

# My Incredible Week In L.A.

John Ruskan

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Spending a week in L.A. meant one thing for me: women.

Having been in San Francisco for over two years now, with not a single serious female encounter, and a non-existent social life in general, has left me with doubts about staying and a big itch. I don't know what it is about the place. Even though I have lived here several times, including a year in the wild seventies, I can't get laid. These periods in San Francisco were preceded and followed by normal romantic life in New York and other places. I have never had sex in San Francisco.

Before this present swing through the foggy city, I was in L.A. for over two years – the first step in my determined move out of New York. In L.A., I went to bed with two women – at different times – an acceptable percentage, seeing how incredibly particular I am about who I get involved with. The first of these I met within a few days of arrival, and in one week, I had moved in with her. It lasted for about a year.

I finally decided to move to the Bay Area because I thought it would be more serious, more intellectual as well as enlightened, that I might fit in better here than in glittery, superficial L.A. with its all-pervasive film-business mentality, but this has not proved to be the case. Possibly an explanation is to be found in astrology: My Venus line – presumably where I will have increased opportunity and inclination to be social – runs through southern California, but not the north. This is what I have set out to explore this week.

The week starts the day before I leave. I am planning to drive in my van, which I have set up as a quite comfortable camper, with

bed, sink with running water, stove, storage, sound system, etc. It has been my home on the road for the last ten years. Even though I have now been in California for over four years, I have not registered the car here – it still has Jersey plates and a registration that expired three years ago. Since I have another vehicle for everyday driving, this has not been a pressing concern, but because I am about to spend a week in the van, I decide to make it legal.

On Friday afternoon, I go down to the DMV. After waiting in line for an hour and a half, I am told that I have to get the car looked at by the inspector out front, which I should have done before waiting in line. I wait more to have the car inspected. Since it's not California smog approved, it will cost three hundred dollars on top of the other fees. I try to go back inside to finish the registration, but it's past five PM, and the doors are locked. Impatient and disgusted, I say the hell with it. Saturday morning I hit the road, having packed the van on Friday evening. I resolve to be the most perfect driver in the state.

### *Saturday*

Late afternoon, I'm rolling onto Santa Monica Boulevard off the 405. I'm thrilled. I do have history and roots here. L. A. has a vital sense of pop culture with which I deeply resonate. My two years here were a wonderful period for me, spent almost full-time working on music: Listening to what was then the best progressive pop music radio station in the country, KCRW; catching up on what

happened in the music world in the last ten years; composing and recording a CD in the *trip-hop* genre, called IN, which I released on my own small label, as I had done in the past.

But what's this? It's cold. It's really cold. I was totally expecting the warm southern Cal sun. I later learn that the weather has been confused all this winter and spring. It continued cold for most of the week, but the last few days it got hot, like it's supposed to be this time of year. It seemed somehow a sign that I was here as it warmed up.

My first stop, as long as I'm in the neighborhood, is the Natural Foods Coop in Santa Monica, where I did all my food shopping. Nothing much happening here; in fact, it's too quiet, compared to the throbbing Whole Foods in the Bay Area. Next stop, the self-car wash on Lincoln, where I clean off what appears to be several pounds of bugs from the front of my car. Then, not wanting to waste any time, I zoom straight over to one of the hubs of my social contact network in L.A., the Novel Café on Pier Street in the Ocean Park section of Santa Monica. This was where I met the woman I lived with before.

The Novel is a great center for artists and other misfits in L.A. The walls are lined with books, people sit all day with laptops, etc. And it's social. The place is busy. I notice a highly attractive young woman sitting by herself near the front door as I come in, talking on her cell phone, with a violin case next to her. She sees me look at her. I get a pot of tea, and wander back near her, looking for a place

to sit. Still talking, she makes signs that I could sit across from her and share her table. I do.

It's the beginning of a magical high that will last the entire week. She's dressed arty, obviously an artist, the kind of woman I think I'm looking for. My initial take is that she's a serious person, doesn't live in the café, and probably doesn't invite everyone who walks in to sit with her. I allow myself to think that there's a mutual attraction underway. Remember, I'm coming from a city where I've spent two years hanging out in cafés, art galleries, and so on, with almost no interaction and no serious encounters, where I don't even see a woman that I'm interested in – nothing like this. This is surreal. I step into another time zone. It's also *déjà vu* that she's got a violin case with her, since my only friend (platonic) and musical compatriot back home, Anastasia, plays violin, not that common an instrument among pop artists.

She keeps talking on the phone, very animatedly, for about ten minutes. I'm reading the L.A. Weekly. Finally, she hangs up. After a few seconds, I open with,

“Well, that looked like fun.”

She smiles back in the affirmative. I continue,

“Not that I was eavesdropping – I couldn't really hear what you were saying, but I couldn't help notice with my *peripheral earsight* that you seemed to be having a good time.”

And so the conversation has begun. It's amazing that it has been so effortless. I am talking, smiling, relating easily, not like back home. It turns out she was not completely having fun on the phone,

but was telling her friend about her day, which has been a bitch. She's had a fight with a producer-songwriter partner she's just started working with. She's tired, and has to talk more on the phone. Her name is Lillie.

She asks me if I'm in music. She must be psychic. She tells me she's a singer-songwriter, that she's got a contract with Atlantic Records. She tells me about the difficulties of keeping a band together, she talks a little about her music. I'm impressed – I'm back in the big leagues now. I try to impress her – I tell her about my musical past, that I used to own a recording studio in New York, that I've released independent records, that I compose and record. I don't mention that I'm not local.

After twenty minutes of talk, Lillie says she has to make more calls, and excuses herself to go outside for privacy. She tells me she's playing Tuesday night at a club called *Genghis Cohen* up in Hollywood, and that I should stop by. At this point, I'm not sure whether she wants to continue exploring the possibilities of personal contact, or whether she merely wants more bodies in the club. I'm suspecting that I may have been dumped because it doesn't look like I'm big-time enough to be able to help her in her journey to the top – a syndrome that I continually encountered in L.A. and which I abhor. I console myself with the notion that at least I looked big-time enough to capture her interest. But still, perhaps I am reacting too soon. I decide to catch her act on Tuesday and see what happens. I'm dazzled by my first hour in town.

I sit there for a while more, checking the Weekly for any art openings that might be happening that evening. I find one, and then realize it's in a new gallery that's opened right next to the Novel. I go to my van and change into the appropriate gallery-opening clothes. When I get back to the gallery, it's about six-thirty PM, and the opening is beginning to take off. Soon, the place is bustling with a heavy hit of Hollywood types, and I'm again intrigued. Good looks, urban style, charisma, the energy in the gallery is pulsating.

There are beautiful women of a kind that I haven't seen at all in Frisco – obviously young actresses. Some of their beauty is plastic, with inflated boobs, but not all. But what's impressing me most is the presence of artist types of all ages – people who make a living being creative. In Frisco, there is a large community of young artists, under twenty-five, but I rarely come across older artists who might form a peer group for me. I try to not think that most of them probably work in the film business, where I don't mesh.

I mingle. I'm noticed too. People initiate small talk with me. I feel outgoing. I start a conversation with one woman. She's young, and after a few sentences it's apparent that she doesn't have enough depth for me, but we continue to babble for a while. The conversation is longer than any of the two or three I've had in two years of gallery-hopping in Frisco. At one point, one of the showing artists comes over and introduces himself. We chat for a minute, but I'm awkward because although I'm entranced by the scene, I don't like the art at all. In fact, I'm curious that this show could have

brought out this crowd, but someone later tells me it's just that everyone knows this gallery.

I linger for longer than I should – almost two hours. I'm still captivated by the glamour. Several stars show up. I notice Jackson Brown standing around; at one point, we exchange glances. I see another lesser-known actor who I've seen in films but whose name escapes me. The crowd spills out onto the sidewalk and blends with the Novel crowd next door.

Finally, I decide to get some dinner and walk down Main Street to a restaurant that I used to go to. As I'm sitting there, waiting for the food, two women from the opening come in and sit down. After they order, one of them shouts to me, across the small room,

“Are you Christian?”

This sounds like a pickup ploy. I just smile back, no, because I'm not attracted, but I'm astounded that I can't turn it off. Undaunted, she continues, laughing,

“I don't mean are you *a* Christian, we're not, but is your *name* Christian?”

I politely mumble something back, and they leave me alone.

After dinner, I'm tired from the day of driving and all the excitement. I take the van to the guest lot of a large apartment building on Ocean Ave, just a block away. I've always been able to crash in their lot without being detected. I sleep well.



## *Sunday*

Sunday was quiet. I'm still flying from Saturday night. After waking, I catch some coffee (decaf) and a muffin. I normally don't drink coffee, but ended up having a cup each morning I was here, and it didn't affect my sleep at all, the way it usually does. I go to Máne's Bakery, another of my old haunts, on Main Street. More urban L.A. types, hanging out. They're all over the place.

I attend the Self-Realization Fellowship service in Pacific Palisades, which I used to frequent. I'm disappointed that it's so much like a conventional church service, with the emphasis on God as some grand being in the sky, instead of an expanded awareness within. The sermon is about setting goals and working hard to achieve them. It completely turns me off. What's happened to going with the flow? Instead of having an experience, I'm preached at. I don't think this is what Paramahansa had in mind.

That afternoon, I stroll the Santa Monica Promenade, still fun, although somewhat mainstream. Evening, back at the Novel, which is quiet, except for a folksinging duo, the *Two Jew Review* can you believe it? Their first song is all about bacon. They are trying to be comedic – to me, they are simply trite.

I drive up to Topanga Canyon, only twenty minutes away, to spend the evening. I know a great place where I can park as much as I want, and never get disturbed or discovered. Up in the canyon mountains, I'm awed by the power of the place, under the dark starry sky, in contrast to the polluted and jangled atmosphere of the

city. The only problem for me is the dogs of the canyon. The quiet is continually raped by the hostile yelping of the dogs, which goes on all night. I can't comprehend how people can be so insensitive to not be affected by it, or to allow it to continue. I feel alienated. If I were to move back to L.A., I would want to live here, but this could be a serious annoyance.

The temperature is low in the mountains. I sleep, but I'm cold most of the night.

### *Monday*

Monday morning I drive out of my lair and to the Mimosa, a tiny coffee place in Topanga. There's room for maybe ten people max, but it's the center for gossip and gathering in the area. I sit around for an hour, and I like the people who come though. There's one elegantly dressed and groomed woman – very hip looking – who's talking to all the men. I start to think about moving back to L.A.

Enough of the Mimosa, I decide to head off to Venice, where I lived when I was here. The central coffee hangout for artists in Venice is Abbott's Habit. I'm revved about seeing it again, because it was another social hub for me. I get there around eleven AM. I order a tea, and I sit out front on the bench that backs up to the large plate glass window of the café. The bench is popular because it's in the sun. Even though the sun is weak and it's cold, it's still a good spot.

I consider that in the effort to establish whether I could have any social life in L.A. I should try speaking to some men, not only women. There's a guy sitting on a chair at the end of the bench that I'm on. He's reading the paper; I'm reading a free healing magazine. After ten minutes, I ask him if he knows where a certain area code is that appears in an interesting ad in my mag. Spotting me immediately for an out-of-towner, he explains to me all the latest changes in the phone network here. The area code is Hollywood; there are now new area codes; you have to dial even your own area code when you call within it. We talk, but soon he excuses himself to go back to his paper.

While we were talking, a young woman comes out of the café with a sandwich, and sits down on the bench on the other side of me, less than three feet away. I notice her, and again, remarkably, I'm immediately attracted by her looks. I say "remarkably" because it's so rare that I see women to whom I'm physically attracted. She's got blond hair, blue eyes, a lovely face, a nice bod, and is dressed intriguingly in a long green somewhat low-cut antique sheath, open sweater, hat, and leopard-skin sandals with crimson toenails. Lord help me, this is the kind of thing that appeals to me. She's tall – as tall as me. She puts her sandwich down on the bench between us, and next to it, salt and pepper shakers that she has also transported from the café. She's got my complete surreptitious attention.

She lifts off the upper layer of bagel from her sandwich, picks up the pepper, shakes it over the sandwich, and the top comes off.

Half the contents of the shaker spill onto the sandwich. We both laugh loudly, simultaneously, as if we are watching a movie. And, indeed, it became a movie. The encounter had begun.

She tells me she's an actress and a healer. We talk for an hour, about the film business, astral bodies, astral travel that we've both done, lucid dreaming, meditation, the importance of emotions, energetic healing, vampirism in L.A. I tell her about my work, about *Emotional Clearing*, and what it's based on. I'm amazed that someone so attractive can be so genuinely into spirituality. She's been in L.A. five months, just back from India, where she meditated a lot and wrote a one-woman performance piece. Her name is Katja. She's from Holland. She says she's been traveling for the last eight years. She speaks with an accent that amplifies her charm.

She tells me that most of her aloneness in L.A. has been loneliness; she needs to be more social. Her last friend never called her back after she mentioned that she thought he should do some work on himself. Her intensity scares people away. Her courage and honesty in sharing this completely win me. She asks me if I have any friends in San Francisco. I say,

“Just one, this woman named Anastasia. We're not romantically involved, but I wish we were, I'm crazy about her. We just work on music together.”

“Ooh, that's nice,” Katja says.

I haven't eaten lunch yet, so I ask her if she would like to move inside the café with me while I get something. She says yes – we appear to have agreed to spend time together. We talk more. For

some reason that I can't remember, the Yes Community comes up. The Yes Community is a communal crashpad run by an Oshoite called Arhata in Venice. It's in a sleazy part of Venice, but their buildings are beautiful. Arhata rents these modern architectural beauties, and subleases rooms to transients, who ostensibly become part of the spiritual community. When I lived in Venice, I used to rent time in the complex to see therapy clients, and somehow the arrangement worked for me. The sleazy/beautiful grounds are even more glamorous because they are right next door to Dennis Hopper's sleazy/beautiful residence. Now that I am on the road, I am dropping into the community for a daily shower. Katja happened to stay there when she first landed here and had a bad experience with them involving money.

I finish eating. Katja says,

"Would you like to come back to my place and hang out in my garden for a while?"

This strikes me as an invitation from heaven – a beautiful, intelligent woman inviting me back to her "garden." Erotic imagery explodes in my head. The surrealness that began on Saturday was quantum-leaping onto new planes. Her place is only a few blocks away. We take the van.

We pull into an alley, walk through a back fence onto a lawn, and around the corner to a small one-room cottage that faces the yard, with a larger, main house opposite. There are trees and grass and flowers – it's serene. Inside, it's charming but without kitchen or bathroom. Katja explains that she uses facilities in the house.

She says, “Would you like to smoke a joint?”

Oh, oh, is this really happening. I haven’t smoked any weed in the last twenty years except for a couple of visits to my good friend in Woodstock, but I remember thinking at the time that I should probably smoke more. Let’s go with the flow, I decide. I take only two hits, which is plenty for me to get off. We are sitting on some chairs in front of the cottage. Katja starts telling me more about her art. She’s trying to break in as an actress. She has a performance piece she’s written that she puts on around town. She asks me if I would like to know more about it. Definitely, I reply. But first she needs to pee. She walks around the side of the cottage and goes in the grass.

“The name of the piece is *Catwoman of the Moon* only I spell it with a K, as in Katja. So it’s Katja the Katwoman. The Katwoman comes down to the Earth, and tries to communicate with the beings of the Earth. But, she knows how to communicate only in her own language, which is the language of emotion. She finds that she is misunderstood, and not accepted. The only person who she can talk to is the Statue of Liberty, with whom she regularly confides and receives wisdom about how to get along with these Earth mortals. Do you want to hear more?” she asks. Absolutely, I say.

Katja launches into her piece. For forty-five stoned minutes, seated across from me, she performs the piece in its entirety, along with taped musical accompaniment. She recites prose and poetry. She alternates between being Katwoman and then the Statue of Liberty (with her arm held up high). She entrances, entices,

beguiles, smiles, leads me through a maze of feelings that astounds me. She is entirely, absolutely in the moment. I totally believe that she is making the story up as she goes along, that she will tell it only to me, and no one else.

We are locked eye to eye, chakra to chakra, meeting on all levels. We have left ordinary time and space behind, and are somewhere on the astral plane. Her face becomes a thousand faces, continually changing. She teases me, she talks to me, but most of all, we are both smiling to each other in complete harmony. She never performs, she is always just a friend telling a story to a friend. As she captivates and holds my mind with her eyes, she reaches out from her body with her emotion and thrashes me from side to side. The superbly relaxed, spontaneous verbal delivery is only to keep me still while her body delivers the real message on the emotional level.

At times, she brings her full power to bear with finely controlled and measured emphatic voicings that penetrate deep through my psyche. She intimidates me. I could never compete with this, I think, but then, she senses my overwhelm and pulls back, again to reassure me with her deep friendliness that we are together and there is no place for fear. I am consciously opening to her, receiving what she is transmitting. I am also deeply in the moment, with no thoughts of my own, just what she sends.

The piece ends, and I am left stunned. Experiencing art, and the deeper realms of myself, is mainly what I used to do when stoned. I haven't had many artistic experiences that have moved me

as deeply as this piece. The sheer presence of it was incredible. We sit for a while, and I try to tell her how powerful the experience was for me. She is obviously thrilled at being seen and heard so deeply. She tells me that I am a good audience. I know I am, this is exactly what I do for a living – I am a therapist, remember? Being supportive through being receptive is my power.

But I don't say this, of course. Part of my growth has been how to reconcile this feminine trait with my masculine self, and all my work at self-expression has been in this direction. Still, a problem I often encounter with women is that the giving I extend though receiving is not reciprocated. Either they are too much into their male, or are simply without the capacity, which, after all, is not all that common. I wonder if Katja will be able to be a good audience for me.

It's six PM, time for her to go to work. She waitresses. I offer to drive her, because I have seen no evidence that she owns a vehicle. She has to change. I wait in the van. When she comes out, she is dressed as a man, in black pants, white shirt and black tie. She hates the way she has to dress for work, but the pay is excellent. Seeing her as a man again sets the surrealness in motion. She has changed into yet another Katja.

Before I drop her off, we make plans to get together on the following day. I tell her I will call her around eleven in the morning. It might be a little soon to see each other again, but my time here is limited. We say good-bye. My impression is that we are both happy about the afternoon we have spent together.



I have a quiet evening, then head back to Topanga for the night. As the evening passes, I feel more and more like a cold might be coming on. I have got a sudden sore throat and drippy nose. Not wanting to mess around with being sick, I stop in the Topanga general store for some nighttime cold medicine.

### *Tuesday*

In spite of the medicine, the cold hits during the night. It's again chilly in the van, and I sleep badly. When I awake at nine, I am resigned to having to nurse a cold through my week in L.A. This is very annoying. It's my third cold of the winter, which is unprecedented for me. Usually, I might get one cold per year, and not always. I start to wonder if it's because of the polluted Point Richmond environment in which I inadvertently landed in San Francisco, and from which I delay leaving because I love my space so much. Disgruntled, I head for the Mimosa, a cup of decaf and a plain croissant to alter my mindset. I am also somewhat washed out from the weed and the excitement of the previous day.

I am sitting at a table near the coffee paraphernalia, just staring across the room, which I do so well – I don't need a book in front of me, like most people. A few locals are bustling about. I don't pay much attention, but I'm courteous when people make remarks to me. After about a half hour, it happens again.

She walks in. Takes off a sweater. Grabs a coffee. She's standing there in front of me, tinkering with the coffee stuff, in a light

gray tee shirt, fairly tight, no bra, light green-gray tight cotton pants, with lots of midriff flashing. I can't believe it. She's cute, but this body is one that some men would die (or kill) for. She's also a brunette, which deeply captivates me and not that common in California.

She sits at the empty table right in front of me, with her back towards me. Gets out a book and writing pad, and zeros in on it. After ten minutes, she gets up for something else from the coffee accessory table, which is right next to me. She's standing there with her butt about one foot from my right shoulder. At some point, she turns slightly, and I take the leap:

"You're looking quite studious this morning," I'm able to say reasonably well.

She smiles, "Yes, I'm writing an essay."

"Oh," I counter, "what's that for?"

"I'm in a psychology program, working toward a masters."

I have died and gone to heaven. I offer back, with gratitude and complete dead-pan humility, "How interesting. I'm in the psychology field too."

She returns to her table, we continue to chat. Within sixty seconds, I'm sitting across from her, and we are reestablishing the foundations of East/West psychology. I have forgotten completely about yesterday. All that matters is that I impress this woman. Since I know a lot about East/West psychology, I shamelessly – utterly shamelessly – start talking my most erudite theories. She seems to be impressed.

Her name is Jenna. She's exotic. I didn't ask, but it appears as if she might have some Icelandic blood. She's also utterly unpretentious, open, and warm. Her completely beautiful and captivating energy lifts me out of my slump. We start to hit on all chakras. We start to make incredibly long eye contact. Her gaze is wonderfully vibrant, supportive, uplifting, healing. I meld with her through her gaze. She tells me she's a dancer. This is too good to be true. I daringly say,

"Oh, nice. Many of my girlfriends have been dancers. I think I was a dancer in a past life."

We start to talk about personal things. She's got an active spiritual practice. She just moved to L.A. from San Francisco (Berkeley) five months ago! She tells me exactly how the two places compare, to help me decide if I should move here. She says that L.A. is full of talented people from all over the world who go deep, not only into professional things but into their art and spirituality. She is experiencing a wonderful freeness in expressing herself. She is tapping into the vibrant creative energy that permeates the place.

She gives me her phone number, and says to call. We get into more personal stuff, and she ventures that she's got a problem with pulling away from a relationship once she gets involved. She asks how that might be handled with my approach. I answer: Sit with it until you are guided to the feeling that makes you withdraw, and then process the feeling. She nods.

At some point, she asks how old I am. I reply. She's surprised. I ask her age. Twenty-eight, she says, "going on twenty-

nine.” Dear God, here it is again. I never thought about her age, but she looked older than that. She asks me my birthday; she wants to knock out my chart on her computer, to check our compatibility. Normally, I don’t give out this information except to close friends, but I am so thoroughly charmed that I do.

We talk more about spiritual practice. I forget how we get onto sexuality, but I’m explaining how Tantra relates to the spiritual path. Tantra, in my understanding, is sex without conventional orgasm, where the energy that builds up is drawn upward into the body. For men, there’s no ejaculation; the inner orgasm is more like that of a woman’s body orgasm. For women, it means relinquishing clitoral orgasm. She pines that she would like to find someone who could show her how to do it. I’m absolutely dying.

We start talking more about clitoral orgasms versus body orgasms for women. She says that a clitoral orgasm is contracting, while a body orgasm is expanding. Instead of being fixated on climaxing, like a man is, a woman can experience an expansion by focusing on the body climax, which is not really a climax, but a building of wave after wave of heightened feeling.

Caught up in the magic of the moment, I decide to tell her something very personal. I tell her that this is something I’ve never told anyone, but in my last relationship (the one in L.A.) I became confused about my sexual role and the different sexual requirements of myself and my partner. She required a lot of clitoral stimulation, which was assumed to be my responsibility, and started becoming a chore, and I started turning off to sex. Usually, when we had sex, I

didn't climax, but if I did want to, all I needed and wanted was normal intercourse. For her, intercourse alone was never enough.

As I look back, I realize that a reason for this may have been that in Tantra, which I was trying to practice, the motion is very gentle, possibly mostly because the man is so sensitive from never ejaculating that he will come immediately if the sex is too active. It requires quiet movements, which can last for an hour or more, but it can actually become more active as the energy builds in the couple over the course of the love-making session. But we never got together in our goals, because she was focused on the clitoris – only another sign of allowing her maleness to dominate at the expense of her feminine, I felt.

During all the talk about sex, we are maintaining huge eye contact, and I think it would be naive to not recognize that this is stimulating. I decide that it would be all right if we got more playful and I allow myself to get a little hard in the central forelimb as we are sitting at the table. Although, of course, I give no overt sign of this, I thought it very likely that Jenna would pick up the energy, since we are so in tune. It seems to go over well.

Finally, we have sat enough in the café. About an hour and a half has passed. I suggest that we go out to the parking lot where I can show her a copy of *Emotional Clearing*, of which we have spoken. Jenna happily agrees. I'm also wondering if *she's* got a garden at home, and after yesterday, I'm thinking that anything could happen next.

As we're walking out of the café, crossing the patio to the parking lot, Jenna hits me in the stomach, hard. I almost fall onto the concrete. She says,

"I'm so, so happy. I met the most wonderful man and we've been together for a month now, and I'm completely in love with him. His name is Devon. We connect more deeply than I ever have with anyone."

I can't believe what I'm hearing. Everything changes in an instant. I have been enticed, deceived, and abandoned. I trusted and was hurt. She gave herself only because she knew she would never have to really give. She toyed with me. "Oh, I see," I manage. We go to the van and I show her the book. We are sitting in the van, on the front seats.

I decide to confront her. "This is totally unexpected, Jenna. I thought we were leading up to something."

"You mean if we can't have sex, then you're not interested in talking to me?"

"It's not a question of sex. I thought we were exploring the possibility of an involvement. I'm not interested in just sex."

"But I *am* attracted to you. I don't understand why I can't have an emotionally intense relationship with another man and not have it have to be a sexual relationship."

"It's just that I feel your position should have been made clear from the beginning. You dropped a lot of hints that you were thinking about how well we would get along, and I think it's clear that all that sexual talk was stimulating."

“Can you see how contracted we’re getting?”

“I’m not sure I would call it contracted; I’m only trying to explain my feelings, and I feel that what has happened should be brought to your attention.”

It doesn’t go much further than this, but we’ve had a fight. We linger for a while more, and then we say good-bye. I forget the actual parting scene, except that it was amicable but strained.

It’s now twelve-thirty PM, past the time when I’m supposed to call Katja. I get to a phone. I’m weak from the cold, and I don’t know how I could ever handle the afternoon with Katja after this morning, but I decide to give it a whirl. I even think that I might discuss the event with Katja, she seems so liberal-minded and insightful, and it would be interesting to get her opinion. I call. She’s just gotten up. She says she went out for a drink last night with a friend and got home late. I immediately feel better about having mentally cheated on her with Jenna. She continues that

“It was terrible. The place was full of vampires.”

A vampire, to Katja, is anyone who sucks your energy. I immediately wonder if Jenna’s behavior would qualify as a form of vampirism, and I decide that I *will* discuss it with Katja.

“But listen John, something’s come up. A friend is going to take me up to the Hollywood sign and we are going to take some shots of me, and then I work later. Can we get together tomorrow? Tomorrow I work lunch, and we can have the afternoon or evening.”

She sounds sincere. But even though I’m in no shape to see Katja, I’m mildly miffed that she is flaking out. Don’t people make

plans to do pub shots more than a hour in advance? But, of course I agree. She ends the call with an emphatic,

“Good. Great. I’ll see you tomorrow” in charming Dutch accent that reassures me.

My cold is getting worse. I’m constantly blowing my nose. I decide to take the van up to another favorite spot in the Topanga hills, where there are no houses, and sit with the morning’s events. It’s sunny and warm up there, and I open the side sliding door, which is covered by olive drab mosquito netting. I make a tea, and I sit cross-legged on my cushion looking out the door, up a dirt road that winds around a bend. There’s a creature up the road that appears to be a dog, just sitting there and looking around, but then I realize it’s not a dog. It accommodately gets up and lazily ambles towards me so I can identify it. Soon, I make out that it’s a bobcat. It stops before it gets too close, and then turns around, but I feel as if I’ve contacted some native animal energy that will help me in my meditation.

I sit. I process. I open to the feelings that came up with Jenna: Strong contact. Incredible attraction, emotional and sexual. Promise of compatibility and fulfillment. Then the hurt: Insensitivity to me, pulling away, denial of herself. Then, humiliation at having exposed personal things about myself to someone who is insincere. Then, anger. I just stay with the feelings, not trying to figure anything out. After only ten minutes, I start to get clear. The feelings start to evaporate, along with my need to get anything from Jenna. I see that on one level, Jenna’s willingness to engage with me can be



seen as proof of the genuine attraction she felt for me, both on a professional and personal level. There's no doubt she found my work inspiring, and there's no question she also participated in the soul communion – delusional or not – that I experienced.

On another level, I see that we both played out a karmic drama, our patterns meshing. But neither of us had yet benefited, since we had not recognized the patterns. As far as I can tell about her at this point, she played out the very syndrome she described: being attracted to, and then stepping back from, a relationship encounter. I played out my current crisis in reconciling the place of relationship with spiritual growth.

I'm aware that the attraction for the woman outside results from the projection of parts of myself yet unclaimed. That so few women can hold the projection for me now, is to me, evidence that I am growing beyond the illusion that they can supply me with the essence that I seek. Still, the hunger for emotional completion remains, and it constitutes a major part of my work, of which an important aspect is learning how to relate in a new way, a way not based on projection. Not having this totally together, I am still drawn into occasional projection-based attractions, such as I have been describing. But when I am, I experience the collapse of the projection very quickly – instead of taking two years, it now takes two hours. I see how I gave my power to Jenna, in buying into the attraction, and I see that I quickly reclaimed it, but the experiencing of reclaiming was cast as disappointment and betrayal, for which I

blamed her. Now that I have reclaimed my power, I no longer feel any resentment towards her, and I have released her from the blame.

I'm feeling good. I linger a while longer in the hills, and then I decide to call her and tell her something about this. I get to a phone, she answers.

"Hi Jenna, it's John. Are you getting any writing done?"

"Oh yes."

"Look, I just wanted to say that I think I must have been in a weak place this morning what with the cold I have and not sleeping well, and I think I overreacted. I want to apologize for anything harsh I may have said. I understand that we were both attracted to each other, and we acted on it, and it was a beautiful experience. I don't want to destroy it by laying any requirements on it, and I'd be very happy to continue to know you and let our relationship be exactly what it is with no expectations. (pause) Are you OK with this?"

"Yes. Yes. That's fine." She sounds speechless.

With this statement, I completed freeing myself from any dependent detachment to Jenna. She felt my withdrawal, and the shift in what I was looking for from her. Then, I asked her for details about a yoga class that she had mentioned, and we hung up.

I drive back into Venice for my shower at the Yes Center. My cold is blazing and I'm constantly blowing my nose. I try to doze in the van for a hour, because tonight is Lillie's performance at *Genghis Cohen* Remember Lillie?

## *Tuesday Night*

I brace myself for the show with pockets full of tissue for nasal leakage. Lillie is supposed to go on at ten-thirty. I get there early. I'm gathering that this is a showcase event, primarily for record company execs. It appears to be tightly run. I see a list of four performers posted, and the times they will go on. The times seem to be closely observed, apparently so that an exec can zip over to the club, catch the act, and not have to dally around. Impressive. Not like the usual club scene, where the act goes on sometime after midnight and you've been waiting around for two hours, your ears bleeding from the sound levels.

The performance area is in a small part of the complex. The seats are like church pews, painted black, with narrow tables on the backs of the pews where you can rest a drink. There's an isle up the middle. The walls are a dull red. The lights are low. Everyone is facing the stage. It's small, intimate. There are about twenty people there.

I catch the last part of the act before Lillie. It's another woman singer-songwriter. She plays acoustic guitar, and two other musicians accompany her. She's polished, but doesn't particularly inspire me. However, I'm pleased that it's the first show I've seen in probably twenty-five years where the artist actually speaks to the audience and tries to establish a rapport, just like in the old days. She concludes and Lillie glides out onto the stage. Right away, she takes over.

“Could everybody move up to the front? I want to make this intimate.”

She is the master of spontaneous stage presence. She beams warmly. She gushes. She laughs. You want to like her. I do like her, in spite of the lingering suspicion in the front of my mind that she’s a Hollywood shark. She starts to play. She’s on violin and vocals, which she alternates. She’s got three people with her, an acoustic guitarist, a percussionist, and player who’s got one of those small, European accordions for which I don’t know the correct name.

She’s excellent. She runs the entire spectrum of emotion. She rants, she soothes, she rages, but most of all, she’s passion, even though the music is soft. I’m impressed with her passion, of which I had seen no hint when talking with her. It’s genuine, it’s coming from a deep well. The violin punctuates the spaces between her words with perfect runs and embellishments. She’s got it together. The tired, distressed woman I spoke with briefly has metamorphosed into the archetypal performer.

Why do I get attracted to these powerful women, I muse? They are too much for me, but then, they may be too much for anyone. I wonder if she is able to carry on a normal life, maintain any relationship, make a real friend, step out of her using, climbing-to-the-top neurotic character, but I catch myself; I’m bitter because I’m starting to realize that I have been rejected.

I allow myself to enjoy and be moved by her performance. Although it came nowhere close to my experience with Katja, this was not a performance for me alone, and the energy I got from her

was diluted, and of course, I'm not stoned. I've also received a message that my own music might contain a little more authentic passion.

Lillie ends the show. She somewhat stiffly walks down the aisle between the seats and exits the space, the first tinge of awkwardness I have experienced from her. I deduce that she is waiting outside to talk to the audience as they leave. A line forms, extending back into the performance space. Since I don't want to wait in line, but would like to at least say hello, I sit in my seat for a few minutes, until the queue has lessened. As I get to her, her back is turned towards me. She is talking to some obviously Hollywood Record Exec. type who has her full attention. After a minute, I get a chance to break in.

"Hi Lillie, it's me John from the Novel, remember? I'm really glad I came to your show. I think you're fantastic. I'd like to speak with you. I've got some ideas. Here's my card. Give me a call." I give her my music business card.

She says almost nothing in return, and gives me an amused and confused look that weakens me. Of course, my card has a San Francisco phone number, which may add to any hesitation she might have about calling.

### *Wednesday*

I slept last night again in my favorite Santa Monica parking lot, right there in Ocean Park on the sea. I manage to sleep reasonably well because of the cold medication, and because the

temperature is not as brisk as the Topanga mountains. I coffee in Venice, at the place on Abbot Kinney. Nothing happens – no women in sight. I sit and try to gather some energy for my appointment with Katja later. I run around town with some miscellaneous errands. I check my machine for messages, and return a call to my publisher that goes badly because I am again feeling worn-out and not at all interested in talking business. Around three PM, I call her.

“Listen, John, a friend of mind has dropped over, and we’re going to hang out and then go watch the sun go down. Then, he’s leaving to move into a new apartment. Why don’t you come over then, around eight-thirty?”

All this is said with charming accent, with no suspicion that one might regard this turn of events as more flakiness after yesterday’s flake-out. I feel as if she’s insensitive to my schedule, that I’m being bounced around to fit in with the capricious whims of a twenty-four year-old. I can’t comprehend how she could spend the whole afternoon with one man, most likely stoned, and then be up for another social encounter directly afterwards that could mean anything to her. But of course, I’m not her. Still, I hesitate.

“What’s the problem? Come over later.”

She does seem to want to see me. She’s obviously got a different value system than me, and it would probably be good for me to loosen up. Maybe I’ll learn something from this free spirit. So I agree. I don’t notice that the same process I experienced with Jenna is now commencing with Katja – the breakdown of the

projection. After all, she did say yesterday that we could get together afternoon *or* evening. But, I am exhausted, and not thinking right. I head over to the Novel to lounge.

I'm in the Novel, it's Wednesday afternoon, and dear God, there's another one sitting there. She's not a knockout like all three of the others, but she's pretty enough if she's a real person and we mesh. She's working on some papers, with a notebook on her lap that has "Modern Art" written down the spine. I sit for awhile, calculating how to get her attention. There has been no eye contact or sign that she's open to flirting. After fifteen minutes, I decide to just walk over and say something. I use the same line that I did with Jenna, since it worked so well. I'm standing next to her table:

"You're looking very studious today. In fact, you're making me feel bad. I brought some work, but just can't get into to it because the weather is so balmy." (The weather has turned balmy and beautiful).

She lights up, obviously pleased that she's being accosted. This is unbelievable, I think – all these friendly female faces. We talk about what she's working on. I never get the story straight, but it's something to do with cataloging art. She asks if I'm an artist. I say I am, I do music and I write. She says she is just getting back to the piano after a long absence from it. She used to study classical. I wince inwardly. She says she is struggling with reading the music. I say,

"Of course, you don't *have* to read music in order to play. I used to read when I was young, but I never read anymore."

She appears perplexed at my statement.

“Not read music. I’m not sure what you mean. How can you play if you don’t read. I think reading must be essential to playing. You don’t mean *playing by ear*, do you?”

I sigh. I simply hate that expression. She’s nice, but she has too far to go. And I just don’t have the energy. I just can’t say, “What an artist does is look inside and then express that in some medium. It means being master of your medium to the extent that you can freely allow the inner to flow into the outer. Just as a painter allows colors and shapes to find form on the canvas, a musician who’s a real artist allows the feelings within to find embodiment in notes and rhythm that come from inside.”

Instead, I just mumble something. I’ve lost interest. I’m worn out, and I need to be turned on in order to talk. Still standing, leaning on a door frame next to her table, I carry on the most inane conversation for five minutes more, and then excuse myself to go back to my work. I never get her name.

In retrospect, I see that she was still thinking in terms of playing classical pieces when she questioned the need for written music, and perhaps my weariness led to an unfair and hasty judgment. But still, it appeared that the gap was too wide. I reject her, just like Lillie rejected me, and probably for the same reason. Not enough soul (or was it not enough clout?)

It’s about five PM. I’m not feeling well at all. My cold is raging, my energy is very low. I have no desire to be social. I call Katja and tell her just that, and that I can’t make it tonight. I’m



going down to Encinitas tomorrow, and I'll call her on Friday or Saturday when I get back. She seems OK with this.

### *Wednesday Evening*

Even though I'm feeling bad, I still want to max out my time here. Jenna told me about a yoga class that's meeting tonight at 6:30 that I decide to attend. I don't have to be social in the class, and if I can't keep up, I don't care. I wouldn't make this effort for an ordinary yoga class, but this one sounds fascinating. It's run by this guy on a donation basis, and he's making three thousand dollars a week, running classes every day, Jenna says. It's power yoga, and there are one hundred and fifty people in the class, and it's got heavy sexual overtones.

I don't like power yoga. I feel it's a corruption of what yoga is supposed to be – a means for consciousness expansion. But power yoga seems to have taken over the country. I thought it was only here in California, but when I went back to the East Coast, I found it popular there. The idea is to use strenuous yoga poses to strengthen the body. The central posture that power yoga has adopted is the *downward dog* position. Almost the entire power yoga session is based on variations of the downward dog, only because this pose will get your butt into shape. There's no other reason for emphasizing it, and in real yoga, it hardly ever gets used. Downward dog, for those uninitiated, is where you hold your body in the form of an inverted "V." You're on your hands and feet, facing down, with

your butt sticking up in the air, and your back and legs straight, bending at the waist.

I get to the yoga studio. I'm twenty minutes early, but there's already a long line weaving down the stairs and around on the sidewalk. After ten minutes of waiting and observing the crowd forming, I catch a glimpse out of the corner of my eye of a bright, beaming, flashing beacon, across the street, moving in my direction. It's Jenna.

This is unexpected. She gave no indication that she would be attending the class. I can't help but answer back with a big smile, and wave with my finger that she get in line with me. We are OK again.

She stands next to me, and once more, it's huge effervescent eye contact, chakra to chakra. She's sending me enough unconditional love to last for two months. I am immediately better, healed. I genuinely feel like smiling – the first time all day.

“John, I've been doing a lot of thinking. I've decided I don't want to be just a therapist. I want to be a writer. I want to do something important and interesting.”

“Does this decision have anything to do with meeting me?” I ask.

“Yes, yes, of course,” she replies impatiently and playfully, “It's you.”

We talk about writing for a few sentences.

“And I've been thinking. I'm not sure about Devon. He's great and I love him, but he wants to have kids, and I don't think

I'm ready for that. I want to do things. And John, I want to keep things open between you and me, and take it step by step, and see where it leads. Meeting you has been important for me."

I'm floored. Speechless. After a few seconds of reverent pondering I say,

"It's really nice of you to share that with me."

"I want to do yoga next to you. Let's lie on the floor together."

The line is now moving inside. I protest. I don't do this power stuff. I'm weak because of my cold. I won't be able to keep up. I'd be embarrassed to have her see me. She won't hear of it.

The class begins. It turns out to be one the most incredible yoga classes I've ever attended, not so much for spiritual reasons, but for the scene. There are at least one hundred and fifty people in a room about one hundred feet square. There's not an unused inch of space on the floor. Yoga mats are touching, edge to edge. All windows are shut, and after a short while, the temperature hits 110. We are sweating together, downward-dogging together, lifting legs high in the air together, to the point of massive pain. It's yoga boot camp, direct from *The Inferno*. It continues for almost two hours. I'm actually doing reasonably well, but after 2/3 of the way through, I crash, exhausted, on the mat. I might be able to push myself to complete the class, but I might hurt myself. Seeing other prone and finished bodies scattered about encourages me to stop. All the while the leader/drill instructor has been going on with pseudo yoga-babble:

“I bet that in the last five minutes all you’ve been thinking about is when you will get out of this posture. You’re not thinking about your history, your past, your patterns, your crap – that’s all disappeared. It’s just you in the here and now. That’s what we’re after.”

It occurs to me that one might be able to achieve the same result with some black leather and a whip, but I don’t share this.

The class finally winds down. I tell the guy next to me that he’s pretty good. We’ve been splashing sweat on each other for two hours. He seems nice, and I feel warmly towards him. On my other side, Jenna has been doing it all, beautifully. She ends the session wrapped up in her process. She’s sitting on her ankles, eyes closed. I feel as if I’ve been through battle with all these people, and a genuine sense of compassion wells up. We sweat, we strain, we pain, together. I tell her of this. I want to put my arm around her shoulders as she sits there – it seems as if she’s inviting tenderness – but I’m shy. In retrospect, I wish I had.

Jenna and I have linked yet again, this time though the ordeal of power yoga. Bonded, we get our things together and drift towards the door. She lingers to exchange a few words with the instructor who’s saying good-bye to everyone. I drop two dollars into the donation box, then continue down the stairs onto the sidewalk, testing the elasticity of our bond, trusting that she will soon emerge out of the building secure in the certainty that I will be waiting. We will find each other again. I will suggest dinner. She will invite me back to her place to shower.

As she comes out of the building, she's with a young man with short blond hair in a white shirt and khaki pants. He obviously did not take part in the class, but was waiting on the stairs for it to finish.

"John! John! I want you to meet Devon my boyfriend."

I am absolutely nonphased. At this point, I am ready for anything in L.A. I take a micro second to remember my meditation yesterday afternoon, my phone call to her, and that I am no longer attached.

"Devon, I want you to meet John. He's the author of that book I told you about. He's here for the week, and I told him about the class."

Devon appears to be in shock at seeing me with Jenna. He must have sensed the energy between us. Possibly he saw us inside as he was waiting. I don't believe she knew he was going to meet her there. She earlier told me they had just had a fight on the phone before she got to the class. He was surprising her by meeting her in an effort to make up.

Devon and I exchange a few sentences. He looks like a thoroughly nice guy, but he looks like a kid to me (I previously learned he's thirty ). Side by side, I can't get over how much more mature she looks. Later, it flashes to me that they have a mother-son past-life history. She has her arm around him, supporting him. She gives him a reassuring peck on the cheek. We say good-bye. I mentally bless them as we part.

I head over to the Yes Center, thankful for its existence. I have a super shower. I skip over to the Mexican place for a fantastic meal of rice and beans, which has become my standard dinner for most of the week. (It's one of my favorite meals, just as it was Hemingway's). Surprisingly, I'm feeling great. The class worked for me. I'm not tired. But, still not wanting to grant power yoga anything, I muse that if I had just sat down and did the same amount of forced breathing that I did in the class, I would probably feel the same way. I call Katja, but she's not there. I decide to leave for Encinitas, which is about ninety miles south. At midnight, I'm rolling into that town.

### *Thursday*

I slept last night in my favorite Encinitas apartment parking lot, in the guest section. I slept well. I have been fantasizing about Encinitas for months now. It's an adorable little town built on a high cliff overlooking the Pacific, twenty-five miles north of San Diego. I first came here in '95 after being in Arizona doing book promo and looking around. I hit the coast after the experience of the southwest desert, and was immediately entranced. I had been in the van for three months, and needed to get out of it badly. I found a motel in Encinitas, where I rested for a month.

The town has a sense of peacefulness and cleanliness that is just magnificent to me. The wind blows continually from the Pacific and the air seems pure, the prana heavy and uplifting, and I just want

to get a house and sit in it. I've been thinking I should check it out as a possible place to live, in my disillusionment with San Francisco. Even though it's a small town environment, it's only an hour and a half from L.A., where I can zip to for city stimulation.

My first stop upon arising, as usual, is the local coffee spot. Here, it's the Panakin Café, on the main drag – a large, old, converted train station. My first impression, as I enter, is negative. There used to be these wonderfully creatively dressed young women behind the counter. Now, there are two Mexican guys. I get a coffee and croissant and find a seat on the large patio in front of the café. It's still somewhat early for the regulars – about nine AM.

As I sit, they start to assemble. Bodies drift in, chit-chat commences, and I'm scrutinizing it all. I'm checking to see if I will find compatibility. My hopes are slowly dashed. These are nice folks, but they are not like the L.A. crowd, and of course, they don't want to be. I don't see, with my psychic see-through vision, the creative edge that attracts me in L.A. I know, many of those city people are flaky and even crazy, but at least, there's the buzz of creative energy in the air. Here, there's the buzz of peacefulness, but none of that intellectual edge that appeals to me so much. It's the same in most of the country. The only places with the creative edge are New York and L.A., and I can't live in either of them.

After a while, a woman walks onto my section of the patio with her coffee and pastry, and sits a few tables away. There's another woman already sitting here, making for three of us. The new arrival looks nice. She's attractive. She's older, which is maybe what

I really need – someone who can be a true emotional equal, who's settled and not flaky, flighty, and just starting out. I'm interested.

I'm thinking about strategy. Her cell phone rings and she answers. She talks for five minutes and hangs up. I yell across two empty tables with a smile,

“You're supposed to leave those things at home when you come here.”

Big smile back and a reply. I reply. The other woman, also a few tables away from both of us, also replies, even though it seems clear that no one's speaking to her. The first woman and I try to steer the conversation back between ourselves. She takes it upon herself to keep the words flowing, in my direction. Looks like she's the take-charge type. I'm mostly smiling and nodding. I inch my way towards her on the long bench that happens to join our tables. I'm having coffee with her.

She tells me that I'm not from around here. I briefly summarize my story. She starts talking about herself, and volunteers that she has two boys, eighteen and nineteen. Her phone rings again. I pick up the book she had in front of her while she's on the phone. It's the first bad sign. It's *Ten Steps To Ultimate Power and Getting Everything You Want*, or some such drivel. How could any serious person read this, let alone be seen with it in public? She's off the phone quickly.

“And what's your field,” I ask.

“Real estate.”



Oh dear. Oh, oh dear. She sells real estate. She's been doing it all her life.

It ends right there. She's a nice person, she might be a good person, she's even trying to be arty for me, reading with her sharpened salesman's sensitivity what I'm looking for, but how can she hold a candle to those high-flying spirits of the wind, moon, and night, Lillie, Katja, Jenna, or even the music-reading modern art cataloger? I'm sorry, I really am, I am really nothing but an immature kid. I have no capacity for genuine relationship – that's why I'm alone; I'm looking for the unattainable; in spite of my clever words of psychology and philosophy, my soul remains chained to the nightmare of glamour and glitter. I'm an L.A. person.

I struggle with the conversation for ten more minutes. Mercifully, it turns out she's meeting someone for a business tête-à-tête. He arrives, and I retire. I get out of the Panakin, my hopes for a life in Encinitas shaken.

I drive into town to have brunch. As I pass down Main Street, I glance to see what's going on at Casady's, the local natural foods place and the other social hub for me. Horrified, I see that the store is vacant. Casady's has left. Also vacant is the New Age book store that was across the street from them, although I learned later that they moved across the street to a larger place. I'm upset. I have brunch, and drive out to the other, larger Casady's further inland. It's also vacant. I'm stunned. I go into the store next door and they tell me that Casady's just decided to close up and now there's no natural foods store here, perhaps I'd like to open one? This seems a

very poor sign. The final nail has been driven into the coffin of Encinitas.

The weather is beautiful and I decide to take the rest of the day off and sit on the beach, which is a stone's throw away from town. It's a weekday and the beach is not busy, but I walk down from the crowded area to a more remote spot. I just want to stare at the sea. After ten minutes, so help me, a blond in a brief, black two-piece who was wading in the water comes back to a towel lying on the sand, about fifty feet away from me. She's easily the most beautiful woman on the beach, because I looked closely as I walked through the crowd. She's got another of those bodies to die for, actually the best I've seen this week, a complete killer, the kind of thing, I remind myself, that I have just not seen in over two years in San Francisco. But she looks really young, I estimate around twenty, and I try to forget about her. She doesn't know I exist, and we sit alone together, with one other guy between us, for almost two hours.

I leave the beach. I'm hungry even though it's early, so I have dinner at a sidewalk café on Main Street. As I'm finishing my meal, the same blond appears on the other side of the road, dressed in street clothes. She's just moping around, looking in stores, doing nothing. She goes into a 7-11. I am mobilized, my curiosity roused. I did not get a close look at her on the beach, and I want to. I pay the bill, walk across the street, and enter the 7-11. She's at the magazine rack. I'm surprised to see that she's not so young after

all, she's probably around thirty. Based on the week's events so far, this makes her completely eligible for further consideration.

I try to figure out how to handle this one. It doesn't feel right to attempt to talk to her in the store. I buy something, leave the store and drop it in the van, which is parked close. I walk a little down the street. She comes out of the 7-11 and is moping in my direction. I start to walk slowly towards her. Soon, we will pass. When she reaches me, I stop dead, and with all the confidence that has built in me from the week of successfully approaching strange women, say with a big big smile,

“And how was your day on the beach?”

Demurely she says, “Fine,” and keeps walking.

It didn't work. I'm shocked. It's the first failed pickup attempt of the week. I know it's hard to make someone stop on the sidewalk, but in my still magical manic mood, generated by all the preceding days' events, I was certain it would happen. I'm thrown back to the old way men and women used to relate, which had been completely transcended in my experience this week in the city: The man pursues, the woman resists. Seconds later, but too late, I think of other things I should have said after the first line:

“Wait. Stop. You're supposed to ask me how I know you were on the beach.” (I don't think she recognized me from the beach.)

But even if I had thought of it in time, I'm not sure I could have. To me, her response represented an unenlightened orientation and capacity towards the male/female relationship that leaves me

cold. I just can't be the aggressor anymore; I have to be met approximately halfway. Or maybe she just wasn't interested. Maybe she was waiting for her boyfriend. Maybe she gets hit on too much. Maybe she just got nervous and regretted not stopping. In any event, the two brushes with local females were not portentous. I catch the sunset in lovely, peaceful Encinitas, and hit the road north, back to L.A.

As I'm driving on the freeway, the front of the car suddenly starts to vibrate wildly. It seems like I have blown a tire. I pull off the road. It's now dark. I panic:

"Shit god damn. I'll be changing the fucking tire and the highway patrol will stop to help me and they'll discover that the registration on the van is three years expired out of state and they'll impound the car and throw me in jail and fine my ass good."

I get out to look at the tire. Wondrously, I discover that it's not really blown. It's still inflated, but the rubber has split open around the edge where the tread meets the sidewall. I've never seen a tire fail like that. I realize I can still drive on it. I put on the flashers and creep along the shoulder to the next off-ramp, which is not far. I exit, find a good place to work, and with no difficulty, I change the tire.

Exhausted again, I head straight from the 405 to the Santa Monica freeway, out the Pacific Coast Highway, and into my nest in the Topanga hills.

## *Friday*

I wake up, still tired. My cold is tapering off, but now I'm in the coughing stage. I hit the Mimosa for the usual. There's no action. I sit for an hour with the paper. Then, I check the bulletin board outside for postings of rentals in Topanga. Today will be a day of business. If I can find a house that I like, I may take it.

I copy down about ten listings. I go to a pay phone and call them all. Not one is home. I decide to try again later, and I head for Santa Monica and the first tire shop. I find one on Lincoln Boulevard. I talk to the Mexican counter person. He's quite nice and helpful. We look at the van, and decide to replace the front two tires. He quotes me what seem to be reasonable prices for a set of Firestone's. In forty-five minutes, I'm back on the road with the tire crisis behind me. Effortless. I feel good that the van, one of my several masculine alter-egos, is again fixed solid and ready to take on the world.

I brunch. Then, I get on the (pay) phone and locate a parking lot where I can store the van, and fly back to Frisco, thinking that the van could serve as a base here. I can shuttle back and forth by air easily and cheaply whenever I need to. I make a tentative reservation to be confirmed on Sunday. Then, I call for flight information.

It occurs to me that I might get a cell phone so I can get call-backs about the rentals. I zip over to the ATT, and discuss what's involved. It's possible to get set up with a working number within an hour, but the phone has to be charged up overnight, and I'm not

able to do that. I shelve the cell phone idea, and decide I will get one in Frisco for the next time I come down if it seems needed.

With all my business done for the moment, I head for the Novel, to just relax with a book. It's about five PM. I'm again completely exhausted, and I have no social impulses at all. I have socialized enough for the next six months. The thought of being inside, alone, with my books, computers, music gear, and a movie channel or two sounds good. I call Katja anyway, but there's no answer. I get a tea. I'm mindlessly lounging on a large, soft, upholstered seat near the front window of the café.

My last new encounter of the week occurs. It's almost not an encounter, but it's still remarkable to me because it nails home the completely different experience I am having from my normal life in Frisco. I get drawn into a conversation with the counter person at the Novel.

It's quiet in the café, and she's tired from having worked all through the night without a break, I later learn – they are having a mini personnel crisis. (The Novel is now open twenty-four hours). With no customers to serve, she comes over to the large, soft, upholstered seat one removed from me, and flops down to rest with her book until the next patron needs attention. She then goes back behind the counter, and comes back to the seat when finished. She's going back and forth, and you would think it might be easier to just stay there, but I guess getting out from behind the counter is important for her at this point.

There's no question that she's too young for me – she's a college student – but in spite of my weariness, I decide that there's got to be a reason why she's sitting there, and that I will simply practice being friendly with no ulterior motive. At the same time, Lord help me and forgive me, she is stacked – really stacked, and cute. Quite frankly, I otherwise would not have made the effort.

As we both sit with our noses in our respective printed media, I drop short, harmless, insipid comments in her direction. About something I'm reading, the news, etc. She mumbles something back. Five minutes and a trip back and forth later, I mumble something else. She grunts. We are an old married couple having breakfast.

Gradually, the conversation deepens. I ask about herself. She tells me she's just going back to school after some time off. She tells me how much she dislikes the job at the Novel – that it's menial. She seems to be concerned that I might judge her by the job. I try to make her feel better. I tell her about the shit jobs I've had, that I was a short order cook once (I don't mention it was in high school), but I don't tell her anything about my present life. She gets up and comes back. Just as she sits down, she has to get up again. She's annoyed, and with a half serious, half facetious “I hate my life,” she drags herself back behind the counter.

I think about this. We have established an emotional rapport. Without my even trying, by just being there with her, which is of course the basis of all effective psychotherapy, I have gained her trust enough to the point where she is sharing and disclosing an

important feeling, obviously genuine even though she tries to conceal its authenticity with humor. I start to sense that if I wanted to, I could move into some sort of relationship with her. It would not be a relationship between adults, but it could become sexual, even though I know that in the end, I would most probably not allow myself to get involved in such a relationship. I never have.

My mind is boggled. My weariness overcometh me. She's stuck behind the counter because it's getting busy, and it's time for my shower at the Yes Center. I leave the Novel.

### *Friday Evening*

After another great shower, I head to the Mexican place for another great dinner of rice and beans. I am enjoying these simple blessings with extraordinary gusto. I get back on the phone and call all the rental numbers again. A few are there, and we make dates for tomorrow.

I was planning to catch a dance performance in Santa Monica next that I had seen listed in the Weekly, but as I'm getting into my car in the parking lot off Abbott Kinney, I see people going into what looks like a theater under renovation on Electric Avenue. It appears that some show might be starting, and I'm curious. It seems meaningful and that I'm being guided that I discover it just at the right time.

In the lobby, the first thing I see is a bulletin board with glossy eight by ten head shots of actors. There's something about



the average actor's head shot that, to me, seems phony, shallow, plastic, bland, soulless. These photos were no exception. I immediately gather that some kind of showcase theater event is going on. However, I still want to believe that I am being guided, in order to continue the magic of the week, so I ignore my initial negative impression and buy a ticket.

The theater itself is interesting. It's built with the seats around a pit, in which the performance takes place. It's small. The pit is about twenty feet square. The pit is on ground level, and to get to the seats, you must walk up stairs to a higher level. The performance begins, and I'm soon disappointed, both in it and my mistaken fantasy that I am being "guided." The actors are inexperienced, the play itself holds no interest at all for me, and there's no magic. I think of Katja, whose incredible magic left me so breathless, and I'm again impressed by her command of the present, of her skill in making the magic happen.

These players, though sincere and not novices, did not have a clue. They were "acting," not experiencing. There was no power to take part in, and the performance was basically a bore. I come down with a coughing fit, and have to leave the room. I do not return.

I decide that it's not happening for me tonight. I head out for my spot in Topanga. I do an hour of real yoga on the floor of the van, with burning candles. I sleep.

## *Saturday*

Today, I may decide to move to L.A. – *If* I find the right place; *If* I can settle the mountain of uncertainty; *If* I am guided and everything goes right.

I begin with a short stop at the Mimosa. Again, it's dead. I realize that I have no social energy anyway, and I would not be good company. It doesn't seem like a good idea to try to get together with Katja or Jenna today. I hit the phone and call all the numbers on my list. I get through to about half, make appointments to see four houses. Of these, three are worth mentioning.

The first is Harvey's. Harvey says the house was hit bad by the earthquake, or some natural disaster, back in '91, or whenever, and that he's just dumped two hundred grand into renovating it. He's vague. The place is a pig-pen. He's living there with his two kids who are watching TV. There's two dogs, a couple cats, and a small furry creature in a cage that's never been cleaned on the kitchen counter. There's a ton of personal junk piled around, especially in the garage. Construction is unfinished. He says it will be all cleaned up by next week.

If it gets cleaned up, it's a possibility, but for now, I pass. I talk to Harvey anyway. He likes me and is talkative, perhaps because he seems to have a gay streak, if it's possible to judge that from a manner of speech. He tells me about the animals of the canyon: You've got to have a cat or a dog because otherwise the rats

will move in. Don't leave your cat out at night or the coyotes will get it. The dogs howling are trying to chase away the coyotes.

Really. That explains the mystery of the dogs going nuts all night. It also means that there's no way of making it better. I've got to be very careful, if I am going to live here, of not getting a place where there are dogs next door, out all night. My hopes for surviving in Topanga are wavering.

Next is Gary's place. Gary is a genuine L.A. musician. Lived here all his life, and has to rent out his house now. There's even a large room where he had a recording studio that I could use. He's a nice guy. I'm unable to avoid comparing myself to him since I also play music. He's the typical musician, a stereotype, if not a cliché. Although I play and compose, I never in my life felt like I was a musician; I feel like I'm an artist or perhaps a poet playing with sound, rhythm, words. I don't mix with musicians; we are from different planets. In some way, they intimidate me with their hip coolness, although I understand that I am not without hipness or coolness.

Gary's place is too funky. The main gas heater in the living room is not vented to the outside. Paint is peeling. It's dirty. There's dry rot and mold in the structure. He wants to leave his furniture there. Mostly, I have trouble with the idea of moving into a psychic space created and permeated by twenty years of rock and roll and marijuana. I pass.

Last of the possibilities is Kate's. I had a hard time having a basic conversation with her on the phone about the house. She

wouldn't answer questions, was hostile, seemed like she was having a bad day in general. Nevertheless, I check out the house because it sounds interesting. It's off Tuna Canyon Road, and has ocean and city views.

It is interesting. It's on top of a hill. It's basically a large open space with very high ceilings and lots of windows, pretty close to what I'm looking for. And I don't see any dogs around. But she's a nutcase. She continues to be hostile, cold, difficult. She tells me at one point that she teaches Shakespeare. Ah ha! A theater person. That explains her neurosis as well as her plastic looks. I can't enter into a business agreement with a fruitcake. I pass.

So, I don't find a place this weekend. Part of me is relieved. I don't have to actually go through with the decision to move today. It's late Saturday afternoon, and there are some openings at Bergamot Station, a cluster of art galleries. I head over there.

The openings seem low-key; nothing like the one last week, but the art is generally better. I walk around for an hour. I am weary from the week. I feel like the trip is over. At six-thirty PM, I impulsively decide to head for home. I change my mind about leaving the van there and flying. I just want to go. I have been in L.A. for seven days and two hours exactly. I arrive home at one AM Sunday, the van again coated with bugs.

## *Epilogue*

Back home, I delight in being inside. I start writing this story nine AM Sunday. It's now Thursday afternoon. I have been working continuously and feverishly.

I see with clarity now that I picked up a huge energy hit in L.A., which is channeling itself into this piece. I am intense, energized, flying high, manic, on the astral plane. People I see when I have gone out for food or mail seem asleep. I see through them, I see their egos, their defenses, their fear and contractedness. The Bay area looks incredibly dull. I understand that I am in an unstable place. I am in the second stage of the art. I allow myself to enjoy it, while trying to not be swept away. I understand that this energy hit does not mean I will always feel this way in L.A., and I'm not sure I would want to, but it might.

I understand that my experience last week can be seen as the result of the frustration that I have been experiencing. While I make a practice of sitting with all my feelings, including this particular frustration, the act of allowing it to find a place in the world, to play it out, has also been important. Playing it out, in a way that many people might find puerile, and framing it in material form in this writing, has been instrumental in helping me move into a more detached perspective with it – to free myself from the emeshment.

On Monday, I called and left messages for Jenna and Katja. I don't have Lillie's number. She has not called me.

Yesterday afternoon, Wednesday, I try Jenna again. She answers. From the beginning, the conversation is strained and unsatisfying, like I'm talking to a stranger. I read to her the parts of the story that include her. She says she likes it, but I don't know what she really thinks – she is aloof. It sounds like she can't relate to the depth and the honesty. We talk for almost an hour, and agree to keep in touch. I'm starting to understand that she is very changeable.

A half hour after we hang up, Katja calls. She is warm, and we are both genuinely glad to speak. I read to her segments of the story about her. She enjoys it, and says she is honored. It's great fun reading to her on the phone, and I'm pleased that she, indeed, is able to support me in my work by being a "good audience." We find more levels on which to connect. We talk for an hour, agreeing to stay in touch.

I finish this last paragraph. I try to psyche myself to go back to the business of the real world – knocking out the contract with Random House for *Emotional Clearing*; looking at the manuscript just back from my editor there; organizing the certification program for therapists. There's so much to do, and all I really want is to just sit in front of my keyboards, computer and musical. It's flowing...

### *post Epilogue*

About a year after this event, I indeed decided to pull up stakes in the Bay area, and I headed south. I landed in Encinitas,

still being drawn to it because of its beauty, mellowness, the presence of spiritual groups, and proximity to LA, in spite of the ever present sense of creeping suburbanism that I had detected in my advance visit. I just had to try it. After about a year, I decided that was enough. I started looking for a place in Topanga, but could never, as I had suspected, find something that seemed quite right. Two years in Encinitas, I left for the east coast, and writing now, I have been back in my old digs in New York for two years. My California affair lasted eight years. And I never had any other experiences that came close to this above described week for the whole time in Encinitas, going up to LA for roughly two weekends a month.