

CONTENTS

5.1 VIRTUE REWARDED - He hopes for miscegenation but makes music differently.	152
5.2 - COCK ROBIN - He holds a bird in his hand but can't do what he wants with it.	159
5.3 - THE TOMCAT - He chases birds in the bush and catches more than he can handle.	166
5.4 - THE RENUNCIATION - He makes a crazy vow but away must start all over again. ...	173

5.1 VIRTUE REWARDED

(Epistle 9/22/63)

Dear Sally,

I think it's just great that you've met another nice guy! And I'm sure you're going to be much happier this year, now that you've gotten rid of that Fred. I'm really expecting to be happier this year too, now that school's started up again. At last I'm getting to take some fun things like ancient Greek and sculpture—and of course all those other courses in Russian and Russian literature. That's a benefit of being a senior with boring requirements out of the way.

But I'll tell you first thing that this first week of school has been quite an emotional roller coaster, and I'm sitting here in my stainless steel island at the Snack Bar for my quiet Sunday evening shift feeling rather wiped out. But that's a really, really good wiped out. Fortunately business is slow, and I should be able to cover the roller coaster ride amply.

By the way, a couple weeks ago I got a letter from Billy—(The euphoria of that wild week with him still hasn't quite worn off!)—a marvelous little note full of misspellings about starting senior year and his girlfriend Ethel who has apparently started “letting him into her panties” after I taught him how to kiss, among other things. At end he wrote, “I think about you a whole lot.” I have no doubt that he'll remember Sir Roger fondly for a long time. For me it was a sweet dream of how my boyhood should have been.

Besides the excitement of starting back to work after my marvelous beatnik summer, there was a new twist to it. They just opened this new food service (in a whole new building) for freshmen and sophomores, and I'll also be working there these first couple weeks for breakfasts checking meal tickets. The perfect opportunity to get to know the names of the newest batch of lovely young things. I reckon there are 15 or 16 real winners—selected by autocratic vote of the opinionated Sir Roger Wrighte-Rowndleigh. The hardest part of the contest is for my errant knight personally to present the lucky winners with their prizes.

Among these candidates for the crown, the most magnificent is the black freshman, the very first Negro to enroll at Tulane, by the name of Adam Carter. They kept it real quiet, but I heard about him before school even started and felt so proud to have played just an itchy-bitsy little part in the historic integration of the university. I saw him for the first time that week before classes started when he came into the Snack Bar with several other new ones. I was transfixed from the moment he appeared at the serving line—so triumphantly beautiful, skin like chocolate, face of impossible perfection with elegant features, and body of such animal grace and sensuous shapes that his Bermuda shorts and white T-shirt could have been painted on! I wanted to make obeisance to the godlike being—grovel before him... Making his change, I said, “Thanks, and welcome to Tulane!” He gave me a smile that stunned Sir Roger into reverent silence.

Another excitement of school is that this year, because I am so good at the Russian language and phonetics, I've got an extra job as an instructor for the first year labs. You know, listening in on the students in their tape recorder booths. It's three times a week. When I called

role that first Monday, I came to the name Adam Carter, and there's that heavenly black boy! During the lab hour I listened mostly to his deep, melodious voice struggling with the simple introductory exercises, but didn't say anything (even though he was completely botching the simplest sounds), and kept looking at the others so they'd think I was eavesdropping on them.

Next morning at the freshman dining hall the dark angel came by my checker's desk for breakfast, and when I dramatically checked him off the list by saying his blessed name, he said, "Good morning, Mr. Youngblood." I was good for nothing for at least an hour after that from the confusion caused by this formal intimacy, like a benediction. It was more than desiring Adam physically, more the question of what does a mere mortal do when confronted with the mysterious truth of immortal beauty. I mean what's the etiquette for an epiphany?

Another exquisite moment of Adam's presence at Wednesday morning's breakfast, and then at 11 o'clock the glory again of him looking up at me from his booth with blinding smiles. When I broke in to correct a vowel, he was very apologetic, and I assured him he'd catch on quickly. After the lab, while I was still at the desk with papers, Adam came up to me. I nearly fainted. "Can I talk to you a minute, sir?" he asked hesitantly. "I think this Russian is going to be real hard for me, and I wondered if you do any tutoring."

Dizzied by this sudden racing curve of the roller coaster, I arranged to start our sessions at two o'clock the next day, Thursday, in the little garden of the library. It's the prettiest and most private place around campus, perfect for an intimate *tête à tête*.

I'm sure it must have been terribly boring for Raph and his roommate Steven when we all went out that night to La Marina, the way I carried on about Adam like a complete love-struck ninny. Raph joked that I was only hot for the guy because black men have big dongs, but I explained why he was very wrong. How it was awe of supreme beauty. Of course, he reminded me again of his cynicism on that subject. Thank goodness, that new girl Georgette was in the mood because I danced like a madman with her in the Third Circle for hours, dedicating the bacchanalian rites to my black demigod.

After only a few hours' sleep, I was back at my checking table to greet Adam with the morning, and he rewarded me with a promise that we'd see each other at two. Then I just had to stumble through my morning classes with my head full of wild madness. By 1:30 I had staked claim to the designated rendezvous, a white wrought iron love seat back amongst tall kumquat bushes, a cool haven from the languorous heat of the late summer day. Through an opening in the leaves you can see a fountain and a wisteria arbor, very Monet. On this stage so carefully set for the tutor to tute the tutee, I tried meditating the way Raj showed me. For the first time I really managed, I think, letting go of everything and floating on a boundless sea of joy.

Or maybe I fell asleep, because next thing I knew it was two o'clock, and my heart started pounding like wild. A few more minutes of me worrying he wouldn't show up, and then Adam came down the steps under the wisteria, amazingly dark in the bright sun. He came over to our hideaway and with that gleaming smile said, "Lord! It's hotter than blazes!" Quickly scooting over, I made room for him to sit in the shade beside me.

While Adam wiped his forehead with a handkerchief, the strange fragrance of his body and its close proximity made my mind reel in a confused mush of passion and worship. Rather than sit silently like a complete boob, I tried to be appropriately tutorish and asked, "Have you studied the vocabulary in the first chapter yet?"

Adam looked at me with a troubled expression and said, "Not really..." He turned over the book in his lap. "I got to thinking that this Russian is an awful hard language and decided to drop the class." Well, no class ever got dropped as dramatically as my stomach got dropped on

this unexpected dive of the roller coaster. “I just came over to say I’m sorry, Mr. Youngblood.” He took my stunned hand to shake it, and I mumbled a damned lie about understanding. Then he said, “See you around!” I sat there stupidly as he left the perfect love nest I’d constructed for us. At the Gin Mill I drank ouzo to get drunk and danced solos to grieve.

Up early again Friday morning for the breakfast checking, the only thing that kept me moving was the thought of a brief moment to adore Adam again. But let me tell you, Sally, Cupid is an ironic little bastard! Adam never showed up! In the last moments of serving, when I knew he wouldn’t come, my tears melodramatically splotched the list.

As soon as I got off, I ran over to Raph’s room in Irby to moan and lament. Naturally he didn’t offer much sympathy, but lots of advice about not screwing anybody I want. I explained that my feeling was terrifically spiritual, abject adoration of an empyrean beauty, and I just wanted to fall to my knees and worship him. Raph didn’t believe me for a minute. “All you want,” he snorted, “is to do wild, dirty sex with him!” (Though Raph and I differ so vastly on many points of philosophy, we are becoming rather good friends, sisters, they call it.)

Whatever it was I wanted, the whole rest of the day was depressed for not getting it. Particularly in language lab when there wasn’t anyone in Adam’s booth. When Raj stopped by to see me at my cash register in the Snack Bar, he told me my religious feelings for Adam are really projections of my narcissistic love for myself, or some such psychological twaddle. My beloved is so often exactly, perfectly right, but when he’s wrong... Of course, maybe Raj himself said that because he doesn’t want me to worship anyone other than him.

Later on in the slow evening the roller coaster took another wild leap! There was seraphic Adam in all his dark glory standing in the serving line. Watching him and the magnificent line of his arm as he reached up for a plate, I had to remind myself to breathe. When he brought his tray of French fries and medium coke over to my island, I greeted him as casually as possible with, “Hey, Adam, I didn’t see you at breakfast this morning!”

“Yeah! I was up real late studying,” he sighed. “Slept right through my alarm and my first class!” He struggled his hand into the pocket of his tight shorts to pay 57 cents.

“You need a better alarm clock,” I chuckled, while automatically making 43 cents change and imagining in great detail how well I could personally fulfill that function. For a long moment I couldn’t take my eyes off his. “So you’ve been hard at it, eh?”

“For sure,” Adam sighed again. He leaned on my counter munching a French fry, in no hurry to go sit down. I shouted silent hallelujahs. “This one math course...”

Turned out he’s a Chemistry major! Just like yours truly used to be! So he hung around to chat about that easy subject while occasional customers passed on the other side of the island. My concentration was a wreck since I hung on every word formed by Adam’s enchanting lips. My advice to him was, “You should try to get on as a lab assistant and...”

“Oh, I already have! I start next week,” he said between more fries. “Got to fit that in somewhere too. Boy, with this schedule, how does a guy find time to have any fun?”

I wasn’t too befuddled to miss this opportunity. “You just gotta make time,” I laughed and snatched one of his French fries. “Like me. After work I’m going out to the Quarter.”

Adam perked up. “They say it’s really wild down there! What’s it like?”

“Are you 18?” I asked quietly, leaning close, and he nodded. “Well, you should come out with me, and I’ll show you some places.”

He couldn’t that night but was quick to suggest going to the Quarter tomorrow, that is Saturday, night (yesterday). Plans were soon made, and with a buddy-punch on my shoulder, Adam left me for another late night of study.

My late night was spent in La Marina dancing feverishly with several nocturnal wenches. When Raph showed up, I crowed about the “date,” but he replied, “You’re disgusting! Now you’re going to debauch his innocence, aren’t you?” It almost made me feel guilty for being such a temptress, but not quite.

So I spent the next day in rarefied excitement, right through work in the cafeteria for dinner and into the Snack Bar for the evening. As arranged, just before eleven Adam showed up, ready to experience the French Quarter, and waited at the counter while I checked out my bank. Then we hopped the Freret Jet, and on the ride I got him to start calling me Tommy instead of Mr. Youngblood. Walking down Bourbon Street so he could see all the strip joints and jazz bars, Adam seemed curious but subdued. Then I realized that the white folks on the street were giving him strange looks, probably for being so well dressed and gorgeous.

He braved it with me to the corner of St. Peter where I purposefully pointed out Dixie’s Bar of Music with the cello over the doorway and advised him that it was a gay bar. He didn’t register any surprise, and so I added, “I think maybe you ought to know that I’m gay.” Might as well get it out there early on and just see what happens.

“I know,” Adam said calmly as we rounded the corner. “Everybody knows that—my roommate’s new frat brother told him all about the queer cashier.”

“And you don’t mind?” I asked as my mind reeled with hope.

“No,” he laughed. But just so you know that I’m not!”

The roller coaster almost lost me on that one. Exhilaration to annihilation! We were passing the site of the former Gaslight Inn (you probably remember, Sally—the place of my debut), where a group of black jazz musicians has started playing in the doorway. They’re calling it Preservation Hall. Adam stopped to listen, and since they were really good, we both put some money in their collection basket. Then I pointed out Pat O’Brien’s next door. He had already heard of this collegiate hangout, but didn’t want to go in.

Although my hopes were so totally dashed, I was still resolute about taking Adam to see my magnificent La Casa de los Marineros. He follow me into that dark maelstrom of merengues and magic. I led him through the crowds to the Third Circle to see the murals and meanwhile squeezed up to the bar to order beers from the barmaid Corinne. She gave me a funny look and leaned across the bar to shout, “I can’t serve no Negroes in here, honey. If the cops come in and find him...” She looked nervously at the door.

Suddenly I understood. Even though Adam, who was still inspecting the murals with interest, had been let into Tulane, truth was, I’d forgotten that the rest of the city was still segregated. I tugged his arm and shouted that we had to go. Adam turned to me with a peaceful smile and said, once again, “I know.”

When we were safely back out on Decatur Street where the music was only a muted roar, he said, “I knew I couldn’t go into the fancy nightclubs, Tommy. I just wanted to see what the Quarter was like. And it was really great getting into this place here, even for a moment!” As we walked down Decatur, I wanted to scream about the injustice and said something incoherent. Adam patted my shoulder and said, “Don’t worry. We shall overcome someday—soon.”

Our walk took us naturally toward the Gin Mill, and I described the marvelous Greek dive and the dancing. Genetically unable to walk past that place without even one beer, I was in a quandary. So Adam waited outside listening to the beautiful “Thessaloniki Mou” pouring out the door while I bopped in to get us drinks. Enormous Jackie brought me two Falstaffs, curious about the second, and I explained, “A friend of mine out there can’t come in.”

“What do you mean, can’t come in?” Jackie chuckled. “Won’t fit through the door? This I gotta see!” Her mountain of flesh floated around the end of the bar and out the door. I was close behind and heard her exclaim, “For Chrissake! What have we got here?” Adam was obviously astonished at this sudden apparition, and I stepped in to introduce him. Jackie grabbed him by the arm, inviting, “Y’all can sit back in the back in a booth, and nobody’ll bother you, baby.”

That’s how we wound up having a night on the town. The whores and Greek sailors didn’t mind having a Negro in the place. As a matter of fact, a number of the sailors gave Adam that pederastical eye, and they bought us beers. My black idol asked me why I called the women whores, and I explained, “Because they are. They work the sailors. Now me, I’m just a common slut! I’m free!” His laugh was so lovely, but... We did some line dances and listened to a lot of the wonderful music. Somewhere in the midst of it all, I reached a plane of joyous contentment I’ve only felt before with Raj, no more needs or desires, that euphoria at merely being in his glorious presence. I was so relieved that he was having a good time that I didn’t mind at all when Adam suggested he should be getting back to the dorm.

Once out on Decatur again, he started laughing merrily and staggered. “I think I’m a little bit drunk!” Walking over to catch the Jet at Canal and St. Charles, he admitted that he’d never drunk beer before. I was honored to be his first drinking buddy. With no ulterior motives, I walked him back to his room on the third floor of Phelps Hall. He thanked me profusely for the unforgettable time and shook my hand. After saying goodbye, I felt absolutely saintly for my self-denial and wandered back down the steps.

Let me bear witness, Sally, that saintly virtue is at times instantaneously rewarded, and I don’t mean by itself. On the second floor, whom do I run into coming up the stairs, but that really sexy guy Mark, my first conquest, if you recall, though he didn’t remember it. Even sexier now that he’s gotten older. Pretty well oiled after a night out and already half-way out of his shirt (showing a mischievous dark nipple), the cute hunk greeted me with a chummy arm around the shoulder and, “Hey, come on in for a minute, Tommy, old pal. I need to talk to you.” Curious, I followed Mark into his room, a senior’s single. Once inside, still in the dark, he turned to me and asked with a little wheedle, “Can I have a blow job?”

“What?!” I almost choked in surprise at his suave approach, but the request had some merit, considering other benefits that might accrue.

“Well... I mean...” Mark bumbled, “Everybody knows you’re a faggot. I mean, you’re a real nice guy, a faggot. And I’d like to know what it’s like, you know...”

Once again confronted with my infamy, I swallowed hard and decided that Mark had it coming. “Look, if having sex with a guy means somebody’s queer,” I proposed, “what does that make you if you have sex with me, big guy?”

The logic of that took a moment to penetrate Mark’s intoxication, but he argued against it. “It don’t make me queer if I just let you suck my cock!”

“So when you come in my mouth,” I pressed the attack, “I’m the one having sex with a man? And what were you doing the whole time?”

“Look, Tommy,” Mark turned apologetic, “I’ve never done anything with a guy before, and you’re so good-looking—and queer—and I thought...”

Time for the *coup de grâce*. “Hold on, Mark. I need to confess something to you—here, sit down on the bed.” He looked up at me in horny confusion. I took aim right between his eyes and said, “Way back about two years ago when we lived up on six in Robert Sharp—remember? Naked bridge games? Well, one night when you were totally drunk, I fucked you!”

He leapt up from the bed, as though he could no longer sit on the tasty anatomical part in question, and cried, “No way, Tommy! You never...” Then he sank right back onto the bed, a bit sobered by the distinct possibility, considering his history of blackout drunks.

He was suddenly charmingly vulnerable, and touched by pity, I also sat down to offer him some comfort. “Don’t worry, I gave you a really great blow job too.”

“You did?” His expression was truly pitiful. “And I don’t remember a bit of it!” Hanging his head, he wrung his hands in silence for a moment. Then without looking at me, he asked very quietly, tentatively, “Can we do it again?”

I asked pointedly, “All of it?” He looked up at me, confused. “Here’s the deal,” I said, amazed at how pragmatic I could be, “first I screw you, and then you get whatever you want! Okay?” He looked down at his twisting fingers, agonizing, and finally, slowly nodded his head. Then he looked up with a resigned, naughty smile.

Showtime! The evening’s concert was packed with crowd-pleasers. First, the renowned maestro Sir Roger Wrighte-Rowndleigh led the Bump-Bacon Brass Band in his own rousing, rollicking composition, the Hide-the-Sausage Suite. Whereupon, in response to audience demand, I blew a fanciful fuguing tune on the bonnie laddie’s bagpipe *con brio*. Then, recalling the golden opportunity once missed, the lecherous Sir Roger insisted on an encore of his first number under the same contract conditions, only this time *allegro furioso*. And the night’s featured work was Mark’s debut performance of the poignantly sensuous Sodom Sonata (scored for skin flute and double bum drum), quite artistically executed for an amateur flautist. His lengthy cadenza was nothing short of inspired, and the final movement was absolutely *maestoso*. Then we slept. (God! I love metaphors!)

I have just put down the pen for a bit because angelic Adam came by for a study break snack and hung around my register again to chat. About nothing in particular, but it provided me with a religious ecstasy on a par with those of St. Theresa of Avila. (No stigmata yet.)

But my goodness, Sally, look at how long this letter is! What a sheaf! I really should do the honorable thing (since I’m up to the present moment) and finish. Ten-four, kiddo!

Always, Tommy

P.S. (Monday morning, at breakfast) Sally, the stars must be playing some kind of hanky-pank up there, an Olympian orgy! When I think of the many long dry spells I’ve suffered, I mean, whole weeks at a time with no nookie! And now...

Last night after work, I staggered home to the Rising Sun, wrapped in the bliss of Adam’s being, and found Joel lying on his bed reading, his splendid nudity barely obscured by a flimsy pair of underpants. Not having seen me for two days, he naturally asked where I’d been. I proudly reported having heroically humped Mark Forrester twice last night and then went back to our medieval bathroom—which we call the Pit—to get ready for bed.

Just as I’m undressed and about to flop, exhausted, on my little mattress under the window, Joel tosses his book aside and asks, “Want to try something new, Tommy?”

The tone of his voice made me look at him askance. His glittering panther eyes left not a shadow of a doubt what was on his mind. (Now, Sally, since our magic night on Royal, I swear neither of us has said a word about it or made a move.) I coyly teased, “New? You mean try something I’ve never done before? I can’t imagine what that would be.”

“C’mere and find out,” Joel urged, slipping off his underpants and tossing them at my head. That great Gorgon, the Medusa, beckoned subtly with a twitch of its serpentine head, and Sir Roger, naturally turning to stone, dragged me, scarcely kicking and screaming, over into Joel’s big bed. Within moments I found myself again intimately impaled by the mythical

monster, and Joel, who turns out to be unusually limber, curled up and simultaneously took my petrified lordship into his mouth... I bounced off the ceiling and walls!

Afterwards, I told Joel I'd invented that trick with gargantuan Terry. We called it the Ring of Fire. He whimpered, "Oh, God, Tommy, you're going to make me queer!"

Caressing his long, lean body, I reassured him, "Just keep on wanking those women, Joel, and you'll be all right." And then we slept.

And we still haven't kissed.

###

5.2 - COCK ROBIN

It's my misfortune to have been named Robin by my appallingly bourgeois parents who have more money than aesthetics. Consequently, I always cut it to Rob so people think it's short for Robert. I registered that way this fall when I transferred for my junior year. Being from St. Louis, after two years at GWU I couldn't bear being so close to my smothering mother. No matter where I moved in town, she terrorized my apartments and friends. The strain of trying to live a civilized gay life in that repressive city, the spleen of the nation, and the intellectual suffocation drove me crazy. With a gift to Tulane from Uncle Albert, who shares my secret, it was possible for me to escape to New Orleans. He assured me it would be a much freer place for a cute young thing like me. I am by anyone's standards an attractive fellow, if I do say so, with wavy auburn hair and sultry (I'm told) gray eyes, and since I am a consummate swimmer, my shoulders, etc., draw much not unwelcome attention.

I suppose I'm fortunate also in that school is not difficult for me. My major wound up as history because I can remember those curious stories easily, like remembering novels or films. My fascination is Renaissance European history, which I consider the most aesthetic period of mankind's millennia. I haven't as yet closely all the other periods, but it's my favorite so far.

Tulane was wonderful from the moment I arrived at the tall, brand new dormitory, where I had a private room on the 13th floor with a balcony. I saw some delectable young men in the hallways and heard Scarlatti from a room down the way. Naturally, I'd be very careful about trying anything with a fellow dormie, but soon enough I planned to find action out there in the wicked city. The French Quarter was waiting, hopefully with open arms.

It took me some days to get settled in. The movers delivered my rocker on Monday, the first day of classes, and the idiots just left it sitting in the hallway in the big box. I was mortified to see that Uncle Albert had addressed it to Cock Robin, c/o R. Hays. That was his nickname for me. Whoever walked by could have read it. It was Monday too before I found a garage nearby for the Mercedes. And that first week I just stayed around campus, wandering all over and getting to know the place, and hanging out in the University Center, swimming every day, and gaily checking out the beautiful creatures around the Snack Bar. Ah, tell me what blessed genius invented the all-boy school? I sat with coffee and watched the eager, pulchritudinous student bodies—who played unbearable modern noise on the juke box.

By Wednesday night of the next week, I was more than ready to venture into the Quarter for the first time. It was rather awkward walking down Bourbon Street wondering where to go. One didn't ask passersby for directions to the nearest gay bar. The disreputable street was a circus of Brueghel-esque activity. I noticed an unmistakable "queen" and discreetly trailed "her" along Bourbon. Meanwhile I was approached by many forward young ladies, drawn like flies to honey, but I brushed them off and followed her majesty in a door (under a sign containing a real violoncello!) into a bar called Dixie's Bar of Music. I had a couple drinks, fighting off the more aggressive barflies. The crowd was rather a disappointment, too many nelly faggots.

Somewhat later an obviously cultured elderly man approached me. Considering the circumstances, I agreed to go to his very elegant apartment on Dauphine Street, where I allowed Pierre to blow me on a velvet settee in the parlor. I think he expected me to ask for money, but I just kissed him goodnight and made my way back to the car. Perhaps I was for Pierre a lovely vision, a blessing visited upon him in those lonely older years. He actually knew rather a great deal about the amazing immoralities of the Renaissance popes.

Such was my first outing into the night life of the city, and it helped me keep perspective on the days at school beset by a thousand temptations. On purpose I avoided contact with any of

the guys living on my dorm floor, except for the hideous necessity of using the sinks, toilets, and showers in one big room. It was torture showering with these naked young barbarians. One of them had a prick of exquisite proportions, uncircumcised, the skin like brown velvet, probably eight inches, a little to the left on the dangle. He saw me looking, and we both turned away.

With my pumps primed by titillation of that sort, on Saturday night I roamed some other streets of the Quarter and came upon a place called the Galley House on Chartres. It turned out to be a “wrinkle room,” and I felt like a tender lamb wandering blithely through a butcher shop. Fortunately, as I brazenly walked up to the bar for a drink, I found Pierre, and we conversed briefly. Clearly he didn’t expect another visitation, and we were very relaxed. But he didn’t introduce me to any other of the many older men nearby who were avidly eyeing my shoulders and other parts. They were playing music that sounded like Kate Smith accompanied by Guy Lombardo, and I mentioned wishing for a place with some good music. Pierre suggested I try down the block at the Napoleon House, but politely declined to accompany me.

Of course, the Napoleon House wasn’t a gay bar, but it was civilized. When I walked in, that marvelous Mozart clarinet was playing. By myself at a table in the corner, watching the flow of people, it definitely felt like my beloved Paris. As usual, while I relaxed in the almost amber light, many women stole admiring glances, but sadly none of the men seemed so inclined. Of course my Brooks Brothers sport coat, shirt, and no tie were perhaps a bit too formal, but I never feel comfortable in proletarian regalia. My physique shows off as well in a tux as a T-shirt.

Off on the other side of the room was a beautiful old lady wearing a 30s- style hat with two lovely black feathers like a crest. Taking up my drink, I went over and introduced myself, asking if I might join her. Her cloudy blue eyes laughed. “Certainly, do sit down, Mr. Rob Hays,” she said with a gesture. “I’m Florence Hays, and I am seventy-nine years old, in case you’re wondering.” In fact, I had noted her thin, frail arms and wrinkled skin, and I apologized if I’d been rude. “Not at all, young Mr. Hays. There are two ways to get old, waiting and living.” She emptied her wineglass, and immediately a fat waiter appeared at her side with another.

At the same time a young woman appeared, greeting Florence warmly. Florence introduced me as her grand-nephew. Watching them chat, I couldn’t get over the feeling that maybe she might just actually be some long-lost grand-aunt of mine. My awful father never did say much about his family, having so successfully pulled himself out of poverty into the upper class. Fortunately this young woman Kathy went quickly back to the other room.

Florence turned back to me and regaled me with tales of her life, most importantly, having studied dance with Isadora Duncan, and having been crowned Queen of Comus three years in a row. She expounded on the splendors of her Mardi Gras courts and fabulous floats in her parades. It was hypnotic. “Of course,” she added, “Darlene Thibodeaux was Queen twice, but now she works in that Krystal hamburger parlor in the Garden District. There isn’t one tooth left in her head!” Florence grinned at me with an enviable set of teeth, clearly her own.

With very little in my short twenty years that would be of interest to her, I quietly appreciated the subtleties of her madness. When a young couple soon came up to greet her, Florence introduced me to Al and Margaret again as a grand-nephew. She invited them to join her, and I took the opportunity to excuse myself to return to the night’s stalking of a man.

The encounter with Florence felt like a baptism into the Bohemia I now sensed around me in the Quarter. I knew the man over by the front window was an artist by the yellow smear on his green sleeve. Before I’d finished my drink, two guys of interest sat at a table by the French door onto St. Louis Street. I’d seen them at school, and never one to miss an opportunity, I went over to greet fellow Tulane students.

They were very hospitable and invited me to join them. The smaller one, Steven, rather delicate actually, and nicely dressed, gave me a look impossible to misconstrue. The tall, lanky one with black curls and a very square jaw, by name of Raphael, said they were waiting for a friend to play cards, whom Steven pointedly referred to as the Tomcat. I was instantly intrigued.

Steven's nelly way of smoking his cigarette turned me off, but the awkwardness of Raphael's long arms and neck were strangely attractive, though a very foreign body language. Our talk was all general about school and backgrounds, etc. Discovering that Raphael comes from big Dallas money explained the rapport I felt with him. Steven comes from Charleston society and momentarily lapsed into a South Carolina accent, which was actually quite charming.

"Tom's here!" Raphael announced, and I turned to see that beautiful blond cashier from the UC making his way over to Florence's table. While he greeted the grande dame with a very continental kiss on the hand, exchanged a few words with her, and came over to us, Steven was saying something I didn't hear. I couldn't take my eyes off the Tomcat, fairly well built, rather long blond hair that gave him an insidious Renaissance look, amazing brown eyes, and a very sensual mouth. When Raphael introduced us, I watched for clues in his eyes, but there were none, just a bright openness in his bewitching smile.

"I bet that's short for Robin!" Tom laughed. I blushed. "I've seen you swimming in the pool at the UC," he added and plopped into a chair. After ordering a Dixie from the fat waiter he exclaimed, "Let's play hearts!" He pushed Steven's ashtray away to clear a playing space.

Raphael immediately produced a pack of cards and started shuffling. "Watch out, Rob," he said as he put the deck out for me to cut, "Tom plays hearts like Attila the Hun!"

"Why do you say that?" Tom laughed. "I feel more like Alexander the Great." The enthusiasm with which he picked up each card dealt was enormously erotic, and I could barely concentrate on deciding the three cards to pass to him. Just to be tricky, I passed him two middle diamonds and the king of clubs.

Leading the deuce of clubs, Steven asked Tom offhandedly, "So, are you still forlorn?"

"Quite the desolate one!" he sighed and played a five. But then they said nothing more about the matter as the play grew serious.

Leading a low spade, Raphael remarked to Tom, "Oh, I finished 'Giovanni's Room' today. It's a real tear-jerker."

Ducking with another low spade, I remarked, "I really liked that book."

There was silence as Tom got rid of a low club, and when Steven took the trick with the jack of spades, he commented, "Well, it's nice to know we're among sisters." We all laughed, much relieved to be beyond straight pretenses. And my heart pounded at the thought that this lovely Tomcat was gay, maybe even a slut. The evening was certainly shaping up!

Steven led the deuce of diamonds; Raphael played the trey; and I dumped the bitch. Tom rolled his eyes in disgust and took the dirty trick with the five I'd passed him. Contemplating his hand, he muttered, "Well, what do you know!" Then he slapped his cards down on the table with a very self-satisfied, "They're all mine!" He was right. I was holding the ace and king of hearts, but he didn't have a single heart! His brown eye twinkled delightedly, and he brushed a strand of his hair back from his face with a gesture not at all like a girl would use.

"Like Genghis Khan!" Steven snorted and lit another cigarette.

Raphael's response was, "Since we're a foursome, let's play bridge."

So I wound up as Steven's partner. When play began on the first hand, I conversationally asked Tom, "And why are you the desolate one?"

“Oh,” he sighed with a pout on his elegant lips, “just a grand passion gone awry. Up in black smoke.” Tom sighed again, dramatically forlorn, and trumped my trick.

I used the subject to remark as calmly as I could, “I’m hoping to find a lover to settle down with, you know, someone to...”

“Well, I wish you lots of luck on that,” Tom chirped as he led a card.

“A rare commodity, that,” Steven muttered.

Tom patted my hand and said, “Finding a lover’s not the hard part. It’s the settling down part I have trouble with.”

“Oh?” Raphael laughed cynically. “Speak for yourself, Tomcat!” He leaned over to me to confide, “I’m still working on the first step.”

“Some of us,” Steven remarked with a significant glance at Tom, “are pretty lucky with one-night stands.”

Tom sniffed in pretend offense. “I don’t have one-night stands, I’ll have you know. They have all been true love—more or less—and some even lasted a couple nights! I just haven’t been lucky with the settling down stuff.” He continued sorting the cards he was dealt.

Feeling brave, I moved my knee to touch Tom’s under the table and stated pointedly, “If I just had a chance, I bet you I’d be lucky.”

Raphael looked discreetly away with, “Oh, dear!” Steven giggled.

Tom looked stoically at his cards and replied, “If you’re going to bid a grand slam, Cock Robin, you better be able to take all the tricks!” His magnificent truism left me speechless.

“Do I hear seven no-trump?” Raphael asked gaily.

I could only bid four diamonds, but all the same, with an added pressure of his knee on mine, I knew Tom was going to grant me the chance.

For the rest of the rubber, our conversation was light, led largely by Steven’s rather bitchy commentary on life and luck, and I struggled to keep my excitement and impatience in check. Tom’s knee, and once for a moment, his hand under the table both helped and hindered me in that. And his affectionate wink when I finessed his jack of diamonds.

When we finished a couple hands, Tom suggested we quit. “I need to go to La Marina for a dance or two,” he said with a pat on my shoulder, “and then we can go home.”

“Well, I’m going to a civilized place—Dixie’s,” Steven announced, and Raphael agreed to come with us to the Latin place I’d never heard of.

On the way out of the Napoleon House, Tom stopped to greet a lovely blonde girl with very Botticelli features who was sitting with a pleasant plain fellow. When Tom introduced me as Cock Robin, this pretty Rose gave me a challenging look and said, “Better watch out for tomcats!” Her boyfriend Ben laughed brightly, and punched Tom’s arm like an old friend. Then we trooped off up Chartres to Toulouse.

Their place, this La Marina, turned out to be a total dive, filthy, dark and crowded with Mexican lowlifes. Tom took me on a tour of its three rooms, which I reluctantly endured, feeling very alien in my sport coat and good slacks. The third room was true sink of depravity. Some madman had painted his crude hallucinations on the walls, and there were many women I would swear were whores of very cheap manufacture. It was utterly offensive, though I appreciated the very lively ethnic music for its strangeness.

In the crowd Tom found one of the maddest looking trollops with frizzy hair, and he and this Leah danced a remarkably energetic Mexican thing. Afterwards, he told me it was a special celebratory dance they called the “President Kennedy.” It struck me as a Spanish version of an Apache dance in a Parisian cellar. Personally distasteful as it was, this La Marina was definitely

a colorful aspect of the night life in New Orleans. That Tom was a habitué of this sordid dive, I found perversely enticing. It would be so easy to lure him out of this sewer and nurture him on history and music and culture. And soon we would be rolling the dice.

Leaving Raphael to go alone to a place called the Gin Mill, Tom and I walked to my car parked on Burgundy Street. On the way I discovered that he's a senior, a student of foreign languages and debauchery, as he put it. The more I saw of him, the more I liked. There was nothing nelly about him. As a matter of fact, when I'd seen him in the Snack Bar, even with the long hair, he was so masculine I figured there was no way in the world he was gay. Tom was impressed by my blue Mercedes baby—he'd never seen a mahogany dashboard before. I found his enthusiasm refreshing. "You know," he confided, "I'm about the only scholarship student at Tulane—a certified pauper." When I said that money didn't make any difference, he just laughed cynically. Later, on the way up to the 13th floor of my dorm, he remarked, "I never like to ride elevators alone." So I dutifully asked the question that was begged, and his reply was, "Rapists." After our laugh, I finally grabbed him for the long-awaited first kiss.

And that's the story of how I met Tom. After that first night together, I really thought I'd rolled whatever it is you roll to win in craps—seven?—eleven? In all modesty, I must admit to being a consummate cocksucker, and Tom's not at all bad himself. I was particularly taken by all the beautiful blond curls all over his chest. By morning something told me I was falling in love. When he'd showered and left, I spent all day Sunday, except for an hour's swim at the pool, lying around, reading for classes, writing letters, and wishing-hoping for a call from the Tomcat.

By dinnertime he still hadn't called, so I despondently walked over to the cafeteria and found him at a cash register. Between customers, he explained working till eleven in the Snack Bar and then going to La Marina to see his Indian friend. Frustrated, I ate dinner and again despondently, wandered back to the dorm for more reading, romantic fantasies, and early to bed.

Shortly before three in the morning, there was a knock on my door. I groggily got up to unlock, and the Tomcat swept my naked body right back into bed, a wonderful, dreamlike surprise after my day of lovesickness. However, he soon made it clear in several unambiguous ways that he wanted to screw me. When I flatly refused, we wound up sitting side by side on the bed having a "philosophical" discussion.

Tom started with a pronouncement: "Fellatio is fine, but it's just foreplay!"

I begged to differ, "Fellatio is a sacrament!"

"It's a nice appetizer—before the entrée!"

"To adore, to worship the divine male..."

"I don't want worship – I crave coitus!"

"...drinking from the fountain of his loins!"

"I want to play the two-backed beast! That's Rabelais."

"I know. But sodomy is so debasing!"

"Debasing? It's basically fundamental."

"It's so crude, so bestial..."

"Buggery is beautiful! Penetrating the glorious Bronze Eye and..."

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"There's this other French writer, Jean Genet, who wrote about how the soldiers in Algeria call the anus the bronze eye. Like a mystical symbol."

"Oh. Well, I prefer the primal symbol of the penis—in the mouth!"

"Well, all right, Cock Robin. But this could really be a problem."

In the morning when my Tomcat was off to his day, I went down to shave in the revolting common jakes to which I am subjected in this dormitory. There I was rudely attacked by one rather beefy jock from down the hall. He had just stepped out of the shower, his bovine buttocks dripping. He reminded me of a water buffalo. The oaf was staring at me belligerently.

"I knew you were a fruit!" he snarled, standing there grossly naked, not unlike Rodin's Balzac. "Want a little cock for breakfast?"

Having experienced a number of queer-baiting instances, I maintained my cool and responded, "I see it would have to be a very tiny cock. But no, thank you anyway!" Then I simply had to add, "Besides, I've already broken my fast with one quite a bit bigger."

The lout actually laughed, a crude guffaw quite befitting. "I bet you did! You and that faggot cashier!" He leered at me grotesquely as I wiped my face with the washcloth. "I seen him come outa your room—and in here!"

Still calm, I was nonetheless getting angry. "And I suppose you made the same indecent proposal to him?"

"Of course not," the ox snapped, suddenly wrapping the towel around his waist. "That guy's one of those toughs from the Quarter. I bet he even carries a switch-blade!"

"In the shower?" I laughed.

"He could catch me later and slip a knife into me," the dim-witted goon worried.

Gathering up my toiletries, I took a parting shot. "It wouldn't be a knife he'd slip into you, and it certainly wouldn't be between your ribs."

He reached a peasant paw out at me. "Wait a minute," he barked, "just a quick blowjob and I won't say anything."

Icily I informed him that if he touched one thread of my silk dressing gown, I would have his fat ass in jail for assault and battery, and if there were any malicious gossip started, I know someone who's not afraid of knives. With that I exited the tiled chamber of horrors, leaving the fellow, shall we say, cowed.

Once dressed, I proceeded to the office of the Dean of Housing where I reported the indecent solicitation and arranged to move to a single in Phelps House across the street from the Sugar Bowl. Cutting two classes, I moved my rocking chair and things to a pleasant larger room on the third floor looking out over the tree-strewn lawn and the new freshman dining hall. Here the bathrooms are only shared among four rooms each. I liked it also because of the open balcony-walkway where I can sit in my rocker. I immediately met two other members of the block for the bathroom, both distraught little freshmen with pimples, glasses, and very serious attitudes. I managed to surprise Tom as he came out of his one o'clock Russian Literature class and lured him up to see the new room, perchance to consecrate it properly.

Looking around the new room, he didn't seem very pleased. I asked if anything was the matter. "Oh, no," he dismissed it. "I'll just miss the view."

"Me too, but I like the walkway." In the next moments of silence I debated whether to kiss him or to try my luck again. I decided on the latter, and suggested, "If you'd like, Tom, we could get an apartment together down in the Quarter."

"No, I wouldn't move out on Joel."

"But I'd pay the rent."

"No, I like the old Rising Sun."

"The what?"

"That's what we call our apartment, the House of the Rising Sun."

"You can keep that place too and just stay with me."

“Hey, slow down, Cock Robin, you move too fast. We’ve only spent part of the past two nights in bed.”

“It was so wonderful! Wasn’t it?”

“As far as it went.”

“Oh... But you’ll still sleep with me here, won’t you?”

“Sure. Sometimes. I really need some time at home. Do my laundry and stuff like that.”

“Sure, Tom. I can gather up mine, and we’ll do it together.”

“No. I need to do it alone. I need some room. It’s not like we’re lovers.”

“But I think I may be falling in love with you.”

“Oh? Well, try not to. But I do like you... Let’s just keep it sex—such as it is.”

“I’m sorry. I just can’t stand the thought of...”

“That’s okay, Rob. But I need time for La Marina and the Mill.”

That’s how we came to our agreement: The Tomcat would sleep with me on Monday, Wednesday and Friday nights after his carouse, which he explained was a somehow sacred ritual, his duty to celebrate with wild pachangas, and so on. And also because Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings were good sleep-later times. Otherwise our conflicting class schedules didn’t leave much possibility of daytime together except on weekends. It was something I could live with, and perhaps might help the Tomcat settle down a little bit at a time.

###

5.3 - THE TOMCAT

The Tomcat and I sealed our trysting agreement with a kiss, and he let me walk home with him to Audubon Street to the House of the Rising Sun. On the lovely afternoon walk that took us across a corner of the park, he told me about some former affairs, not in a boasting way, but more about who the guys were. I couldn't even feel jealous about his promiscuity, but I did feel even more intrigued with this blond faun. My afternoon with a faun! There's something about Tom—I can't put my finger on it—that reminds me of Michelangelo's Bacchus. I love the way he sometimes did a skip step walking beside me. And he warned me never to look at his roommate Joel's cock—like the Gorgon, it would turn you to stone.

That roommate, lying on the bed with a book in just his jockey shorts, stuck out his hand to shake mine. He oozed an atmosphere of sensuality and seduction. Quite appropriate that over his bed hung an image of a satyr in full rut. And I was gratified to hear the Vivaldi mandolin playing on his stereo. The apartment was definitely a beatnik "pad." Tom's bed was an unusual construction with a bookcase and thin mattress on what looked like a dining room tabletop on white marble capitols. An outrageous ebony elephant-head stand, curious paintings...

Tom immediately set to gathering up his laundry into a striped bag. Meanwhile Joel stretched lazily and remarked, "So you're the guy with the Mercedes?"

Almost embarrassed, I admitted I was. It was extraordinarily difficult not to look down at the monstrous shape lurking there, barely masked by white jockey shorts. "It's pretty old but still in good shape," I said for an excuse. Tom was on his hands and knees in the closet. My gaze locked with Joel's, and I didn't dare look away—because it would have been to look at his crotch. And his glittering eye seemed to dare me to look down.

"Hey, Joel," Tom called, "got anything needs washed? I can do some more."

"I think so," Joel answered and in a feline motion got up from the bed to rummage in his end of the closet and toss a few shirts and socks into the bag Tom held out. "Oh, and take these too," he added and stepped right out of his underwear. Only a glimpse of something long and dark stopped my breath before Joel turned away to the closet.

"He's shameless!" Tom laughed and to my consternation, patted Joel's bare buttock. "Put some pants on, buster, before I have to haul another statue back into the basement!"

Everything together, Tom took off on his bike to the laundromat on Magazine Street, and I walked back to the dorm in a whirlwind of emotions. So it wouldn't be the kind of settling down I'd had in mind, but it felt so good to think that at least some kind of relationship was starting, and to know that according to our schedule, late tonight when I'm asleep there would come a knock on the door of my new room in Phelps Hall.

After that knock, subsequent shenanigans, and snuggled sleep, in the morning Tom went to take a shower, and I dozed luxuriously. When I became aware that a second shower started in the bathroom, my prurient curiosity compelled me to get my toothbrush and investigate. You can imagine my surprise to find that this other suite-mate was a Negro! I'd heard they let one into the university, and just my luck... He did have a fantastic body, the soap very white on his skin.

Tom was all soapy too, and they were talking about something. He introduced me to this Adam as a former language lab student. While brushing, I spied on the two in the mirror, jealous in spite of myself. The young buck had a respectable endowment as one might expect. At one point he turned and bent over to pick up his soap, and Tom clutched his heart in a swift theatrical pose for my benefit and threw me a kiss. He can be so comical.

Waiting for Tom, I turned to my book on the Piccolomini Popes, a time of supreme grandeur. In spite of all the great reading for classes, I was finding them more demanding than I

expected. Two of my Profs, horror of horrors, gave only essay discussion tests that terrified me. Ask me facts, any kind of trivia, I love it, but I don't want to discuss the whys and therefores.

Closing the door behind him, Tom stood there all naked and clean, drying his long hair with my blue towel, and sighed, "I don't know if my heart can take it!"

"How can you possibly be attracted to a Negro?" I pouted.

"Like we used to say, as easy as falling off a log! Adam is so straight it kills me!" He pulled on his green corduroys and sighed, "The whole campus, and you had to get a room right next door to my grand passion! I mean, there he was with me, naked as a blackbird. That makes purely platonic adoration fairly difficult, don't you think?" Before Tom left, I quickly relieved him of any residual non-platonic urges caused by this chance encounter with Adam.

Actually the Tomcat's sleep-over schedule worked out beautifully. We also spent a good deal of time together on weekend afternoons (since he cashiered in the evenings), taking rides in my car around town, or on a Sunday up the River Road to plantation houses that Tom had never seen either. One of his free evenings, I took us to dinner at Commander's Palace, which Tom enjoyed but felt very out of place. We went shopping in Maison Blanche, and I bought him new corduroy pants and some nice Madras shirts. He was so grateful that I was embarrassed. It was wonderful doing my swim in the evenings, and as I turned on the laps, through the big glass wall I could see my Tomcat at his register there in the Snack Bar. And he could see me.

Of course, he was still going out in the Quarter almost every night and never had much to say about those times except that he danced with so and so. Ever so rarely, I went out with him to La Marina and endured the filth. And once I accompanied him to the Greek place which was even filthier. The prostitutes were straight out of some Fellini film. I really had to wonder how such an exotic flower as the Tomcat blossomed in such cesspools. He introduced me to any number of his friends, including a plump Indian guy with an American girlfriend. We'd see Raphael at one place or another, and I met many of the girls who were their dancing partners. One was an elf-like girl named Beth, as strangely out of place amongst the trolls and hags as Tom himself. Apart from those outings, I devoted my evenings to study, grateful that the distracting worries of finding sex and friendship were a thing of the past.

As the weeks rolled by into November, I found other worries, two acute problems. One was that my fears in the two courses were being disastrously confirmed by consistent Cs, and the other was Tom. He faithfully kept to our schedule and was always warm and affectionate. But more and more he began to look tired. Of course, the way he went out almost every night, and the schedule of classes, and cashiering... I wouldn't have the energy for all of that. He also grew listless in our lovemaking rituals, except when platonically primed by a shower room epiphany with Adam, but he insisted that he wasn't fooling around with anyone else.

Then there was the Wednesday in early November when I got up feeling sick with a cold and skipped classes. By early afternoon I was tired of lying in bed and went out to sit with a book in my rocker on the walkway in the warm sun. From there, I had a view down below of a piece of MacAlister Drive, and amongst the trees a stretch of sidewalk leading up to the dorm. In a few minutes, to my surprise, I saw Tom walking up the Drive. He turned up the sidewalk in my direction. I thought about calling down to him, but something made me keep quiet.

Since he knew I was supposed to be in class, maybe he was coming over to see Adam? Truthfully, that continuing friendship by now caused me no concern whatsoever. Standing by the top of the stairwell to surprise him, I heard Tom's footsteps ascending, but they stopped at the second floor. Then that distinctive knock he does, the "shave and a haircut" one. I peered over

the railing and could see just his feet by a doorway right below. And heard Tom's voice say, "Hey, Mark." And see the bottom of the door close.

Stunned, I gripped the railing and sought an explanation. None came to mind except my jealous suspicions. Back in my chair, without rocking, I waited for sounds of Tom's leaving, all the while longing to sneak downstairs and listen at the door. It was torment as minutes dragged on with no sounds from below, my mind tortured by images of what was going on behind that closed door. I waited impatiently for almost an interminable hour, with a few heart-stopping false-alarm door-openings below, before hearing one accompanied by Tom's rippling laugh and an impeccably Italian, "Ciao, Marcello." I watched his feet walk to the stairwell, heard his steps descending, then saw his back move down the sidewalk with that happy little skip step.

The rest of the day, on top of the cold, was a sheer hell of jealousy, anger, and hurt. I couldn't bear the thought of seeing Tom at the cash register, and so I had suitemate Ronnie bring me a bite of dinner from the cafeteria. All the tedious evening long I plotted what to say when the Tomcat showed up later at my door. The plans changed again and again, ranging from a total ranting fit to a reasonable, understanding discussion. Worn out with the cold, I fell asleep early without a clear decision about how to handle the situation.

The knock came at nearly three am, and Tom was distressed to find me ill. He felt my forehead and asked if I'd been drinking lots of liquids. He made me drink a big glass of water right then and there and then filled it again for later. Sitting by me on the bed, he stroked my cheek as I stared at him in a confusion of feelings. He asked, "Is something the matter?"

"Who's Marcello?"

"Oh... An old friend from when I lived in Robert Sharp."

"I want the truth."

"Oh... Okay, he's the first guy I ever screwed."

"And you're still doing it with him?"

"Yes. Between classes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday afternoons."

"And then you come sleep with me those nights too, you bastard!"

"Actually I call this Thursday morning. But Mark bumps like a bunny."

"I don't want to know. Why'd you lie to me? Why?"

"I didn't. I never promised you exclusivity! I told you before—I crave coitus! I need to plunge into the Bronze Eye!"

"Oh, shut up about your damned Bronze Eye! No, tell me the truth—is there anyone else besides this Mark downstairs?"

"Yes."

"Oh, for Chrissake! So who?"

"Joel."

"What? You said he's straight!"

"He is. I trade off with a girl named Jill. Just imagine! He can even suck himself off!"

"What? How can he be straight and..?"

"Last night we decided to stop fucking. He said if we didn't, he'd forget all about girls."

"My God! For two months you've been balling the three of us! I can't believe you're such an unbelievable liar! You son of a bitch!"

"I never lied, and I'm telling you the truth now. So you want the whole truth?"

"There's more? Now you're going to tell me you've been banging with Adam too?"

"Don't I wish? No. But I have humped a couple Greek sailor boys."

"Oh. Not those greasy foreigners! How revolting!"

“Just pretty young ones—while they’re still versatile. Those dark Mediterranean eyes...”

“You’re a depraved whore! I can’t believe you come in here to me after you’ve...”

“I’m a depraved slut. I don’t charge. And I only did the Greeks on Saturday nights.”

“Oh, shut up! Oh, God! You’re so disgusting!”

“What are you complaining about? It was no skin off your nose.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’ve been getting what you want—a hard cock to suck, a warm mouth... Why should I let my other talents go to waste? Oh...”

“Oh? Something the matter?”

“I just remembered about that orgy three weeks ago. I wound up in a sandwich!”

“You’re horrible! Get out! I don’t want to...”

But Tom stood up from the bed and with a sneaky smile, dropped his green pants. That perfect penis nestled among the blond curls gave me a twitching salute. Before I could protest, he was up astraddle my chest and abruptly cut off our discussion.

The next couple weeks passed like that, sharing the Tomcat with the unknown Mark downstairs. At least Joel was out of the running. I didn’t hear about any more Greeks, but Tom boasted one night about seducing some cute freshman in Robert Sharp Hall. He was particularly elated because the kid was a virgin—till then—and “his little bottom is as round and fuzzy and sweet as a peach!” All I could do was grit my teeth and try not to listen. When at last I wrapped my thighs around his blond head, I didn’t have to.

But at the same time, though the sex with Tom was still basically very satisfying, I kept feeling angry and hurt and in spite of myself soon began to pick fights with him. All that tension and stress didn’t help with my dismal situation in classes either, and I was nearing academic despair with all the essays. It wasn’t supposed to be like this.

One Friday night after my swim, when I swung past Tom’s register, he told me he’d be over to my room early. He wasn’t going to La Marina tonight because he had a surprise for me—something to cheer me up. The mystery was invigorating as I waited with my history books, rocking patiently with Beethoven piano trios. Tom’s knock woke me suddenly. He stood there in the doorway, empty-handed, grinning wickedly.

“So what’s the surprise?” I asked dubiously.

The Tomcat stepped back and motioned off to his right. Into the frame of the doorway stepped the exquisite man-child I had, shall we say, noticed several times at the pool, who smiled at me with such lips that I got weak in the knees. He tossed a flop of brown curls off his forehead and said, “Hi, I’m Leon.” Dumbstruck, I moved back to let them in. Grinning, Leon continued, “Gee, you’re that gorgeous swimmer guy!”

“Yes, I guess I am. Rob Hayes,” I said, extending my hand to a warm, firm grip.

Leon literally bubbled, “I can’t believe it’s you!” He excitedly held my hand in both of his. “God! I’ve been in love with you for weeks!” His bright blue eyes flashed with desire, and my knees started to buckle.

Tom closed the door. “Isn’t it a small world? I mean, Leon meets me, and I know you—” He stepped behind Leon, who was still staring at me, reached around the boy’s waist. “Just take a look at this!” Tom chortled, unsnapping and pushing down Leon’s pants. Abruptly revealed was an organ of classical proportion and perfect coloration that... “And he’s never done fellatio,” Tom announced. “I haven’t touched it, I swear—at least not with my mouth.”

By now Leon was blushing and looking down at his wondrous penis rising. “Nobody’s ever sucked on my dick, that’s the truth!” He glanced back up at me with a beseeching look that

destroyed any hope of controlling the situation. In a flurry of thrown clothes we all leapt onto my big bed, where Tom and I had our individual ways with the succulent youth—simultaneously—in the process removing any last vestiges of his virginity. And again in the early morning light. Leon was angelic sprawling on my silk sheets.

That day, Saturday, the three of us went for a fun ride up the River Road and stopped for lunch in a nice little Cajun restaurant where the gumbo was spectacular. I would never have imagined such a triangle feeling so comfortable! Adorable Leon turned out to be an intense Math major with a very quick sense of humor and a naiveté that made my heart melt. Squeezed between Tom and me in the front seat, a hand on each of our thighs, he groaned blissfully, “I must have died and gone to heaven!” I felt rather the same. In the afternoon before Tom had to go off to work, we played another energetic round of “Ravish Little Leon Three Ways from Sunday.” The kid was insatiable. And since Saturday was the Tomcat’s “night off” for the Greeks, I had the pleasure of Leon’s delightful lust all night long.

As a matter of fact, by Sunday morning I was so enthralled with the boy that I barely noticed not seeing Tom all day. We spent some time at the Zoo, getting to know each other as we gawked at the poor creatures in their prisons. Leon’s story of adolescent sexual confusion was so familiar and touching, and his tale of “falling in love” with Tommy at the freshman dining hall check-in was told with sweet, childlike romanticism.

It seems that the consummation of that passion was more of his own seducing than of Tom’s. Leon had heard right away that the cute cashier guy was gay, and so he found this Tommy of great interest in his virgin fantasies. Then in the Music Room in the UC a couple weeks ago Leon had discovered Tommy writing a letter and sat on the sofa by him with his book. “I couldn’t really read a word in my book!” Leon giggled.

“Finally I pretended to doze off and let my hand kind of flop so it was touching his leg. All I did was move my finger a tiny bit...” In short, the Tomcat led the foolish, aggressive virgin out of the Music Room outside onto the sidewalk and warned him that he was playing with fire. Up in his dorm room Leon first learned the art of making fire from one Sir Roger Wrighte-Rowndleigh. “That’s what he calls his dick,” Leon laughed. A surprising piece of information...

“But I’ve been in love with you too, Robbie, the whole time!” Leon assured me brightly, perhaps sensing my vague, confused jealousy. “And now I’ve got both of you gorgeous guys! God! I’m so happy!” He scampered around in circles on the walk in front of a puzzled elephant. And to my surprise I felt the same, now having two glorious lovers.

If nothing else, the next week’s amorous marathon kept my mind off the woes of my essay exams. With or without the Tomcat, Leon and I were inseparable, except for classes, which I experienced in an impenetrable haze of contentment. Leon swam with me in the evenings. The nights Tom was with us were triply fantastic, each focusing on our favorite orifices. In our tender tangles there were so many mouths and things to put in them that one easily became confused.

Right after my art history class that Friday afternoon, just as I was about to pay midday homage to Leon’s erection, there was Tom’s knock at the door! Something alarming in its force. When I opened, he was standing there quite pale, with a terribly distraught look in his eye. “They shot President Kennedy!” he choked and stumbled into my arms.

I was shocked speechless. Pants still down around his ankles, Leon held us both, and the two of them started crying on my shoulders. My tears didn’t come. In the midst of sobs of anguish, he told us all he’d heard the President was shot in his car in Dallas. We held him tight between us till the lament subsided and then kissed each other hungrily. The calm we found was merely another level of shock.

When Tom staggered out to go tell Joel, who was home in bed sick, Leon and I curled up for a fitful nap, all thought of sex banished by the awful tragedy. As an historian, I was terribly impressed by the political momentousness of this November 22, 1963. Leon wept more for the beautiful man who was killed in such a way—in the midst of a parade in his honor! The poetic irony of it was almost mythical!

At dinnertime, the Tomcat sat sadly dejected at his register, as was just about everyone else in the place, but he made our change with little tickles in the hand and assured me he'd be knocking tonight. Leon said that we'd be waiting up and then blushed furiously when he realized the guys behind him in line must have heard. They did give us some looks, but I was used to that when with Tom—he had such a reputation! Over our dinners we talked about being “out” like Tom. Leon wasn't sure he wanted people in general to know he liked boys. Tommy wasn't faggoty at all, but really masculine. But everyone simply knew. I rather fancied myself like Tom in that. But for young Leon, I guess it was really something to worry about.

Still emotionally distraught, we agreed to do some studying and then around nine went for a swim. From the Snack Bar, Tom's eye was often on us as we splashed along the lap lanes. Leon's style is a little sloppy, but he could shape up quickly. All the exercise and closeness of Leon's nearly naked body enflamed my desires once again, but back in my room he insisted we hold off doing it till Tommy got there.

Listening to marvelous Vivaldi lute concerti, we played gin rummy on the bed in our underwear, during which Leon asked about how I met up with our lover. He got the whole wonderful story, including the truth about the Tomcat's ‘schedule.’ “You mean he's got another guy downstairs?” he moaned. The next moment he brightened and asked with a lift of the eyebrow, “You think maybe we could...?” I was adamant that I would not take part in any four-way constructions. The game kept us from thinking about the horrible assassination or talking about other serious things, and I was soon on fire with desire again. I couldn't keep my hands off him, but he was also equally adamant about “waiting up” for Tommy as promised.

It was nearly one when the knock came, and we both raced to the door. Immediately he was wrapped in our arms and our special triple kiss. But rather than let us hustle him into bed, Tom pulled away and sat in the rocker. “Wait, guys...” he sighed, wringing his beautiful hands.

“Is my Pussycat still sad?” Leon purred and mussed those blond locks.

“I can't believe he's dead. My God!”

“Tom, it's history now,” I mumbled.

“I went to La Marina to meet Leah. We did his dance for the last time. No one will ever dance the President Kennedy again!”

“Come on, Tom, don't think about it anymore tonight.”

“Yeah, Tommy, let's get into bed.”

“Wait, honey, I can't stop thinking about it—the tragedy! I feel like the whole world has changed. All evening at work I've thought on it. And on me. And on you guys, watching you splashing in the swimming pool, my mermen!”

“Well, long enough then. Come on, merboy, help me get him over to the bed.”

“No, Rob, please... Sweet Leon... I've got something I want to say. To mourn for JFK—in honor of him—I've decided to be celibate for one year!”

“What!? Are you out of your mind?”

“Tommy! That's so long! Just make it a week!”

“He couldn't make it for even a week. Come on, Tomcat, be reasonable.”

“Don't you want me anymore?”

“Sure I do, Leon. And you too, dear Rob... But watching you two merguys together, I knew that it was accomplished. You two go together perfectly. You both want lovers to be true to forever? Well, now you’ve got each other.”

“But I can be true to two lovers, Tommy, honey.”

“No, baby. You just stick with Cock Robin here. Don’t worry, I’m not going to be doing it with anybody else now for a long time.”

“Oh, for Christ’s sake! Here, Leon, help me get his pants off.”

“No, Rob, please... But I do want you two to take your shorts off!” Tom insisted and once Leon and I were naked, said, “Rob, my dear, now you’ve got no choice. You’re going to have to give our sweet Leon here what he needs. And the first thing is this...” He made Leon stand by the bed and had me kneel down beside him to contemplate the boy’s buttocks. “See the tiny peach-fuzz all over the curves. Here, touch it lightly with the palm of your hand. Yeah, like that. Hey, no laughing, Leon!”

“But it really tickles!”

“We’re being serious down here,” Tom said sternly. He made Leon bend over some more and pull his cheeks apart. “See, Rob!” he chortled, “Lo and behold! The mystical Bronze Eye! See the little petals radiating from the dark center of the flower.” Then he gave me detailed instructions on “contemplating the Eye,” and, in spite of my earlier reluctance, I actually found myself fucking Leon. “Just feel it,” Tom whispered, “feel the sheer reality of you in him—yes, yes, all the way...” It was tremendously erotic with sweet Leon moaning and wiggling his hips and Tom there watching with glittering brown eyes, and I came like gangbusters.

He made us change places and told Leon, “Remember, baby, you’re about to take Rob’s virginity, and it’s something for you both to treasure forever!” Whispering in my ear, Tom gently talked me through Leon fucking me. As terribly as I dreaded the penetration, there was no pain, and I forgot about anything in the world except the feeling of my Leon moving inside me, filling me to my fingertips, and the rhythm of our hips.

When we’d collapsed on the bed, Tom said, “How perfect! Congratulations on your consummation. My two blessed ones! But it’s getting late, little bunnies. Now I’ve got to go downstairs and break it off with Mark, and that won’t be anywhere near as much fun.”

“Don’t go, Tommy,” Leon whimpered and clung to him.

When the Tomcat kissed me goodbye, I started to cry.

###

5.4 - THE RENUNCIATION

(Epistle 11/24/63)

Dear Sally,

Only now on this somber Sunday evening on my steel island am I finally pulling it somehow together after the devastation of two days ago. But the state of shock continues. I sit and stare stupidly at my reflection in the huge dark glass along the pool, wondering who this is looking back at me like a total dope. (Meanwhile Rob and Leon are out there swimming laps.)

It really amazes me how the assassination seems to have changed the world. Now I've never been very political, and couldn't even vote for Kennedy when he was running, but in the back of my mind he'd always seemed such a bright hope. And now he's murdered! Nothing in my life has ever shaken me like this before.

And another thing that amazes me is how I've suddenly started thinking and feeling things differently. As though JFK's death marked the true end of my childhood—I'm after all now 21—and maybe this is what happens when you grow up. Lord knows. I only know that I keep crying when I think about it. Leah and I did the ceremonial last President Kennedy leaping tango on Friday night in La Marina, weeping copiously the while. (Ah! There's little Leon at the edge of the pool making a funny face at me through the window! He's such a clown.)

What I mean about thinking and feeling differently is that by Friday evening I had taken an oath of celibacy for a year in honor of this great man's passing. I don't know how I got the idea, but it just seemed so right. Maybe part of it was because I suddenly became aware of what an idyllic life I've been living. New Orleans has been New Olympus for me. I am the Divine Debauch, Dionysus, blissfully dwelling amongst beautiful, immortal Olympians. Especially during these past exhausting months of their embraces.

From my new perspective I see them all for the gods they are. Joel is Zeus, ready to jump anything anytime. If I hadn't run into Pan a couple years ago, I'd have sworn... Mark is most definitely Ares, with mighty horns, full of war with himself and intent on winning. Rob is apparently the ethereal Apollo, and Leon is without doubt delicious Eros incarnate. And we have all been ecstatically fucking each other silly. Stunned by the President's death into this new awareness, I suddenly felt the need to pause in the holy orgy to regroup, to find out who this new young man is that I've become. When I tried to explain my reasoning to Raj, he said he understood perfectly, and it would be a great spiritual exercise.

My oath understandably made some radical changes in relationships. As you know, Joel and I had already broken it off a couple weeks ago—before we both lost our minds. Talk about divine madness! We're still affectionate, but both know that for sanity's sake we can't go there anymore. Maybe part of my decision was this first renunciation. No, wait. The first was from Adam, who came by my register yesterday all broken up about the assassination, and tells me he's decided to drop out of school! Like people all over the place, we both started crying again. So I am doubly devastated losing this precious closeness with my beautiful black boy. But he'll stay in NOLA because of his girlfriend Janeen (whom I've yet to meet) and find a job.

Anyway, back to renunciations. The rest happened on Friday night. First I broke with Rob and Leon. That was lots easier than I expected because I very fundamentally gave them to each other. In my capacity as Notre Dame de la Rue, I presided over the consummation of their nuptials (which caused me several times to regret my oath, but my resolve held firm). The two of them *in flagrante delecto* was a sight to arouse a saint! I can see it rendered in erotic chiaroscuro over an altar lit by candles. Anyway, it's so wonderful to see them happy together, as they are at this very moment over there swimming their laps in the pool.

Breaking with Mark afterwards was an ordeal, to say the least. At first he was surprised and pleased to see me at his door on an unusual (very late) Friday night, and he grabbed me in a naked embrace. I pushed away, saying, "No, hon, I'm too upset about President Kennedy."

"Yeah, it's so terrible," Mark mumbled, "I can't believe it." And next thing we were both sniffing up a storm. Then he pulled me toward his bed, wanting to screw. I resisted and tried to explain how the whole world has changed now, and how I'd vowed to be celibate for a year, a symbolic act, you know, an oath of celibacy as a ritual of mourning.

"What a crock of shit!" he exclaimed and rubbed his hard on against my leg.

"No, it's a spiritual sort of thing," I insisted and resisted. "I feel like I've been drowning and have to come up for air to breathe."

"Just sit down then and breathe." Mark pulled out his desk chair for me. "Wait, I'll get you a glass of water." He disappeared into the bathroom, leaving me to wonder how to get out of there. A few sips of water did help calm me down. "Now let's take off your clothes," Mark began, reaching for my belt. "It's time for beddy-bye."

"My God," I choked, "you didn't hear a word I said."

"Sure I did," Mark laughed as he and I struggled over my belt buckle. He suddenly grabbed me by the wrists. "Look, Tom, you don't just come in here and say I can't fuck you anymore! Because that's a total crock of shit!"

The hard look in his eye frightened me. "Mark, no, let me go!" But he didn't let go.

"No way, buddy!" he snapped and forced me over to the bed.

My protests and struggles were to no avail because Mark is a big guy. In spite of my thrashing and fighting, he managed to push me down onto the bed, pull down my pants, and turn me over, shall we say, bottoms up. "I'll scream!" I protested, bucking and twisting under him.

"Just try it!" Mark snapped and crammed a handful of sheet into my mouth. "I'm going to fuck you all night long!" Utterly overpowered and gagged, I saw no choice but to cooperate and realized it was actually poetic justice for Mark to rape me. Then he almost lived up to his threat. Actually I was impressed with his pacing and control. Several times while being pounded into the mattress during his crescendos, I thought I would faint.

It was utterly mortifying that my resolve of celibacy had lasted not much more than five hours. Now I had to start all over again. Mark and I slept the last couple hours of the night. But by the time I left, he'd accepted that this was indeed our last time. He was very sad, swearing that he'd never go after any other guy but me. He'd just have to go back to dating girls. I didn't really believe him, but it was nice to hear.

Yesterday, Saturday, after work at lunch, I moped around in the park in a distraught state. Everything was so different somehow. And everybody I saw wore the same expression of grief. But when I went out last night to La Marina, I couldn't tell any difference! The juggernaut of divine debauchery rolls on unphased even by the passing of the mighty. I tried to keep up, dancing with various nocturnal ladies, but my heart wasn't in it. A walk to the Gin Mill didn't do much for me either, so I sat in the Napoleon House where there was a vague sense of mourning in the air. And the classical music was appropriate.

I've just been staring out the window at the pool again. Enthralled by the grace of Rob's stroke through the water. Beyond the glass, he and lovely Leon are in another world.

In the Nap House nursing a beer, I marveled at the strange feeling of being celibate—once again—looking at a cute guy across the way and not plotting how to get him into bed. It was a remarkable feeling of independence, of freedom. The thought of having sex with someone began to seem weird, almost surreal. Soon Rose and Ben showed up and sat with me, both also

very depressed. In her earthy way Rose is so beautiful, the Aphrodite of New Olympus, and I guess Ben might even be Hermes. Maybe that's stretching it, but he could be an immortal hero. At any rate, I feel like he's a younger brother, especially now that they're together.

After we shared our remarks of grief for JFK, I revealed my oath of memorial celibacy, and they both laughed in my face. "You won't last a week!" Ben chuckled into his beer. Rose asked how long it was so far, and honestly I had to admit it was less than 24 hours. This time they both roared with laughter, but I wasn't offended. Their friendship and gentle derision only, shall we say, stiffened my resolve. I soon left the two of them there, really the perfect lovers that she and I once merely seemed. But they don't dance merengues.

For the first time I can remember, I made my way home alone on the streetcar with no regrets for being by myself. And went to sleep in my little bed so close to Joel and whoever the girl with him was. (Turned out to be someone I've seen around named Marsha.) I could even lie there and think back on our storms of Olympian passion without wanting more.

Today the strange feelings have continued right up to now. Now I've been intentionally celibate for more than 24 hours. I'll just take it one day at a time. I spent a good deal of the afternoon with Raj talking about all the political ramifications of the assassination. He sure has a broad perspective of history. And we arranged that he will go out to the folks' place with me for Thanksgiving. It will be good to have his company there.

Anyway, Sally, please don't let my new resolve influence you in any way. I hope your new George is still performing well! Write me with the juicy details. I'm afraid my letters now will probably be fairly dull, considering. Sorry.

Always, Tommy

###