

Transitions

A Book About Love

by

Nowick Gray

© 2007 Nowick Gray

cww@hyperlife.net

A Cougar WebWorks Publication

<http://cougarwebworks.com>

Transitions: A Book About Love

Table of Contents

1 -- Man and Nature: A Dialogue	3
2 -- Stillness and Motion, Me and You	21
3 -- Woman at the Bridge.....	24
4 -- In the Sunshine of Your Love	28
5 -- That Gender Stuff.....	30
6 -- Woman and Deer	34
7 -- Breathing Together: Sketches of You and Me.....	36
8 -- No Present	38

Transitions: A Book About Love

1 -- Man and Nature: A Dialogue

Day 1

--What's the purpose of your trip, Mr. Now?

--To argue the vagaries of existence with one who understands.

--I see. Is that why you brought a smaller, lighter notebook but two days' too much food?

--Yes, I thought I might stay awhile.

--You mean, until your food runs out.

--Are you badgering me?

--Sorry, sir. Back to the questions. Just what are you doing here?

--Following my footsteps.

--One at a time...

--What my heart says.

--At the moment. What about tomorrow, when the food runs out?

--You mean, five days from now?

--Whenever. It will happen.

--That's all right, I still got my pen and pad.

--Till that runs out. Then what?

--I'll swim in the creek.

--Get serious. Weren't you going to become a lawyer once?

--To get back to your original question, I just felt inspired to go.

--Just like that. No plan?

--I did pack a little too much food—just in case.

--In case you might be inspired to extend your visit, when the time comes...

--Yeah.

--By the way, who was that pretty lady I saw by the bridge you crossed coming this way?

--Is that part of the interview?

--Absolutely. Our readers want to hear everything. Especially that part.

--I thought I'd set out on a solo adventure. Now. Does that answer all your questions?

--Not by a long shot. But I can see you're ready for a break. Why don't you walk awhile, and I'll see you at the next stop. Don't be late.

Day 2

--Well, Mr. Now? You look different.

--I turned back. Spent the night at home.

--Alone?

--Yes. Dropped half my stuff off: the sleeping bag, tent, food...too many options, it was a burden. And so unnecessary.

--We learn from our mistakes.

--You said it.

--So what have you decided to carry with you now? Do you mind my prying?

--No problem. You've noticed my different pack: a standard mid-sized Outbound daypack with its top pocket zipper replaced by Velcro which is too worn to rely on anymore...

--Go on...

--All right. Item: one dog-scratched mouse-chewed twenty-six year old ensolite pad, which I got for my first camping trip in the west, when I came to California in 1972...

--Are you planning to give me the whole story?

--You want the whole story?

--Uh...does this mean for every item? We're only on the first.

--We've got 2 days.

--Save it for later. What's next?

--Okay:

- one mini-bungie for a chest strap
- one pair Tevas strapped to the outside of the pack
- one canister pepper spray for bears, strapped around my waist
- in my left pocket, one handkerchief and a basic pocket knife combo
- in my right, a trail map and whistle
- on my body, one knit polo shirt from GAP, one pair seersucker bathing trunks, both hand-me-downs from my older brother
- a \$5 watch on a \$7 leather band
- poly socks under medium heavy wool
- cheapest (\$23 Cdn) Sears running shoes
- my father's leather notebook, 6-ring 4X6, two pens

You want the contents of the pack, too?

--Absolutely. Our readers are hungry for information.

--Okay. You want the food bag first?

--Your choice.

--Let me put on these Tevas first.

--Is this an ad or what?

--Ad, plug, hyperlink, they're just comfortable around camp after a long day's hike.

--And I'm paying for this?

--No—I am.

--Oh? What are you bringing?

--Poetry and philosophy. Flute music.

--Names, titles?

--Huh? Oh, just my own stuff. You know.

--Hmm. I really don't think I have any use right now for...

--Not even the flute?

--It sounded like no bird I ever heard.

--Fine. I'll just be quiet.

--Could we have another few moments? I believe you were starting in on the food.

—All right. So far, what's already gone, a cheese and pickle sandwich, two carrots, a tahini and honey sandwich, a butter and honey sandwich with chocolate chips, a nutritional meal bar and raspberry chew, a couple of handfuls of trail mix—

--Consisting of? This is key.

--Filberts, raisins, sunflower seeds, coconut. I think I brought too much food still. Could have left the trail mix home, along with the signal mirror, the fat candle...

--What else have you eaten already?

--Several crackers. Four hard-boiled eggs.

--This is in addition to breakfast at home, I believe.

—That was a small meal. Toast and tahini and honey, peppers and onion and garlic sautéed in olive oil...

--And what's on the menu for tomorrow, if I may be so bold--

--More crackers, cheese, trail mix, a tahini-honey sandwich, chocolate chips, algae treats, dried apples...

--Let's just hear the breakfast.

--Probably the sandwich. Whatever else. Oh—and coffee and chocolate soymilk, from home.

--You mean you made the coffee and carried it all day?

--It's very small and powerful.

--Whatever you say. Go on...

--Clothing: silk undershirt with long sleeves, polypropylene undershirt with long sleeves, a red fleece saying "Canada North" on the breast, a down vest—

--No ads, please.

--Each one has a story.

--Like every citizen in "The Naked City."

--You got it. There's a yellow double-layered treeplanter's polyurethane rain jacket, hand-knitted wool cap—

--The lady by the bridge?

--How did you know?

--Everything's connected.

--Hmm. Even my spare underwear?

--Everything. No exceptions.

--Well, at least you're clear. Shall I go on?

--Proceed.

--One pair spare poly socks and one pair of heavy wool, one short 5/8-inch rope and carabiner, one box moleskin, one bundle of six lengths of baling twine—

--Orange or black?

--Orange. God, you're picky.

--I don't like being called that.

--What, picky?

--No—God.

--Why the hell not? What's the difference?

--It carries too many connotations.

--Like what?

--Like the old man with the beard.

--I get it. You don't want to be confused with me. I can see your point. On the other hand...

--We need specifics.

--I'm giving them, all right? Colors, smells, history—

--Calm down. Just a descriptive tag or two will do, this time through.

--Fine. Wait a minute, what do you mean, "this time"?

--Your privileges here aren't unlimited, you know.

--So we have to go through this every time now? It wasn't like this before.

--Yes, I know. In 1972...well, then my pet cat did the talking. Today, it's my turn. I wanted to meet you personally. To get to know you. To understand better. About you and the things you carry around you...and what you leave behind.

--Humph. Are you ready for more?

--Always.

--Okay. One hand-carved Sioux love flute of cedar, with cougar head mounted—

--That's your totem?

--Yeah. There are a couple more stories behind that one.

--Later.

--Maps, wallet and—brown leather wallet—and truck key on blue plastic key chain, for the trip home. Toilet paper—

--What's the toilet paper for? We don't have toilets here.

--I think your readers can figure that one out. To continue: webbed work gloves for the cable crossings. Ace bandage.

--An ex-Boy Scout, I can tell.

--"Be prepared," right? But, I think I still brought too much food. You know, I was thinking. There are basically three levels of lifestyle: survival, comfort and luxury. Luxury is excess. But it's all in degrees. I already cut my load in half, and it did make a big difference, but now I see I'm still in the "excess" range.

--We forgive slight lapses. You don't want to mess around too much at the "survival" end of things, now, do you?

--No kidding. A "slight lapse" there can be fatal.

--No kidding. You're still smarting from that "close scrape" on the boulder slide up Poplar Creek, aren't you?

--I put some chaparral ointment on it.

--What else is in your kit?

--This really is a border crossing routine, isn't it?

--You're in another country now. Open it up.

--Needle and thread, gauze and bandages, Traumeel, waterproof matches, Chinese wooden comb, floss fork, floss, toothbrush...whoops.

--You forgot toothpaste. What an idiot.

--I guess with the tube of Traumeel, I thought—

--You thought...

--Maybe my brain misfired, okay?

--Sorry. We don't have to bicker like old lovers, now do we?

--Sigh.

--You're acting like one anyway. What went wrong?

--Save it for the next guy, will ya?

--Oh, tough talk now. You used to watch "The Untouchables" when you were a kid, am I right?

--My favorite show was "The Twilight Zone."

--Like every other kid on the block. Anything else? Anything...unique?

--I forgot to tell you about my supplements.

--All that food and you need "supplements"?

--Yes, you see, in today's mineral-depleted soils—

--Here we go.

--What?

--Oh nothing. Just tell me, what's in the white box.

--Blue-green algae, sprout tablets, bifidus.

--You forgot the bug screen and bug repellent, citronella.

--No, they're right here.

—I meant, you forgot to declare them.

--I wasn't finished yet.

--Okay. I see one blue-labeled small plastic bottle. More algae?

--Those are electrolyte tablets. And—hey, a mosquito just bit me.

--Be prepared...I see one pound heavy plastic. I thought I told you it wasn't going to rain.

--Chalk it up to experience. In any event: one roll birchbark for starting a fire...

--Let's come back to that. I don't know about this second pen.

--In case I lost one, or it ran out.

--You've done the weight-benefit-risk analysis.

--In this case, yes.

--Tell me, Mr. Now. Where did you get your unusual name?

--Let's just say it's a shortcut to who I am. In the meantime, I'd like to report a small rubberized flashlight, 2 spare AA batteries, and a plastic disposable lighter.

--Fire again. Tell me about fire--in your opinion.

--It is my power over you.

--Oh, really?

--It gives me an edge.

--I see. Into the comfort zone, eh?

--I'm talking survival, too.

--Though in this case, perhaps a luxury?

--It could be anywhere in there. I'll admit, the definitions are fluid. I haven't really done this before.

--You mean, the analysis, or the experience?

--Well, both. Except...

--Except the time you got eaten alive by mosquitoes all night, sleeping in your half-pound of open plastic. 1972, was it?

--I was a raw youth. Then there was the campsite on the ridge by Crater Lake with the wolves howling, and a cougar hissing so close I prepared to fight for my life...

--With your two-inch pocket knife.

--It was all I had. And incense to mask my smell.

--So how is it now?

--Similar, in some ways.

--Starting over, are you?

--Just continuing.

--Step by step.

--Yeah. Half done now already.

--What's next for you?

--You mean after the hike?

--Yeah. Between now and, say, the winter.

--I've started to think about that. I mean, to imagine steps along the way.

--Whether to go it alone...

--I have other options. I'll see what develops.

--Your passion for inspired "argument" has given way to a certain terseness, I believe. Tell me, are you really planning on wearing those Tevas through the mud on the other side of the pass all afternoon tomorrow?

--It'll depend on the condition of my feet by then, and the trail. We'll see how it goes.

--Tell me about your friend by the bridge.

--You can talk to her yourself.

--I realize that. I'm asking you.

--I plead the fifth.

--You're sure it's not the fourth?

--I'll bet on it.

--How much?

--Loser pays for lunch?

--In the meantime, you were saying...

--Watching fire is better than television.

--I'm glad you think so. I agree. Much more primal.

--Yeah, and ever-changing. Ever-fascinating.

--And yet, you only use its light to write by.

--I try to keep a balance.

--And to top it off, you also resort to writing by flashlight, don't you?

--Just for this last bit, before bed.

--And now, what's all this poking, prodding...

--Just tending to the cinders. I want to be careful not to leave any, any dormant coals.

--You're afraid of hurting me?

--Well, I'd feel guilty, if I caused a huge forest fire by my negligence.

--But in the realm of relationships, you're a little more happy-go-lucky?

--Low blow. Can't we move on from that subject?

--You'd better tend those coals. I'll go talk to your lady friend.

Day 3

--Pleasant dreams?

--I hardly slept. It was kind of restful, anyway, just being out under the sky and trees, curled by the fire.

--You relit it?

--Had to. My legs were too cold.

--She said something about that. Tell me, what sort of philosophical poetry do you write, Mr. Now?

--Oh, before I forget again, I forgot to mention: the Silvicool® tree sac, foil-lined and polyurethane coated, with a nice drawstring, 8 bucks from Bushpro. I bought it the first day of that horrendous 1 ½ day misadventure with Suzanna from Germany who went from there to the U.S. Marines. It was the worst paying contract of my treeplanting career. Plus a two-hour drive, a ferry ride each way; and supper at a schwag Nakusp restaurant. They served us pasta with a dollop of tomato sauce, a puny green salad and 2 slices of white bread. The mangy hash-addled highballers ate like wolves and called for more. Now about this rain—

--I only gave you one mosquito. Things could be worse.

--How much snow is going to be in the pass?

--You never know.

--No. I suppose not. There's no arguing with you, really. I can see that now.

--My fault, is it? Do you like the view?

--I do appreciate that pound of plastic coming into play for a while this morning. It wasn't much help for warmth, though.

--You should have brought wool pants.

--I know. By the way, that sharp peak across the valley reminds me of that first camping trip in the west, to Glacier National Park, also in the rain, Wolf Mountain, I made an enlargement 8X10. Black and white—no thanks to you.

--Hey, it's an art form. Just like your little parade in blue ink.

--Pass the chocolate chips.

--Please.

--Thank you.

--Tell me something. Are you going to clean me up before publication?

--Minor housecleaning only. I love you as you are. I accept and support you in your journey.

--My journey. That's rich. Natural fires and all? I am bringing the blue sky back, you'll notice.

--I appreciate that. I feel that editing is like living. We can't really cut the past. We can re-vision it, for therapeutic purposes. But it's better, I feel, to accrete than to delete. Revision moving forward rather than backward, means integrating past mistakes into present learning, always keeping the whole in mind.

--The growing whole.

--Your trick.

--You mention wolves. Were you afraid of bears last night? It's all right—you can tell me.

--Only a few visions in the dark. A grizzly swiping at me with its six-inch long, razor sharp claws. Maybe sitting hard on me, batting me around a bit. Or a black bear, hungry for a few large chunks of thigh meat.

--I wondered if they might react to your flute playing.

--React?

--Mm, the shrill sounds of a small animal in distress?

--That reminds me of another story, my last east-west crossing of these mountains. Jumbo, Dewar, Earl Grey II; it could be a trilogy.

--You say you hear voices in your head, and you write them down.

--I don't recall saying so, but yes, that's true.

--You make your living doing this?

--Actually I'm in the nutrition business, as I may have mentioned.

--I don't recall. Do you think that Pepsi pays Stephen King every time he mentions their brand?

--I'm confident we can work something out. Oh, and, I also partake in the investment sector.

--I see. And after the year 2000 worldwide computer economy collapse—

--I'm going to buy more matches soon.

--Good plan. Time to brush up on all your bushcraft, bush pro. I've been thinking about this concept of excess. I'm glad you brought it up, in fact. It might be time for a few large fires—you know, earthquakes, volcanoes, pole shifts.

--I'm sure you'll find a way.

--Hey, I've enjoyed having you here. You're still comfortable, right?

--On the edge. Keep that blue sky coming.

--You really may be better off in Arizona, come to think of it. Since you seem to like traveling fast and light. A regular moving target, you are.

--“Keep on walkin’. Don’t look back.” Marley and Jagger can’t both be wrong.

--No more searching for “The Lasting Relationship”?

--I’m a wandering monk now.

--Indeed. And what is your practice, noble sage?

--I'm going to begin as soon as I get back home. Four hours a day of writing, Monday through Friday. Morning by default, otherwise squeeze it in. I might like to garden some sunny morning, or play my drum.

--You’re clear on your priorities, are you?

--Absolutely. Music practice an hour a day. The rest free.

--And weekends?

--Saturday off. Sunday, four hours for business and writing, mostly planning.

--That's enough to sustain your business?

--I’ll throw in four more hours a week, anytime that makes sense. I’ll plan that by the week, according to the needs of the time.

--Good luck. It’s getting into fall, you know. I’ve seen these sorts of good intentions before. You’re sure about the garden, firewood, fall chores, town trips, social events...it’s all covered in the time I’ve allowed you before snow?

--Yeah, well, as far as relationship goes...I’m gonna have to cut way back there. A monk’s life, you understand.

--As I say, good luck. Someone still loves you, you know.

--She’ll have to love me as I am.

--Do you know that to love is to recognize those qualities that attract you to another, and to nurture them in yourself?

--Is that why when I come to this lovely shaded golden-pebbled brook, having just told myself, "No words, now, no words"--the words came to me, "Drink of this water"?

--We're having a conversation, right?

--But I wanted to put you on hold.

--You do it to everyone, and everyone does it to me.

--You have my sympathy and affection.

--Nice words. What do they mean?

--I'd rather not talk about it anymore. I want to be alone.

--Go for it. I'm always here. You can report when you get back home. About the purpose of your trip.

--I'm going now. It's been real.

Later...

--I've been thinking about that "happy-go-lucky." I'd like to change it to "devil-may-care."

--Oh, you're back, are you? How was the pass?

--A little too much of myself. Nice view, though. The classic towering mountain over its glacier and flanked by two subordinates like breasts with their peaks hard with desire, or the upraised knees of a lover with the river running between her thighs...

--And to the left?

--A wondrous broad and verdant valley.

--And you stayed awhile, and then walked on.

--Yes, and I do care. Even though to others, what I do and how I am may seem hurtful, or even evil.

--And like a devil, you may—or may not, as your whim dictates—care.

--I tried to go without words, without you, but the voices, the words wouldn't stop. They did become the clang of a street car, pounding with my steps and the beat of my heart, offset by chirring squirrels and brush gently rubbing past my leg as I walked—then the chimes of a meditation retreat, calling me to the breath, the breath alone. But I didn't want to go there.

--Why not?

--Not today.

--What do you want, today?

--A feeling of harmony with you.

--I'm touched.

--Is commitment an issue with you?

--Do you mean my commitment, or yours?

--Mine.

--You're free. Always absolutely free.

--That sounds pretty open-ended.

--Oh, I'm nothing if not that. Certain cosmological finalities notwithstanding.

--The Big Bang, in reverse?

--Let's go beyond time, shall we? Say, can I get you another sandwich? How about a thunderclap or two?

--I see you have your sore points too.

--It's easy to be abused in the area you give the most.

--You're talking to one who understands.

--I feel safe with you.

--I like hangin' out with you too and all, but uh, time to get moving again. There's things I gotta do.

--Like what? Just for discussion's sake. I could care less, personally.

--I have to do some thinking.

--This sounds serious.

--I'm just feeling antsy about entering "society" again. And I can't take you with me.

--Why not?

--They'd run me out of town. Anyhow, that's one thunderclap too many. I'm outta here. Catch you back at the truck. If you have any last questions, save 'em.

--Oh I will. But I'm not going anywhere. You know where to find me.

2 -- Stillness and Motion, Me and You

You said it was like riding a birdwing in the dark night. We were the little red and blue lights riding, stillness in motion. In such swansong is our beginning recorded, the foreground in motion against the still background. Yet also the background moves; and in this earth-wandering, and in the solar and galactic passages in turn, there is a stillness of each frame beyond, until we go there and whip it too into a frothy becoming.

Breathing, I take the pulse of your blood and elevate it to a supple motion, an undulating welcome of my touch. Breathing, you draw my caught thought down the well to ground-tide, and in seconds flat I am rounded into your whole wonder, our soft fullness of lips drinking lip to lip, sipping slowly the drink of life, until whistling with a rush of air like a waterfall in rewind and play, we tumble breathing, onward to the cliff and final run dancing to the sea. The bird trembles above, shaking off droplets and soaring on.

To dream a material condition and have it transpire!

For instance: tawdry as the ingredients may be (old fiberboard, gyprock and plywood, tacked together on an old outhouse), birdsong now conspires with the hum of modern communications technology to flesh out this bone-some presentation, two months after the first inkling vision from the shower window, and gratified I sit here regarding the gift of creative process from the other end: completion.

In such a way do we create each other and are ourselves created, though more unconsciously than as homespun architects and with the savor of unimagined discovery, with plain and tarnished ingredients, used and unused tools of latent architecture of the self, the opening soul. We oil well each other's hinges, and open wide the gates forever. How could we ever stay locked in that enchanted garden now going to seed, that backwater pond in overlush dim darkness, with the whole wide and sunny desert and oceans before us?

The geography of the heart: this is where we run to, and whether forested or bricked, we need to fly the corridors, nuzzle the feathers, challenge the

avatars of needless worry who pretend to rule here. In this bright morning that gives its tears and soft-sun glories to us whimsically, the bird sings patiently, a lambent figment of creation, harking us to its fair resonance with the accompaniment of insect drone and fanning arms of benevolent trees, or seething tidal flats, as the scene requires.

So the adventure begins, and there is nowhere it needs to stop.

Sitting, walking, both have their degrees of motion, their tendrils of connection. Slow thought, fast thought, poetry and prose, our walking and running and lying together, these give me a sense of you in your range of openness, your skin dissolving into mine, my spirit riding your bliss, I have to ask you, in the middle of the night coming cold from my study to your bed, with my soft lips on your soft eyes, how it could be that we could ever be less than absolutely happy?

There are always adjustments to be made. Your breath catches, anticipating my next move. I wonder: would walking move more thought; or should thought rather slow to the pace of the resident body, coming peacefully to rest in this moment now in cloud-shade, now in sun-tease? I go out, I come in, I do this now and that later, I return with my footsteps alone and in tandem, dancing with your circles till high-noon comes with our appointment at the district dump. There our breaths are held in deference to the rot of rubbish, leakages through untransmuted dross, unhealed residues of accidents and other lessons in material karma. We return home to take our kind repose, to enjoy the laving solicitude of maple, cedar and spruce-stump.

The world as it is: flat snapshot, blue and white, green and brown.
 The world as it is: gray brain splashing in bath, pulsing irregularly.
 The world as I imagine it to be: after the beginning, when words stream as a matter of course through the tree-body of this self-knowledge. When self converges with self, this stillness is converted to motion and back again in the call to union, and our conspiring fire brings everything in vision from self to Self, from this to all, and all to this again.

There is glamor in the endless elaboration to be had in the head, the adventure to be gained in the setting out boat-full to the distant horizon.

There is a certain gentle appeal also in the adventure of the tiniest moment, the wonder of possibility in the opening of choice to infinite size when the stillness is stilled large enough to hold all imaginings.

Your love continues to amaze me, your welcoming into this world of your grace, your all-accepting smile and bounteous laughter. In your soft eyes I see room to grow, to include in the I the you of you and I. On your lips I rest my motion, breathing stillness from your faster-beating heart. From the bird of your wing do I hear the angels of darkness weeping for joy, for then is their pain of leftover humanity allowed to descend to the earth of our splendid visitation, in fullest summer. Unmindful of weather changes, we stride-skip-and-saunter down this driveway calm and serene, because we have allowed what is in the way to stand behind our torrent; what forms the hard carapace of our crystal pool to hold the trickle of yet more upwelling tears; what holds our vision to break apart into full light and starshine, embrace and flying-free. There is a constancy in the motion of our wings, in this migration.

I oblige myself to tell you of this, in a warble of one understanding.

I recognize your own divinity of intention, your own chart of waters near and far.

I bring to your table my mercy, with gratitude for the lights you have placed on my wing. I hold in my hand a letter from you, and with it a snow-flurried crystal ball. There were times of great difficulty and stress, I recall. One child not born was sacrificed on the tree of our love; another almost died, quivering, in our arms. For two weeks after we lived in fear, sleepless, taut, too careful even to breathe. Floodwaters are coming: birthwaters yet.

On this placid lake where we find ourselves in this grace-given moment, I place my trust in you, paint your trust in you and me. With this pulling motion of our oars we move this boat cross-stream, to find what the world looks like from the other side. For picnic there is all we have brought, and red and blue berries for dessert.

3 -- Woman at the Bridge

What was that thing that you wanted, sunshine, a book to read, something else? Her shadow grows longer by the hour.

You take the time to put it into words. But the words find their own way home, into the Forest of Nothing. The winds stay low this May morning, and the sky remains partly cloudy, a cool air telling slowly of the morning before.

It is about the river, and the endless song.

It is a mystery in the heart, which longs for her even when she is at the closest, though then there is an encompassing peace too, that rides us through the changes.

Together. And yet, for a time, alone. How does one then fill the time? There are a thousand activities possible. Of them all, for the moment, there is only writing this book, singing this song. Between words I gaze out into the limpid light, remembering to breathe.

Words are like clay. You shape them in your hands, molding, stretching, and when for a time they take a shape recognizable, in more time familiar, you go back to them and mash them together, starting again from the raw wet world.

You said that even if they should shut you in a dim-lighted cell, with a vision of greenery just outside your reach, you would be content, and set to work again. And so it came to pass, by your own manifestation. In the midst of this self-created condition, you only had to, in order to extend the magic into a semblance of the unknown, relax and release your fear into the open hands of the water-princess standing behind you.

Princess, or goddess? It's more than a matter of semantics. Yet less than what really matters, her profound presence in my life. It is she that gives me the courage to release my fear, only she I can turn to in absolute trust as an infant to his careful mother. In this aspect we see clearly the goddess;

yet, too, there is the fatherly aspect I am able in turn to present to her, to allow her enfolding in the arms of my love.

So love: there's the keynote, the concept, the thing itself. Yet how unnamable it truly is--am I to keep silence, in fear of disturbing your crystalline purity of surface, your surface which contains every depth?

You call me by my name, I call you back by nothing less. You are my very reflection, my mystery revealed. Yet in the revealing, still your silence must be masked, by the words you use to weave your fabric of self. Otherwise, you might as well return to my body.

I call you simply to be. Is that enough?

With your permission.

I cannot do otherwise.

Window into your soul: I thank you for being human, for coming to the window and looking in.

You seem to like the darkness, the hush of your pet machine, or is it your mechanized brain--? I remain partly cloudy, with a threat of rain.

There are friends to visit, plans to make; the phone to answer, letters to write; places to walk and a space for sheer reflection . . . no end of the things you can do or the time you can wait for more.

Still, you know in your heart that the fullness and the emptiness equally are nothing without the central force, the dissolving of boundary, the merging of self with her, to a larger self--ultimately the all.

Yes, and what do I do with it?--I realize a characteristic response. Now, I mean.

(smile)

Darkness leans closer: even in the bright time of year. There is a passing away of the oldest, the largest preoccupations, in this season of unsettled ripening. There is a wondering behind the darkness which asks of what is to come, if it is to remain so compelling as that which drove the life forward to this point; or if, rather, I am to assume nothing, pretend to know nothing, and, as in the story of the dawning of love, learn only to set aside final judgment and blame, looking at once to the opening of self and the honoring of the other, who in her gracious splendor has opened her arms to me.

Her story does not end--though yours may, at any time. Just so you know.

My secret understanding, then, is to come to you now, and learn while I have the leisure of a slow becoming, and the enjoyment of present fruits along the way.

Just so you don't get too picky, too greedy, too smug.

Human failings: and scattered, and driven, and afraid.

You've used that term before: fear. Just what is it you're afraid of?

Death. And, I guess, all that it implies. Meaninglessness. A "why bother?" attitude. Apathy. Bitterness at the pain suffered and inflicted along the way. For what?

I get the drift.

So, fear: fear of breathing; I guess that's neurophysiological. And it's the smaller things that hook into that. So for instance, how much money I have. If I said something someone doesn't like, or misunderstood. It makes me catch my breath, and forget--for the moment--about her. Worry about how I am, who I am. If I am loved--fully, completely, without question or reservation.

She gives that to you.

Yes. And it should be enough, and it is enough, only sometimes I don't quite get it, or remember it, or realize it clearly. I get caught up in the details of the other parts of life, everything that surrounds us. Food, for instance.

When it should be a joy, a sacrament of the life you are privileged to share.

Yeah, and even there, there's getting caught up, in a superficially happy way, an addictive way--

A childish way. And that's not all bad. To be naturally exuberant--
or sad.

Fear and sadness. Is it about your mother, your father?

Of course. And so I can see where all this religious stuff comes from, even in myself: yearning for the greater self, the protective embrace of what now is just a concept, dead flesh in the grave.

Or scattered ash, as the case may be. Still, you have the warm embrace, so close at hand. The eyes of all forgiving, the fire of ongoing attraction. Love her. There is nothing more.

Love is about challenge, willingness. Confidence, acceptance, and grace.

Sitting in full glorious blue-day sun, the twenty-third of May, on a bench in a flowering orchard, with the plum cake you made and fresh chocolate sauce.

There is nothing you cannot do, with the power of love--as long, I should add, as you do it in the spirit of love, which is to say, of openness. Of giving of yourself fully, and accepting all that comes in return. This exchange is really just part of the merger of your smaller self with your larger self, which is to say, all that is. So of course you are afraid. I say, look to her for your courage, for she invites you to her, to the all she holds within. She has the keys to the realm, and is offering them to you in her open hands.

4 -- In the Sunshine of Your Love

May

The only cure for less love is more love.

Today in the sunshine of the clear May morning, though my head was foggy from dreams and your eyes were shiny with tears, you spoke to me of all your thoughts and feelings, the crowded summer ahead, and the distance we've put between each other since the weekend so close together in love. In the sunshine there is no conflict with anything else I need to do; there is no separation from this writing nor from the music I played without you last night at Soleil's, with other friends, Richard, Roxanne, Jenny, Spring. Only a realization of how difficult it was to cross respective boundaries, to find blissful union among those more occasional acquaintances, than with you on the long journey we have begun. Only an appreciation of how this work and the deep truth in any story reveals the same truth: the central importance of love, its undeniable priority. To schedule our time together, to think that music will fall effortlessly into the evening cracks, to see our contact as negotiable, misses the reality of what our love means in daily practice. It means moving other things aside instead, to make room for the love to shine forth. Whether it's a sacred boundary around our bed Sunday mornings, or taking this Thursday morning in the sun to make up for a lost evening, a short night and a sleep-fogged dawn, the sun of your love calls us out to sit in the flowering trees, where cats and birds and squirrels and deer and butterfly conspire to say, linger here awhile in the verdant grass, savor the gentle air in the apple trees before the afternoon clouds arrive.

June

Time should be measured by love, instead of the other way around.

Now in the full sun of early summer, alone with you on the beach by the lake, there is nothing other to do or say, no way else to be than like this, naked and new, raw and real, needing for both both to be loved and to become ourselves. In this union is your face shining under the blue sky of our summer together, is your touch gentle, tender, hands together by our

sides. Your painting, my music, these conspire to leave us speechless by the rippled water, the rhythms and colors awaiting our participation singly or in tandem. Your disappearance around the point at this moment is not the point, nor my driving into town this evening for a practice. It is rather the coming together of our spirits in the ripeness of growth, our parenting of our own and each other's and our own self-children, holding each in patience and love. It is making the adjustments, to the flies or the clouds or the injured cat; responding to opportunities for those cabanas in Spain or Portugal, Italy or Greece, Austria or Germany or France...in accordance with our innermost desires: where we want to be, how we want to be there. We will walk together, footsteps beating a gentle rhythm in the tawny foothills of autumn, three months hence. In the meantime the hills across this inland lake are verdant, dark and still, and the sunshine of your love comforts me beyond all need.

5 -- That Gender Stuff

"How would you like for me to be different?" she asked point-blank. We'd been lying together naked in bed, reading and talking about the Mars-Venus theory of the sexes.

"Oh, uh, well, I wouldn't put it that way, I wouldn't want you any different than you are."

"But are you at all frustrated, or missing something, some ways I'm not as feminine according to the stereotype?"

"Well, I mean--I wouldn't want you to be any different. I'm happy with the whole person you are."

"But still--"

"Ah . . . I guess there are some ways of being feminine, that I miss, being with you."

Now her eyes lit up, shining with some alchemical mixture of challenge and hurt. "All right. Like what?"

I tried to avoid getting too pointed and personal, by first sketching a profile of the feminine stereotype--a straight-line, 100% female in all attributes, against which any individual (of either gender) would measure up with a wavering line, sometimes meeting the straight-line standard, sometimes not. The model attributes included gentleness, sensitivity to process, attention to "frilly" dress, makeup and perfume, affinity for childcare and baby care, fondness for domestic skills like cooking and sewing, and interest in "female chit-chat" (which I left undefined).

She encouraged me in this academic effort, fascinated by the figure I painted. Then she dared me to repeat the same exercise, this time dealing with men.

Her strategy paid off: I quickly realized that to give men the opposite attributes (brusqueness instead of gentleness, working at a job away from home, and so on: you know the drill) planted a minefield of culturally-weighted assumptions. This whole business of stereotyping was grossly unfair to differences between individuals, blind to context, and inconsistent with respect to culture. Mixing features from a hunting or plowing culture (women minding the hearth) with those from modern culture (frilly dress) showed how blatantly arbitrary and self-serving were my ideas of personal models for the genders.

Yet, if you don't follow one stereotype, are you merely falling into the reactionary stereotype? If you don't follow the mainstream fashion or conditioning, are you responding instead to that of your subculture or local community?

For instance: finally I was able to broach the subject of her chopped hair. Was it really unfeminine, as I tended to think? The question had become rather fuzzy. Does she decide her hair length on the basis of:

- a) conformity
- b) perversity
- c) comfort
- d) whim
- e) habit
- f) my preference

(And is my preference in turn determined by my own a, b, c, d, or e?)

When we ask these questions in a spirit of inquiry, we defuse potential argument and come to a place of wonder in unity. Her eyes go wise, inward and distant and also live and present, and we feel the intellectual orgasm and shared space of lovers of each other's truth and the greater truth we seek together.

We had common questions, but no firm answers yet. Still leaning up against the big pillow together, bright twin reading lights on...

"I just feel," I tried again, "that there must be something to this gender stuff."

"What real evidence is there, though?"

"Well, the obvious physical differences--"

"Like big muscles, or hairy skin . . .?"

I knew she was going to her usual gambit about no firm dividing line: some women have bigger muscles or hairier skin than some men, and so on. I quickly clarified: "I mean at least genitals, and breasts, and hormones." But was that all? I risked a shakier limb: "And all these cultural and historical patterns of dividing up gender roles must have some real basis, to carry such majority weight all these centuries."

"Not necessarily. Are wars necessary, based on biology?" She knew I wouldn't argue that one.

"No, I don't think so. But with the two sexes, it just makes natural sense for behaviors to match up with what we're already given, the different physical templates. Each successive layer matches the form underneath, beginning with the X and Y chromosomes. The basic form starts out different and stays different: round and square, say. Moon and sun . . ."

She took a deep breath and smiled radiantly. "Now I get it!" she exclaimed. The reason we don't see eye to eye on this is that you're a poet--"

"--and you're a scientist." She wouldn't have given herself the label but accepted it with grace.

"Yes. What you're talking about is symbols, and I'm talking about the actual details of individuals that make us different from stereotypes. What you're doing is like religion."

That caught me off guard. I knew she'd gone too far but didn't know what to say. It was unlike her to use a metaphor like that.

"I can see it now," she added.

"What?"

"You're getting ready to tear my argument apart."

"No, no," I pleaded. "I was just considering, trying to understand what you mean. I think actually I can see how it applies. In the twelfth century they had this cult about women, the Virgin and the Whore. Women were all modelled after the Virgin Mary or the Whore of Babylon. One or the other, nothing in between."

"Yeah, that's the idea. Or your romantic poets. The lady in white satin, and the big strong knight."

"You're right, I admit it."

"You want pattern, and I want--"

"Chaos--or rather, as Crichton's new book has it, 'complexity' theory."

"Yup, yup. That's it."

"I see what you mean now about religion. Trying to simplify through abstraction, and fantasy. Art does that too, doesn't it? The schools of dogmatic fashion--"

"Yeah. It's like this rock painting I'm doing. I'm accentuating the stripes, exaggerating them for effect."

"Which is fine, but if all your paintings had to be like that, or if everyone's did, it would be oppressive: nothing but stripes. The way Cubism was, I guess. Revolutionary, at first, and then dogmatic."

"The Mexican Revolution."

"The American Revolution."

"The Beatles, as musak."

I held her breast. "Ummh," she moaned.

We both laughed. "Right," I said, "now you've done so much talking, you're allowed to go back to the 'Ummh . . .'"

And we got back down to the X and the Y, and let the rest fall away.

6 -- Woman and Deer

26 May

Yesterday when we made love in the morning I was thinking about the deer I was going to kill. Holding you in my arms, so strong and tenderly, I thought of the body of the deer, felt my need and power going right through your body. What other needs might I have to surpass these--to love, to feed?

The deer had been eating the tops off the beets and carrots, has started in on the strawberries and apple trees. Last year the same one, a small tame white-tail, had destroyed half the garden, including most of the strawberries. Now just the day before I had made my decision, gone for the gun and even set up a shot, scaring it off Thursday night with shouts and rocks, then finding it skittish on Friday, fleeing the orchard but then showing up right away again in the back lawn. In my sights she turned nonchalantly showing me her thin backside and casually strolled away.

But yesterday after making love, at breakfast time I was despondent when you reported more damage to the garden. My manhood was at stake--my skill or lack of it, my judgment, my ability to bring the meat down when it counted. Now the very crop was at stake, and I as provider was failing. Was it any different from a failed erection, a loss of passion at the critical moment? Fearful of a shaky aim, I'd kneeled to steady the rifle barrel against a small tree. But leaves then obscured the shot, and then the deer moved--turning her white placid rump disdainfully at me instead. I thought of my groundout with the bases loaded; my lockup at solo time in the drum performances. Just too excited, too uptight. Premature ejaculation, or not getting it up at all.

What the hell, let's go camping. Back and forth between buildings, on the last trip the phone rang. I talked for a few minutes, came back out and met you coming halfway down the path. I talked about the prayer meeting happening Tuesday for the clearcutting of another sacred forest, where we might have walked that day. Looking over my shoulder into the orchard, you said, "There's the deer behind you."

I got the loaded rifle, chambered a shell, aimed and fired. The deer was stretching up to nibble leaves from the apple tree, her full neck exposed. She went right down, her legs kicking death.

Later, skinning her, I slid my hands into her warm body cavity, removing the organs. Slid fingers down the skin of the belly, along sliced meat. Carving around a leg joint, I hacked into the top of my thumb a quarter inch, welling blood to mingle with deer's blood in my hand.

When I was done, we set off for the hike, you with a fresh tampon. I said I might as well use my thumb. On the trail, in a rocky nest we made by the roaring creek, we made half-naked love again; your eye shining open to me in the sunlit leaves, yours the eye of the Goddess Natura. "I will take you, all of you," you told me then, and I knew you were speaking for the world itself, or the world itself was speaking for you.

Still later, in a tent on another beach, we made love for the third time. My fingers probed gently and deep within you, the raw meat of creation, but alive, so alive. My hands held the bony crotch of life itself, swelling with love and writhing with the union we had become. It was enough then to say simply, "I love you."

7 -- Breathing Together: Sketches of You and Me

The Triple Muse is woman in her divine character: the poet's enchantress, the only theme of his songs.

– Robert Graves, *The White Goddess*

1

Broth of potato, parsley, cabbage leaf and nettle is the food I take on this cleansing fast. Slowly I walk down your driveway in the cold May air. Words lie piled up like cordwood along the road. I feel like running past them – or slowing down to a crawl, feeling my way: forward, always forward, breathing, just breathing. All the rest is production: the conversion of energy into matter, the making known. Baseball scores, tax payments, the local weather: part of the stew of what happens. I continue my search for the missing words, the ones that really matter. To what other enterprise can I bring such wonder? I rest awhile, to hear your thoughts.

2

At this long table, my spreading heart, you do have a place – and now, I've told you. I love you.

Believing in you, I can believe in myself, can play the tune to the end without stopping, can begin another without even thinking. In your beauty of silver cloud-wool, your promise of garden glory, I take my measure of life by the lungful. Breathing together, let us walk now under these dark firs, into rarer sunshine tonight, the all-too-forgettable bliss of stars.

3

Caught between spring and summer, sunshine and rain, I pause in the stillness again, awaiting your move. I deliberate, while the rain starts and stops. I collect the fragments of past and future love together. If I can sift

them tiny enough, they will vanish altogether. This, in the doing, is all I can play of this game.

Another moment, there is more time to ponder, to wonder about how it happened or will transpire. We sit holding hands that droop like last week's flowers. In this rush of new love we are fallen branches caught upon rocks; we are dripping leaves; we are silent.

4

There was hoarfrost on the rippled mounds ridged beside the road to the snow-hung creek, where I walked away from you once. Now between us, in a warmer season, we have five kids to take care of every day. With you in my arms, I taste the salt of my own becoming. And I whisper in your ear, come away with me; come away to a space that time forgets.

You allow me to feel that I'm living inside a painting – where tree shapes, lively and interpenetrating, enfold me.

Now tell me how it is for you. Blind, surfacing, say – and I don't mind waiting in your close embrace.

On the woodlot above that snow-hung creek, are scattered trees left standing – bruised, battered, broken and alone. How can we tell them we love them?

Astonished, opening, you hold my name in yours, breathing, only breathing in our felled silence.

Let's just say no to the drug of doing, for a while.

This is easier in a forest.

5

Old man's beard hangs from a dead drooping thin branch, in midair, by a dying pine with brown-yellow pitch wounds; stoic.

In Nature's studio there are no demands – only sun dappling through greenweft, with the sound of shushing water, under blue pastel brushed skyhaze.

On Valentine's Day you walked with me steady on the compact snow corn, soft treading. Now we come to the melted moss of a new day.

This energy, come drink with me.

Did I say I want, I do?

8 -- No Present

Yesterday I discovered a new religion.
 Today I will use words to build up a wall of understanding.
 There is no present.
 All is past and future, the one becoming the other.
 Consciousness is a vector of acceptance.
 To Be > To Become
 And not to freeze there in the new become, but to keep on becoming.
 It's the jam theory of reality and of awareness and of being.

Now I will add on words to the wall.
 I will speak of this use of words to build understanding.
 I have spoken of them as springboards.
 Let me then make a springboard of the present tense.
 When I use it, as now, it is of a conditional understanding.
 A sense of as if it were palpable, in my hands.
 Just as if words were real things.
 They are useful illusions by which to manipulate and move ideas.
 Just as the present is a useful illusion of presence in time: of self-solidity in space.
 Just as concreteness, in words or sense perception, is useful illusion by which to maintain the entertainment of the body.

Let me speak instead of time.
 I do not have to be let: I will speak.
 Free will is a key ingredient: working forwards by working back.
 I see the concreteness of what has been, by which to jump forward;
 or, by which to define what is coming.
 This can be a curse, or a useful foundation: it is up to the judging free will to decide that, not to let the pattern drag down. But to use it to build on: deer trail blazed by droppings.

As in any religion, this focus is the same as a one-god. A point of consciousness. Most posit the present, the all present. They gather the past and the future into the now. That is a useful illusion. I would rather empty the present of the past and future, of self and world, of any meaning or time at all.

Why?

Because to dwell in the present is to be stuck. To be more than vegetable is to move. That is our animal nature. That is to move in space. To be human is to move in time. Isn't this merely neat, another illusion? Let's try it out.

There is no letting. We will try it out. There is no we. It will be tried:

To be human is to move in time. Following thought, forward. To new awareness. By building up awarenesses as they come: perceptions, idea-links, flashes of light: building up, or sensing and letting fly by. There is no letting: they fly by.

To be human is to move in time. Is this mantra stuck? It's part of a spiral. Human time is spiral, cyclical and ongoing. We are not part of the animal zoo, the caged pacing, if we choose not to be. If we choose to become other, if I and I do choose to let newness of experience enter freely at all times. Not to build my own cage of thought or even religion, even this one: this, too, will be temporary, a season of ideas.

Let us move on.

There is no letting . . .

We move.

There is no we;

it moves.

There is no it;

only moving.

There is nothing to move,

only movement.

There is no time,

only timing,

no presence,

only continuity, change, growth, spiralling life energy cascading into new space with new forms, new exchanges and interaction.

Words are only words. Yet they are useful, to move the mind forward. Not in themselves, but little thought vehicles, individual and linked like express trains on errands of consciousness, buzzing in a hive of understanding. Why is this valuable? Because otherwise it is easy to become mired in the dripping honey, the cells of wax.

I use the words to sing a prayer for the liberation of the dreams within us, so that they may fly back to the outer universe:

Let me see the me as us.

Let us see the us as all.

Let all see the all as nothing, and as all again.

There is no letting: we will undertake our own freedom of self-realization.

There is no self to be realized: but only to get out of the way for the universe to reveal its energy in a variety of forms: infinite variety, infinite beauty.

I rejoice in my ability to participate in this cosmic drama.

I take pleasure in the awareness within mystery, of the paradox of my twin role: to "get out of the way" and "to participate." In this balance is the energy exchanged, and forms transformed.