

HARLAN ELLISON

LOVE AIN'T NOTHING
BUT SEX MISPELLED



"These are the Fates, daughters of Necessity ... Lachesis singing of the past, Clotho of the present, Atropos of the future."

Plato, THE REPUBLIC

FOR SHERRI, WHO PICKED UP THE PIECES.

FOR LESLIE KAY WHO ARRANGES THE PIECES.

FOR LORI, WHO IS OPTING TO BE ONE OF THE PIECES.

There is an inscription on the lintel over the octagonal portal to Ellison Wonderland. It says:

Always look up.

Never look down;

All you ever see

are the pennies

people drop.

There is a seven-headed dog guarding the octagonal portal to Ellison Wonderland. If you aren't nice, it will bite you in the ass.

Kilimanjaro is a snow covered mountain 19,710 feet high, and is said to be the highest mountain in Africa. Its western summit is called the Masai "Ngàje Ngài," the House of God. Close to the western summit there is the dried and frozen carcass of a leopard. No one has explained what the leopard was seeking at that altitude.

THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO by Ernest Hemingway

INTRODUCTION

HAVING AN AFFAIR WITH A TROLL

One evening I met a young woman for whom I quickly developed carnal desires. We met at a party, I think. I don't remember now. It was a while ago. And I cut her out of the crowd and finally we got back to my house and it started to go wrong. Oh, not wrong in the way that once we were alone the sexual thing didn't seem to be working out: quite the contrary. She began getting misty-eyed. I could see that she was forming a fantasy view of the man who had swept her away to this strange and colorful eyrie. She was thinking ahead: can this one be THE one I've been looking for? And I didn't want that.

No point here in going into the reason I didn't want that; perhaps I was the wrong one for her on more than a casual basis, perhaps she was wrong for me permanently, perhaps it was a hundred different little things I sensed in the ambience of the evening. Whatever it was, I wanted to discourage the fantasy, but not the sexual liaison. I'm not sure there's anything wrong with that. But maybe there is. It depends where your concepts of morality lead you. For me, it was better to be upfront about it, to say there's tonight, and maybe other nights, but under no circumstances is this permanent.

And I tried to tell her, gently.

And that was wrong. Because it was hypocritical.

I wanted to have my picnic, but I didn't want to have to spend the time necessary to putting the picnic-grounds back in the same condition I'd found it.

(That isn't a casually-conceived metaphor; and it's quite purposely not coarse in its comparison. To love well and wisely, I now believe, we must attempt to leave a situation with a love-partner with the landscape and its inhabitants as well off, or better off, than they were when We arrived. Like this.)

(Walter Huston and Tim Holt and Fred C. Dobbs [sometimes known as Humphrey Bogart] are about to leave the mountain from which they've clawed their gold. And Huston says to Holt and Bogart, "We've got to spend a week putting the mountain back the way we found it." And Bogart looks amazed, because they are running the risk of being set-upon once again by Alfonso Bedoya and his

bandidos. So Huston explains very carefully that the mountain is a lady, and it has been good to them and they have to close its wounds.

(And finally, even flinty, paranoid Bogart understands, and he agrees, and they spend a week repairing the ecological damage they've done to the mountain that was good to them.)

So instead of trying to weasel and worm my way through an explanation that would have been a real explanation at all, I asked her if she would mind my sitting down and writing something for her. She said that would be nice, and I did it, trying to say as bluntly as possible with fantasy images when words from the "real world" would not adequately say. And this is what I wrote:

She looks at me with eyes blue as the snow on Fuji's summit in a woodblock print by Hiroshige. She says, "You're really different, really unique." Beneath the paleness of her cheeks the blood suddenly rushes and she only knows her nervousness has increased in the small room, though nothing has altered from the moment before. She does not understand that her skin and survival mechanisms have registered the presence of an alien creature. Her blood carries the certain knowledge. Like the sentient wind, she perceives only that she has crossed an invisible border and now roams naked and weaponless in a terra incognita where wolves assume the shapes of men and babies are born with golden glowing eyes and the sound from the stars is that of the very finest crystal.

To her fingertips come the vibrations of flowers singing in silent voices, telling of times before the watery deeps carried the seed of humanity. Her skin: absorbing the vibrations of unicorn's hooves as they beat the molten earth into gold. Her nostrils: bringing to her the scents of dreams being born. Her delicate nerve-endings: vital and trembling with expectation of oddness.

She sits with a troll, with another kind of creature, and her uneasiness grows. Cellular knowledge assaults her in wave after wave, and she cannot codify that knowledge.

"Let me tell you a story," I say, and in few words explain the horizons of the land into which she has wandered.

Will she understand that mortals and trolls cannot mate?

It didn't go well with her. It was a sour relationship from the start. I wound up doing her damage hurting her; she didn't hurt me. I don't brag about it, I'm certainly not proud of it, there was no notch cut in the stock of the weapon from the encounter. Machismo wasn't part of it: I hurt her and she didn't hurt me only because it didn't mean as much to me. I was a hard thing. Colder. She was vulnerable. It had to happen, I suppose. If I'd been a nicer person I'd have forgone the sex and sent her away at the start. I explain it now, by way of justification, by saying she is a born victim: someone waiting to be savaged by love. But the truth is simply that I am precisely like everyone else when it comes to love. I am a child. I want my picnic, and I hate cleaning up the mess.

Pause. Go back to the start of this book, just before the beginning of this new introduction. Recall the quote from Hemingway's "The Snows of Kilimanjaro." Do you know what it was the leopard was seeking? Do you understand why the creature climbed to that altitude and what happened to it? The answer to the riddle is the answer, I think, to understanding how to travel the road of love. I put the quote there, what has become a powerful literary metaphor since Hemingway first wrote it exactly forty years ago in 1936, because it seems to me to contain the truest thing one can know about traveling that difficult road. Friends of mine, around this house as I assemble this book for my publisher's deadline, don't seem to understand why that little parable, riddle, metaphor, whatever the hell it is, seems so eloquent, and so right for this book of kinda sorta love stories. I hope these words will clear it up for them. Probably not, though. I'm not too clear on this subject of love myself.

In fact, some years ago, when I was writing the introductions to the stories in an anthology I edited called DANGEROUS VISIONS, I found myself writing these words about myself and Theodo

Sturgeon:

~~"It became clear to Sturgeon and myself that I knew virtually nothing about love but was total familiar with hate, while Ted knew almost nothing about hate, yet was completely conversant with love in all its manifestations."~~

That was in 1966. Ten years ago. I've revised my estimates of both Ted's and my understanding of hate and love. It's been an interesting ten years for both of us, and if I were to take the toll today I have to admit grudgingly that I've had some of the parameters of the equation of love drilled into me by experts. And so now, ten years later, I set down these first few tentative thoughts about the subject offering as credentials the stories in this collection.

I can tell you many things love is not. Telling you what it is comes much harder to me. When one feels like a novice, it becomes an act of arrogance to pontificate. Much of what I think changes from day to day. And I suppose by the accepted standards of success, I'm a poor spokesman. It seems that the more experience I get, the less sure I become about anything where love is concerned. (I'm not talking about my three marriages and divorces. That's another thing, and peculiarly, it has less to do with my caution about this subject than more "informal" relationships.)

Lori and I were talking about this several weeks ago, and with what I take to be the normal curiosity of anyone merging his or her life with someone else's, she asked me how many women I'd been with. For a few days I wouldn't answer her. I wasn't hiding anything, I just didn't think she'd care to hear the real answer. Finally, I told her. "I tried to count up, one time about six years ago," I said. "And I used snapshots and correspondence and phone lists I found lying around in old files and desk drawers, and I had to stop when it got over three hundred. I suppose I've been to bed with maybe five hundred different women."

She didn't say anything for a long while, but I could see she was shocked. When I'd tried to talk the tally half a dozen years ago, I'd been shocked, too.

I realize there will be guys out there who'll read that figure--five hundred--which I think is pretty accurate, and they'll react in one of several different ways. There will be assholes who'll think that's pretty terrific. There will be amateur Freudians who'll think it's sick. There will be professional sympathizers who'll feel sorry for me. There will be guys who can't get laid who'll think I'm lying, trying to trumpet some kind of bogus swashbuckler image.

Each view has some validity going for it.

But mostly, since I went through all those days and nights and people, since I was there (or as much of me as I had control of was there), I subscribe to the view that I was looking for something very hard, perhaps with uncommon desperation. I think I understand the psychological reasons I was on that endless hunt, and I submit there was less of deviation, perversion or obsession than loneliness and a determination to find answers. I'm constantly perplexed at the dichotomous position of people who laud a student's seeking everywhere to find the answers to life, or creativity, or the existence of God, or the direction of the student's career ... who cluck their tongues and badrap the same attempts to discover the answers to interpersonal relationships by those who seek in every area that presents itself. If the true purpose of living a fulfilled life is in establishing meaningful liaisons with people, if it's part of that fulfillment to seek and find and give and accept love, then why should the search be looked on with such moral disapproval?

Perhaps I'm advocating profligacy, but I don't think so. Discovering the nature of love is infinitely more complex and exhausting than, for instance, learning how to be a brain surgeon. But the smug, self-satisfied moralists think it's precise and proper for someone to spend fifteen years learning how to ease a subdural hematoma, yet twisted, sick and sad for someone to spend the same fifteen

years learning how to ease his or her loneliness. Answers to the former can be found in medicine textbooks and in O.R.s all over the world; answers to the latter slide and skitter and avoid discovery save by chance and steady application to all possibilities.

The search is as important as the discovery.

(And therein lies the core of the answer to Hemingway's riddle about the leopard.)

Lori seems to feel as I write this, that even if I don't have the answers, at least I've had a great opportunity to find the answers than those who deny the search, settle for whatever's handiest, and then spend the rest of their lives with secret thoughts and open frustration.

On the basis of her view, and the fact that I trust her opinions most of the time, I'm plunging ahead with this essay on love. I hope to God she's right. If she's wrong, and I've been merely profligate, indulging myself in adolescent sex-antics, I'm going to look like a righteous schmuck by the time this introduction is completed. If I don't already.

Ambrose Bierce has two definitions of "love" in *THE ENLARGED DEVIL'S DICTIONARY* (Doubleday, 1967, and a sensational book). Bierce, a cynic beside whom I look like Pollyanna, writes this:

Love, n. The folly of thinking much of another before one knows anything of oneself.

Love, n. A temporary insanity curable by marriage or by removal of the patient from the influences under which he incurred the disorder. This disease, like caries and many other ailments, prevalent only among civilized races living under artificial conditions; barbarous nations breathing pure air and eating simple food enjoy immunity from its ravages. It is sometimes fatal, but more frequently to the physician than to the patient.

People reading my books, most particularly the introductions in my books, think I am the reincarnation of Bierce: that I am a mean, pugnacious, constantly depressed or alarmed sonofabitch into whose life the sunshine of affection has never cast its effulgent glow. Fuck you, I say politely.

Even the most drooling of the Jukes or the Kallikaks* should be able to perceive that someone who manifests such volatile feelings about injustice, racism, stupidity, mediocrity and general negative bullshit in the Universe has his times of joy and happiness and noble dreams that soar aloft above one with the greatest aspirations of the human race. Those who read my works and remember only the stories and essays that deal with blood, lust, violence, death, disfigurement, pain, depression, smarm and sex and ka-ka do me a disservice. Also, they are sick and ought to be "put away," if you catch my drift. I have written dozens and dozens of kind, gentle, happy, funny stories and introductions. But do they remember those? Do they? Huh, I ask you, do they!?! Not on your cryonic crypt, they don't! All they remember are stories such as "I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream" or "The Prowler in the City at the Edge of the World." All they recall when my work is mentioned are the shrieks of torment coming from my characters.

When the truth of the matter is that I'm basically a very happy fellow. Funny, too. I adore smart children, dogs of all breeds, Barney Miller and Richard Pryor and George Carlin and M*A*S*H and noodles, the humorous novels of Donald Westlake. (Noodles have always seemed hilarious to me, go figure it.) For instance, I got a letter today from Debe (No Last Name Given) at Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois; and she went on you wouldn't believe about being a fan of my writing, but how disturbing it all was, how I always seem to write sad or mean stuff. "Is there another side?" she asked. "We all have our demons. But tell me more of you. You must have some light, some happiness, something good that you cherish?"

Now, see! There you go. A perfect example. Here's this young woman (I presume she's fairly young from the writing and the content) who encounters me in a series of books and gets all grunched

out of shape because she thinks I'm downcast, and she wants me to spill the beans on myself, to tell her what makes me smile and laugh and love.

And apart from wanting to keep some personal feelings to myself--Gawd, you're a greedy bunch no matter how much I blather and reveal, you're never satisfied--the things I do unleash are frequently as happy as they are miserable. But when I try to look on the bright side, and pass along the lustral limbus of my personal joy, everyone who remembers those screams of anguish comes down on me like a tsunami, accusing me of being maudlin and saccharine.

So if the observations I make about love seem just a tot on the pragmatic, even cynical, side, well, it's purely an attempt to walk the tightrope: to indulge an uncommon (to my readers) softness of spirit without slopping over into Rod McKuen-ism; to be as tough-minded as possible (and therefore useful) about something as intangible as love, without sounding bruised or discouraged; to avoid cliché without purposely wandering in the glades of perversion.

I've included two of those tightrope-walking routines in this book. Originally, they were installments of a column I wrote for Art Kunkin when he was editor of the Los Angeles Free Press and later, when legitimate-thugs-turned-illegitimate-"businessmen" screwed him out of his own newspaper and he started an abortive, short-lived competitor, for Art's Los Angeles Weekly News. Though they're true, not stories, they read like stories--I've listed them on the Table of Contents as Personal Reminiscence I and II--and it's in the story-form that I feel most at ease writing my views on love. Unless one is Shelley, a Nuñez de Arce or La Rochefoucauld, one has no business publicly shooting off one's mouth about something as mysterious and ethereal as love. Unless one is le Marquis de Sade, in which case one has a personal vision of love that defies all strictures.

But in fiction, even a groping dullard like myself can stumble upon a truth or two; or at least a rule-of-thumb that seems to work in certain situations, among certain kinds of people. So when I pass along these remarks, I'll try and couch them in anecdotal terms, all the better to entertain you, my dears, and not coincidentally to alleviate my own nervousness in this area.

So here is just about all I know concerning love. Some of it light and happy, some of it cynical, perhaps some of it even accurate and truthful. One never knows, do one.

The minute people fall in love, they become liars.

You'd think such good feelings in the gut and other places would make people want to ensure the continuance of those feelings. But their fears overcome their good sense, not to mention their ethics. They begin to lie, virtually from the first moment they feel the stirrings in the aorta ... or wherever love is supposed to make itself felt.

They lie in a hundred different ways. From the first tentative social conversations that bore the silly, they lie by pretending to be interested in inanities. This is a generality, but I think it holds: if it's guys, they listen to banal bullshit just on the off-chance they'll get laid. If it's women, they listen to the blown-out-of-proportion nonsense of men so they can reinforce the guy's need to be a Big Man. They lie to one another with looks and with words, and only the body-language tells the truth.

They lie to keep the upper hand, even before they're threatened. The fear of rejection is so ingrained, from the schoolyard, from the locker room, from the parties, from the Homecoming Dance, from the years of seeing lithe tanned women in bikinis and feral muscular men with shirts open to the sternum up there on four-color billboards; they fear the unknown outer darkness of someone saying "No."

So they lie to one another. Granted, it's akin to the social lying we all do at parties, in restaurants, at social events: putting up with trivia to be politic or civilized or "gracious," whatever that means. Nonetheless, it is lying. And by feigning interest in that which bores or turns one off, they set u

artificial grounds for a potential relationship that they have to maintain all through the rest of the association. I know a young woman who met a guy at a party. He turned her on, and he started voicing some of his rustic views on busing. She had worked for the integration legislation as a regional attaché to one of the senators pushing the facilitation of busing. She came out of ten years of hard and thankless work trying to achieve racial balance. He was a divorced businessman with two kids, who was, at heart, a man who feared and hated blacks. Though he would have gone to his grave swearing there wasn't a scintilla of bigotry in his well-clothed body. But they turned each other on, and she listened and nodded, and said nothing. They started dating. It lasted six months. Then it fell apart. When his narrow view of the world became too much for her, she started to fight back. Now he tells everyone she was a "castrating bitch" and she harbors guilt feelings for her own intransigency. False and untenable rules for the relationship had been the order of their mating from the git-go. It was doomed to fail.

Earlier, I passed along a generality. There are, of course, exceptions. There are women who listen to the crapola put out by guys at parties because they want to get laid, and there are guys who put up with women's inanities because they want to be polite. It happens. But the point still holds. They do so because they want to be liked. They lie and listen to lies so they'll be accepted. The first faint stirring of love--barely codified, still inarticulate--force them into the role of liar.

And then the lies, once having been freed from Pandora's Hope Chest, begin to breed. They multiply like maggots and riddle a relationship like a submarine hit by a depth charge. Consider just the most obvious ones we've all either used or been victimized by:

You walk into a room and she (or he) is brooding.

"What's the matter, something wrong, something bothering you?" That's what you say.

Then he (or she) replies, "Nothing."

A lie, a bald-faced lie. You know damned well there's something wrong. The way the legs are crossed, the way the arms are folded, that telltale pursing of the lips, the vacant, abstracted stare, the peremptory way the words are bitten off. There's something wrong. But she (or he) says, "Nothing."

Is it because the brooding party really has something heavy to brood about and, out of love, chooses to lie rather than to lay it on the other person? Is it (more likely) that the brooder has been brought down by something the other party did, and wants to whip a little unconscious, free-floating guilt on the perpetrator before spilling the load of shit being carried in the gut? Is it part of the stylized ritual of hide-and-seek so many lovers play? Is it a physical manifestation of the brooding party having done something they mutually consider "wrong" (like going out and getting laid on the sly) and getting him or herself set to rationalize it in such a way that the other member of the team feels like the criminal, using the brooding dark mood as a kind of head start in the argument that will follow?

What does it matter? What we're dealing with here is dishonesty, cupidity, misdirection, acting out ... lying.

Here's another one. And you've all been on one or the other end of this one:

"No, I have a headache."

"No, I'm tired."

"No, I'm a little inflamed."

"No, I have a hard day tomorrow."

"No, it isn't right."

"No, I'm still in love with [fill in appropriate name]."

Now none of those oldies but goodies is being spoken by a man or woman on a first date. I'

talking about their use in an already ongoing relationship. But a relationship in which one of the partners has been turned off, and won't cop to it! So he or she lies. Again and again and again. Instead of simply saying, "You have bad breath," or "I'm not sexually turned on by you any more," the lies are ranked like Mirv missiles and fired off, one each time an enemy approach is sighted.

Here's another one. Before they met, he was attracted to medium-height, auburn-haired females between the ages of seventeen and twenty-eight with high conical breasts and very thin legs. She was attracted to guys with tight little asses and an almost total absence of chest and arm hair; guys with blue eyes and heavy torsos and English accents and thin, aquiline noses. But one time he made the error of going on admiringly about one of those fantasy-women just a few seconds too long, as she sat there watching the hair coloring commercial in which the woman appeared, and she got extremely uptight. And one time she made the error of spending a half hour in a corner at a party talking to a guy just like the kind she lubricated for, and he (her boy friend) went into a towering Sicilian machismo rage about her flirting.

So now, they purposely turn away from the somatotypes that attract them, when they're out driving, when they're walking in the shopping mall, when they go to the movies, when they spend an evening at the bowling alley, when the tv camera pans across the bleachers at the football game, when they're at a party. She'll test him by drawing his attention to a girl he's already clocked and turned away from, by saying, "Do you think she's attractive?" And he'll glance over quickly, and with feigned disinterest mumble, "Legs're too skinny." But he has a stack of beaver magazines hidden away in his work bench, each magazine containing 372 unretouched shots of girls just like the one he dismissed. He'll test her by introducing her to a guy at the office party who fits her secret sex fantasies, and later asking, "What'd you think of Ken?" And she'll go right on basting the roast or drawing up the blueprints for the new museum wing or finishing the sketches for that children's book, and she won't even look up as she says, "He's nice enough, I suppose. Not very bright, though, is he?" But half the time when she's fucking him, she's envisioning Ken.

These are only a few. There are others, many others. Add your own at leisure. Talk it over with your mate or love-partner. See if you can get further examples to convince yourself that what I'm talking about here is hypocrisy and fear, not standards of sexual conduct. What I'm talking about is the title of this book: love ain't nothing but sex misspelled. The perversion of sex in the name of love using two quite clearly separable needs as reinforcements of one another, because you're not secure enough in either to think they stand by themselves and take care of themselves and enrich through their separate powers. The perversion of love to obtain sex as a commodity. The lies that are told because honesty might well mean rejection. And the unbelievably crippling fear of rejection that moves most of us more than we care to admit. Thus doth love make liars of us all.

An obnoxious woman is a strong man's "limp."

(I'm sure there's a reverse to this, as seen from the viewpoint of a woman; but being a man, I'm most familiar with this side of it. You'll forgive me if I report this section only from what I know, even if it is one-sided. Female readers can mentally write an addendum in which they project what I'm about to say for the flip-side.)

Here's this really sensational sweet guy. He's gentle, fair, moderately talented, seems to be happy with his life and what he's doing; and he's involved with a woman who is a righteous phony. She's loud, she drinks too much, she's a fucking pain in the ass at a dinner table: namedropping, interrupting, belittling him in front of his friends, cutting the other women who try to show some warmth to the guy because they're embarrassed for him, interrupting everyone, rearranging the environment to suit herself ("I have to sit here, not there" ... "Would you ask the maître d' to lower the

air conditioning" ... "There's absolutely nothing on this menu, would you ask the waiter if they can find me an abalone steak" ... "Sid, would you mind not smoking, I washed my hair this afternoon").

And you ask yourself, how can this terrific guy hang out with such a creep?

(It occurs to me that the reverse, a sensational woman tied to a schmuck guy, is more clear changing these days. The incidence of women splitting from their husbands, initiating divorce dissolution of a living-together situation, is very much on the rise. Female-initiated divorces have risen in this country alone by three times what they were even fifteen years ago. Now it's the men who try to hang in there with a lousy relationship while the women, I suppose because of widespread consciousness-raising that has advised them it's feasible to break up without social stigmatization, are taking off. But that's just a guess.)

I've fiddled around with trying to come up logical on this one, finding some kind of Universal Truth why strong people should harness themselves to albatrosses, but this is one of those aspects of love that I've seen again and again, and every time it's for a different reason. In one case it was that the guy wasn't sufficiently secure in his ego-strength, sufficiently filled with feelings of his worthiness to be loved and be loved in return. In another case it was because the woman was devoted to the guy in private, absolutely revolved around him. In yet another case the guy felt guilt about how he and his woman had gotten together, and he hung in there because he was paying dues.

Lori shrugs and says, "Love is blind."

Maybe that's the best answer. I don't know. It's one of those troublesome areas that defies practical answers.

All I know for sure is that there are many, many women and men who are hanging out--because of "love"--with partners who are clearly their inferiors.

Shit, maybe it's that one of the selfish aspects of love is that we be able to feel we're the dominant love-partner in the link-up. I don't know. Think about it; maybe you can write a critical study, then we'll both know.

Love weakens as much as it strengthens, and often that's very good for you.

The operable part of that aphorism is that vulnerability is a good and enlarging thing. When you fall in love, you start to need. For people whose self-sufficiency or fears of life have made them encysted creatures, love opens them.

For instance, the other day Lori and I were talking about what a prick I am when someone tries to chop me conversationally. Being a "fast gun" in a verbal encounter has always been a stance I believe to be extremely pro-survival. There aren't too many people who have as vicious and insulting a manner as I can manifest when I'm annoyed. That's because in some ways I'm conversationally suicidal: I'll say anything. There are no bounds to how deeply I'll cut to win. That's simultaneously one of my strengths and one of my weaknesses. I won't go into how it got started, it goes 'way back. I just say that it makes me a very enclosed individual a lot of the time. I'm constantly on the alert for the attack.

So Lori put forth the proposition that I was stronger than she in such situations, and I said, "No, we're evenly matched." And then she said, with considerable disbelief, "But you could cut me up in a minute and we both know it."

Which led me to think about it and I responded, "Then why don't I?"

"Because you love me," she said.

"Right," I said.

Then she grinned and made the perfect point. "You're handicapped."

Right!

Willingly, gladly, joyously handicapped. A mercurial sprinter happily tying a bag of cement to his left leg so he can race with fairness to the competition, because he loves the race, not the winning.

Love can do that. It can make you dull those savage aspects of your nature so you become more nakedly ready to accept goodness from your love-partner. It is even more pro-survival, if one accepts the theory that life is a string of boredoms, getting-alongs, sadnesses and just plain nothing-happening times, broken up by gleaming pearls of happiness that get us through the crummy stretches on the string.

Weakness becomes strength.

After you've had the Ultimate Love Affair that has broken you, leaves you certain love has been poisoned in your system, then, and only then, can you be saved and uplifted by the Post-Ultimate Love Affair.

Because that's when you're most uncertain, most self-doubting, most locked into a tunnel vision of love and life. And that's when new experiences come out of nowhere to wham you.

I guess this ties in with what I was saying about pain in the introduction to PAINGOD and about how we cannot savor the full wonder of joy unless we've gone through some exhausting, debilitating times of anguish. No one likes pain (and please be advised I'm not advocating S-M or any of the torture-games some people need to get them off; I'm talking about life-situation pain; enemas and shtupping amputees and whips 'n' chains may be superfine for Penthouse and other sources of communication for those who're into such things, but I'm not, and so when I talk about pain I mean getting your brain busted, not your body shackled; okay?) but it seems to me that we spend so much time avoiding pain of even the mildest sort, that we turn ourselves into mollusks. To love, I think, one must be prepared to get clipped on the jaw occasionally.

Otherwise, one would always settle for the safest, least demanding, least challenging relationship. Wouldn't we?

I think that makes sense.

And so, having been destroyed by an affair, knowing one has had the Ultimate Love, one wanders lost and broken in a new place. And then, from out of nowhere--and I've seen it happen time and again--comes this whirlwind that sweeps you up and carries you along, and three, four, five months later you realize it isn't a rebound affair, it's the Post-Ultimate Affair, and you're whole again, and stronger than ever.

So go find the greatest love of your life, the one that burns and sizzles and chars everything around it, and fling yourself into it like a child in a playground. Drain all you can from it, and then get your back broken. Suffer and stumble around and weep and piss and moan. And then look out. Because here comes The Lone Ranger or Wonder Woman, ready to make it all good again ... and this time probably for keeps.

Here are a few more things about love I think work.

Friendship is better than passion.

As Richard Shorr says, if you can say to your partner, even when you hate him or her the most, I wish you well, then you've got a chance to make it. Lust works wonders, it puts apples in your cheeks (and sometimes crabs in your bed), but it ebbs and flows. Friendship sustains and enriches and stays constant.

Hate and love have the same intensity of emotion.

Hate ain't nothing but love misspelled.

But you know that one already .

You can't go home again.

If you were sweethearts after college, and had a thing going, and one or the other of you took off and did your number and it went sour--the marriage dissolved, the career didn't materialize--and discovering yourself turned out to be a drag filled with Tantric Yoga and Kahlil Gibran platitudes--and you fantasize what it would've been like if you'd stuck with that Great Love of Your Youth ... forget it. He's changed, she's changed, you've changed, and the best you can have is a quick fuck and a lot of recycled memories. It just doesn't play.

Next to telling your lover what turns you on precisely, the best thing to bring to bed is a sense of humor.

Nothing is more tiresome and capable of creating tension in bed than heavy breathing and serious. God save us from the men and women who need to hear all the artificial "I love you" jingoism, even when they know it's bullshit, said at the moment and having substance no longer than it takes to use Kleenex and dash to the shower. But laughter, taking the hangups and inconveniences and work awkwardnesses as sources of mirth ... wow, how bright that can make it.

Please yourself and be selfish about it.

In love and sex, it's every man and woman in a one-person life raft. If you don't go'n'get it, the other one'll stake you to a free ride. Concern for each other goes without saying, and attention to detail; but when it comes right down to it, you've got to satisfy yourself. If the guy ain't doing it right, lady, bite his nose and tell him how to do it. And if you've got a premature problem, fella, let her know about it before the fact so arrangements can be made. And don't clutter up your pleasure by swallowing the outdated nonsense about, "Oh, it seems too clinical that way; it takes all the romance out of it." Romance is one of those ephemerals they whip on you so you won't know that sex is supposed to be sweaty!

And finally: love ain't nothing but sex misspelled.

Which is an ironic title. It means people confuse one for the other. They think passion alone makes love. And so the relationship flares while they explore each other's bodies, and when it's gone so is their affection for one another.

Love is being utterly honest, even when it's ground glass painful. Tell the truth all the time! And the truth! Not just that part that you can get away with. Go the limit. And the answer to Hemingway's riddle is that the leopard lost his way. He took the wrong path. And that's what so many of us do in love.

Keep aware, keep wide open, and remember everything that's ever happened to you, everything that's ever been said, every motion and change of tone and subtle hint. We'll read a long, essential, dull book on how to get through probate with our skin intact, or take a correspondence course in electrical wiring just so we don't have to pay an electrician to do our house, or go to college for four years to acquire the obscure knowledge that will permit us to make a living in one or another proscribed field of endeavor. But about the most mysterious subject of all, love, we bumble and careen and hope for the best; without proper education, without proper tools, without even a goal that can be named. And more often than not it poisons our lives. The wrong men and the wrong women get together and proceed to kill each other piece by piece.

This is all I know of love: like the leopard we must pick the right path, and we must never confuse what the body needs with what the soul demands. Beyond these idle thoughts, I know no more than you.

As a troll, as an alien creature, I know that having an affair with me is not the same as having an affair with an orthodontist or a salesman of mobile homes or a guy going for his degree in P.E. That's my arrogance.

I hope to God you have yours.

~~Final words about this book.~~

In the original edition of LOVE AIN'T NOTHING BUT SEX MISSPELLED, published in hardcover in 1968, there were 22 stories. For this edition, I've dropped nine of those stories. They are good stories, some of them I consider among my best. But they are available elsewhere, in other books of mine currently in print. I have grown highly sensitive to the odd remarks about duplications of stories in my collections, and so I have taken extra-special pains to make sure there are no duplications, or if there are any, they're at a minimum and they've been included to maintain the theme of the book.

So I've added three new, uncollected pieces to the 13 from the original version of this book. Usually, a short story collection bulks out at about 60,000 words. LOVE, first time around, came in at 165,300 words, almost the equivalent of three books. I've deleted 51,900 words of stories and added 16,400 to the remaining 115,400 words' worth of material from the hardcover. That makes a total of 131,800 words of stories, plus this introduction of approximately 8000 words, for your money's worth of 139,800. Something well over two ordinary collections' size. And no room for complaints from those who've bought my other books.

For those curious as to which stories were dropped, the following list with the titles of the other Ellison books shows where they can be found.

"Pretty Maggie Moneyeyes

DEATHBIRD STORIES

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM

"The Night of Delicate Terrors

GENTLEMAN JUNKIE

"Final Shtick"

GENTLEMAN JUNKIE

"O Ye of Little Faith

DEATHBIRD STORIES

ALONE AGAINST TOMORROW

"Delusion for a Dragon-Slayer

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM

"Lonelyache

ALONE AGAINST TOMORROW

I HAVE NO MOUTH AND I MUST SCREAM

"The Face of Helene Bournouw

DEATHBIRD STORIES

"Ernest and the Machine God

OVER THE EDGE

DEATHBIRD STORIES

"All the Sounds of Fear

ALONE AGAINST TOMORROW

ELLISON WONDERLAND

As for the stories I've included, some may seem to you less thematic than others. "Blind Bird, Blind Bird, Go Away from Me!" is a war story, and I suppose might easily have gone into another sort of collection. But I intended this book to cover a wide spectrum on the subject of love; and friendship; a sense of duty, love of those who depend on you ... that's love, too. As is the love-turned-to ha

demonstrated in "Daniel White for the Greater Good" and "The Universe of Robert Blake" (not the actor, though we're friends and I probably used the name unconsciously years before we met) and "Prayer for No One's Enemy." These are all stories peripherally concerned with love, and they are included here because this hook was, and remains, one of my personal favorites. And each tale told reflects another part of my fumbling attempts to understand the mystery of love.

These stories have helped change my opinion of myself where human knowledge is concerned. They total up to almost 140,000 words of groping in the dark to find the answer.

For a troll, groping in the dark is second nature.

Here's hoping they shed a little light.

HARLAN ELLISON

Los Angeles

12 September 75

INTRODUCTION TO THE FIRST EDITION

The Introduction to the first edition was dumb, and I've dropped it. You wouldn't have liked it anyway. Trust me.

NEITHER YOUR JENNY NOR MINE

My first inclination, upon learning Jenny was knocked up, was to go find Roger Gore and auger him into the sidewalk. That was my first inclination; when she called, I lit a cigarette and asked her if my girl Rooney, her roommate, knew about it, and she said yes, Rooney knew and had suggested the call to me. I told her to take a copy of McCall's and go to the bathroom, that I had to think about it, and would call her back in twenty minutes. She wasn't crying when she hung up, which was something to be thankful for.

There is a crime in our land more heinous than any other I can think of, right offhand, and yet it goes unpunished. It is the crime of gullibility. People who actually believe the lowballing of used car dealers; people who accept the penciled "2 Drink Minimum" card on their table as law; girls who swallow the line of horse crud a swinger uses to get them in the rack. Like that, yeah. Jenny was the product of that crime wave. She was a typical know-nothing, a little patsy who had been seduced by four-color lithography and dream-images from a million mass media, and she believed the stories brought babies.

In about ninety days her tummy was going to tell her she'd been lied to. And been had.

When I'd started dating Rooney, and had learned that the roommates were two eighteen-year-olds fresh out of nowhere and firmly under Rooney's wing, it had been a toss-up whether I'd try to make them on the sly, or become Big Brother to the brood. As it turned out, Rooney was enough action for me, and I took the latter route.

We started taking Jenny and Kitten (née Margaret Alice Kirgen, the second roommate) with us when we went out. Parties, movies, schlepping-around sessions in which we put miles on the car and layers on our ennui. Kitten wasn't bad; she was a reasonably hip kid who was actually six months younger than Jenny, but much more aware of what was going on around her. Jenny was impossible. There was a naïve quality about her that might have been ingenuous, if she hadn't been so gawdawf stupid along with it. They are two different facets, naïveté and stupidity, and combined they make for a saccharine-sweet dumb that paralyzes as it horrifies.

Why did we allow them to come along with us, to adopt us somehow; or rather, let us adopt them? Put it down to my past, which was filled with incomplete memories of deeds I did not care to think about. I can't remember ever having been young, not really. On my own as far back as I can recall, there was never that innocence of childhood or nature that I longed to see in others. So Jenny

and Kitten became my social projects. Not in any elaborate sense, but it pleased me to see them enjoy the bounties of the young ... oh hell, Norman Rockwell and Edgar A. Guest and let's all pose for a Pepsi ad.

Kenneth Duane Markham, thirty years old and a humanitarian. Let's send this child to camp (we can't roll her in the hay, hey hey!). Call it noble intentions, for all the wrong reasons.

At one of the parties we took Jenny to, I ran across Roger Gore. He was (is) (will be, till I catch his face in my right hand) a good-looking jackpotter with a flair for wearing clothes that would look slovenly on other guys, and a laudable record of having avoided honest labor. His father owned a chain of something or others, and Roger indulged himself by taking jobs as switchman on the railroad, soap salesman door to door, night watchman. He never did any of them for very long; his rationale for taking on such onerous tasks was the same as that of the aspiring novelist. He wanted to be able to say he had done these things. It was all very Robert Ruark and hairy-chested and proletarian. He was a fraud. But a good-looking, smooth fraud with a flair for wearing clothes that would look--but I saw that already.

It was one of those parties where some college kid had met a hipster in a downtown black-and-tan club, and had invited him over the following night for "a little get-together." As a consequence, the room was jammed, half with inept, callow UCLA students, half with sinuous spades wrapped up in color. It was one of those scenes where the gray cats felt a sense of adventure and titillation just being in the same time-zone with Negroes, and the blacks were infra-digging, wasting the white boy's Watusi with their own extra-lovely dancing, and mooching as much free juice as possible.

Everybody hated everybody, 'way down deep.

We walked in and I saw Roger first crack out of the bag. He was trying to make the scene with a couple of black dudes I knew from downtown, and they were being indulgent. But they "felt a draft" and Old Rog was about to get frozen out. When they put him down (which could be noted by the way his sappy expression went sour) and he walked away, I took the two girls over and introduced them to the black guys. Roger would make his own introductions, I had no worries on that score. But the two downtown operators were bad, meaning they were good. One of them was a shipping clerk for a record distributor, and the other was a gopher in an exclusive men's hair salon. (Gopher: "Go for the coffee, Jerry." "Go for Mr. Bentley's shoes, Jerry." "Go for--")

"Hey, baby, what's shakin'?"

"Howya doin', man, it's been time I seen yoah ass."

"Busy."

"Yeah, sheee-it, man, you always busy one thing'n 'nother."

"Gotta keep the bread on the table ..."

"Got to keep that bread in yoah pocket!"

"True."

Jenny was standing there, her face open, and as far as she was concerned, where was she? Rooney was digging, as usual, and loving me with her eyes, which was a groove. I pointed each one out to the guys and named:

"Hey, Jerry, Willis, want you to meet Rooney and Jenny." Kitten had had a date. A CPA from Santa Monica. Wow!

"Very pleased't meetcha." Jerry grinned. That cat had the most beautiful mouthful of teeth known to Western Man, he knew it. and he flashed them like the marquee at Grauman's Chinese. "Very pleased't meetcha," Willis said, and I knew he was shucking me, just to make me feel good; he was coming on with Rooney because he knew it would make me feel tall. I gave them each a soft punch on

the bicep and we moved off into the crowd. We said our hellos to the host, who was an authentic schlepp, and took the coats into the bedroom. A pair of UCLAmnesiacs were making it among the coats, so we laid ours over the windowseat. It promised to be a bad, dull party. The roar of rhythm&blues was coming out of the living room, meeting the bubble gum music from the dining room head-on, and canceling each other out in the hallways connecting.

We stepped out into one of these eye-of-the-hurricane areas, and started looking for the bar. I saw Roger Gore heading for the kitchen, and I knew immediately where the juice was being dispensed. I turned to Jenny. "See that guy in the gray hound's tooth, the one going into the kitchen?"

She nodded.

"Stay away from him. There are ten thousand guys at this party who aren't trouble. That one is. He's clever and pretty fair-looking, but he's a lox, and I tell you three times, one two three, stay out of his reach. That's my only advice for the evening. Now scoot." I gave her a shove on the rump and she moved out.

Rooney grinned at me. "Guardian of the morals of the young."

"Poof you," I answered.

"Not here, surely, sir." There were times I wanted to chomp on her ears. And that damned grin of hers. Heidi. Rapunzel. Snow White. Mata Hari.

We went our way, and nodded to Roger Gore in the kitchen, where he was doing something innocuous with martinis and sweet gherkins. What a lox!

About an hour later Rooney was bopping with Willis (that sweet muthuh!) and I was in the corner digging a T-Bone Walker 78 somebody had slipped into the stack. Jenny came up to me; "I'm going out for a drink with Roger. I'll be back in about half an hour."

I didn't even think it was worth getting angry about. I'd known it was going to happen. Don't get up in the top shelf of the cabinet and take a bean out of the jar and shove it up your nose, you tell the infant, and when you get back home, there he is, stretched out blue on the linoleum, a bean up his nose. It's the way children are.

She mulched out of there on Roger Gore's arm, and when Rooney was done sweating with Willis he brought her back and I told her about Jenny's exeunt simpering.

"Why didn't you stop her?" she demanded.

"Who do I look like: Torquemada?" I got hot. "I've got enough trouble governing the habits of you and me without taking on the world at large. Besides, he won't hurt her, for Chrissakes. They'll be back."

We waited six hours. The party was over, we were really drug with the scene, and finally were back to my place to sack out. About five A.M. the phone rang, I groped for it, somehow got it up to my nose and blew into it. After a minute something fell into place and I knew I had it wrong. I tried my eye and my mouth, and by process of elimination got around to my ear. It was Jenny.

"Can you come and get me?"

"Whuhtimezit?"

"I don't know, it's late. Can you come get me?"

"Whereyooat?"

"I'm in a phone booth on Sunset, near Highland. Can you come and get me?" And she started crying. I woke up fast.

"Are you all right?"

"Yes, yes, I'm fine, can you come and get me?"

"Sure. Of course, but what happened to you? We waited till everyone else vanished. What the

hell happened to you? Rooney was worried sick."

"I'll tell you later. Can you come get me now?"

"Give me fifteen minutes."

She hung up, I slid out without waking Rooney, threw on a pair of chinos and a jacket, and fled the coop. She was standing under a streetlight where she had said she'd be, and I bundled her into the car, where she immediately broke down. I got her back to my house, and bedded her out on the sofa in the living room, and went back to sleep myself.

Next morning Rooney cooed over her like Little Orphan Annie. We eventually got the story, and it wasn't that spectacular. He'd taken her to a little bar nearby, tried to get her lushed (which he didn't have to bother doing; Jenny was--putting it politely--not smart enough to avoid being a pushover) and finally told her he had to get the car, which was allegedly his roommate's, back to his house. When I got her there, he proceeded to try The Game, and Jenny swore he hadn't succeeded. In childish retaliation, Roger had fallen asleep. She'd waited around for three hours, but he snoozed on, and finally she'd tried to waken him. Either he couldn't or wouldn't rouse himself, because she finally took her to her heels, and an hour and a half later had managed to get to the phone booth.

"Why didn't you call from his house?"

"I was afraid he'd wake up."

"But you wanted him up, didn't you?"

"Well, yes."

"So why didn't you call from there?"

"I was afraid. I wanted to get out of there."

"Afraid? Of what? Of him?"

"Well ..."

"Jenny, tell me now, tell me true, did he get to you?"

"No. I swear it. He got very angry when I gave him a hard time. He called me ... he called me ..."

"I know what he called you. Forget it."

"I can't."

"So remember it. But don't lie to me, did he get in?"

She turned her face away. At the time I thought it was because of my choice of words. "No, he didn't," she said. So I couldn't really bring myself to feel possessively angry at Roger Gore. He'd done what any guy would try to do. He'd tried to make her, failed, and gotten disgusted. His chief sin was not being a gentleman. In falling asleep and letting her fend for herself; but then, I'd known Gore well enough to know anything but a gentleman, anyhow, so there really wasn't provocation enough to go find and pour it on him. We let the matter drop. I forgot about it, and fortunately, didn't run into Roger Gore again for some time.

Now, eight weeks later, I sat smoking a cigarette, while Jenny languished in the bathroom of her apartment, reading McCall's, and the seed grew in her. I felt responsible. The phone rang. I picked up reluctantly, and it was Rooney. "She told you?" I mumbled something affirmative. "Have you got a solution?"

"Three of them," I answered. "She can have the baby, she can get it aborted, or she can get Roger Gore to marry her. I'd say the first and third are out, the second one the most feasible, and a quick fourth reason altogether possible."

"What's the fourth one?" Rooney asked.

"She can blow her fucking stupid brains out."

All you have to do is get friendly with a couple of jazz musicians, have met a hooker at a party

be on civil terms with a grocer who takes the neighborhood numbers action, occasionally make an after-hours set in the Negro section, and suddenly you are a figure of mystery, a man with "connections" in the underworld; people come to you for unspeakable foulnesses you have never been within spitting distance of. It is a reflex cliché of people who really haven't the faintest bloody idea what the Real World is like. Since they themselves never slip over the line, anyone who lives beyond the constrained limits of their socially acceptable scene, has got to be a figure of mystery, a man with -oh well...

Rooney asked me how soon I could locate an abortionist.

"A whaaat?"

She repeated herself, all honey-voiced forthrightness. It was a foregone conclusion. "Spide Markham, denizen of the murky underworld, familiar of hoods, gunsels and two-bit whores was the man to ask when you needed a butcher.

"What the hell makes you think I know an abortionist?"

"Well, don't you?"

"No. Of course not. I take precautions. I'm not an imbecile like Roger Gore. I've never knocked anyone up, so ergo I don't know any abortionists." I looked at her with unconcealed annoyance, and she stared back blandly. She wasn't convinced. I was, of course, hiding my connections, for obvious reasons.

"Say, you don't believe me, do you?" I was getting highly hacked by this scene. And Jenny just sat there with her face hanging out, and her stomach growing.

"Well, you can call someone, one of your strange friends, can't you?"

I blew higher than the Van Allen radiation belt. "You've got to be putting me on, Rooney! Call who? What 'strange friends'?" My face was so hot I could feel it in my mouth.

She stared at me accusingly.

So I called Candy.

Candy was a muscle for some nameless amalgamation of interests I don't think could be called the Syndicate. Maybe The Group, or The Guys, or Them, but definitely not The Syndicate. To begin with, he was Greek, not Sicilian.

But Candy was a furtive figure, I must admit. He collected the payoffs for the numbers banks in East L.A. and I have seen his 340 pounds walk into a deli as lightly as a prima ballerina, and within ten seconds cause more of a stir than a thermite bomb. "There was a lotta hits this week, Candy," the deli proprietor will con him. "The take is tiny. Tiny. I can't pony it all up. I can give ya 'bout half though, Candy, and the rest next week sometime."

Candy, who is only slightly less prepossessing than Mount Etna, will suck air into his bellowing chest, puff up twice again as large as normal, pouter-pigeon fashion, and in a voice soft as strangling babies, will reply: "Angie, you will kindly get it up or I will have to hurt you. Seriously." The scamper. And from some ratty cache beneath a counter, they produce the held-back portion of Candy's pickup money.

So I called Candy, who is maybe the gentlest cat I know.

"Hi," I started. It was not a particularly brilliant opening, but it was all I had available at the moment. "Listen, a friend of a friend of mine has got herself in a family way. Do you know anybody who can, uh, take care of her?"

He was affronted. Practically shrieked at me. What the hell kind of a guy did I think he was? He didn't screw around with those kinda people. Listen, if that was the kinda guy I thought he was, he would kindly honor him by forgetting his unlisted number. The nerve! The gall! What kind of a creeper

did I run around with, to need a guy who'd do that and finally Good-bye slam!

I turned around to Jenny and Rooney. "He hung up on me. Thanks."

They seemed shocked, and Rooney made devious remarks about the furtiveness of some shady types. I think I groaned.

Then I tried Van Jessup, a character actor who seemed to know everyone. He knew no one. Then I tried a tv director I'd played gin with a few times, and he said he'd get back to me. Then I tried a chick who made the Sunset Strip scene, and she asked a couple of guarded questions and said she'd get back to me. Then I called a relative in Pomona and she giggled outrageously, and said I should get back to her. Then I called The Boffer, who is a writer and a singer and a hustler of personal needs, and the conversation went like this:

"I need a doctor."

"So go to one."

"Not for me, man, for a chick."

"Pregnant?"

"Of course, stupid. You think I'm the Blue Cross or somedamnthing?"

"Rooney?"

"Don't be funny."

"Who then? And does Rooney know you've been playing pattyfingers?"

"I didn't do the knocking-up."

"A likely story."

"Cut it, man. I'm serious. This thing has lost its funny for me. It isn't my woman, and I didn't do the job on her, and I need a D&C man. Now can you help me or not?"

"I suppose so. I've had occasion to--"

"I don't want to know. Everyone agrees you're the finest swordsman in these parts. Can you get me a guy ... this is a favor I need, Boffer. It's for a friend."

"You know, everybody you call is gonna think it was you."

"I know."

"Since when did you get such humanitarian instincts?"

"A recent malady. What's his name? Is there a number?"

"You're a lot more noble and friendly than I'd be. This kinda scam is liable to ruin your reputation."

"I haven't got a reputation. What's his name? Give!"

There was a pause, as though The Boffer was seriously considering saying no. He's peculiar that way. His reasoning is on a very furry plane, taken up by intricacies even he barely understands, and informed by a scurrying rodentlike deviousness that comes from having been on the Hollywood merry-go-round for too many years. "Take this down. You got a pencil? Okay, take this down: S Jaime Quintano: the number is--"

He rattled it off twice and I still didn't get it. So he laid it on me slowly, and I wrote it down accurately as I could.

"Thanks, Boffer. You've got one coming."

I gave the information to Jenny, and she stared at it as though it was contaminated. "You'll have to do the calling," I told her. "Apparently he's a good man, has his own clinic, works most of the week in the Miguel Aleman Hospital, that's the big one down there. This friend of mine says he's taken gin down there a couple of times and this man has been very clean, very good. Three hundred dollars."

She continued to stare at the slip of paper.

"This is the number," I emphasized. It was like talking to a statue. "D-U-five-three-three-seven two, that's in Tijuana, and I think I have his name spelled right. Jenny ... ?"

First her shoulders began to heave. Silently. Then her entire body shook, as though possessed. And in a second she was dry-crying, her head sunk down on her chest almost, the top of her head bobbing like a cork in a rough sea. It had started to get through to her: what she had undergone had not been love, it had been something far more indelicate, something simpler, more destructive. She felt contaminated, felt insulted, in the strictest possible sense of the outmoded term, she felt sullied.

I moved over to her and put my arms around her. She was incapable, at that moment, of even knowing I was there. I held her very tightly for what seemed a long time, and slowly the shivering passed, and her head came up. The front of my shirt was soaked.

She came out from the burrow of my arms. "What's the area code to Tijuana?" she said softly.

"Nine-o-three," Rooney said, from the other side of the room. I looked at her, startled. "I've been there, too." Her face was very sad, and I realized: no one comes to anyone untouched.

Everyone goes through fire.

Jenny picked up the receiver and started to dial.

By the time the Thursday rolled around, I had six more names. A doctor in Monterey Park who was rumored to charge between three and five hundred, but had apparently been busted some time before, and was very much under wraps now. It would have entailed a drive out to that suburb. Five more in Tijuana. Two brothers with their own *Enfermería*, who only charged one hundred and fifty, and to whom you had to say, "Nurse Carlotta suggested I call you." Apparently Nurse Carlotta was a swinger in L.A. that the brothers dug. Another was alleged to keep the patient over for eight hours, and that was too terrifying for consideration. Overnight in that town would be worse than the operation for Jenny. There was an American doctor down there, Oswald Tremaine, Jr., who was appended with the title "butcher" by my informant, but he only charged one hundred and twenty-five. We decided Quintano was the best bet. His name had come up again, from a very reputable source, so we held the date of the appointment Jenny had made that night.

It was tacitly understood that Rooney and I would drive her down. If her parents ever found out the consequences were too hideous to consider. Jenny never expanded on the remark, but when I suggested that perhaps her parents might be very understanding, if she explained what had happened, she said, "My father has never hit me, but he has a very loud voice, and he wears a belt. My mother would cry."

We left it at that, and spent the week between the phone call and that Thursday getting ourselves ready. I was driving an MG Midget, a pretentious, cheaper copy of the Jaguar touring sedan. It was a lovely sort of thing, though, with glove-leather upholstery, dual carbs, a solid walnut dash panel that could be lifted out, four doors and the traditional MG red-painted engine. I got it lubed and checked out for the ride down. Rooney worked, of course, so her readying was all interior. As for Jenny, all I could tell of her state of mind, her capacity for handling this thing, as her nineteenth year became a nightmare, was that she did not cry again, and her conversation was not introspective.

When I asked her what had been said on the call to the doctor, she said: "A woman answered. She said, 'Bueno.' I told her a friend from Fresno had suggested I call Doctor Quintano about consultation. Then she put me through to him, and I said the same thing, and he asked me consultation about what I said I was having menstrual difficulties, that was what your friend told me to say, and he said just a minute; he said it very quickly, as though he didn't want to talk any more. Then the girl came back and asked me what day I wanted to come down, and I told her Thursday, and she said to call from San Diego when we got that far."

I had a feeling Jenny was going to be all right. She was getting much sharper, very quickly. Sometimes childhood and adolescence pass away just that fast, like morning mist, burned off by the sun or a rotten experience. Markham, the philosopher. You can't miss my ruminations: they're in the purple-bound folio over there.

Three hundred dollars had been the next point Quintano's woman had brought up. "Do you know the Doctor's fee?" she had asked. Jenny said three hundred. Not any more. That was last year's price. But what with the high cost of this and that, the going rate for Dilation & Curettage was now four hundred. Jenny said all right, to the woman (whose name was Nancy, and who spoke with a faint trace of Spanish accent) and to me, and to Roger Gore when she called him for the money.

She said all right.

But Roger Gore said no.

He also said she was a whore. He also said she was a harpy and a blackmailer and a tramp and she slept with dogs in the streets and if she had as many sticking out of her as she'd probably had sticking in her, she'd look like a porcupine. He concluded his chivalrous polemic with the comment that she could go peddle her ass on First and Main in downtown L.A. and raise the action that way. His parting line was, "Even if you charge what you're worth, you shouldn't have to make it with more than two or three hundred guys to raise the money."

When she repeated the conversation, I felt my jaw muscles turn to concrete, and I must have scraped a half-dozen layers of enamel off my back teeth. Frankly, I wanted to kill the bastard!

"I'll talk to him," I said.

I took a drive and stopped off at a phone booth in a gas station; while they were putting in a couple of bucks of hi-test I called Roger Gore.

"Is Roger there?"

"Who's this?"

"Ken Markham."

"He's not here."

"You won't be here for long, Gore, if you don't start acting like a man."

"I'll tell him when he comes in."

"Shape up, Gore. The kid's in trouble, and you'd damned well better be ready to take the responsibility."

"Screw you." Click.

I walked back to the car. "You save Blue Chip Stamps?" the gas jockey asked.

"Yeah. I'm saving up."

He grinned pleasantly. Make conversation. Build the clientele. "Oh? For what?"

"A hydrogen bomb."

He was still staring as I tooted out of the lot.

I was right, of course. He was trying to split. I drove up his driveway just as he was driving down. He screeched and stalled the Impala, and I slewed the Magnette crosswise across his path. I left the motor running and the emergency brake on, and I was out of the car, dashing toward him, fast as a walrus out of spit, before he could get coordinated. He was rolling up the windows and locking the doors as I pulled open the rear door on the side away from him. With four doors, four windows, he could only get to so many before I got to him. Logic. Wham!

I yanked open the door and plunged into the rear seat before he could turn around.

My arm went around his neck and yanked him half-out of the driver's seat. I used my free hand to slam the door handle beside him, and flung the front door open. Still holding him, I punched open the

door, and reached around. I grabbed the sonofabitch by his jacket and yanked him sidewise. He went sprawl-assing out of the car, and I was on him.

"Let's go see your house," I said tightly.

I took the car keys, and using a bring-along I'd learned at jolly old Fort Benning while doing my two for Uncle Sam, we dogtrotted back to the house. I unlocked the door and shoved him just enough ahead of me to plant my foot in the middle of his butt. I jacked my foot forward as hard as I could and Beau Brummel went flailing across the room, headfirst into the genuine imitation mahogany portable bar. Glassware went in all directions, his right hand swept an ornate cocktail shaker against the wall and he knocked the caster-mounted shell on its side. He fell in a very untidy heap, and I slammed the door behind me as I moved toward him. His eyes were like a pair of Rolls Royce foglamps.

"Four hundred dollars," I said, very gently, lifting him by his jacket front and his Jay Sebring twelve-dollar razor-cut.

"No, I, listen--" he started ...

"Curettage," I recited, from reading I had recently done, "is a French word meaning to scrape out. This is the simplest operation performed upon the uterus and consists of scraping the lining of the cavity." I let go of his jacket, still holding him up by the hair, and cocked back my fist. "It is performed under a light general anesthesia." I hit him as hard as I could, just under the left eye. "The normal uterus is a pear-shaped, muscular organ, about three inches long, two inches wide and one inch thick, lying in the midportion of the pelvis." He sagged sidewise, and the skin burned, blued, went gray and he started to bleed from a small cut. His eyes misted.

"The uterus," I continued, slapping him back and forth across the bridge of the nose to revive him, "consists of three layers--a thin, outer, sheathlike coat, a thick muscular layer, and a membranous lining to the cavity which is located in the center of the organ." He came back from wherever he fled, and there was a fear of the Furies gibbering in his blue eyes. His tongue peeked out of his mouth and I slammed him with the palm of my hand, and he bit the tip, screeching at me something I couldn't understand. I cuffed him in the right ear, then the left, and his head bobbed like the top scoop of an unsteady ice cream cone.

"Simply stated, the function of the uterus is to receive the fertilized egg (which travels from the ovary through the Fallopian tubes), nourish and contain the egg as it develops through pregnancy and"--I hit him with everything I had, flush in the mouth--"expel the fully developed embryo. Four hundred dollars, Roger." The lower lip tore, teeth bit through the upper, and he went far away again.

Softly, "Four hundred, Roger baby." I let him slip back down on his side. He lay there looking frightened.

I went into the kitchen and drew myself a glass of cold water. He was a lousy housekeeper; I had to rinse my own glass.

It had not been the most methodical of jobs, but then neither was I a schooled pistolero. It had been informed, however, by a classic frenzy and a degree of hatred/brutality I'd never known contained. I sat there while he sponged off his face with the wet washcloth, and my knees were shaking. He looked as though someone had mistaken his face for ten pounds of dogmeat, and had tried to fry it. His left eye was swollen shut, with thick, red-blue puffy tissue that gleamed in the light. His mouth was raw and cut through by his teeth. He had smaller cuts and contusions all over, and frankly it would be some time before the hatcheck girl at PJ's winked at him again. I handed him the phone. He looked at it, then at me. The eye was starting to drain blue into his cheek.

He called his father and mouthed some sort of nonsense about needing four hundred dollars to get him out of a very tight spot. I think he knew just how tight that spot was. His old man must have

said okay, because I saw Roger Gore visibly brighten at one point midway in the conversation. There was a great deal of ~~"Okay, Dad, this is the last time, I'll be turning over a new leaf, you'll see; you won't be sorry, Dad, thanks a million,"~~ and he racked the receiver. I looked at the kid just as hard as I could, and I said:

"It's a shame there's no law protecting girls like Jenny from their own stupidity. It's also a shame there's no law that punishes a guy for not being a gentleman. But anyhow, Roger friend, there are more serious pains than the ones I loaned you. I'm not telling you not to swear out an assault and battery on me. That'd be foolish, though; assault means to threaten battery, and since I didn't threaten you, I guess the best you could do would be battery, which might net me about five years in the slam, but there are more serious pains, Roger friend, and they are dispensed by much more unpleasant guys than me. I leave you with that thought.

"We'll be taking Jenny down to TJ on Thursday. Get the money to her before then." I stood up and made to leave.

He snarled at me from the floor. "Your Jenny is a tease and a bitch, man! She wanted it as much as I did, that Jenny of yours! So just who the hell you think you're helping? Your Jenny's a dummy and a tramp, and she hasn't got any honor to protect! So take your Jenny and shove--"

I planted my foot with carefully calculated force in his groin. Gently I added, "She is neither your Jenny nor mine. She is her own Jenny, and whatever is wrong there, fellah, she is still a human being."

"Which is a condition I doubt you possess."

He was sucking air like a beached bass when I left.

My engine was still running.

When I got back, Jenny was alone. Rooney had gone over to see her parents; they had bought a new dog, and Rooney was a flip when it came to babies or tiny dogs. It wasn't a vagrant thought: Jenny looked like a little of each. The washed-face pinkness and confusion of a baby; the anxiety and need for love or be loved a small dog wears like a second collar.

"Want to play some gin?" I asked her.

She nodded mutely and went to the sideboard to get the dog-eared deck. We sat down on the sofa and she shuffled while I lit a cigarette. For a while we played, and didn't say anything. Finally, I knocked on four in a spade hand, caught her with about twenty-five points, and said, "I talked to Roger. He's changed his mind."

"You didn't hurt him!" That was the first thing to cross her mind. Not did I get the money, not was she going to be rescued, but was he all right. I had one of those moments of stomach-muscle-tensing disorientation, as though I had intruded on a personal fight between two people who knew each other better than any interlopers with inclinations of arbitration.

"He's okay. We just ... talked awhile. I convinced him you were his responsibility. He'll be getting the money to you before Thursday."

She dropped her arms, and I could see her gin hand. It wasn't so hot. "Thank God," she breathed. There was a pale milkiness about her then. As though some vital ingredient in her spirit had been hatched by a catalytic agent, had vaporized in her system. She seemed just a little dead, at that moment.

She dropped the cards and lay back against the sofa with her eyes shut. Her hair was a natural blonde, somewhere between hard canary and yellow ocher, and she wore it in a ponytail, usually, a style few girls affect any more. But she wore it well, and there was a pleasantness to her youthfulness. I looked at her, resting there, and something turned over inside me.

She had said something.

I hadn't really heard it, had just imagined I'd heard it, but she had spoken, absently, without

realizing what words had been selected to convey her fear and her insecurity, but she had said, "Oh, Kenny ..."

And it was someone else's voice from another time. I can't remember even now who it was. Another girl I had known, when I was young enough to be able to remember everyone who had said yes, and count them on one hand. Perhaps it was that second girl I'd slept with. I can't recall who she was. There isn't anyone, man or woman, who can't recall the first. But the second ... ah, that's another matter. And perhaps it was her.

Whoever it had been, this was now, and Jenny had said, "Oh, Kenny ..." and I was holding her slim body very close to mine, and my hands were locked behind her back, still clutching the gin cards. Her face came up, and there were dust motes spinning in her eyes of whatever color those eyes might be.

I smelled her hair, and it was very clean. It was another reminder of things from before, but they were silly, irrelevant things, like a field of winter wheat I had run through once, on a picnic day, when there had been such things as days right for nothing but picnics. It was a stupid thought, and it passed quickly, but not before I recalled having run and run and finally fallen down on my back, and lay there, completely hidden from all but the sky, staring straight up and feeling sorry as hell for myself. I kissed Jenny, and her mouth was soft, precisely as a woman's mouth should be. I kissed her the way a gentle lover would kiss someone he revered.

"Not like that," she murmured, pulling my face down harshly. "Like this." She opened her lips and worked at me fiercely, as though it was something worth doing and hence, something worth doing well. It was possibly the grandmother of all Soul Kisses, and when she was done, I knew I'd been kissed. My hand was on her thigh, and she moved slightly, so my hand went over the rise, down where her slacks were tightest. I had a mad thought that someone was going to pop out of the clothes closet. I don't want to take movies of it all, but that thought passed, too, and in a moment we were wriggling with each other's clothes, trying to keep our mouths together, and yet get naked.

Jenny was young, but Jenny was expert. She took me the way Hillary and Tenzing Norgay took Everest: all the way, and chiefly because it was there. Anything worth doing was worth doing well. Midway, she arched up and there was a feral gleam on her face, a drawing back of the lips and an exposure of small teeth that reminded me of a timber wolf I'd shot up near North Bay. Sometimes though, she was a flower, and sometimes she was a hot shower, and sometimes she was a pitch pipe whistling an elegant tune. She had a small habit of twisting her hips sidewise at special times.

When we were over the final hill, and the road behind seemed much too rough for anyone to have crossed alone, much less two people as strangely locked as we had been, I went into the bathroom and took a bath. Not a shower. A bath. I have taken showers since I was sixteen and had a bad back. Baths are a pain, and they leave a dirty ring around the tub.

I felt I needed a bath.

And I wanted to see that dirty ring around the tub.

Thursday was two hells and a decapitation away. Every time Rooney looked at me I could swear she knew. And when Jenny leaned over in a movie we three attended, with her hand on my leg, and whispered, "At least I know for sure you couldn't make me pregnant," I wanted to open my wrists with a beer can opener. What had I stumbled upon: a key to the depravity of the young? Or the key to my own yin and yang? I didn't feel guilty, I felt unclean, which was infinitely worse. I, Kenneth Duane Markham, became a case in point for myself. This, I thought angrily, is how we fool ourselves in thinking we're honorable men. Jenny's mere existence became a constant reminder of the other side of my nature; an ungovernable side that didn't even have the consistency, the decency or the stamina

be constant. I was a mealymouthed, smiling sinner who took his pleasures and pains as they comfortably fit into the regimented scene of everyday life. Dorian Gray be damned! There isn't one of us who isn't in that bag.

But finally we left. Our little caravanserai moved out onto the road with all the glee and aplomb of a New Orleans funeral that couldn't find a Preservation Hall Dixieland band.

We turned onto the Hollywood Freeway and sped straight down Route 101. Santa Ana Freeway, Pacific Coast Highway, El Camino Real; past Downey and its used car carnivals, past Disneyland and its ludicrous Matterhorn rising out of the surrounding squalor, past Tustin and the art bookstore that faces out on a highway going too fast to give a damn. San Juan Capistrano, and I've never seen a swallow yet, going or coming. San Clemente, Del Mar, Pacific Beach, and we were in San Diego. I once asked a resident if they minded the Navy calling it "Dago," and that worthy responded he didn't care if they called it dog-whoopee, as long as they kept spending their money. That, I feel, sums up the beauty and glory of San Diego, a helluva way to end a beautiful state. It is not, I hasten to add, a coincidence that Dago appears at what might metaphorically be termed the backside of the state. We pulled in at a one-arm joint on 101, just before National City, the other side of San Diego, and while Jenny went to phone, Rooney and I had cups of coffee; I worked my neck around, trying to unkink it.

"What's the matter with you today?" she asked, over the lip of the cup.

"What do you mean: what's the matter? Nothing. Why, does something look the matter?" I couldn't feel my nose growing, like Pinocchio's.

"You've been awfully quiet the last forty miles or so."

I shrugged. "Tired. My back aches. That's all."

She didn't answer, but she knew I was lying.

"And this isn't really the pleasure trip of all time," I added. Keep talking, schmuck, I told myself. Dig it a little deeper.

"Well, it'll all be over soon enough," Rooney said, trying to cover her own awareness of my mood. She knew me too well. I knew we'd be splitting up soon. I couldn't let anyone get that close to the core of me; as long as it was froth and foam it was safe. But the encystment was too marked in me at age thirty. I smiled across at her reassuringly.

Jenny came back. "Have a cup of coffee and a piece of pie," I told her. She shook her head. "I'm not supposed to eat before the operation. His girl told me not to eat for about six hours beforehand. I haven't eaten since last night. I'm starving, but you know you're not supposed to eat before this kind of thing."

I hadn't known, but I saw no reason for her to make a big who-struck-John of the whole matter. I mumbled something about oh yeah, I knew. And that was that. She sat down next to Rooney, staring at me with open malevolence. Like I was the guy who'd knocked her up. In a philosophical sense, suppose I was as guilty as Roger Gore, but somehow I couldn't bring myself to eat that particular humble pie. I had a feeling too many strange Jack Horners had already had their thumbs in it.

"Well, what did they say?" Rooney asked.

Jenny pulled her eyes away from me with difficulty. There was actually physical violence in her expression. I chalked it up to her fear and the fact that I was a man the same as Roger Gore, only I wasn't handy for hating.

"She said to drive across the border, into downtown Tijuana, and park behind the Woolworth's at 4:30, there'd be a fellow to meet us. She said his name is Louis--"

"Luis," I corrected her.

"So Loo-ees," she snapped back. "So what?" Then she went on, addressing herself to Rooney.

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