then precisely where would we wind up?

Always the beautiful answer that asks the more beautiful question—

18 June—Friday

Today my Post Office box was full of letters.

None of them from strangers. Seven of them from people I have met, have balled, have had sex with. And who would like me to get in touch. They supply their phone numbers in the event I have lost them. They remind me what a good time we had, and hint at what a better time we'll have.

No.

I don't want to see any of them again.

No new mail. I suppose I should run the ad again, as I have more or less ceased getting replies from the last insertion. Or I could call some of the people whose original letters I never got around to answering.

Not now, though.

20 June—Sunday

An odd weekend.

Odd for now, typical of what once was. A weekend of doing puzzles in the *Times*, of sitting around reading, of having no human contact whatsoever. Not long ago all my weekends are like this, and now it almost seems as though I have come full circle. Earlier today I wondered if this would be a new pattern, or more accurately the resumption of an old pattern; if once again all my weekends would be spent alone.

I want it to be tomorrow and am unwilling to speculate precisely why this is so.

21 June—Monday

Arnold, I should have had less to drink tonight. I think I stayed sober enough at dinner, or at least sober enough in outward appearance. You must have known I was high. I wonder, though, if you know just how high I was.

I felt at times as though we were carrying on two conversations at once, an audible one and a private one of mind-talk. *I want you*, your eyes kept saying.

How did my eyes answer, Arnold? I honestly do not know. Because they spoke to you and not to me.

You are not a handsome man but I like the way you look to me. You are not a well-schooled man, you are not well-spoken, but I love your voice in my ears. I have known men who are younger and slimmer and better-dressed and glibber, and I have had their cocks in my hands and mouth and cunt, and their eyes have never talked to me as yours do.

Oh, Arnold, I don't know what I ...

This is silly and I am drunk, extra drinks since I came home and did not need those drinks. Drank with you and failed to show up for a date with a man in Greenwich Village telling myself it was because I was drunk and did not want to meet him drunk but actually it was because I did not want to go, did not want to go at all, wanted only to come home here and have a couple more drinks and go to bed, but instead I am not going to bed, I am sitting here at S C E 110, I am sitting here typing and hitting mostly the wrong keys and God only knows if what I am typing would be readable, not that it matters because it is not for reading, and here I am running on and on like this for no earthly purpose at all and what I really want to do is turn out the fucking lights and go to bed, but if I lie down I will probably vomit and if there's one thing I hate it's to vomit, which is probably not that unusual come to think of it because I suspect it's rather a standard thing for people not to like to vomit because what's there to like, after all, and I think I will stop writing this right now because I can't stand it and what I really want is not to be writing this but to turn out the lights and go to bed with Arnold.

I didn't mean that the fucking typewriter it wrote that all by itself and I did not mean it not a bit.

Or did I?

22 June—Tuesday

How could anyone bear to be an alcoholic? How could anyone have a morning like this every day? Even my hair hurts.

24 June—Thursday

Last night I ...

Last night Arnold and I ...

Oh, dear.

I got up from this chair just now and walked over to the radiator. And looked under the cover and saw nothing but the rusted tray in which one may, if so inclined, place water which evaporating will humidify a desiccated winter day. There is no water in that tray.

Neither is there a pile of paper, paper which reposed there for a matter of months, pure innocent virgin white paper which some fool had ruined by typing drivel upon. Drivel on every sheet, sheet upon sheet of paper, week after week of paper-ruining, and all of that paper gone as the fool persists in her folly.

Gone. While the fool sits here, ruining more paper. Her diary is gone and she continues to diarize.

I am so afraid.

Dinner and a play.

I had mentioned the play. I don't know what I mentioned about it, but Monday night when we had dinner I said something about having read a review of the play and it sounded interesting, and this afternoon he took me aside and said he'd gotten tickets.

And so we went. The play was ...

Oh who cares how the play was?

I hardly paid attention to it myself. Two acts, and during the second act we held hands. My hand found his, and we held hands.

I guess I made up my mind then. Insofar as I made up my mind at all. I don't think there was ever a point where my mind was literally made up. More that by then everything was set in motion, and I followed the script without ever looking at my lines in advance.

Well, I know what I mean.

Left the theater, talked about the play. Stood on West 47th Street sharing a cigarette. I had run out and we passed one of his back and forth, kissing each other through the cigarette as Paul and Gregory fucked each other through me. Did I write about Paul and Gregory? Two faggots who wanted to ...

Oh, it doesn't matter about Paul and Gregory. "Where would you like to go for dinner, Arlene?"

"Anywhere."

"Steak? Chinese? Italian? Name it."

"Actually I'm not very hungry."

"Want something light?"

"Could we just have drinks somewhere?"

"Sure, if that's all you want. Come to think of it, I'm not that hungry myself. This place okay?"

We went to the Spindletop two doors down from the theater. Tall long-stemmed waitresses with leotards and mesh stockings and plastic hair. I drank stingers and he drank Scotch on the rocks.

Two drinks each, and I said, "Would you like to go some place with me?"

"Wherever you say."

"There's an apartment."

"An apartment?"

"In Chelsea."

"Sure. Who lives there, friends of yours?"

"Nobody lives there."

What did he think? I'll always wonder. Whatever he thought, he kept it to himself. Pushed back his chair, put money on the table, took my arm. Out of the Spindletop and into a cab. His car was in a lot down the block but he knew not to bother with the car, knew the car would be there to be picked up later, knew I ought to be taken to the apartment directly.

I gave the driver my address.

Holding hands in the cab. Thought he might kiss me then and it would have been all right but hoped he wouldn't and God bless him he didn't, just held my hand and squeezed it now and then and I squeezed back.

Oh Jesus Jesus.

Cab pulled up in front of my door. "Right around the corner from your friends," he said. "The friends you stay with when you don't go back to Brooklyn."

No answer from me. Into my building and up to my apartment and he waiting for me to ring the bell, but no ringing of the bell because I of course have my key. Trouble fitting it into the lock, fingers so nervous and shaky, and he takes the key from me and unlocks the door.

"This is a beautiful place."

"I like it."

"Whose is it?"

"A typewriter lives here. And a philodendron."

We kissed. For a moment we each held something back, and then the moment passed and we didn't. His arms around me, his tongue in my mouth, his hand dropping to cup my bottom and press me close.

Oh, Arnold.

Jeff.

Kiss ended. A step back and hands behind my back and worked the zipper and dropped the dress to the floor. Stepped out, kicked shoes loose. No bra, no pants, nothing but me, burning in his eyes.

Hands so nervous and shaky, and God took the key from my fingers and stuck it in my head and turned off at last my brain.

Won't write about it.

Can't write about it.

Can write about everything else but not IT, not Arnold and Arlene and Jeff and Jennifer, not us in bed, can't write about it, won't write about it.

All for him, that was the idea, all for him, everything for him, and not thanks for the drinks thanks for the dinner thanks for the play not thanks for the job thanks for the raise not thanks for anything. Thanks for you for being you, everything for you, everything, and all of me caught in it, owned by it, part of it, with it and of it, and my brain turned off *off!* and my body turned on *on!* and me alive and with it and of it and for it and all for him, all, all, and then suddenly surprisingly impossibly ...

All for me too.

"Don't go."

"All right."

"Sleep with me."

"Yes."

"No one ever slept with me."

"Won't your mother expect you at home?"

"So much to tell you."

"Huh?"

"She won't expect me. Your wife—"

"Don't worry."

"Good."

"Arlene, I—"

"No. Oh my darling, I can't talk or listen. I cannot. Don't talk, don't make me talk."

"Sure."

"Just hold me all night. Just do everything you want with me, just show me what you want me to do with you. Both of us in the darkness and doing everything and not talking, oh my darling."

Slept so nicely. Woke two, three times, reached to see if he was there.

He always was.

Slept so nicely.

Woke, and he asleep. How warm and soft and helpless. Curled on his side, baby in the womb, sweet.

Woke him in my mouth. Woke him up, up, up. Arnold come for breakfast, how sweet.

He showered, returned. I showered and he was dressed when I came back wet and naked. Dried my hands and went to the radiator and took off the cover. Looked at the stack of paper and closed the cover and turned to him.

Said, "Arnold, you have to know me. Jeff has to know Jennifer. Arnold, my mother is dead and this is my apartment and, oh I can't talk, I honestly cannot talk. Arnold, you have to read this. No, don't talk, please don't say anything, just let me."

Opened the cover again, got out the pages. Handed the thick stack to him.

"I'm in these pages," I said.

His eyes.

"I'm in these pages, this is where I live, in these pages, this is all the persons I have been and all the places I have gone and what I have seen and been and done there. Arnold, listen to me. Take this with you. I'll stay here. Take this with you and read it. Read all of it because that's where I am and I want you to know me. I am afraid but I am more afraid not to be known by you."

My own eyes closed now.

"Take this with you. I'll stay here. Read this, read all of it. And then decide."

"Decide?"

"Whether or not to call me. If you don't call me, I'll never call you. Just a minute." I find a pen, scribble my unlisted number on the top sheet of paper. Odd that I know the number. Never gave it out, never dialed it myself. The number sat all these months in a corner of my mind, waiting for me to need it.

"It's all up to you," I said. "And don't answer now because you can't answer now, you don't know me enough. You have to read it first. And then it's up to you. Kiss me. Yes, oh yes. Now go."

And turned away and closed my eyes and stood like a statue until he was gone and the door shut behind him.

A long time staring, a long time sitting and doing nothing, thinking nothing.

Then sat at this typewriter and rolled another automatic sheet into its carriage.

Because my diary is gone. It has gone away and left me behind, and I must work hurriedly to fill up the void beneath my radiator cover. I must hurry and type up thousands more sheets of paper and let those sheets share my empty life, my forever empty life.

Glad I did it. Glad glad glad I did it. Glad I brought him home into this apartment where no one has ever been but me. Glad I brought him here and took him to bed.

Last night in bed beside him thought I might die in my sleep and thought too that it was all right if I did.

What will he think when he reads of Arlene? When Jeff learns of Jennifer?

God, what will he think?

Better that he knows and hates me than that he goes on knowing only part of me. Better that I am for once in my life naked in one man's eyes, even if that man never sets those eyes upon me again.

Better.

Tears in my eyes that won't come out, a lump in my throat too big to swallow. Oh, to come that close. To have that much and watch it walk out and hear the door close behind it. To have that much and not have it.

For he will never call.

And why should he? He's reading the words of a crazy person, but he's a good man, too good a man to laugh, too good a man to feel anything but sorrow. But an intelligent man. Intelligent enough to burn the idiot pages and put the idiot girl reluctantly but firmly out out out of his life for once and for all.

Better this way. A far far better thing that I do than I have ever done, the best of times and the worst of times, oh, Christ, I don't think ...

The phone is ringing...

A New Afterword by the Author

Jill Emerson began her career with a pair of sensitive lesbian novels in the mid-sixties and next wrote three determinedly erotic paperback originals for Berkley Books. If the books had one thing in common, besides their eager embrace of American literature's new sexual freedom, it was to be found in their structure. I had come to find the traditional novel limiting in its artificiality; I was drawn to books that that moved beyond the standard first- or third-person narrative.

Jill's first work for Berkley, *Three*, took the form of a diary. Her second, *Threesome*, was structurally the most ambitious of all; its three narrators, who

comprise a sexual ménage à trois, have decided to collaborate on a novelization of their own experience, and the book we are reading is the one they are writing.

For a third book, I chose a return to the diary. The keeper of this diary is a young woman, discontented and more than a tad neurotic. I don't know that it's fair to call her mad, in either sense of the word, but I hung the title *A Madwoman's Diary* on it all the same. I'm sure I was echoing the title of Sue Kaufman's excellent novel *Diary of a Mad Housewife*, which I'd read and been hugely impressed by a couple of years earlier. I don't know that Ms. Kaufman's heroine could truly be described as mad either, but the title had worked well for her, and I reworded it and took it for my own.

If I took the title from one author, I stole the plot and character from another. I obtained my protagonist, my titular madwoman, not from another novel but rather from a work of nonfiction, specifically a collection of psychosexual case histories. Her background, her emotional makeup, her sexual acting out, indeed all the elements of the life she led, moved seamlessly from this case history into my novel.

Plagiarism? Well, I can see how you might think so, but I could argue otherwise. Because how can one steal what one already owns?

See, the collection of case histories was my work. It was I who had written up all the case histories in the volume, had in fact made them up out of whole cloth. The fabrication of human lives is after all part of the job description of a writer of fiction. That's what we do, and that's what I was doing when I wrote the various works of John Warren Wells.

First, years before there was John Warren Wells, there was Dr. Morton A. Benjamin of Chicago, Illinois. You may not have heard of him, and indeed it would be remarkable if you had, because the only people on earth who knew of his existence were an editor at Monarch Books and, later, an editor at Lancer Books. The public knew Mort Benjamin as Benjamin Morse, M.D., which is the name he put on the books he wrote—or would have written, if he'd ever existed in the first place.

I was the one who wrote the books. I made up his name and I made up his pen name and I made up all the characters in all the books he wrote. The books consisted of the stories of the doctor's patients and told how each person had gotten the way they were and how Dr. Morse led them out of the darkness and into, oh, hell, I don't know where he led them. Where do you go when you emerge from the darkness? Into the din and the glare, I suppose.

We never learned much about Benjamin Morse, not even his false real name, but it was evident that he was a kind and thoughtful therapist, and insightful and perceptive in the bargain. Now I had never been to a therapist at the time, and the only psychiatrist I knew was a man in Buffalo, New York. His two boys were in my scout troop, and he and his wife played bridge occasionally with my parents.

After one such evening at the doctor's home, my father reported that he thought the fellow was nuts. "The kids went upstairs around nine thirty," he said, "and fifteen minutes later they called down that they couldn't sleep. 'The boys can't sleep,' he announced. 'I'd better go give them each a sleeping pill.' And he did."

Ben Morse would never do a thing like that. Or Mort Benjamin, either. No fucking way.

I was all of twenty-two when I began life as Mort Benjamin, or Ben Morse, or whoever the hell I was. My then-agent, Henry Morrison, came to me with an assignment from Charles Heckelmann, the genius who would later come up with the notion of *Fidel Castro Assassinated* (now *Killing Castro*). Heckelmann wanted a doctor to write a book of case histories on female homosexuality, probably figuring this was a way to get on newsstands where lesbian novels wouldn't be tolerated.

Well, I'd already written lesbian fiction, so why not write some more in the sheep's clothing of nonfiction? Henry assured me it was legal to be a fake doctor, as long as I didn't usurp medical privileges by diagnosing or prescribing. So Ben Morse wrote *The Lesbian*, and a companion volume called *The Homosexual*, and, God help us, a marriage manual.

Then Heckelmann read a book called *The Power of Sexual Surrender*, by a psychiatrist named Marie Robinson—a real one, evidently. He decided Monarch ought to publish it—but since someone else already had, he wanted Dr. Morse to rip it off. Henry sold him on the notion of another doctor, one Walter C. Brown, as being better suited to the subject matter. Then he told me to get busy being Walter C. Brown.

I used a different typewriter. I wrote the book—God knows how, I couldn't really make out what Marie Robinson was getting at. And Heckelmann took it, but he told Henry he wasn't nuts about Walt Brown, that he just wasn't on the same level as Mort Benjamin. I could only conclude that he liked me better with a larger typeface, and that was the end of the short and happy life of Walter C. Brown.

John Warren Wells came into being after I split with the Scott Meredith Literary Agency. Benjamin Morse hadn't limited himself to Monarch and had done a book or two for Lancer, and I got in touch with Larry Shaw at Lancer, whom I knew through mutual friends in the Village. I said I was Dr. Benjamin's collaborator. I proposed a book—*Eros & Capricorn, a Cross-Cultural Survey of Sexual Techniques*. I wasn't sure what that meant, but it sounded good to Larry, who suggested that I might want to leave the good doctor out of this and do it on my own. Well, okay—and the name I came up with was John Warren Wells.

J. W. W. went on to produce a considerable body of work, most of it for Lancer but some for such A-list houses as NAL and Dell Publishing. For the better part of a year he had a monthly column in *Swank*, a magazine published by Lancer; it was something like *Penthouse Forum*, with letters from readers. I could tell you a great deal more about John Warren Wells, and may if I decide to republish some of his work, but that's enough for now.

In one of the books for Lancer—and don't ask me which one, because I haven't the faintest idea—one of the fabricated case histories stayed with me. It came to mind when it was time for Jill Emerson to work up a third novel for Berkley. So I took this figment of my imagination, which I'd spun out as a supposedly true case history, and recycled it as a work of fiction, itself presented in the form of a document—a diary.

The book went pretty well. It evolved, of course, and owed less to the Wells case history by the time it was done, but it seemed right to acknowledge the debt, if obliquely. Jill did the right thing, and the book bears this dedication:

To JOHN WARREN WELLS
a jack-of-all-trades
and master of me...

J. W. W. returned the favor, dedicating at least one of his works to Jill Emerson.

Berkley called the book *Sensuous*. It's not a terrible title. (*I Am Curious—Thirty*, which is what they called *Thirty*—now *that's* a terrible title.) *Sensuous* is merely a pedestrian title. But I'm fairly confident the same keen mind was responsible for both of these retitlings. The first was an attempt to tie in with *I Am Curious—Yellow*, a faintly pornographic Swedish film that got a lot of press when Jackie Kennedy decked a photographer who snapped a shot of her emerging from the theater where it was shown. That made it a nine-day wonder, and a lot more than nine days had passed by the time Jill's book came out with its remarkably lame title.

And *Sensuous* was someone's way to cash in on the great success of *The Sensuous Woman*, written by Joan Garrity under the pseudonym "J" and published brilliantly by Lyle Stuart. You liked *The Sensuous Woman*? Well, here's *Sensuous*. Maybe you'll like this one, too.

Still, not a terrible title. But I like *A Madwoman's Diary* better, perhaps because I'm the one who thought it up. Or Jill did. Or maybe it was Jack Wells ...

—Lawrence Block
Greenwich Village

