

CHAPTER THREE

I like the sky at this hour. I'm reminded of what seems like a hundred reasons for staying alive and healthy. And co-operative. I like that nurse, that one with the small nose. She has a very small nose. And she's not petulant, not, what's the word, not solicitous. She's a fine person. I'd put her up in that sky. She could claim it. I'll bet no one would object.

I think about marrying her. About being married with her, I mean. I do that constantly, with every one of them. She introduced me once to an ex-co-worker of hers. She'd stopped in to see her. I didn't get the feeling I was on display until now. You know, I'll bet she shouldn't have brought her in here with her.

The sky changes so fast. I'll bet there's no place in the world where the sky is so quick to pretend as it is here. One moment it's blank; it says nothing; you don't notice it. Then I look out and it's right there in front of my window. Like it knows me, like a brother or something. Imagine if it could talk. It would talk about sleep. It must be *the* authority on sleep. *The* authority on sleep even if it's never slept at all. How could it? It's always changing clothes. And what a wardrobe; what a selection of outfits to choose from. It wouldn't talk though, even if it could. It's probably come to realize that all the talk in the world has never been able to provide sleep to them that need it most. What dedication it has - in spite of such an exhibition as we put on for it. Even after seeing me - or seeing Aslo and his plans hit the wall, drop and bounce for a moment and then roll into a corner and be nothing. Seeing that, it can still find a reason for trying out a new fashion that no one's ever seen before. It must make painters kick themselves for not being able to paint it four, five, six times a day, each day, everyday.

You should be able to walk into a bookstore and buy a book of skies. I'd send one to Margaret and one to Aslo, and then I'd buy a different one for myself. There'd have to be a whole shelf of different editions, different collections of skies. And, if I had enough money, and

my wits about me, and the addresses of each of my wives, I'd send them one too. And I can't forget poor Natalie, with the small nose. I'd surprise her and see how she'd react when I told her these skies have seen her too. I could make up something about what these skies think of her small, small nose.

I'd like to call this A Book of Skies. But really, it's called The Strength of Weak Woman - after St. Augustine.

After I left Frannie, I drove from St. John's straight to Port aux Basques; from one end of this endless island to the other. Ten hours; perfect road conditions. I never had any intention of crossing the gulf. I could never leave this. Never. I felt the heritage in me begin to well up the moment I left the city. Like the last pay cheque, I put it too into my wallet and never questioned whether or not it was mine. I felt it and encouraged myself to feel it because I wanted it and because no one ever bothered to tell me that I couldn't have it.

I was going to spend the night in Port aux Basques before I started back to St. John's on a trip that I hoped would take me the rest of my life. After I registered and looked over my motel room, I directly went looking for the smallest full-grown woman I could find.

In the first bar I went to - 'The Port o' Call' - I didn't see anything small. I didn't expect anything small enough would come in either, but I drank a full bottle of beer anyway and nearly enjoyed it enough to forget about filling my other order and, instead, spend the last hour of the night here, drink two more, listen to the guys around the bar talk about which cigarettes were better and get back to the motel where I knew sleep would come easily. But I guess I didn't want to lighten my perceptions that much so I went out

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onto the street and walked to another bar. I read the sign that said 'Port Side' and once inside, remembering now the obligatory red and black interior, I felt the pattern and

ordered a beer and sized up the other customers. First I saw two small girls at one table who were apparently alone. But they didn't look full-grown, probably because they weren't talking to each other. But there was another small girl who sat at a table adjacent to them who definitely was full-grown. After a few minutes I walked over to her – forgot your beer at the

bar, she said - and I said Hello and asked her if I could sit with her. I'm sure that simple 'with' broke through.

I won't sharpen the focus on the rest of this. I'll say only that neither of us found the other in any way extraordinary. And neither, I'm sure, did either one of us discover some previously unknown facet of our characters. What we did, naturally, was just revel in the loneliness of sex and touch and just talk about Port aux Basques and Arnold's Cove, where, after I had asked if she'd ever been to Arnold's Cove and she said 'No', I told her I was from.

I thought about her as much as I could (trying to make everything significant) for I definitely was in the company of normalcy. I knew though, as much as I know the smell of no big deal, that I could have easily handled abnormalcy, if the need to would have happened to have arisen. But it didn't. So there.

Port aux Basques was - and still is, no doubt - everything that every serious Newfoundland community has struggled for its whole lifetime to *not* be. The hick spirit that breeds the self-conscious appreciation of our life in Newfoundland is sick in Port aux Basques. For example, nothing in Port aux Basques recommends itself to the visitor except the fact that you can leave from either end. Via a pseudo-professional ferry service one can push oneself to the mainland; or, on the Trans Canada Highway that leaves the town at a dead run one can enter into the actual Newfoundland mode. Port aux Basques,

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more than any other stationary place on the island is an old mattress dripping ... and it smells.

In this town everything that ought to be served cold is served warm, and everything that tastes best warm is too hot. Every food outlet is a low budget and lower interest confectionery. And if I bothered to look deeply into this most profound of inconsequential I could make Port aux Basques disappear forever.

For how important is Port aux Basques except as a last resort? Is it really anything more than a silly attempt to keep afloat an incoherent present on the pontoons of a history- less past?

The mood there is filthy, thick, stunned, and slimy. A runny albumin and a deflated gray yolk. Marie herself was of that blasted shade. Of course I liked her. And, of course, I went back to her later when I attempted, for the second time, to begin my march home, after a laughable series of escapades, about two hours' drive away in St. George's.

I also noticed more smiling fat in Port aux Basques than anywhere else. I'll grant you that maybe we owe to this most masculine of excuses - I speak of that intuitive lumbering behind grocery bags, baby carriages, and open windows - this smiling, squint-eyed fat, I suppose is the sufficient cause for our having survived the speedy winnowing of the planet's species. But really, where does that leave us? What hope have we? What redemption - think of bodily resurrection ... and try not to be overcome with chagrin - can we expect? I tell you, without hesitating, that there is nothing of any meaning to be found in Port aux Basques.

Think of the range of occupations that we commit our bodies to. Go through the yellow pages. They are, all of them, in Port aux Basques. Now pick out the one that would give meaning or value or even spice to your being there. Not any of them. Where is even a hollow role, played, as in the case of Marie, like a tambourine under the dark clouds, in a boat, on a fishless pond, atop the flat summit of a mountain. There can be no

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suspense in this vacuous community of shells and sputtering candle flames. Sex becomes like a dry run, or an accidental pre-conscious death. You don't wake up in the midst of it; or even after it's over because you never really went to sleep. I'm convinced that neither of us would ever come to see what we were engaged in as evidence that we were important. If we drew any 'conclusion' it was that, well, there wasn't really anything wrong with this, you know. And, maybe, if the occasion ever presents itself again, we'll align ourselves on its track and repeat the process.

So after a couple of days, or was it the next day, when the sun was directly overhead, I left this town of many pancakes. As I slid up and over the gloomy black hills that keep Port aux Basques where it ought to stay I came upon a newly resurfaced span of highway and gladly welcomed the deepening of intent that driving at a constant speed will bring on. This always causes me to fasten my seat belt and also contracts the perception of the empty space inside the

car. I had phoned Aslo that morning. "Good," he said. "You're only a couple of hours from St. George's. Please get a hold of Margaret Aaron at a place called Indian Mountain Resort. You want to help, don't you?" Well of course I did. I'd read Aslo's essay. As a matter of fact I'd helped him flesh it out; though naturally I didn't feel about it as he did. But I suppose the best way to get out from under your own cause is to join another under his. So, "Telephone Margaret Aaron," "Call Margaret, she's just ready to leave for St. George's." I phoned the Indian Mountain Resort and Margaret Aaron wasn't there. So I called Aslo back and he said O.K., she'd left already and was hitchhiking. All right, so what does she look like; I'll leave now. Light complexion; wearing an engineer's cap this morning. You won't miss her. According to Aslo, this Margaret could just as easily probably pass for a man.

You want to be told why Aslo, who was 'treating' me because I had used three women and was, prior to leaving her, in the process of using-up Frannie, would trust me with another. Now that I think of it, I'm not sure that Aslo saw me the way I saw myself.

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Or maybe he thought that Margaret could not be used. No one has ever told me how close Margaret and Aslo were. Margaret may remember if she and I ever discussed Aslo; I don't.

Now, it's not my practice to pick up hitchhikers. Naturally, the first one I saw, I pulled off the road for. I remember it now. Just the other side of a mile or so of road that

passes through what is known as 'The Wreckhouse' I saw a person hitchhiking. Marie told me later that 'The Wreckhouse', which is not a thing, is the place where the wind comes down the side of a valley and regularly blows transport trucks off the highway. And I found that interesting. Anyway, the hitchhiker was sitting on the guardrail with his hands clasped tightly around the straps of the knapsack on his back. The words on the sign by his feet blended into the dull mosaic of the gravel shoulder "South"? Is that what it said? South? He was walking east. I was not able to get a close look because I was concentrating on bringing my car to a quick stop while also avoiding at the same time being struck from behind.

I studied this hitchhiker through the rearview mirror. He limped a little. He had on an engineer's cap, which I hadn't noticed before, full and irritably balanced on top of her head. I knew it wasn't a man. Her ears were those of a girl. She was older than a girl but her ears were

girl's ears. I reached over and opened both doors on the passenger's side. She put her things in the back seat and herself in the front. I made a joke about her sign and she laughed. Then she said her name was Margaret. I told her mine was Karl and handed her a bag of chips that was between us on the seat. She had both hands in her coat pockets. I told her she could open the bag whenever she wanted. She said O.K. and that she would.

Right here, I can only relate what happened telescopically. And, besides, mixed with it will be some things that didn't register until later.

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I looked over at her legs but saw instead a sort of pinkish blur as her hands jerked as something - skinned frogs perhaps - spilled from her sleeves. They started a slow motion clawing at the bottom button of her jacket. She seemed to be forcing herself to look straight ahead while thumbs and fists mauled each button or snap. A knarled mesh of veins, bones smooth and pink-green; her hands weren't related in the slightest to the white face. Her lips, pursed or tightened, and always full, betrayed a strong and a meaningful age on a face that didn't know those hands.

Only the pavement and its undulating glare could flatten the shock of this absurdity. This was Margaret Aaron. "Telephone Margaret." "Call Margaret, she's just ready to leave for St. George's."

Of course I speak from a straight jacket of anger; of course, the whole bloody pig pie is a concoction of mine. What else do you expect? Have I not said that it's my fault? Have I not already tabled enough evidence to put me away for good? for the sake of good? for the deposition of evil? Probably not.

Of course I have. And, of course, so too could I slough off the blame and the anger and the resentment too, don't you know. Like this:

Imagine my consternation (as they say) when - totally by pure mistake - I let Margaret accompany me on my search. I let Margaret get into bed with my armour still aboard of me. And, not content to let my sheen reflect her SOS, I transmitted one of my own. Then another. And another. "Come away quickly," my guardian angel cried. But - no surprise - by then I was

too peculiar, too unusual to let myself drip out of Margaret's arms, Margaret's effortless pin. Who was I to think I could rise above, or run around, or even sneak under Margaret's promise? Better men than me....

Why sure I could blame Margaret. Blame her for her tendentious smile, beige eyes, that promised victory. Victory over the lazy thinking that had always been so easy for me to justify in the wake of all my previous defeats. And victory in this war would

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entail un hoped for spoils, yousee. I would no longer be surrounded by the ever-present refuse of my ever-popular insipid sincerity. Four wives and no closer to a return on my investment. Is it any wonder that I too was prone to disingenuous means?

That's how I slough it off. Trouble is, it doesn't stick to Margaret. Remind me to get back to this. I'm not yet too keen on dragging Margaret into this this far. I'd like to leave her out. This should be my story now, not hers. I like to think of that period when I actually loved Margaret as an interval. Or as the ten-page insert of full-colour illustrations

in a book about allergies. For it was like being stuck in the endgame of one of my seven ages where I became so sick, so troubled at having to start over that, rather than make plans, I just slowed down and let myself be dragged over those days, dragged right up to death's door.

On the first day, the day I picked her up, we drove as far as Deer Lake; that is, right past St. George's, where Aslo waited for us, about whom neither of us had said a word. I remember what I felt when I said I wanted to get a room before we ate supper and also that I wanted to eat an early supper. Really, I wanted to sit in one of those staid motel chairs and unwind. Or more like unharness.

Margaret came out of the bathroom, left the light on, and came straight towards me. Her jeans were unfastened. She said that she probably could have stayed in the bathroom for another ten minutes and probably have gotten them closed but thought probably I'd do it for her. As I zipped and snapped (with a delicacy that I'm sure she didn't notice) she said why not order room service. I told her to go ahead and then I went into the bathroom myself. I can see me staring into the mirror and saying you're in there someplace.

Somehow I told her I was a doctor. Now I also remember that, instead of ordering a meal, she just picked up the telephone and said send up two of whatever is featured. I'm sure I didn't have anything to say about that.

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I'm also sure that along with my very real and very serious and very ethical interest in her creatureliness, I found her captivating. You will not take as a sign of disrespect my urge now to enclose her appearance with my well-chosen words.

Back of her hands, which by the bye, I could neatly abstract out of sight, being a doctor and all, was that aura. Now, I don't claim to understand what perceives that aura but it nevertheless, as you know, attends and makes solid the absorption of the body through the standard senses. Neither do I know, like I know the smell of no bearings, what that aura is. Maybe it's just another word for a personality. But do I have to be precise? I feel precise. Maybe my language isn't precise but when it's wending through my head it is. I don't have a reason for concentrating on her appearance, except perhaps to keep one foot firmly in the material. My reason for that is to prove that the material is not just material. A cruel and hopeless tautology maybe but so what else is new? or known? as well as the smell of no hope, for instance?

I don't say that there was passion at that early stage. And, given the fact that my doctor ruse, as I have already said, was so initially compatible, I think that it could be shown that passion was one of the last things to prick me. I don't think it did until the night was half over.

After supper - the first meal I ever fed her - we went to the lounge for a drink. While she sipped gin through a straw, I remember like a nightmare wondering whether or not I should ask her if she wanted to dance. But I think that was the extent of my uncomfortableness. It's stupid, you know, in these nightclubs because you can't talk without screaming. We just looked around. Let's go back to the room and talk. "O.K.," she said. It lasted, the talk, for the next two days.

I can observe my body as it falls down a set of stairs. Yet I found it almost impossible to watch over myself as I repeatedly dug in my heels in the face of her iron and steel reign. She was older than me by six and a half years (so make that seven) and had

gray hair where I still had black; and a wiry mixture of gray and brown where my hair was ashen. But only this much, in fact, was older than me for I had become old a couple of days before I met her. Of course she had her years of experience packed into a soapbox from which she could orate on the topic of 'personal relationships' but I was so goddamn adept at making her see the banality of all previous couplings - both hers before me and mine before her - that she was never able to pose for long as a 'value free psychologist of human failing'. No, we were, we kept discovering, the same fish, both of us, and swam with or against the same currents and sank to the same bottom when attacked by predators and reaped from the same salty waters what little nourishment there was to get from this cursed ocean of infirmity that Aslo and Professor Coincidence had dipped us into. Newfoundland, humanity, and the insincere voice of Aristotle.

For it was, and I know it, as I know now the smell of nonsense, it was Aristotle, that plastic monster, who absolved by default each and every sin we handed ourselves over to the other for. Whether she was lost in me or only just forsaken? I don't understand, do I? But I was lost in her; and a strict diet of Newfoundland, an incoherent human nature, and a mundane Aristotelian seriousness was all that we ever shared and was never enough.

I have recounted how her sad hands nearly whipped me back into myself. But I have not said how they later came to take me by the throat and why I still feel them in my hair and how, now that they are severed from her forever, they make me mount this final assault on cynicism. Only because I have loved those gory hands do I now feel the need to save every one of us.

Usable pockets, on a sweater, or in a pair of slacks, are not so common in women's clothes as they are in men's. This might be changing, but it's too late now. So, although Margaret never went outside the door without available pockets, or at least something for

each hand to hold onto, when we were together, alone, in the car or finally registered in a motel her rapt hands attended everything she said and did. Now, truth to tell, she was a normally

pretty woman, and I do not want to talk about that now. And she was healthy too, in a normal way. Perhaps her knees irritated her at times. When I asked about it it was usually all right. I suppose she was a few inches over five feet and weighed then about 140 pounds. So, not thin and not fat, had close-cropped hair and wore mostly white. When she was young, a kid, she said, she played an 'adjusted' game of tennis regularly. I never met any of her friends so I'm unable to say anything analytical about the way she interacted with anyone she was close to. But I'm sure nothing unusual or weird was characteristic of her past. Except for what I have said already. But we have all lived in weird times ourselves. So what?

But they were always there, her hands, and when I went with her she let herself come out through them over and over. What anger or resentment she felt is one thing I'm still not clear about. She must have felt some. With a sensitivity as expansive as hers was, she couldn't have escaped standing under the light of it herself. But with me at least, she was usually bigger than self-pity.

Bigger than self-pity but not so stony that she didn't mourn. I never thought that I encouraged this in her but I think that I did. She was a companion of mine in Deer Lake, but a lover in Steady Brook. Going southwest from Deer Lake (that's back toward St. George's), and just before one reaches the arrogance of Corner Brook is a selection of about a dozen little communities and local improvement districts. One of them is called Steady Brook. Whereas I myself had met 'in love' with Margaret in the afternoon following the first night we spent together (I might have occasion to speak about that particular day later), she came to want to trust me - I call that 'love' now - during our first night in Steady Brook, the place we picked to celebrate our flat peace.

CHAPTER FOUR

What we talked about. About a childhood that was too short but too long also. She told me about when she used to go fishing, in the early evening, with a boy she, as she put it, "paid special attention to." We talked about it and reflected on how a personality loses control of itself in the psychic sucking that all young love and young depth and young touching is. I'm sure we talked all night about that and, certainly, tangential things. My memory of it is vague so I'm sure

it was serious stuff, painful, meaningful and that we mourned in the end the whole reckless thing. If she gave herself to me out of that suffering. Or, if I was above it like she was above it and at that spurious height we just coincidentally and luckily met. Or, if the mystery of evil music began its attempt to rule her - it had tried to rule me since I left Frannie, of course. I'm not sure, am I?

So there are quite a few things I'm not sure of. If there was physical pain; if her past nagged or still lived at all in her; if her pessimism came from within her or from outside; if the evil music was the mystery or only its voice or its interrogation; as I said, I don't have it by its handles.

I will bring you close, then, to some evil music: I will discuss her hands. One does not forget about a deformity, or explain it away, or even come close to justifying it as one forgets or rationalizes saying the wrong thing at a funeral, or to one's boss. We can forget our sister's birthday and make up for it on Valentine's Day or during Christmas. But if we are crippled in an obvious way we are then carriers of a unique but totally inappropriate and pointless symbol: evil music. Fuel without matter to transform it; energy without a context; a seed germinating in an inorganic darkness. Margaret had hands that may have served well another creature on an absolutely other planet but here with us they were the hands of a fanatic. They did nothing normally. They did not even contrast normality normally. They could not even splash water in the bathtub. They raked blankets on a bed like cellophane. Like ants, they never slept. This is the evil that few of us have ever

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encountered: not evil as the contradiction of good, not evil as privation, but evil as exterior being, as self outside of self. Margaret was in her hands and her hands were not of the head my heart befriended or the heart my head schemed for possession of.

I fed Margaret every meal she ate during the months we were together. And I helped her dress when clothing had to be functional. I did little things for her like buckling her seatbelt or unlocking the car door for her. I cut her toenails when, for all these years, she had been filing them down. She could sew on a button or unstick a zipper but I did it faster, so I did it. And every thank you or that's good or how can I ever repay you for years and years of devoted service was perfunctory. Only perfunctory because it couldn't be anything other than perfunctory. She

was in her hands and I was not ministering to them; I cared for her flesh, I looked after her feelings, I communicated with her eyes and her lips and reacted to what she said. When I took her hands in mine I did not understand that that was Margaret herself and she didn't know it either. How could she know that? No one ever told her to look to her hands as we say look to your heart or think of what you are saying or get control of yourself.

But I saw her find her hands. That I did. I stared as she drew back from herself when she first detected it in her hands. And I made stupid jokes about it when she met defeat. That was all that I could offer in place of sympathy. My humor, which was my art - a patchwork of illusions - and my dreamy desire to hold her were the only things I could supply. I knew right away, as I have always known the smell of no healing that that would never, ever, be enough.

I will continue to perform evil music. When I discovered that my being, my is-ness, was outside of my history, was outside of all that I had let myself in for with my wives, the families, and my job and my network of convictions and my 'principles for decision-making' I, as I said, and as is well known, left again my most recent wife. This

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wife, Frannie, was/is the woman to whom I had pledged - because I assumed that pledging was what made me exist - care, concern, sincerity and, ultimately, the by-product of these three (a by-product, it must be said, that I did *not* pledge because I was not aware of it as a distinct factor in a relationship that's supposed to transcend factoring) what we call 'warmth'. The lugubrious, Newfoundland dusk was my introduction to the evil music wherein was stored all that I should be but was not and which became also the only anima for which I now feel - or ever have felt - warmth. This is the mystery. I married it and now follow it, chase after it even, I don't know as I know, for example the smell of no light, just what it is because I have never been it. I mean, obviously, I have never been what I am not. But I am also not what I have always thought I was.

Listen: a seagull is never its flight. But it becomes its flight, wholly and consciously, when the wind is able to usurp its flight. The seagull is thus released from its search for food or for a mate and becomes entirely other than a feeding and copulating animal when it is its wind. I am the seagull that no longer feeds and copulates *and* I am the wind that has stopped me from feeding and copulating. Luckily, for the seagull the wind will die down. But how do I die

down? Sure I was once dead; I was married to Frannie. Now I am not dead. But neither am I able to feed or to copulate. The evil music, the exterior being that I can only go after in my car on this island does - to put it quaintly -

still elude me. Therein is it evil, therein is it music, therein is it mystery.

Pyrrho, an old Greek Groucho Marx is supposed to have had a conversation that went something like this, with an unnamed interlocutor. Pyrho begins: "There is no difference between life and death." "Why then do we not die?" "Because there is no difference." So also is there no difference between me and the self I'm not.

I think I can do justice to all of my memories. I'm pretty good anyway. I remember almost exactly what the weather was like when Margaret slipped back to St. George's without telling me where she was going. And I remember myself thinking, once I

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had discovered or figured out that she was gone, I remember repeating to myself throughout the rest of the evening that even if she'd wanted to leave me a note she couldn't have because she probably couldn't write. Of course that's not true because Margaret can write legibly enough. What's more, I was a little disappointed because she should have realized that since I was a doctor I could read any handwriting that I wanted to. But I got no note. It wasn't more than fifteen or twenty minutes before I realized that she'd probably gone to St. George's. I spent most of that night wondering what she'd say when I got there and she discovered - if Aslo was also there - that I wasn't really a doctor. I don't think I ever came to a decision as to how I would explain it. The truth is that I wasn't, in fact, worried because Margaret, if I understood her right, wouldn't be bothered by the lie.

So, the next day, I went to St. George's wondering this time why Margaret left when she did. Aslo never told me that he'd photocopied sections from his essay, and pinned them on public bulletin boards all over the island. Margaret told me later that she saw one at the Mall in Corner Brook when we'd gone shopping for raincoats. I was surprised; but not really surprised at Aslo for doing it.

I guess with something like this you can't really help but act like a fugitive. But Aslo had that characteristic ever since I'd known him. The first time I saw him in what I figured was his normal element was when I was a patient of his in the Waterford. I'd met him a couple of times already in my room before but had never seen him in the halls doing anything except talking

with a patient. On this particular day that I'm remembering now Aslo was standing at the door of one of the common rooms while a tour was in progress. A bunch of kids from a psychology class from somewhere. I ignored them and concentrated on the other patients - looking for someone who was like me, probably, which is what I did most of the time when I was out of my room.

Like a patch of old trees. The tallest ones, the ones with large trunks are dead and, with their pointed tops broken off and all their green gone, they are losers who stand at a

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distance with simple eyes. Only because these old ones are sometimes half-naked do they get noticed at all. Always, though, someone from the tour group will stay back to speak to one of them. "Didn't see you," a squat, effeminate boy will say to three or four of them that stand in a row. One of them happens to be Dr. Aslo who looks like he's been employed at the hospital since it opened. He's used to this; even sometimes a new orderly or a cafeteria bus-boy will mistake him for a patient and right away take to disliking him because Aslo doesn't help stow his tray or because he steps in front of the orderly, who doesn't realize what he's supposed to say because he's not convinced this isn't a patient. The new guy wonders if there's a code, something like "Us or Them?" There are some days when Aslo smiles a lot and some days he doesn't smile at all. He's not smiling on this day and I can tell he's ready to do something to get this kid back to his group before he gets left behind. I never saw what he did but the kid started backing up and turned on a dime and slowly, though directly, went after the rest of the group.

And that's the way Aslo was when I finally made it to the church at St. George's. He was definitely *not* suffering fools. I thought to myself: Willy, I figured you'd be in your glory here. Margaret was somewhere in the background, writing, or reading something from a bunch of papers spread out on one of the pews. He was nice enough to me. And wise: he didn't ask about Frannie. Launched right into the Pope's visit, thinking that's what I wanted to talk about. And we talked about it but you wouldn't be interested. I mean I wasn't. Right then everything began to set in. Like hand prints in cement. My eyes opening up to my isolation; they'd been getting wider and wider ever since I'd been released and moved back with Frannie. Someone was slowly closing glass doors on the world in front of me and my eyes were straining and opening even wider. A headache would have saved me but that was weeks ago. By this time I'd reached

the stage of "now you don't." I understood exactly what these people are like who call the "National Enquirer" to say that they were just dropped off after two weeks aboard a UFO.

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Here I was with all these little Buddhas running around detached. All mixed-up together under the watchful eyes of Aslo, who learned German from a woman during the war. Someone had been testing Holy Water and Aslo didn't think it was funny. What do you think, Karl? Well, I agree with you, of course.

Notwithstanding the risks of a too-confident disposition toward our calling, we hold that the proper approach to any civil war must be characterized by at least a philosophic competency. But our 'cause' is not reducible to strict formulae, least of all slogans to be shouted from atop the ramparts. The mainspring of our operation is a critical evaluation of our place within the institutions we cannot liberate; a self-reflexive attack that eschews equivocation. Any argument of ours that is not at the same time a flowering of personal autonomy is not an argument at all but rather a death-promoting negation. If optimism cannot decorate the margins of our critique then that critique, even if driven by suffering, remains anemic.

~~The managers of traditional institutions are not to be called~~ invulnerability and the simplicity of our horizon. While we hope for an early, positive response, we know better than to depend on it and must therefore depend instead upon ourselves and take whatever steps are necessary to retrench the self-educative capacity that guarantees continuous growth. For it is this process of growth that banal religious institutions forever arrest.

Any consideration of childhood that is not underwritten by the love and respect - for the two are inseparable - of parents for youth is worth nothing. In lieu of a sermon on this theme, we trust that it is enough for now to profess that if we fail to regard the raising of our children as an integral and indivisible part of the elevation of our own personhood, we will fail ultimately in both campaigns. A full understanding of what this joint exploration involves can only be had once one has razed the idol of 'Spiritual Maturity' to which we expect our children to sacrifice. We hold that no one - including the Founder himself - ever attained absolute spiritual maturity; to teach otherwise is inhuman and pseudo-spiritual.

Just as our own offspring present us with novelties nearly every day, so too do the minions of Scientific Educating. And because we are naturally and rightly open to our children's fictions, and thereby benefit from their freshness, we should not categorically dismiss this present stage of the industrial revolution. However, the type of involvement that is needed in order for religion to operate within the range of supra-industrial communication/ information systems is too high a price to pay. Technology, like any tool, demands that we make unwieldy distinctions in critical human concerns because, as Abraham Maslow has written, if the only tool a person has is a hammer, he will tend to treat everything as a nail.

to illustrate the extent to which Christianity has prostituted itself to the absurd. This is a predicament to be considered in the 21st Century, not in the 20th. In the 21st Century, the lines of technology itself are being severed right across the country, lines be severed and terminals deserted. It is simply being suggested that we should realize that Christianity doesn't need the 20th Century as much as the 20th Century needs Christianity.

It is not because he wore robes and sandals that it is impossible to imagine the Founder in a lab coat, or hear of him calling a press conference at 11:00. It is not for histrionic reasons that his meaning is so easily and so often perverted in the web of electronic circuitry. It is rather that the framing and constraint imposed by technological projection cuts into the existential worth of his purposes. When Christianity is packaged to compete with other merchandise its commercial failure is not confined to the marketplace: the failure, however slight, does irreparable damage to those who are responsible for 'marketing' it in the first place. And not only is their credibility marred, so too is their own belief in the inviolability of the product, though they can scarcely perceive the significance of this.

I went right upstairs to the choir loft and lay down. Aslo came up but I pretended I was asleep. I wanted to be well rested for Margaret tomorrow. For Aslo tomorrow. For Margaret.

I lasted only one day before I went back to Port aux Basques. At last, I saw past Aslo. I never wanted to get serious about this revolt of his. Naturally, like everyone else on the outside, I couldn't assimilate it, though I think my confusion wasn't the same as yours. After all, I saw precisely what Aslo was up to. I never worried about whether he would succeed or not. I never thought about that. When I offered Aslo advice it was because he had asked for it. Nevertheless, he'd shake his head, yeah you are right; or no, I don't think so and that was the end of it. Never a debate. It was as if what he'd really written was an autobiography and him and his essay were inseparable. My confusion began when the essay came to life that first morning in St. George's. Here, for me, was religion for the first time since I'd left high school. And was it strange. Not likeable at all.

I saw everyone's eyes but no one saw mine. Like I was being looked through, you know. Like they were talking to somebody else, like there was someone listening besides me.

And I've already said that these weren't all crazies or rehabs.

Aslo had figured that nothing would be done to stop him while the Pope was here and he was right. In fact, the first three days were the most encouraging of all, as far as Aslo was concerned. One priest the first day, a couple of nuns and another priest on the second day, in St. George's alone now, I mean. And three outsiders as well. None of them knew Aslo. One of the teachers that showed up kept saying, with the birthday party smile on his face all day, I remember you from somewhere, Dr. Aslo. You remind me of a prof at University.

I knew loyalty was important but I'd never been so close to it before, like I was that day in St. George's. It was scary and anyway, I scare easily. I kept looking for Margaret and the fact that I couldn't find her just made it worse 'cause I figured she was doing Aslo's bidding. Like changing water into wine for him out back somewhere. And I felt like I was on stilts; and when I got a chance to talk to Aslo just before lunch, I felt like he was on stilts too. Only his were taller.

Lunch was funny. Three minute pause while everybody avoided saying Grace. Then later somebody passed out potato chips for communion. A woman and a couple of men were laughing about it and then we all got the joke: betcha can't eat just one. You can imagine that the priests found it hard to laugh at; though I think one of them was transubstantiated, right there and then. But that didn't last long. Somebody asked Aslo a couple of questions and he kept leafing through his copy of the essay and posing questions of his own. And then a priest and Aslo started building something right there before my eyes. It got bigger and bigger. We need trust. We need more food and

blankets. We need more discussion. We need freshness. We need time. We need something to read. We need to watch out for fires. I was lost all over again. And I was supposed to stay lost? Stay there where there were no maps? No road signs? Not even worry about being lost?

No thanks, Dr. Aslo. Thanks, but no thanks. So I went and found Margaret. Told her I had to talk to her. It was foggy outside. We went down over the bank to the beach. The RCMP were driving by about every fifteen minutes or so. As long as they didn't see us come out of the church, they didn't know who we were. I told her I had to get going. There was much I wanted to see. She definitely wasn't interested in me then, though she didn't really say as much. I kept talking. I said I think I'm making Aslo nervous. She was good at ignoring me. It's cold, isn't it, I said. She said yeah. I asked her if there was anything she wanted me to get her. I could come back, I told her. I won't be here long, she said. I told her I'd like to get back to her. She said O.K. and I said I thought we might have a lot to offer each other. She said yeah, maybe but I don't want to think about that now. I found it hard to go any further. I told her she could go back now; I was going to stay down there for awhile. She said O.K. and she kissed me as she walked around me and then went back to the church.

I kept thinking I should go talk to Aslo. But, about five minutes after Margaret had left to go back, Aslo came down the hill. He had the oversized windbreaker on, with the hood tied tight around his face. He wanted to know why I was going. I told him I was going to see my brother in Corner Brook. He said yeah but I think you should come back. Where's Frannie? he said. Still in town, I told him. I wondered if he was worried about trusting me. But I didn't ask him that. He said where were you and Gretchen? I said didn't you ask her? Yeah, he said, she said ask you. Oh, we just wasted a couple of days, I said. I was about to tell him that Margaret never even mentioned him but I felt that talking about

Margaret was not a smart thing to do. That was about the gist of it. I guess he figured I didn't have any advice or any questions so he went back to the church and I went with him. And then that day passed and you, of course, would still like to hear me talk some more about what it was like on the inside those first days. But I can't, you must see that.

Anyway, you must have heard what some of the others have said about it. I can't do as good a job. It was just a tiny piece of the huge block of unreal that I was pulling along back then. I can't recapture the feeling that I got. And besides, because of the fact that I wasn't part of what was really happening in St. George's, what I remember, and I think I've told you all of it anyway, what I do remember wouldn't be accurate. Everybody was pretty busy talking and sitting around thinking and some were even praying. I didn't do any of that. People were nice, of course. They tried talking with me but, like I've said, they were in a way possessed. A harmless possession - certainly not demonic, don't get me wrong on that. Aslo picked almost all of them and wouldn't have let in anyone who was psychic in that direction. I can remember the odd wisecrack about the devil; or about sin anyway, but Aslo had spent a couple of years getting most of these people together. They weren't like that. They were open to radical change but that's because most of them were already on the outer rim to begin with. They were all mature; most were over forty. They were naturally well-mannered, quiet people. But not passive in any aberrant sense. The church was a good choice. Aslo had often said that the only honest reform movement would have to be one that you could reform from the inside. And so since everyone in Newfoundland belonged to the church it was simply a matter of picking those people who could accept the converse, that the church belonged to them. The public couldn't reform

any other institution cause they were, most of them, on the outside - government, education, the courts. Only the church had the quality of belonging to everybody.

But I'm sick of this now. My topic is me and that has nothing to do with religion.