A Portland State Soap Opera
They met on campus — in class. He was the epitome of young manhood — intense, dedicated to his work, hair sprouting from the tops of his Adidas. And she was what is usually called a beauty. She had no gap between her teeth.

This at a glance: hair, coarse; her heel canting ceilingward; fingers tense on his pencil; knees bent; crotch folds in brown corduroy; breasts; chest; sweater; neck; flick of hair from ear to opening in blouse; eyes. No embarrassment this once.

Bright boy. Sweet treat. He was elated. So was she.

It was fall. Soon the trees were stencil-on black, bare above the limpid, trampled university lawns — above their universe. Winter was blooming in snow clouds above the Cascades. Boyoboy, they thanked the computer that registered them for the same class though neither of them had requested it.

They both passed.
FRESHMAN

SOPHOMORE

JUNIORS
Portland State University

Viking Yearbook

1975

presents

A Portland State

Soap Opera
I sat in a desk off to the side, drumming my fingers on its formica top with one hand, scratching my nose with the other, staring at the small depressions in the plaster wall. People were coming through the door at the back of the room and searching for places to sit. The room gradually filled with chattering mouths and shuffling feet.

A middle-aged man wearing a gray suit and a matching vest beneath his long overcoat walked briskly to the front of the room. He tossed some papers onto the desk and looked out at the faces staring back at him under the bright fluorescence pouring from the tubes in the ceiling. Light bounced from clothes, flesh, and desk tops, giving everything a mild phosphorescent sheen.

"Well, the first thing I suppose I should do is introduce myself," he said as he took off his overcoat and laid it on top of the desk. The vent on the back of his suit spread wide as he strained upward to write his name high on the chalkboard where everyone could see it. This done, he turned back to the attentive eyes, lips, and pencils, and smiled so that his cheeks bunched up into little balls on either side of his nose. Then came the syllabus, outlining the class, more scribbling on the blackboard, and an endless stream of words that mixed with the drone coming from the heating ducts.

My pencil began scratching on notebook paper while my feet kept time on the linoleum. During pauses in my attention span, my eyes would bring different faces in and out of focus. Some of these faces were intent, dutifully scribbling on college rule. Others were vacant, their thoughts seeping soundlessly out into the air. One face was always looking at me, but everytime my eyes would try to form its features, it would turn quickly and leave only a sweep of red hair across her profile for me to see.

The class ended and I stood up to join the line of heads that had gathered near the door. I followed the head nearest me out into one of the many concrete and plaster veins that run through the university. The halls throbbed and swelled with hundreds of bodies as people worked their way to their next class.
When I got home the shades were drawn and there was no one in the front room. The television glowed in the corner, seemingly entertaining itself. I walked into the kitchen. Ed was there, elbows on the table, face in hands, muttering at the table top. Dishes were stacked in greasy piles in the sink and garbage-loving scum fleas were flying around in circles above.

"Did the mail come?"

"Oh man," Ed moaned, turning around to look at me. He accidently knocked over a glass of water as he turned. A small puddle formed then trickled over the edge and onto the floor. We both ignored it.

"I need to know if the mail came. I have to go to the welfare department and talk to the lady again, so they're sending some more forms for me to fill out. I might be able to get more money."

Ed moaned again and got out of his chair. He walked out into the front room and came back with a stack of envelopes. He tossed them on the table, just missing the small puddle that was draining off onto the floor. He watched while I thumbed through the mail and pulled out what I was looking for.

"What's the matter, anyway?" I said, looking up at Ed. He cocked his head to the side and brought his hands up, making a strangling motion. I tossed the envelope from the welfare people back onto the table.

"Janet?"

He nodded.

I could see it coming. Ed was getting ready to start a long complaint session, listing for me all the details of their latest fight. I moved toward the screen door that pushed out onto the back porch and looked down the alley that runs from our backyard into the Safeway parking lot.

"I have to get some cigarettes. See ya in awhile."

I disappeared out the door before he had a chance to object. It was just starting to get dark outside. The air was still warm, especially for October, but there were heavy clouds moving in and I knew summer was ending, because I watched a grasshopper die on my windowsill the night before.
October 7, 1974

The orange and silver Tri-Met bus filled with businessmen, secretaries, students, and old people so that by the time it reached the Ross Island Bridge there wasn't even standing room. The bridge was crowded with commuting automobiles, each of them belching smoke out into the morning and carrying a single passenger.

I glanced around at all the other bodies on the bus — at the legs of a woman in a short skirt, at the arms of a high school boy folded across his chest, at the sagging breasts of an elderly woman who was reading the Reader's Digest. I was, in accordance with bus rider's etiquette, very careful not to look anyone directly in the eyes.

A fat teenage girl stood in the aisle and nearly fell over everytime the bus stopped. She had short curly blonde hair and a very plain face covered with acne. I pictured her lying amidst the frills of her bedroom, enraptured with the bubblegum overtures of Donny Osmond. She was massaging herself. The music and the self-love carried her to the bliss she could find nowhere else. Her mouth fell open and a pearly drop of spit ran out its corner and down her pudgy cheek. I saw her face screw up in a confused ecstasy while her body heaved up and down on the mattress and set the floorboards creaking.

The bus stopped quickly. The girl almost fell over again and my fantasy ended. I had been staring at her during the daydream and now I noticed that she was staring back. I turned quickly and looked out the window.

As the bus crawled slowly toward school, it seemed the air inside was becoming more and more difficult to breathe. All the people competing for it were sucking up the oxygen. I looked around me again and took a quick inventory of inflated nostrils. The sight of those undulating noses made me feel extremely nauseated. I couldn't wait to step off into the cool morning air at Portland State.
October 11, 1974

I was sitting in the cafeteria thumbing through a textbook when I heard a rustling of material and the squeaking of rubber on linoleum. Standing up, looking down, holding a blue tray bearing a plastic spoon, yogurt, and an apple was Madeline, the redhead from my philosophy class. After playing eye evasion games for a few class sessions, our exits at the rear of the room had smoothly coincided. The ice had been shattered and our bodies floated down sterile hallways, exchanging trivialities.

"What’s your major?" and
"What’s your name?" and
"Oh, that’s interesting!"

Overhead lights hummed while people jostled and bumped. Eventually we were spit through glass doors, over concrete slabs and grass paddies to wooden benches in a place called the Park Blocks. We became friends.

Now Madeline’s teeth flashed white in the cafeteria as they bit into an apple. A piece of green-white pulp escaped her tongue and fell down onto the blue serving ray. She took up the little bit of apple pulp with the end of her finger and put it into her mouth with a grin that wrinkled the make-up in the corner of her eye. She held out the apple to me.

"Here, finish this," she said and she put the apple down on the table in front of me.

"But I don’t want it."

"It’s good for you, just eat it." She took the top of the yogurt container and began spooning its creamy contents into her mouth.

I wasn’t sure if she was serious about the apple, so I took a bite of its flesh while she watched. When her head turned to look around the cafeteria, I put the apple on the seat beside me. It was sour.

I sat and watched her eat the yogurt and talked to her while she alternately listened and responded, her eyes shooting off now and then to the different tables and bodies that shaped the surroundings.

Later, we walked over to the bookstore past big blocks of concrete, steel, and a little neon, being careful to avoid the rushing rubber and thin painted steel of the cars as they rolled over the asphalt, their metal hearts beating with piston throbs.

"There is an interesting book on deformed physiques that I must have for my art class," said Madeline with a smile. We opened the door and moved into the store full of paperback books and more thunk-thunk bodies.
October 17, 1974

Madeline and I walked into class late and the professor was already lecturing. Both his overcoat and suit jacket were lying across the desk and he stood in front of the class in pressed trousers and a gray vest with white cuffed sleeves running down his arms.

"Society establishes rules to protect itself and allots different roles to different segments of the population to facilitate survival. But some of these, um, roles get oppressive as time goes on. Look at the Women’s and Gay People’s Movements of today, for instance."

The teacher balled his cheeks into a grin. Someone at the front of the room was waving his hand around.

"Yes?" said the teacher.

"But, sure, if that is all true, couldn’t you say that if evil is only a cultural perception, then murder isn't really any more inherently evil than masturbation?"

The professor threw his head back and his arms flew up, following his rearing torso backwards. He then leaned toward the talking student and shot out an answer.

"Yes, but don’t you see? There is no reason for the establishment of moral absolutes. That phenomenon is what separates men from apples, I mean animals. Life comes to us — we don't know why — seemingly out of chaos. It is something for us to shape."

The professor’s voice had risen during this speech as if trying to compete against the drone coming from the heating ducts. All the effort had caused his neck to strain and swell, pulling tight his constricting white collar. It was as if something had short-circuited in his brain and caused a paragraph to be pulled from some other well-prepared lecture.

A second later everything was back to normal and the professor was again lecturing calmly. Kant’s *Categorical Preposition* was being diffused into the air, and the strange moment had disappeared, sucked with the dust down into central heating before it had a chance to settle.
October 21, 1974

At home, Ed sat on the couch in the living room and waved his hands in frantic circles as he talked. They were big hands that accented his speech with erratic searching jabs at the air. I sat in the big red chair across from him and listened to him ramble.

"Man," he said, "I should know better. I shouldn't even fool around with women. I just don't understand. We were singing here on the couch watching TV and everything was fine. Then all of a sudden she starts crying and runs out the door. I should know better, I really should."

I agreed that he should know better, but I was having a hard time suppressing a grin as he sat there looking desperate and miserable on the edge of some ludicrous hysteria. I reached for my can of beer and took a sip to cover my smile. I put on an intense and thoughtful look, meaning that he could continue talking and still receive my attention.

"Well, we were just sitting here and she started talking. I should have known something was up, because she was getting all flirty and pretty, rubbing herself up next to me. And then she started talking about this guy she ate lunch with who was 'kinda cute'."

He emphasized the last two words with an imitation feminine squeal and an upward wave of the hands.
And then she said, 'Well, he asked me to go out to the movies with him and I just didn't know what to say. He was awful nice so I didn't really want to say no. I mean, he just works at the office, no big deal. You don't mind, do you?'

Ed's hands had been moving ferociously during the entire speech. It took awhile for his waving hands to figure out that his mouth had stopped and that there were no longer any sounds for them to punctuate. Then the hands joined in his lap and nervously fumbled with each other. Ed leaned back on the couch and shook his head.

"Women are so illogical, man, you know? I wanted to kill her, but I was real cool. I just said, 'Sure, do whatever you want.' And then she started snuggling up real close to me, saying, 'Oh, I'm not really sure if I want to go anyway.' Then she tried to kiss me, and I wouldn't let her, so she ran out of the room crying."

Ed was back on the edge of the couch. He looked at me again and shook his head.

"What about Karen?" I said, just to complicate things. For a moment the name didn't register. Then the sunrise moved across his face and left a confused scowl buried in his features.

"Well, that's different," he said, "and besides, Janet doesn't know about her."

Ed stood up and started walking in circles in the center of the room. He began talking again and waving his hands in the air, continuing a conversation that was doomed to last all night.
October 28, 1974

The air was gray and swollen with moisture and the clouds hung so low that we stooped our heads as we walked through the Park Blocks toward her apartment. Madeline lives on the second floor of one of those brick apartment buildings that lie to the northwest of school. Despite every effort of mine to visualize these old buildings as quaint and comfortable, the cozy image fades as soon as it forms. If one of the buildings happens to be well taken care of, if the bricks outside are cleanly scrubbed, if the inside hallways are freshly painted, it only makes the building look worse. It’s as if the owner were trying to cover up for the people who live there.

As we walked along, something about Madeline reminded me of a day some five years ago. Maybe it was the way her hair was tied back, or the curious lack of her usual make-up, or the soft, bony whiteness of her fingers hanging out of the sleeves of her dark coat, or her blue jeans, or the bright paisley colors of her shirt that were just visible at the open neck of her coat. Or maybe it was the contrast, the bright warmth of the one against the dank cold of the other, that brought the two days together as if connected by a faint glowing cord.
It had been near the end of my senior year in high school. The day was warm and the moisture could be seen rising out of the ground and steaming up into the blue sky. There were a lot of people in the park, gathering in circles, some playing guitars, others passing around joints and bottles of cheap, lukewarm wine. One guy dropped assorted chemicals into a wine bottle every time one passed his way. Two policemen stood off in the background. They looked at us and shook their heads as if they didn’t know what to make of the situation.

I walked away from the crowd with a friend and we tossed a yellow Frisbee back and forth to each other. The exercise must have been accelerating the effect of the chemicals on my brain, because just as I felt the plastic of the Frisbee in my hand, I also say the saucer fly out of reach over my head. As I bent to pick it up and looked at the world upside down, I heard a vague whisper in my ear. I stood up with the Frisbee in one hand and the scenery swooped in a blurred rush past my head. I sought out the form of my friend on the landscape and felt the top of my head with my free hand. I felt, or imagined, or saw a vast black space that was broken with tiny clusters of pinpoint light. And coming from inside that space I heard a whisper. I didn’t want to listen to it and I didn’t want to be captivated by the webbed darkness inside, so I cocked my arm to throw the Frisbee toward my friend, who was melting into the ground. Then the voice came out of the blackness and grabbed me as if it were taking me by the hair. It held me against the nebula of lights and burned itself into my hair.
"Ha. Ha. I thought you liked it here," it said. My arm released the Frisbee and it went bouncing off the ground directly in front of me. My friend fell to the ground laughing.

The voice had been holding me there in the confusion of that moment, when I heard Madeline say something. We were at the steps of her apartment building and she was smiling, waiting for me to respond to whatever it was she had said. I could still hear my friend laughing back in the distance. Then the voice let go of my hair, let me fall, land, run stumbling out of the Swinging Sixties and back into the Seedy Seventies. Finally, Madeline shrugged and forgot about whatever she had said and I followed her into the building.

Later, up in her apartment, I watched Madeline pull her paisley shirt up over her head. Her breasts, diminished for the want of suggestion caused by clothing and subsequent imitation, hung small and almost limp in her bra. She looked boyish in her jeans with just the bra hanging on her chest. I thought for a second that maybe she was a transvestite who lured unsuspecting males into his room. A ridiculous thought, but these are kinky times.

"Madeline, why don't you undress in the closet?" I said.

She looked at me with a troubled expression, then seeing that I was only kidding her, wrinkled her face up into a grin. It was the same grin that she had given me the other day in the cafeteria when she had handed me the sour apple.

"Don't be absurd," she said.
THIS BAG IS MADE OF RECYCLABLE
AND BIODEGRADABLE KRAFT PAPER

WET WASTE

ECOLO-BAG
November 7, 1974

My tennis shoes were soaking wet. I had accidentally stepped into a deep puddle when I looked up to see the bus disappearing around the corner two blocks away. I hurried out to Powell and started hitching, because the next bus wouldn't come for half an hour, and I had to make it to school for an exam.

I got a ride within five minutes from a blonde high school kid. He was driving a jack-ed-up, racing-striped, orange Dodge Charger with a rumbling muffler.

"Damn cops," he said, "they've been trying to catch me for two weeks. Some old lady in the neighborhood has been complaining about the noise this thing makes, and now they're after me. Yesterday I had to ditch a couple of them. They chased me all the way down Flavel—you know where that is?—but I lost 'em on a side street."

He offered me a Marlboro, then told me how many parts of his engine were chromed. He let off about a mile from where he had picked me up, made a squealing right hand turn, and was gone.

I got another ride a few minutes later, this time from a young long-hair that worked in an auto body shop. He drove a Mustang with a rotted-out green body. The upholstery was torn and dirty, and there was no carpeting on the floor. Wires hung in tangled bundles from the dashboard, and the brakes scraped loudly when he applied them. He admitted the car needed "a little work." He barely managed to stop the thing at the corner where he let me out.

After the two quick rides, I figured that my hitchhiking luck had run out for the day, and I was still on the east end of the Ross Island Bridge. Surprisingly though, I got another ride from the first car that came by. It was a red van. A husky young man with a crew-cut let me in, and I sat between him and the driver. John Denver was playing on the tape deck.

"Man, this guy here is the best friend I got," said the guy with the crew-cut. He grinned at the driver, who returned the gesture and pulled out an open quart of beer that had been rattling between his seat and the door. He passed it in front of me to his friend.

"Me and that guy are just like this," he went on, crossing two fingers, "last night he caught me in bed with his old lady and we fought it out right here in the cab of this truck. See that splotch on the roof there? That's my blood. We've been out drinking all night ever since."

I looked up and there was a rusty red spot on the tin roof of the cab. The driver was staring straight ahead, singing along with John Denver.

Daddy don't get drunk this Christmas
I don't want to see my mommy cry.

The guy with the crew-cut elbowed me.

"Hey, man, don't you like John Denver?"

"Sure, sure," I said, and started singing.

They let me off near the freeway downtown. Their van disappeared down the on-ramp toward Beaverton, and I walked the last few blocks to school.
November 12, 1974

I'm taking an advertising class this term and today we had a guest lecturer, an ex-Portland State student who now works for McCann-Erickson. Someone asked him a question about how Georgia-Pacific, one of his accounts, handles its image in the face of attacks from conservationist groups like the Sierra Club.

"Well, frankly," he said, brushing chalk from his red and blue checked bell-bottom pants, "Georgia-Pacific isn't too concerned with what the Sierra Club thinks, because they wouldn't listen to us anyway. The people we are trying to influence are the decision-makers in this country. We want our story to reach the businessmen, corporate leaders, and policy makers, right on down to the school teacher. We want grade school kids to walk out of the classroom with a favorable image of Georgia-Pacific."

He thrust his hands into his pockets while he talked, fondling keys, change, and anything else that jingled.

"We're not trying to play games either. The Georgia-Pacific story is true. They've been good citizens when it comes to environmental considerations, and we want everyone to realize that. We aren't trying to stroke anyone."

The man talked in smooth and practised tones. He was so friendly and so convincing, I almost overlooked the fanaticism in what he had said.
November 27, 1974

I saw a young couple lingering in the hallway between classes. They attracted my attention because the young woman had the same type of wrinkle around her eyes as Madeline. But she wore much more make-up than Madeline usually does, and the cosmetics wrinkled when she smiled. The fellow she was talking with was carrying a heavy black book with dull red letters on the binding. *Enjoying Management* the letters said.

I went over to the drinking fountain near where they were talking and eavesdropped for awhile. She was talking, head tilted, fingers tugging lightly on her dyed hair.

"They told me that they would have to keep my car at the shop for a couple of days while they figured out what was wrong with it. Something electrical, I think. I had to take it down to the place where I bought it on Front Street, because no one else has the parts. Probably cost a fortune by the time they are through."

She fluttered her eyelashes at him. She had cosmetic rosy red cheeks and her hair and clothes were styled so that she looked like a slightly modernized version of a 1948 college girl.

I could picture the pair of them in about ten years. She would be an aging and slightly desperate housewife. He would still be a young, though more powerful, executive. Of course, he would have a hard time getting it on with anyone who wasn't under thirty, but his wife would have the kids.

By coincidence, Madeline happened to come by while I was listening to and watching the couple. I walked with her down to the art department and she showed me some pictures that she had drawn. One of them was an effective, if grotesque, still life. The objects, placed against a rough-hewn wood background, resembled deformed humans rather than fruit.

I told Madeline that Ed and Janet had insisted that I go with them to a friend's house for Thanksgiving dinner, so I wouldn't be able to go over to her apartment tomorrow. Even though Ed and Janet insisted that I go along with them, I got the impression that they were doing it out of politeness rather than any desire to have me along. They have both been cool toward me since the night Ed cornered me with his problems. Maybe they are blaming their problems on me. After all, every relationship needs some common enemy to hold it together.
November 28, 1974

We sat around in the living room all afternoon and watched the Thanksgiving football games while Janet and her married friend shuffled food in and out of the oven in the kitchen. The table was pulled out from the wall and an extra leaf was stuck in it, and it was covered with a white linen cloth, gold-trimmed plates, folded napkins, and champagne glasses with beaded stems.

Occasionally Janet and the other woman would come out of the kitchen and sit at the feet of their men and join us in staring at the swirling colors of the television set and listening to the grunting football players. The two couples were playing a teasing battle of the sexes.

"You're so big and mean," said Married Woman to Lanky Husband.

"Oh, Ed’s mean, too, but he isn’t very big," said Janet, and the two women giggled. Ed and Lanky Husband looked at each other and grimaced, I sat in a chair off to the side while the married couple’s kid crawled up my leg. The kid’s mouth was full of potato chips. He was digging his fingernails into my thigh.

"How long before the food is ready?" asked Lanky Husband.

"Who’s winning the game?" asked Janet.

"In a few minutes," said Married Woman, answering the first question. She stood up, walked in front of the television, and eyed her husband.

"Hey, move away from the television, will you?" said Ed.

"That is all you guys think about — food and football. I swear," said Janet.

"Him, too," said Married Woman, motioning toward Lanky Husband.

I could still see the game from my chair. The quarterback was rolling out with the football, getting ready to throw the ball downfield.
“Will you move away from the television?” said Lanky Husband.

“Look at that catch! Why, I’ve never seen anything like it!” The excited voice came from the television speaker. Ed moved up to the edge of his seat, waving his hands around.

“Will you get away from the television?”

“Shit! We missed the play.”

“Wait, we can catch it on the replay. Will you MOVE?!”

She did, finally. And then the announcer said that the instant replay machine wasn’t working, but, “We’ll have that one for you at half-time in case you missed it. That was some play!”

Ed and Lanky Husband groaned. The women got up to get the dinner. The potato chips in the mouth of the kid on my leg threatened to dribble onto my pants. I pushed the kid off my leg. In a few minutes it was half-time and Ed and Lanky Husband walked into the kitchen.

Food was laid out in steaming dishes along the counter. Broccoli buttered, potatoes mashed, cocktails fruited, a wicker basket filled with Betty Crocker puffed rolls. Married Woman pulled the turkey out of the oven while the kid hung on her leg. He had more potato chips in his mouth. Lanky Husband took a knife to the turkey and began carving.

“Let’s do it buffet style,” smiled Janet, a pair of chrome plated meat tongs in her hand. She transferred sliced bird meat onto a large platter as soon as Lanky Husband carved it. Ed grabbed a plate from the table, walked over to the counter and piled food on it. He sat down at the table and ate while the rest of us gathered around the counter with plates in hand.
"Wait for us, Ed. Let's all eat together. It's Thanksgiving, after all," said Janet.
"Yeah, come on, you guys, this is only once a year."
"This Thanksgiving stuff is a bunch of shit," said Lanky Husband beneath his breath. Then he too walked over to the table with his brimming plate and began eating.
"Oh well, tradition dies hard," I said from the counter.
"Fuck tradition," said Ed as he shoveled another bite of mashed potatoes into his mouth.
The two women were offering each other food at the counter.
"Want some broccoli?"
"Have some fruit salad?"
I put some gravy on my turkey and went over to the table. The two women followed, both of their plates having been filled by the other.
"Hey, they're showing the highlights of the first half," said Lanky Husband. He and Ed picked up their plates and started for the next room.
"Come back here, you guys."
The fleeing pair didn't respond but instead settled themselves down in the other room to watch the television. The two women looked at each other and shook their heads. They looked at me and a smile flitted from one face to the other and quickly disappeared. Underneath the table, the two-year-old was tugging at my pants leg. He opened his mouth, showing me the big wad of potato chips sitting on the edge of his tongue.
December 5, 1974

I woke up this morning in Madeline's bed and crawled out slowly on my hands and knees over to the window. I put my fingers to the glass and shoved my nose up against it so that my breath fogged the pane. It was cloudy outside and rain was falling on a garbage bin in the alley below. Flower pots, trinkets, statuettes, and strung beads decorated the curtained windows of the other apartments. A few stories above, someone was looking down at me. When he noticed that I was looking back, he moved away from the window and drew the curtains shut.

I had called Madeline last night and then gone over to her apartment. She mentioned on the phone that it would be nice if we went somewhere and listened to music. When I got over there, though, we changed our minds and decided to spend the evening at her place. I think that Madeline had probably wanted to go out, because she had rouged her cheeks and put some white liner around her eyes.

I stared out the window and watched the rain come down, saturating the garbage below. It was a narrow alley and the rain was falling straight down in the windless space. Madeline rolled over on the bed behind me and moaned softly in her sleep.
Last night Madeline and I had made love, or fucked would be more accurate because that is what it was. Afterwards, she went into the bathroom and got a towel to wipe the mess off of herself and the bedsheets.

"Did you come?"
"No, but it's hard for me. I don't really care. I'm more interested in making the other person feel good."
"Yeah, sex can be disappointing."
"It's a lot of pretending, like everything else. I'd rather have simple affection but most guys won't give it to you unless you sleep with them first."
"Hmm."
"I just like to make the other person feel good."
"Well, you weren't too bad."
Madeline stiffened in the bed next to me, then rolled away. I fell asleep staring at the ceiling.
I had been looking out the window and listening to the rain. It came down harder and beat on the glass of the window. I turned around to see Madeline sitting on the edge of the bed and staring at me.
"What are you thinking about?" she said.
"Nothing."
December 7, 1974

Madeline came into the classroom after me and sat on the other side of the room. The teacher didn't come in right away and the mouths of the people in the class began to move around and make noises. Madeline was talking to the guy next to her.

"Oh, really?"

I heard Madeline's voice rise above the chattering and then fall back into it. She saw me looking at her and let out a little flashing wave of the hand, her fingers curling out of her fist and returning quickly. The guy she was talking to turned and gave me a quick look. Then the teacher came in and everyone re-directed their attention toward him. He lectured.

"Many people turn to romantic love as their salvation in the search for fulfillment. In earlier times, external influences, such as the need for survival, kept people together long after sexual attraction had disappeared. The same is basically true today. Familial involvement, though, is more likely at present to be detrimental rather than beneficial to individual survival, so it is becoming increasingly more obvious that romantic love is a fallacy. However, erotic pleasure will always remain a definite attraction."

The people in the class reacted to his statements in a variety of ways. Some nodded in agreement and scribbled in their notebooks while others looked as if they were going to fall asleep. Madeline had her eyes on the teacher's rear end as he walked back and forth across the room. I closed my eyes, retreating, as he rambled on.
December 10, 1974

Towards the end of class today someone raised his hand and asked the teacher a question.

"How do you reconcile all the hatred and just plain boredom to the fact that there seems to be nothing below the surface? I mean, I am not even sure if the rest of the world is real."

The student looked around the class anxiously. The teacher put his finger behind his ear.

"Well, that's just one of the problems that you have to face when you undertake the challenge of the world."

The teacher smiled and the class laughed. The fall quarter ended about five minutes later. Madeline told me that she was going to Medford for Christmas vacation and wouldn't be back until after New Year's. I went down to the cafeteria.

There were a few of my friends there and I sat at a table with them. There weren't too many other people around. It was late in the afternoon and people who didn't have finals the next week had already taken off. My friends and I sat around and talked, drinking coffee and not really having much to say. It reminded me of a time a couple of years ago when a friend of mine had been murdered. Then, too, we had little to say.
He had been working in a gas station when he was killed. A group of young punks had come in and demanded that he give them all the money in the register. Then for some reason, they tied his hands behind his back with electrical tape and blew off the back of his skull with a gun. We speculated that it was his unrelenting smart mouth that had gotten him killed. He never could be quiet.

The funeral had been several days later. His parents had the morticians shave off his stubbly beard, which he had always worn, and trim his hair. After the ceremony, a group of us had stood around and muttered incoherently.

"What a rip off," and
"Shit," and
"Damn, man."

As we climbed into the station wagon that was waiting to drive us away, someone threw up. I could see the raisins he had put in his cereal that morning, and the curdled milk that had once been fresh and sweet on his corn flakes.

After sitting in the cafeteria at Portland State for awhile, I left my friends and went home.
Ed and Janet were sitting on the couch and watching television when I got home. I threw my books and my jacket in the closet and came back to watch it with them.

"What have you been doing lately?" asked Janet.

"You saw me this morning. What do you think I've been doing?" I said.

"She was only asking," said Ed. He waved his hands and turned his attention back to the television.

It was cloudy outside and late in the afternoon. The curtain to the front window was drawn. The only thing breaking the gray darkness was the numbing glow of the television.

"It's dismal in here. How can you guys stand sitting around watching TV? Do we have any beer? Did the welfare people send out the food stamp authorization? Did the mail come?"

"No, we're out of beer and the mail didn't come today." Ed didn't turn away from the television. A commercial flashed onto the screen. Janet looked over at me with a little smile on her face. Her smiles always look like toothpaste ads. She is good looking by television commercial standards.
“Who was that girl you were with the other day?” asked Janet.

“The Cosmic Divinity,” I said.

“Pardon?”

“Can’t anybody ask you a question?” said Ed.

“I was just saying that I went out with the Cosmic Divinity. What’s so odd about that? You know the Cosmic Divinity, that thing you and Janet think you are rubbing against every time you touch each other.”

“God,” said Janet. She got up and walked toward the bathroom.

“Hey, man, what’s wrong with you, anyway?” said Ed.

“Nothing, nothing. I’m just irritated. Tell Janet I’m sorry. But it’s none of her business what I do anyway. I’m going out for a walk.”

“Oh, by the way,” Ed said as I grabbed the doorknob. “Janet and I are going to spend this vacation down at the beach in a cabin that belongs to a friend of hers. We’ll probably leave Sunday.”

“All right.”
December 23, 1974

Usually I spend Christmas with my parents in Los Angeles. This year my father didn't have enough money to get me down there, so I had to stay in Portland, which is just as well since my holidays in California have become increasingly nerve-wracking.

Last Christmas Eve, I took the hour-and-a-half drive from my parents' house out to San Bernardino where an old girl friend of mine was staying. Sally goes to school in nearby Pomona and spends her academic vacations with her cousin and his wife in their suburban home.

After spending some time talking to her relatives, Sally and I took off in my father's Plymouth Duster for a restaurant she knew in Riverside. It was a Mexican restaurant complete with singing Chicano waiters and three-fifty-a-plate burrito dinners. We sat there a long time amidst the stuffed toy donkeys and rattling marimbas that hung from the stucco walls. We spent the time talking, eating, and spending my father's money on Margaritas. We drank enough to make the drive back to her cousin's a little too exciting.

When we got back to her cousin's house, the lights were out, the cousin and his wife were in bed, and I tried to follow Sally into hers. She didn't go for the idea. She told me she had a boy friend who was home in San Francisco for Christmas and she didn't want to be unfaithful to him. I couldn't see what that had to do with anything, so I stood in her bedroom doorway and drunkenly persisted.

I don't remember what I had been saying, but after a while Sally walked up to me and gave me a good hard shove. I fell down in the hall and she slammed the bedroom door shut. A second later the door opened again. Sally threw a sleeping bag out at me and told me to sleep on the couch in the living room. I took the sleeping bag and put it in the back of my father's Duster, and drove back down Highway 10 to Los Angeles. Sally never called to ask about the sleeping bag and I didn't see her the rest of the vacation, nor ever since.

I stayed in L.A. until just after New Year's. I went to a few high school parties with my brother and his girl friend and spent a memorable New Year's Eve on a backyard patio, sticking my tongue into a fifteen-year-old girl's mouth. She had to be home by ten o'clock.
January 2, 1975

Madeline came back from Christmas vacation and spent the night at my house. She had shown up on my doorstep in leather knee boots, a sequined blue dress, and more make-up on her face than usual. Later, while lying in bed, Madeline talked about all the weird looking people there are in Portland. We both spend a lot of time riding Tri-Met which is a haven for the old and encumbered.

"Have you ever noticed how many grotesque people there are downtown? Those stumbling old men with eyes almost always shut, and those wrinkled, hunched-up women, and those young panhandlers with the huge, flat noses. They are everywhere!"

"Where else can they go?" I asked.

"That isn't the point. Those people don't even look human. In fact, I know they aren't. They are part of the invasion."

"What invasion?"

"The one from outer space. Those people are part of a plot to demoralize humanity by showing us hopelessly ugly caricatures of mankind. Or maybe the aliens haven't gotten good enough at assuming the appearances of earth people."

I laughed. Madeline did too, but she kept on talking.
"But I'm serious. They land in a clearing outside the city and then infiltrate. They drain the resources of the earth, living on welfare and getting jobs in government. Of course, the government keeps it a secret."

Madeline spoke with an excited edge to her voice. She was electric. The sound of her voice hummed me to sleep.

The last thing I remember before drifting off, she was telling me about the time she and a friend had gone into one of the arcades downtown. They went back into a curtained room where old nickelodeons showed thirty-second porno flicks for a quarter.

"A little man, he must have been a dwarf, with a money bag tied around his waist, checked our I.D.s before he would let us go back there."

When I got out of bed this morning, Madeline had already left.
Ed and Janet came back from their vacation at the beach and walked into the house with their arms around each other. They went into Ed's room, and I could hear their voices from where I sat in the kitchen. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but I had a feeling that something was up. After awhile, I heard the door to Ed's room open and footsteps in the hall. The front door opened and closed as Ed walked into the kitchen.

"Did Janet leave?" I asked.

"Yeah, she went home for awhile. She'll be back later."

Ed looked like he had something on his mind. He looked uncomfortable.

"Janet and I are going to get an apartment together," he said suddenly. I didn't say anything.

"We thought it might be a good idea."

"Sounds good to me," I said after a short silence. I really didn't care, although it would be a pain to move and find a new place. Those two had been irritating me a bit lately, but not that much.

"We probably won't move out until the first of February. What are you going to do...find another roommate?"

"Nah, I'll probably just move closer to school. Get a place by myself. It's about time for a change anyway."
"I just figured, you know, that since Janet and I are together all the time anyway, we might as well get a place together. She sort of wants to get away from the people she lives with now. Some people she knows are moving out of their apartment at the end of the month, and they said that we could just move in and take over the rent. It's a pretty nice apartment."

"Sounds good to me." I was starting to feel awkward myself.

"This is a pretty good place, too, though. You and I have lived here for a pretty long time," said Ed. He was waving his hands around, making circles in the air.

"Yeah, it is a pretty nice place," I said.

I got out of the chair and walked over to the stove. Ed gave me a strange look.

"We've been friends for a long time," he said. "You aren't mad, are you?"

"Why should I be mad?"

"I don't know. I just thought that it would be a good idea for Janet and me to get a place. She wants to. You know what I mean?"

"Sure, man."
January 4, 1975

Madeline greeted me at the door of her apartment with her face decorated like a cosmetic circus. Black nylon stockings ran the length of her legs and disappeared at the top of her thighs beneath the hem of her dress.

"Come on, let's hurry," she said, flashing a grin that looked like it was set in plaster. "I want to get over to the Ramada Inn and see Tommy and the Teen Tones. A friend of mine said that they are a fifties style rock band that tells dirty jokes. They're supposed to be funny as hell."

I said that I didn't think it was worth the trouble, that it was too far to walk, and too cold outside. Madeline said that we could take the bus. She insisted, so we went.

The Ramada Inn Cocktail Lounge was filled with business types and their dates reliving scenes from the Eisenhower decade with a few embellishments. On stage, members of the band grabbed at each other's crotches while graying executives sat in the audience swilling bourbon. The men's dates dragged ferociously on their cigarettes, pausing only to chuckle at the jokes and pat their hair into place. Madeline and I sat near the back of the lounge, our knees and elbows knocking against a small bar table. We ordered a couple of bourbons, finished them quickly, and ordered more.

"See that guy up there?" Madeline pointed to the drummer who was wearing a set of Mickey Mouse ears.

"He's one of them," she said.

"One of what?"
"The aliens. I saw him getting out of a spaceship the other day and then this morning I saw him again down at the welfare department."

I refused to play along with this continuation of the other night's silliness.

"No, the band is from Las Vegas. They came here on an airplane. Very simple. You couldn't have seen that guy at the welfare department because it's Saturday and the place is closed. Besides, the band makes too much money to go on welfare."

Madeline smiled, laughing at my argument. She continued to point out different people to me, telling me which planet they came from, how many dimensions they traveled through to get here, and what their appearances really were when not masquerading as earthmen. By the time we left, she had recounted almost every science fiction gimmick I had ever heard and was still going strong. We were both drunk.

Madeline didn't want to go back to her apartment, so we caught the bus and got off downtown near the arcade she had been talking about the other night. An old man was leaning against the wall of the building, he was playing with something that hung from his lapel. As soon as he saw us, he started walking toward us.

"Here comes another one. He's from Alpha Centauri." Madeline laughed again. I didn't. I was getting tired of the joke.
"Hello, hello," said the old man. "I'm having problems and I know that you young people will understand. They threw me out of that place over there that is supposed to be a public eating establishment. Do you know why? Because I am old and I am on welfare, and because I wear a rose in my lapel."

He grabbed his lapel and thrust it out toward us. A wilted stem with dead leaves hung from the buttonhole. The flickering white and yellow lights from the neon arcade sign flashed down on his face, shimmering in his wrinkles and lending his words an importance that couldn't really have been there.

"Every day I put a fresh rose into my lapel because if anyone should doubt the existence of God, all he has to do is look at a blooming flower. You don't doubt, do you? I have come a long way for an old man. I left my wife in Miami and I need a young girl to shake my hand. Shake a poor old man's hand. Will you?"

Madeline stuck her hand out. I was getting fidgety standing there, I wanted to go. The old man swung his hand past Madeline's and put it on her shoulder.

"Thank you, thank you, my dear. You don't know how much it means. My name is Harry...Harry of Miami."
"I'm leaving. It's too cold to stand around here," I said. I wasn't really cold. We'd both had enough bourbon to keep us warm for a week, but the sight of that old man touching Madeline was bothering me. I wanted to get up to her apartment, but she was ignoring me.

"Well, I'll meet you at your apartment then. I'm not going to stand here all night."

I turned and walked up the street. About halfway down the block, I decided that leaving Madeline alone wasn't such a good idea. But when I turned around, both she and Harry of Miami were gone.

I suddenly noticed that there were people all around me, up and down the street. I might have been too drunk to notice before, but now they were there. My eyes were having trouble focusing their bodies into coherent shapes. I looked up at the sky and tried to clear my vision.

Directly above me, I saw a glimmering object hovering in the air. It was dropping tear-shaped balls that splashed down onto the sidewalk around me. The slime was hitting the concrete and rising into ambulatory, gesticulating figures that would stroll along for a few feet and then suddenly fall back into a puddle. I stood there and steadied myself until the people re-formed into walking, talking human beings. It took a few seconds for my head to clear.

I figured it would be best to get off the street, so I walked quickly, ignoring my surroundings, until I got up to her apartment. Madeline didn't come back for several hours.
January 7, 1975

Ed and Janet were moving Ed's stuff out of the house this morning. Ed had said that they were going to wait until the end of the month, but the tenants of their new place decided to move out early. Now I have to get busy and find another place to live. But today was the first day of Winter term at Portland State, so I had to hassle with new classes. Also, I woke up with a nasty burning sensation in my bladder, so I wanted to go to the Health Center at school.

The nurse had me lie face down on a table while she filled both cheeks with anti-toxins. It seems I've been afflicted with a well-known tropical disease that was born in the soft recesses of the jungle underbrush where natives make the air hot and clammy with their caresses. The disease has worked its way up to the cold north where suburbanites screw and pant their chilly breath into each other's heart. Mozart would be proud of me.

I spent the rest of the day going to classes, listening to teachers and staring at walls. I saw Madeline down in the cafeteria chewing on an apple and talking to, of all people, the philosophy professor. I'm supposed to tell her about the germs that she is incubating, but I walked on by as if I didn't see her. Someone else will have to tell her.

Since the other night downtown, the people I see have taken on a peculiar mucus-like quality. They plop up and down, sliding through the corridors, their little hearts thumping in chameleon slime.
SEE! SEE!

THE ROBOT

SEEKING A YOUNG SAUCER FROM MARS!

Do you dare see...

THE THING?

FRIGHTENING...NIERED...

ASTOUNDING...

CREATURES FROM OUTER SPACE

Be Amazed!
January 10, 1975

I spent the afternoon sitting in the Park Blocks. It seemed warm for January, though there have been a few cold days lately. The usual clouds were overhead, and a few drops of rain moistened my scalp.

I heard on the radio that it has been a mild winter in many parts of the world. The Moscow Weather Service reported temperatures there are unseasonably warm. The radio announcer made some speculation that the mild winter is sign of an impending Ice Age.

As I sat in the Park Blocks, the rain began to come down harder. An old man hurried into the shelter of Neuberger Hall and people hustled back and forth from the library in the increasing drizzle. I sat there, on a bench, and it reminded me of a time when I was a kid. I had been sitting on a felled tree in the woods, looking at a dead possum. Its teeth were bared, as if ready to fight, and fleas hopped on its carcass. Parts of it were well rotted. The animal’s features were already beginning to blend into the contours of the ground, much like an imaginary face blends into the stucco patterns on a bedroom wall.

I felt my face and it was cold and damp with rain water. I imagined if I looked into a mirror, my face would be white, drained of blood. I looked at the steel and concrete buildings of the university. There were a few people standing hesitantly at one of the doorways, staring out at the rain. The scene became a moist and colorful blur, that frayed along the edges, folding inward.
The don't need names. Call them Cecilia or Carl, Alex or Amanda, or Daisy. for chrissakes — anything connotating aspiration. And that is where their bravery lies — or some imbalance consanguineous with bravery — in their determined aspiration. That imbalance needn't be named either. It is as nameless as any of us on, say, some damp, precipitous morning when the whole army of us slides toward class, job, office, or appointment. Like cuts of meat on packing plant hooks, we do not notice much.

There is a strange smell in the air those slaughter-house mornings. All God's little cutlets — light meat and dark — trundle into elevators, slip-slap together in halls, wrinkle a bit at the edges under the institutional lighting. Their conversation would sound bizarre to the uninitiated:

"Meat for lunch? Oh, Pinky, I'd love to."

"Gee en Pea's on the upswing. I'd steak my reputation on it." The combined murmuring of the University gathers above its geographical center.

"I perceive, therefore I think I am. I perceive...."
The text of this book is fictitious.
Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.