

CHAPTER 10. SAILING ON

.i.

I've taken a couple weeks off from writing to focus on the rest of life, in particular my drawing, Mack and his art, friends and family, and my personal routines—not necessarily always in that order. As a matter of fact, for simplicity, I'll comment on those things in reverse order. My personal routines you know already, an old man's comfortable rut, but they were interrupted by several days away with family to Phoenix where we visited as many museums and basked in the balmy days (110°) and nights (103°).

It was a great getaway for me with Aimée and Rich, but for too much (most) of the time Jammes had his head stuck in games on his iPad. I find the whole video game phenomenon a horrifying perversion of both technology and child psychology—don't get me started. Some months ago I made my feelings known on the subject but haven't seen any particular change in his behavior. Now Papou can only bite his tongue and regret the revolting development.

My young friends have been hard at work organizing the Five Flower enterprise. We've been planning the product lines and strategizing marketing and distribution. I must admit that I've been of little use in those discussions, working mostly with George on the layouts and Janet on creating the individual horoscopic statements. When Deirdre and Lynn got back from their honeymoon hiking in Denali, she got to work on the PR package, and Jason is designing our publicity campaign. I know what this old man would've done without them—exactly nothing.

When I mentioned to Mario about the two decks of cards I'd long ago worked up around the Aztec calendar, he got quite excited. One with 54 cards is a curious numerical thing that could be useful for teaching basic math, and the other is a twist on the standard 52-card deck that has eight suits instead of four. Go figure. Meanwhile, George came up with the idea of creating a deck of Aztec tarot cards. More meetings put all of these ideas into our plan too. These "kids" have given me a whole new understanding of boon companions.

Meanwhile, of course, my biggest boon is wonderful Mack. We're still not rushing things, just enjoying being together when we can. His work on what we're now seeing as the video serial is continually surprising and pleasing. Since writing the scenario several years ago, I've picked up some more ideas, and after the monster battle, I suggested changing things around and adding another challenge for even more of a parody of the traditional quest. Fortunately, Mack shares my taste for the absurd.

Saturday last a whole bunch of us went to a supposed Renaissance Faire out at the ranching museum. It was actually a Mother-Goosed medieval fair (a term we used to use in the historic preservation world for prettifying and sanitizing a piece of history). There were all manner of glamorous knightly paraphernalia, including jousting demonstrations, and hordes of picturesque, contented peasants doing primitive things like spinning and black-smithing.

Nothing wrong with that, of course, but I'd hoped for some real Renaissance stuff to match my mood. Nowadays, with my new lover and young friends, my Middle Ages are brightening into a new Renaissance. The Dark Ages are finally over, and I've lived to see it.

In the midst of all this activity, I also dived into drawing on my new icon. (As a life-long swimmer and linguist, I will maintain to my dying breath that 'dived' is the proper past tense of that verb.) The figure of Huitzilopochtli from my old book needs a lot of work, but I think I'm now in emotional shape to wrap up this voyage of the Faerie Prince.

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By the way, another reason for the delay was that I was waiting on Johnny to post that last chapter and for my friends' reactions. In particular, I was curious what they'd think of the

hallucination, which I still remember vividly, though maybe I'm just recalling what Richie wrote. Whatever. In any case Ricky makes a certain sense as an interior dialog.

They all thought that the sprite was credible, but Mack wondered if hallucinations really crack dirty jokes or grant wishes. Of course, they do much weirder things than that. The women of the group were impressed with Richie's growing emotional involvement with Barbara and Jake and were distressed by his divorce plans, maybe a girl thing because it didn't seem to bother the guys at all.

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We left the new father safely back in Seattle after a relatively wild experience in San Francisco and looking forward to sailing smoothly on through the coming summer. Richie figured he could easily go on being the helpful husband and doting father for the next few months, knowing that come September...

With that light at the end of the tunnel and the lighter schedule, he was happy to go sailing with Gene and maybe even really get back to swimming. Though Richie stole moments to dance on campus or at Ravenna, he needed those other outlets for all his excited energy. He felt alive again, like a new person, like re-born after the long, hard year.

Of course, there was still the sexual frustration, but he'd long ago gotten used to putting that out of mind. Besides, he now had Ricky to be frustrated for him. The apparition was quite vocal about the problem, but Richie pointedly ignored his complaints as frivolous. He had sex with Barbara less reluctantly now, simply as a kindly physical habit. Like the rest of their relationship, his 'love-making' was always gentle and affectionate.

Back in the swing of fatherhood, Richie found that he truly enjoyed being with his wife and baby. It gave him a strange thrill of pride to walk with them (and little Oná) along the sidewalks or in the park, a beautiful little family. Overall, he felt reasonably content, especially knowing that come September...

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.ii.

The next week being the term break, Richie went sailing on the Sound with Gene almost every day, and his tan soon got every bit as dark as Ricky's. He reveled in feeling beautiful again, and Barbara even remarked on his good spirits. Then on Thursday morning they got a call from their professor friend Willis inviting them to dinner again on Friday evening to meet a couple who'd just moved back to town from UCLA.

While Barbara and Richie were fairly excited at finally having the chance to meet someone socially, Ricky was even more so, almost wild-eyed foreseeing an opportunity for romance. Richie told his tormentor to shut his trap and get lost.

Dear Me,

...Again Willis was kind enough to pick us up for dinner. When we walked into his living room, his wife Rachel (Barbara having reminded me of her name), introduced this new couple, a tall husband Roger and his short wife Muriel, basically the same height as Barbara. Roger was vaguely Nordic, rather handsome with very light brown hair and blue eyes (quite like mine).

Muriel was pretty plain with round features, hair dark and curly, and tortoise-shell glasses. In conversation she was very quiet and attentive to everything Roger had to say. Involuntarily, I felt a perverse pride in having a pretty wife. Ricky called me a disgusting straight pig.

Their two daughters, two and four, were happily and loudly playing with Willis' girls, three and five. Baby Jake immediately became the sensation.

Barbara held her up to stand on her tiny feet for a moment, and she squealed and babbled at the children's frenetic attentions.

We three husbands sat on the other side of the room with traditional Russian vodka, mine with tonic, and chatted. I was struck by how very butch Roger was, genuinely masculine. When our eyes met, his were blank, and he'd break contact first. No matter what Ricky hoped, I figured there was no chance Roger liked boys. A Seattle native and undergrad at U-Dub, he'd gone off for a Master's at UCLA and now was moving back home for his doctorate. Their moving van would get here tomorrow. He explained that as an undergrad he'd taken all Willis' courses in Russian literature.

Roger listened to my own resume without much expression. While he and Willis reminisced about those earlier classes, I found his face, even unsmiling, quite attractive. For the fun of it, I imagined kissing him. Now I've never had a mango, but I bet that's how Roger's mouth would taste.

At dinner we were seated in strict alternation, I between Muriel and Rachel and across from Roger, who was beside Barbara, and so on. This led to a number of simultaneous conversations alternating between neighbors. At one point Rachel asked about my meeting Barbara and got a careful history of our dog-based relationship. Later, Muriel asked how I felt about being a father now, which was an excuse to carry on over the joys of watching Jake grow. Instructed by Rachel's example, I then asked Muriel how she and Roger met and heard about a high school romance resumed two years later at U-Dub.

Over dessert, Roger asked about my thesis on Khlebnikov, whose wacky poetry he recalled from Willis' class. Not to bore them, I gave him a thumbnail sketch with only one brief quote and was gratified by the excitement in his eye. He said he'd like to read it if I didn't mind. Ricky commented privately that Roger was more than welcome to see anything we've got, and I certainly agreed.

What with the many children's bedtimes, we parted company soon after dinner. Muriel said goodbye to us with hugs. After shaking my hand firmly with an open smile that made him even more attractive, Roger suddenly hugged me too. I was too shocked to fully appreciate the firmness of his body or the strength of his hands on my shoulder blades. He hugged Barbara too, and she and I shared surprised looks.

When Willis dropped us off at home, Barbara went in to put Jake to bed, and I sat out on the porch bench thinking about the evening. Ricky was convinced that Roger's a live one, but I argued that the guy's married for years, two kids... The only thing that turned him on was my thesis. Ricky insisted that Roger's hug was far from platonic, but I figured the hugging was probably some California custom, maybe an Age of Aquarius thing, peace, love, and all that.

Shortly, Barbara came out and sat down beside me. I put my arm around her, and she said, "I hope we can get to be good friends with them. Don't you, Richie, honey?"

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Though Ricky kept carrying on about Roger, Richie gave little thought to their new friends over the weekend. Sunday night at dinner, however, Barbara remarked that they ought to invite Roger and Muriel over for dinner some evening soon, and he suggested maybe Thursday? She figured on having Martha and Gene over to meet the nice couple too.

The next morning was the start of summer quarter. Richie had enrolled for more thesis hours and for variety, a class in the history of the English language. In his new Russian class, he noted some cute fellows and looked forward to a summer of visual vitamins. Running through the usual opening stuff about the alphabet scared the bejesus out of some of them, and he spent the whole hour, as always, spelling out their names.

Dear Me,

...Leaving the classroom, I was surprised to find Roger waiting in the hall. He laughed at my surprise and said, "I checked your class schedule."

I said, "Hi! What are you up to?"

"That depends," he said walking with me down the hall. "What are you up for?"

Ricky went wild, but I doubted Roger meant anything suggestive. I explained that I was planning on calling him today to invite them over for dinner on Thursday evening.

"Love to," Roger quickly accepted and added, "I was hoping you'd invite me over this morning... to take a look at your thesis." I certainly wasn't about to disappoint his hopes.

On the walk across campus, Roger said they moved this past weekend into a place some blocks up 12th near Ravenna Park, so now we're close neighbors. It turns out he'd been running there in that park for many years. He'd done track back in high school. All I could contribute sports-wise was being good at swimming, and now at sailing with Gene.

Ricky suggested I also tell Roger that I'm good in bed too, but I ignored him. Instead, I mentioned also being a dancer. Roger was most impressed, and I performed a brief Greek sailor dance under the shady trees. He called it neat and then started talking about the two courses he's taking this summer in Soviet and Old Russian literature.

Barbara was pleased to see Roger and insisted on making him a cup of tea. I leafed through the thesis papers to show him the parts. He skimmed the chapters with nods of understanding and jumped to the poem and translations, which he read closely. It was enthralling to watch someone experience my esoteric work.

Browsing through the glossary of neologisms, he often smiled and then said, "I think I've got something you really need." I shared Ricky's enthusiastic agreement. Roger went on, "A dictionary of Old Russian."

Barbara gladly joined us with Jake in her stroller for the walk up to see Roger and Muriel's new place. While she and Roger chatted about kid things, I quietly stole looks at his fine-nosed profile and enjoyed his long-legged stride. It was easy to imagine him running like a deer.

Nearing their new home, Roger remarked that Muriel was off right now with the kids. She was leaving them with her parents for the day and going shopping with her sister. Ricky muttered, "Damn! He was trying to get us off alone." I again doubted Roger had any such carnal intention.

The tour of their two-bedroom apartment went quickly. Big windows made it quite bright. Basic furniture sat haphazardly in rooms with boxes stacked everywhere. Barbara complimented the place, particularly admiring the kitchen, much bigger and more modern than ours, I have to admit.

While Barbara was changing Jake in their bathroom, Roger dug around in a box and pulled out the promised dictionary. A random glance into its columnar pages proved that I did indeed need it. Ricky whispered that this was our opportunity, and I dared a meaningful smile, saying, "Thanks, Roger. I certainly do need your thing." Missing my innuendo, he simply nodded.

When Barbara and I were leaving to take Jake into Ravenna, Roger again hugged us both goodbye. His tight hug was a bit awkward for me with the Old Russian dictionary under my arm, but I still didn't feel anything sexual in it. Again Ricky disagreed, noting that it lasted at least two beats longer than appropriate. Who does he think he is to judge what's appropriate?

As we continued our walk behind the stroller, Barbara remarked, "Richie, you know, next year we'll be needing two bedrooms too." I didn't respond to her moot point.

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Since getting back from San Francisco, Richie had done reasonable work on the thesis between parental duties and sailing. He'd scribbled a fair amount on the rewrite of Chapter Four and gotten in a few licks on the remaining typing. This new dictionary fortunately fit into the bibliography quite near the end on a partial page, which he re-typed that very afternoon. The next day he checked connections between the neologisms and archaic words, adding several to the glossary and refusing to think about the extra typing that entailed.

Dear Me,

...In the afternoon I happily escaped in Gene's boat. A light breeze took us out onto the Sound and then died away. Since he has only one, Gene and I took stoic, exhausting turns with the paddle, moving the boat imperceptibly toward the distant shore. Laboring in my turn with it, I challenged Ricky as an airy faerie to summon the wind.

While I paddled, he muttered some mumbo-jumbo, to no avail. Then he asked when I plan on telling Barbara about splitting in September. I figured it would be cruel to say anything yet and make her live with that dread. Far better if it simply happened out of the blue when we got to Michigan.

Ricky didn't buy that. "You're full of shit! It's just as cruel whenever you tell her."

"Well, I worry about her and Jake. I have to take care—"

"—You piss me off," Ricky broke in. "You're not just acting straight. You really are a breeder."

"I'm a good actor," I argued. "I'm still just as gay as I ever was."

"If you are, you'd grab this Roger hunk. He's got his eye on us, I'm telling you, darlin'."

"You're crazy, Ricky. Roger's a happily married father." I paddled extra hard.

"Just like you, eh?" He ignored my silence. "Now listen, you silly queen—you're going to jump on this gorgeous guy with both feet, or else."

"Try and be patient, won't you? Come September, we'll be free."

"That's too long. You're just wasting our time."

We didn't talk anymore. Finally, in my third stint at paddle, a breeze came up, but no thanks to Ricky's airiness. Only when we'd loaded the boat on its trailer did Gene express irritation with getting becalmed. He simply grunted, "Well, that wasn't nearly as much fun as a stick in the eye."

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.iii.

Dear Me,

...After this morning's Russian class, I certainly didn't expect Roger to be waiting for me again. I gratefully raved, not without innuendo, about how wonderful and helpful his thing was. Again he only registered my comment with a nod. Then he asked me to do him a favor and help him move their furniture around. Chatting about this and that, we walked by the house to tell Barbara what we were up to and ambled up 12th. Ricky was speechless with anticipation. On the way Roger mentioned that Muriel and the kids went to an aunt's house today—because she can't let the girls run loose in the apartment till it's all organized.

First thing was to move a bunch of large boxes out of the way, which led to shuffling chairs around in order to position their huge sofa on the long side of the living room. Lifting the sofa, a load almost beyond my strength, we shuffled with it over to the wall, and then I proudly showed off my biceps. At last I was pleased to get an openly appreciative smile.

In the bedroom it was the same process of organizing boxes and rearranging smaller furniture. Then we struggled to get their enormous bed across from the window. Afterwards, when Roger went to use the john, Ricky

leapt onto the bed and writhing shamelessly, said, "Get those pants off, darlin'—right this minute!"

Disgusted with his immodest proposal, I turned away to the window and for long moments admired a view of the pleasant, tree-lined street. Not waiting but wishing. Then Roger walked up behind and wrapped me in his big arms, his hands pressing my chest and cheek hot against my ear.

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Please forgive me for turning all authorial on you at this delicate point in our story, but editorially speaking, Richie's descriptions of what followed are way too (porno)graphic. Suffice it to say that Jolly Roger was an accomplished pirate and swiftly boarded the Faerie Prince, an easy prize for having grown a bit slow and rusty since that long ago Mardi Gras with Jim. At last, no more *carne vale*! With scarcely a word, Richie and Roger did the lascivious and wanton things that pirates do. Afterwards, they simply knew they'd seize the next opportunity to rape and pillage each other. Richie was delighted to learn what a mango tastes like.

After staggering home, barely able to see straight, Richie struggled to give Barbara no indication of anything happening other than arranging furniture. He spoke about their heavy sofa but didn't dare mention the huge bed. Going to their own bed that night, he prayed that Barbara wouldn't signal for sex, and luck was with him.

Dear Me,

...When Roger, Muriel, and the girls arrived for dinner, he and I guarded closely against unwarranted glances and didn't dare get too engaged in conversation. Some of our glances, however, were highly charged. Fortunately, as I'd expected, with all the people, kids, and dog in the apartment, there was ample chaos to keep everyone occupied with otherwise than watching us.

The couple seemed to strike it off well with Martha and Gene, too. Muriel, an English major, and Gene had a number of literary conversations which went way beyond my background in Russian lit. Roger was charming to everyone, an entertaining raconteur and attentive listener. He remarked something about traveling that set Martha and Barbara to remembering their own childhood trips to France. I was not uncharacteristically quiet in the conversations. It was all I could do not to break character and stare at Roger's now intimately familiar attributes.

Suddenly Gene invited Roger to come sailing with us tomorrow afternoon, and he leapt on it enthusiastically, never having been sailing and always wanting to. I stared at my plate envisioning him in a bathing suit. They arranged for Roger to pick me up, and we'd meet at the boat landing. There was no missing the sweet fragrance of opportunity on the air.

For a short while we sat around in the living room in post-prandial conversation, Roger and I on the carpet playing with Jake and his girls and casually smiling at each other. When they got up to go, he and Muriel proceeded to hug us all goodbye. We'd warned Martha and Gene about this apparently California custom. I told them it probably had something to do with the Age of Aquarius. Embracing me tightly, Roger made a tiny, almost inaudible moan in my ear.

While the sisters cleaned up in the dining room and kitchen, Gene and I sat on the sofa with baby Jake wiggling around on the cushion between us. He said, "I bet Roger will be good at hiking out. He's bigger, you know, longer and heavier than you are." Noncommittally, I agreed that he's indeed all those things and savored my secret knowledge of those measurements.

I expect Barbara was surprised when we went to bed. Of my own accord, unbidden, I initiated sex. My body still felt alive and electric after the hours of being close to Roger. In the midst of it, I suddenly wondered if my

kiss was any different now and tried to be no more aggressive than usual. She probably didn't notice anything, but I'll certainly have to watch out.

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To meet Gene at the boat ramp at two, Roger picked Richie up at one o'clock:

Dear Me,

...When we got into his big blue car, he grabbed my thigh and said, "You are so hot."

"You should talk," I replied. "What're we going to do about it?"

Driving off down the street, he answered, "You'll see." That vague prediction was good enough for me. Curious as always with a new paramour, I asked when he found out he was gay. He quickly said he's not queer, just bisexual, and I asked which he prefers. "Depends on my mood," he laughed. "How about you?"

"Men," I replied without hesitation and briefed him on my sordid history as a faerie in the French Quarter with a predilection for Greek sailors. Roger found that titillating.

Recalling that he'd gone with Muriel even in high school, I asked about his early experiences with boys. He had a three-year affair in high school with his best friend Harold while seeing Muriel at the same time. They'd double-date and then go off somewhere secret and fuck each other. And at U-Dub, he and his jock roommate Terry got their rocks off all the time.

Roger drove us to Fort Lawton, where I went last year with Gene and the Cub Scouts, and turned into an empty parking area. Then he led me into the woods to a secret place where he and Harold often came for privacy. In a shady ravine with bushes and big boulders, we removed our much smaller rocks. I've never done it outdoors in the woods before, and it was almost like fucking Mother Earth. Definitely a new experience in my slutty life, somehow spiritual and real at the same time.

We were only a few minutes late to the boat ramp, and Gene already had the boat in the water. Because it's so small, he could only take one of us out at a time. For Roger to see my technique for hiking out, I went first for a sweet, short run on the wind nearby and tacking back. Then we switched places, and I sat on the dock to watch. Being longer and heavier than I, Roger definitely is more effective in hiking out. There were good winds, and Cap'n Gene was blissfully occupied with his navigating, even if it was in recurring loops back to the ramp to switch crew. After several exhilarating crew rotations, we called it quits.

While helping load the boat onto the trailer, Roger thanked Gene for the wonderful experience on the water and then talked about a new exercise thing he'd recently found about in California called jogging, a slow kind of running. It was supposed to be easy and really good for you. Gene helpfully suggested that for exercise maybe I could go jogging with Roger. I immediately agreed that I could do just that, as did Roger.

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Since he hadn't been swimming anymore, Barbara quickly sanctioned her husband's new opportunity for healthy exercise by going jogging with Roger. They agreed that he'd jog with their new friend a few afternoons a week, and go out sailing with Gene on others. So Richie and Roger were all set for a summer pleasurable physical activities, athletics not the least of them.

However, Richie's most urgent activity was typing because the thesis had to be done in the next couple weeks. It was looking good to finish in spite of all the rewriting and new info from Roger, who came by Saturday afternoon to see the revised fourth chapter. While Barbara played with Jake in the living room, they sat close at the dining table poring over the yellow pages of scribbles. The scholarly activity allowed for surreptitious pressures of knees and casual,

secret caresses. After the helpful suggestions from his new buddy, Richie set to typing the chapter in maddening triplicate.

That Sunday evening they put Jake into her stroller and walked with Martha, Gene, and Oná up to Roger's for a cookout in the back yard. Their handsome host was impressively in command of the grill. With the little girls playing happily with the dog, they must have looked like perfectly normal (i.e., straight) young families clustered around the picnic table. Savoring the sweet irony of their secret, Roger and Richie spoke but little to each other and were careful of glances. For social grace, they paid most attention to each other's spouses. On the walk home, Richie felt he'd given an academy award performance of acting straight.

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Dear Me,

...With my first 'jog' with Roger looming this afternoon, I couldn't keep focused in my Russian class. Then at home I clattered distractedly on the typewriter the rest of the morning, taking frequent joyful breaks to play with Jake, who now seizes her rattle with both hands, shakes it, and laughs in a way that reaches straight into my heart.

Over lunch, Barbara and I talked about the jogging. I'd wear some old tennis shoes (or as she calls them in her Midwestern dialect, tenny-runners) and cut-off shorts. She thinks we should shop soon for proper gear. I've never cared for shopping, even for myself, but I agreed to the inevitable ordeal, someday soon. *[It never occurred to Richie that Barbara may have been glad to get him out of the house and out of her hair. We old guys try to see other folks' points of view.]*

Afterwards, to earn brownie points, I took the laundry down to the basement and did a load. In the solitude of the dungeon with the grunting washing machine, I wondered about the coming afternoon with Roger, (no pun intended), and imagined various tender opportunities. While I was hanging out the wash in the sunny back yard, Ricky popped up and told me not to fantasize because that eliminates real possibilities. "Just go with the flow, darlin'," he advised. "But prepare for the unexpected." We guffawed at the oxymoron.

Strolling with Jake and me up to Roger's, Barbara remarked again how nice it is that I'll get to exercise more. After last winter's diet, I figured I look in pretty good shape. She laughed and said, "Your shape's fine, Richie. You've just gotten soft is all I'm saying, sweetie."

Wicked Ricky made me promise, "I'll get hard again real soon." Fortunately, Barbara apparently missed the innuendo.

Muriel was in the yard with the girls poking in a flower bed and greeted us merrily. In a moment Roger came out in jogging shorts. Barbara remarked that she had to stop by the grocery store on the way home, and since Muriel had to go there too, she offered them a ride.

Bidding our spouses and progeny goodbye, Roger and I took off up the sidewalk at a very slow pace to warm up. He explained that I'll have to take it real easy at first not to overdo things. I remarked that the only thing I plan to overdo is his. Roger blushed and commented graphically on my sexy cut-offs. By the end of the block I was feeling the exertion in my calves, and we stopped for Roger to show me how to stretch them out with my foot pushed up against a tree trunk.

When we started to jog again, to my surprise Roger led us down the street to left, not toward Ravenna as planned, and then turned left again. Stopping at the next corner, he showed me how to stretch my legs by propping my foot on a fire hydrant and reaching for it, not as easy as it sounds.

Then down the block to our left, a big blue car came out of the alley, turned, and disappeared around the next corner. It was our wives leaving for the store! Roger took off at a fair clip. For novice me, it felt like a

serious sprint. We raced up the alley and in their back door, which he locked behind us, and then he pushed me up against it for a devouring kiss.

Roger yanked my cut-offs down to find me fully prepared for the unexpected. When he started kissing and fondling me, I burst out laughing. He looked up in consternation, and I apologized that back in my faerie years I'd dubbed my cock Sir Roger Wrighte-Rowndleigh. Then I pulled down Roger's blue shorts, bent him over the table, and rogered him right roundly. We also took a moment for me to return the favor on their living room carpet.

Then we scrambled into our shorts, raced out the front door, and sprinted up the block, stopping again at the first corner. I hung on his arm, gasping, and asked what had just happened. Roger laughed, "I try to grab every opportunity, Richie, ol' buddy." ...

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.iv.

...We jogged at a pleasant, leisurely pace for a couple blocks toward Ravenna, and I began to get into it almost like dancing. A few times I pranced about or skipped along and made Roger laugh. With more stretches and a spate of walking, we made it to the park and my dancing green. He lay back on the grass while I danced a jubilant jig. Floating on a cloud of happiness. When I got done, I lay down beside him, and he growled, "Damn, Richie! I sure wish you weren't going away."

"I know, darlin'," I sighed, unable to say me too because I'm so glad to be leaving Seattle. Feeling so close to Roger, I confided that when we get to Michigan, we'll get a divorce. That confidence provoked a quite unexpected conversation.

"Why?" he almost shouted. "You've got it made, a beautiful wife and family... Why?"

"I want to be free again," I stated with feeling. "Single."

Roger touched my arm tenderly. "Richie, babe, you need to have a wife and family."

"What for? I told you, I'm gay, and being married is making me crazy."

"But a guy needs a woman to cook and take care of the kids. All that."

"Well, I can cook for myself, and I want a man for all that."

"You've got me—for now. Do you want to wind up one of those eccentric old bachelors?"

"Well, I..." That looked like about my only other option. Queer boy, queer old man.

"It's the only way for a guy to live, I tell you—a wife at home for the work, and then it's easy to find guys to have fun."

"Easy? Roger, darlin', you're the first fun guy I've met in almost two years here in Seattle!"

Roger laughed self-consciously. "And in two years in LA, I had three affairs. Richie, there are lots of us out there, family guys like you and me, guys who like cock."

"I don't know... There aren't even that many single guys who do."

"Richie, it's the best way, the only way. Don't worry, you'll meet someone in Michigan, I know."

...When I got home, Barbara was glad to hear I'd had fun jogging and wondered if maybe she should try it too. I said nothing. She added, "Muriel says Roger really likes you."

All I managed was, "Oh?"

"She says it's real important for husbands to have male friends."

"Yeah, I do like having male friends."

Barbara kissed my cheek and said, "We'll make some new ones for you when we get to Michigan."

"I guess so," I said, trying not to sound eager. Maybe it really might be as easy as Roger says.

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On Wednesday, Muriel was again away with the girls, and the secret lovers messed up the huge bed, which was almost big enough for their amorous wrestling match. On Thursday afternoon, which was Roger's turn to sail with Gene, Richie typed frantically on his thesis. On Friday afternoon, Muriel was at home and brightly saw the athletic friends off on their jog.

At Ravenna they stopped to stretch calves. Then Roger led them around the eastern edge of the park to where a thick forest descended into the ravine. They wove through bushes and trees to a bower of saplings and vines, another love nest recalled from his affair with Harold, where these two engaged in absolutely feral fellatio. Such sylvan passions naturally put more spirit into Richie's sex with Barbara, but after Roger's wild embraces, he had to be careful not to be suspiciously energetic or innovative.

Careful mainly in order to spare Barbara's feelings, Richie felt no guilt about this extramarital affair. It seemed in no way to diminish his feelings for Barbara and actually may have enhanced them. As a matter of fact, Richie almost wished she'd have an affair with somebody too—he certainly wouldn't feel "cheated" out of anything. Barbara deserved to fall in love too. But fifty years ago such an open marriage with a husband and wife each finding romance(s) elsewhere was unthinkable.

In the meantime, Richie reveled in his times with baby Jake, utterly fascinated by the way she played now with her tiny toes and babbled joyously. He really began to feel strangely content playing it straight—while having his hot guy on the side, of course. Oddly, Richie hadn't seen Ricky once or even heard a snide comment from the apparition ever since Roger made his move. Glad for the silence, he figured the phantom was probably just sitting back and enjoying the ride.

Roger's affections also spurred our scholar to even more furious work on his thesis. Nose to the Smith Corona, he finished typing by the end of the next week and duly submitted it to the department by the deadline. Walking out of Smith Hall, the whole thing now out of his hands, he swooped out into the sunshine on the quadrangle in a dance of gratitude for this new life with a lover. Now marriage and fatherhood was starting to feel like a halfway reasonable situation. Again, with his hot guy on the side.

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To celebrate the submission, they went out with Roger and Muriel to see a much-advertised new movie. They shared a baby-sitter, a grandmotherly woman named Helen.

Dear Me,

...At first Barbara was fine about leaving Jake with the sitter, but by the time we sat down in the theater, she got awfully fidgety. Fortunately, the movie distracted her immediately. It was called "Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?"

Unfortunately, the theater was quite full, and we had to sit way down front in the second row off to the far right side. From that abstract, almost expressionistic angle, we viewed with up-turned heads the riveting performances by Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, many shots in close-up on their expressive, stretched-out faces. Besides the miserable perspective giving me a sore neck, the aggressive mood of the film shocked my system seriously. I've never imagined such animosity and viciousness between people, much less a husband and wife, and felt thankful for my peaceful, humane relationship with Barbara.

Leaving the theater, Muriel asked if we thought they loved each other, and we all had different answers, mine yes. In the car Roger remarked how nice it feels to be relatively sane in comparison to those characters, and we again disagreed as to whether they were insane.

Then Barbara started to worry about Jake again, and as an experienced mother, Muriel calmed her fears. Of course, we found our darling daughter asleep, and she stayed that way on the ride home. Roger and I agreed to jog an hour later on Monday because he's got a dentist appointment.

With Jake snug in her crib, Barbara and I sat out on the porch talking about the movie. She remarked, "You know, Richie, I'm so lucky that you're always so sweet to me." I was taken aback. "Even when you're distant," she said, "you're nice and polite. Never raise your voice—or get angry."

"You're just as nice and polite to me, Barbara. Don't you ever get angry at me?"

"Sometimes," she admitted. "You can be aggravating. But nothing serious, sweetie. I'm glad that you seem so happy now."

"I'm so glad to be done with that thesis," I exulted, hoping that sounded like a good reason. "And the exercise makes me feel alive again."

"I can tell."

We sat in silence enjoying the fresh night air, and then I said, "But I'm still gay." She was silent. "I think I'm doing a good job of acting straight, don't you?"

Barbara took my hand and agreed that I was indeed a good actor. She added confidently, "I'm sure Roger doesn't suspect a thing."

#

Thus began the halcyon summer of '66, long days and sweetly slow hours of happiness like Richie had never before experienced, both with his lover and with his family. The two families, often expanded with Martha and Gene, Betsy and the Twooth, or Willis and family, had fun together on frequent outings for picnics and holiday events around the city.

Soon the athletic regimen got Richie into fine physical shape with much better endurance. He and Roger would jog around exploring other parts of the city at greater distances, sometimes over to Fort Lawton for a relaxing wrestling match in their rocky retreat. Sometimes all the way to the arboretum on the point into Lake Washington, a beautiful forest full of secret places to indulge passionate urges. Theirs was a splendidly natural idyll.

#

.v.

By unspoken agreement, Barbara and Richie didn't mention or make any plans for their first anniversary in late July. That Jake was almost five months old made any celebration a bit out of place. But the Twooth had been there in Tahoe too, and he knew the date. With no overt pretext, that weekend his folks again invited everybody, including Roger's and Willis's families, out to their big house on the shore that weekend for one of their famous cookouts.

Now as well as dogs, there were flocks of children running around the broad lawns. Briefly to get away from the hubbub, Roger and Richie walked on the stony beach of the Sound.

Dear Me,

...Roger remarked suggestively that Muriel thinks I'm really attractive, and I flatly declined the implied proposition. "Too bad," he sighed. "Muriel's a sweet woman, and I want her to be happy. Not even once?"

"No." I couldn't believe my lover would even think of such a thing.

Roger wheedled, "But you're leaving so soon, Richie. Just once—to make her happy?"

"No," I repeated, starting to get angry. "And it's not 'so soon.' We've still got six weeks." To make amends, Roger pulled me into the bushes under the bank and molested me briefly. The surprise restored our bliss, and we returned to the party acting like perfectly straight male friends.

Back at home in the evening, while Barbara was giving Jake a bath, I sat out on the porch bench regretting what Roger had said about so soon. Suddenly, after being gone for weeks, Ricky appeared at my elbow and remarked, "You know, darlin', your Jolly Roger's full of straight bullshit!"

"Maybe not. Actually, I've been thinking..."

"Not about screwing Muriel, I hope!"

"Of course not, Ricky. I was just thinking..."

"Well, you better not be thinking about that dumb olden rule of yours. That's what got us in this wretched mess in the first place."

"Wrong—you're what got us into this, you horny little bastard. And it's not a wretched mess." I had it up to here with my hallucination and turned on him. "Just go the fuck away, Ricky. I don't need your bitching and moaning about my lover—or my marriage."

"I'm just trying to help, darlin'. To get us through the divorce."

"That's none of your business. I'll do it myself. Now scat! Get lost!" I swatted at him, and with a hurt look, he faded away, whether to Mexico or the moon, I don't care.

#

All through those incomparable, shining weeks of August, Roger and Richie enjoyed their illicit liaison with days full of jogging and sailing. They had wonderful social dinners and evenings out, contented wives, thriving offspring, and frequent occasions for furious fornication. In the joyous flow of days, each today was more fantastic than its yesterday, only to be eclipsed by the glory of its tomorrow.

As soon as their love affair took off in June, Richie's journal writing started noticeably slowing down, superseded by passionate reality. After that anniversary cookout in late July, it settled into simple notes on itineraries of jogs without mentioning where or how they dallied. Consequently, terribly few miraculous moments of the affair with Roger were recorded. Even fewer survive as memories for this Old Me. It's really a shame the way we tend to remember in gory detail only the disturbing events in our lives, but our beautiful, peaceful experiences only live on, if at all, as blurry recollections of contentment, even ecstasy.

Our happy lovers' idyll sailed serenely on, though Richie tried desperately to deny the passage of time. Then came the Friday when those six weeks had undeniably shrunk to one. It was the last day of the summer term with the finality of his last Russian class and an emotional farewell to the students. Finishing with History of English was nice but hardly emotional. On their jog by Ravenna that afternoon, Roger and Richie hid in their secret bower for a private exchange of passionate bodily fluids. Since there still was a whole week yet to make love, at least that jog didn't taste of finality.

On Sunday the two couples left their children with Willis and Rachel for the day and took a getaway drive up the coast. For a scenic adventure, they rode the ferry to San Juan Island and back again with long vistas of the Sound and wooded islands. Richie couldn't find his mountain, even low on the horizon, but maybe he was looking in the wrong place.

After an early dinner at a fancy waterfront restaurant, they retrieved their progeny, thanking Willis and Rachel profusely for dealing with the whole passel of kids. Back at home, Barbara said she'd had a fantastic day and was so glad to get to see those beautiful islands before we left for Michigan. Richie agreed but cringed. It wasn't time to think about that yet.

#

In the midst of Richie's towering passion, as I noted before, he wrote excruciatingly boring notes to Old Me, but once he let slip some prurient details. That was in comments about the next Monday's rendezvous, delayed slightly by Roger's dentist appointment. Describing their horny shenanigans in the big bed, he again personified their amorous apparati, referring to his own impudent Sir Roger Wrighte-Rowndleigh and praising Roger's impressive Prince Peter the Perpendicular. Fun silliness, but disappointingly (porno)graphic.

Tuesday afternoon Richie went sailing with Gene:

The winds were strong and erratic, making for quick course changes, and Gene clearly enjoyed himself at the rudder. For me there was lots of coming about and ducking of the boom, and the hiking out was thrilling as ever, like flying over the water. When eventually Gene took us in at the boat ramp, I helped him load the boat on the trailer as usual and saw tears in his eyes. When I asked the matter, he told me he'd sold the sailboat this morning, and this had been our last sail. He didn't tell me before because he says it's best if folks don't know when they're doing something they love for the last time. I hugged my old friend and thanked him for some of the most wonderful experiences of my life.

In the evening, Roger and Muriel picked Barbara and Richie up for another movie. They again left the kids in the care of sweet Helen. Later Richie wrote:

The movie was an artsy French flick called "Le Bonheur" or "Happiness," a promising title. This guy François has an affair and in a very French way decides to tell his wife Therese about it in order to share his happiness. Let's just say she doesn't handle the happy news too well. At least two audience members found the plot rather pertinent. ...

#

.vi.

...Roger drove us home. At the curb, I helped Barbara and Jake out of the front seat and leaned across to shake his hand. He tickled my palm and said, "See you tomorrow, good buddy."

Taking Jake inside to put her to bed, Barbara left me out on the porch to enjoy the street-lit darkness and ponder the strange French flick. Shortly, she came back and sat beside me.

"How'd you like the movie, honey?" she asked, leaning on my shoulder.

"François should have kept his trap shut," I said with conviction.

"I don't think so," Barbara said. "He wanted to share his happiness."

Going out on an unnecessary limb, I asked, "If I had a lover, would you want to share mine?"

Barbara squeezed my hand and said, "All I want is for you to be happy, sweetie." Then she stroked my cheek and said, "I know how hard it's been for you, Richie, but you're a good husband—and father—even if I'm not what you want." She started crying, and I put my arm around her. Through tears and a sniffle, she asked, "Would you want to share my happiness?"

My heart leapt. Suddenly, the fantastic possibility that she's found someone else... I answered levelly, "Yes. I want you to be happy too."

Wiping her eyes, she smiled tentatively. "Well, I am happy, Richie," she said and squeezed my hand. A few beats later, she added, "I think I'm in love with Roger."

"Oh," I grunted, reeling from the implications.

"He said he wants me too."

"I see. That's not a very good idea, Barbara, darlin'."

"Why not? He says we should seize the opportunity—at least once before we go away."

I could hear Roger saying exactly that. "Don't do it!"

"Why not?" she asked more forcefully. "Now come on, Richie, honey. We both know that if you'd had a chance with Roger, you would've jumped on it."

Barbara was right. I did jump on it, with both feet. Now here was a chance for the open kind of relationship I'd imagined, albeit with my guy. Putting aside any jealousy in either direction, I figured that dear Barbara deserved to make love with someone who wants her. "Okay, go ahead," I said and added an off-handed encouragement, "I bet he's a great roll in the hay."

She gave me a hopeful, embarrassed look, and I realized how complicated this was all getting. It was probably time to come clean—before things got any more so. Steeling myself for the inevitable discussion of divorce, I confessed as gently as possible, "I know he is because we did it."

She stared at me for a moment wide-eyed and then laughed, "Oh, Richie, I don't believe you. You're just saying that because you're jealous. You're so sweet."

I couldn't let her think that on either count. "No," I honestly insisted. "All summer long we've been screwing each other silly. That's why I've been so happy."

"Oh, sweetie, all summer?" Barbara stroked my cheek again. "Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to hurt you," I mumbled. "Besides, it was going to be all over in a few more days." In the past I'd never had a problem saying goodbye to lovers, so now I could just let her have Roger. Like Gene had said, it was a blessing not knowing that yesterday was our last time.

Unlike the wife in that tragic movie, Barbara cuddled up to me affectionately. "I just want you to be happy, Richie."

I was amazed at her acceptance and said, "I want you to be happy too, darlin'. You should make love with Roger if you want to. I mean, seize the opportunity..." In her silence, I mentioned, "Once he suggested wife-swapping. I'm not interested in Muriel, of course—but you and Roger..."

She smiled at me weakly and wondered, "But when? How?"

"Muriel will be away tomorrow afternoon," I suggested. "You should show up instead of me and give Roger a big surprise. I bet he'd like that."

Snuggling close, Barbara was silent for long moments and finally said, "Maybe..." I couldn't tell if that maybe was about her surprising Roger or his liking it. Either way, I urged her again to seize the opportunity and said I'd take care of Jake. She thought a bit and said, "Okay."

#

Wednesday morning Richie went with Gene to get moving boxes for both couples. Then he and Barbara concentrated on packing up their few things to ship. After their agreement the night before, Barbara and he didn't speak another word about it. Calmly, with an affectionate understanding, they went about their business, be that breakfast, feeding or playing with baby Jake, or the quick walk to the drugstore for more baby formula. Barbara didn't seem at all nervous about the approaching adventure, at times even smiling at him more brightly than usual, and Richie almost felt good about sending his wife to his former lover.

Dear Me,

...At one-thirty I loaded wiggling Jake into her stroller, and we left Barbara at home, free to go up to Roger's for my regular two o'clock arrival time. Jogging slowly down the street pushing the stroller, I watched Jake wave her little arms about, clearly enjoying the scenery passing faster than usual. We jogged east across the campus, deserted now between terms, into an area where Roger and I had never jogged.

At the vista by the Library, I stopped to pay homage to my magic mountain looming sublimely over the Cascades like a fading dream and found

myself in tears. I unstrapped Jake and sat her down on her blanket in the shade of a giant oak. She's good now at sitting up but sometimes rolls sideways, which always makes her gurgle happily and drool.

Then I noticed Ricky lurking guiltily beside the tree. He came over to sit down with us without a word. I unpacked Jake's bottle, and she grabbed it hungrily. When she'd lapsed into the feeding trance, my phantom started in on me. "Well, darlin', you surely did screw that up royally." I ignored him. "Why in the fuck didn't you tell her you want a divorce?" I offered no excuse, and Ricky fumed. "You're a coward."

Stung, I struck back. "You're a slut."

We glowered at each other for some moments, and then I apologized. Ricky did too. In our truce, he remarked more calmly, "Well, you better get around to telling her pretty soon. Time's a-wastin', darlin'."

Having had enough of her bottle, Jake dropped it like a rock. She grabbed my index finger and jammed it into her mouth, not sucking on it like before, but chewing with a harder spot on her lower gum. She was teething! I laughed out loud at the discovery, an amazing miracle, though one not totally unexpected.

Packing her up in the stroller, I continued our jog, and Ricky kept up beside us. Mostly silent, a couple times he sighed dramatically, but again I ignored his melodrama. Then Jake made known by a whimper an accident in her diapers, and Ricky took that as an excuse to conveniently disappear. While I changed Jake on a nearby bench, she kicked her feet and wildly thrashed her arms around. In the stream of her baby sounds I distinctly heard her say, "Daa." My jubilation was probably excessive.

To spend yet more of this unusual afternoon away from home, I jogged north to 17th to drop in on Betsy at Little Sweden for another chance to say goodbye to Rainier from my old balcony. She was surprised to see me out jogging with the baby, and I told her perfectly truthfully that Roger had something else to do. Looking around the room where I'd spent so many anguished months, I felt acutely what a different person I am now. Actually, it was Ricky who used to live in this room. Betsy remarked, "Remember when we met, Richie? I never imagined you'd be a happily married father."

"The best laid plans..." I noted ruefully. Cuddling Jake to my shoulder, I had to admit that I was indeed all of those strange things right now, more or less.

With Jake sound asleep in the stroller, I walked us home at four o'clock. Barbara was relaxing on the couch with a magazine and greeted us with no word or sign of anything having occurred in our long absence. I certainly wasn't going to ask if she had fun. She was elated about Jake teething and her first syllable.

In the evening Barbara and Richie walked up to Martha and Gene's for dinner and after a couple forgettable television shows, took Jake home for bed. Having said not a word about the elephant in the room, at their own bedtime, they just kissed goodnight. To be frank, Richie preferred not knowing what may have happened that afternoon in Roger's vast bed.

#

Thursday morning the furor of moving shifted into high gear to finish packing the boxes of clothes and personal items. Meanwhile, Barbara again said nothing about her doings yesterday afternoon. Everything between them still seemed the same, gentle and affectionate.

Shortly before ten, Richie took off to the pool for a quick valedictory swim. Under the shower afterwards, he lamented briefly that his affair with Roger was all over, finished, and done with, and calmly concluded that was alright. After all, he didn't really love Roger—they were just in passionate love. He saw now that he'd never actually loved his boyfriends, but had just

been in that kind of love with them too. Only Desai, his Indian soul-mate, had he truly loved, and now oddly, in a totally different way, he loved Barbara.

With his feelings more in focus, Richie walked home across the deserted campus, stopping once to dance on the sunny lawn, a farewell to Roger's arms. Back at the house, he found Barbara relaxing on the living room floor with Jake, who was happily rolling over this way and that, laughing and shaking her little clown-head rattle. Yes, everything was alright.

That afternoon Gene and Richie made several trips in the VW to the shipping office with a few boxes at a time to send to Papa and Nana in Michigan. Gene was excited about the impending trip and actually asked Richie how he felt about moving to Michigan. He replied easily, "Fine." Gene didn't pursue that, so Richie didn't have to qualify the feeling.

At their last supper in the apartment (dinners out planned for the next two evenings), Richie mentioned not hearing from Roger that day. He was angling for a conversation about the "swap," hoping to elicit something from Barbara about the experience. Instead, she said, "Oh, I forgot, honey. Muriel called this morning right after you left for the pool. Roger's grandmother in Spokane is real sick in the hospital, and they left this morning. They both said goodbye."

It took a moment for Richie to process this new information and realize that it didn't make any difference. The affair was over, finito. The certainty was comforting. Now he could turn his attention to that other pressing piece of business. Once they got to Michigan, he'd have to arrange the divorce.

#

.vii.

Suddenly unencumbered by the family's boxes as well as his summer lover, Richie spent that transitional Friday comfortably with the larger family group. Gene drove them all over town on a farewell tour, and they had lunch at the Space Needle again. Only once while they were walking around downtown, did Richie think that right now he and Roger would have been making love. He forgot all about that when they came to the old-book store.

Richie walked out with the two Doré volumes of Dante's "Divine Comedy." The hellish images and spectacular bodies in "The Inferno" and eventual empyrean visions in "Paradise" sold him on adding them to his collection. Of course, Richie saw them as symbolic for his own life, knowing that in just two days he'd escape from this year's inferno and again be a free faerie, free to fly around heaven like Doré's ecstatic angels. He figured the prophetic old books would fit into his suitcase with no trouble.

To celebrate Martha and Gene's departure the next day, dinner was with the entire cohort of Seattle friends, including Betsy's new man-friend Irving, a short guy with big glasses, at a fancy seafood restaurant at the Pike Place Market. They sat at a table overlooking the harbor and Sound with the Olympic Mountains iconically silhouetted against an igniting sunset. Richie wrote later in his journal about the sentimental event.

Dear Me,

...Our bon voyage toasts for the couple were flowery with heartfelt wishes. Gene's farewell toast was even flowerier, full of thanks to Seattle, bidding adieu to its natural beauties and futuristic architecture. Knowing that underneath he was missing our glorious summer of sailing, I teared up. My toast to the illustrious Cap'n Gene was for smooth sailing with hopes that he'll find another fine ship someday. Thinking of my own faerie ship about to set sail once again, I cried some more and made a fool of myself.

In the middle of our splendid meal, the Twooth made a startling announcement to the table: "I'm moving to Chicago." With his master's in

English, we'd all assumed our second Richard would go for his doctorate at U-Dub—like Betsy was going to do in Poli Sci. He said he decided to go there to look for a job instead and added with tears of his own, "I'll miss you guys, you know." I offered the dubious comfort of Chicago and Ann Arbor being not all that far from each other.

#

Departure of the valiant beige beetle was set for early in the morning with a simple farewell at the curb. After many hugs and repeated proclamations of love, not to mention cautions about driving, Barbara leaned in the little window to give Martha a last kiss. Golden little Oná leapt up to the window for her last ear-scratch, and the trusty VW rolled away up the street. Awkwardly what with holding baby Jake in one arm, Richie put the other around Barbara, who wept on his shoulder.

The morning of that last day in Seattle, now almost alone together, they spent in long walks with baby Jake around campus and the neighborhood saying goodbye to the familiar places. After a last lunch at the Olympia restaurant, they took Jake on a last stroll to Ravenna, where the leaves were only faintly tinged with fall.

Dear Me,

...I bade farewell to all my special spots. That stream down in the ravine where the equisetum grows... That hillside where the faerie so often danced... Off in the woods over there to the north where Roger and I... Momentarily, I wondered again about Barbara's Wednesday afternoon with him, but dismissed the thought. If she didn't want to talk about it, that was fine with me. Now we'd both shown that we were open to and accepting of outside romances. It was thrilling to see my wishful thinking becoming a real possibility.

Leaving wife and daughter playing on the grass in the shade, I took off on a last jog around the park. As soon as I was alone, Ricky showed up with an accusatory look and jogged effortlessly along beside me. Knowing full well what was on his mind, I ignored him for a block. Then I sternly told him he'd just have to wait till we get to Michigan.

"Okay, darlin'," he grunted dubiously, "I'll do that, and when they're all safe with her folks, you'll get us a cab to a motel, right? C'est finit! Minimal anguish and all that?" I merely nodded. "Just checking," Ricky said with a playful flick of my chin and faded away.

Finishing my last Ravenna jog, I found Jake napping in Barbara's lap under a tree faintly red with autumn. I sat down beside them on the grass and rested peacefully. It was a strange, wonderful sensation of closeness for me, the three of us lovingly clustered under the tree, all alone in this special park, in this city that we're leaving tomorrow. It hurts to think about tomorrow, and I can only hope and trust that it will be for the best in this best of all possible worlds.

#

Later that last afternoon, Richie took a while by himself and brought his journal up to date for the past couple days, right up to the above exchange. It was some days after he and his family landed in Ann Arbor that he managed to write about that dire last night in Seattle.

Dear Me,

...For our last dinner in Seattle, we took a cab and met Betsy and the Twooth at the Red Robin and were happy to get another table by the windows. I was really sad to see that Lane wasn't there and asked our new (also quite handsome) waiter where he was. He moved to Puyallup last week.

Over our burgers, the four of us reminisced about these past two years that have changed us so much. We recalled adventures, like Betsy's and my

midnight invasion of the fraternity house next door to Little Sweden, and those crazy summer nights of Keno in the casino. Somehow, it felt like a final summary, like ceremonially closing up one of my Doré folios.

Barbara started to talk about her hopes for Michigan, and I quickly got up with baby Jake in my arms to walk around and not listen. I couldn't bear to think about the future yet. Instead, I thought about Betsy and the Twooth and felt a surge of affection for them. They'd been such great friends. I truly wished them happiness here and in Chicago.

When the cab dropped us off at home, there were warm hugs with these two dear friends. In his hug, Twooth told me to be strong, and in hers Betsy whispered, "I'm so proud of you, Richie." I cringed inside and jokingly thanked her yet again for finding Oná a new home.

Since we needed to be up and out for our flight real early in the morning, Barbara and I went to bed almost immediately. Both of us were too excited to feel sleepy. After lying there restlessly for a while, we had sex. For me it was unusually sensual and pleasurable. Afterwards, it dawned on me that this had been our last time, and I knew it. It was terribly painful to think about.

Not knowing what I knew, Barbara fell peacefully and soundly asleep, but I was still wide awake. I stealthily got up out of bed, pulled on my pants, tiptoed around Jake's crib, and went out onto the dark porch. Sitting on the bench, head in hands, I agonized about doing what had to be done. When I looked up, Ricky was sitting beside me.

[The following comments in the journal are what makes me think, as mentioned before, that the phantom Ricky wasn't a hallucination but a literary device for expressing Richie's mental processes.]

When he started beating on his same old drum, I came to a decision and then in the face of his angry complaints and arguments spelled out why. In the first place, per the Golden Rule, I cannot just walk out on dear Barbara and the baby—I must not do such a heartless thing unto them.

In the second, I will not do it simply because Ricky selfishly wants me to. I'm not a silly faerie anymore, and he's no longer important to my grown-up life. I told him he's just the memory of the me I used to be, like a ghost.

And thirdly, I'd realized that for my own well-being, I don't have to leave them, indeed should not do it. Roger was right that the best way for me to make it as a gay man in this straight world is to be married and take lovers on the side.

I told Ricky to get his pretty little butt back inside my head where he belonged. He threw me a sad kiss and disappeared.

Dizzy with relief, I felt suddenly full of hope, awash in a glow of well-being—but bone-tired. Back in bed, I slept peacefully, a gay man blest with a loving and beloved wife and daughter.

#

.viii.

Hallelujah! I made it. So ends the voyage of the Faerie Prince. Obviously, it's not a coming out story, but a tale of how and why a wild young faerie climbed into the closet. A going in story. Back then that was his only real option.

For extra time to fight my way through the later sections of this chapter, Mack and I have both stayed separately at our homes for the past two days. He was happy for more time to obsess over his video production. Yesterday, I even skipped gym, a sign that I was really busy.

Soon this afternoon I'll go meet my darlin' there for a workout, and we'll do dinner here. For me this evening's entertainment will be watching Mack's animation clip of part of book one

of the epic. Meanwhile, he'll read this final chapter. (He already knows about Sir Roger Wrighte-Rowndleigh.) Then we'll think of something fun to do afterwards.

Before I go, I should explain that I was rushing to finish up Richie's story before Barbara gets here. Still a petite redhead, she's coming to visit for our grandson Jammes' thirteenth birthday, arriving the day after tomorrow. We're still the warmest (and now oldest) of friends, and I love us being the wise and loving grandparents Nonnie and Papou. I still call her my first and Number One wife. My guy is very excited about meeting her, and I bet she'll like him. By the way, we've yet to speak about what happened on that long ago Wednesday afternoon.

Coming along with her is none other than Auntie Martha, also still a glamorous blond. Though living in different places, the bread-and-butter sisters have been thick as thieves all these years, and that magic charm has obviously worked on me too. They travel all over the place together and this summer took our eldest grandson Ike (14), Jake's son, with them to Spain.

To make this a real epilogue, I'm sad to add that we lost dear Cap'n Gene a few years ago. He and I got to sail together one more time on his catamaran on a Florida lake. But Richard the Twooth is still kicking after a brilliant career in journalism back in Seattle. So is Betsy out in Sacramento, and fairly high, I gather. I can't keep track of her marital status, but I believe that once she actually married clueless Bob. At least for a while. Maybe twice.

This weekend George and Mario—wait! News flash! They're adopting Syrian orphans, twin sisters three years old. My only advice to them is don't panic. Oh, Kevin's curls are now entirely platinum, making him look devilishly like Harpo Marx or maybe Marilyn Monroe.

So, as I was about to say, George and Mario will throw a party at their beautiful home for Barbara and me, a belated Golden Anniversary party, since our would-be 50th was just a couple weeks ago. She and Martha will get to meet my whole fascinating circle of young friends—who of course have already met them long ago in Seattle.

Maybe I'm just a sentimental old queen, but to bring my life poetically full circle, I can well imagine that this party might be the perfect romantic occasion for a certain someone to ask a special somebody to be his first husband.

#END#