

CHAPTER 2: CHEZ GEORGE

Once again I'm astounded and confused that writing a memoir about 50 years ago is more a voyage of discovery than telling a simple story about my past life. It's like researching and writing about an entirely different person, which makes sense since I've also been several more different personas in the decades since then. Digging back into my files, I'm finding events and people that had left no trace in my suspiciously selective memory. Notes about so and so doing such and such are news to me, but they sound right. So here's the reconstructed story of living in George's house. I too might as well be reading it for the first time.

Right after moving out of Chas's basement apartment and into George's house at 608 Constitution Avenue NE, I started work on July 24, 1972 with the Federal Research Division—both historical facts to which I can attach no recollected detail of importance. From a vague memory of the front bedroom and Google street-views, I know that George's house was a narrow two-story row house with a square bay. My work was in a non-descript building a few blocks down the Avenue with a desk on the second floor by a window, a splendidly easy commute.

The first week or so in my new digs and job is as lost as the history of the Cro-Magnons. In George's wonderfully Victorian bedroom with its square bay window, I was as content as a troglodyte in a new cave. Though a borrowed hideaway, it was my first taste of the home I longed to make for myself in this new city. A special plus was that George had two lovely dracaenas in his bedroom window. I'd always been a pushover for houseplants.

At my new desk (with an IBM Selectric typewriter!), I was back in a familiar work environment, and actually working again with my beloved Russian language. The other Slavic tongues came back quickly, and learning Romanian was a minimal chore. Soon I bought two small jade trees for the window, Mamai and Batu, named for the Mongol Khans in ancient Russia. (They stayed with me for some decades thereafter and grew huge.)

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I'm not sure exactly how long my domestic tranquility lasted. As I was to learn then and often found in later years, as soon as you get your own place in DC, visitors magically appear, whether or not they stay with you. My first guests, and they for just the afternoon, were Barbara and the girls in passing on the way to meet Papa and Nana in New York. Our welcome hugs warmed my paternal heart. Proud and confident in my new job, I promised to send Barbara extra money for Jake and Aimée's nursery school in the fall. She was quite surprised and pleased by my normal hairdo, and I half-joked that I had a hairdresser on retainer.

In my files I found a few pages I wrote on August 10, 11 & 14. On the 10th I compared my present state with Augusts in the past and remarked on some of my current friends:

There's Charles of almost 12 platonic years, who I still miss after our months in Ann Arbor; Don, who found me enough reason to lower his defenses and who now on this visit has lowered them even farther with Emerson...

Okay, news to me! I hadn't been aware that Don visited me in DC, except on a later trip, much less that we had some kind of triangle going on. With no remark on Chas, I continued:

...the same who's on his way to work right now; and Ginger who wanders in the midst of us pretending she doesn't know what's going on.

There's a paragraph with excellent details of my activities and a comment that needs explication: *This precise moment is the rush hour with traffic rumbling by along Constitution Ave below my window. If the pick I found in George's basement (cleaned up yesterday evening) hadn't been broken, I'd be breaking up the cement slab out in the back yard. But instead, I'll write this while I wait for Don to get here after he takes Emerson to work at*

the Town House on 8th Street. When I called him to see if Don was there, and found he was, I have to admit feeling just a little pang. Jealousy is something I don't usually feel and don't now really. I suppose it's just that I still don't know the story of last Sunday morning. But doubtless, over dinner I should be able to dig it out of Don. It doesn't make a great deal of difference. He'll be with me for the evening—and doesn't know yet that I'm going to drag him off to see "Troilus and Cressida" with Ginger and Chas.

I tossed in another total surprise in following up on current friends, merely mentioning:

...the other Charles in Mobile, the crazy Jim in Charlottesville...

Who in the devil were they? Mobile? Charlottesville? I've always boasted about my great long-term memory (as opposed to spotty short-term recall), but this other Charles and crazy Jim come at me out of far left field. Maybe they were recent tricks from the L&F?

The comparison slips into reminiscences of August two years before with beloved Ken in Milwaukee and a romantic reminiscence of coming home to him after my security cop job at the drop forge. I dearly wish I'd had it when writing about this time in LORD WIND:

Down those stairs past the pile of shoes to his door, and there he'd be sitting on the 90-inch sofa with a magazine, the radio playing, his curls awry and a big smile for me.

Clearly in sentimental frame of mind, I ended that day's writing with an otherwise non sequitur but emotionally revealing paragraph and a Parthian shot of the mystery:

This evening I am literally ripe to fall in love again. The symptoms are clear: the mixed pleasure and frustration in being with someone I care for like Don or Emerson; the fidgety feeling of being alone, and the way my nerves hark back to when I was in love, looking for that stimulus to come alive again. Not to mention momentary hot flashes of such things as what it would be like to kiss Jim.

Who the fuck was Jim? Crazy or not, he was just a symptom. Evidently I was coming out of the emotional cocoon I'd been in since losing my Ken. Though still not really looking for another, I was at least starting to be on the lookout for one.

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What I wrote the next day, August 11, is worth quoting in full:

I was rather taken aback yesterday evening when Don came over. In his inexperience he'd taken it amiss that I called Emerson's—thinking I was checking up on him. I got rather angry and hurt on top of it. He acted as though his going there was supposed to be a secret, and it goes very much against the grain of his often-stated policy of mutual honesty. Again, today when he called me, the time 6:15 told me he'd be taking Emerson to work again, but he won't admit it to me. Oh, well, I've got bigger problems than that to contend with.

It turned out that we didn't go to "Troilus and Cressida" last night, another thing that aggravated me—the way he sat there looking pained when I suggested it to him. Instead, we went to the Italian restaurant to eat on the sidewalk where we dismissed rather than settled the argument. Ravioli and veal parmigiana were consumed with scant attention because we went on talking, and I got worked up into a pensive mood. I even told Don how this feeling of readiness is growing in me. Afterwards we drove the long way out to the University of Maryland and walked in the twilight on the campus. When I'm with him, I can't help blathering about the nature of interpersonal relationships. And why is it that now those very masculine things that used to remind me of my father—like his always needing to find a bathroom—now only irk me vaguely? It's disconcerting that I can think of him at a distance with great tenderness, but when I've been with him

for an hour, everything he does aggravates me. I can't say I wish he weren't here, but at the same time his visit upsets me, holds me back from developing my world here, I guess, taking me back to those months in Ann Arbor that are totally over now. Don told me that I operate on a very controlled and practiced set of principles with people. While we walked back up the quad to the car, I confused things further saying I wanted a situation where there were no controls. Surely he got the message that I'm not in love with him. I came right out and told him so. We went back to the house and sat on the sofa, where I simply talked about work. Then Don left and could easily have driven over to meet Emerson for all I know. Just as he may have spent the afternoon with him. That's not what's making my head feel all in a jumble.

It's the tension and anxiety that have pervaded this day. When ambling along the sidewalk in this unseasonably cool August, watching a tower gliding through the trees. When sitting at a table and catching whiffs of a wonderful pipe. The whole time I felt the waiting growing. The breeze and the calm of the evening do nothing to alleviate the feeling. Maybe in writing this I am mastering the mood. There's too much ahead for this evening to let myself be depressed. It's Friday, and I must make the most of the weekend now that I'm a working man.

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There are many comments I could make about ending love affairs, but I won't. Let me instead note that the concern about interpersonal relationships was a brand-new aspect of my character. I'm not really sure where it came from, but I hope it's a positive sign. On the other hand, I find the inchoate tension and anxiety disturbing. I'd thought I was in a much better place than this emotionally speaking.

The following Monday, August 14, I wrote:

The whole weekend, three evenings, I found myself in rather strained relations with Don. On Friday there was the way he acted so disgruntled the whole time of "Troilus and Cressida," even going to nap in the car, and later the very overt hostility he showed toward all and sundry.

We must have gone to the play (at Folger Shakespeare Theater) on Friday night instead, and that remark about Don going out to nap in the car made me flash on an authentic memory of same in my old brain. Now I figure the poor guy was having great difficulty in dealing with me not being in love with him. (Indeed I never had been.) He likely had come to visit planning on resuming the tender affair we'd had in Ann Arbor, but I was now a different person.

When I lay down to sleep, I wondered if maybe I should have a talk with him and suggest he go straight. We did talk on Saturday morning and patched things over at Michelangelo's—where we coincidentally also "ran into" Emerson. That evening we went to the Lost & Found where he was incommunicado with everyone, but at least he wasn't hostile. I must admit to being occupied mainly with dancing, but I'd introduced Don to enough people...

Yesterday evening we had dinner in a little restaurant with an awful singer and went for a long walk on Embassy Row. In the twilight, he asked if after all of this I'd still go to bed with him, and I said, sure, silly. That was pleasant, but it felt like an empty exercise. And this morning, we met for breakfast early before my work, and he asked if I still liked him. My answer was the same.

After doing all kinds of verbal gymnastics not to mention it, Don finally admitted that he'd been seeing Emerson all these days of his visit. That had ceased to bother me by

Friday night. In our farewell lunch together on the Library lawn this noon, our words were lazy and empty, not a terribly poetic way to say goodbye. Now that Don is off, I must get back in touch with Emerson.

Above and beyond all that, the weekend's activities were exceptional. Friday night all sorts of people started showing up...

Now wait a minute: If Don and I had gone to T&C on Friday night, this must have been the later afterwards when Don showed overt hostility to all and sundry. In any case:

...first Dale from Chapel Hill [another person I can't remember at all], and then at the bar I ran into Jim from Boston who looked much the same after these three years. [Not crazy Jim, but one I remember from my famous research trip in 1969.] After the bar closed, he got us stoned on the street. Then at the Smithsonian on Saturday [apparently while Don was with Emerson], I took up with a herd of about eight guys, most horticulturalists from South Carolina. We met up that night at the bar where they met sullen Don, and they came to breakfast with us on Sunday morning. Ryan, Randy, and Tom were off that afternoon to Europe.

I'd scarcely gotten back from the museum that afternoon when who to my wondering eyes should appear but my wonderful Ken! With him were two little Japanese guys we installed in the Everett Hotel. (Going in there was a very wistful experience for me, of course.) And Ken also brought along a guy with long black hair named Pat.

So the passel of us [I assume that to include Don, who was at least not hostile, but I'm sure overwhelmed by the crowd.], went to Georgia's party upstairs from Chas. While Chas and Ken got drunk, Pat and I went downstairs and got stoned. That accounts for the haze of dancing at the L&F that night and for the fact that he and I wound up very late in bed for a stiff bout of sex. [Did Don go with Emerson? And what about Ken?], and Sunday afternoon Pat and I made the National Gallery and part of Science.

This development is not a little perturbing because I'd not have pursued it myself. Last night they came in late [presumably after the empty exercise and Don had gone back to his hotel—or to Emerson's], and I'm afraid I didn't exactly welcome Pat to my bed with open arms. [I wonder why not!] Instead, I went back to sleep and apologized this morning. At least one can't get bored in this situation.

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Pat probably just as happily joined Ken in the back bedroom—which brings us to the nub of this whole thing: my former lover Ken. When I wrote with such feeling in LORD WIND about leaving him at the dorm in Baton Rouge the year before, I'd erroneously recalled not seeing Ken again for three years, and here I discover that it was really only one year. I declare, memory can be such a lying bitch. But let's let sleeping dogs lie... At the end of this document, again as a non sequitur, I wrote a rare paragraph validating my beautiful memory of Ken's and my enduring brotherhood:

So Ken arrived Saturday. He gave me a big hug, and immediately it was as though no time had passed. The same instantaneous acceptance of each other. His hair is still long and curly, and that note of near-hysteria is still in his voice. In the evening when he was drunk, there was a moment when he held me from behind and kissed my neck. A glow of bliss. Last night he came in late to sleep in the back room [with Pat...]. In a very few moments I'll go over to Chas's apartment to see him. A couple times we've made remarks showing how alive the ties are that bind us. Seeing Ken now, I can't help but wonder if maybe we're still in love with each other. We will see.

Reading these delightful details of Ken's visit awoke some very real memories, like of him getting drunk and kissing my neck. Another was undocumented, from when Ken (and Pat) stayed on a few days after Don left. At least twice, I now vividly recall Ken and me going directly from affectionate hug to spiritual embrace, our intimacy as timeless and boundless as before, the incomparable love of brothers.

In those same few days Pat (whom truthfully I remember only as his long black hair), I vaguely recall provided more physically focused intimacies requiring no emotional connection. Remember: This ménage with Emerson, Don, Pat and Ken was terrifically ironic in the context of my earlier comment about being ripe to fall in love again. But that didn't happen. Instead a new complication arose, as mentioned in an earlier paragraph on the page:

Today a letter finally came from Steve. It was pronouncedly business-like, while being rather sarcastic, ironic, and bitter—not at all the stance I hoped he'd take.

In our brief May visit, Steve and I had parted on loving terms, per Leonard Cohen's song, my love going with him and his staying with me. However, this last of his letters—all of which I also still have—doesn't strike me now as at all sarcastic, etc. It simply opens with an emphatic comment: "I was pissed off that you wrote me a letter full of philosophical bullshit."

I bet this new Richard the Research Analyst got offended by Steve's vulgar complaint, though I'm afraid my intellectual attempts to cut off yet hold on to the tenderness of our love affair probably did read like bullshit, like steaming piles of dubious verbiage. No doubt I'd rambled on about my new pre-occupation with interpersonal relationships. And getting pissed off in response, I projected my own offense on Steve's letter. I now find it full of congenial remarks on his idle summer, on his new home in Chapel Hill living as roommates with a queer named Phil, not writing anything but playing the piano a lot, and not having fallen in love again.

Steve also wrote that he'd be in DC the weekend of the 18th, the coming Thursday, and added: "If you'd like for me drop by when I'm there to chat, or strike up a friendship, or something, then call me here." Frankly, I wonder what stance I'd wanted Steve to take as an abandoned lover. His "or something" offer sounds now like dearly hoping to get together again. Perhaps that innocent implied hope was exactly the stance I didn't like. I continued in the pages:

He'll be in town this weekend. So I really feel I should get in touch with him, but I don't feel either of us is in shape for a meeting.

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I hope the foregoing pages will convince you of the utmost importance of writing down, even sporadically, and keeping documents on the facts of your life. (Even if you don't care to recall the past, it might come in handy in court sometime.) As shown above, you really can't trust your undocumented memory. It makes things up—or loses important facts. Without those rambling and confused August pages, how would I ever reconstruct my brief time living on Constitution Avenue? Even though they were written with my head all in a jumble...

But more important is the lesson I've learned that we can't always trust the veracity even of documentary evidence! Sometimes stuff we write down can be subtly biased, stupidly confused, or just plain mistaken. What we write can also be unwitting evidence of unconscious behavior. Reading the pages, I see now that I was excessively harsh and unjust with Don and unfeeling of his sincere, if conflicted, affection. After all, I'd lured him out of his closet into an affair, and now wanting it to be over with, I'd held him at arm's length emotionally and sat stewing in my irk and aggravation at his visit. Actually, I suspect I was relieved that he was sneaking around with Emerson on the side. The resurrected memory of this episode is painful and of no credit to me. No wonder I'd so thoroughly repressed it this past half-century.

Discovering the unreliability of primary sources also makes me question the truth of my two earlier memoirs, grounded as they were in the journal I kept so assiduously. I mean, maybe I'd journaled about my love affairs with an eye to self-aggrandizement or self-justification—or as likely, omitted pertinent details not flattering to my ego. This also leads me to question the truth of any nonfiction, no matter how footnoted and intensely referenced (with the possible exception of mathematical equations). Pray tell, Your Honor, how can one truly express the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

When you get right down to it, anything we write, including scientific studies, history, biography—memoir—occult treatises, current event news, celebrity and fake news, and flat out fiction, is essentially semi-fiction in one degree or another. So maybe all my semi-fictional memoirs, novels, and scholarly studies aren't really so much out of line. Let's just trash the old distinction between fiction and nonfiction and recognize that any writing is an admixture of objective and subjective realities. But that's enough of my philosophical bullshit.

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The best justification of the August pages is that some off-handed remarks rescued real memories from oblivion, like Ken's sudden appearance and our enduring closeness. When he (and Pat) left early Thursday morning, it was again like the Cohen song: the shoreline and the sea. Our steps would always rhyme. A great way to say goodbye.

Steve arrived after my work that evening, and as we'd arranged on the phone (against my better judgment), he stayed with me for two nights. Even without the reminder in those August pages, I recall his visit well, but I'd originally thought it came a year later under entirely different circumstances. Score another one for documentation! On first seeing my aspiring playwright, I was seriously taken aback by his appearance. He'd grown a scruffy beard!

I'd never been attracted to hairy faces, and if Steve had looked like this back in January in the Rathskellar at Tulane, I doubt I'd ever have given him a second look. All the same, we had a friendly dinner conversation at the Italian outdoor place and took a long walk around the Capitol and Library, talking on a friendship level and neither mentioning "or something."

Back at George's, when I steered Steve toward the back bedroom, he gave me puppy eyes and asked to sleep with me. I told him I didn't think that was a good idea anymore and planted a quick kiss on his hairy cheek. I could tell he was about to start crying, and hardening my heart, I turned away to my bedroom. Today I'm sure Steve lay in bed in the back room that night feeling utterly, miserably rejected and calling me an asshole schmuck.

I was indeed that kind of schmuck and more for shutting him out of my bed. Just because he had a scruffy beard? What would it have cost me to toss a little piece of my promiscuous sex Steve's way? Not so long before I'd claimed my love would go with him. His love had obviously stayed with me... But the schmuck slept soundly.

Over breakfast, Steve and I both put on nice faces and didn't mention my rude behavior. Instead, we discussed a good route for his sightseeing that day. Regrettably (but fortunately for my purposes), I had to spend it at work, where I no doubt put forsaken Steve out of mind. How I wish I could do the same right now, but regret and shame torment me. It's not for me to forgive my young self, but maybe this writing can earn us some kind of absolution for his cruelty.

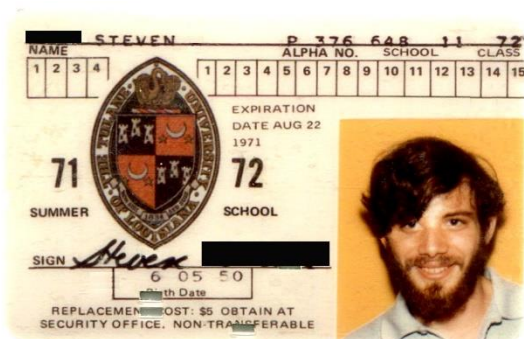
Since this writing is already semi-fiction, I'm sorely tempted to claim that I made up with Steve that evening, but it would be a damned lie. When I got home from work, he wasn't back yet, and being out of my sight, I expect he was also out of my mind. On his return, we went somewhere for dinner and talked about his sightseeing adventures of the day. Being in a public place made it easy for us to avoid subjects of emotional depth.

Nevertheless, over dessert Steve bravely took my bullsh*ss by the horns and asked if I was going to sleep with him that night. I doubt I had the courage to look into his hopeful eyes when I answered no and explained how I was now a different person than the guy he'd known in the spring. But I believe Steve looked me straight in the eye when he said he was too. If he hadn't been before, he probably was a new person now after this second rejection.

In the early evening we dropped in on Chas, who had of course met and often seen Steve in New Orleans, even while I was away in Ann Arbor. They greeted each other as close friends, and we sat over drinks while they congenially caught up. I hoped Chas couldn't see the vast distance yawning between Steve and me, but surely he did.

A bit earlier than was my wont on a Friday night, I took Steve off to the Lost & Found. Since he was only familiar with little Pete's Place on Bourbon Street, the DC super-bar naturally amazed him. Though early, there was already a huge crowd, and the dance floor was rocking. Fortunately, several guys of my acquaintance (former tricks?) were already there and pleased to meet my bearded visitor from Chapel Hill.

Because Steve didn't want to, I left him off, on, and often to dance with somebody while he chatted with new acquaintances—or sat there solemnly observing the milling, clean-cut crowd. Anyone who had a heart would've taken the new Steve in his arms and... But this new Richard person evidently didn't have one. Rather later on, hunky Emerson showed up, and shortly after introducing them, I off-handedly informed the quiet Steve that this handsome fellow was my part-time boyfriend. After making my patient guest wait far too long, I finally walked Steve home, and he retired to the back room with a soft look and a hard goodnight.



Early Saturday he took off with a hard goodbye, leaving a thank-you card in which he wrote: "Thank you for teaching me to move to the rear. May all your friends in Washington eat the bagel and leave you the hole. S." He also left his canceled ID card from Tulane. With painstaking effort, I've now restored his picture, removing the holes punched in his sweet, smiling face—one like a bullet hole right between his eyes. Please let my work count as penance for my sins against him.

This ID card is curious because Steve also had a beard in the fall of 1971, which fate seems to have made him shave off for me by spring 72. His new beard now in August 72 wasn't as full but still enough to turn the superficial new person I'd become off completely. Reading Steve's parting wish now, I have to respect his self-control and still loving attempt at humor. It was a gentle way to say goodbye and the only comfort I can take in this debacle.

I neither saw nor heard from Steve ever again and have good reason to worry he might not have survived the plague or passed on otherwise before hitting 70. If so, there's no way other than in these late words that this old man can apologize to the innocent kid who loved me so frantically at Mardi Gras: I'm frantically and profoundly sorry.

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Those August pages certainly kicked me in the head with graphic details of my disgusting behavior in cavalierly dispensing with two former lovers, Don and Steve. At least they gave me the wonderful gift of the continued tenderness with a third, Ken. But their most disturbing news was my stupid comment that I was ripe for falling in love again. For all my talk of being a new person and my fascination with interpersonal relationships, I'd apparently relapsed into my old

academic persona and was wallowing in a romantic swamp again. And this while I hypocritically pushed away two guys who did love me—just because I was no longer in love with them. My weak excuse was that my “head was all in a jumble.” In fact, I seemed to have lost my grip on the hard-won maturity of turning thirty.

Still in a jumble a week after Steve left, I wrote an awkward, hypocritical poem that next Friday wondering who’d ever look on me with love again. Give me a break! There was nothing in it about me looking on someone else with love, nothing about me loving somebody else. Somehow, it seems, I’d gotten a lop-sided notion of falling in love. More to the point, I believe one of its awkward lines may hold the key to my jumbled emotions and attitudes: “I have no earthly idea were exactly my home is.”

Speaking of kicks in the head, the months of lusting for a house of my own and now of camping out in someone else’s house seems to have knocked Richard the Research Analyst off his rocker and emotional center. Slipping back into old patterns, I fell back on falling in love as a *raison d’etre* and cure-all for any distress. But after the parade of lovers I’d had ever since the divorce, much less all the casual sex, I believe I no longer knew how to fall in love.

A year before in New Orleans after an overdose of pornographic indulgence, I’d come at last to a peaceful place of patience and satisfaction in building my personal life—regardless of being in love or not, which would be nice but wasn’t really necessary. That attitude had carried me on into this new world (and persona) in DC.

But now, lost in lusting for a home, a place of my own in this new world, I’d forgotten this mature reasoning and backslid into the old romantic swamp of wanting somebody to look on me with love. Well, ask and ye shall receive. By golly, the same evening right after I wrote that wretched poem, sexy Emerson dropped in to give me a trim and brought us Chinese takeout.

He sat me out in the back yard where the evening light was still good for barbering and easily chattered about his brief affair with Don. While brushing me off, Emerson broke the news that he was leaving next Tuesday, going back home for a decent job in Albany. He’d had it with being a lowly waiter in DC. In our hug of thanks and farewell, we kissed, and Emerson said something very like, “Oh Richard, I know how much you love me, babe, but I gotta go.”

We had our Chinese dinners on the picnic table under a tree, threw a great bon voyage party on George’s bed, and went out dancing at the L&F till all hours. Living in the opposite direction, I left Emerson from the dance floor—at the end of some wild number—and walked home saddened by our parting and already missing his enormous expertise. I wonder if Emerson really did know how little I loved him. Probably just about as much as he loved me.

Well, there you have it! I was so off my rocker that all evening I hadn’t been able to see handsome Emerson looking on me with love. I didn’t even know how to be in love. This should have been a touchy-feely goodbye scene, not just a quick hug and kiss on the dance floor. So what if we were just part-time boyfriends, we were also part-time lovers. Forgive the repetition, but I neither saw nor heard from Emerson ever again.

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If I hadn’t found the August pages, only two details from those six weeks at George’s were all I had in my head to write about. It started with an early morning trash-day excursion. On other occasions I’d salvaged a little end-table and a bench for my host’s hallway, and on foray this I found a fancy birdcage and stand. Thus inspired, I soon had a pair of emerald finches named Babylon and Nineveh. Their cage stood in the bright bay of the bedroom between the dracaenas, and I doted on them.

As was bound to be, George had a cat, a shaggy former male named Snarlie. He never snarled me, but maybe he was named for all the snarls in his shag. I only had to leave food and water out for him by his cat door, and even though neutered, he spent his life outdoors, as George had crowed, eating lots of the local rats. When I brought the birdies home, I started keeping the bedroom door shut just in case.

Also as was bound to happen, one evening when out reading at the picnic table, I suddenly remembered not shutting it. By the time I got upstairs, the cage was on the floor, and Snarlie was finishing off one of the tiny birds. Nineveh was still in the cage fluttering in terror. I grabbed Snarlie by his raggedy neck and back, hauled him snarling and clawing down the steps, tossed him out into the backyard, and blocked up his cat door. One simply doesn't ever forget scenes like Snarlie chewing on Babylon.

Just so you'll know, the book I was reading was equally unforgettable, a historical (and hysterical) novel by John Barth about the 1600s in the Chesapeake area, "The Sotweed Factor." For the less erudite than I, sotweed is tobacco, and factor is farmer. For a couple weeks I sat in the pleasant evening back yard reading the fat book and laughing fit to burst. Once when I was literally choking with hilarity, a neighbor man looked over the wall to see if I was okay. I'd dearly love to regale you with a passage or two—like the part about Capt. John Smith and the eggplant—if only to balance out the less amusing majority of this chapter. But there are so many other riotously funny episodes. Like Sir Henry and the Indian attack. How could I choose?

George got back from Spain the first week of September, and I moved into John's lovely house at 310 6th Street SE. George loved the previously owned furniture I'd hunted and gathered for him off the wild streets, and he made me a present of the two dracaenas. Choosing not to tattle on Snarlie, I didn't mention his devouring Babylon. Alone now in its cage, Nineveh came happily along to our next home.

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