

THE BARON FILES

a novel for young adults
by **Clayton Bess**

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INCIDENT REPORT

SUBJECT: Violent Assault in Unit A

SUBMITTED BY: Abraham Johnson

DATE: March 23, 1979

I was on duty in the cage of the West Wing Dorm on the second floor tonight. About a half hour after LIGHTS OUT there was noises coming from the northeast corner. I turned my left ear to the noises, which is my good ear of the two. The noises was getting louder. There was a fight brewing. I snapped, but the noises (which was yelling) kept getting louder by the second.

I heard a voice which I believe was John Baron yelling to get away from him or he would kill him. Another voice which I believe was Joe Everett called him a “nigger lover” and how he couldn’t suck on it long enough if it was a “black d - - -” (male penis).

There was other voices, too, but too many to reckonize, yelling things like “Suck on it, queer.”

There was black voices yelling now, too, things like “Everett, you white mother-f - - - - (incester),” and how they’ll burn his eyes out and cut him, and Everett’s voice also again yelling things like “Come on hambone, I’m waiting for your black a - -” (buttock).

I turned on the lights from inside the cage and seen that a mass fight was already comenced in the northeast corner. The beds was pushed out of place and the lockers turned upside down. The fight spread fast through the north half of the dorm and into the south half and I couldn’t see nobody who wasn’t getting and taking blows. It was pretty much a white-black fight, but there was three whites who was ganged up on John Baron who is also his self a white, too.

I sounded the whistle and got on my gas mask. Then I seen Baron break from the guys after him. He run to the cage yelling at me how I should do something or they was going to

kill him. I sprayed him and them that jumped him with gas just when the other guards came in the cage and got on their masks. They got their gas canisters and let loose on the whole Dorm. That broke up the fighting fast. The wards was screaming now to be let in the showers. We let them in three by three for a fast wash-off. Then we hustled them into the Adjustment Center where there was clean underwear in each cell.

Abraham Johnson
Correctional Officer

PUNISHMENT:

Detention of all wards in the Adjustment Center until clean up and detox of the Dorm.
Transfer John Baron to Protective Custody. He should not be among Dorm wards.

Norman Bandy, Associate Superintendent

djt: 4/3/79 — 11:10 a.m.

Countermand effective immediately: Transfer Baron to
Med-Psych.

I am disturbed by the coy reporting of Officer Johnson. It may be unintended, or perhaps not. Copy these pages before they are typed and edited. Interview him and the other guards for more accurate details. Try to discover who leaked Baron's homosexuality; it is doubtful he would have been found out so soon after arrival otherwise.

This use of gas does appear to have been necessary to quash what might have become a riot.

Diana J. Town, Psychologist High Broder

Thursday

Dear Frank,

They've been driving me nuts in here. They haven't told me anything. They haven't let me near a phone. They haven't let me have visitors. Today was the first time they gave me anything I could write you with. I have no idea where you are. I'm writing this to the apartment, hoping, trusting in your Universe of Good Things, that the cops let you go.

They assigned me a lawyer, but he's a mosquito. He told me he would take a letter to you but I don't trust him. I'll trust the post office instead.

I need you. I miss you. I need to know you're safe and free. I wish I had you here so we could talk, and so much more. I've never felt so helpless and alone. If I only knew what's happening to you, I'd be okay. I can get through. But you must be going crazy, too, waiting to get word from me.

Don't worry, I'm fine. They've been digging at me with a whole troop of damn doctor or social worker or psycho-pshrink, but they're all of them just mosquitoes. I've had run-ins with judges and cops and guards, but they're not getting inside me. The only thing that really bothers me is the wondering, and the lock-up, how long it's going to last. But I can take it. I can take everything they throw at me.

They call me "incorrigible" and I told them, "You're damn right I'm incorrigible. You can't correct me. I won't let you. Who are you to even try?"

And Frank, I guess I did a stupid thing. I had a chance, they now tell me, to get out with a suspended sentence and sermon and probation at home with my parents, but that judge was a five cent runt of a dollar dictator. You would have died to hear the kind of things he was

saying and to see my mom and dad sitting there nodding at him like two pure little daisies in a field of bull pucky. All the other kids from the Hall went up to the bench crying and saying how wrong they had been and how they were okay now that they'd had a chance to think about it, and the judge would smile this caterpillar smile and send them off with their parents like so many darling turds down a toilet.

But I was so pissed at them they could have taken me right then and put me in the electric chair and I'd have turned on the juice for them. And when that judge started telling me I needed an "attitude adjustment" I told him, "Get fucked, Your Honor. That'll adjust your attitude." So that was that. Here I am and I guess here I'll stay for a big old while. The parole board doesn't even meet on my case for months.

But it's okay. It really is. Today anyway. They first put me in a place which would have done me in, but there was this incident and they had to move me. I don't want to go into any details here. I'm sure they'll read what I'm writing. But now they've moved me to another floor and I've got a room of my own now, "special treatment" you know for "special people" and the real truth is they don't want me contaminating the other darlings. But that suits me fine because this is the Med-Psych floor (how does that make you feel? Med-Psych, like I'm psycho and in need of medicine?) and the other darlings are not so adorable as you might imagine.

They're okay, I guess, but ignorant. Some are downright stupid. They range from fifteen to maybe twenty years old and some may have gone to school for maybe as many as four years out of their lives. They've been out on the streets so long that's all they know, street life. The older ones keep getting their time extended because they're not bad enough to send on to prison, but they're not good enough to be turned back on the streets loose. They spend their days

here in front of the television or in the rec room lifting weights and feeling their muscles or sprawled out on their beds with their mouths hung open. The books in the library sit on the shelves catching dust because nobody in this place wants to read heavier stuff than ladder books.

I can hear your voice, “Johnny, don’t be so hard on them.” Yeah, just because I’m lucky enough to have a high school education (well, yeah, almost) ((for what it’s worth)). I’m sure they think I’m the one who’s stupid. They’ve been in and out of the Hall all their lives and some of them have been here in High Broder for years now, so they know the tricks. They like to try to make a fool of me. (Fat chance!)

Like the other night in the mess hall. (What a zoo.) There’s this thing about race that everybody’s supposed to know here, and that is that the whites hang with the whites, the blacks with the blacks and the browns with the browns and the yellows with the yellows, and never but never do they mix. Well, you know me. So I came into the dining hall with the group I was supposed to be with and I guess they had arranged it ahead of time so that the only table with any empty seats was this one with two black guys sitting at it. I didn’t think anything about it but sat down with these two black guys, naturally.

Then I could hear it, all over the mess hall, this kind of bristling going around among all the white guys on one side and all the black guys on the other side. Evidently, you see, I should have put up a big stink about it, but of course it never crossed my mind.

Anyway, I “got a ticket” from the whites on account of my not minding eating with the blacks, and I guess I got some kind of ticket from the blacks, too. It’s crazy. But the whites tried to make me pay my ticket later that night. That’s the incident I told you about earlier that got me transferred. So it worked out okay. But they’ll be making more trouble for me, I guess, all

the colors, but I'm catching on fast and I'll beat them at their own game if they give me enough time. And, yeah. It looks like I might just be in here for a long old time.

Frank, what are we going to do? I hope you can write me, wherever you are, that you get this, and you'll write and tell me what we're going to do, both of us. God, I miss you. Write me, Frank. Write me soon. I can't have visitors for another month for some damn reason they can't even explain to me, but come and see me just as soon as you can. And write.

Johnny

P.S. I've got a funny story for you. One of the black guys I ate with that night, Henry Elliott, was telling it to the other one, and supposedly it really happened. This will kill you. I almost put myself under the table laughing so hard, which is maybe one of the reasons the white guys were so mad about how I was getting along with the black guys.

Anyway, this Henry Elliott was up in Montreal visiting his cousin Rufus. (I'm not kidding; his cousin's name, he called him, is Rufus.) While he was there, Henry Elliott met this girl in a restaurant where she was a waitress just down the street from where Rufus lived, but because she only spoke French and Henry only spoke English, they couldn't communicate. All they could do was smile at each other, which they did a lot of, so he came into the restaurant every day to see her. And she was saying to him every day when she would see him come in, "Comment allez vous?" which I guess he thought was "Comment vous appelez-vous?" asking him what his name was, so every day he would say back to her, "Henry Elliott."

And she would just keep smiling and going on with her waitressing, and every day the same thing, which made him think maybe she was a little stupid that she kept forgetting his name, but every day the same thing.

“Comment allez-vous?”

“Henry Elliott.”

“Comment allez-vous?”

“Henry Elliott.”

(Now to get the real flavor of it, Frank, you’ve got to hear the way this guy says his own name, kind of like Johnette talks, you know, that black, low, beautiful sing-song and very casual, “Henry Elliott,” like he’s saying, “Sir Laurence Olivier” or “Washington Monument” or something else real important.)

So finally Henry tells Rufus about it and Rufus, who’s lived in Montreal for a while, laughs big and tells him, “Fool, she’s not asking you what your name is, she’s saying, how you doing today?”

So Henry smites himself on his forehead (he actually did it, Frank, he smote himself on his forehead, it was so funny) and then the next time he goes into the restaurant he says quick to the girl before she can say anything to him, “Comment allez vous?”

And she says to him, “Henry Elliott.”

Same voice, same intonation, “Henry Elliott.”

I can hear you laughing, Frank, if this gets to you. I hope, I hope, I hope it does.

P.P.S. Frank, you do understand, don’t you, why I couldn’t go along with that hearing and the kind of vomit that judge was spewing out on me? It would have gotten on you,

too, Frank. What he was trying to get onto me would have gotten on you. You're the real thing they're after. I get that. They're trying to use me to get to you. I get that.

This will all be over some time and we'll be together again. I would like to say more. But they're, you know... ils lisent ces mots.

Yours (and I mean it)
Johnny

MEMORANDUM

TO: John Baron
FROM: Norman Bandy, M.S.W.

DATE: 6 April, 1979

John:

You realize, of course, your letter to Franklin Parker will not be mailed. Rather than try to redact it line by line—for its language and content throughout are too completely out of the question—I have decided to return it to you. I have made a copy of it for your file.

In the future, keep your letters inoffensive: use no profanity, make no mention of your fellow wards, especially by name—as you did with Henry Elliott—and by all means avoid exacerbating our meliorating racial problems by spreading word of it to the outside.

In any case, however, I doubt very much that any message written by you to Franklin Parker will leave High Broder.

Norman Bandy, M.S.W.

Dear Ms. W. Bandy,
That's your crap. You eat it.
Sincerely, John Baron

djt: 4/9/79 — 8:35 a.m.
cc. both Baron's letter and Bandy's memo for my
Baron file. Bandy seems bent on trouble for Baron.
Context.

MEMORANDUM

TO: Diana J. Town, Ph.D.
FROM: Norman Bandy, M.S.W.

DATE: 20 April, 1979

Let me take this opportunity, if a little belated perhaps, to formally welcome you to our staff. Although you already understand we have our fundamental differences of opinion, I am sure we will be able to overcome them in our efforts toward our mutual final goal, that of making the Fourth Floor the most efficient, safest, and thereby most nurturing of the units in High Broder.

I had not meant to denigrate your work in any way when we met last month. I think psychological counseling an absolutely indispensable tool in rehabilitating our wards, and although I hold no degree per se in Psychology, I do have some background in it, of course. As I told you, I worked very closely with the late Dr. Galvin (a psychiatrist, not a psychologist) in setting up the Med-Psych Counseling Program here at High Broder, using as its basic practicum an innovative combination of Transactional Analysis and Behavior Modification.

So you can see that it is not your area of specialization with which I have a quarrel; it is rather with your schedule. Frankly, I do not believe one session a week with a ward is sufficient to yield any benefit whatever. I realize that your intention to circulate throughout the four floors of High Broder rather than basing yourself primarily in the Med-Psych Unit, as was Dr. Galvin's practice, is not an intention motivated by sloth. Quite to the contrary, you will have almost seven hundred wards to attend to, and you will most certainly be overworked, especially when you consider the special needs of those wards housed in the Intractable Unit and Protective Custody. You mistake your abilities, I fear, in this plan of yours.

I can appreciate your point that every ward in High Broder does at some time need psychological counseling, but still I must remind you that the Med-Psych Unit was created specifically as a place where those wards are housed who are most needy of and most responsive to psychological counseling.

You have perhaps been spoiled by California's affluence, but even California appears to have entered our new era of cut-back realities. You will find it necessary to make some adjustments to our relative insolvency at High Broder. If this state allotted us the monies that California allots its Youth Authority, we would have double or perhaps even treble the staff and could provide the kind of far-reaching, general psychological counseling you wish to institute in High Broder.

I hope you will come in time to accept my opinion on this. It is derived from thirty-five years of wide-ranging experience. In the meantime, however, please accept my hearty and sincere welcome.

As you requested, I have had duplicate files of all the wards photocopied and sent to you. You have no doubt already discovered that the paper work alone will keep you quite busy for some time. In my own office I have kept consummate records of every ward to come to the Fourth Floor these past thirty-five years, and I think you will find that once you have read all the files, you will most certainly know my young men better than they know themselves.

This is true with the exceptions of Jack Cole (18), Roger Standing (16), and John Baron (17). Roger Standing's obvious problem is that he is a deaf mute, and consequently communication with him has been difficult. I have compiled the records of all the institutions in which he has been a ward for the last eleven years, but I am afraid they are less than helpful. For

the most part they are sketchy reports from various supervisors and correctional officers on the many scraps Standing has managed to get himself into. Because of his progressive ungovernability, he has been transferred from institution to institution around the state until it was unfortunately deemed he should be in a maximum security situation, and he was laid finally on High Broder's doorstep.

I say this is unfortunate because he has never committed a crime, per se—or perhaps I should say one that we can identify. He was originally designated a ward of the state because he was an abused and abandoned child and there was no other place to send him but to a youth institution. I'm sure you appreciate the difficulty of finding a foster home for such a child. So with the State he has remained, growing every more distant and intractable.

Jack Cole may as well not be here, so completely has he withdrawn from life in High Broder. He appears to have communication with nobody. All the other young men on the floor avoid him, frightened less by his extraordinary size than his hostility and taciturnity. He shows none of the usual racial allegiance so that even his fellow Afro-Americans stay away from him. He has been with us for three years and has never been promoted out of Phase I. In fact, he voluntarily spends the greatest part of his time in a life which very much resembles our Austere Program.

The Austere Program is, as its name implies, a severely simplified life. A ward who, through misconduct of some kind or through assaultiveness, is "rubberbanded" back from an advanced phase into the Austere Program, forfeits his privileges for a time and remains without possessions in a locked, unadorned room, coming out only for meals until such time as he is willing to take up again his responsibilities to the Fourth Floor community.

Although Cole's room door is not locked during the days, he has in every other way chosen for himself an austere sort of life. Each year when he comes before the parole board, he is so abusive of the members that he is returned to me with his parole denied, to nobody's surprise. He is his own autonomous unit within the Med-Psych Unit, and if you will accept some good advice you will leave him as he is. I do not normally have a defeatist attitude about my young men, but I know from experience that it will be best for all of us on the Fourth Floor if Jack Cole's boat remains unrocked.

Because of your directive to transfer John Baron to Med-Psych, we must discuss his case in some detail. He is an intriguing young man, to be sure. He has not spoken more than fifteen words since the disturbance on the second floor toward the end of last month. Except for the one letter to Franklin Parker (his former homosexual partner as alleged in the Admissions Report, a young teacher of about twenty-five years of age) and except for the one obnoxious note to me in response to my returning to him that letter, he has not sought any means of communication. He has not spoken with or tried to befriend any wards on the Fourth Floor.

He has so far ignored all my attempts at psychological evaluation that I have been tempted more than once to give up on him altogether. He is not, however, without intelligence and his mind is an active one, as can be seen by the unexampled amount of reading he does. (May I suggest to you while I think of it that should the occasion arise that Baron does merit punishment, you could not inflict upon him one more efficacious than to recall his library privileges.)

He is clever and savvy, as well. He never does anything which might call down upon him punishment or reprimand, or at any rate not since he spent twenty-four hours in the Adjustment Center as penalty for having written that obnoxious note to me. He learns quickly.

If you have not yet visited our Adjustment Center —our Crisis Intervention Center variously called the “hole” or “bucket” or “jug” by the wards— I suggest you do. It is located in the basement along with the Intractable Unit and is one of the more severe punishments for wards who fail to respond to the more usual demotion into the Austere Program. It is a row of small rooms about six feet by eight feet, without windows except for the door aperture, and without furniture except for a pad on the floor on which the ward sleeps, no linens, no blankets. The walls and low ceilings of each room are padded, both to prevent the ward from battering himself against them and to prevent his cries from disturbing the other wards in the nearby Intractable Unit. The Intractables do hear, of course, despite the padding; and I believe that is all to the good as reinforcement of their dread of the Adjustment Center.

The point of the Adjustment Center is to give the ward, stripped to his underwear, a time of absolute solitude and self reflection in which to think over his crime and the punishment for that crime —rerun the tape, as it were— in order to make his own re-decision as to how best to “go along to get along” at High Broder. It is amazing what one day or even only twelve hours in solitary can do to a child’s mind.

In John Baron’s case, his re-training in the Adjustment Center seems to have done him some good. After his release, his brief communications with me and his fellow wards have been entirely blameless, no longer abusive, no longer provocative. He still, of course, is not what one would call amicable. He responds only when addressed and then with a kind of

undistinguished indifference which is not exactly punishable as insolence. Still, there is disrespect lurking beneath the exterior nonchalance.

The Phase IV wards report he appears to have no aim to promote himself out of Phase I, and I am not completely convinced at this time that it is wise for him to even be in the Med-Psych Unit at all. One of the major purposes of the Counseling Program is to provide an avenue for advancement for adjusted wards. An example like Baron might be deleterious to those young men who have committed themselves to their contracts for self-improvement and who are making their best efforts to advance through the program to eventual parole.

Of course Baron's unrepentant homosexual background raises another objection entirely. Should a young man who has had homosexual relations with an adult be housed with other young men who are already beset by psychological problems? Since Baron arrived on the Fourth Floor there have already been three apprehended homosexual incidents, and there is no way to conjecture how many incidents went undiscovered. The Fourth Floor in its physical layout, with its single rooms and three-bed rooms instead of the dormitory arrangements in Units A and B—which of course allows us better surveillance—is immediately more conducive to illicit goings-on.

Although John Baron was not a participant in any of the three known homosexual escapades, there is no telling what his influence might have been in inciting them. It is true that we have had occasional evidences of homosexual intrigue in the past, and we do expect a certain amount of it as a form of sexual release among confined heterosexual young men. It is true, too, that in the past we have had self-admitted homosexuals in the Med-Psych Unit, but they were

dedicated to contracts which aimed at the modification of that behavior, and the Life Scripts these young men developed excluded homosexual activity.

John Baron, however, has rejected all suggestions of therapy. He has insisted that he not only has no need to modify his behavior but that he will resist to his utmost any efforts we may make on his behalf. I realize there is a new school of thought that homosexuality is not a symptom of mental aberration, but new philosophical schools come and go with the fashions.

My recommendation, with all due respect to both your authority and your prior deliberation, is that John Baron be transferred back out of the Med-Psych Unit and into the Protective Custody Unit on the first floor. There he would be in a locked single room so there would be no concern either for contamination by him —as might be evidenced among our wards on the Fourth Floor— or persecution of him, as was the case in the disturbance of 23 March.

Finally, I wish to repeat that I hope we two shall begin a harmonious association in the Med-Psych Unit. I am pleased finally to have a colleague with whom to consult, with whom to share my experience and insights, and from whom to select new ideas.

Sincerely,
Norman Bandy

P.S. I cannot refrain from adding, for your own good, that I am not wholly in favor of a woman's working in an all-male institution. You are young, you are not unattractive, and I predict your presence on my floor will cause us all a great deal of discomfort, perhaps even danger to yourself. Rape of female personnel has been both attempted and accomplished in the past, and your doctorate will be of no protection here. Be that as it may, I am in hopes that some of your womanly grace will lend to the Med-Psych Unit some homely softness.

djt: 4/21/79 — 9:05 a.m.
cc. for the files of Residents Baron, Cole & Standing

MEMORANDUM

TO: Norman Bandy
FROM: Diana Town

DATE: April 25, 1979

Dear Mr. Bandy:

Thanks very much for the duplicates of your files. They'll be a big help. I'll be getting to them as I can. In the meantime, you can expect me to be up next Monday and then every Monday and Tuesday after that. I'd like to have a community meeting first with all the wards, and then I intend to break them into ten groups of about six or so in each group, five groups to be seen on Mondays and the other five on Tuesdays. I'll be wanting your advice on how best to break them up, but no promises on necessarily adhering to that advice. A deal? More on that Monday.

Now, about John Baron... I agree with you that a safer place for him (for High Broder's sake) might be Protective Custody, but for Baron's sake, I think he should be in Med-Psych. As you so perceptively recognized, he is a very bright young man. I've talked briefly on the telephone with his high school principal and two of the principal's recommended teachers; they had nothing but the best words for John. He simply has too much potential to be locked up with the weaker personalities in Protective Custody.

The four phase counseling program you have set up with Dr. Galvin is a thing of beauty, and I am convinced from the very impressive parts of it I have seen that this is the one place in High Broder where John's nature can survive. I realize he doesn't fit exactly any of the criteria you have set forth in your program statement, being neither psychotic nor neurotic, having no tendency toward suicide, no disfigurements, no muscular disorders or migraines, or any signs of schizophrenia. Surely you will agree, however, that he is special and merits special

attention. I admit it's not going to be easy on you, but then neither of us expected when we took our jobs that they would be easy, did we?

About John's homosexuality... I agree with you that we're not here to foster homosexual activities or to breed homosexuals —if such a thing were even possible, and I am inclined to believe it is not. If John were in any way responsible for those homosexual incidents you reported —and you yourself acknowledged you have no evidence for such an idea— we would need, of course, to take some action. Absent this evidence, however, it is utterly unfair to link him with those incidents. He was not one of the participants and further, since you report that he had “not spoken with or tried to befriend any of the wards on the fourth floor,” any influence he might have had with the sexual offenders must surely have been minimal.

Given all this, I am sure you will now agree that Med-Psych is the place for John Baron. I am very much looking forward to working with you, especially on the Baron case. It's kids like him, with his kind of potential, that make our work exciting and give us a feeling of accomplishment and a chance for success, don't you think?

Thanks for the good work you have done through these thirty-five years. It's a pleasure to join you.

Yours, Diana

P.S. Thanks, too, for your warm words of welcome. I intend to deserve them, although I'm planning to give High Broder something more than homely comfort. And, needless to say, being raped is not among my plans.

djt: 4/15/79 — 9:45 a.m.
Copy for the Baron file.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEE: Donald Lawlor

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: May 1, 1979

I met this morning with Donald Lawlor, Principal of Broder High School, and with some of John Baron's teachers. Evidently John was one of the best students in the school, not straight-A by any means, but intelligent and well liked and involved in numerous activities, including debate, basketball and gymnastics. Though he had lively interests while at school, he also had unconcealed antipathies and this seems to have worked either for him or against him depending upon whom he was interested in or antipathetic toward.

His teachers of Political Science and Chemistry (both males) had little good to say of Baron either as a scholar or as a class citizen, while his teachers of English, Public Speaking and French (all females) could not speak highly enough of him as both. His basketball and gymnastics coaches (both males) seemed unsure of their opinions. Clearly Baron was a superior athlete, due to his height and physical coordination. He seems too to have been a good sportsman while at Broder High School. Neither coach, however, could give what they would call an unqualified endorsement.

All the teachers, it appeared, knew John is homosexual. There seemed to have been some sort of school-wide exposé of John earlier this year, but none of the teachers was explicit as to exactly what had occurred. In fact they seemed almost evasive. It is a good possibility that the report of every teacher is biased by their knowledge of John's sexual preferences. Certainly I had the impression from both the coaches that they felt somehow betrayed by one of their star athletes. But this impression is only vague. Nothing they actually said comes in for reference here.

I returned from Broder High School and called Baron to my office. He confronted me with silent hostility. When questioned, he responded, but he volunteered nothing other than this rather revelatory caveat when I asked him how he was getting along with Norman Bandy.

“Don’t be fooled by Bandy’s appearance,” Baron said. “Inside that weasel body and behind those weasel eyes and weasel mouth there’s a brain and heart and soul that’s all weasel.”

He indicated he had liked high school, although he does not participate in any of the classes here in the Vocational Institute. When I asked John if he would like to try starting up a debate program in Med-Psych, he simply answered, “No.” I told him then that I had talked with Ms. Lindquist, his English teacher. This surprised him, at first pleasantly and then with irritation. I told him Ms. Lindquist thought him a very good writer, especially a good poet, and I asked him whether he might like to try some writing for me.

His answer was flat and in the negative. As I seemed to have offended him both with the suggestion of doing some writing and with the information that I had been to see his teacher, I thought it best to dismiss him before antagonizing him further. He left without a word.

I think it vital that I get John to communicate. He appears to grow ever more morose and taciturn. He is a resourceful self-protector and has begun erecting and reinforcing barriers between himself and his surroundings. Those barriers must be broken down before they become too high and too strong.

GROUP REPORT

INDIVIDUAL: John Baron
SUBMITTED BY: Diana Town

DATE: May 7, 1979

As I detailed in the Groups Report, I selected the members of each group with an eye toward a racial mix and recalcitrance-ratio calculated to best facilitate communication, integrating Phase I through Phase IV wards to highlight rewards of promotion.

GROUP ONE contains John Baron, Jack Cole, Will Downey, Ernie Rivers, Roger Standing and Leo Washington. Baron, Cole and Standing are in this group because they are the traditional non-communicants in the unit, Downey because he is garrulous, and Rivers and Washington because they are Phase IV wards and hopefully will serve as examples of success to the others. Another consideration in this grouping, as in all my other groupings, was that of race, and here I chose to place three blacks (Cole, Rivers, and Washington) with three whites (Baron, Downey and Standing). Because of the already complex personality mixtures in this group, I thought it best to include no Latinos or Asians here.

This grouping is the only one to meet with objections from Mr. Bandy who thought it a mistake not to separate Baron and Cole who are both hostile to the program. Mr. Bandy fears the two will not only reinforce each other's withdrawal but will also work together (in some unexplained and perhaps inexplicable way) to diminish the morale and consequently good behavior of Downey, Rivers and Washington. Mr. Bandy has no objections or recommendations concerning the placement of Standing.

I see Mr. Bandy's objections as legitimate and I must confess that this experimental grouping is primarily for the benefit of Baron. I want him to have peer examples not only of success in High Broder (Rivers, Washington, and to some degree Downey) but also of failure

(Cole), and I want him to have before him as well the example of little Roger Standing, a pathetic case of a physical handicap creating a social outcast. Because of his deafness, Standing is suffering, at none of his own volition, what Baron is willfully trying to bring upon himself with his insistence upon remaining mute.

If after four meetings I find this grouping proves as problematic for the participants as Mr. Bandy fears, I will redistribute them. In the meantime it is my hope all the wards will benefit from closer contact with this diverse selection of personalities.

John Baron's participation today was the most remarkable. His usual reticence seemed increased by the tension of being in a group. Nevertheless, he did respond when addressed, however briefly. Still, this was more commendable than Cole's performance which was stony, aside from a glance or two at Baron—a questioning glance, I thought, more than one of antagonism—and was obviously preferable in the group's opinion to Downey's chattering.

Baron, actually, is remarkable in his group interaction. He is alert to every word the other wards utter. He has a certain something which I hope in time to define: it is not a quality of leadership but still a sort of potential to influence his fellows. I can understand why his basketball and gymnastics coaches wanted him on their teams. The other members of the group, while never directing their eyes toward Baron, seemed keenly aware of him at all times, unconsciously copying his body language.

There was one moment when I thought Baron might even reveal something quite deep and rare. We were talking about teachers and their inability at times to see things from the student's point of view, a subject dear to all hearts, it seems. Downey was full of criticism and was in the middle of a headlong diatribe when Baron cut in suddenly and angrily:

“What do you know about it? When did you ever go to school with anything more on your mind than lunch or your next high? There are a couple of good teachers out there who make it a career. I’ve got a friend who —”

He stopped and dropped his head and settled back in his chair and stretched his legs out in front of him, murmuring something that the tape recorder did not pick up, a kind of ejaculation of scoff, it seemed to me. It was an extraordinarily quick and smooth change of his entire attitude, and his posture and seeming disdain was soon and by turns adopted by every other ward, except Jack Cole who maintained obduracy.

Baron didn’t speak again for the remainder of the session. He did, however, inadvertently supply me with a very significant contribution as Downey returned to the argument he was trying to make. Baron had found a large scrap of candy wrapper under his chair upon entering the consultation room (I had placed it there in hopes of this very outcome) and soon he began scribbling on it with a pencil within reach on the end table. When I dismissed the group at the end of the session, he crumpled the paper and threw it into the wastebasket by the door on his way out. I recovered it before the next group entered. On it was the poem I have typed below. Since Baron’s space on the scrap of paper was limited he was unable to divide his poem into lines and stanzas; so I have done it for him here.

talktalk make talktalk
to the man to the man with the bombast
in the cage by the blacklight
of the moon of the moon with the farsight
of the deadpast

who’s the man who’s the man what’s his question
where the hell where the hell where’s his face

what's he say what's he say what's he stutter
in the moonlit lock-up

can't you see can't you answer
can't you say can't you talk
keep him here keep him here keep him with you
make talktalk

tear his mask tear his mask stab his blankface
rip his flesh shred his heart scathe him
crack your mind your life your life
crack your life your life your life
crack your life
crack tatter make talktalk

The despair of these lines is overwhelming. And I must always remember that in John Baron's mind, I am "the man" and the mask he wishes to tear is my own mask as well as the mask of society which, of course, he has learned to distrust. Certainly he distrusts my motivations —how can he not?— seeing me as merely another instrument of punishment fabricated by the system.

This must be the thrust of my efforts with Baron, to try to gain his trust. Then we will have something we can work with. I think his English teacher is correct; writing is the key to getting Baron to open up. How, then, to persuade him to write?

INCIDENT REPORT

SUBJECT: John Baron's fight with Harry Neal

SUBMITTED BY: Norman Bandy, M.S.W.

DATE: 10 May, 1979

I was at the Desk at 2:15 this afternoon when I became aware of shouts and calls coming from the East Corridor and a crowd of wards beginning to cluster at the entrance to that corridor. By the time I had alerted Abraham Johnson to the fact there seemed to be a disturbance, two wards broke through the crowd, fighting. They were John Baron and Harry Neal, Neal trying to escape Baron who was holding onto him and battering him with his fists.

With Johnson's help I broke up the two boys and after we quieted the other wards who were by now in a great state of excitement, I undertook to examine Neal and Baron individually in the consultation room.

Neal's story is that he was walking down the corridor when he looked up to see Baron standing in the doorway to his room with his fly open and "this big hard on showing." The gist of Neal's story is that Baron proposed that Neal perform oral sex on him. Neal was outraged and struck at Baron, but Baron fought back and, being the stronger of the two young men, soon had Neal on the run to the safety of the Desk.

Baron's story was the reverse in every aspect. According to him, it was he who was walking down the corridor and Neal in the doorway to his room with his fly open "wagging his penis" at Baron and saying, "Come on, cocksucker, I got a hot nine for you."

Here Baron remarked gratuitously upon the inflation of that measurement, the usual stuff of adolescent male banter. He went on to say that he then attacked Neal and drove him back into his room and when Neal escaped, pursued him down the corridor, caught him, and beat him

again. He seemed quite proud of his pugilistic triumph and added, "If he ever brings out that pee wee in front of me again, he's gonna get him a hard core circumcision."

Since both stories are virtually identical contradictions of each other, and since there are no witnesses except to the ensuing fight, there is no way to say which of the two is lying. My tendency is to believe Neal (a Phase III) and to disbelieve Baron (a Phase I) simply by comparing their relative records.

PUNISHMENT:

Both wards are to be put into the Austere Program for their assaultiveness and are to remain there until they are ready and willing to resume their community responsibilities.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEE: John Baron
SUBMITTED BY: Diana Town

DATE: May 14, 1979

The second group session was very unsatisfactory in every regard, but particularly in regard to John Baron. He was absolutely uncommunicative for the entire forty minutes. When I dismissed the group I asked Baron to stay behind, which he did with sullen reluctance. I asked him if something was wrong and he said no. I told him I could see he was angry and wondered why he was taking his anger out on me and the Group. He answered in a way that puzzled me at first. He said, "I thought speech was just another one of the privileges they take away from you in austerity."

As he spoke he turned to the door as though to leave, and I was forced to reprimand him with the reminder that I had not dismissed him. Seeing then that he was on the verge of saying something we would both regret and which might force me into a more severe stance or even a punishment, I quickly gave him permission to leave.

After I completed all five Monday sessions, I found Mr. Bandy and asked if Baron had been put into the Austere Program. Mr. Bandy said yes. I asked why I had not been informed of this. Mr. Bandy replied that he had put the report of Baron's misconduct into his own Med-Psych files and that he had not thought it necessary to alert all personnel personally. I asked if I could see the report and Mr. Bandy opened his filing cabinet and produced it, offering me while I read it an embarrassed apology for the language of the two young men in the report. Trying to set him at ease I joked that having been through medical school I was probably more familiar with the private parts of the male anatomy than he, and having been through high school, I had that

same education with adolescent language that I assumed he himself had. The non-medical terminology does, of course, change with time, but they have meant the same thing for eons.

I then suggested that since I must keep my own files in my office and since I habitually refer to them instead of to the files on individual floors, it would be a great help to me if all new reports on Med-Psych wards were duplicated and forwarded to me so that I can integrate them with my files. Mr. Bandy protested that this practice would cause him excessive paperwork, but I pointed out to him that the report fanfolds were already in triplicate and while the first copy was kept in his files, and the second forwarded to the Superintendent's office, there was still a third which would serve quite well as my copy. Mr. Bandy agreed then, though with a grimace, that I would be sent all new reports on the wards.

The Baron-Neal Incident Report itself is straightforward enough and I do agree that the punishment is merited for both wards. As Mr. Bandy points out in the report, we cannot know from the testimony who the would-be seducer was, but we certainly know that the second party was guilty of assaultiveness, however justified, and that neither party is an innocent. Since demotion into the Austere Program, or "rubberbanding" as Mr. Bandy calls it, is the common In-House penalty for assaultiveness, it's reasonable that both wards should suffer it.

However, I discovered that while Baron has remained in the Austere Program for five days, Neal was in the Austere program for only two days before he was promoted back into Phase I, and from there in only two more days to Phase II. Since Neal was originally in Phase III, I wonder if my assumption is valid that tomorrow he will be promoted once again. I asked Mr. Bandy how this discrepancy in the duration of punishment between Neal and Baron came about. He replied that Neal had shown contrition for fighting Baron and had evinced a willingness to

resume his peaceful interaction with the community while Baron, on the other hand, had admitted no guilt, had not tried to reconcile himself in any way with the community and had in fact further alienated Mr. Bandy by maintaining a persistent, hostile silence.

I pointed out to Mr. Bandy that the fact could very well be that Baron's version of the story might be the true story and that his hostility might stem from righteous anger that he, the innocent party, had remained honest and had suffered on that account a more severe punishment than the guilty party who, through deceit and flattery, had been rewarded with promotion. Mr. Bandy allowed that this might be the case but that given the nature of the Counseling Program, he could not in any conscience hold back a ward who had announced his commitment to self-improvement and neither could he advance a ward so recalcitrant and steadfastly opposed to cooperation as Baron.

At this I asked Mr. Bandy if I secured a promise from Baron that he would communicate with me on a regular basis—that is if he would take this first step toward community interaction— would Mr. Bandy consider promoting Baron back into Phase I? Mr. Bandy conceded this would be a move toward the positive and agreed to the proposal.

I then returned to the consultation room and had John Baron sent to me. He was still sullen when he arrived, but when I explained to him that I had just found out about the incident and that I had persuaded Mr. Bandy to agree to my proposal, John's stance softened somewhat. I told him that he could regain his privileges if he agreed to write me one letter every week of at least ten pages. Something in his hard eyes changed slightly. He even talked a bit.

I felt he welcomed the chance to write, but he wanted to know my motivations for wanting him to write. He accepted rather offhandedly my simplistic explanation that

communication is healthy while self-inflicted autism is unhealthy and that furthermore I am getting paid to make him healthy.

He asked —perhaps with suspicion at putting thoughts down on paper where they could be read by “anyone or everyone”— if it wouldn’t be enough for him simply to talk with me rather than to write me letters. Seeing his reluctance and fearing I might get nothing from him if I pressed him too hard, I almost settled for this weekly talk. But I still sensed that he was actually eager to write, and so I ended up countering that my time was full, that I could not devote that much time to him or the other wards would soon be demanding equal time, and that really I was very busy and could he simply make up his mind? This nonchalance on my part seemed to work well; I could see him reflecting upon it.

I also stressed that letters by nature are a more valuable form of communication as they require more deliberation than casual conversation. Erasures can be made, I said, you can use pencil. Thoughts can be outlined and filled in, and changed, and improved. Finally, but still in an offhand way, I threw in that letters are also more lasting than speech and can be referred to in the future, whereas speech is transitory.

This was, as I suspected, at the crux of his opposition. He did not want his words available to be used against him in the future. He wanted to know where the letters would be kept, and for how long, and he asked again who would be reading them.

No problem, I explained. Only I would have access to these letters and if he ever wanted them back, I would return them to him personally. I pretended to be in a hurry for his answer. I moved some papers around on my desk.

He said he wanted some time to think about the proposition.

This rather took me aback; I had expected a quick, easy and delighted acceptance. Perhaps I even expected gratitude. After all, a ten page letter is not much to ask in return for release from the Austere Program. I took the opportunity here to comment to him how dismal I thought it must be for him to have had his library privileges revoked upon his entry into the Austere Program. I added that his library privileges would of course be returned to him immediately should he agree to my suggestion.

He said again he would think about it. I was amazed at his negotiating with me, but I believe I kept my amazement concealed. I arranged with him to come to my office at 3:00 tomorrow afternoon to give me his decision. Then I dismissed him.

N.B. This kid had better be worth the trouble. But yes, he will be. djt

Monday night

Dr. Town,

I still don't get what you want me to write about. I still don't get even why you even want me to write about anything. What's in it for you?

Sincerely Yours,
And all the best forever,
Little Johnny Baron

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWED: John Baron
INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: May 16, 1979

John Baron was to give me his decision yesterday as to whether or not he would be willing to write me weekly in trade for promotion out of the Austere program back into Phase I. However, both Monday and Tuesday he reported he was still undecided. He handed me the attached note that he wrote Monday night. He has an admirably clean and clear, bold handwriting. And his thoughts are equally clean and clear and bold. His attitude even in his penmanship is challenging.

He asked again who would be reading his letters, to which I repeated, "Only myself, as I thought I had made clear."

He also wanted to know exactly what sort of thing I expected him to write. I answered that I had no expectations but would leave the choice of topic to him, that he could write about whatever might come into his head.

He also asked whether or not his promotion out of the Austere Program would in any way imply that he was admitting any guilt in the Neal episode. He wanted it plain that he would never agree with promotion if such an implication might exist in either Mr. Bandy's or my mind. I assured him that this promotion had nothing at all to do with the Neal episode.

"Will you tell Bandy that?"

"You can tell him yourself."

"I don't talk to that guy."

"Well, perhaps one day you will find yourself in a better position with Mr. Bandy."

"That's nothing to take to the bank."

“Then yes, I will so inform Mr. Bandy that you are in no way admitting any sort of guilt in the fight with Harry Neal.”

“Okay then. I’ll give you my offer tomorrow.”

“This is my offer to you, John, not your offer to me.”

“Yeah, anyhow. I’m dismissed now, am I?”

I said yes, and he left, to return today with the news that he had decided to agree, but with two stipulations. The first, he wanted a guitar thrown in. The young man is not without gall.

I informed him that was out of the question for several reasons, chief among them that guitars are strictly prohibited in High Broder. He seemed alarmed to find out that there had once been suicide attempts in the Institute by wards who had tried to hang themselves with guitar strings. In any case his eyes widened at the intelligence. I pointed out too that he would be promoted only into Phase I at this time and would still not have earned the privilege of maintaining his own possessions. I also raised the question where such a guitar would come from.

But he was full of objections to all my objections about the guitar, countering them with either very naive or very satirical and lucid solutions. Since he kept a straight face through it all, it was difficult to ascertain just how much tongue was in how much cheek. He said frankly that he intended to learn how to play the guitar, not how to hang himself with it, that he should be promoted into Phase II instead of Phase I so he would then have the privilege of maintaining his own possessions, which he believed was his right in any case, and that I could find a guitar or money for one somewhere in the system, justifying its purchase out of State funds as a

therapeutical instrument, and that I could keep it under lock and key to prevent him or anyone else from hanging themselves. I was impressed by both his audacity and his fiscal ingenuity.

The second stipulation was that he be allowed to decorate the walls of his room with photographs of nude men in the same way that the other wards pin up their nude women. At first I thought this pure impudence. Then I saw that in fact it might be an attempt at reassertion of his personality. After all, the others have decked out their rooms in their all too identical fantasies. It must be quite depressing, perhaps even revolting, for a homosexual to have to live among those thousands of photographs which paper every room and locker in the Institute. Why should Baron not be allowed to indulge his own fantasies?

Immediately after this thought I was sure again he was laughing at me, trying to make a fool of me. What does he really care about those pictures? Are they a joke on me or a defiant gesture against the other wards in the unit? I still don't know.

However, here was an opportunity he had given me to place myself squarely on his side, and I felt I must take it. There would be trouble over the photographs, of course, especially with Bandy. Still I couldn't let the chance slip by.

We ended finally with a deal wherein I would bring him several back issues of nudie-male magazines (Do I even know which to pick out?) with my "written permission" (John covers all bases) that he might pin them on the walls of his room, even the ceiling. I would also bring my own harmonica, which I never have time to play any more, and music instruction booklets. These are to be placed in the library and Baron may check them out as he would books. The harmonica is not to be considered his possession and he must share it with other wards if they ask to borrow it.

“They’ll spit in it,” he objected.

“Nevertheless,” I replied.

Those stipulations settled upon, Baron agreed at last to write a letter of at least ten pages weekly. We decided the letter should be due in my office every Tuesday morning no later than 11:00. This would allow him to comment on occurrences within our Monday sessions if he should wish it.

By this point in our negotiations we had both become so voluble that the conversation had taken on a definite amiability which, as I think about it now, I actually treasure. He is funny, I find, as well as clever. I thought it might be a good time to give John some advice on how to get along at High Broder. I began by reminding him that although Mr. Bandy might seem to him to be an unduly strict disciplinarian, John might try to see the job through Mr. Bandy’s eyes. I pointed out that the young men in the Institute are here because they have been found delinquent by law and are therefore going to require from the beginning different tactics than are used at home or in school.

I could see that John’s good humor began to leave him at this and that he was hardening against me, but I thought I might throw him one last idea before dismissing him. I said, “Don’t fight them, John. It will only bring you trouble.”

All his cordiality vanished in an instant. When I dismissed him, saying that I looked forward to seeing him in session Monday, he did not answer; he simply turned and left.

I am only at the periphery of his trust. I must remember that. I must not assume too much, and most especially, I must not ever seem to betray him by siding or appearing to side

with his enemies in this institution. In the meantime, I have accomplished a great deal; I have gotten him to communicate.

Tuesday, May 22

Dr. Town,

Okay, here goes.

I don't know what I'm going to write. It's taken me like fifteen minutes just to get the pencil to the paper. You said anything I want to say, right?

This isn't going to do any good, you know. Well, I guess you don't know, but it's not. You're just like those student teachers who come over from the college all set to teach their first class until they run up against what really goes on, and then they fall to pieces. All their big ideals get junked in the shredder. Then they either drop out or they put on their jock straps and cups and get into the game the way it's got to be played.

You come in here and you're going to reform the place (pun intended). You put your little waifs in little mishmashed groups and are going to give us all these sensitivity sessions. I'll give you two more weeks before your groups fall apart and a month before you're running bananas and nuts around the outside wall of High Broder.

But I'll write for you, doc. I like your style and I'm willing to help you. Hear what I say? I am helping you. Catch? Against Bandy and the rest of all these damn authorities in this UnAuthority.

And yeah, Miss Lindquist told you right. I do like to write. I used to write letters to my best friend, Frank, all the time. You probably heard all about Frank, right? And now you're saying to yourself, "Yeah, sure, 'best friend,' right."

Well, you probably didn't get told this, but Frank and I used to write to each other all the time. Even when I'd be seeing him in a couple of hours, I'd write him a little letter

because I had something I wanted to say to him right then at that moment and because it was just good, you know? Sometimes I'd deliver my own letters to him and sit down and watch him read them.

But this idea you've got that it's going to be somehow therapeutic for me and a way for you to get at the real, hidden truths behind where I'm at, oh yes, doc, I've got you figured out, that's just a lot of the same old phony psychobibbitybobbidyboo that we've been watching on TV for too long.

I can just see your face as you read that last sentence. Offended? Why? It's just the truth. Okay, maybe I'm sorry. But you said you wanted the truth, and yeah, that's the truth. And if I'm going to do this at all, that's the way I've got to do it because I can't stand pretense. And we've got a deal, doc, and if you go back on it and start showing what I write around or use it against me somehow, I'll put out the wire on you all over High Broder and that's the last word you'll get from any of us.

From the day you walked in here I could see that you weren't a caveman like all the other pigs in this place. You came on straight and I like that. When you asked your questions I could see you wouldn't mind getting the answer. You've got a head and a heart with you. Those others are carrying their degrees and salaries and stop clocks. And you've got ideas, too. You're not just trying the same old junk that the rest of them settled with. Like the business of putting us into the groups, mixing three blabbers with three stiffs. It won't work, like I say, but it beats hitting the couch on your own. And you're not pushy about it. Like this idea of writing. You asked if I'd like to do it and you made it worth my while, too. You didn't try to tell me I was going to do it. That wouldn't have got you a syllable.

Not that I'm going to be making you any great confessions or anything but like I say, I won't tell you any lies. But it's not going to do you any good, all the same. And I guess I'm just messing around here because I don't really know what to say. What have I got? Almost three pages, not bad. And I'm not even trying to write big or anything.

Okay!

Okay!

Okay, I'll start high. And I'll start with the greatest and the most real truth in my life. And that's Frank, good, honest, frank Frank and his Universe of Good Things, and Frank really believes in that, and so I do, too. You've just got to learn how to tap into it and keep the tap in place.

But I know, doc, that you won't be able to understand when I tell you why I love Frank or how I love Frank. Straight people can't get over all their prejudices about queers. And you're no different despite all your training. I could see it in your eyes that day in session when I started to tell Downey about the way Frank teaches, and you were thinking ...

“THAT QUEER IS A TEACHER !!!!”

... and you went all weird. I could see it. I don't hold it against you, not much. You can't help it. But it's there all the same.

That's why I stopped talking. I shouldn't have even started. I was stupid. But I let myself get carried away there for a minute and forgot where I was. Sometimes you just get so lonesome and you let the flapping of some duck like Downey get to you and you start talking and then all of a sudden you look up and see who's listening and who's watching, the wolf and the trolls sitting there all eyes and ears.

Cole's eyes, particularly. And Roger's. The others are so dumb and into their own empty heads so far up their own butts that they can't hear anything except what splashes off their own tongues. Three lames on the same sidewalk.

But Cole listens, and he sits there with those hard, mean nasty little eyes of his, like if you let your defenses down he'd burn holes into you with them, like two pee-holes in the snow. I can't stand that guy. He's only talked to me once since I've been in and that was when he shoved me out of his way and said, "Move it, faggot."

By the way, doc, how come everybody in this place knew right off I'm gay? One of your pigs is squealing, and it's making me trouble. Not that I care. They all know now.

All the guys in here are afraid of Cole because he's so big, and they show it too. When they pass in him the hall they practically brush the wall and walk sideways. I'm afraid of him too, I'll admit it. But it's not because he's so big. I've got his program down. He won't use that against any of us in here. He wants out too bad, and from what I hear he's eighteen now and not far from his next parole board hearing. He's too smart to cause any troubles, not any more. He doesn't need to prove anything to the rest of the trolls anyway. All he has to do is hulk it over them and they shrink about a foot. He's so stoned out and low-rider he doesn't need anyone, black or white, not even to watch his back, because nobody's going to be fool enough to go after him.

Old Roger's a different case. He's stoned out not by his own choice but because he's so small and helpless he can't make the program and all the trolls use him for a goat. Roger's all right though. They're just too stupid to catch on to him. They call him The Dummy because all they can see about him is that he's deaf and can't talk. They hate anything different

from them and strike out at it whenever they can. Did you ever hear of a book called The Painted Bird, doc? Real fine story. Frank and I read it together. It's about a little Jewish boy in Europe during World War II and how he's persecuted because he's different, and the author has this symbol for the kid of this wild bird who's taken away from its flock and painted these fantastically beautiful colors and then returned to its flock again. All the other birds hate it because it's different now and they jump on the painted bird and tear it to pieces with their beaks and claws. That's what the ducks would like to do to Roger.

But anyway, back to Frank, I won't talk about him in your class sessions again. Your eyes looking at me like you're trying to read in bad light, and Cole's eyes, and Roger's eyes... You know, I think Roger can lip-read. He looked like the only person there that day who could hear and understand. Funny.

Frank is the most important thing in my life. He's the best person I know. And when I think that he might be in prison now, in the real prison, you can't even imagine what happens to my insides. High Broder is one thing, Carlton is something else. Some of the guys here talk about it. Some of them have friends who've done time in Carlton and they've got stories going around. It's a bad place, doc, and nobody comes out of there the same person they went in. High Broder is Disneyland next to it.

High Broder! We used to look up here when we were kids, my brother Larry and I, and we'd whisper about it. We'd be after crawdaddies down at the river and we'd look up at High Broder on its hill like some castle where bad barons lived. High high walls of red bricks stacked on top of each other, back before they painted the bricks gray, almost no windows and the bell tower on top rising another story up. We used to think the really bad kids were kept

chained in the tower and fed on bread and water. We never figured then that they use the basement instead for that purpose. Anyway, we'd look up here and shake in our shoes.

Do you know Johnson, one of the guards, Abraham Johnson I think his first name is? You couldn't miss him, fat and stupid and mean and petty, one of those guys who was born to be a pig in a prison and nothing else. He even works two shifts because he likes it so much. He needs to be where he can push people around and use them against each other. When he goes home at night, he locks himself into his room and watches TV and reads war comics. He talks about his war comics. You can hear him talking to the smacks about his war comics. War comics. What an oxymoron for a moron. He never sees anyone on the outside and never takes a vacation because there's no where to go and no one to go with. The only people who talk to him are the smacks in High Broder who do dirty little deeds for him and hang on his leg to get cigarettes and candy out of him and go on the help. They call him friend to his face and The Grease Pit behind his back.

Anyway, Johnson's got this story he likes to tell the new guys when they come in. You've already been through a medical exam, but Johnson makes you strip and shower anyway, I've got a good guess why, and you're standing there naked and humiliated, waiting for Johnson's own sweet time to give you your clothes. He makes you stand there smelling his bad breath while he tells you this story about the way High Broder used to be in what he calls the good old days. It seems there were orchards and fields on this side of the river once, and when they were off the count they would blow this whistle that sounded out over the valley clear to the other side of Broder. One whistle would mean one kid had escaped. Two whistles would mean

two kids, and like that. Then the farmers who owned the orchards and fields would get their dogs and shotguns and go off looking for them. Ten dollars a head.

No, no, not dead or alive, but Johnson would like you to believe that, and he smiles this smile at you where you can see every yellow tooth and every missing tooth and he throws you your clothes like it's a dramatic punctuation and says, "Nobody ever got out of the valley."

Big deal and congratulations all around on a dirty job dirty done.

When I was a kid and would do something wrong, or even when I didn't do anything wrong, my mother would say, "If you don't behave I'll have Daddy take you up to High Broder and they'll lock you in and throw away the key." Congratulations again, folks.

I don't know what I thought was in here, but it sure as hell scared me into doing what she told me to. It never occurred to me, I guess, that the worst thing about High Broder wasn't High Broder itself but what the people in it make of it. What is it? Just a cold hard bunch of bricks and plaster that you live in. A person can take that. Lots of people have a lot worse place to live. You go to a big city like New York and lose yourself in it and it's not so very different from High Broder, bricks and plaster, concrete all around. We've got our little room here, or at least in Med-Psych we've got our little room.

(Did I ever tell you thanks, doc, for getting me off the second floor? They'd have killed me down there, ganging up on me, coming at my back and from all around. And I sure would have killed some of them first. Also while I'm on the subject of thanks, thanks for letting me put up those pictures you brought me. You did a good job. Most of those guys in those pictures are even my type, you know, all dreamy and hung. I've now got the most popular room in High Broder. Nobody comes into it, because I don't let them, but they like to stand around my

door and look through the door window, just trying to see how they measure up to the guys in the pictures, I guess, not really interested, or are they? Some of them? Bandy's pissed about you letting me put up those pictures, by the way. Is he making you pay for it? I'll bet he is.)

Anyway, we've got our little room, "self-contained" as Johnson says, like he's showing you around your hotel suite. We've got our beds. We've got our little wash basin which lifts up and makes into our little toilet. Hot and cold stagnant water. No mirror, of course, just a cruddy plate of shiny metal that we call a mirror because they won't let you have a glass mirror afraid you'll cut your own throat, but those metal plates are good enough anyway because you don't want to get a clear look into your own eyes in High Broder anyway. And if your door closes at night and if you hear it lock and if there you are locked inside with the world outside, how's that so very different from living in your own home and locking the world out at night?

No, High Broder's not so bad, not from what I hear about other states and the places they've got. Jess Lyon did lots of time in some of those states back east, Illinois and Indiana, and he says they're out of the Middle Ages there. He's got scars all over his butt and lower back from this strap they used to beat him with. They'd have three pigs hold him down bare assed on a table and let the biggest pig do the flogging. And when the guys there got put in the bucket, it wasn't for any piddly day or three day term, it was a month. How about that, doc? How about if I locked you in a closet for a month? At least we don't have that in High Broder, although to be absolutely honest we've got to admit, don't we, doc, that as lifestyles go, this one does suck.

"Rehabilitation Not Revenge." You know that sign they've got in the rec room, or maybe you don't go in there? Anyway there's this cloth thing someone put up in a frame saying "Rehabilitation Not Revenge." Someone crocheted it or needle-pointed it or something, some

half-blind half-wit using what looks like an ice pick or something instead of a needle. It's got a coat of dust thicker than topsoil on the frame. I always get a good laugh at it. "Rehabilitation not Revenge," right.

The guys who were waiting for trial down at the Hall would talk about High Broder like it's the last stop before the grave. All kinds of rumors were going around. I was in the Hall for a little over a week before I came to trial. The guys were all tense about it because they were afraid they'd probably end up here. We all had to go up before Howard, the Hanging Judge. They call him that because he sends so many kids up to High Broder, which he's not supposed to be doing since this is a maximum security institution, but the guys figure Howard figures that since High Broder is so nearby and handy he may as well make use of it. The ones who had come up before him in the past were telling us new ones about how temperamental he is. Everything depends on his mood whether you'll be sent home or to a foster home or up to High Broder, and everybody started saying prayers they they'd come up early in the day before Howard got testy.

It didn't matter to me one way or the other. I damn sure wasn't going back to live with my mother and father after what they did, and I couldn't feature living with any foster martyrs. High Broder looked as good to me as anything else I might have in my future, even with the rumors.

When I saw Howard I wanted to laugh. He looked like he was the national chairman for Little Men's Lib. We all had to stand up when he came fumbling in. I thought he might end up getting lost forever in his judicial robes which he kept tripping over. During the first couple of cases you could see that he didn't have any idea which way his door was swinging. He was like some unhinged little king sitting on a highchair issuing proclamations. And if you wanted to get

on the knob and kiss his ass you could tell your own future. I sat watching him, about ready to puke, he was such a smug little bastard.

And then it was my turn. I was fourth up. First thing off, the pig whose face I kicked in got up looking like the leftovers of a royal barbecue and informs the judge that I was a dangerous lunatic who had no regard for the law. Then my mother, who the whole time had her head in her handkerchief, took the stand and choked around for a while until Howard had to ask her to step down and get control of herself. Then my father tried to explain to the judge that I'm really a law-abiding and God-fearing boy but that I had been misled by a man whose morals were taught him at the bottom of a sewer.

I swear. If I could have ... Well never mind, that's what he said, and I'm done with that man.

But Howard woke up at the word "sewer" and with a few pointed questions ascertained that I had been making it with a man, an older man and a teacher at that, and a whole lot of horror and disgust mixed with about equal parts of satisfaction and petty triumph smeared over his face. Then he started this tirade at me and he really worked himself into it and started spitting a little. I mean, he went on and on so you thought you were going to scream. And the guy really and truly hates me as though I have taken him personally and put toads in his mouth.

As Frank says, "The squeakiest wheel wants the oil the most," and this little lady up on the bench was protesting too much, methought. What made him so violent about how I like my sex? You're the psychologist, doc, you tell me.

And then Howard sat up real straight and I could just about hear angels' harps, and haloes were beginning to bust out of everybody's heads and I finally couldn't take any more of his sermonizing and I told him to get fucked.

I meant it, too. Yeah, I'm sure that's exactly what I said, "Get fucked, Judge."

No, I said, "Get fucked, Your Honor." That's it. I remember now, and I like that better, don't you, doc? "Get fucked, Your Grace." "Hey, Judge, get fucked, Your High-ness." I like that.

But BIG SILENCE.

Howard's mouth kind of fell open, and he went all ~~apopleptic~~. That should be apoplectic, I think. I don't have a dictionary here.

Then I told the pig that if I ever got close enough I'd make his ass resemble his face, only prettier. I was just about to think up something equally witty for my father and mother but all these pronouncements came raining down on me and the next thing I knew I was whisked out of that court to arrive at High Broder, along with just about every kid else who came to trial after me that day. They all tell me thanks. They hold me responsible for them being sent here because I put Hanging Howard into such a bad mood for them.

What insanity! They put people's lives in the hands of little Hitlers and then they wonder why they have trouble with the younger generation. Because old Howard's got a screwed up sense of morality, all of us kids get sent up, and all the decent people just sit there and let it happen. If they just had a little imagination outside their Straits of Jesus ...

That's it, doc. imagination, I've just pinpointed it, your problem, you and the other psycho-pshrinks. You don't have any imagination. I've been thinking that all this time, but I

couldn't break it down until just now when I wrote the word. You don't have any imagination, and that's why you call me "incorrigible". Incorrigible means uncorrectable, right? What would you say, doc, if I came sneaking around your bedroom and said, "Oh, my, oh dearie me, Diana Town enjoys intercourse in a strange way. I must correct her."

And "delinquent"? I looked it up in the library. It means "failing in duty, failing in conduct due to parents and superiors as shown in obedience and submission." What sort of superiors? Like Howard? And my mom and dad who give me over to Howard? And obedience? And submission? Damn right I'm delinquent! Submit? Never!

Oh, yeah, and official abbreviated court terminology for me is M.I.N.S., Minor in Need of Supervision. "Minor" means unimportant, which is what everyone thinks a kid is and you've got me down wrong. You're overlooking me, and I'm not taking it from you. I'm no minor, not to me I'm not. I'm an I.P.I.N.I., no I'm a V.I.P.I.D.N.I. a Very Important Person In Desperate Need of Independence.

Like I say, doc, no imagination, and that's why all of you label me with initials and handy tags, and that's why when I try to tell you about Frank and me and the way it is with us, I can see that you don't have any idea what I'm talking about. But more than just the obvious fact that Frank and I are both guys, you can't picture that someone who's only seventeen can really love another person. Right?

"As young as that!"

Of all people, you, doc, and the rest of your psycho-pshrinks need an imagination. Didn't they tell you that at school? Where did you go to school anyway? Where do they train

people to sweep out other people's heads? And how do they teach that? And where do they think they get off teaching that?

Maybe you think I don't have any right to say things like that to you. But I just can't take this idea that you're going to "help" me. I mean, I sympathize with you. That's very nice of you, and all that, even though you are getting paid to so-call-help me. But I don't need your help.

I mean I need it, sure, of course. I could use a lot of help. I'm in a bad spot. But I don't need your kind of help. I need all of you to leave me alone, just leave me and Frank alone, right from the beginning of all this. And wouldn't that have been so simple if only all of you had just left us alone instead of trying to "correct" us?

This letter's a mess. I should start the whole thing again. But now I've got my ten pages and then some, and I hate time wasted. Beside, it would just turn out the same way all over again. As you keep saying, I've got to find some peaceful way to give vent to my frustrations. Otherwise I might wring old Bandy's scrawny neck. You'd like that, wouldn't you? You don't like him any more than I do, I can tell by the way you look at him when he's talking to you.

(By the way, you did tell me that Bandy doesn't get to put his grimy eyes onto my precious words, didn't you, and so I can feel free to expose your feelings about him here, I guess, can't I?)

Yours in Cripes,
John Baron

djt: 5/22/79 — 6:35 p.m.

My goodness, the dam has burst.

I'm not sure how to handle this letter. I think perhaps I'll just ponder it, put it into the file, or perhaps into a file of its own,

ponder it, not mention it to John other than perhaps, “I read your letter. Found it very interesting. You make some very good points. I’ll have to ponder it a while.”

Yes, I think a file of its own. It won’t do John any good if snooping eyes were to find this letter.

I am stung. Yes, I will admit to being stung. I think he has not been fair to me, but that is not the point. That is nothing to the point. He is a young man in great distress, and of course he will fling himself against the wires of his cage and any and all barriers he meets. And yes, I see that I am a barrier to him.

I must ponder this.

Later Tuesday night, May 22

Dear doc,

I guess I'm on a roll. You said I had to write at least ten pages. You didn't give me a max. I came back to my room after I delivered that letter to you, and you know what? You had such a look in your eye. You were glad for me, weren't you? And I had written all that bad stuff about you. And you didn't deserve that. And I put it in your hand. And then I just walked away like there was nothing to it.

Doc, that was some kind of poison pen I handed to you. I'm sorry.

But you asked for it. You know you did.

But anyway, here is what else I've been thinking about, back here in my room, and I need to let you know these things, right now on top of the first half.

Here's the thing. I used to be happy. I was so happy, doc. Especially when I was with Frank, but even before I even met Frank, everything was nice. No rocks with my mom and dad, everything all smooth and easy at school. I had some good friends. It was all gold, you know.

Yeah, but it was gold and happy with Frank, like you know, ecstasy. I just wish I could tell you about it so you could put it together the way it really was. So try now, just try to imagine.

I met Frank when Scottie, former man-o'-mine, was giving me a real hard time. Frank was such a relief from Scottie, and he was everything that Scottie wasn't. Soft, and gentle, and kind. And careful. Frank sort of took care of me while I made up my mind about Scottie. And he let me make up my own mind, and never said a word against Scottie, though that must

have been a real feat of self-restraint. I guess Scottie would be about the hardest person in the world not to find something bad to say about.

Now that doesn't sound right. No wonder you can't understand this whole thing. I'm not telling it right.

Frank is ... well, you must have seen his picture in one of your secret files ... he's not gorgeous. Or at least he doesn't have the looks that Scottie has (but Scottie's not going to be able to keep his looks, I can tell that already. When Scottie is Frank's age, Scottie's going to definitely be past his prime, and Frank is only twenty-five.) And yet, there's this kind of magnificence about Frank. That's probably pretty strong, I don't know, but it's, yeah, it's magnificence anyway that he's got.

I used to watch him, you know, when he didn't know I was watching. He'd be reading his papers from his fifth graders, and he'd have this expression on his face. Or in his eyes, I guess, a look of way deep depth and way high intelligence, but mainly a complete goodness and caring about what he was reading, you know, what his kids were trying to write to him, and a fatherliness to the kids, you know, and a gentleness, you know, where the word "gentleman" comes from, that kind of gentleness. Sometimes I could almost understand what he was reading by watching his face. Sort of like Roger's lip-reading.

And then he'd be so different at other times. I can remember this one day when we went down to the lake in the park and rented a canoe and paddled around. I was in the front. Finally I quit paddling and turned around to face him and leaned back against these cushions we had brought. He kept paddling like hell and we started going around in these circles. He made a big deal of not changing sides of the canoe. His hair fell down over his forehead and he was

laughing because, you know, he was doing such a bum job of getting us along. His teeth had the sun reflecting off them, and his eyes, too, and the water was splashing up all around him and everything about him was glittering and bright. Then he looked up at me and put down his paddle and shrugged, and those eyes of his were so full of light that it seemed like he could light up a dark room with them. And me, I felt like all inside of me was crumbling away.

I'll tell you what I felt like. I felt like in this movie that Frank took me to see because it's one of his favorites, Wuthering Heights, filmed way back in the thirties or forties, in black and white, and really nothing that I would ever think I would ever want to see, but Frank got me into old movies and art movies that they're playing over at the Majestic now, and hey, doc, you should go over there, those movies are great and they're all but lost to us because of the junk that they play in the regular theaters. Man, Wuthering Heights, they really knew how to jerk tears in those days, I mean the whole audience was sniffing for like thirty minutes when Cathy was dying and then Heathcliff gets up and he condemns her right there on her death bed to be a ghost for the rest of her life and to haunt him because he loved her so much. I mean, doc, chills up and down your spine! And this one scene that I started to tell you about, way up top in this paragraph, it's where Cathy is standing in the kitchen with her servant and Cathy is going on and on to the servant about how much she can't stand Heathcliff (Sir Laurence Olivier, who is great! the way he looks at Cathy makes me just melt into a puddle of semen, if you can understand that, doc). Cathy is saying, "I hate Heathcliff. He's dirty and messy and like a wild animal, and I hate him!" She's standing up against this window and looking out and you can see there's this really bad storm outside, lightning crashing and rain slamming against the window. Then she starts remembering how when she and Heathcliff were kids together and how much they always loved

each other, and as she talks she starts to realize that she still really loves Heathcliff because they've shared so much through the years, the castle on the moors and all, and also because she and Heathcliff are just exactly alike. And so she says it out loud, "I love Heathcliff." Then there's this one second when she turns around so you see her face full-front and her eyes are real wide because she's just made this fantastic realization and there's this huge lightning bolt we can see through the window behind her, and she says, "I AM Heathcliff."

So that's me, in the canoe with Frank. No lightning bolt, but still it was like I just got hit with a million volts, and that was the first time I knew how I loved him, that I was IN LOVE with him, that I WAS Frank.

He had taken me out for the day to get me out of myself and have a little fun away from Scottie, and he went and made me fall in love with him up to my last hair standing on end, and down to my little toe, and all of the rest of me, too, standing on end.

And doc, one of the reasons I fell in love with him was because all of a sudden I knew that he loved me. He had kept it a secret because he didn't want to interfere between me and Scottie, but he loved me. He loved me. Me. He loved me.

It's a frightening thing when you look at someone and you see that. It's like someone flashing one of those magnifying mirrors at you. And I could see that he saw then how I felt about him. Well, how could I hide that? Even if I had wanted to? I was sitting there frozen. I must have looked goofy as hell.

I don't even know how we got out of the lake. I guess we paddled. How else?

When I got home I couldn't think or sit down or stand up or eat or sleep. At the dinner table my mom or dad would ask me something and I'd turn to them and say, "Huh?" I

kept moving from room to room trying not to think about the telephone. Well, he couldn't have called me anyway.

Well, we knew he couldn't call me on the telephone. We knew that much. We couldn't help but know. Me in high school, and him in his mid-twenties, and a teacher. Talk about a "forbidden love," talk about "the love that dare not speak its name."

Oh, I had already had plenty of experience, with Scottie and all, but Scottie was so much closer to my own age that we got away with all kinds of things because we were pards. But this, with Frank. He couldn't call me on the telephone at my mom and dad's house, this strange man calling me on the telephone with maybe my mom or dad answering. So why was I thinking about the telephone? Just over my head in love, and hoping, that's all.

We saw each other a lot after that, on the sly, whenever we could manage it, and it was clear to both of us what was happening to us, even though we never talked about it. Frank never rushed me. He could see that I was having to make this big decision about what to do about Scottie. who was pestering me to get together with him all the time, but I kept finding ways to put him off, damn him! But Frank just lay back and took off the pressure.

And I guess that's what I love most about Frank. He doesn't try to run my life for me. He doesn't even really give me advice. Just sits back and lets me do it.

YOU could take a lesson from him, doc, as a matter of fact. Isn't that what you pshinks are supposed to do best, listen?

Well, do you begin to get the picture at all? You see you really are coming from a different place. You think that anyone under twenty-one or not yet out of college doesn't have

brains or something, or maturity or whatever, and can't make their own decisions about something so important and intimate and individual as love.

That's crazy. You go to Africa or India or into the country towns of places like Italy and Spain, or even right here in the country areas of the United States and people don't treat kids like this. Kids have to go out and work at real early ages and help take care of the family, and they've had their first lay by the time they're thirteen or fourteen, I mean, it's ridiculous. If you left it up to my parents and the schools and all, I'd be a virgin until my twenty-first birthday. And that's just not natural, if you want to talk about what's natural and what's not natural, and it seems that's all I get from anyone any more. That's Bandy's routine anyway, and Hanging Howard's.

"It's not natural, what you do."

You're never going to convince me that I'm not natural just because I know what I want and it's not what most people want. You're especially not going to convince me of it when you're coming from a place where they teach their kids that it's wrong to do a thing until they get a paper from the government and the church, and then the next minute, bang, it's perfectly all right, where in order to do something that you think is perfectly natural for you, you have to submit yourself to be stood up in front of a bunch of gawking people and say a few embarrassing, pious words that you should only ever have to say in private, and then let those perverted hypocrites play dirty-minded tricks on you and make dirty-minded jokes about something very personal and valuable and even sacred and finally give you their consent to do something that's none of their business to begin with.

No, not you or randy Bandy or any of those other psychologists and therapists and social workers and judges and mothers and fathers who have been trying to “cure” me are going to change me, because I’M ALL RIGHT.

You’re in your little world and you’re in the majority and because of that you feel like you can take pity on us minorities and deviates and do us all kinds of good turns like put us into institutions where you can work your analysis and group therapy and turn us into model little creatures just like yourselves. I’m not going to let it happen to me, doc, believe me, and it’s not because I’m stubborn or delinquent or incorrigible, although I have already told you that yes, I fit those definitions, and it’s not because I like to make trouble, which I don’t, unless I’m returning it. It’s because there is nothing wrong with me.

You’re all scared of me because I’m different, like the painted bird. And you’re just like those other birds, and you want to tear me to pieces. Only you want to do it the human way, and after you tear me apart you want to take the bloody pieces and put them back together and pretend I’m just like you and happy about it. And what makes it so funny and so tragic all at the same time, you’re all scared of me because I’m in love with Frank, the very most wonderful and beautiful and kind person in the whole entire world.

Pull it together, doc. Maybe YOU should start writing letters to ME.

Sorry, I got mad again. See, it always comes back to the same thing, so what’s the use? We’re just going to have to drop an Open-Mindedness Bomb on the planet and do away with all you do-gooder warts. But I’m sorry, doc, and you’re nice. You’re wrong, but you’re nice.

John Baron

djt: 5/23/79 — 10:40 a.m.

Set up an appointment with Mr. and Mrs. Baron. if possible tomorrow morning or tomorrow afternoon..

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEES: Rev. Lawrence and Delores Baron

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: May 24, 1979

I went today to see Rev. Lawrence Baron and his wife Delores, John Baron's parents. I had originally intended that they come to the Institute for the interview, but Rev. Baron was adamant that if we were to meet at all it must be in his home. I agreed to this with reluctance since there was something of a home-court advantage I believed I was seeing play out with an immediate adversarial relationship being set up. But with his terms being the only terms, I could see no other way.

Rev. Baron answered the door and informed me at once that his wife would not be joining us as she was ill and confined to her bed. He extended her regrets. He showed me into the living room, which was pleasant and well appointed, suitable to a minister in a suburban area. He got brusquely down to business with a rehearsed and intoned, "How may I help you, Miss Town?"

I explained again, although I had explained once already in my telephone conversation with him, that I was his son's psychologist and that I would appreciate any history he could give me of John, his relationship with the other members of the family, his likes and dislikes, his friends, how I might gain and retain John's trust. At this point, Rev. Baron stood up as though he were calling an end to the interview and seeing me to the door. He informed me that he knew very little of John's friends and that I would do best to get any such history from John himself.

I tried to ease myself around his belligerence, which was not altogether unexpected considering his curtness on the telephone, and I assured him that I understood and appreciated what a painful thing his son's incarceration must be to him. He interrupted me again.

"John's incarceration," he said, "is the best thing for him at this time. He has broken the law by severely injuring a policeman in a most reprehensible manner and circumstance. If he were not being punished by the state for this, he would most certainly be suffering grievous punishment here at home. Since he chose to run away from that home, then we have no choice now but to allow the state to oversee his punishment."

I pointed out to Rev. Baron that I was not so much interested in John's punishment as I was in his mental health, and that further I was not asking for a history of his assault on the policeman, which is well documented, but about Rev. Baron's understanding of John's homosexuality.

"There's nothing I can say about that," he said, paling perceptibly. "It's another of John's choices which has nothing to do with myself or his mother. I suggest you speak to him and not to us. And if there is no other subject you wish to talk about—" he said and moved toward the door.

I felt I had no choice but to be ushered out in this fashion. The man's reticence and hostility would not be reduced by a confrontation at this time. I did however invite him to feel free to call me if he should come up with anything he thought I might find informative, and I offered him my card, which he made no move to accept from me. I put it on an end table nearby and tried one last thought. I asked him if he had any message he would like me to take to his son. He hesitated, and I thought for a moment he might break into tears. His lower lip quivered, he

took a couple of shallow breaths intended to be deep breaths, his eyes blinked rapidly. Finally he managed, “I don’t know what I might say to him. Good bye.”

He opened the door, guided me out, and shut it behind me and I literally stumbled out to the sidewalk, I was so surprised at the quickness of my exit. I turned to look back at the house and am quite positive I saw a fully dressed woman through the sheers standing at the window of the living room that I had just left. But as she saw me turn toward her, she moved quickly to the side. I am quite sure I was not imagining this.

I was tempted to return to the house to see if somehow I might talk with this woman, but that thought was really very silly. How would I accomplish that? If this woman was John Baron’s mother who was supposed to be sick in bed, nothing would be served by my trying to force an unwilling interview.

I found it telling that both the parents and the son have found the same solution: silence. But to very different problems. The parents use it as evasion of what they do not wish to recognize; the son uses it as a weapon in self-defense.

As I drove back to the office, however, I considered whether it might not be valid to reverse those two theories. Perhaps the parents are finding themselves now in a hard-fought and perilous battle to defend themselves and their lifelong ideologies from a new enemy, their son, whose very life clashes against theirs and threatens to obviate their existence by taking away from them one of their primary reasons for being, ironically that very son’s very life. Perhaps they are using silence, then, to defend themselves by keeping their son and his alien life at a safe distance.

And perhaps young Baron is the one who is using it as an evasion. He is so insistent in his denial that he needs help with his homosexual problem and has so carefully and completely countered all attempts at therapy with this barrier he has found so effective—his silence—that I wonder if his concomitant denial, rationalization, intellectualization, and I believe to some extent his introjection are not simply parts of a complex defense mechanism fabricated out of his anxiety which stems from an intrapsychic conflict and resultant guilt at the covert and unwilling recognition of the abnormality of his sexual desires.

Note to self: Although I think I believe everything in that last paragraph, I really do think I need to ponder all of this much more. There is more here. There is much more. And psychobabble, even truthful psychobabble, can still be mere psychobabble. What did Baron call it? Psychobibbitybobbityboo. Yes, this young man is challenging.

I returned to the office and had been here for perhaps only twenty minutes when I received a call from Delores Baron. She had found my card on the end table. Well, done.

Her voice was tremulous as though she had been crying, and soft as though she was afraid of being overheard. She said she was sorry not to have been able to speak to me when I was at her home, that she would very much have liked to ask about her son's progress.

“Is he eating?” she asked.

I can't think of a more profound question for a mother to ask about her son. Well done, Delores. I assured her John was in the best of health and that the food in High Broder is first rate and appetizing.

“Is he sleeping? He needs his sleep so.”

“Yes, I think so. He seems alert and bright always.”

“Yes, Johnny is so bright, don’t you think? And... and... happy? No, of course I know he can’t be happy in that dreadful place, but it is the best thing for him right now, that’s right, isn’t it?”

“Yes, I believe you are right about that. And he seems much happier now than he was at first. Perhaps you might come on the next visiting day and see for yourself?”

“Oh, no, no, I couldn’t do that. My husband says, and I’m sure he’s right, that we should wait until Johnny is ready to see us. This is just Johnny’s rebelliousness, you see, and he’s always had some of that. But he will call for us, and then we’ll come. Until that time, you understand, he would only rebel all the more. I know him. You must understand. I know him.”

I said, “Are you sure that Johnny isn’t waiting for you to come to him first? As a sign of your good faith?”

After a moment she said, “Is he?”

“I can’t say. Johnny has confided very little in me, which is one of the reasons I was so disappointed at your husband’s insistence that he could tell me nothing. I think it’s only natural that Johnny should be hurt by your not coming to see him.”

“That is so much what I have been afraid of, but I don’t think I could. My husband has been very stern that we shouldn’t.”

“Perhaps you might come without the Reverend’s knowing about it.”

“Oh, no.”

“You might bring your husband around to the idea, perhaps suggesting it to him at moments when he would be most open to it.”

“I don’t think he would ever agree to that. But do you really think Johnny is ready to see us? He was so angry at us at the trial, in front of that judge. His obscenity.”

“If you can’t see your way clear to visit Johnny, perhaps you might be willing to see me privately some time? I would love to get your opinion on all of this.”

“I have no opinion.”

“You might come to my office, or perhaps we might meet at a cafe?”

“My husband wouldn’t like that.”

“Would he need to know?”

“Oh, yes. Yes. The only... the only... (she was stammering here)... the only reason I’m calling you now is that I just had to know if Johnny is eating properly. It was just something I had to know. But I can’t deceive my husband. Surely you understand that. That’s your business, isn’t it?”

“Yes, of course,” I said, “of course I understand. I didn’t mean to imply you might work to deceive you husband, not at all, but just like this call, we achieved something, didn’t we? And you’re happier for it, aren’t you? Yet you probably did not tell your husband that you wanted to call me, did you?”

“Well... no.”

“I’ve found in my work that it is frequently necessary to work quietly and peacefully around obstacles, in order to get at fundamental truths, which are always beneficial. I am so sorry to have misled you about my intentions.”

There was a brief pause. “What would we talk about?”

“Whatever might happen into the conversation, any parts of family history, family relationships, the things you and Johnny used to do together, the entire family. And Johnny has a brother, I understand?”

“Yes, but he...” she faltered.

“The things you all shared together, the good times that you have loved. Johnny’s friends, the ones you liked, and maybe the ones you didn’t like so much. There’s no set catalog, Mrs. Baron. Anything will be helpful to me in getting to know Johnny better. He has become so much more communicative recently. He writes letters to me now. But that is only recent.”

“Johnny writes you letters? Aren’t you right there with him?”

“Yes, of course, but sometimes it’s easier for people to write things than to say them out loud. Haven’t you found that?”

“Do you think he might write to me?”

“Well, I don’t know. I could suggest it. But if you were to write to him, wouldn’t that be wonderful for both of you?”

“But I don’t know what I might say to him. Now, I mean.”

“You could think about that for a while. You could ponder it.”

“Yes, I could ponder that.”

“But as you said, Johnny is rebellious. So you might have to write him more than one letter before he might respond. In so many ways, I have the same kind of parental relationship with him that I expect you do.”

I let that sit a moment, and then she said, “I’ll talk to Larry, Dr. Town. Not just now. But I’ll ponder it. We both want to do what’s right for Johnny. It’s just so difficult to know what

is right. This hasn't been easy for us, as I'm sure you can understand. But I'll explain to Larry that by helping you we are helping Johnny, and perhaps I can get him to change his mind, after a time. Please give me time, and please let me call you. Don't please call us."

"Of course."

"And Dr. Town. Johnny is really a very good boy with decent upbringing. You mustn't think we raised him badly. It's simply that sometimes he's very easily influenced and doesn't take the time and effort to... to... ponder the consequences of his actions. He doesn't see the end of where these new ideas are leading him. You'll find that he may exaggerate the truth sometimes, but I believe he would never tell an untruth. And Dr. Town, you won't let what he's done influence you badly, will you?"

"To set your mind at ease, Mrs. Baron, let me assure you that I've taken a very special interest in your son, and I'm already giving to Johnny more of my time and effort than to any ten other wards at High Broder at the moment. This is precisely because I do believe in your son, and I recognize those admirable character traits that you see in him."

That Mrs. Baron called gives me much more insight about the family than either parent would like me to know. It is the case of an extremely strong-willed and moral father and an obedient mother, the reverse of the stereotypical picture of the homosexual's family, but not one without numerous precedents. Hopefully the mother is not so weak as she seems and can indeed have some influence with the father. I have the feeling that neither the father nor the son will break their stances as regards each other without some subtle undermining, and I believe an early reconciliation in the family will immensely help young Baron's progress.

Monday, May 28

Dear Dr. Town,

It upset you what I wrote last week, didn't it? I could tell by the way you acted toward me today in session. Well, I tried to make it better. I wrote almost another ten pages, so I tried, didn't I?

And you asked for it, right? You said I could write anything I wanted, so don't come down on me with the silent treatment when I do. You people are all the same. Sometimes, doc, I feel like I'm ready to explode in here. And to be honest, it did me good to explode at you. I think you may be right about that. I think that this writing business is probably a really good idea. Better than exploding at Bandy.

So there. That should make you happier. A formal apology from the bad boy.

But you've got to know about me that I don't usually yell at people like I yelled at you in my letters. I don't see any reason in it. And as a matter of fact, I guess that's just about the only thing that I think is really wrong or bad, to deliberately set out to hurt someone else. And I apologize to you for it (again I apologize?) if I did hurt you by the things I said. It seems to me though that you've got to take some of your own responsibility for it, too. It seems to me that most things a person does are his own business and other people should mess out. I know that when a person starts hurting someone else it's time for other people to make it their business, because we've all got to watch each other's back, but I mean deliberately hurting someone. We all hurt people all the time and we just can't help it most times.

I've got a theory about that. (I've got so many theories about everything that sometimes I wonder how my brain can handle it all.) I think it's because other people take too

much upon themselves, step too far into your life, and then there's no way to keep from hurting them, just trying to get them to back out again. There's this old Indian motto that I'm sure you've heard because I get it preached at me at least once a day (and you're a pshrink and all, for pete's sake) and it says you shouldn't judge your compadre until you've walked a mile in his moccasins.

Well, that's a good enough saying, but if you let them, there are some people who'll take hold of those moccasins before you ever even try them on and they'll stretch them all out of shape before they give them back to you, or they'll wear holes in all the wrong places. What in hell good does it do you to put on those moccasins after that? I'd like a chance to wear my own holes in all my own places, thanks anyway.

Take my parents for instance. I've really hurt them, okay, who can't see that? And I'm sorry about that. No matter what I think about what they've done, I'm truly sorry that I couldn't avoid hurting them. But it's not my fault. They just messed in too far, way too far. They wanted to take my choices on themselves, and then when they found out that I didn't choose their way, it all fell apart for them, and I'm the big heel.

Okay.

Okay, yeah, this is what you're after, isn't it? I guess I fell right into it. You're all the time after the guys in session to pry into their lives and dig out all that past history so you can perform your psychoanalobotomy, yeah, I get it. But sure, now I'm started, I'll tell you how it all rolled out for me and you can just go ahead and try to pick out the milestones as they go spinning by and then YOU try to tell ME what they mean.

(Like I don't already know.)

(And lots of luck.)

Where did I go different? That's probably what you think is at the heart of it all, right? Do you think I haven't wondered? Why me out of all the people in the world? What is it, something like one in twenty who are queer? And I'm that one? Well, I'd call one in twenty conservative, but that's beside the point. And also, what is queer anyway? Doing it with the same sex ALL the time? Doing it with the same sex HALF the time? Or just once or twice in a lifetime? Doing it with the opposite sex while fantasizing about the same sex? Dreaming only about guys when you're a guy, or dreaming only about girls when you're a girl? Dreams. There's the thing, doc. Dreams tell you everything about who you are.

But it's all just too dumb to try to figure it all out. I used to worry about it a lot, but not anymore, not since Frank. But when you're a kid, doc, it's not easy to accept the fact that for some reason you turned out different. And you've got to ask the question why or you just don't think. I guess you wouldn't have to worry about it so much if it wasn't for all the ducks of the world out there telling you that you're somehow bad and disgusting.

Got another bird story for you. I always think of human beings like animals, which we are. Remember the story about the ugly duckling? Well he grows up to be a swan and that's the big time moral because we all know that a swan is beautiful, right? But if the swan has still got to live with the ducks, what's the big difference? He's still an eyesore to them. So who's got to change, the swan or the ducks?

Anyway, I promised you "my story" so here it is. I'll be interested myself to see how it comes out.

Where would you want me start? What question would you ask? With my first sex-perience? It was with a little girl, and I trust you will get a laugh out of that. Jeanie Jenson. I was probably around five. No, I was older because it was after we moved to Broder, so maybe six or seven. Anyway, we looked at each other's things and played around a little with our fingers. Jesus, my mom was pissed when I told her about it. Oh, yeah, I told her because how was I to know it was evil? My mom started asking me all these questions about exactly what all I had done to Jeanie Jenson. Can it be this curiosity was to determine if entry was achieved and if consequently marriage or abortion might be necessary? Ha! Well, with my mom it would have to be marriage, I'm sure.

And if not to that end, then just exactly what was behind all this intense interest? I can remember that I couldn't figure out why my mom was so mad at me. In fact, I still can't figure that out.

And then when I was older, maybe about eight or nine or something, some of us kids were messing around in the bedroom of a friend of mine's house, Tommy Daily. We were all boys this time, and we were showing off our dicks to each other, and some of us were sucking like they were lollypops. This time we knew to be doing it on the sly because we knew we were doing something very very wrong, and we even had a lookout posted in the hallway, but we weren't anywhere near as sly as Tommy Daily's mother who snuck around and looked in the bedroom window and then raised a stink around the neighborhood that put the sewers to shame.

There's an example for you of why not to grow up like your parents.

I thought my mom and dad would never get their health back after that. My dad gave me a spanking and my mom made me brush my teeth with soap. Soap, yeah, really. And for a couple of weeks they both made my mealtimes miserable with either the silent treatment or the preaching. I couldn't even eat. My dad is a minister, you know, and he sure knows how to beat down a sinner. My mom must have taught him. The other four kids said it was the same thing over at their houses. I didn't see Tommy Daily for weeks after that.

I don't know what goes on in the brains of parents. It was no great tragedy and yet you'd have thought the Red Sea had fallen back in on Moses or something. I'll bet every kid on the block did that kind of thing at least once, for cripe's sake. They just didn't get caught is all. And I'll even bet that my parents must have played around a little when they were kids, even my parents. Well, maybe not my mom. What happens to them that they can't remember? Do they think they grew up straight and healthy in spite of it? It's kids experimenting is all, and learning from it.

Anyway, I can remember being sort of scared and unhappy for a long time after that, and I guess I probably must have blamed myself. I mean, I do remember thinking that I had done something bad, very very bad, and I was an awful little boy and God wouldn't ever let me into Heaven.

But with the next trouble I got into, I got a little perspective on the situation. By this time I had read a little, you see, and reading is a potent charm against the superstitions our parents try to make us believe. I finally had some proof that I wasn't bad and I can remember coming to the shocking realization that my parents could be wrong.

I was twelve years old and had been experimenting around with masturbation for I guess around a year. I had heard about it from the older kids and had read about it in some books I snuck out of the public library and kept under my mattress. I knew how you were supposed to do it, but I didn't quite understand WHY you did it. But then one time when I was doing it, I all of a sudden knew exactly why you did it, because man! I finally got the feeling and it felt great, the burning and the electric shocks, and I wanted to keep on doing it and doing it and doing it. And I did it a lot after that.

But I was careless about it, because I didn't think about hiding it, really. I guess my mother must have found the telltale kleenexes that I stuffed up in the little bookcase at the head of my bed. What was she doing snooping around in there anyway? And then she must have told my dad because one night he came in to give me the big talk. I was pretty scared, but even then I can remember thinking how silly he was being. Now, of course, I just laugh when I think about it.

He came into my bedroom all serious and he was going to have this man to man talk with me. He must have cleared his throat like fifteen times before he started talking. He told me that I had to quit doing it because it would make me think too much about sex and then I'd be real unhappy for the rest of my life because sex is something we have to keep in proportion to the many other important aspects of our lives. At least he knew enough not to tell me that it would make me blind or my hand fall off or something.

I just kind of sat there and nodded my head without saying much, but I can remember thinking that my father was wrong and probably a hypocrite and that there was

nothing wrong with it and I couldn't wait for him to leave my bedroom so that I could do it some more.

But I did learn to be more careful with my kleenexes.

You asked the question today when I stayed behind after the session, the big one you thought. "When did you become gay?" Thanks, by the way, doc, for keeping that kind of stuff out of the Group. But I've got to tell you I almost laughed out loud when you asked it. That's the kind of thing that old randy Bandy used to ask me before you got here, when he was doing all the messing in. Hey, but you know what? Since you came, he's pretty much stopped all that crap with me. I guess you talked to him maybe? Or maybe it's just your authority that intimidates him? You do have authority, you know, doc? It's weird. You're so quiet all the time, and polite, but that gives you a kind of authority. The other kids like you, too.

But anyway the reason I almost laughed out loud? Come on, doc, what if I asked you when you became straight?

Or even if you are straight. Hey, I never thought about that one. Are you straight, doc? Ha! The tables just turned. And when did you become straight, doc? Can you tell me the precise moment? Or if not straight, can you tell me the precise moment that you became gay? Ha! This is fun.

~~You're probably all insulted reading this or ...~~

But you know what? This isn't fair. You've got me here writing all this junk, and you just sit there and read it or not read it and there's nothing coming out of it. Except like the silent treatment you gave me in session today. That's why I stayed behind.

Ah, cripes, there's no winning.

Anyway, there's no answer to your question, and I can't believe that you really thought that was a good question in the first place. I didn't BECOME gay. I've always been gay. It's like saying, "When did your eyes turn blue?" You can't remember. It's just part of the way you are.

But I do remember when I was just a little kid and we were still living in New Hampshire, I probably wasn't even in school yet, and this big kid was walking in front of me down the sidewalk and he had a really hard round bubble butt inside his jeans, and I can remember getting turned on by it and hoping my butt looked like that. I mean, I didn't think to myself, "Oh my god I'm queer!" I didn't understand it at all then because I was just a little kid, but I remember that now. I'll always remember the way his butt looked, and that I really dug it.

But what you really want to know is when did I first make it with guys, right? Well there was that time with Tommy Daily and Vernon Todd and his two cousins whose names I forget. But that was kids' play, like I told you. And then there were two times with my brother.

If you mention this to my folks, doc, I'll take it out of your hide, I swear to god. You wanted to know, not them. I guess you probably talk to them once in a while. I mean, you'd be a piss-poor pshrink if you didn't. but it wouldn't do anything but hurt them if they found out about Larry and me. They'd think they had raised two perverts instead of just only one, and worse, incestuous perverts. And I couldn't handle my dad throwing any more Leviticus at me. Besides, that would get Larry all wrong. It was just kids' play again, or at least that's what it was for me.

I was probably thirteen or somewhere around there and even though Larry was more like nineteen, I think it was just an experiment for him, too. He had come home from

college for the weekend and Aunt Ellen was in town and Larry had to sleep with me in my bed and that's how it all happened. It wasn't significant in any way. We just used our hands for a while, and then he pushed my head down, and I was willing enough to go down.

Well, I shouldn't have written those details, I guess. It wasn't significant. It just wasn't significant. I didn't like fall in love with him or anything. But I was really anxious for the next night to come so that we could do it again. I think Larry felt guilty because the second night I was the one who had to reach over for him, though he had been the one to reach over for me the first night. I think he might have thought I was already asleep the first night. But I wasn't. He was so big and hot in bed next to me that who could fall asleep?

Anyway, even though it was not significant, it did kind of let me focus in on what had been just a vague feeling before. I now began to understand why I was so fascinated with pictures of men. While all the other guys were ripping off girly mags from the magazine racks in the supermarket and shoving them in their jackets, I was going after the pictures of the guys. I mean, doc, aren't you really glad we have those magazines and those men?

What's funny is that I didn't think all that much about it at the time. It was so obvious where I was going, but it never really occurred to me or to my conscious mind anyway that I was different from everyone else. Of course, I knew not to tell anyone about my pictures or show them off in the locker room at school like the other guys did. Oh, that locker room, jeez! But I knew their place, at home in my bed with just me and my fantasies.

After Larry, I began to have a little more focus to these fantasies. Poor Larry. He must have been scared out of his head. See, he was so straight arrow and old enough to know all the dirty names for what we had done, and on that second night, he went down on me, too. Yeah,

this time I was the one to push his head down because I wanted to know how it felt, too. And he went down without much resistance. But he couldn't look me in the eye afterwards, and in fact, I don't think it's ever been the same between us since then. Hmm. Poor Larry.

But I guess he got over it, in his way. The next time he came home for the weekend, he had his room back and with the pressure off he did start at least talking to me again. But we used to roughhouse. No more roughhousing. He got married a couple of years later and now he has a kid and a house and the whole family thing and pretends, at least, to be very happy. That's another reason for you not tell my mom and dad about this. If it ever got back to Linda (that's his wife, Linda, whom I love like a sister) she couldn't handle it. Well, could you? I don't know. We were just kids.

And that's my sexual history until I made it with Scottie. I mean my real sexual history. In my dreams I've been to bed with all the sexiest men of the world, it doesn't matter what decade, I just bring their youth up to date. Nureyev? You've seen pictures of Nureyev?

Well, and some of the women, too, to be honest. But the women don't figure too much into my fantasies. And all that lipstick and makeup, how can real men stand that junk? No, women just represent the perverted side of my nature.

(That's a joke, doc, in case you didn't realize it.)

So then, let's see, Scottie! Well Scottie didn't just come along. He used to live next door, and although he was a few years older than me, we played together all the time when we were growing up. Then his folks moved across town and they'd come over for dinner sometimes and Scottie'd come with them. But we were never alone together, so we couldn't do IT. We never even got to talk about IT because there were always grownups around.

Grownups! That sure is a crazy word but in fact it really is a more exact word than “adults” is. “Adults” implies maturity, a thing that grownups don’t always have. But “grownups” implies something about size and age which is probably more to the point in defining the difference between a lot of kids and their parents.

See, there’s the thing, doc. As long as you’re old enough, you’ve got rights and you get to have a lawyer and a fair trial and you’re innocent until proven guilty and all those nice American things. Theoretically anyway. But when you’re a kid there’s not even any theory. You don’t necessarily get a trial, and almost no lawyer will handle you, and the ones who will are crummy and like the one they tried to give me, mosquitoes and messing in where they shouldn’t. And you sometimes don’t even appear before a magistrate and even if you do, the lawyer and the judge are bound to be second-rate because there’s no money and no prestige in juvenile justice, and only the bottom of the barrel accepts a position in it. But generally the whole thing doesn’t have anything to do with justice anyway. Someone just says the word and you get locked up and then you go to the Hall and maybe get sent out to the foster martyrs or back home or to your grandmother’s or uncle’s on some other place you’d rather die than be, and then if you break out of there it’s back to the Hall and around and around until you finally end up at a maximum security place like High Broder. And baby, there’s nothing you can do to protect yourself because the big THEY has got the wire out on you.

Take my parents. Is there any way that anyone can condone what they did? And yet the police backed them right up and here I am, stuck in this place that even the cockroaches crawl away from.

But anyway, back to Scottie, who keeps slipping my mind. “Grownups,” that’s it.

The grownups were getting together again, and Scottie came with them, that was in the middle of last year, and how Scottie had grown up! Oh, I’ve got to give him credit. He covers it all up very well when he wants to. He was super charmola to my folks and they thought he was just the sweetest petal on the rose. He had just graduated from college and had gotten a job in a men’s clothing store and they could see success looming in his radiant future because he was so polite and self-assured and well-groomed. He was “manager quality” in their eyes, and in fact he IS manager quality, but that’s no compliment to him. I’ve got to admit it, though I hate to, that some people I know who are way nicer than Scottie, way more intelligent and way more talented are never going to have it half so easy in life as Scottie, at least so far as business goes. He’ll have his own store by the time he’s twenty-eight. And he’s such a duck.

But I was just as taken in by him as my mom and dad. Oh, so good looking! Oh! I sat there tongue-tied all night and kept my eyes burned into the tablecloth afraid I’d be caught staring at him. And then when he called me up the next weekend and asked me if I’d like to go to a movie with him, I had to make a quick trip to the john.

I never figured out what Scottie saw in me. I’m obviously not the shiniest pebble in the aquarium, and I can remember when we’d go out to The Other Way together, one of the gay bars in town, everybody would turn to look as we came in. They pretended not to, but I could tell that all the antennas were out and they were all aimed at Scottie. It was damned exciting is what it was, and I guess that’s why it took me so long to see what a loser Scottie is. I was in a state of ravishment the whole time, as though I was being escorted by a prince. I knew everyone in the place wanted to tear me to pieces out of jealousy. And I loved it.

For a while anyway. But it got real old real fast. Poor Scottie. That's him.

But Scottie was a star, no getting around it. And he introduced me to a whole new life. At first he was the mover. He asked me out to the movies and then back to his apartment. I had no idea. There was no seduction. I was as eager as he was, and it all happened very naturally and with no embarrassment. It was like something out of one of my dreams or, I'll tell you what it was like, like coming home after a long time being in jail, that easy, that good.

Scottie and I saw each other constantly after that, and my mom and dad never thought twice about it because we had known each other as kids, funny. We were always going out to The Other Way. At first we'd go on crowded nights and we'd go early before they started taking the cover charge at the door and we'd sit way back in the shadows so they wouldn't think about carding me. Then when it started getting crowded, Scottie'd take me around and introduce me to the bartenders, Scottie knows everybody in the bars, and they got used to my being there. So after a while, I could go in any time and they were cool with it. Besides I look a lot older than what I really am. People tell me that all the time. You told me that, but you were just trying to get in good with me, I know.

In The Other Way that's when I first knew what dancing was about. Oh, yeah, I had gone to a lot of the school dances, usually with this girl Claudia that I've practically grown up with and who in spite of everything is probably in love with me. But the dances always bored me, although I'm very fond of Claudia. They were always one of those things you did because everybody else was doing them not because you were getting the same kind of thrill that they were getting. But when I danced with Scottie the first time, yeah, I knew now what that thrill was, finally, our bodies smashed up against each other, his blood pulsing alongside my blood,

our hearts pounding together, our hard-ons rubbing up against each other through our pants.

There was a reason for dancing, I found out, thrill. It was sex right there standing up. Wow. Now I suddenly knew.

I had come home. And I had never really even dreamed that home existed.

Thanks, doc. I'm starting to like this. But as my Grammy Lula always used to say when she got ready to get off the phone, "Okay, I'll let you get back to your rat killing now. Bye."

djt: 5/29/79 — 10:15 a.m.

1. Make appointment to see Franklin Parker, best time Friday morning or afternoon.
2. Get address of The Other Way. See about changing plans for Saturday night.

Thursday night, May 31

Dear Frank,

(TOWN AND BANDY, IF YOU'RE READING THIS, DROP DEAD!)

Frank, if this letter gets to you unopened then you can ignore that business above with Town and Bandy. That means Dr. Town kept her word to me that this letter is just between you and me. I've got a psychologist and a social worker breathing down my neck and they're this new breed of human being who don't consider anything sacred (or at least the social worker for sure, who wouldn't even send you the first letter I wrote you) and if they opened this letter I at least want them to know what I think of them. They've got me over a barrel, so that's all I can do. The social worker has a severe case of hemorrhoids and nothing gets out.

I'm hoping this letter's going to be a different story, though. It's supposedly getting to you through Town, the psychologist and a woman, and she seems more together. She told me she is seeing you tomorrow and will deliver a letter to you, unopened. Town's done a few things for me, but I don't know yet how far I can trust her. Do me a favor, will you, Frank, and check the envelope for me and see if you can find any evidence that it's been tampered with. Make sure she sees you do it. I want her to know that I don't trust her all the way yet. Then write back to me. It doesn't have to be like a tome, just a few words. You know what I like. But make sure you seal it good before you give it to Town.

Paranoid? You think I'm paranoid? Well, in this place... oh, but jeez, Frank, you may be even in a worse place. They won't tell me anything about you. Town says she's going to see you and that she's going to hand-deliver this letter, but she won't say where. I'm thinking that if she were going to see you at your apartment, then she wouldn't be keeping it a secret. So I'm thinking maybe ... the worst. I can't stand it, Frank, thinking that. I'm hoping you can write

to me. It's the not knowing, suspecting the worst all the time. There are so many things I want to say to you, and here I spend the first half of this dismal letter making a spy out of you for me.

I didn't know until I got put in here how helpless you can be, how helpless they can make you, how much at mercy you can be and how little mercy there is. Town says that you're going to be standing trial, or she let something about that drop, and she fumbled around, but she didn't say where you are, whether you're in some kind of holding tank, or what. I tried to get her to tell me why you were going to court, but she wouldn't give me anything more. What is it, Frank? Can you tell me about it? Is it on account of me? Well, sure, of course.

I guess you can't visit me? That's why you haven't been here yet? They won't let you? I guess you shouldn't even if you could, if you're going to go to court. And I guess I'd better be extra careful what I say in this letter, too, and not any of the stuff that I really want to say, but you know all that stuff anyway, you know it by heart.

Listen, in case you're worried about me, don't be. I'm doing okay here, just fine. I've got a kind of friend and we help each other get through. His name is Roger and he's a pretty good guy except that he's a deaf mute and so our communication is kind of limited. Boy does he let me talk though! He can read lips, or at least it seems like he can. And he writes me notes and is teaching me to hand-talk, so it's not bad. Lots of times he seems to know what I'm going to say before I even say it. He's a bright guy and he makes things a little easier on me. The other guys pick on him, but not when I'm around. I've earned some respect from them. Yeah, the hard way, but respect is respect.

Town is okay too, I think, although she has a definite tendency to try to mess in too far. But what do I expect anyway? That's what they're paying her to do, the Youth Authority

Trolls. I feel kind of sorry for her because the guys in here give her a real hard time. They're always after her because they've got this macho image they're trying to keep up and she's the only woman they ever have around to show off what they call their masculinity. It would make you sick to hear the things they say about her, Frank, and even sometimes TO her, right to her face, all their stupid bragging. I don't know how or why she puts up with it, but I guess she's got her own tough image to put across, and she's pretty good at it. She takes a lot off the staff here because they're all men and defensive as hell about having a woman above them. She's new at High Broder and they're just waiting for her to slip up so they can come down on her. They're always saying things to her like, "Ready to quit yet? Had enough?"

You can see this makes her mad as hell, but she's got this idea that if she's nice enough she'll win them over to her side. That's not going to work with these cretins. She's going to have to bring her heel down on them before they're going to give her any respect. That's all they know. She says she's going to "interview" you about me. Let me know what you think of her. If she really delivers this letter to you unopened she goes way up in my estimation. She'll be stepping right over Bandy, the social worker creep, and breaking one of his favorite rules, and that's a big red A for her.

Well, I've got lots to say to you but I guess I'd better not write them. They'll have to wait until I can say them in person, right into your ear. When will that be? Frank, WHEN IS THAT GOING TO BE? How am I going to get through until then.

Well, take good care of yourself. Johnny

djt: 6/1/79 — 7:30 p.m.

Photocopy this letter to Franklin Parker and establish a new file for John Baron in the locked drawer of my desk. Label it Verso.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEE: Franklin Parker (File in Verso, djt)

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: JUNE 1, 1979

I decided in the case of John Baron to do what might be regarded by some as unethical and perhaps even deceitful and secessionist, certainly secretive. However, it is a professional decision for which I am prepared to take full responsibility, and I see no harm. I secretly and with no authorization other than my own invited Baron to write a letter to Franklin Parker which I told him I would deliver personally, circumventing the normal mail route which crosses Mr. Bandy's desk. Because I feel I am very close to complete openness with Baron, because I seem to have passed in his opinion all the tests he has set for me, and because I feel this voluntary act on my part will so establish with Baron my good faith that he will end in giving me his complete trust, I have decided to take this unprecedented step.

I am not oblivious to the inherent dangers of the action. I realize that while I am encouraging his trust in me, I am encouraging his distrust of Mr. Bandy, that I am siding with a ward against a staff member. However, I believe Baron will never trust Bandy in any case, too much bad water has already passed under that bad bridge, so there is nothing lost. Perhaps I even believe that Baron is warranted in distrusting Bandy since I have never seen that Bandy has in any way earned that trust from Baron. He has punished Baron twice for offenses in which I feel Baron was either justified or entirely innocent. He has shown not the slightest degree of benevolence or even compassion for Baron, and he has displayed on more than one occasion an unreasonable dislike for the ward. There has never been an occasion of overt and culpable discrimination on Bandy's part. Therefore I have no reason to make a formal charge against him. I merely mention it here, in Verso, as documentation for one basis for the action I have taken.

I realize too that in delivering unvetted mail I am running the risk for High Broder of an organized escape attempt. I feel sure, however, that Baron is not a candidate for escape and I am vindicated in this trust by the contents of his letter which I have photocopied for his file, after a brief perusal wherein I attempted only a verification that there was indeed no danger. Although I had told Baron that his letter would not be read by Mr. Bandy and assured him I would not CENSOR it, I made no promises to him that I would not simply skim it. So although I did mislead him, I did not actually lie to him; our fragile relationship would not withstand deceit of that magnitude. I was successful in steaming open the envelope without its being evident, photocopying the contents for the Verso file, and resealing the letter in the envelope.

While Franklin Parker read the letter upon my delivering it into his hands this morning, I saw him interrupt his reading to take a moment to examine the seal, as John had asked him to do. I feel confident, however, that he was unable to see my tampering.

Parker is a personable young man, and he lives in a lovely, airy, well kept apartment in mid-town, a very tidy man in all regards. He informed me with obvious embarrassment that he is out of jail on bail and will be going to trial next week and therefore would not be able to be completely open with me. He had warned me on the telephone about this, that his lawyer has advised him to say nothing at all about John Baron and his relationship with him other than to confirm the fact that, yes, they do know each other. Of course I did not question him about the allegations against him, but it was evident that John Baron is at the heart of those allegations.

He was as good as his word. The interview was very brief. He read his letter from Baron with an inscrutable frown that never changed, turned to me then to apologize again that he could say nothing at this time, neatly evaded answering the few questions I did put to him about

John, his parents and friends, and finally hemmed and hawed politely until I saw that it was past time to leave. I had no other success than to see that I very much liked this man and his demeanor and his clear respect for John. Indeed, after his warning me on the telephone that he had been advised to remain silent, my major reason for the interview was simply to satisfy my own curiosity about this man that John so esteems. That and the good faith I would be establishing with John himself.

He asked me to tell John for him that he was not at liberty to visit him but that he had hopes to communicate with him in the near future. I suggested he write Baron a note and when he hesitated I assured him the note would go directly from my hands to Baron's just as Baron's letter to him had done. I felt quite guilty about it since this might be evidence for a forthcoming trial, but I felt I needed the note as proof to John that I had actually delivered his letter to Parker.

Parker wrote a half-page note, folded it into three and was about to seal it in an envelope when he had a thought. "I hope I can trust you, not only for my sake but for John's. His letter spoke very highly of you, and I would hate to see his confidence betrayed. He needs somebody like you now. His letter to me was hard, very hard and bitter, and Johnny is not like that, not when he's taken care of. Please be good to him. And if you really want to help him, let me give you a word of warning: don't push him. He'll get to the right place if you let him go on his own. Trust him. Don't try to direct him; he won't take it. And don't do anything to deceive him. He won't compromise his own honesty and integrity, and he won't stand for it in the people he believes in."

I thanked him for the advice and took the opportunity to pursue an idea that seems unlikely yet likely at the same time. I said, “I wonder if you could give me an opinion on an idea I have been tossing around in the back of my head. We have a wonderful chaplain at High Broder. He has developed an incredible rapport with so many of our wards that I think perhaps he might make an inroad with John. However, I have already met Rev. Baron, and I know at least a bit about the dynamics of his relationship with John and —”

I let the thought finish on its own and gauged the smile that appeared on Parker’s face, its nature, how long it lasted, its wryness, and knew that there was understanding.

“So, how would you suggest I introduce Chaplain Kincaid to John?”

As I hoped, Parker unfolded his letter and wrote a quick P.S. at the bottom of the sheet. It appeared to be no more than two sentences. I would like to have read those two sentences to see how Parker might accomplish so easily what would have been a truly delicate undertaking on my part.

Parker smiled again as he refolded the letter, put it in its envelope, sealed it and handed it to me. “Mission accomplished,” he said. I felt as though I were handling a little treasure. “And thank you again.”

I returned directly to High Broder and called Baron to my office to deliver Parker’s note. I was actually excited for him even though I did not know the exact contents of the letter. I had tested the seal and decided that because the glue seemed of better quality than on the State envelope Baron had used, and because Baron was bound to inspect the seal with much more care than Parker had examined Baron’s, I could not take the chance of trying to steam it open. I am very sure, however, there was nothing vital in the note because of its brevity and because Parker

dare not risk saying anything that might incriminate himself. Still, I knew John would be tremendously excited to receive it.

I hoped he would open the letter in my office so that I might watch his face as he read it, but he simply took the envelope, examined the handwriting, examined the seal, and then tucked it into his shirt pocket. I did think, however, that I detected a look of anticipation on his face before he managed to control his expression. I found myself touched by this—I must learn to control my own emotions better with this ward—and I was gladdened that I had taken the risk for him. But in fact when I examined these emotions of mine more carefully, I found among them not only excitement and warmth for John’s sake, but something like jealousy. I must get control of this.

In fact, I document it here that these emotions are beginning to be felt, and I am rather stunned by them. I remind myself here and now with these words that I must keep myself utterly clear of transference. That would not help Baron, and it certainly would not help me. I am not his mother. Nor do I want to be. In fact, mothering is exactly the wrong thing for this ward; he would take it as smothering.

This is becoming very clumsy. And I know I can’t approve.

But the fact is, I realize, this entire episode with Franklin Parker, the delivery of the two letters, is exactly the sort of thing that should be perfectly legal and legitimate and allowable and wholly within the domain of Youth Authority, to take this kind of personal care with the wards. This simple action might do more to break down Baron’s barriers and buoy his spirits than all my sessions and talks with him. Certainly now I have earned his trust.

And reminder: thank Chaplain Kincaid for the idea. Also —I document here— the good chaplain advises that I move Verso from the locked desk drawer to home. He has observed certain things during his tenure at High Broder. Therefore, let it be documented herewith, that I am creating a separate file for John Baron at home, labeled Verso, and that its rationale is to keep more private details for the good of this ward —and perhaps others, in time— in a more secure location. The Baron file in my office will contain the more formal documents that accumulate on the ward. I should have thought that my files in my office are inviolable, but I take the chaplain's advice as gold standard. There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio...

Monday, June 4

Hi, Doc,

This is kind of fun. It's like keeping a diary and I keep thinking all through the week of all the things I am going to sit down and write to you. Fun. But you guessed that, didn't you? And don't think I don't know about all the manipulations to get me to write, but okay, it worked.

I kept a diary once when I was a kid, for just about one entire week. I found it a few months ago when my mom made me clean out my closet, and it was a riot. "Dear Diary," that's how I always began. "Today I mowed the lawn." Ha! Big news.

"Dear Diary, today Claudia and I walked home together. I think she likes me. She asked me if she could carry my books."

"Dear Diary, today Larry and I got into a big fight and he lied to Mom and Dad about it and they took his side."

Dear Diary, today Jack and Will were the only ones in session. Do you know why? What you probably heard was that Leo and Ernie and Roger got into a big free-for-all and got all busted up, right? Bull.

I wonder if I can trust you with the truth. I think you'd like this. I've got your promise now. doc, remember? Confidential, remember?

No big deal, but that's not how it happened. What happened was last night Leo and Ernie and Mohammed Rashid got a mean streak going, which happens a lot in here because it comes to the place where the cork blows out. As it happened, they weren't looking for trouble but it just came along their way and they couldn't resist it. They were up on the roof smoking

dope, and where they got it is one secret I'm not going to trust you with because if we couldn't get weed in here then we really would go crazy, so just forget about it. Anyway, Leo was supposed to be the chickie on the lookout for the pigs, but evidently he was so loaded he couldn't see a barrel in a bathtub let alone a pig in a pokey.

Suddenly they all heard a noise and looked up and saw Roger was there. He's so damn quiet, you know. I guess since he can't hear anything he doesn't know what noise is and never makes any. He was going up there to work on this little garden he's got going on the roof where there's some sun. He took me up once to show it to me. It's just a couple of boxes of dirt, but it's his and he's got plants growing and he's proud of it.

You ever been up on the roof, doc? If you're a kid in Med-Psych you get to go up whenever you want, and it's quite a sight. You get this beautiful view of the whole smoggy valley. On a clear day you can even see the river, and when there's a high wind blowing you can see the smog vapors around the government buildings in Broder drifting this way and that, pretending maybe they'll go away if you're real quiet and pray hard. It must have been pretty from up here on the hill once upon a time, in Johnson's good old days before Broder spread out and ate it all up with suburbia.

Anyway, Leo and Ernie and Mohammed got spooked because they hadn't heard Roger come up, and being so hyper anyway they jumped up and put him in a cross. That poor guy gets the worst in life. He just stumbles around and gets into everybody's way. I can just see the way it must have happened. Roger probably didn't even know to yell for help. He didn't have a chance to defend himself, being so small and younger than them, let alone not even hearing them come up behind him.

They could have killed him. As dumb as those three are I wouldn't put it past them to have just thrown him off the roof and laid it down as just another ghost put to rest. There's a fence around the outside of the roof, of course, but they'd have got him over that without even seeing it. The ground below is all concrete and five stories down, and after a fall like that, the only way the pigs could tell who it was would be to call roll.

But, lucky for Roger, Jack Cole evidently heard the noises of the fight and went up to see what was going on. He and Roger are cellies, you know, and they lock right next to the stairway up to the roof. When he saw the three of them on Roger he pushed into them and beat them all to pulp. He's so damn big it was like scattering toothpicks. I guess Leo and Ernie and Mohammed must have started running after the the first couple of swings, because they're all chicken to their heart's core, but after Jack took Roger down to the clinic, he went back looking for them and beat the chicken patooties out of them. Except for his right hand, which he told the pigs he caught in his door, there's not a mark on him.

I saw Ernie afterwards, but he didn't see me. As a matter of fact, he won't be able to see period for a couple of weeks, which is too good for him when you see how broken up Roger is. All four of them get padded rooms next week, down in the hole. That probably won't be so hard on Roger as it will the rest of them because he's had nothing but solitary all his life. But Leo and Ernie and Mohammed will be walking bananas when THEY get out.

Nobody's going to catch old Jack though, because nobody's stupid enough to snitch on him. He'd as soon kick a field goal with you as pass you in the chow line. I've got to give him credit for what he did for Roger, of course, especially since he had to beat up three of his own race doing it. I guess he's stoned so far out that he doesn't even belong to a race any more. More

power to him on that score, I say. He's come up about one hundred degrees in my estimation, but he's still an iceberg.

Well, so.

Did you have a nice weekend, doc? I did. You know who came visiting yesterday? Claudia. Remember Claudia that I wrote about last time that I always had to go to the dances with? Blew my mind when they told me somebody had come to see me. But I could have figured it was Claudia. For one thing, who else? Frank can't come because of the trial. He may be in jail already, and I wouldn't even know. And my parents? Who can break down their trip? After two months you get used to not expecting them.

But besides all that, it just figures that Claudia would be my first and probably only visitor. Next to Frank she's got to be the nicest person in the world. She brought me a mess of cookies and when I say mess that's just what I mean. She hates to cook and can't fry a piece of baloney, but her mother has taught her that the way to a man's heart is down his throat and so she's always baking these crumbly peanut butter cookies that taste like she did her internship with mud pies. I'm pretty sure she knows how lousy they taste because I notice that she never eats any of them herself, but that doesn't stop her from making them and bringing them to you on any and all occasions. Even after High Broder's food they still didn't taste any better, but I ate a couple and said how good it was to get home cooking, and that made her smile. She's sweet.

Nothing much happened. We were both too embarrassed to talk. We sat around looking at each other and not looking at each other and listening to Will Downey going on and on to his parents, coming out of his face so wrong they'd have to be children to believe him. You

can't blame him, though. He's been in and out of High Broder so many times that he can't see his own lies when he's telling them.

But it made me feel so good just to have Claudia here, even if we didn't do any actual talking. I mean, of all the people in the world, my parents and all those lames who keep trying to lay the guilt trip on me, it's just on account of Claudia that I have any regrets about being gay. She's been in love with me since third grade, you know Valentine style. Nobody else, just me. And all the time I felt real bad that I wasn't coming through for her. I mean, there was nothing I could do, I know that. And if she'd known I was gay, she'd never have asked me. I mean, she would never have asked me anyway. She never has asked me, even now. It's just that she's always been there and I know how she's been feeling about me and it's a kind of pressure, you know, a kind of obligation I have toward her because I'm special to her.

And she's very special to me too, of course. We used to do everything together, play, study, walk home from school, go to the movies, go to the dances, all that stuff. We'd sit around and share dreams. She's going to be a doctor and I've always told her all the things I was going to be, a cowboy first, then a truck driver, a doctor sure, a newspaperman, a French teacher, an actor, a writer. From the third grade you carry a lot of dreams. But Claudia still and always has wanted to be a doctor. And she will be, too. Just think, doc, maybe she'll end up like you, in High Broder in twenty years, a shrink for shrimp.

She's a genius, at least as far as science goes. She'd always do my science and math for me and I'd do her English for her because she can't write compositions. She can't even spell, and as you have no doubt noticed, I never make a misspelling. (Notice the two sses in misspell. There are very few people who can spell misspell correctly. I'm one of them.)

(Doc, do you get my sense of Yuma? Am I too wry for you?)

Well, Claudia doesn't even talk all that well either. I mean, she doesn't have any speech impediments or anything like that, but she's not a very verbal person. Which is about the only thing about Claudia that always got on my nerves. If she'd get mad about something, she'd clam up and when I'd ask what was wrong she'd say, "You know," and that was that. This used to really piss me off because I'm no good at all that nonverbal communication stuff, you know, the silent treatment and cold shoulder and all that. I'm very talk oriented. Except in session, but you already know that.

So anyway, Claudia just sort of sat there the whole time brushing the lint off her lap and pretending like she was in complete control of her emotions and definitely was not just about to bust into sobs. She said they had their first graduation practice Friday night and she was hoping I could still graduate with my class.

"Big joke," I said.

"Everyone missed you," she said.

"Who?"

But she couldn't come up with even one name. It doesn't matter. They're going on. They've got their lives ahead of them, and it's easy enough to forget the people who aren't there. I lost all my good friends when I started going with Frank and never found time for them any more. It was my fault mostly, I guess. You should keep up with your friends.

Claudia said, "I guess your parents are feeling pretty bad about it, huh?"

"How would I know?" I said. "They don't come to visit me, and they're the ones who put me in here."

She couldn't believe that. "THEY put you in here????"

"Sure, do you think I got in here by invitation?"

"They said you ran away!"

"Who did?"

"Your parents!"

That's just the kind of thing they would say. I mean, here it was Claudia, my best friend. She deserved the truth from them.

"And they haven't even come to see you? Why?"

"They hate queers, I guess."

"Don't, John! Don't talk like that."

"Well, what do you think then?"

Claudia knows all about it now, me being gay. Before the big lock-up, it went all over school like a rainstorm over the Mojave, flash floods and all. But that's a story in itself. Claudia showed up at school that day, but then she went home and stayed out for the rest of the week after she heard the news. I only called her once because I was going through so much myself those days and nights, and when I did call, her father answered the telephone and said Claudia was too sick to talk to me. He couldn't tell me what was wrong with her, but he sounded kind of funny, distant and unfriendly, so I knew what was up. She disappointed me there. I could have used her help, and she was pulling the sick trip on me.

But I guess it was real hard for her too. She had our whole future set out together in her head. I know it. All lost hopes. You see, no other guy in school ever paid any attention to her. Not because she was a dog or anything like that. In fact, Claudia is a very pretty girl, in her own

way. She just doesn't show it off like all those girls with the makeup and fashions and all. But really, she's a knockout if you just take a second look at her. Like I would know, right? But I do. I can tell that much about it, boys and girls, and what they like and don't like.

And Claudia's so good too. Very kind and sensitive and generous. When she was leaving today, she said, "John, why don't you send your mom and dad a note? Ask them to come. That's all they're waiting for."

I just smiled at her. No sense in putting her on the bottom of the deep blue sea with me.

"Take care of yourself, John," she said and went out real fast. I thought about her going through all the doors and gates on her long way out of High Broder and I felt real bad for the way she must be feeling as she heard them close and lock one by one behind her. She really is a hell of a person to have braved it all.

And how was YOUR weekend, doc? Did anyone come visiting you? Or did you just lock yourself up reading my last letter. I could tell by what you talked about today in session. I know a little psychology too, you know, and all that bull asking what did Will and Jack and I use to do in the evenings when we were on the outside was pretty obvious. You didn't give a damn what Will did and you knew Jack wasn't going to be dropping any nuggets in your vicinity. You wanted to hear more about The Other Way, right? Well, I sure wasn't going to talk about The Other Way with Jack and Will sitting there listening. Oh, not that they wouldn't enjoy hearing about it, about all the flits and fairies and how they fly around with all their fairy glitter. But I'm not going to give Will any dimes to drop about me and I'm not giving Jack the satisfaction of laughing at me with those eyes of his.

So *The Other Way* intrigued you, huh, doc? Does that start giving you doubts about yourself? You can feel free to tell me. I wouldn't tell anyone. I wouldn't worry about it, if I were you. If you don't know about yourself by now, you should stop trying. Not that it's not possible, mind you, not to know at your age, especially with women. Women are always turning to other women late in life, realizing what jerks straight men can be.

But I don't think you're the type. Maybe you should think about talking to Chaplain Kincaid about it. Frank wrote to me that you think Captain KupKake is the bee's knees and that a person could talk to him about just about anything. So? A little of your own advice?

Well, in fact you're right. Old Kupkake is as reliable as Old Faithful, going off every hour or so with the hottest of hot geysers, lots of laughs that guy. Everybody in High Broder likes Cap'n Kupkake because he thinks of everything and does whatever it takes for you. You want cigarettes, kozy up to Cap'n Kupkake. He'll arrange to have you wash his car and he'll leave a pack of cigarettes in the glove compartment so you can swipe them. Cool. He doesn't make any judgments.

This morning as soon as I told him Roger was in lock-down, Kupkake went on the run down to the jug. He's always as soft and gentle as his ~~monaele~~ monicker (?) and he cares about each crummy guy in this place, including even me. But with Roger, Kupkake is way cool, just sitting there and holding Roger's hand, just communing, you know? Actually, Kupkake holds hands with just about everyone, and they let him. That takes a lot of nerve for a guy to do that with another guy but, you know, just about everyone needs someone to hold his hand at one time or another, even the worst guys in here, even if it's only Old Kupkake.

Well, except Jack Cole, of course. Kupkake would never offer to hold Jack Cole's hand, I'm pretty sure. But maybe. Kupkake's that cool that maybe, maybe even Jack Cole.

Kupkake came back up from the hole with a pretty good report for me. Evidently Roger is not beat up as bad as Ernie and Leo and Rashid. He saw all three of them, too, and they're just garbage-haul after Jack's creaming. So, good. Good old Kupkake.

He took Roger some drawing stuff, a pad of paper and colored pencils and crayons, and Roger drew this terrific devil kind of face, really terrific with the colors all blended. He's really good and I didn't even know that. Maybe Roger didn't know it himself. But Kupkake drew it out of him in the hole where Roger's not even supposed to have access to any personal belongings, just sitting in there on his mattress pad in his underwear, but Kupkake is the chaplain, and he can do that kind of thing without the guards blowing their hot air and bad breath at him. He brought the picture out with him, and all the drawing materials because he wouldn't be able to leave them in the hole with Roger or the guards would break it all up. He gave me the Satan picture to keep for Roger when Roger gets out. I gave it to Cole, and Cole put it on the wall of their cell. So it'll be waiting for him at home. That'll make him feel good when he sees it already up on the wall.

Kupkake gave me some gum, too. He'll do that. He knows me. He knows I'll flush it down the toilet when it goes stale, that I won't go trying to make any impressions of keys or jam up the dishwasher. He knows it's the big taboo, gum, but it's really nice to chew some gum sometimes, doc.

But anyway, back to you, doc, and how you might benefit from talking to the chaplain about this problem of yours ... like you told Frank to tell me, like I couldn't see through

that? you telling Frank to tell me about Kupkake? ...but yeah, doc, telling Kupkake about your latent feelings of amorousness to women and your interest in The Other Way, yeah, that might do you some good. You can trust Kupkake. Like you told Frank to tell me, Kupkake can be trusted. Unlike some people who maybe mess into your business too far, and maybe tell your boyfriend to tell you to seek help. You know what I mean? Am I making myself clear, doc? Maybe you could seek help from Kupkake?

But me, I'll just advise you straight out, doc, just straight from the shoulder, one man to another, if you really do want to get into some lesbo action, my advice is forget The Other Way altogether, and go over the river to The Tank because the dykes don't hang out much at The Other Way. They like their women butch or femme, one or the other. Just to give you a little heads up. I'd say you are femme, doc, just in case you don't know which stereotype you belong to.

There are only two or three gay bars on this side of the river, ever at one time. They open and close pretty often, because the pigs need pay-offs and if they don't get them they find ways of making trouble. Too bad because the bars are so crowded they could always open another one and get the business, but I guess there are considerations about that. Some bars do a booming business, but others don't seem to catch on, and I heard somewhere that the cops are afraid if they let too many gay bars get started over here, the so-called decent people will get outraged and clear them all out on some pretext or another and the cops will lose their payoffs. That may be paranoia. There's a lot of paranoia among gays, but with all the Bible thumpers always out to get us, can you blame us?

I have to admit, though, that I was sort of scared by The Other Way when I first went into it. It's true, it's full of fairies doing their Tinkerbell acts. When I first started going, you know a new face, every once in a while some fat old queen with a smear of makeup on would come up leering at me and make some lewd proposition and it would turn my stomach. It wasn't just the age or the fat or the makeup, but it was the dirtiness of it all. They're all the same with it. They come up and lisp and roll their eyes at you as if they're offering you some sort of forbidden ancient pig dung. Most of them are drunk and can't focus their eyes, and their tongues wrap around their lousy talk like a crumbling hot dog bun so you can hardly understand them.

But I've got a theory about it. I think the old queens came after me because I was brand new to the bar scene and they could sense it. They probably thought in their drunken stupors, "Maybe I can get this kid while he still doesn't know how putrid I am." After I got used to The Other Way and the people there got used to seeing me, those old fags never came up to me anymore.

That's where I first met Frank, to change the subject back to my favorite subject, good frank Frank. One night Scottie and I were at The Other Way and Scottie stopped at Frank's table and did one of his "darling" lines, "Darling-it's-been-so-long,-where-have-you-been-hiding,-in-the-dark-dark-closet?"

I can remember not liking Frank at first. First of all, he was with this chick, and that put me off immediately. A lot of straights come into The Other Way because they get off on watching the gays and it's a flashy place to dance without spending much money. And that's what I figured Frank and his girl were doing, and my territorial instincts got put on end right off.

Besides, if I had been honest with myself at the time, I'd have acknowledged to myself that there was something about Frank that tickled me below the belt at first glance. Probably an aura of masculinity which thank god he has. His hair was not too long and not too short, no fashion statement, not done, and not in any way self-conscious. His clothes didn't show himself off. He was just him.

Pop-psyching my own self, doc, maybe I'll admit that what he did to my subconscious was to stir up guilt feelings for being just doggone downright attracted to him, and so I found myself holding onto Scottie like we were allies against Frank. It didn't help matters that this girl who was with Frank was so good looking too. They set each other off like two bright diamonds in the same setting. I guess now I can say that under my pretended disdain I was jealous. She made him seem so unattainable, and if there's anything that makes me want to attain something, that's it.

But it wasn't until Scottie said to her, "Johnette, honey, where DID you get that divine fall?" that I realized this was no girl at all, but a guy in drag. I about dropped my rocks. Most of the drag queens hang out in the city in places like The Glass Slipper and The Carousel, so I hadn't seen many of them before, and the few queens who had come into The Other Way simply did not have themselves together like Johnette. Their wigs always looked like they they'd been ripped off the dummies in Penney's and they always had tacky rhinestone tiaras with matching earrings dangling to their navels. Their makeup always looked pasty and never completely hid the mustaches and beards underneath. They were always too slim in the hips and too thick in the waist and their wrists were too bony.

But Johnette could have gone on the silver screen and driven the Lakers and the Rams into the showers. She ... I call her “she” because “he” is definitely the wrong word for her ... was soft and voluptuous and her face was sensational. Maybe her jawline was just a shade too square, but that turns out to look good in a woman.

I looked again at her plunging neckline and wondered how she managed to get that cleavage. Well, I guess hormones, but she also must have been wearing some kind of underwear that pushed her chest up and out or she must have taped them together or something. I couldn't figure it out, and as often as I've talked to her since then, I've always been too embarrassed to ask her how she does it. So the mystery remains unsolved.

But that night, I wasn't really in a mood to pay very much attention to Johnette. I'd been down all night because Scottie had been relentlessly doing his act, flirting with every creep in the place and going off to dance with absolutely any thing. And he was drinking too much, which was only too obvious when he went to introduce me to Johnette and Frank.

He turned to me and said, “Johnny, this is Frankie. Oh, listen to that, Frankie and Johnny. You're right out of that old song. I always knew it was queer.

Frankie and Johnny were lovers,
Oh, Lordy how they did love!”

Scottie's a good singer, and he likes to do it loud so that everyone will hear. I could feel myself getting hot. I don't know why it should have bothered me so much. I should have been used to it by this time, Scottie doing his act. He had been a big drama star on campus and never could really get off the stage. You'd think that he'd have stopped singing after making his point, but not Scottie. He went right on, and when the people at the tables near us shut up to listen, he played it to the hilt.

“They swore to be true to each other
As true as the stars above,
Oh, he was his man,
But he was doing him wrong.”

He pointed out the last of the song so everybody would know just which man was whose man and who was doing who wrong. I could have knocked him onto the floor.

“And, Johnny, the duchess here is Johnette,” he said and pointed a crooked finger in her direction, “Another coincidence!

Frankie and Johnette were lovers!

Are you?” he asked, leaning over the table to Frank and actually leering at him.

Johnette laughed softly and said, “I only wish.”

Just then one of Scottie’s best numbers started playing and he whisked Johnette out of her chair and they were out on the dance floor whirling like dervishes, leaving me standing at Frank’s table. So I sat down, which was all I could think of to do, and burned.

Poor Frank didn’t know what to do with me and for a while there wasn’t any conversation at all, just some finger tapping on the table and a lot of looking around. Finally he started asking me questions, but when he found out I was still in high school, he shut up. And why did I ever tell him that anyway? What a dope! But I did. I don’t even remember how it came out.

“What’s the matter,” I said when I could see him going all silent on me. “I’m too young to be worth talking to?”

I didn’t care how rude I was. He was getting to me in a bad way, all that masculinity just sitting there, and me comparing him to Scottie which I knew that I shouldn’t even be doing in the first place.

“No, of course not,” Frank said and actually smiled. He could actually smile into the face of this little snit in front of him. See, that’s what I mean about what a great guy he is. “I was just thinking to myself that you look older than that. And act it, too,” he said far too generously.

I even snorted, knowing that I was acting much more like a kid than I wanted to act. “How would you know how I act?” I snapped, and that did shut him up.

I jerked my head back to the dance floor and laid my eyes on Scottie, preening with Johnette, and I pretended to myself that the reason I was so irritated was that Scottie and Johnette were making fools of themselves, when in fact they were getting a lot of adoring and jealous stares from the other dancers. They were like royalty out there. When they went into the next dance, and then the next, utterly faultless in every move, I couldn’t take it any more.

“Look at those two screaming queens and all those stupid faggots who have nothing better to do than to come here and watch them. What are they trying to prove?”

Frank glanced over at me with this look of surprise and after a second or two said, “They’re just having fun. And anyway, all of us are trying to prove something, Johnny. You can’t hold that against them.”

“Oh, yeah?” I said. I was warming up to a good old fashioned fight with this man. I was hot for it. “Well, then, what are YOU trying to prove? What was the name again, Frankie, right? What are you trying to prove, Frankie, with all your purring and goody goody bull pockey?”

I don’t know what kind of answer I expected from him, probably nothing at all. A quick click of the teeth or a sudden deep breath, or maybe a fist in the face. I can’t account now

for how I could be so obnoxious and I wonder why poor Frank had anything at all to do with me that night. He just looked at me kind of casually and kept purring, “You don’t know me well enough to ask me that. Maybe some day you’ll want to ask again and maybe I’ll want to tell you. Not tonight.”

“Well, don’t hold your bad breath,” I said and took a big drink. I looked back out toward the dance floor but wasn’t any longer seeing anything or registering anything at all. I had surprised even myself with that last one.

Frank sat quietly for a few seconds and I could see out of the corner of my eye that he was actually watching me closely but out of the corner of his eye, too. I was wondering what he was thinking. He was probably wondering what I was thinking, what really I was thinking.

Finally he said, “Are you and Scottie lovers?”

“Yeah. I guess that’s what you would have to call us. I don’t like it, but it’s one word for what we are.”

“He’s a little drunk tonight,” he said. “I wouldn’t worry about it so much if I were you. I’m quite sure he doesn’t have any designs on Johnette.”

It was my turn to look at him while he pretended to look out at Scottie and Johnette. Then he added almost to himself, “I can’t feature the two of THEM making it together, can you?” and his lips twitched.

I went into hysterics and had to spit my drink back into my glass. The mental image of Scottie and Johnette in the same bed together was too preposterous. They would spend the whole night admiring each other’s underwear and ankle bracelets. I choked around for a few minutes over that and when I looked up, I saw that Frank must have been conjuring the same

image because his face was red and he was fighting for air, too. When I got my breath back, I said to him, “But she’s not YOUR lover, is she?”

He shook his head. Then he added, “She only wishes.”

That broke us up again.

“No,” he said after he got his breath back and had taken another sip of his drink, “I like men.” He didn’t look at me when he said it, and I wondered for a hot moment what he thought of me.

“What’s with her anyway?” I asked. “I mean, what’s SHE trying to prove?”

Frank thought about it a couple of seconds and then said, “You’re new to all of this, aren’t you?” and he gestured vaguely around the bar.

I wanted to say something, maybe to defend myself for being young or naive or whatever I was, but I couldn’t figure out what, so I just nodded.

“Well, we’ve all got to get through it somehow,” he said, and he gave the same sort of vague gesture again, as though to say, “All of this.” But I somehow got the idea that he was talking about something much bigger than the room we were in, and the people in the room. “And there are various ways to go about it. It’s all very complicated, of course, and nobody’s really alike, though sometimes you think you’ll go crazy because everybody acts so much alike. She’s just built that way. That’s how she was born. Inside she wants to be a woman, but outside she’s a man. She thinks like a woman and she really should be a woman. She’s saving her money for an operation.”

Call me naive, but I never imagined something like that before. Being gay, that’s one thing, and a total brain-warp, but this was entirely different. I looked out onto the dance floor

again. Next to Scottie's hard, angular body, her body had the soft curves of a woman and her small breasts were moving under the material of her dress like the real thing.

"That's the thing about Johnette that I respect so much," Frank went on. "She knows what she wants and she's not afraid to go after it, no matter what kind of opposition she faces. That's a big important commitment she's set to make, a whole life's worth, and there's no going back on it afterwards. All her money goes towards changing her life. And that's what she's trying to prove, I guess, the way you put it, Johnny, that no matter what people say about her or think about her, she's got this duty to herself to do what she feels is right for her. Even God messed up that lady when He made her, if there even is a God. But she doesn't let that stop her. She's the only one who can really tell what she's like on the inside and she trusts what she feels."

The dance ended and everybody started moving back to their tables. Scottie did an embrace number on Johnette, watching out of the corners of his eyes to see if everybody was catching it, and then the two of them finally started coming back towards us.

"And that's how Johnette is different from ... from so many of the people who come to The Other Way and the rest of the bars. She's real and they're pretending. They live one way all day in the world of daylight and then at night they come out like some pale-eyed creatures and live the other way. And they do it as if the daylight is never coming again, so that when it does come, they're still not prepared for it."

Scottie came up and threw himself into a chair and said, "Prepared for what? Who?"

Frank laughed in an offhand way and said, "Oh, the world. People."

That was the start of the big love affair, I guess, though I didn't know it at the time. I mean, I knew I liked Frank a lot, well, a lot more than at first. Not only because of that immediate groin appeal, but because of his figuring out Johnette so clearly, so cleanly. It's easy for gays to make fun of and look down on transsexuals because they're so far out and not a part of us at all. Frank worked it out about Johnette for himself, and it sounded like real talk to me, not all that other stuff I was so sick of hearing.

Still I didn't have any idea then where Frank and I were headed together. I can remember how pleased I was when I saw him again the next weekend at The Other Way. And he seemed pleased to see me too. I didn't mind so much when Scottie went off and danced with anyone and everyone, because Frank was so good to talk to and had so many interesting things to talk about. Most people Scottie dumped me on while he went out starrng on the dance floor couldn't get out a sentence on anything but clothes and fashions. But Frank found out that I loved movies and books and we always had things to talk about then. I kept learning from him, more and more, a lot, and I started to love it.

He seemed to turn up at just about all the parties Scottie and I went to. One time I said to him, "Why didn't I used to see you? Have you been at the bars and parties and I just missed you?"

"No" he said. "I've only just started coming to them again recently. They always bored me so much. Not my style."

"Well, why do you come now?"

He looked away and shrugged. “Oh I don’t know.” I should have started figuring out by this time that when he talked without looking at me I should pay attention to what he was NOT saying, but I didn’t know anything in those days.

Scottie was always saying, “Frank called today. He wanted to know what we’re doing tonight. I told him that unless something better came up we’d probably end up at The Other Way, and he said he’d probably see us there then.”

Which used to make me incredibly jealous. Frank always spent his time with ME while Scottie spent his time running around making his little show-and-tell contacts, but he would always phone Scottie to find out what was happening. I was just too dumb to see what it all meant.

Frank was always concerned with how things were going between Scottie and me, and I always had plenty of complaints, believe me. But Frank never said a word against Scottie. In fact, Frank would take up for Scottie, offering explanations and excuses for him. I never saw a person waste so many opportunities to reach out and take what he was after, especially when it was so ready to be taken.

And finally there was that Sunday I told you about on the lake in the canoe. There wasn’t any blinking away that sudden awakening. Oh, yes, let me say the dreadful sentence, I was in love.

You’d think after that I would have started to do something about me and Scottie. But it was so tough. Scottie had become dependent on me, in a way. We went out together several times a week and always spent our weekends together, when we weren’t fighting. I don’t know what my parents must have thought about it all. Parents are pretty blind most times, I

think. They thought Scottie was just the young man of the century, really going places in life, and as long as I was keeping up my grades, they just didn't appear to give it a second thought.

But Scottie and I were anything but happy together. It was the kind of thing that just kept going on simply because it had been going on for so long. Everybody called us a couple and asked us places together. And although Scottie never paid very much attention to me when we were at The Other Way or at any of the parties, he always came back to me and sort of clung to me, like I was a base in sanity and soberness or some sort of oxygen outlet where he could come and gulp down some breaths of air before diving back in.

One night, and I'll never forget this night as long as I live, I finally knew that I had to break it off. We were at a party at this rich guy's house over in Stoneford. It was a beautiful night and a gorgeous place with secluded spots in all the yards, trees and bushes all around, and the moon was full and giving everything it had, putting a silver shine on everything in sight. Scottie had been as ugly as hell all night and was getting drunker by the minute. Finally Frank and I went outside for some fresh air away from all that smoke and lousy breath and we started walking through the trees, just enjoying being alone together out in the quiet in so much beauty.

I started it up. I said, "One time you told me that everybody is trying to prove something. What's Scottie trying to prove, do you think? No, wait a minute. First tell me what you think I'M trying to prove, and then Scottie."

There were a few seconds of silence and then he said, "Maybe that's one of the reasons I like you so much. You don't make it that easy. I don't think I know yet what you're trying to prove."

“Okay,” I said. “I don’t know either. I’m just too deep, you know?” I laughed and was surprised when he didn’t. “But okay, then, what about Scottie?”

“Oh, Scottie,” Frank laughed, and it was soft and, maybe, a little sad. “Scottie just has to prove to himself that he’s loved by everybody.”

“No,” he said, “that’s not quite right.” He pulled at a small piece of bark that was loose and peeling off a tree and held it up to the moonlight as though trying to see it better. Then he dropped it, looked at me, and then started trying to peel away more loose bark. “He wants to prove to himself that he’s loved by SOMEbody, by somebody very special.”

“No,” I said, “you were right the first time. By ANYbody. By anybody at all. Love is cheap to Scottie because it comes to him so easily with all his good looks and glamor.”

“Do you really believe that?”

“I think I know it.”

“Does that hurt you, Johnny?” he asked and put his hand on my shoulder.

What was between us was this second of silence, but I can still feel the tension of it like the second before the burning fuse reaches the bomb.

You know, doc, you’re not going to like this. I mean, you’re not going to understand it at all and you’re going to get real put off by it. I can remember one time before I was out, reading this porn book which had both hetero and homo stories in it, and I can remember that all the sex was fine in it no matter who was doing what to who, but then all of a sudden these two guys were kissing and I can remember thinking, “Yeccccch!”

I don't understand it now, but I can very well remember that the two guys had already done everything you could imagine in your best dreams to each other, and it was just great great great literature. But then the second they kissed, "Yeccccch!"

Of course, it's different for me now. The first time I ever kissed a guy it was Scottie and although there was just a second before it happened when I was scared, I never thought about it again after we once kissed. It was natural for me after that, and wow, such a great thing to do.

But you know, I have to confess that I still get that same turning over of the stomach when I see two women kissing. That yecch feeling. I mean, in my head I can say, "Fine, great, nothing wrong with it, you of all people, John, should understand." But still, a little yecch. I guess it's conditioning, everything you're used to accepting from the time you get sluiced into the world.

But just let me ask you to try, doc. That's all. Try to imagine. Here's Frank and me, you know, in all that cold moonlight and shadows from the trees, all alone in all that quiet and beauty, and I'm about ready to bust into sobs anyway because we've been talking about Scottie and all that heavy heavy heavy junk, and Frank is standing there right in front of me with first one warm hand on my shoulder, then the other warm hand on my other shoulder, and he turns me to face right into him, and there's nothing for my arms to do except go right around him, and his eyes are right there staring into mine and what are we going to do but kiss? It's like a magnet and a needle, you know, those lips of his, and mine? Frank was the one to lean in, he was the one to put his lips against my lips, so soft, and his beard scraping my cheek on the way, and for that

moment I kind of just leaned into him and crumpled against him and wilted into his arms, and I had to hold on for real now because those knees didn't have anything but buckling left in them.

See... see... here's the thing. With Scottie, kissing was pretty much always when we were making love, and it was always very passionate, but it was never very ... intimate ... or personal. This kiss with Frank was a whole new thing. I was struck down. He had touched me somewhere way deep inside of me, and it hurt. My heart hurt. It was in there pounding away like crazy, and it hurt.

Doc, I started to cry. I put my head into his chest and I started to cry. And I never cry.

Poor Frank. He misread the whole thing. He thought I was crying about Scottie, I guess, or that I didn't like the kiss of something, when I was doing all I could do just to stand there against him and cry. He caressed my neck and rubbed my head and scratched through my hair and said again and again, "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Don't cry."

"No," I kept trying to say. And I think I did say no, again and again, each time he would say "I'm sorry," which I guess made him say it again and again, too. I was strangling over the tears and the humiliation of being such a kid in front of him, him of all people, and making him think the wrong thing and be sorry about it when I was so glad and grateful. I made a huge effort and pushed against him to stand on my own and I was able to see him again in front of me, so close, the moonlight bouncing off his hair. He's not really blond, but in that moonlight, he looked blond, and so lovely all miserable the way he was looking, that he just hurt my heart all the more.

"No, I love you, Frank. I love you so much. No. No."

There's a title on some book in Frank's bookcase which I haven't read yet, The Agony and the Ecstasy and that's exactly what it was, exactly, both of those things in equal amounts just tearing up my insides. I wonder, doc, does everyone who falls in love have that kind of experience? Where does that come from, all that agony and all that ecstasy just ripping through your body and your mind?

It is the single moment in my life, I am very sure, that will get me through all of this damned life, all the sewage that I am having to endure right now, and all the sewage that's lying out there like a big tidal wave coming down on my little boat. It is this single moment and the memory of it that will get me through. It was the whole world inside my being, all in a moment. And Frank, Frank, so beautiful, right there in front of me.

I should tear this up, doc. But I can't. It's for Frank.

djt: 6/5/79 — 7:45 a.m.

Make photocopies of the pages on the fight on the roof and file them in the Cole, Standing, Rivers, Washington and Rashid files.

Sunday, June 10

Hi, doc,

I had a real big day today, so if you don't mind I'm going to start this letter today and turn it in tomorrow. Then if something comes up in Group that I want to write about, I'll just write another letter. But this is okay for you. You don't lose anything. You just gain a second letter, maybe.

I had a visitor today, and it wasn't just Claudia either. You should have seen her, a real knockout! She drove all the guys crazy in the visiting room. Big laugh — it was Johnette. She just got back in town and one of the reasons she was looking like such a million is that she had had her operation, and it glowed out of her face like a rebirth. No joke. I asked her what she did with the remains and she said, "Why? You want it?"

She told me Frank's in jail. I knew it. When you told me he was going to be standing trial, I knew in my gut he wouldn't get off. I guess it's better for me to know for sure than to lie all night wondering, but it hurts so much to think of him locked up like that, with all those murderers and thugs. I'm sorry Johnette told me. I told her not to tell me anything more about that. I couldn't stand that, not any more of it.

Oh, but she did tell me she had moved into Frank's apartment. He had asked her to and if she would take care of his things for him until he gets out. It's weird thinking of the apartment without him in it. Johnette's a good friend.

You know what else she told me? She said Frank came to see me when I first got locked up, before he was indicted, and the pigs wouldn't let him in. Did you know about this? It was probably Bandy's idea and he got Johnson and Taylor and the rest to go along with it. You

go half-crazy with wanting someone, with needing to know how he's making it, and those bastards keep him away from you and call it protection. Sadistic sons of bitches!

Johnette said that Scottie tried to come to see me too, but they wouldn't let him in either. I guess they're screening all the guys away from me. As Johnette says, "Ain't it a kick in the panties that they let ME in?"

She said Scottie told her to say he was sorry about what he had done. Evidently he was the one who set the whole thing going by tipping off the whole world about me in some anonymous letters and telephone calls. Frank and I had that figured out already. Scottie had gone into hysterics when I told him it was all over between us. First he got down on his knees, I swear it, and begged me not to leave him alone. It was awful. He said he'd pay more attention to me and I said that I didn't care about any of it. He said he loved me and needed me, and I told him he didn't but just thought he did because he couldn't have me anymore. When he found out I was in love with Frank, he went crazy. He called Frank all sorts of things and then called me the same things and said he'd kill us. Then he said he'd kill himself and went into the kitchen and got a knife. He was making such a fool of himself, it was all too horrible to watch, so I left. Besides he wasn't listening to me anyway, so why should I hang around to see all that lousy drama. Needless to say he did not use the knife on himself.

Later he got on the wire and started dropping lugs about me and Frank to anyone who would listen. Johnette said today that Scottie said to tell me that if he had known ahead of time what was going to happen, he'd have killed himself before doing what he did. My reaction to Johnette, "It's never too late."

I'm just as glad the pigs didn't let Scottie in to see me, but I'll tell you right now, doc, if I ever find out that you had anything to do with screening my visitors, I'll make you sorry for it. If you even knew about it ... never mind. I'd better not find out, that's all.

Now they've got Frank up at Carlton in a two year sentence. You know what for? Contributing to the Delinquency of a Minor (there's that unimportant person failing to submit to his superiors again, only this time getting a little help from a well-meaning, sympathetic adult), and Possession! Frank might have had a teaspoon of weed, maybe, he never smoked it and so it would have been left over from someone else.

Johnette says they wanted to get him for Statutory Rape, but they didn't have any evidence on that charge that they could make stick in court. It seems my parents wouldn't testify against him in a rape trial, you know, sodomy and all that with their darling little boy who now hates them. The most they would testify to was that Frank had encouraged me to run away and the pigs found grass in the house, or more likely they planted it, and that was all the jury needed.

They didn't even call me to testify. Can you imagine? How much of an unimportant person can they think I am? I'm not only not consulted about my own future but about Frank's, too. Well, I suppose it was good for Frank that they didn't call me because I probably would have given them an earful.

Anyway, it was great seeing Johnette again, and although you couldn't call it good news, I guess it's better than the worst they could have done to us. Two years in prison. Poor Frank. What'll happen to him in there? What's he going to be like when he gets out? I've heard the stories. He's in there with the big boys and what they play isn't touch football. There's always a knifing or a rape.

There's a big laugh for you. I'm thinking about Frank up there getting raped, and did Bandy get the rumor to you that I was raped last week? Well, in case you're wondering, it's no rumor. It's the real thing.

Does that surprise you? Or doesn't it? Maybe women live so long with the threat of rape that to find out that a guy gets raped, it's just like tit for tat or something. Of course, it's different here from how it is in Carlton. These guys on me were just kids, and with them it was over before I could even figure out what was happening. Well, not really. But it's not what it would be like in Carlton, you can bet.

These four trolls, and don't even think about asking me their names, doc, because that's my business, not yours. They came into that empty class at the far end of the East Corridor where Roger and I were working. Of course, we're not supposed to be down there unsupervised, but it's easy as hell to slip away from the pigs and get into the classroom. They don't give a damn, except for Bandy, of course, who's got to know what everybody's doing all the time. But Bandy wasn't there this day, only Johnson and McCarthy, and in fact, if the truth was out, I'll bet old Ronson Johnson sent those four after me. He hasn't liked me from the start because I refuse to hang on his leg like the other guys do. He's just perverted enough to send them after me and then watch it all through the door window.

Roger had just gotten out of the bucket for the fight on the roof and we were real glad to see each other and we had a lot to talk about. Well, not talk, naturally, but write notes back and forth. He's a good writer. He's told me his whole life story in those notes, what there is of it. He never knew who his parents were. He guesses that after they found out they'd given

birth to this deaf mutant monster, they just dumped him. His records just say he was found in an empty apartment, beaten up. Some parents, huh? I told him he was better off without them.

No foster martyrs would take him because there were always plenty better kids to be had. No one's that masochistic. So he stayed in one institution after another. But he was always getting into fights and he never knew why. He says he doesn't think he was ever the one to start the fights, and he sure never won any because he didn't know how to hit back, although with that kind of experience, you can bet that I would have learned, fast. Worse than the beatings he took in the fights, he always caught the blame because he could never take up for himself while the other kid or kids would be blabbing a mile a minute.

So finally the "ungovernable" word got assigned to him and he was sent here where he still gets the crap beat out of him, and he still has to take the rap. Poor guy. He says he doesn't belong anywhere, and I guess he's just about right. He sure doesn't belong in here, but this is the last stop for him, and if he can't make it here, there's nowhere left for him to go. If I could get out and get a place of my own, he could come and stay with me, but even if that was possible, old Roger's probably too far gone already. He blames himself, I think, and that's the beginning of the end. I think he's starting to believe that somehow he does start all those fights. I try to get him to understand, you know, by writing notes to him, but the kid is born to lose.

Anyway, the big rape. These four lames came in and grabbed us, but Roger got away and they let him go. They probably figured that The Dummy couldn't rouse Johnson and McCarthy off their asses anyway, and I guess they were after "The Stuff" which is what they call me. Or "The Snake" but never "The Punk" or "The Squeeze" though, because that's reserved for the princesses down in Protective Custody, and they know I'm nobody's punk. I'm too big for

that and too butch, which is maybe the attraction. I'm used to the names they call me and the way they hiss at me when I pass them in the halls. I follow the program, but believe me, there are a couple of snake charmers among them and wouldn't they just love me to go for them. Since I kicked Neal's ass, they don't dare make any passes at me. They just hiss and write my name in every john in High Broder and whisper to the others what they would like to do to me.

These four in the classroom backed me into the corner and closed in. I fought for a while, but when I saw what they were after and that they weren't pulling any knives to cut me, I decided it would be easier on me if I just held still. I'd only have hurt myself by fighting. They took turns at me with three of them holding me down. It wasn't the most pleasant thing I've ever had happen to me, but they used a lot of spit so as not to tear up their dicks, and so the lubrication helped, and it wasn't as bad as I've imagined it would be. They were kids, that's all, and didn't even know what the hell they were doing. They had all been without it for so long that they got off real quick. One of them couldn't even wait for his turn but shot his wad before even getting on me.

I mean, yes, doc, okay, it was physically the worst thing I've ever had to go through, and I'll die before I ever go through it again. I've never experienced pain like it before. I've never had my hand cut off or matches lit under my toenails or glass sewn up in my legs or anything like that. But mentally, baby, mentally this rape wasn't a drop in the ocean compared to what my dear parents have put me through. I won't give those trolls the satisfaction.

I've got a shock-absorber system like a Rolls Royce. That's what Frank used to tell me all the time, and I know it's true. It's like I can turn myself numb or something. I just closed

my eyes during the whole thing and gave them my butt to make it as easy as possible. I started trying to name the presidents of the United States.

I don't know how long it lasted. I know I got stuck around Rutherford B. Hayes and couldn't keep my mind on it any longer. I don't even have any idea what Rutherford B. Hayes was like as President, and I kept thinking to myself, "Rutherford B. Hayes? Rutherford B. Hayes? Is that even a name? Was he even a President?" It couldn't have lasted more than ten or fifteen minutes because I remember giving up on Presidents and started naming the states in alphabetical order, then gave that up and started naming them in geographical order beginning on the West Coast but wasn't far into that when the trolls got off me and ran off and left me alone. I went over to the sink in the classroom and puked out my guts. The worst part was their smell. It was still all over me. And it stayed in my nose all day and the next and the next.

And like I say, don't even think about trying to get their names out of me. I don't trust you that far. Not that far. Bandy questioned me about it the next day, "a full interrogation" because somebody had dropped a couple of dimes at the Desk and word got back to him, but I pretended I didn't know what he was talking about. And I'm only telling you this much because I think you might be interested, not because I want you to punish the four who did it. If I got a rep as a snitch in High Broder I'd never live to get out. They'd come after me with their homemade furniture and make a pin cushion out of me, and I've got no one in here to watch my back.

I'll take care of those guys myself and in my own way. And anyhow, when you think about it, those guys are not any more responsible than all of the people who put those guys into a place like High Broder to begin with. I know one of those guys got put in here for sniffing glue and another guy for truancy. Truancy, for cripe's sake, as if school is such a great big

wonderful thing that everyone should just love to go to. And if you think those are uncommon first offenses for kids who wind up in High Broder, take a look at the records. Those are just the start toward “ungovernability.”

But yeah, I’ll get them myself so you don’t have to worry about punishment. They’re every one of them smaller than me, and I’ll get each of them alone and make their little rape look like a tea party.

I was still hanging over the sink watching my puke stopping up the drain when I heard someone come in. It was Roger, and he’d brought Jack Cole, the hulk. Roger came over to me and you know he’s got those big spaniel eyes and they were about twice as big as usual. Cole stood in the doorway and took a careful look around the room.

“What took you so long?” I said to Roger, who I knew couldn’t understand, but it was for Cole’s benefit, I guess.

“What’s going on?” Cole said finally. “The Dummy couldn’t tell me. He just made me follow him.” I guess that was more words than I had ever heard Cole say. Better than “Out of the way, faggot,” which is all he had expressed to me previously. “He brought me here to watch you heave?”

“No,” I said. “There were some guys in here making a lot of noise and his ears couldn’t take it so he went and got his big bouncer to have them thrown out.”

“Funny guy, are you? I’m laughing.” He took another look at the chairs and desks that had been knocked over in the fight. “What did they do?”

“They were trying out a new furniture arrangement. They didn’t like it and left.”

I took a mouthful of water and swished it around in my mouth and then spit it out. Then I went over to where Roger and I had left our notes and wrote out, "I'm okay," and gave it to him.

"What's that? He can read?"

"And write, too. And he also does a very good job of blowing his nose."

"Look, faggot. I came in here because the Dummy looked like he was going to shit a brick if I didn't follow him. I came to help you."

"Look, nigger. You wouldn't have come if you'd known it was me. So now you know, go."

He just stood there looking at me until finally I couldn't take it any more and I gave a big sigh that he could hear then started cleaning out the sink. I heard my mother's voice like the little cartoon angel on the opposite shoulder of the little cartoon devil saying, "They're called Negroes, Johnny. Negroes." Then I heard the little devil answer her, "This one's a nigger, mother."

"You're sure you don't need any help?"

"I'm all right! Keep out of my kitchen until I give you a personal invitation."

He stayed there for a couple more minutes while I kept my head bent over the sink. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Roger look from me to him and back again.

Then Jack said, "I guess you and the Dummy are about the only two guys in this place who aren't afraid of me. I give you points for that. But don't ever call me nigger, because that makes YOU the nigger. You want to be a nigger? That's your business. But I've got a feeling you're better than that. You get in trouble again, you call me." And he walked out.

I didn't talk to him again until today. He was in the visiting room while I was with Johnette. He was down at the other end with some guy who looked even bigger and slyer than Jack is. I noticed that they both kept looking down to the end of the room where Johnette and I were sitting. Oh, did I tell you, doc, that Johnette is black? Well, so, you can guess what Cole and that other black guy were thinking, me with a mocha dish like Johnette all to myself.

Johnette noticed their looks, too. "Johnny honey, who ARE those two mountain men?"

I shrugged and said, "One of them is named Jack. I don't know the other one."

"Well, are those looks of lust aimed at you or at me?"

"Not me, that's for sure."

"Good," she said. "I don't mind queers, but I hate honky-lovers." She laughed like she'd said something funny.

"I don't get it," I said.

"Nothing, honey. We brothers just got to stick together, that's all."

This I couldn't break down. This was Johnette's first time acknowledging to me what I had known from the first, because Frank had told me, that she is black. She kept that a secret from me, and I guess from the world, passing for white but with a great, smooth tan, even though she was perfectly willing to let everyone know about her sexuality, being born a woman in a man's body. So I've been thinking about that, and I'm thinking now that it's because she knew that she was going to be changing her sex soon but she also knew that she could never change her race, that all she could ever do was pass.

But why does she want to pass? That's the big question for me still. Why does Johnette think it's so important to be thought of as white and to have white friends, especially now that she talks about honky-loving black guys, her brothers? See what I'm saying here?

Maybe because I AM white, pure white, and have never had to worry ever about being THOUGHT black and having to face a white-controlled world, I can't really see the problem. Black people, and by that I mean obviously black people, people who are dark in color and have Negroid features, had to go through those years and those stages of coming to R-E-S-P-E-C-T, as Aretha sang out loud to them, throwing around slogans like "Black Is Beautiful" because they had to get themselves to believe it first before all the white overlords would believe it.

So maybe if you CAN pass, you do pass. So I'm not holding it against Johnette now. She got her operation, and got rid of the thing that was making her feel so wrong, and whatever she does inside her head is okay with me, I guess. It's not anything I can think about with clarity, I guess. But this race thing has been going on for centuries, maybe since the beginning of time with tribes fighting for no real reason, like cats that can't stand being in the same house with each other, and Johnette's got to learn on her own to be as proud of her race as she is of her sex. Or maybe I should say as proud of her races as she is of her sexes, since she is such a combination of them. Just as she had both man and woman in the same body, she also has black and white in the same body. Seems to me she should be shouting it in the streets, proud of everything she is, not hiding it in the closet.

But what do I know about it? I'm just having to deal with the sexual persecution. I can't imagine dealing with racial persecution on top of it, although come to think of it, all these

black guys in here hate me just for being white in pretty much the same way as the straight guys hate me for being queer. I'm fighting it, though, on every front. Johnette is giving in on the racial front. Oh, well, that's for her to deal with, I guess.

As she held my hand, with Cole and his friend over there giving us both the eye but only knowing she was black but not knowing she used to be male, she gave my hand a little squeeze and I had this big rush of sympathy for her. She knew that Frank had told me about her being black but she was hiding it from whoever she could, and here she was now talking to me about it, or alluding to it, anyway. It was a kind of breakthrough for both of us. I squeezed her hand back, not knowing what to say.

She smiled, understanding, I think, and said, "Oh, my, they look even more mountain than man. They are an inspiration to my deepest darkest blood. It would almost be worth going to jail if you could find yourself flung up against one of those. Or both. Oh, my, yes."

I was glad to see that at least she was only hiding her race hang-up from the whites. I guess maybe blacks are more willing to accept blood mixing than whites, but again, what do I know? Anyway, Johnette wasn't holding herself back from these two black guys. She was making as many eyes at them as they were making at her, and they were eating it up. I laughed. "You'd better watch out. The bigger one is free to follow you."

"Is that so?" she said. "Well, in that case I think I'll go out their way." She picked up her purse and stood. "I'll come see you again real soon, Johnny. Now that I know the secret of getting into this charming residence, I'll have every queen in town in here to see you, in drag."

“Oh, god, please don’t!” I laughed and said goodbye and thanks for coming and watched her move out of the room, picking up all the eyes in the place like a magnet picks up screws.

“How’re you doing, boys?” she said over her shoulder to Jack and his visitor as she went out the door. The guy with Jack got up then and followed her out. Hey, that’s a kick for you. I wonder how that’s going to work out.

As I was coming up to my room right afterwards, Jack caught up with me and said, “That was some chicky came to visit you. Where does a guy like you come up with something like that?”

“Oh, you know the way those older women go for us sweet boys,” I answered and to my surprise we both laughed. “Who was your visitor?” I asked.

“Oh, my brother. Big deal. He comes in every week with the same old story, ‘Why don’t you let mom and dad come and see you? They want to talk to you and you’re breaking their hearts.’ Breaking their hearts! I’d like to take their hearts and wrap them up with barbed wire strung to an anchor and drop them in the deepest part of the Arctic Ocean.”

“Jesus! What did they do to you?”

“Oh, nothing I guess.” He laughed a bitter laugh. “But they never did anything for me either. The old lady gave me birth and still complains to this day what a pain in her ass I was, and the old man never says anything except about how much of his food I eat and never do anything to repay him, not even say thanks. I got this kind of shit off them all my life until finally one night when I was fifteen they were on me so bad I couldn’t take it any more and went down to the liquor store on the corner and broke the window with a garbage can off the street and went

in with all the alarms blaring and broke open the cash register and took the money. There wasn't much of course because at night they only leave enough in it to open the store in the morning and put the rest in the safe. But I really wasn't after the money anyway. I took it all and went back up to the hole where my parents had a framed sign saying 'Home Sweet Home' and I dumped it on the table and said, 'Here's the first installment of what I owe you.' Then I went back down to the street where all these people were standing around looking through the broken window into the empty store where the alarm was still ringing and these police cars came screaming up with their sirens going and the red lights on top whipping around and around, and everyone was yelling and the police were trying to figure out what the hell was happening. I went over to the drug store kitty corner to the liquor store and picked up this other garbage can and heaved it through the drug store window and climbed in and was going for the cash register in there when the pigs caught up with me with their guns out and saying all the TV shit that pigs say, 'On the floor! Arms behind your back' all that shit, and I did it because they'll shoot you if you're black, and hell, I was guilty."

I said, "Why did you do that with the cops right there? You wanted to get caught?"

He said, "Sure. I guess. While they were putting me in the car, you know pushing my head down just like on TV, I could hear this voice saying, 'It's Jack! It's Jack!' It was my mother with my father standing there next to her. 'The rest of what I owe you is in that cash register in there. Go get it,' I yelled at them. They just looked dumb."

I said, "And you've been in here ever since?"

He grunted. "It's been a hell of a lot happier in here than it ever was out there. I mean, hell, you can get out of here and run any time you want. They'll get you again, but if it's

the outside you want, you can get it easy enough, at least for a little while. But I don't want it. And you keep coming up in front of the Big Brother parole board and if you kiss their asses soft enough they put you out on parole. They love that. It makes them feel like real people. But it's been good for me in here. I don't have my stupid mom and dad on my case all the time, and I eat as much as I want without having to say thanks to any mother-fucker. It's not the best food in the world, and not the best company to keep. But it's better than anything I ever got at home. So I always tell the parole board to pack it up their asses sideways, and it's so funny watching them turn purple."

I said, "Well, yeah, but what's going to happen to you when you come of age? They won't let you stay in High Broder."

He said, "No, that's why I've been playing it cool in here this year. This year is different. I just had my eighteenth birthday three months ago, and that's what I've been waiting for. I come up for parole again in a couple of weeks, and now I'll play it sweet for them, and they'll see that I haven't made the kind of trouble I used to make, because I'm 'maturing' and they'll put me out on parole, see, and now my brother's got his own apartment and he'll say he's responsible for me, and I'll get a job and play the parole officer along, and I'll never have to see my mom and dad ever again, and I'll get out of this damn city."

"Where will you go?"

"Hell, anywhere's better than where you are."

"You haven't seen your mom and dad since you've been in here?"

He laughed. "They're scared to come in here. Scared I'll throw THEM through the window probably, which I think I probably would. My brother comes. He's okay. He goes to

them and tells them I'm okay. They tell him to tell me that they wish I would say I was wrong and come home to them, but they don't care. They pretend. They can send those messages easy, but it's just them pretending, and he knows it and I know it, and they know it. They've got it easy now that I'm gone and my brother's got his own place. They can sit back and yell at each other. They like it that way."

He laughed and looked at me. So I laughed too. It was kind of uncomfortable.

"Catch you later," he said and walked down the hall to his room. When he got to the door he turned and called back down the hallway to me, "Hey, Baron. You're okay. They put a brand on you and you wear it like a medal."

"Pack it up sideways," I called back to him and laughed. But it wasn't a real laugh. I didn't feel much like laughing. Where do you find people who are going to do more than just pretend? I mean, as lives go, I've certainly had a better one than Jack. Easier anyway, lots easier. With love. Yeah, I'll call it love, what my parents feel for me. Certainly love with Frank, all good love with Frank. But here we are, Jack and me, both ended up in the same place and when it comes down to it, we're here for the same reason, for our parents' pretense. They would love for me to say that I've been all wrong and come back to them, but that's just their pretense, too. I wonder if one of these Sundays I'll hear I have a visitor and come down and see Larry telling me about Mom's and Dad's broken hearts and asking me won't I ask them to take me home.

Look at me, doc. I'm growing this shell around me and I'm rotting away inside that shell. I'm like Jack Cole.

I'm like Jack Cole. "Anywhere's better than where you are."

I don't want to be like Jack Cole, hard and coarse with mean eyes, or like Roger either, afraid of everything. I don't know. It seems like you start to lose control over your choices. They put you in a place like this where you've got no choices, and you forget what a choice even is. I was out there with Frank, moving along in life in love and peace and harmony, and smash. In here I can't even look into a mirror anymore. Even these stupid steel plates, all dirty and smeared up and warped, that guy in these mirrors with those monster eyes. Eyes like Jack Cole. Sometimes eyes like Roger.

Yeah, doc, I could use some help. KupKake's good, but he just listens. I could use some real help, the kind you're supposed to give.

There, you like it that I say that, don't you? Okay. I've said it. I'd like some choices again. Frank used to say something. I don't think I quite understood it. It was about us, about gay people, and about him and me, us. He would say, "Don't let them be the one to make your choices for you." He was talking about straight people, the people in our society, the people he knew how to fight, he knew it inside himself, and he was trying to teach it to me. "If you let them give you your choices, they'll give you only two: this or the other. Like all these gay guys in The Other Way. But you don't have to take that choice. You can make your own choices."

I believed him. Well, he always knew so much. He always knew what he was talking about. But he didn't know then what we both know now. How choices can be taken away from you. How easy it is for that to happen. Doc, I want to make my own choices again, and no amount of handholding by Kupkake is going to make that happen. What can YOU do for me, doc?

Hell, I don't know anything anymore, doc. But this was a big day today. Yep.

djt, 6/11/79 — 7:20 p.m. (File in Verso.)

1. Call Baron to office for questioning about the rape.
2. Make appointment to see the Superintendent.
3. Make photocopies of the pages dealing with Jack Cole and put them in the Cole file.

Tuesday, June 12

Dear Diary,

Today the pshrink changed her habits. Usually she doesn't see me until the next Monday, just like a little machine. But because she cares so much about some little body here, she called me to her office on a Tuesday after a Monday. And all because of you, dear Diary, because of what I wrote in you. How does that make you feel?

You see, after reading you last night, the pshrink just couldn't wait for a whole long week to go by, so she made a special and very definite appointment to see me and she said in a very low, very grave voice that she wanted the names of the four young men what raped me, and she didn't mean maybe, even though I most particularly told her that I would not disclose those names. Now, Diary, if the pshrink is going to use you as a C.I.A. document to find bad boys to punish, I'm just going to have to stop writing in you, because that's dirty and stinking and because she promised me and now wants to break her promise.

The pshrink calls that "helping me" but doesn't the pshrink know that I could get cut up real bad if the word got out that I was a snitch? Didn't you just get through telling her that?

djt: 6/12/79 — 2:20 p.m. (File in Verso.)

Cancel the meeting tomorrow with the Superintendent.

Wear jeans and a shirt tomorrow.

Wednesday, June 13

Dear Diary,

Today the pshrink really changed her habits. She actually came to the fourth floor right to my room and inside, and this was on a Wednesday after a Tuesday after a Monday, and she never comes to the fourth floor on a Wednesday. She was very contrite and full of concern that I should think that she was trying to betray me when in fact she was only trying to PROTECT ME!

But the pshrink is not so bad as she sometimes seems. She is beginning to understand, and that is a very important thing in one so grownup. Don't you think so, dear Diary?

Thanks, doc, for the apology. But don't do any protecting either, okay? It's the step just before betraying, and one step always seems to follow the other. I don't want to write any more today. It's oppressive in here. Outside it's raining, one of those summer rains I'd like to be running around in. I'm going to go up to the roof and run around and catch some drops.

Say, doc, when am I going to get my papers returned to me anyway, all corrected and marked with a big red Q? I'd love to read some of this hot time literature I've been putting out.

djt: 6/13/79 — 5:30 p.m.

Make photocopies of all Baron's letters except the two to Parker and give them to him.

Monday night

No letter tonight, doc. I don't feel like it.

djt 6/19/79 — 4:00 pm

John Baron did come to session yesterday, but he did not give me his usual letter today. I did not reprimand him, hoping that next week will find him in a more communicative mood.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEES: Rev. and Ms. Baron

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: June 22, 1979

Rev. Lawrence Baron called me yesterday afternoon to say that he and his wife would like to talk with me. He was still determined not to come to High Broder but said he would gladly receive me in his house. We made the appointment for 10:00 this morning.

I arrived at the Baron household and was met by Delores Baron who showed me into the living room but who disappeared soon afterwards into the kitchen to make and serve us coffee and rolls. She contributed little to the conversation. Rev. Baron did most of the talking, which was very little more than his wife's contribution. After repeated attempts on my part to draw them out and repeated, futile attempts on theirs to be helpful, I realized that open dialogue was inefficient, mostly from embarrassment, it seems to me. I am convinced that now that they have had time to consider their situation, they recognize me as an ally, but they are too inhibited to speak directly on the subject of their son's problems.

I decided writing might be as helpful to them as it has been to their son and made the suggestion that they each write me a letter, however long or short each of them cared to make it, telling me whatever they wished about John or themselves. I suggested these letters be separate and private, between each of them and me, to allow them more freedom of expression. But I added that if in fact they did decide instead to write me a joint letter, that would be fine.

"Communication," I asserted, "is the goal."

The husband was at first against the idea, but the wife, who seemed relieved at the prospect of my leaving the house so that there was no longer any effort at dialogue, persuaded him to it.

“Communication, Larry,” she repeated, “should be our goal.”

They hoped to have letters for me by Monday.

Sunday Evening, June 24

Dear Dr. Town,

Thank you so much for being so patient with us through this ordeal. It hasn't been easy for either my husband or myself, as I am sure you are aware, and I know that your job is not the easiest in the world. Professions like yours and my husband's are very draining and are too often thankless. You have our thanks, you may be sure, and I am quite sure that Johnny in his own way thanks you. Perhaps not now, perhaps not in so many words, but he will in time, when he comes to realize how much you are doing for him.

My own enthusiasm, my own faith in you, are great. And although I could see that you were somewhat surprised at my husband's seeming reluctance to cooperate, I assure you that he is as anxious as I to see Johnny back home, healthy again. The pressure on him has been great. It is an especially delicate thing for a minister to have a child in a detention center, and although of course we have not told any of the Church members just what the trouble is, the simple fact that Johnny is in High Broder is awkward enough. Rumors, you know.

But you may be very sure that Larry will do everything in his power to help you help Johnny. Right now he too is writing you the history that you asked for. I think it was the unexpectedness of your request for us to write you, more than the request itself, that upset Larry. You see, it is something of a threat. Not that you intend it that way, of course. But I must admit that at first I too felt unsure of what good such a history might do you and felt for a moment as though you were suggesting that we ourselves should undergo psychoanalysis as well as Johnny. And that is a threat of sorts.

After we had time to think about it, however, we saw that of course you would have to have a history, and who but we could possibly provide that history? Any history you would get from Johnny would, of necessity I should think, be biased. Not that it would not be true for the most part, of course, but after all, Johnny's objectivity can't have been very great. He is not a natural liar. In fact, he is more than usually frank, often uncomfortably so. He has more than once embarrassed his father and myself by his bluntness to guests and even strangers. We laughed, of course, but through gritted teeth. That laughter, I am afraid, probably only encouraged his tactlessness.

Lately, as you might imagine, he has gotten some very good practice at avoiding the truth. I blame myself. I really do. No matter what sort of horrible things he was doing, he should have been able to come to me about it, to tell me what his troubles were so that I could give him guidance. It is my fault that somewhere along the line I lost his trust. Larry tries to reassure me, but we are both to blame for somehow having grown distant from this son of ours. I more than Larry, of course. Larry Sr., that is. Larry Jr. seems to pay all of this very little attention except to say to us that everything will be all right in the end. Ah, the young.

This separation, our growing distance from Johnny, has been especially hard on Johnny, I fear. That expression "generation gap" is apt, but there appears to be more than that, perhaps because of that very candor which has gotten us into so much trouble. Johnny used to be so open, not like Larry Jr. who always kept much more to himself. He was, in fact, the ideal child, never into trouble, never rowdy, never a nuisance.

But if Larry was the ideal child, Johnny was the adorable child. He simply could not, could never keep a secret. Not from me anyway, no matter how hard he tried. One

Christmas, Big Larry had given me two presents, only two that year. It was Christmas Eve and we were all sitting around the fire eating fudge and tantalizing each other with threats of revealing to the others what all the presents were. What fun we were having, but Johnny was taking the whole thing very seriously, and when Little Larry pretended to be whispering in my ear what Big Larry had gotten me, Johnny got absolutely red in the face with indignation.

So I said, "Oh, don't worry, Johnny, he only told me one of the gifts."

"Which one?" Johnny blurted out. "Shoes or purse?"

It took him just a split second to realize what he had done and of course we were all laughing uproariously, even I, although it was my own Christmas that was spoiled. You should have seen the look on Johnny's face. I wish I had had a camera. Then he burst into tears and rushed into his bedroom. Oh, I had to go in and console him, telling him that Little Larry hadn't told me anything at all, but that seemed to make it only worse. Oh, being a mother!

But either by accident or trickery or by his sheer honesty, I have always been able to get the truth out of Johnny. Just like that about shoes or purse.

Well, of course, I suppose you're saying to yourself that since he's been fooling me for the past many months and I wasn't aware, how can I be so sure that in fact he had been giving me truth all along.

But you see, I was aware that Johnny was lying. Well, perhaps that is a little strong. I felt there was something wrong. It was a sort of sixth sense, I suppose, that we mothers have. Are you a mother, Dr. Town? Perhaps you know what I mean, if so. But I do believe that all mothers have that sixth sense with their children. That might sound silly to you, a professional

woman, but I've talked with other mothers and I've heard the same thing. And I believe it. I certainly know that it is true between Johnny and myself.

I didn't know exactly what was going on, and certainly this... this thing, I don't even know what to call it... this attachment to this Parker man never even crossed my mind. How could it? I thought perhaps it was a girl friend he was seeing, which would have been bad enough, but when his grades didn't suffer but in fact were actually improving, I decided against the girl friend idea. Johnny's grades were never what they could have been. I suppose it must have been difficult for him, coming after Larry Jr. who was estimable in all ways, but most especially in his school achievements.

I tried very hard not to compare Johnny against Larry, or at least to never let Johnny see it. I told him several times that he would probably get better grades if he would not contradict the teachers so much. He came home once bragging about having corrected a teacher in her pronunciation. Of course I made him march right back to that school and apologize to the teacher. But that's the sort of thing a teacher doesn't forget when it's time to make out the grades.

To come very bluntly to the point of all this, I simply can find nothing, though believe me I have searched my memory thoroughly, which can explain away this sex thing. There I said it. This kind of thing has never been in my family or in my husband's family. And I simply cannot think how this has happened to us.

I have done a great deal of reading recently, trying to find reasons to justify it, to make it make sense, and I was wondering if all this might not simply be child's play. Young boys do go through this stage, isn't that true? And it is not terribly uncommon, is it? I know that Johnny is rather older than what is generally considered adolescent, but Johnny was always

somewhat immature for his age, I have always thought. His growth spurt was a little later than any of the other boys in his group, though he more than made up for it later, which is why he was so important to the basketball team. He was also one of the last boys in the church choir to still be singing soprano. It was a very clear, sweet, unearthly soprano. How I used to love for him to sing to me.

I definitely do not want to sound as though I am looking for excuses for what Johnny has done or trying to pass it off as unimportant. I certainly recognize its importance, but I also think that we should look at all the possibilities, and therefore, it really could simply be a phase, could it not?

I want to make it clear that I am willing to accept my share of the blame for what Johnny did. I am aware of what some people have written about the mother's responsibility in similar cases, and I will not shut my mind to that possibility. Although I have looked very carefully backwards at my relationship with Johnny and can see no problem there, I will listen to your opinion and value it. It does seem, however, that since Larry Jr. turned out perfectly normal, such a possibility in Johnny's case is unlikely. Or so it seems to me in any case.

Please let me know if there is something more I can tell you. If I come up with anything further on my own, I will be sure to either give you a call or send you another letter. I hope this letter will be some help to you. It doesn't seem to contain much to help you, does it?

Thank you very much for working with Johnny for us, and thank you for consulting us.

Yours truly,
Delores Baron

June 24

Dr. Town:

I've just read my wife's letter to you. I know you asked us to write as individuals rather than as a couple and suggested we not read each other's letters, but Delores indicated she would like me to read hers and correct grammatical errors, as if there would ever be any, and so I felt it would not violate her privacy.

I'm not sure I can add anything to what she has already told you. I've begun this letter three times now and I've always ended by throwing away what I had written. It's a very difficult thing to do. I'm not sure you're completely aware of that. A child is born. He grows up. As a parent one does his best for that child. One makes decisions and then one stands by them. One can't always see the turning points in the child's life, either during the growing-up process or afterwards, looking back on it.

Johnny was always a good, healthy child. He was headstrong, it's true, but that can be looked on as a positive character trait. I think it's fair to say that he got into his share of trouble along the way, but no more than any boy. As a minister, I am very aware of all the discipline problems of our community, and Johnny gave us no more trouble than did the normal child.

And I like to think that we gave Johnny no more trouble than did the average parent. Both Delores and I lavished every attention on both Johnny and his brother, keeping all the pluses and minuses for both averaged out. At night she and I would discuss the boys' development and their future, and we would carefully adjust them whenever we thought they were heading in the wrong direction. Of course they both had good, healthy religious education,

Church and Sunday School every week. We moved into a good neighborhood when we settled in Broder, and the neighborhood has stayed that way. It's not a rich neighborhood, and the schools are not perhaps the best in the city, but the undesirable elements are kept out.

My wife and I have discussed Johnny's present problem at some length and neither of us has any idea how this has happened. She indicated this to you in her letter. It is doubly mysterious in the light of the fact that his brother is a perfectly normal, healthy young man, married and with a lovely young family. That would seem to rule out both the heredity and environment factors that you might be looking to find, unless a berserk gene was somehow handed down to one and not the other. I should think cause and effect work as much in these cases as in all others, but I'm afraid I cannot find the cause. Perhaps a teacher along the way. Perhaps that boy Scottie, happening into John's life at a very impressionable moment in his maturing process. I really can't say. I never liked Scottie.

My wife is a very generous woman and is always ready to take upon herself the responsibility for others' failures. You can see this from her letter to you. In it she indicates that perhaps she is somehow to blame. I wish to assure you that she is in no way to blame. She was a model mother to both boys, loving and impartial. She neither overprotected nor underloved either of them

As for my own part, it's difficult to tell. I watched myself the whole time. I tried to be a good father. I constantly tested and retested myself, my motivations, my actions. When a discipline problem arose with either Larry or Johnny I would analyze the situation, take a stand and try to talk with them to explain the punishment.

This is perhaps the crux. Larry accepted the punishment and its rationale. John questioned it every time. It's a quality that simultaneously endeared him to me and maddened me beyond patience. He was never able to take the statement, "This is the way things are." He was always eager to make new rules to the old games. I would try to explain to him that it would end in chaos, but he was not willing to settle for tradition.

You might say he was merely precocious and that an inquiring mind is an asset. I suppose it is. But it is anarchy. It throws order into chaos. We cannot allow it. He must play by the set rules. He must learn that.

This homosexual affair of his is simply his latest way of trying to change life to suit his whim, or defying the system. Once he turned all the furniture in his bedroom upside down, the bed, the desk, even the waste paper basket. I asked him about it and he merely said, "I like it better this way."

"Try sleeping in that bed now," I said to him.

"I'll sleep under it," he said without giving it a thought.

It was merely a play for attention, you see. But I didn't say anything further, and I would not allow Delores to straighten the room for him. Within a week all the furniture was back the way it was supposed to be. He learned his lesson by himself on his own terms. I asked him why he had turned everything back right side up and he said, "It's better this way."

He'll get over his latest perversity. I wouldn't take it too seriously if I were you. I wish you the best of luck, doctor.

Yours sincerely,
Rev. Lawrence Baron

Tuesday, June 26

Dear Dr. Town,

The reason I didn't write anything last week is because I read those copies you gave me of my letters and they depressed me so much that I couldn't bring myself to sit down and write any more crap like that. It's like all of a sudden looking into a real mirror, not these dopey polished metal plates they hang on the walls in this place but a real mirror that shows the true picture. You see yourself changed like that. It made me just about cry, I can tell you. I used to be a real nice guy. Everybody said so. I used to be kind to people and like them. They used to make me happy. I'm sorry I've been so abusive. It couldn't have been very much fun for you to have to read those letters. Nobody likes to hear a guy badmouth all the time.

But today, Dear Diary, I'm going to make it up to you. I want to get back to some of the good times and add a little milk and honey to all that bitter tea. There HAVE been good times. I'm just going to write and write and write about all the best memories I have.

I used to have a very nice family relationship. Real nice. We used to do all kinds of things together and really enjoy each other. I mean, we fought sometimes, sure, and Mom and Dad would mix it up once in a while, and for sure Larry and I couldn't stand each other most of the time (although I'll admit to you that I secretly idolized him even though he had no use for me) but we all generally loved each other and had good times.

I can remember this one day when I was just a little kid, we went down to this little park somewhere in Broder, which I've never been able to find since then, and there was one of those twisty slides, one of those spiral jobs, but a super long one. Man, I played on that thing all day long and Mom and Dad stayed right there and let me and laughed with me each time I came

down. I don't remember where Larry was that day. He was always so much older than me that we never did too much together.

Except this one time when all four of us went off into the Boundary Waters up in Minnesota and canoed way the hell back on this chain of lakes and got miles away from the world, right on up into the wilds of Canada. We portaged the canoes and our supplies over the rapids and just kept going north, like we were never going to come back to civilization. Even Mom kept up with it, and it was hard work. I paddled the front end of my dad's canoe because I was only nine or ten and wasn't strong enough to guide the canoe, and Mom paddled the front of Larry's canoe, because he was almost full grown by that time. We caught and fried our own fish for breakfast. Sometimes we'd go for a couple of days without seeing a human being except ourselves. That was probably one of the best times of my life.

And we used to do other things together too. My mom loves to play cards and I guess I inherited that love from her. After Larry went away to school, we were all the time having my old maid Aunt Lois over to play spades with us, until finally my mom started teaching us all to play bridge. Sometimes on Friday night we'd play bridge past midnight. My dad never liked cards too much, but he pretended to have a good time for our sake. He would always be the first to wear out, but he stuck to it until he couldn't keep his eyes open and his butt on a chair.

But of course the happiest times I've ever had were with Frank. I spent almost every night at his apartment. I'd tell my mom and dad that I was going to the library and then I'd go over to Frank's. As a matter of fact, I may as well have gone to the library, because I did always spend at least a part of the night studying. Frank made sure of that. He's an elementary school teacher, you know, fifth grade, or at least he was before all of this happened. And he was

like a field marshall about my school work. My grades soared. All my teachers thought my folks were really putting on the screws.

But Frank never let me go home without love. It was great.

We would kind of lie around for a while afterwards, talking and loving. He would always ask me what I did that day, as if anything new ever happens in school, but in fact, I found out that new things were all the time happening in school after all. Frank brought that out in me. Then after a while he'd say, "Okay, let's go to work," and give my butt a slap. We'd get up and I'd pull out my books and he'd start correcting papers or working on his lesson plans for the next day. One of us would make coffee, well decaf that late at night, and we'd sit opposite each other sipping it and working.

I'd sit and watch him when he didn't know I was doing it, watch the thoughts move across his face like the shadows of clouds across one of those still lakes in Minnesota. Sometimes I'd be sitting watching him and he'd look up at me, chewing on his pencil, or with his chin propped in his hand while he was puzzling over something. He'd find me watching him and then would frown at me for a second and then laugh. We used to laugh at each other a lot.

And this will sound funny to you probably, doc, but we would spend a lot of time reading to each other. Every night. We always had a novel going on the table beside the bed and because we made a rule that we could never read ahead during the day, we'd both be waiting all day long to see what was going to happen next.

Are you married, doc? Or got an old man anyway? You don't seem like the solitary type. You need people too much. Anyway, you and your old man ... or maybe your old lady, I'm still trying to figure that out, doc, and by the way you looked great in your jeans and shirt last

week! Anyway, you and your old lady or your old man or whoever should read to each other. I know it seems funny with television and movies and all, but it's real sharing. And it seems to me that sharing is what love is all about.

And besides, I learned a lot during those reading hours. We almost always read what Frank suggested because he had a much better background and was so much better informed on what to read. We started reading all the novels of Mary Renault and went right through them all. You know, she's that woman who always writes about the ancient Greeks. She's written some others, too, but almost all of them have something to do with homosexuals and how we fit (or don't fit) into the world. I think every gay person should read at least one of her books. They're exciting to read in the first place, but they also give you a lot of insight about the kinds of limitations you might put on yourself if you're not careful. I mean, you want to be a person first, right? And then after that you can be a gay person or a straight person or a Martian person, and it doesn't make any difference once you decide you want to be the best person you can possibly be.

One of the things that interested me most about her books, this is something Frank pointed out to me, is that the main characters, the ones you care about anyway, are always striving to be better than they are. That's where the conflict comes about is because other people and your own inner nature are always tempting you to be worse than you are, so you've got to fight at every turn, "fight the good fight" as Frank says, to keep yourself from giving in to those temptations. And when I'm talking about "good" I'm not talking about the things most people call good, you know, virginity, patriotism, marriage and all that garbage, I'm talking about good like Gandhi and Plato and Christ and Melanie Wilkes are good.

These are people in love, you see, and that's the trick, to love something outside of yourself, to care more about someone or something than about yourself. Socrates once said that the best army he could imagine was one that was made up of lovers. I know you're thinking that the only reason I like that is because I'm queer, but that's not it. I mean yes, I do enjoy the idea of two soldiers sleeping together in the field under one cloak and all that good stuff, but what I really like about it is what Socrates really meant by it. If you went to war with your lover, you would always try to be a better soldier than you really are because you care so much about your lover and your lover's respect for you, that you wouldn't disgrace yourself in front of him by cowardly acts or bad soldiering. You can sometimes disgrace yourself in front of your own self, but never in front of someone you love. The secret is to try to truly be what you want to seem to be. No pretense.

One night, when Frank and I finished reading Mary Renault's book The Charioteer we sat back and thought for a while and then we started talking. I guess I was still bothered about being gay. I don't know, maybe I still am, it's sometimes a hell of a thing to get used to. Anyway, I didn't see any reason why I had to be linked up with queens and fairies and faggots when that wasn't the way I saw myself. I loved a man, that was all. I wasn't any kind of freak or anything. I didn't look different or act different. I was just me.

Frank could see how bothered I was and he said, "I know how you feel, babe, because I always felt the same way. That's why I stopped going to the bars. Until I met you," he added with a big, big smile. "But the way I see it is that everyone should be able to lead whatever life he or she chooses and if that's how they go, that's their business. Not yours or mine. We shouldn't be making any value judgments of any kind about somebody else's life. But the

problem is that all you want to be is yourself and you've got people on every side of you telling you NOT to be yourself. The straight world tells you you've got to be one way and the gay world tells you you've got to be the other way. Either you've got to be Mr. Football Jockstrap or you've got to camp around and be Miss Femme Fatale, this or the other. The big trick is to be yourself and still let other people go ahead and be whoever they see themselves as."

"That's what YOU'RE trying to prove, isn't it, Frank?" I asked. "There's another way and if you work the world right, you can take it." He looked over at me like he was going to make a painting of me, then he smiled and gave me a kiss.

You see, doc, homosexuals are outcasts today, but some day in the future, just like it was with the ancient Greeks, we're going to be all the rage again, and this time for a very good reason. This world's in a bad way because of the overpopulation problem and what better birth control device can there be than homosexuality? It's not only failsafe, with no worry over leaky rubbers or I.U.D.s or a lot of pills you might forget to take or which screw up your whole system, it's also a lot of fun and feels good. It's the way to have the best piece of cake and eat it too, over and over again. And more and more kids are starting to realize it, and more and more old people are dying off with all their backwards attitudes. Come back to earth in thirty years or so, you'll see.

Of course right now none of the sociologists and biologists are recommending homosexual behavior as a valid birth control alternative, but it's just a matter of time. The public mind keeps changing, thank our lucky stars for that, and so does the scientific mind. The laws keep changing all the time, and even though there are always plenty of Bible-thumpers trying to take us back a couple of millennia, we keep moving forward and getting rid of those laws. Of

course we're talking about "adults" here, right? Kids, of course, are a different thing. They're still going to keep trying to lock us kids in a cell or in a closet, but we're breaking out.

When the news got out that I'm queer, nobody would leave me alone. First Scottie's "anonymous" letter hit the school in multiple copies, and I've never seen news spread so fast. I mean, in one morning every kid in the place knew I was making it with a guy. I had to leave school that day because it got so bad. They were all making fun of me and some of them even started trying to shove me around, some of the jocks. They turned into animals in just a matter of minutes. Most of my friends were cool, at least to my face, but I could see the two-sided smiles, because they all had always assumed I was straight, and now they thought dirty thoughts about me and thought it was funny, making jokes I guess about was I the one on the top or was I the one on the bottom, you know crap like that that wasn't any of their business, but you know, funny in their heads.

Even Claudia couldn't handle it. Like I told you before, she just went home and stayed there without even facing me. She's gotten over it pretty much now, I guess, judging from her visit, but that hurt me, her running out on me, too. The others I could take, but not Claudia.

And the jocks, even my teammates, started making little remarks out loud in front of me that they thought were cute and subtle. Pretty soon they weren't so subtle any more and got down to dirt, and a couple of them like I said shoving me and saying things like, "What's the matter, faggot? Scared to fight?"

I couldn't believe it. I mean I really couldn't. People say that all the time, "I can't believe blah dee blah..." but I really couldn't believe it. When something is so natural to you, you forget other people can be so stupid about it. Especially when it's none of their business to begin

with. You know with some of the other known queers in school, the guys who act so fruity all the time, I guess they thought that those guys were one thing. But me, I was a kind of jock myself because of basketball and gymnastics, and so it was a different thing for me.

I couldn't take it any more that day at school and ran to Frank's place and let myself in and locked the door. Then I just threw myself down on the rug and let it all out. I even thought about turning on the gas and putting an end to it all, except that I didn't want to give the animals the satisfaction of thinking they drove me to it. I'd been humiliated and had found out all of a sudden that the friends I thought I had weren't all that great after all. I was a mess. I didn't see how I was going to live the rest of my life after that, and I sure never thought I could go back to that school again.

When Frank came in that night I told him what had happened and he was furious. He was the one who figured out that it was Scottie's job. He knew what a scene Scottie had made with me and how he'd said he would make Frank and me sorry. Well, I guess he did, all right.

Anyway, I was almost hysterical by this time, but Frank was as calm as if he was talking to one of his kids at school about homework. When I said I couldn't go back to school, he just looked at me for a second. Then he said, "You can't let people drive you like that, like you're some of their livestock. You've got to stop and stand up."

He was right, of course.

I did go back to school the next day. The trouble began right off. Rich Farleigh, this slimy guy who always hated me because he thought I was taking his place on the basketball team, he was sort of ring-leading his gang of toughs. He came up to me with four or five guys and said so everyone could hear, "What about it, Baron? Want to do me?"

It always kills me that people think that because you're queer you'll go after any despicable thing. Farleigh couldn't get laid in a harem of nymphos. I just looked him in his hideous eye and tried to walk on past. He moved in front of me and said, "What's it feel like making it with men?"

"Great," I said. "How is it with dogs?"

Before I could sidestep him he hit me. I fell back against the wall of lockers and blood started pouring out of my nose. The guys behind him circled with a kind of growling noise, just like a pack of wolves, no exaggeration. I said through the blood, "You stay where you are, sons of bitches."

And damn, they all stopped, kept their circle, but stopped, and now more and more people were coming for the show. Farleigh was standing there holding his hand and looking dumb, like he'd just woke up and couldn't figure out how he'd gotten there. And I could see now that he was scared. I'm in good shape, and Farleigh knew it, so I did the animal thing, too. I wiped the blood off my lips with my sleeve and looked at it and then held up my arm to show the blood to Farleigh, and I narrowed my eyes and said through my teeth, "I'm going to make you so sorry you ever tried to mess with me. When I get through with you, you little motherfucker, you're going to look like a motherfucking tripledecker fucking dishrag."

That son of a bitch turned and pushed out of the circle of kids and split down the hall as fast as he could go. All his "friends" busted out laughing. What a pile of crap humanity amounts to. They've got as much loyalty as a pack of hungry hyenas. I turned to all of them now and said like I was talking into a sewer, which I was, "I'm not going to take any crap off any of you any more. So keep your sorry asses out of my way."

Then I pushed through them, too, and walked away. I thought, if they jump me I'm dead. But I was pretty sure they wouldn't. And I kept my back straight and at least I thought I was carrying myself with dignity. In fact, I think I was. And in fact, I thought I could see some pride in the eyes of some of the kids who made way for me to walk away.

Well, who knows, but anyway from that time on, if jokes were made, they weren't made in front of me. I think I'd have made it to graduation even, if it hadn't been for my mom and dad.

I asked Frank if he thought I should tell my mom and dad what was going on at school and he said something like, "Well, what do you think, Johnny?" That was so typical of him, letting me make my own decision. Well, it was only a matter of time I figured. A lot of the parents of the kids at school are in my dad's church. But I kept thinking, well it's none of their business. And it was easier not to tell them and, of course, it never came up naturally in the course of any conversations we were having, so I just kept putting it off.

One Saturday morning I got up early and told my mom I was going bike riding down by the lake, which was true and which I did, but then I rode over to Frank's place. My dad was out of town because he was going to be giving the service in Harrison the next day. Although my mom usually goes on these trips with him, she wasn't feeling well this Saturday and stayed home.

Frank and I were messing around in the kitchen making breakfast. He got splashed with some hot grease while he was frying the bacon and he started jumping up and down and making a real good show of it. Neither of us had any clothes on, so we got a couple of aprons and put them on to keep our jewels from getting splashed with hot grease. Ever seen someone

naked in an apron, doc? There's nothing more pathetic, but really cute, too. And Frank's got a great butt.

But god, this next moment was the worst moment of my life.

I mean, I've always loved my mom a lot. I've always been protective of her. I can remember this one time we were at this big picnic that my dad's church was putting on and we were playing softball. My mom and Larry were on one team and my dad and I were on the other. My mom came up to bat, and she looked so small and helpless up there that I suddenly got scared she'd get hit by the ball or fall down and break her bones to powder or something. She was choking up on the bat to about the middle of it, just pathetic, looking all serious and nervous, but game, you know. The pitcher was lobbing the pitches over high and slow and so soft and easy that I thought they might drop to the ground before they even reached the catcher, and my mom would swing and miss by a mile. But on her third swing, she finally hit one. I was playing shortstop and the damn ball came right at me on this slow bounce, the easiest out I've ever had handed to me.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see my mom running for all she was worth toward first base, and it was hopeless, like a cross between a turkey and a snail. I ran up to get the ball and deliberately tripped and fell on top of it. I made it look real good, fumbling for the ball like I really was trying to throw her out at first, but I made sure she got there before the ball did. Man, she was jumping up and down as excited as hell, and her eyes were flashing because she was so proud that she got a base hit. It was all I could do to keep from weeping.

I don't know. I just love my mom a lot. That's all.

So this Saturday when Frank and I were in his kitchen naked but for our aprons, the doorbell rang and Frank put on his robe and went to answer it, but I stayed in the kitchen to take the bacon out of the skillet and turn off the fire.

There was this silence from the living room and then Frank called, “Johnny, you want to come in here?”

I knew what it was. Somehow I knew. There was something in Frank’s voice, I guess. I very carefully took each strip of bacon out of the skillet first and turned off the fire before I went into the living room. I saw Frank’s raincoat hanging on a hook by the back door and I had the good sense to put that on before I pushed open the kitchen door. I was ready to vomit.

My mom was standing at the edge of the entrance hall with her purse hanging from her arm. Frank was a couple of feet away from her, like I say, in his robe. His legs looked pale and skinny against the dark navy blue cloth.

I stopped in the kitchen doorway, aware that my own bare legs were showing beneath the hem of Frank’s raincoat. My mom could see and understand it all, and what was she doing there anyway at Frank’s place that she never even knew about, except that she had gotten the word somehow, that someone had given her the address. But she had this expression on her face like she had been blindfolded and brought to this strange place and didn’t know where she was or why. But of course she really did. Her hair was tangled beneath the collar of her sweater. She looked like she had dressed in a hurry and not even looked in the mirror. She just stood there looking at me like I was someone whose face she couldn’t quite recognize.

“John,” she said finally. “I got a telephone call. The voice said you were ... I went to the park first and drove around the lake. You weren’t there. You said you were going to the lake. But you weren’t there.”

I didn’t say anything. In flagrante delicto. I read that somewhere. In flagrante delicto. Very flagrante, I kept thinking to myself, very delicto. With bare legs, with Frank and his bare legs. Very flagrante, caught red-butted.

“What are you doing here? Where are your clothes? Who is this man?”

Then she started to cry. My heart just about broke for her, but boy was I mad, too. Frank was the one to keep me from screaming at her, “What the hell are YOU doing here????!!!!????”

Frank took a step toward her and started to say something. “Mrs. Baron ... ”

But she jerked her head up and pulled away from him and backed up against the angle of the front door. There was a little table there, and Frank always had a little bud vase with a single daisy on that table, like a kind of “Hi, how you doing?” to anyone who might come to the front door, and now my mom hit that table as she backed into the corner of the door, and the table tipped over and the vase broke on the floor and water and broken glass went spraying everywhere and the daisy hit the floor with a little splat.

“Get away from me,” my mom cried. “Get away! Get away!”

Frank backed off. He didn’t do anything about the daisy or the broken glass. He didn’t look at me. He just backed off and stood there. “Be careful of the broken glass, Mrs. Baron. Johnny, don’t come over here with your bare feet.”

But my mom just kept screaming at him, “You keep away from me, you filthy, filthy, dirty thing!”

Frank was barefoot, too, and there was a big piece of broken glass behind him where he was backing up to, so I started to warn him, too, “Frank, don’t ...” but he looked down and saw it just in time, just as my mom turned on me screaming and with a look that I didn’t even recognize as my mom’s face. It reminded me of once when I was down in the basement looking through some boxes of books and I moved this one box and a rat came running from behind it, but there was no place for him to run because he was cornered, and he whipped around and faced me with his teeth bared and his eyes blazing, and I turned and ran screaming from him. But now, from my mom, there was nowhere to run.

“Get your clothes!” she screamed at me, her voice as ugly as her face. “I’ll wait for you in the car.”

She was opening the door to get out as fast as she could when Frank said, “Johnny, you don’t ever have to go back and take that if you don’t want to. I love you. You can stay with me forever.”

My mother turned on him and took several steps back into the room, the glass of the vase crunching beneath her shoes, grinding into the wood floor. “Don’t you say the word love. They’ve got words for you, and those words should never be mixed with the word love. You do dirty things and you’ve taken my son and done them to him, and maybe he’ll never be able to forget them. I spent my life raising my children so they’d be healthy. I carried that boy in my body and I have had such dreams for him, and after he was born I took such care of him, and not

so he could fall into the hands of a filthy, ugly thing like you, trying to make him as filthy and ugly as you are.”

I’m just kind of trying to get out all the things she said, doc, because how could I even begin to remember it all just the way she said it. She said “womb” yeah I remember now, not “body” but “womb” when she said “I carried that boy in my womb.” Jesus Christ!

“I carried that boy in my womb!” and then those words “ugly” and “filthy” and “dirty” just came running out of her until now she broke down and started sobbing, but still the words kept coming out, through the sobs and gasps for breath. She was staggering now, back over that glass that kept crunching into the floor, and she sort of fell and leaned back against the door which closed shut behind her, and she straightened up and ripped open her purse and pulled out a wad of kleenex and started wiping her nose and eyes furiously.

“I said get your clothes on. I’m taking you out of here.”

“It’s your decision, Johnny,” Frank said.

“You go to Hell!” she screamed at him. “Let’s go, John. I won’t wait.”

Doc, sorry that I keep interrupting this story with all these other stories about rats and daisies, and now another bird story that I’ve got to tell you, but these are all things that go through my head as I keep remembering my mom on that day.

This ugly memory was from the lake when I was just a kid. It was during the summer and all the wild ducks had flown into our lake and made their nests and there were all these strings of ducklings trailing behind the mother ducks as they swam around. This day, I saw this little kid about seven or eight down the by the edge of the water, and somehow he had

managed to catch one of these little ducklings. He wasn't being mean to it or anything. He just wanted to hold it. You know how kids are.

The mother duck with her family of about seven or eight other ducklings were swimming around frantically in the water quacking like crazy. Finally I told the kid that he should put the duckling back in the water. I had heard somewhere that you shouldn't touch wild baby birds or the mother wouldn't take them back.

But man, I didn't expect this. When that little duckling got back in the water he split for his mother like he had an outboard on, but she wouldn't have anything to do with him. She just swam off and left him behind, and all her other ducklings followed her. I explained to the kid how it was his smell on the duckling that made her do that and he promised that he wouldn't ever pick up any wild birds again.

The little duckling kept following his mother and quacking this little squawk of a quack and trying to get up close to her like he was asking her forgiveness. Pretty soon she started pecking him. Not just little pecks, but big vicious blows on his head. You could see that he'd be really hurt by her because when she'd swim away from him after pecking him like that, he'd just sit there on the water kind of stunned. But then he'd take off after her again, still quacking that little quack at her.

This must have gone on for five minutes. The little kid was crying now, watching it all, and pretty soon his parents came down to see what was going on with him, but we couldn't do anything. The ducks were now out in deep water. I couldn't believe that little duckling could take that kind of punishment, but back and back and back he went to his mom.

Then all of a sudden it was over. She pecked him so viciously that I guess she broke his neck because this time when she swam away, he didn't follow. His head was lying straight out ahead of him on the water at the end of his neck. He was struggling, trying to lift his head, it looked like, for about a minute, splashing but with his head under the water, until finally he was still. Drowned. Just a little bunch of stuff bobbing on the water.

The mom and dad rushed the kid away from the lake. He was screaming bloody murder.

Now in Frank's apartment I kept running that vision through my head, that little duckling out on that lake, killed so brutally by his mother, for nothing. My mom was still screaming at me to come with her when I finally got my brains back in my head and said, "You should go home, Mom. I'm staying here."

All kinds of things were in her face, but it was the pain that got to me the most. It was like I had just knifed her. She turned after a second and put her hand on the knob. The door was closed now. She turned the knob and opened the door a crack and said, but without turning back to me, "Don't ever come home."

"I guess I won't then."

Then she whipped open the door and turned back to me in the doorway and it was like a wave of hatred and disgust washed over her face and wiped away the pain. "I'll burn your things." She fixed this look on Frank then and said, "I'm going to make you sorry you were ever born." And then she was gone.

Well, damn. How did I get here anyway? I was going to write happy things today.

djt: 6/26/79 — 6:45 p.m.
File in Verso.

Sunday, July 1

Dear doc,

I'm writing you early, before session. But you're not here today anyway. Where are you? You got vacation already? You won't read this until when? I just got out of the jug, you're nowhere to be seen, Kupkake won't tell me where you are, why you're not here, you didn't tell me you were going anywhere, but you're not here.

And see, doc, I've got to have you here. I've got to talk to you. But where are you? You can just go off like that? You just started working here. They let you just go off like that? This soon?

Well, that's okay. I'm a big boy. I guess I know how to take care of myself.

But I did want you to know, doc, about what happened Thursday night and why they threw me into the slammer. I guess you'll find out about it when you get back, whenever, but you should know about it from me, because nobody else knows anything. THEY DON'T KNOW ANYTHING!

AND WHERE THE FUCK ARE YOU?

Okay, be calm, Johnny. Just tell the pshrink all about it, in your own words. That's what she likes, your words. Okay.

They're already forgetting all about it. Oh yeah, Thursday night it was all the news, and then they throw me in the jug and I come out Sunday morning, and now it's all same-old same-old, nobody's even noticing.

But me? I can't forget it. I can't forget it. I can't forget it.

You can't know. You weren't here. But I can't forget it.

Well, let's see, how can I make this short and easy so maybe you can understand, wherever you are, whenever you read this?

You know that I had been teaching Roger. Well, maybe you didn't know. I told you about it one time, but I don't think you were listening, and I didn't tell you much. You were moving some papers around on your desk the way you do when you're tired of us. And you probably forgot. You didn't make one of your notes, I noticed, so you probably forgot, if you even heard it. But anyway, I told you that I had been teaching Roger.

Well, but I mean, Roger was really teaching me, that's the truth of it. But I was teaching him, too. We'd teach each other. And it was real good for us. Nobody in this whole place to talk to ... well, Kupkake but he's, you know, old ... and you sometimes, but you know, you don't really listen. But here's Roger who's got better ears than anybody else around when it comes right down to it, and he and I shared a lot of things together.

I told you how we'd write to each other. You probably don't remember that either. And then he taught me how to hand-talk and that's the way we communicated mostly. I got pretty good at it, and I could see it meant a lot to Roger just that I would care enough about him to learn it. We never had all that much to say to each other, really, but just to have somebody say, "How're you doing?" and that kind of stuff makes a big difference to you. Of course, Jack is a lot friendlier now to me because he sees how it is with Roger, but Jack's a natural loner. I've got to have people around. Or at least always before.

I never got into anything personal with Roger. I mean, I never told him anything about Frank and all that. But I'd talk about my family a little, and you could see he was eating it all up, never having had any family himself. He just didn't know anything at all about it, except

the junk you see on TV, and he believes that junk, too. But here I had lived it. Well, I didn't tell him the bad stuff, only the good stuff.

He would tell me about some of the places he had lived, these orphanages I guess you call them, group homes for kids. Like once when he was telling me about how the people in the home took all the kids to a lake, I told him about my family going into the Boundary Waters up in Minnesota, and the canoeing and all that. He really liked to hear about that. Well, not to hear, but you know, to watch my hands as I would try to make words and ideas. I told him that maybe the two of us could go some time after we got out of High Broder, go up to the Boundary Waters, and his eyes looked like street lamps.

He liked the idea of getting away from all the people. And I told him how quiet it was, and he seemed to understand that in a way that I couldn't even imagine. Which is funny when you think about it. You'd think that in order to understand what quiet is, you've got to know what sound is. Sound and noise. Well, but maybe noise is more a way of life than it is something you hear through your ears, and I guess old Roger had about as much noise in his life as anybody could have.

Well, anyway. I taught Roger to talk. Yeah, really talk, speak with his mouth. Can you feature it? Poor guy. He worked so hard on it. Sometimes when he'd try to make the sound and he just wasn't getting it and I'd shake my head that he wasn't doing it right, he'd get these big tears in his eyes and I'd feel so bad for him that I'd want to cry myself. But that little sucker just kept trying.

And you know, I think he was doing it more for me than for himself. I was determined he was going to talk. And he was determined to learn how to do it. I knew other deaf people had been taught to talk with their mouths, and it had changed their lives.

I guess it never really sounds like the way regular people talk. I can remember once I was walking past the school for the deaf that's over on Bower Avenue and I could hear these deaf kids trying to sing "Lazy Bones" you know that old song. They were sitting out on the grass and their teacher was leading them by clapping his hands high in the air so they could all see it and follow the rhythm. They weren't trying to hit the notes, but were just speaking the words in rhythm. They probably thought it sounded like singing, though, I mean, I guess. How would they know about singing as different from talking, other than rhythm?

It was weird listening to them, all those eerie voices, breathy kind of more than real voices and no inflection, sort of like a bunch of people just leaving their graves.

Lazy Bones, sleeping in the sun,
How you gonna get
Your day's work done?

But still they could do it. They could make all the sounds. And if THEY could, then Roger could, and then he could finally go up to all those slob who never want to take the time to learn to hand-talk or to even read a slip of paper with some writing on it, and at least he could tell them fuck you.

I made sure I taught him that. He already knew the finger sign for fuck you, which of course is all the hand-talk I knew at first, and he wanted to know how to make all the lip and voice-box sounds. The consonants, of course, are easy since those are mostly lips, but the two vowels are hard to get across. And the K, because the K is in the back of the throat, with the top

of the tongue tapping against the back of the mouth, that was harder. I had to open my mouth way wide so he could see what I was doing with the back of my tongue. But boy did he like to say that once he started getting the hang of it.

“Fuck you. Fuck you. Fuck you.”

He would use his middle finger, too, and the way he would coordinate, it was too much to watch. He just made me laugh and laugh, and he would do it again and again, and he just loved making me laugh like that.

I think that someone in Roger’s early years must have tried teaching him something about vowels and consonants because he seemed to catch onto things that I couldn’t really explain very well. He said he didn’t remember anyone ever teaching him, but I think some kind soul must have helped him way early on, and he was just too young to remember. Maybe he wasn’t always deaf, I don’t know. Maybe it was one of the times that his parents were beating on him that he turned deaf. But anyway ...

The way we would work is we’d go down to the classroom in the East Corridor, you know, the notorious one, and we would write on the blackboard all the consonants which he knew from reading words. And there, too, doc, I figure someone must have taught him something about words and reading, because where else did he learn to read? I guess in school, but I don’t think he was ever at any one school for very long before he got into trouble and got sent away to the next higher institution. Anyhow, I’d show him the consonant or the vowel we were working on, then show him the way I make the sound, and he would imitate me. I’d take my hands and shape his mouth until it was making the correct sound, or just about the correct sound. Since he couldn’t hear himself making the sound, it was all by feel.

I learned a lot, too. Like I never noticed before that certain consonants you make basically the same way, like T and D, or P and B, or F and V. I had to figure out how those consonants are different from one another, and I finally did figure it out, and it was F and V that was the breakthrough for me, because both of those are sustained consonants where you put your bottom teeth against your top lip, and you can say FFFFFFFF for as long as you have breath, and of course that's absolutely necessary for "Fuck You."

Same with VVVVVVV. Try it. Hear the difference? FFFFFFFF you do without using your voice-box. VVVVVVV you have to use your voice-box.

So what I did was to have Roger put his hands around my Adam's apple, like he was choking me. Then he could feel my Adam's apple vibrate when I would say VVVVVV, but not vibrate when I would say FFFFFFF.

Same with T and D. Same with P and B. Try it. Put your hand up to your own voice-box, doc.

Once I got Roger to understand that, and to start making voice sounds himself, and tell the difference between them and non-voice sounds, he started coming along a lot quicker. But man, there's lots to explain that hearing people just take for granted. Like take a simple word like "three". That's got the TH sound together, which is certainly not T and H the way it's written out on paper, which would be like tuh huh. It's something different. You can see it easy enough with your tongue stuck through your lips and the air going around either side of your tongue, but then to get that R sound into the entire works. And then to show the difference between "three" and "throw" and "through". See what I mean?

And that's not even starting on why the hell we have all those silent letters in the written words. Language, doc, it's simple enough when you can hear, I guess, but man! When you can't? And then writing?

But anyway, we worked on it and worked on it. We've got nothing but time in High Broder, and we were both really motivated. And I would point to things and have him say them, "desk, table, chair" and like that. And the difference between "chair" and "seat"? Why do we make a difference like that? As if things aren't confusing enough, we've got to make a difference between "chair" and "seat" like that?

And then finally I gave him his first sentence to say. He wrote it down for me, what he wanted to learn to say out loud, and well, yes, "Fuck you," is a sentence, but I mean that he wanted to say a real sentence. What he wrote? "I want to talk."

How does that make you feel? That makes me want to cry.

"I want to talk."

And he really did want to talk. Yeah, at first he was doing it for my sake. But now he was getting close to doing it, he wanted to do it for himself. Not just words that I would point out and have him say. He wanted to take a thought in his own head and put it into his own words and have those words come out of his own mouth.

And after he could make all the sounds of "I want to talk" I would get him to speed them up, little by little, so that they all began to flow together with the consonants chopping off the vowels just the way that regular, speaking people say them. "I want to talk." "I want to talk." "I want to talk." Over and over again.

Jeez, I was proud of him. He was proud of himself. And we were both jumping up and down, doc, so excited. I was so happy for him. I was shouting for him, and he was just gurgling and gargling all kinds of sounds, all these happy noises all mixed in with shouts of “I want to talk.” And then the two of us stopped and looked at each other and old Roger had big tears in his eyes.

It sounds stupid, I know, but doc, what a moment for Roger, what a big moment for him. Little unwanted kid who never amounted to anything in anyone’s eyes and he did a big thing.

So I made this plan for him. We were going to surprise everyone all at once, Thursday night in the mess hall. I don’t know why now, but something gave me the idea that the trolls would get a big thrill out of hearing Roger talk. I guess maybe I was trying to prove to them how stupid they all were for calling Roger The Dummy. Anyway, after we had all finished eating, and just before Johnson was going to give the signal for dismissal, I stood up with Roger and said, “We have an important announcement to make.”

Roger was waiting for me to give the signal when the guys were all quiet. He hadn’t wanted to do this in the first place, and I could see he was real nervous now, but he was going through with it all right. He stood there shifting his weight from foot to foot until the trolls finally stopped blowing their air about my announcement and shut up to listen, and I nodded to Roger, and he started out with “I want to talk.”

See, you’ve got to be clear on this, he never did say it absolutely perfectly. And now that I heard it through the trolls’ ears, I could hear that he was exaggerating the sounds and the mouth movements and he sort of led with his shoulder because, you know, it was still difficult

for him to get it out. While I was working with him, I forgot what he looked like, but now I saw him through the trolls' eyes, and I suddenly saw what a mistake this was for me to put him up there in front of all of them.

He blew his first try and snapped his fingers and started over again. He had his eyes up on the ceiling trying for all he was worth. Then somebody out there, and I never found out who, said, "Hey, The Dummy's talking! The Dummy thinks he can talk!"

Then they all started laughing and saying, "The Dummy thinks he can talk."

Roger couldn't hear them. He was still standing there looking at the ceiling and saying over and over again, "I want to talk. I want to talk. I want to talk."

I don't know how many times he said it. My head was coming off. But you know what? The last time he said it, it was just like it was coming out of anyone's mouth. It was perfect, and he knew it, and so he brought his eyes back down from the ceiling, knowing he had done it right, and here were all these guys laughing at him.

I could tell from the expression in his eyes that at first he thought they were laughing with him, that they were just as proud and happy for him as I had been in the classroom. But then he looked over at me and saw the expression, I guess, on my own face. And his eyes changed. And he knew.

It took a second, and then he turned and split out of there as fast as he could. Johnson had unlocked the door already and Roger almost knocked him over on his way out. That just made the trolls laugh louder. I was so glad now that Roger couldn't hear that.

I took off after Roger, but Johnson had recovered by that time and blocked my way and locked the door again.

“Where do you think you’re going, Baron?”

“I’ve got to go after him.”

I could hear Jack Cole shouting at the trolls to shut up, but they were laughing too hard. Johnson smiled at me all slimy and said, “You can just wait right here until the rest of us are ready to go. Don’t worry about The Dummy. He can’t go nowhere. Okay, you guys, line up,” he shouted at the trolls and everybody got up and formed a line at the door. “You want to get in line there, Your Majesty?” he said to me. “We’ll just all wait until you do.”

He stood there waiting and tapping his keys until I did get in line and then he said, “All the way to the back, Your Majesty,” and he kept tapping his keys again until I did. Then he finally took all the time he wanted and turned the damn key in the damn lock and opened the door.

When I was finally out the door I bolted past Johnson and got to the stairs and was up them before he could stop me. I heard him behind me shouting, “You Baron, get back here or I’ll have you in the jug.” But I didn’t listen. I had to find Roger.

I hit the fourth floor and took a quick look around the rec room, but he wasn’t anywhere in sight. I went to his room, but the door was open and there was no one inside. I ran back down the East Corridor to the classroom, but it was empty too. Then I just started running like crazy up and down the halls looking into all the rooms for him. There wasn’t any use in calling to him, poor alone guy in all that silence.

Then I remembered his garden up on the roof where he always spent a lot of time. I made sure to water his plants for him when he was in the hole that time. I went tearing back up the East Corridor just as Johnson and the guys got there. Johnson made a grab for me and said,

“You’re going to pay for this, Baron,” but I shook him off and ran down the West Corridor, past Roger’s room and up the flight of stairs to the roof.

It was all quiet up there except for a slight cool breeze that was blowing and making a whispering sound down the stairwell behind me. The moon was half full and lit up the roof, making shadows here and there from the fence and the bell tower. I went over to Roger’s boxes of dirt and his plants, looking almost silver in the moonlight. Roger wasn’t there. I hesitated, then shivered, and was just about to go back down when I heard these muffled noises coming from the ground. I climbed the fence and looked over the edge of the building. Way down below I could see a crowd beginning to form.

I knew what had happened. I didn’t even try to deny it to myself. I slid back down the fence and landed in a heap next to Roger’s garden.

Johnson and a couple of the other pigs he had called to get me found me there some time later and took me downstairs. I was a mess, screaming and ready to hit out at all of them, but they shot me up with some dope of some kind, so I didn’t feel like anything any more.

Then Johnson kept his promise and put me in the hole where I’ve been until this morning, just me and my awful thoughts, and the ghost of Roger haunting me. I’m the one who killed him. I moved in and took over his life and I may as well have shoved him off that roof. I’m crazy with it, doc. I keep thinking of his face when his eyes came rolling down from the ceiling looking so proud of himself. I can’t stand it, doc. I just can’t forget that poor unhappy little guy.

Tomorrow’s Monday, doc. Kupkake says you won’t be here, won’t say why, and not here on Tuesday either, won’t say why. Wednesday’s the fourth. Are you out buying firecrackers

or something? Got a hot date? When are you coming back? Thursday, the fifth? Next Monday? The Twelfth of Never? Are you never coming back, doc? Is that what Kupkake is trying to tell me?

If so, big fucking deal.

djt: 6/9/79 — 7:20 p.m.

1. Make photocopies of these pages and file them in the Roger Standing file. Transfer the file to the Inactive Drawer and stamp it Deceased.
2. Put the original along with Norman Bandy's Incident Report of July 4 into the Baron File.

INCIDENT REPORT

SUBJECT: John Baron
SUBMITTED BY: Norman Bandy

DATE: 4 July, 1979

I was at the Desk this morning at 9:03 a.m. when I heard the sound of fighting emanating from the West Corridor. By the crowd that had formed in his doorway, I was able to ascertain the source of the disturbance as being Vic Hill's room. As I reached the room, John Baron was pushing his way through the crowd. He had spots of blood on him, some swellings beginning on his face, and skinned knuckles that he was massaging. I looked in the room and saw Hill pulling himself up from the floor. He was bleeding profusely from the nose and was clearly in much pain. The Clinic has since reported that his nose is broken and there are contusions over his left eye.

Hill refused to say anything about the fight when questioned. Baron said only, "Just cashing in some Wholesome Bonds I've been saving up."

PUNISHMENT

Since this is the first assaultive offense of Hill, he is to go into the Austere Program upon release from the Clinic. He is to remain in the Austere Program until he shows signs of contrition.

Since Baron's assault on Hill is the second assaultive offense by Baron—the first having been Harry Neal—and since Abraham Johnson and I believe more and more that Baron was the instigator of the riot on March 23, Baron's punishment is to spend an entire week in the Adjustment Center. Upon release therefrom, he is to be demoted into the Austere Program until he too shows signs of contrition.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEE: John Baron

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town (file in Verso, djt)

DATE: July 9, 1979

When John Baron did not appear in session today, I asked Mr. Bandy where he was. It was then he gave me the attached INCIDENT REPORT along with Baron's letter from Sunday night, July 1, which Mr. Bandy says he found when he searched Baron's room.

Bandy did not have much to say, but there was a certain attitude in the way he handed me the papers that makes me uncomfortable about how next to proceed with Baron. I expect trouble. That Bandy merely mentioned Roger Standing's suicide as though in passing — with a kind of feigned indifference, it seemed to me— allowing that I would find out much more about it by reading Baron's letter to me than Bandy himself could provide, reinforces that expectation. Clearly Bandy read Baron's letter. What assumptions Bandy might have made or might be making about Baron's and my relationship do worry me.

There has been no transference, no actual transference, but John's fascination on my absence and the emotions that were drawn out of him on paper are clear to any reader. I must be alert to Bandy's next moves. He has always been antagonistic to my having reassigned Baron into Med-Psych.

I went first to see Chaplain Kincaid who was curiously closemouthed. That too disturbs me since his volubility has always been something I have relied upon. He allowed that he had been visiting Baron almost daily in the Adjustment Center, for which I was grateful. I did take an understanding from Kincaid's reticence that the weeklong term in the Adjustment Center for Baron's assault on Vic Hill —coming hard upon the three days assigned by Abraham Johnson for Baron's rebelliousness on the night of Roger Standing's suicide— was undue severity. The

chaplain did not, however, supply actual words for this understanding; it was more a “see-for-yourself” attitude, I thought.

Chaplain Kincaid did supply an extraordinary addition. He was watching me carefully as he spoke and then made a decision, it seemed to me, to go this far but no farther. He said that in one of his visits to the Adjustment Center, John sang him a song. He said, “Now, have you ever heard John sing?” he asked me.

I replied I had not. “He very much wanted a guitar, but of course that was out of the question. I provided him access to a harmonica. I don’t know if he has ever even availed himself of it. So John sings?”

“Like an angel. I’ll sing you the song he sang for me in the hole. Of course, I can’t do it justice. John is baritone, and he sang it just ... beautifully.”

When a body meet a body
Coming through the rye,
If a body kiss a body
Need a body cry.

For every laddie has his lassie
And none, they say, have I,
Yet all the lads they smile on me
When coming through the rye.

Among the train there is a swain
I dearly love meself,
But where’s his hame or what’s his name
I dinna care to tell.

Though every laddie has his lassie
And none, they say, have I,
Yet all the lads they smile on me
When coming through the rye.

I hadn't imagined the impact a simple song could have on me. Kincaid's Irish tenor rendered it so gracefully I thought I might weep for this boy's loneliness. I could hear John's voice beneath Kincaid's —John's phrasing— and I remembered and compared it to the harsh cacophony of John's poem, 'Make Talktalk'. This tune was familiar to me, but I had never listened to the words, and I do not think, in fact, that these are the lyrics that the poet actually wrote. I asked Chaplain Kincaid if he would write them for me.

"Robert Burns," he said, "a la John Baron. John made little changes of gender, I guess, but isn't it life, all of it? That boy down there needs your help, Diana, but most of all your understanding."

Next I visited Baron in the Adjustment Center. He was lying on the pad in only his underwear and because he had no bed linens or clothes with which to cover himself, the brief interview was, I would say, humiliating for both of us. He had lost a lot of weight in the little more than a week since I last saw him. I think I must have gasped audibly.

"Haven't you been eating?" I asked.

He retorted with, "What are you, my mother?"

I was quick to cover, getting right down to business and asking him why he had fought with Hill. He merely shrugged and made no other answer. I asked him if Hill had been one of the participants in his rape.

He said with venom, "You know I can't tell you a thing like that. Why would you even ask? Where have you been, anyway?"

I asked him if he was intending to go after the other rapists in the same way.

He said, "Why don't you just not worry about it? Where have you been?"

I told him we had our own way of punishing wards in High Broder and that if he chose to seek revenge and inflict his own punishments, he would find only himself punished and not the real offenders. Again he shrugged, but I could feel in him a great and accumulating anger.

I didn't know how to bring up Roger Standing's suicide, but he did it for me.

"So you're not even going to say anything at all about Roger? You got my letter? Bandy said he was going to give it to you."

"Yes, Mr. Bandy did give me your letter. And John, I can't tell you how sorry I am. You must be—"

"Yeah. All of that. But never mind, right?"

His interruption left me, really, with nowhere to go in this conversation. I think perhaps we should wait for next Monday's session. I think I will ask all of the group at that time to describe their feelings about Roger. That might be dangerous. But it seems civil. And it seems to me right. Even Jack Cole will perhaps participate since they were roommates and Cole had come to Standing's defense at least once that I know of.

John kept after me. "You can just go off any time you want, can you? Is that vacation time, or like what? You were sick? Is that why KupKake wouldn't tell me?"

I said as flatly as I could manage it, "John, this might come as a surprise to you, but I have my own life to lead."

"Oh."

"I'm not your mother."

"Yeah, that's what I just told you. You're not my mother, so don't start acting like her. You've met her? You talked to her?"

I said. "It's good to be close, John. It's good that you and I trust each other, and that we want to trust each other."

"Oh, but I don't trust you, doc. I keep telling you that. And you keep betraying me, betraying my trust. Are you talking with my mom and dad? Are you looking for another job?"

"I'm calling an end to this interview. I wanted you to know that I just learned about Roger Standing, and how sorry I am. I'll make sure Chaplain Kincaid comes to see you."

"Yeah, send in KupKake."

Of course there is no way to walk out of a padded cell with any sort of dignity. And leaving behind a nearly naked young man with so much anger about to explode out of him did not help. I expected him to scream at me at any moment during my exit. But he did not.

I don't think I dare try to countermand Bandy's term of punishment at this point. Baron is to remain there until Wednesday. Perhaps I will ask Chaplain Kincaid to intercede, bringing to Bandy's attention John's weight loss, and suggesting a return of the ward to Med-Psych for health reasons.

We must try to get back to normalcy. He needs to eat, and he needs to be back in his own room.

Wednesday (I think)

I've been thinking about the whole thing of maturity, doc. I've had a good long time down in the hole with nothing filling it but to give it a little consideration. I got out again this morning, but they're thinking of putting my name on one of the cells down there so it'll always be reserved for me. It's not so bad in the hole, not really, not when you've got a gimmick for pulling through without losing your sanity. You know what I do? I make up poems and plan what I'm going to write you about next and do sit ups and push ups and running in place. And then I think a little, too, make plans for my next move, figure things out.

And I couldn't wait, doc, to get my papers and my pencil back and write to you about what I've been thinking. Remember what I told you about Frank and me, and how we would write to each other, and I'd watch him when he would read my letters? I'd like to watch you, doc, when you're reading my letters. I wonder what that would be like.

But this maturity business, doc, that I was thinking about in the jug... What is maturity anyway and how do you measure it, and all like that? Age doesn't mean a thing to maturity, that's for sure. Look at Scottie. He's twenty-two. He can drink and vote and go his own way and do his own thing and he's about as mature as Will Downey who kills frogs and puts them in people's soup bowls and then tells you how funny that is.

Look at what Scottie did to my life, and he's outside and free while I'm locked up. Frank's in Carlton and Scottie says he's sorry. But he doesn't take a bit of responsibility for it, not really.

Responsibility. I guess that's what maturity is, if you're ready to take responsibility for what you are and what you do. I think I'm mature. And yet, just because I haven't lived as

many years as Scottie, I don't have any rights and the cops can come and pull me out of Frank's bed and call me a runaway and incorrigible and put me in an institution.

Funny, huh? And you know what's even funnier? If I was just fifty miles away, just over the state line, I'd be in a state where the age of consent is sixteen instead of eighteen and I'd be mature by law and none of this could have happened to me.

Because you know, it wasn't because they found out I was queer and doing things that are "immoral" that made my folks call the cops. It was because I was leaving them and I was only seventeen and still in high school and their baby and they couldn't stand it that they couldn't control me any more.

And don't kid yourself. Those cops didn't come out after a couple of queers. What do they care? They came to PROTECT me. To protect me not only from a "pederast" like they want to call Frank since legally I'm not old enough to have any consent to give him, and so I'm really a child, but also to protect me from myself, because they're afraid I'm having too much fun, and I'll go out and get THEIR kids. Like I'm from some cult of the undead.

Protect me. What a laugh. They've got a word for that, it's a literary term Frank told me about, ~~and it's not sarcasm and it's not satire, but it's ...~~ oh yeah, irony. Like, how ironic that my mom and dad say they want to protect me so I can be happy. I wonder which of them did the telephoning to the cops, my mom or my dad. I wonder just what words escaped from that mouth. How would they phrase it? "My son is in bed with a man. Could you please go and arrest them for statutory rape?"

My dad was back in town that night. He came over before the police did. Evidently my mom had called him up in Harrison and told him all about her fine visit to Frank's apartment

and so he came right home and met her still hysterical. Then he drove right over to Frank's. I was sitting on the couch and couldn't see him out in the hallway because of the angle of the entrance hall, but I heard his voice as he stood out there talking to Frank. It was very polite and restrained, "Is my son here?"

Have you met my dad, doc? Have you met my mom? If so, you can hear his voice, right? "Is my son here?" You know, all full of plums and blackberries and thorns.

"Yes. Please come in," Frank said. Of course Frank knew who he was instantly. Well, Frank had just met my mom. So yeah, of course, this man out there would be my dad.

He came in ahead of Frank and saw the room before he saw me. It was like he had been sent out on a reconnaissance mission and he was scouting the terrain or something. When he saw me, it was like he remembered to smile. I don't know what I did. I'm pretty sure I didn't smile though.

Frank and I had had a few hours to talk about the scene with my mom, about what it meant for all of us and where we were going. Basically we were both glad it was out in the open, although of course we would have liked it all to be different. And we had said a few things about how we would manage living together, and my future and finishing high school and things like that. But it didn't occur to either of us right off that my dad might be coming over that night. I don't know why not. It seems obvious enough to me now that he would, but I guess that's history for you. It's always easier to see your history when it's behind you.

But anyhow, there was my dad standing in the middle of the floor looking like he was going to start twitching, and then he finally turned to Frank and cleared his throat politely, "Would you mind if I spoke with my son alone?"

“No, no, of course not,” Frank said quickly and turned as if he was going into the bathroom, but that would have been pretty stupid, so he made a sharp turn toward the kitchen and said, “Perhaps you would like some coffee? I’ll make some coffee?”

“Oh, yes, perhaps some coffee?” my dad said.

“John,” Frank said as he pushed open the door to the kitchen, “coffee?”

“My son doesn’t drink coffee,” my dad said, and then it was like he heard his own voice, saw where he really was, understood that maybe there was a life that I had outside of his own house where in fact perhaps I did drink coffee, and he added quickly, “Or perhaps he does. Johnny?”

I decided I would play along and I made my voice real casual like theirs and said, “Um, no, huh uh, Frank, thank you very much. No coffee for me. Gotta hit the books tomorrow morning.”

After Frank closed the kitchen door behind him, my dad just stood there for a while and pretended to be looking around the place and kind of nodding as if to say, “Nice place you have here, son. This is how homosexuals live?”

I could hear noises of pans banging each other in the kitchen and I had this image of Frank with his head in the pots and pans cabinet rattling them to make sure he couldn’t overhear anything. As my dad turned around, pretending to take a closer look at the print on the wall behind him (a Maxfield Parrish I gave Frank as a birthday gift) he managed to get his face out of sight. Then it was like he suddenly couldn’t go on with the pretenses and his back sagged a little and I knew that he was finally going to get into it and didn’t want to. Well, neither did I.

“I had it all written out, what I was going to say,” he said without turning back to me. “But it’s easier when you’re sitting at home and you’re full of anger. It’s hard when you come face to face ...”

He broke off, paused for a second, and I thought to myself that if he was going to keep his back to me it was hardly what I would call being face to face. I think the same thought must have occurred to him, but no, he was going to say something else.

“ ... face to face with your own failure.”

“Oh, Dad,” I started to say to him. I didn’t want him to start laying blame and running the whole martyr trip over me. The thing about my dad and being a martyr is that he does it way too well. It was like he was born for it and some day they’d crown him a saint and nobody would ever stand a chance of being happy ever again. Besides, I didn’t want anyone calling me his “failure” and I sure wanted him to know that, but he wouldn’t let me talk and went on with his own thought in his own way.

“ ... see your own failure, sitting in a strange room and looking at you with eyes you’ve never seen before. I can’t believe this has happened to us.”

I sat back now and set my teeth together and I was damned if he was going to get another word out of me.

“Do you know what you’ve done to your mother?”

Another silence. I think he actually expected that his question was worth an answer and that I would attempt to give one. Now he turned to me, and I could tell by the way he did it that he was pretending that yes, indeed, he had expected an answer and was surprised I had not yet given him one. I found myself looking down at his shoe laces, and that seemed to me bad, or

maybe cowardly or something, and so I looked up into his eyes, but then I saw from his expression that he was taking this as a chin-up kind of defiance. Jeez, there was no winning.

But I guess he saw that his trying to get me to feel guilty by bringing my mom into it wasn't going to help him, so he tacked around and came suddenly to sit beside me. Quite the maneuver, and it did take me by surprise. He reached out his hand as though to put it on my knee, but drew it back suddenly, which almost made me laugh, wondering if he thought that maybe I might think that he was making a play for me after all these years, my own father. Ultimately he laid his hand in his lap to get it out of the way and said, "Look, Johnny, let's go home and begin trying to forget this. What do you say?"

This left me behind. I was sitting there with my jaws clamped tight together like some little kid who's not going to eat his peas, and here he was being all generous and forgiving. And now of all times I wanted to behave like an adult, even if at the moment I had very little sympathy for the way this adult was behaving with me. But I still couldn't think of anything to say to him except a flat no, which seemed a little hard right in his face.

I didn't want to look at him, but I could see his face out of the corner of my eye looking like some big melon hanging over me. I kept my eyes down, somewhere, anywhere, on anything but him. I blinked them, I remember, so as to get rid of some of the spoiled kid look in them, and I finally put them on the floor over by the window where there was a leaf that had fallen off the coleus. I had given Frank that plant as a present for the first day of our New Year together with each other. He had put it in a window facing south and it had grown almost overnight into this incredible bush, purple velvet with a little green in the veins. This was the first leaf to drop from it.

“Look, don’t worry about all this,” my dad went on after a second of silence from me, and he gestured to the kitchen where Frank was still busy making noises. “It doesn’t mean a thing, I promise you. Kids get into trouble, but they live. Boys experiment around sometimes, but it doesn’t mean they have to stay that way. I know about all of this, believe me. Come home. Your mother didn’t mean those things she said today.”

Now I didn’t trust myself to look at him because I was getting ready to really scream the place down.

“Well, she meant them of course or she wouldn’t have said them. But she wasn’t saying them against you, you know. She was saying them against him,” and he motioned toward the kitchen doorway again where Frank was turning the faucet on and off and the coffee grinder and clanging and banging. “Come home. She’s fixed a German chocolate cake for you.”

That was finally too much for me, and I shouted at him with all I had. “I can’t believe you can come in here and say these things to me, right in the home of the man I love.”

The noise in the kitchen stopped.

My dad’s eyebrows went up and his chin fell down. Suddenly he was ludicrous, my poor old dad, coming over here to offer his bad little boy some German chocolate cake.

“Don’t say that, Johnny. Don’t say you love him. That’s not love. You’re too young to know what love is, and it certainly isn’t that. It’s wrong, Johnny. Sodom was destroyed for it, you know that, I taught you about that, those angels in Sodom. That’s where they get the word for it, Johnny, what you and that man do with each other. ‘Thou shalt not lie with mankind as with womankind, it is abomination.’ Abomination, John. I didn’t make that up. It’s God’s law.”

“Don’t start quoting Bible at me, Dad, because the Bible is full of shit. You know that better than anyone. It’s thousands of years of shit and hypocrisy, and that’s the stuff you preach, but not at me, not any more.”

This is what I think I remember saying, but you know, it’s hard to remember. Maybe I only thought those things, but now we were shouting at each other and over each other, each one accusing the other.

“It doesn’t mean anything, Johnny, it really doesn’t, that man in there and the way you think you feel about him, it’s nothing, it’s wrong, it’s shit.”

I’m pretty sure he said that. My dad, who never ever uses any swear words, but maybe he was getting it from me, both of us yelling shit at each other. I guess we had both stood up because now he was facing me and I was facing him, and he had me by the shoulder, and he was actually hurting me, grabbing my shoulders so hard.

“Listen now, no listen. I know. I know all about it. Believe me! I know!” His eyes were great big, and I guess something must have registered in my own eyes at that moment, like three cherries in a slot machine or something, because he suddenly looked panicked and dropped his eyes but he kept holding onto my shoulders like I was in a vice. I looked down too, hoping he would go on and say what he had started to say, but so afraid of it, so very very afraid of it.

But he didn’t go on. There was just this silence, him squeezing me by the shoulders and me like a rag doll in his grip. That was a pretty long silence. I don’t know how long. But pretty long. And then there was a knock from Frank on the other side of the kitchen door.

“You two all right?”

I wondered how much he had heard, what with the coffee grinder going sixty and all the banging around.

“Yes,” my dad said and let go of my shoulders and kissed me on the cheek. He kissed me on the cheek. He kissed me on the cheek, my dad, and let me go, and he resumed his seat on the sofa. “Yes, come in.” Like it was his home.

Frank went back into the kitchen for a second and came out again with a tray. There were three cups on the tray, plus a pitcher of milk and a bowl with sugar. Frank had had plenty of time to dress it all up with even a cloth napkin for each of the three of us.

“I guess I will have some of that,” I said.

“I thought you would say that, so I made you decaf.” Frank answered. He gave me a wink over my dad’s head that my dad didn’t see and he put the tray down on the coffee table. I actually managed to twist out some little thing like a smile as I realized that now we were all going to act very civilized. After all of that, all that had been said, and that big whopper of a thing that I think my dad was about to say but stopped himself just in time, we were now going to be very civilized.

“Oh, how good it smells,” my dad offered.

“How do you take it?” Frank asked my dad.

I was thinking to myself, “Yeah, Dad, how do you take it?” But I sure didn’t say it out loud.

“Um, sugar please, two teaspoons. And a little cream please, yes.” Frank spooned the sugar and poured the cream into one of the cups. “That’s fine. Thank you.”

What the fuck?

Frank handed one of the cups to me and took one for himself and sat down on the armchair facing the couch, smiling at us both. I think he was saying, "I'm back to stay." I for one was glad to have him here.

"Mr. Baron," Frank finally said. "Please excuse me for breaking in like this, but I do need to say some things to you, and I'm afraid if I wait too long you might get away before I have a chance to say them. You seem like a fair man, and listening to me can't hurt you. Will you promise me that you will let me say everything I want to say without interrupting me? I won't be long."

My dad changed his position on the couch, but he didn't make an outright objection.

Frank went on. "I don't know what's going to happen tonight, but whatever it is, it will be something important and I hope it's the right thing for all of us. So let me talk and then I'll go back into the kitchen and the two of you can be alone together again."

My dad thought a second and then smiled slightly, like his dancing partner had just stepped on his foot, and then he nodded, crossing his legs and sitting back into the couch.

"The most important thing I have to say is that I love your son. Please don't. Let me finish."

(My dad had started clearing his throat and uncrossing his legs, but now he crossed them again, as though that was really all that he had intended to do, clear his throat and uncross and recross his legs. Certainly not interrupt. They had a bargain on that. by Christ.)

"I think by now all the worst surprises are over for all of us. And I think we should all heave a little sigh of relief that it's in the open now where we can all work with it. I love

Johnny very much. He came as a surprise into my life and every day I say a little thank you for having found him. He's got something extraordinary about him. I've been struggling to identify it because I would like to be able to tell him what it is and thank him for it. I would like to find it in myself and nurture it. It is precious. I have wanted to explain to him why I can't imagine ever loving anyone else."

And through this Frank and my father were watching each other, Frank talking about me like I wasn't even there. It was so beautiful, everything he was saying, but it was beginning to piss me off because I wanted him to be telling me, me alone, and not my father. But I held it all together and sat quietly.

"It's a depth. Words like sincerity and honesty keep coming up, but they're not right. They're a little too sincere and honest to fit Johnny. He wouldn't stand for them. (Hah!) It's got to do with other people and what Johnny has for them. It's an understanding and a love. And generosity. He cares deeply, and too many people do not."

My dad uncrossed his legs again and put both feet flat on the floor.

"Yes, it's you, I realize that. It's to you that Johnny owes these great gifts, to you and Mrs. Baron. I would like to know you both better and I hope that we will have that opportunity. Because I want to be with Johnny forever. Please let me finish. You promised."

My dad had gotten up and said something like, "Oh, come now ..." but now he sat down again. I looked from my dad to Frank and then down into my coffee cup. I wasn't happy with any of this. Frank was doing a good enough job, playing my dad's game and choosing his words carefully. I had seen Frank do this kind of thing before, choose his words carefully, the right words for the right person to hear, almost speaking an entirely different language. With my

dad he was getting all ministerial, it seemed to me, and I was about to puke from it. But that didn't bother me as much as the fact that in trying so hard to win my dad over and establish a goody-goody connection with both my dad and my mom, should we ever all get together for Thanksgiving dinner or something heavenly like that, that maybe Frank was trying to do my own talking for me. Okay, he needed to say these things. But I needed to say things, too. But I waited.

“You're shocked, Mr. Baron, at all the wrong things. That I love Johnny and want to be with him forever, that should not shock you. That is what you should want for Johnny, absolute devotion, devotion to his goodness, those qualities that you and Mrs. Baron instilled in your son. I want our relationship to be solemn and with your blessing. John knows this and if he's forced to make a choice between us, he knows that I desperately hope and trust he chooses me. And I think he will. But it would be good if you didn't force him into such a choice. We will all live less happy lives if you do.”

He paused for just a moment and only then did he finally look over at me, and he smiled, just a momentary smile.

“I guess I had better say one more thing before I give up the floor. It may be the last time I'll be able to say it. And it's not an easy thing to have to say. I have my share of self-respect, no more than what I think is healthy, but it's there all the same. And it's one of the most disagreeable parts of my life to have to defend myself from time to time to people who are probably not ever going to accept my defense in the first place. I am what I am. I don't know how I got to be this way, but it's for all my life as long as I can remember, and here I am. I'm not going to change, ever. I can't change. And I don't want to change.”

Then he looked at me again. “I can't speak for John.” He smiled at me.

I was just rushed over with love for him. I remember thinking, “This man is okay. This is the man I want. If he talked for me, so what?”

I smiled at him and said, “You said just what I would want to say, but way better.”

“Are you finished?” This from my dad. Frank nodded.

“You will appreciate that it was difficult to sit still and listen to the things you said, young man,” by dad began, using the voice he uses from the pulpit. “Not that I don’t think that you believe it. But I do not believe it. You are dreadfully wrong. You say you love John and of course I can’t deny that. I can’t see what is inside you. But what you imagine to be true may in fact only be your illusion. Satan is all around us with his illusions.”

“I told you, Dad, don’t give us the Bible.”

“You’re both so young,” my dad rode right over me. “How old are you?”

“Twenty-five.”

“And Johnny’s sixteen.”

“Seventeen. I’m almost eighteen,” I said.

“Don’t quibble, John. All right, seventeen, a whole year’s difference from sixteen. It doesn’t make any difference. There is a huge life in front of you both. You’re only at the beginning of it. You’re too young to make decisions like this. And there are so many years difference between your ages. I could be wrong of course, but I don’t think Johnny for one is ready to judge whether or not he’s in love, as you call it. And to talk about being with each other forever, as if in holy marriage. It is unnatural, a sacrilege. ”

“Don’t throw Bible at us, Dad.”

“And finally, you say you are happy as you are. That is a trap. You should not simply settle because you believe it’s the easy way. And I don’t intend for John to settle for it. You can get help for it, and believe me, young man, you won’t be happy until you do. Please believe me when I say that I want to help you. If you stay as you are, there’s no future for you. You will always be an outcast and you will grow to have poison running with your blood. You would be better off dead. Now.”

“Dad, shut up! Don’t talk like that to Frank!”

Frank gestured to me to keep down my anger, but I had had all I could take.

“Come home, Johnny,” my dad said, turning to me.

“No, wait, you just wait a minute!” I yelled at him. “I’ve got some things to say about this too, and I’ve listened to all the crap I can take. You say it’s unnatural, Dad, but how do you know what’s natural for me and what’s unnatural? It’s what I feel, but you can’t feel that. You CAN’T feel what I feel. It’s in my nature. It’s not normal, sure. I mean, it doesn’t follow the norm, it’s not what most people are like. But it IS natural. For ME. And you talk about us being young. Mom told me the two of you got married the day she turned eighteen and on that day she cut her hair. She cut her hair because her father would never let her do it, not until she was out from under his control. And you were twenty-six at the time, Dad, if you want to bring up age differences.”

“That was a completely different thing,” my dad started to say.

“What’s the difference, Dad? There’s no difference except that you’ve forgotten what it was like, that’s all. You’ve just forgotten that other people are human beings, just like you used to be before you became this thing that you are now, this preacher, this thing that goes

around telling other people how they should live their lives, telling them they'll never be happy and that they're better off dead. When was the last time you were happy, Dad? Think about it a minute and you tell me when that was. And then you tell me who'd be better off dead."

Frank moved to shut me up, and suddenly I realized how far I had gone. I wished like hell I could take back my words because my dad looked like he just got hit by a bus. He aged thirty years right before my eyes. His face sagged and turned gray and his eyes got this look like old wood that needs dusting. He turned quietly and walked out of the apartment. He didn't even try to say anything more, or straighten up his back or walk tall or anything like he would have done in church, walking away from the pulpit. He just left.

And that was the last time I saw him except for that morning in court.

A few hours later, after Frank and I had gone to bed, both of us feeling like we didn't care if there was every going to be a next morning, the doorbell rang again.

"Don't answer it," I remember saying. "I can't go through another round."

Frank gave me a pat on the butt, his last one, and got up. He pulled on a pair of pants and shirt and went out of the bedroom. I heard the front door open and then strange voices and some other sounds I couldn't put together somehow. I threw off the covers and was just going to see what was going on when two silhouettes appeared in the doorway. Then the bedroom lights were flicked on. I blinked at the brightness and saw these two cops looking at me, me completely naked. Cops in our bedroom.

"Okay, come on, get dressed," one of them said to me in a voice that could drive nails.

"Where's Frank?"

“Don’t worry about him. He’s getting his rights read to him, some of the ones he ain’t gonna have much longer.”

I must have looked like a dunce because the pig started laughing right in my face and made the ugliest remark I can ever even imagine, so ugly that I won’t even repeat it, doc, because you would never get over it. It’s why we call them pigs.

I could hear Frank’s voice coming from the living room. “Frank!” I called and started for the door.

“Shut up,” the pig said and pushed me backward.

“Come on, kid,” the second cop said. He wasn’t so mean, but that one pig, he made his impression on me. Remember that, doc, when you think about the things that happened next.

I had to put on my clothes in front of the two of them and listen to this stream of garbage coming from the one. I had never imagined that, that I could be humiliated like that, in the privacy of my own bedroom. When I finally couldn’t take it any more and told him to shut up, he came towards me like he was going to tear off my arm, and I shut up quick. He grabbed my right arm and pushed me into the living room, out the front door and down the stairs of the apartment house. He was big, real big, and he didn’t care how much force he was using on me. I kept telling him to take it easy, but he clearly enjoyed his work. When we got outside I could see Frank getting into the back seat of a police car. I called to him and started to run toward him, but the pig had a tight hold on my arm.

I pulled my arm away from him and bashed him as hard as I could in the face with my fist. He fell backward but the other cop moved in and grabbed me from behind and put me in a half-nelson or some damn wrestling hold. I could hear Frank yelling at me not to fight and the

other cops came running up and shouting to get down on the sidewalk and the cop who had hold of me was telling me to cool it. But I could see the pig coming up to me with this smile on his greasy face and all I could think was kill. When he got near enough, I kicked up against the cop behind me and with all my strength planted my two feet right in the pig's face, the heels of my shoes right into his eyes, smash. He went flying backwards with blood splashing all over and he landed in this holly bush and slumped to the ground. Yeah, I can remember hoping in that moment that he was dead. Yeah, I would have liked to kill that pig.

But no luck. He showed up at my hearing. He was a sight with sore eyes, all black and blue, and I remember feeling proud of that.

But with so many cops grabbing me, there was nothing else I could do. They shoved me up against a second police car and put handcuffs on me. That was weird, feeling my hands cuffed behind my back like that, all helpless, all completely in their control suddenly. But they didn't try to cream me or anything, which is to their credit, I guess, since I was so out of control, and seeing what I had just done to their buddy. But they probably hated that pig, too.

They weren't any too gentle. I pulled my head off the roof of the second police car and managed to get a look at Frank's face through the back window of the car he was in. He was frantic for me, this look in his eyes, but what could he do, just sitting there, locked in, watching me, both of us helpless? Then they pushed me into the back seat of the second car, and that was that. We were both prisoners. End of story.

I watched them through the car window as they picked up the pig from out of the holly bush and helped him over to the car. His nose was pouring blood. He shook his head and

splashed my window with big drops of blood, and then he slid into the front seat and vomited all over himself.

His buddy slipped behind the wheel, took a look at the mess and just shook his head and didn't say a word. Then we drove off. I saw Frank's face move to the side window of his car as we drove past him, and then he was gone.

I haven't seen him since, or heard his voice. You don't know how that breaks me down, doc. This lousy world's got a rotten heart and sometimes it stinks so bad I think I'm going to choke on the stench. It's times like those I figure I may as well spend the rest of my life in the hole. It's got to be as good as what I've had up till now. At least there I don't have to be bothered by humanity.

djt: 7/11/79 — 6:50 p.m.

1. Make photocopies of the entire contents of the Baron file.
2. Set up an open-ended appointment with Rev. and Ms. Baron for an afternoon and evening, suggest at least five hours.

INCIDENT REPORT

SUBJECT: John Baron's fight with Jess Lyon

SUBMITTED BY: Norman Bandy

DATE: 12 July, 1979

I was at the Desk this morning at 10:22 a.m. when I heard a commotion coming from the West Corridor. A crowd of wards was formed around Jess Lyon's door. I made my way through the crowd and saw John Baron in Lyon's room delivering blow after blow to Lyon who was pinned against the wall and who would clearly have fallen to the floor if Baron had allowed him.

I told Baron to stop but he ignored me, continuing to pummel Lyon whose face and body were so covered with blood as to be nearly unrecognizable. When I interposed my body between them, I thought for a moment Baron might, in his fury, try to strike me. He did stop himself, however, from throwing any more blows. Behind me Lyon crumpled against my body and slid unconscious to the floor. He was taken to the Clinic and his wounds attended to. Like Vic Hill before him, Lyon has a broken nose and contusions over both eyes, plus a fractured right hand and two broken ribs. At the time of this report he is physically unable to bear questioning.

Baron was again only slightly injured in the fight. Although I did question him, he gave me no information other than that he was still redeeming his "Wholesome Bonds" and he added, "Suck the big one, Bandy."

PUNISHMENT:

Jess Lyon's punishment, if any, will be assigned after he is well enough to be questioned as to his involvement in the fight. John Baron, in the meantime, is to serve another full week in the Adjustment Center before transfer.

RECOMMENDATION:

I recommend that Baron be transferred at the end of his term of punishment into the Intractable Unit. He is absolutely out of control and an obvious danger to the other wards. He has in no manner made any attempt to adjust himself to the Med-Psych program, personnel or wards. He has seriously injured two young men without a sign of remorse and without apparent rationale.

I can no longer take the responsibility for Baron's irrational, refractory and dangerous conduct. The young man should be under constant surveillance and lock and key. In short, he should be placed with the other intractables in the basement where he will not have the opportunity to continue injuring his fellow wards.

COUNTERMAND

SUBMITTED BY: Diana Town, Ph.D.

DATE: July 12, 1979

I am hereby denying Norman Bandy's recommendation for John Baron's transfer into the Intractable Unit. I am also hereby commuting the punishment to only three days in the Adjustment Center, the minimum sentence for his offense. If it were within my authority, I would annul the sentence altogether and, further, I would abolish the Adjustment Center forever from High Broder. Although I in no way condone Baron's assaultiveness, I believe it is the Adjustment Center that has created the tension in Baron that has caused his eruptions into violence, and I can see nothing but more danger in locking him up there again.

I am convinced from Baron's communications with me that he is either innocent or justified in all his offenses. I believe that Baron's attacks on Vic Hill and Jess Lyon are retaliation for a rape they committed upon Baron with two other wards, as yet still unpunished by Baron. I

further believe that if it had not been for Roger Standing's death, Baron might never have been pushed to the actuality of seeking this revenge. I believe the isolation of the Adjustment Center gave him too much time for thought (certainly High Broder has given him the food for it), that he dwelled unhealthily upon his grievances (which are many and great) and that this increased his desire and indeed his need to act upon those grievances in the only way he could conceive within the system of High Broder where trust is never fostered between staff and wards and where justice is subordinate to and often not even vaguely related to law and punishment.

Because I feel that High Broder has every chance of ruining what could be a very productive and potentially fine life, I intend to make every effort to secure a release for John Baron. I would like to persuade his parents to ask him to come back to their home, and to this end I have made a set of photocopies of Baron's communications with me for their benefit. I am convinced that once they read his story in his own words they will understand and appreciate his point of view.

The difficulty will lie in getting Baron to agree to go back to his parents. He is a proud young man and he has been deeply hurt by his parents and feels betrayed by them. I think, however, that if Rev. and Ms. Baron agree to withdraw their charges against Franklin Parker, young Baron will look more favorably upon his mother and father.

If I can accomplish these things, we need no longer concern ourselves with John Baron. If not, perhaps then I shall have to cede to Mr. Bandy's wish that Baron be removed from Med-Psych, although that recourse is a frightening one to contemplate.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEE: Franklin Parker

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: July 13, 1979

I went this morning to see Franklin Parker at Carlton State Prison and I found him unrecognizable as the cordial young man I met in his apartment only a little more than a month ago. His imprisonment and evident abuse at the hands of his fellow inmates have reduced him to a shadow of what he was at that earlier interview, a terrified little man, twitching and stammering. Although his brain seemed alive enough, he had little control over his speech, answering my questions in such vague and roundabout terms and with so many stumblings and reversals that I was unable to get any information on his relationship with Baron which I could call solid.

Still, as his eyes seemed sharp and as he frequently apologized for his incoherence, it occurred to me that he might do better to try to write me a letter. I suggested this to him finally and he quickly, with signs of relief, agreed to it. He promised he would write this afternoon. So I left him.

If the Barons do agree to withdraw their charges against Parker, and if we can convince the judge and attorneys involved to try to find a way to reverse the actions that have been set in motion and set Parker free from prison, we will all, together, be saving more than one life.

Friday, July 13

Dear Dr. Town,

I sorry to make you so poor showing this morning. It sometimes hard I think to think. And I was not expecting you. Now that I think, I think I should. I remember from when we met, in my apartment I remember, and you were very nice, and helping John. So yes, I think I should expected. But I did not. Not here at Carlton. This place.

I had visitors, this place, who told me you are helping John. They told me he writes you. You must love that. John loves to write. I miss John writing. To me. Perhaps he wrote you these friends in his letters, our friend Johnette and John's good friend from school, but I forget her name. Claudia. Now I remember. I never met Claudia before. John told me so much about Cauldia, but I never met her but she visited, with cookies, but her visit here at prison was surprise me. I felt bad for her to see me here. With cookies. I think I confused her. I'm confuse, too. I am often confused, I'm afraid, I can't. That was brave, Caldia, strong, coming to prison to give me news of our Johnny, and cookies.

But you will be pleased. Both Caldia and Johnette told me John like you very much, and you helping him. I thank you so much. Being in prison is a killing thing. To the soul. You making it easier for John. People turn away. That you do not, and for that I thank.

You asked me to write you, I am writing you. Johnny's happiness means more than all and every thing to me. His father and mother, you asked, I don't know them. I met them. But I don't know them. I don't know how they can do what they did. I can't give you answers for them. Was that what you want. I'm sorry. I can't. I don't think.

~~I lost track lose~~

I—lose

John has some thing I do not have. I wish I have it. Not hard but that, too. Not depend independence, but that, too. Not imag lack of imagination, but like that, but that would not be worth to write about John. It's like blind John is with blinders on, looking straight ahead, to get to somewhere and not get lost go somewhere else. I lost It is this thing what make him good in his basketball. He keep his eye on the ball and the basket. He make sure.

John can adapt. I don't seem able John does that

I think about Scottie. You said John told you about Scottie. You ask me about Scottie? I think you did. Scottie was first for Johnny butnot good for Johnny but Johnny had blinders on. Johnny has trust. Scottie, no. When the blinders drop, Johnny could see me then. I made sure I was there then. So he could see me. I was there.

I think what Scottie did to us me and to Johnny and had no reason but reveng but he took it. Johnny, I hope, is not feeling it the way I am feeling it. Please help him. He loves me, I know He has trust please do not show him this letter. This letter is for you, to help Johnny how ever. I don't know how it might help you help him. I can't think.

But if you tell him you come to see me here in prison please tell him I send him my love the best thing you can tell him from me. Remind John Socrates tell John army of lovers John know army of lovers but don't show him this letter this is not the way he know

me to write. This letter would not be good for him. I told Johnette, don't tell Johnny. I told ~~Cald~~
Claudia, dont tell Jonny. I ask you now please dont let Johnny see this letter.

But thank you, doctor, most sincerely.

Sincerely,
Frank Parker

Last Letter
Sunday night, July 15
Because I'm not ever going
to write you again

But you need to know that it was another big day today, doc. I got out of the hole again today and I'm paying my last respects. I figure I owe you that because you've been very good to me, very very very good to me, so very fucking good.

But here's to Jack first because Jack got out of High Broder today. And I'm going to miss that bastard. He's eighteen now and so when he came up this time before the parole board last week, he just told them all that he had learned a lot and they all looked at each other like aren't we all sweet and good, and they signed the papers and sent him off. Just like that.

Of course he's got to live with his brother for a while and get a job and report to the parole officer every week. But like he said to me just before he left, "It's a kind of free. It's a step away from this place. And this place was a big step away from my folks. I'm heading out, Baron, and I'll get there. Take care of yourself."

Then he gathered up his things and left. I ran up to the roof to watch him go. When he got to the edge of the yard he turned around and gave us all the finger. Then he threw his suitcase up on his head like he was off to Africa, and walked out the gate.

Outside there was a car waiting for him. There were three passengers, so I figured it was his father and mother and brother there to pick him up. One of them called to him and he went over and ducked his head and stood there for a minute talking into the car. Then he turned and started walking down the road again. The car waited there for a second and then drove after him and slowed down beside him. Without turning his head he set his suitcase down on the roadside and sat on it. Pretty soon the car drove off. He sat there for about fifteen minutes

looking down the road and then the car came back. This time there was only the driver in it, and I figured Jack had told his brother to dump his parents or he wouldn't get in. So now he stood up, picked up his suitcase and threw it in the back seat and got in the front seat.

Weird, doc. but yeah I'm going to miss that guy.

You know what else happened today? Sure you do. I bet you're sitting there reading this now and peeing your pants with all that pleasure. You bitch.

My parents came in to see me today. Seventeen fucking visiting days later and they fucking come to see their boy. And now I know for sure what I always suspected. Yeah, you're behind all of this.

You gave them my letters, they said. They sat there and showed me this big envelope, and it was full, they said, of my letters to you. I wrote those letters to you in confidence, doc, and you told me you would never show them to anyone, and you gave them to my parents????!!!!

And don't give me that crap that you were trying to help me and look at all you've done for me. That's all beside the point because we made a deal right off at the beginning and I trusted you. Don't you have any idea what trust even is?

Well, forget it. It's done and there's no way now to get it undone. But from this point on, you and me are through. Because you can't do that to someone you pretend to care about. Or not to me anyway, because I won't let you. Pretend, that is. Pretend any more, that is.

However, I WILL tell you what happened between my parents and me today. One last entry, dear diary. Or do you know already what happened? I guess you've been in cahoots

together with them all this time. You've probably been masturbating each other for weeks, your tongues in each other's ears.

Well, it was a real surprise, I can tell you when I came down from the roof after Jack was out of sight and I saw Bandy coming for me. I figured that Ed Ready had snitched who smashed him up after they carried him to the clinic this morning, and that Bandy was going to shut me up in the hole again. See, doc, I'll confess to you what you've already figured out, or will soon figure out, is that the first thing I did after they let me out of the hole this time, I went looking for either Ready or Billie Karl. (I can tell you now that they were the other two.)

Well, what should I find but the two of them together in the classroom down in the East Corridor, on the floor doing 69, no less, their pants all bundled up between their ankles and their butts humping. I thought it was great irony, my favorite word these days, to get them both like that in the middle of a punking. Both of them, the two guys I was looking for. Sucking each other off. Perfect.

They didn't even see me coming. I pulled Ready up, his mouth all wide open and hollering, and slammed him up against the wall and with one quick, sharp, but carefully executed rap, I broke his arm across the edge of the wash basin. He never expected to have a climax like that one. He just slumped to the floor screaming and whimpering, holding his arm like it was a new part of his body that he didn't know what to do with.

Then I turned to get Karl. He was a mess, crawling across the floor to the door, trying to get his pants up, and then making for the corner and crying and begging me not to hurt him. He said he'd be my punk any time I wanted, only that I should do it easy. That idea hadn't even occurred to me until I realized that he thought I was going to do it to him, but all of a

sudden it seemed perfect, like perfect justice. Let the punishment fit the crime in the very room where the crime was committed. What could be more beautiful?

I even started to unbutton my pants. I was even about to pull my dick out. I was even thinking about actually doing it. It had been a long time for me and I was thinking about how good it would feel, the whole thing, and getting revenge and driving it really hard up inside him because no, I wasn't going to go easy on him.

But then it flashed all over me, like a lightning strike or something, what I was doing, and I about puked at the thought. He made me dirty once, and here I was about to make myself dirtier, way dirtier, dirty all through and through, inside and out. Man! Jesus! God! And I stopped. I shook my head. I couldn't believe it.

Karl was looking up at me with this stupid look and I half think he wanted me to do it now. He was the last of them and he knew he had a big hurt coming to him. The others had fought back, or tried to, but Karl was taking it like a doom. I heard Ready moan and I looked over at him. His arm was stretched out along the floor at this funny angle and he was in bad pain. I realized then what I had done, what I had been doing, what I was, what I had become. I looked back at Karl. There wasn't a thing I could think of now that I wanted to do to him.

"Get your clothes back on," I said to Karl. "Make a sling for him with his shirt. Take him to the clinic."

Then I left the classroom. I wasn't feeling too good. That's when I saw Jack, and he said goodbye to me, and I ran up to the roof, because it really really really meant something to me that he was finally getting out, and I really really hated to see him go, even though I was glad for him. I saw him give his fucking parents their fucking farewell, and good for him. But now,

coming down from the roof, I was feeling all miserable and the last person I wanted to see was Bandy. Yeah. I figured Ready and Karl had spilled their guts to him.

But imagine my surprise when all Bandy said to me was that I had visitors. I had to ask him what? What had he said?

He said, "You've got visitors."

I said, "It's too late for visitors."

He said, "Special visitors. Dr. Town arranged it."

He sure hates you, doc. You should have seen the way his lips twisted around your name. Man, he hates you.

Well, of course the last people I expected in the world were my mother and father. I figured maybe it was the Duke and Duchess of Hanover maybe. Especially since I was escorted into this private luxury chamber with a rug and armchairs. Did you also arrange those deluxe accommodations, doc? Very thoughtful.

But anyway there they sat, the two of them, all saintly. My mother had her purse in her lap and my father had his hands in his. They both looked terrible, like they hadn't slept since I last saw them in court. But still they had their wings and haloes on.

I sat down too. What else was I supposed to do? I don't know if I said anything. I can't imagine what. As a matter of fact, I don't remember too much about the first five or ten minutes except that my mom was all crazy about how much weight I had lost, and wasn't I eating, that you had assured her that I was eating but I looked all like a skeleton, and my dad kept saying how breakfast was the most important meal of the day. They don't have even a clue what goes on in here and they come in like angels, for cripe's sake?!?!???

But the meat of the matter, which is what you want to hear, doc, don't you, is that they made me a proposition. Oh, not just straight out like that of course. There are appearances to maintain, after all, and lots of hemming and hawing. But that's what it was about all the same.

"We've been thinking, Johnny..." my dad said.

I had to bite my tongue to keep from saying, "Oh? What does that feel like?"

"...and we realize now that we have been very unfair to you."

I didn't trust myself to say anything, so I didn't say anything.

"Oh, Johnny!" my mother broke in. "We read those letters you wrote to your counselor ..."

1. Set dynamite in head.

2. Blow mind.

"... and suddenly we saw how wrong we were. What you wrote about her right there in the beginning was so true of us. We don't ... we didn't have any imagination, Johnny. It never occurred to us, it never seemed possible to us that you could ... that you and that man could ... that ..."

She choked around like that for a while until my father took over like he was picking up a deck of cards that had fallen out of his hands, and he was trying to get them back together in suits. "John, you've got to forgive us. It's a big change for us, and you can't expect us to make a change like this overnight. What you've done is something we've been taught all our lives is wrong, and it's going to take us time to undo that learning. It's not going to be smooth waters ahead of our canoe, Johnny. But the worst is behind. We can pull together now."

There was a little moment of silence and I wondered if my father was as embarrassed as I was over the corniness of what he had just said, and taking us back to the happy family on the Boundary Waters. Cripes!

My mom was good for another line or two. “Yes, Johnny, it’s been hard, but we’ve talked it over now, lots of time to think and talk, and we’ve decided to put it all in the past where it belongs. We’ve decided to bury it and neither of us is going to talk about it ever again.”

I guess my dad must have read something in my face (and there sure was a lot going on in my head) because he jumped right in like somebody had missed an entrance and he was going to have to adlib a brand new play because of it.

“Now your mother doesn’t mean to imply that you have to bury anything you’ve done.”

“Oh, no!” my mother said, remembering her line suddenly. “We don’t want ...”

“We don’t want you to feel you have to forget your friend ...” my dad was going on.

“His name is Frank, dear.”

“Hum?”

“Frank,” my mother smiled at me. “Johnny’s friend’s name is Frank.”

She smiled at me and said Frank’s name. Frank’s name in her mouth.

“Yes, well, we don’t want you to forget about Frank at all. In fact, we hope that you two will go on seeing a lot of each other. I mean, if it’s possible. I mean ...”

He looked over at my mother a little helplessly as if he had jumped way ahead in the script, and she stumbled to pick up her cue, but when she realized that she didn’t know the next line after all, she settled back down again and opened up her purse and fished around,

closing it back up without ever finding anything at all. Then my dad fumbled a while, and continued on his own. I mean, what a joke.

“Well, he’s in prison now, you know. You do know that, don’t you, Johnny?”

“Of course, Larry, don’t you remember? His friend, the one who dresses ... you know, Johnette, that Johnette ... came to visit Johnny and he ... I mean, well, she ... told Johnny all about that.”

A joke.

“But we’ve got high hopes, Johnny, that we can get the sentence commuted. We talked to the lawyer last night after we had read your letters and had a chance to think the whole thing over and to realize how wrong we had been to call the police into it.”

“We didn’t know, Johnny, what was going to happen in this place!” My mother opened her purse again and this time found a wad of kleenex that she held to her nose and eyes. “We didn’t know ...” she was struggling more than ever now, “... how you would become in here, the way you talk, the way you think ... those fights ... the ... the ... “

She wanted to say “rape” but didn’t know how to get there or how to get away from there. Such a joke.

“Oh, Johnny!” she hid her face in her wad of kleenex. I almost laughed out loud.

“We talked to your lawyer again, John,” my father went on. “He seems like a reasonable man. He said there might be a good chance, if he talked to that judge on our behalf, and if you were out of the detention center and were home living with us again, and if we, your mother and I and you yourself, went to the judge with the lawyer to plead for Frank and to say we had been wrong originally in evaluating the situation, that you were indeed merely

overnighting that one night at Frank's apartment, then the judge just might find a way to commute the sentence. Or ... or something. He was talking legal talk, John, and it was somewhat difficult to follow his thinking, and I don't want to say too much and get your hopes up too high because we're not sure we can do this, but there's a chance, Johnny, a chance, a good chance."

Suddenly, doc, suddenly I saw. I saw why they were here and what they were stumbling around about and my heart, doc, I can't tell you. My heart jumped right up out of my chest and started pounding around in my head. Doc, I can't tell you.

But yeah, that's what you want to hear, isn't it? That's why you arranged all this, isn't it? But doc, yeah, if this could be true. Yeah, for that moment I was numb with it, with the sudden hope. If that was true, if that was possible that Frank's sentence could be commuted, then these last months were gone and behind us, I could forget them, I could forget them easy if I could get Frank out of prison. And Frank could forget, too, because I know he's been through hell in there. I could make him forget. We could start all over again right from where we left off.

So my dad could see it in my face, and he was now getting into it, getting louder and brighter because he could see how excited he was getting me, and my mom, too.

"The lawyer said he could do that?" I said.

"Well, he said, maybe," my dad tried bringing it back a notch. "But he would try. He would help us."

Another notch back. "Of course, the past can't be wiped away entirely. Your friend will probably have to leave town in order to find another job. Word spreads so fast, and with that kind of stain on his record he'd have a hard time trying to find somebody in Broder who would want to hire him."

“And of course he would never be able to be a teacher again,” my mother added.

“But if he goes far enough away, out of state?”

“Sure,” I said, “that’s a possibility. There would be nothing keeping us here.”

What a dropped sledge hammer that was. The silence after it was deafening. Finally my mother said, “But Johnny, you would stay home. With us.”

And then I saw where we were. All that stuff they were handing out was just confetti. Just pretense. Nothing had changed, not inside them. They just wanted to get Frank out of the way, way far out of the way, out of state. How about China? And they would have me back where they wanted me.

Of course they knew that they had to get Frank out of prison. But they wanted him out of my life, too. Banishment. And of course it was such a convenient banishment too because, “after all, he HAS to go if he wants to find a job, if he wants to eat.” Oh, sure, I’ll give them the credit for not laying it out exactly like that in their heads, me and Frank as the patsies and them as the heavies, but a rose by any other name still stinks.

I guess there was another long pause as I sat there looking at them because my mother finally said, “Johnny?”

“No I wouldn’t,” I said finally.

“Wouldn’t what?” They had lost track of the conversation.

“No, I wouldn’t stay home. With you. You are no longer my home.”

“But you’d have to, Johnny.”

“What about your school?” my dad said. “You’ve already missed your graduation. You’ll have to at least get your diploma, perhaps from night school. And then college. We always had plans for you to go to college, remember?”

“I would not stay home with you,” I said again, not caring any more whether or not I hurt them. In fact I wanted to hurt them. “Not with you. Not ever.”

“But you’d have to, Johnny,” my mother said again. “Don’t you see? If you ran off with that man now, you’d be committing the same offense as before and you’d end up back here and he’d end up in prison again.”

“Not if you didn’t send the cops after us again.”

She looked like she had been shot. She opened up her purse and started pawing around in it again. Smelling salts? I couldn’t stand looking at her any more. I turned away. I couldn’t stand her any more.

My dad said, “But you realize that you would both be on parole, that’s what the lawyer told us, and he told us we should emphasize that, you would both be on parole and the terms of your parole would forbid your seeing each other.”

“They wouldn’t know Frank and I were living with each other if you didn’t tell them.”

“It’s the law, John,” my father said. “We’re bound by it as much as you are. You can’t expect us to deceive the police.”

I said, “If you really believed what you said just now about realizing how wrong you were, you wouldn’t tell. You’d know that the law is wrong. You’d know that Frank and I are right to want to be together, and you’d help us.”

“Your mother and I didn’t make the rules, John. It’s the law.”

“Fuck the law. It wouldn’t even apply to us if you hadn’t put us in jail to begin with. There wouldn’t be any fucking parole to worry about.”

“Johnny!” That was my mother. She had heard the F-word and nothing else.

They sat over there frowning at me, him like he used to do when I didn’t want to go with him to church and her like she used to do when I would knock over a fucking glass of milk. I sat back and looked back at them ... I guess ... the same way.

“You want me to make a deal, don’t you? If I’ll come home and be a good boy, you’ll do your best to get Frank out of prison, right?”

“Well, John,” my dad said and cleared his throat, “I wouldn’t put it that way.”

“No, I’ll put it that way because that’s the way it is!”

A lot of kids never get over their parents, doc, but today I think I did. You should be applauding. But I guess maybe you’re not. And oh, still more talk talk talk.

“John, you’ve got to learn to compromise.”

“I’m not compromising my life, Dad! I’m not! And I’m not going to compromise Frank’s life.”

“Everybody compromises, John.”

“Not me.”

“Look, John, stop being stubborn. After your parole is over in two years or possibly even one, you’ll be on your own, legally of age and free of the parole terms and then you can go off with your young man.”

I took a big breath and walked around the room, kicking the legs of the armchairs, kicking the waste basket, kicking whatever.

“Okay,” I said finally and sat back down at the table and laid my hands out flat on the top of it, “here’s the way it is, I guess. I’ve got two choices the way you lay it out. One, I sit here in jail until I’m eighteen and I get out in four months or six months or whenever the parole board says I get out. Frank stays in prison his full two years, or let’s say gets out in a year or even less for good behavior, this without the two of you doing anything to help. By that time my parole is over and I don’t have to answer to anybody and the two of us try to get back together, if that’s possible, and try to forget it all happened, if that’s possible, and live happily ever after. If that will ever be possible again.”

My dad started to interrupt but I waved him off.

“Two, I go home with you, and Frank maybe gets released pretty soon, and maybe not, and if he does get out, he leaves town. In the meantime I’m locked up in your house and before I can do anything or go anywhere I’ve got to get a parent permission form signed in my blood.”

“Oh, Johnny,” my dad said. “Be fair.”

“You’ll probably be surprised to hear this after making me such a fair deal,” I said, “but thanks and no thanks. Number two might be easy enough for me. It would be a hell of a lot easier on Frank, maybe, if maybe he really did get out, if maybe you really did go ahead and work to get him out, which, you know, I kind of doubt. But be fair, Johnny.”

“Yes, be fair, Johnny. We came here to help.”

“Well, I’m not going to sell out to you. If I went along with that kind of slimy deal, I’d keep sliding the rest of my life. You want me back on your terms. And I want back my life, on my own terms.”

“But what about Frank, Johnny,” my mother said. “What about Frank’s life?”

“I think Frank would tell you to go to hell,” I said and walked to the door.

As I put my hand on the door knob, I heard my dad let out this sudden big sob and my mom say, “Johnny, please. Please, baby.” I turned and looked at the two of them sitting there and my heart swelled up so huge it hurt me and I broke down with them. We all cried together, I don’t know how long. All three of us, bawling together, but not together at all.

“Don’t force me to make a choice like that!” I shouted at them. “Be on my side for a change. Believe in me, your son, and forget the law, forget the parole officer. Lie to them if you’ve got to, but help me, Dad. Help me, Mom!”

They just kept crying, both of them. For maybe two minutes, maybe five, they just sat there crying and looking away from me. Then I left.

So that’s that. You happy, doc? What hath doc wrought?

Oh, I guess I’m being too hard on you, huh? You’re not to blame for anything, right? Except losing my trust, but big deal that is. You just work here, and that’s your job, I guess. You come and try to help people, try to set things right in our little upside down worlds.

I’d like my letters back now, doc. You told me you would give them back when I want them, and I want them now. I don’t want them in your possession any longer. They were between me and you, that was the deal, and you broke the deal. I’ve got no power over you, and I know you’ve told me other things and then gone back on them, but I am very sincerely asking

you to give my letters back to me and not make any more copies of them and not show them to any fucking body else. You've got no right to them any more.

See you in session, because I guess I've got to. You bitch. You fucking bitch.

djt, 7/16/79 — 7:40 p.m.

1. Photocopy Parker's letter of July 13.
2. Call Baron to the office.

INTERVIEW REPORT

INTERVIEWEE: John Baron

INTERVIEWER: Diana Town

DATE: July 16, 1979

(file this memo and Baron's last letter in Verso djt)

John Baron made an appearance in session today just long enough to hand me his letter from last night, then he turned and walked from the room without a word.

After the session, I read the letter, cancelled the remaining sessions for the day, returned to my office and had Baron sent for. It has become clear that the young man is willing to throw away his life out of pride, that he is ready to spend the next year in the Adjustment Center rather than admit to being wrong when he feels he wasn't, rather than subject himself to what he believes is the tyranny of his parents and the injustice of society.

And of course his feelings about me are obvious in this letter, but that is of no consequence.

I felt sure that if John knew about Franklin Parker's dreadful state in prison, that he would abruptly realize that he must take the deal that his parents are offering him. Fortunately, Franklin Parker's letter arrived in Saturday's mail, so I had proof to give Baron, Parker's own words, as broken as they are, to show how feeble he has become in only these first few weeks at Carlton.

When Baron arrived, he reminded me of the young man who came to my office three months ago, doggedly silent, suspicious, hostile, accusatorial, so different from the lovely person I had come to know once his barriers had been broken down.

But there was something else, now, in this young man who presented himself to me today: a new aspect in his eye of the animal, of the keen hunter at once with the wary hunted.

There was not a trace of that softness that we occasionally have shared with each other. No

confidence, not any longer. No chance to laugh. No joy. Nothing but the bleakest of hate and condemnation. I missed the John Baron I had come to know; I missed him enormously, and I told him so.

“You gave my letters to my parents?”

That wasn’t what I expected him to say. “With certain redactions,” I answered.

“What’s that mean?”

“I cut out certain parts.”

“Which parts?”

“Well, for one, you and your brother in your bed.”

“Well thank you, doctor, for small favors!”

“John, your parents needed to see what you have been through so that they could understand how they can help you. They needed to hear it in your own words, your own honest words.”

“Honest, huh?” He snorted. “Are you going to give me back my letters?”

“I do have a letter for you,” I said, “but it’s not one of yours.”

“You said you’d give them back. Are you going to?”

“This letter is from Frank.” I took the envelope out of my desk drawer and held it up so he could see Parker’s handwriting.

He was surprised. In another moment, he put out his hand for the letter.

“It’s not written to you,” I said. “It’s written to me. He told me not to show it to you.”

He was clearly puzzled. His hand remained out, ready to receive the letter. I did not extend it to him yet.

“I could barely recognize him, John. I went to see him Friday at Carlton. You have no idea how he has suffered in there.”

He looked stunned, uncomprehending.

“I doubt you will recognize even his words.” I now extended to him the envelope. “Do you want to read them?”

Since his hand was already out and the envelope was now so near, this new intelligence appeared to leave him compromised, full of distrust. He looked at the handwriting. I realized that he might not recognize Parker’s handwriting because it was so spidery now, not like the bold handwriting I had seen on Parker’s earlier envelope.

“That’s not Frank’s handwriting. Frank didn’t write that letter. What are you trying to get away with?”

“He did. He’s very feeble now.”

“You tell me he told you not to give it to me, and then you stand there offering it to me. What are you trying to get away with?”

“You’re the one with your hand out.”

He gave his fingers a quick jerk as though to say, “Give it to me.” But he didn’t say the words.

“Before you read it, John, I should tell you that not only am I aware of the deal your parents have made you, but I’m the one who advised them to make the deal. I also advise you to accept it. If you stay in High Broder, I won’t be able to keep you in Med-Psych any longer. Your

acts of violence to the other wards have made that impossible. Mr. Bandy has gone over my head to the Superintendent who has informed me in no uncertain terms that I am a psychologist, not a disciplinarian, and that if Mr. Bandy cannot handle you, then you must be transferred. Mr. Bandy, as you might suppose, has indeed insisted he cannot handle you. You have wreaked havoc here. You will have to be moved either into Protective Custody, which is a lock-down, or into the Intractable Unit, also a lock-down. From your time in the Adjustment Center I assume you know exactly what that situation is. If either Ed Ready or Billie Karl report you as the malefactor in the incident with Ready's broken arm, you can be sure Mr. Bandy will not rest until you are in Intractable. I understand from Chaplain Kincaid that so far Ready and Karl are keeping quiet about it, saying that Ready tripped and fell against the basin. Doubtlessly they do not want to establish themselves as snitches. The fact that you came upon them in the way that you did, with their clothes off and during sex, only I and only you know. I have made up my own mind that I will keep all of that secret. It is unethical, but I intend to do it. All of this conversation right now, John, as well as this letter from Frank I will keep secret. I have a special file into which I have put copies of the various compromising materials and actions that you, and Frank, and now I myself have made."

"Why do you even—" he began to say, still distrusting me.

"I need those documents to remind myself of the exact words we have used with each other. I will make a report called an "Interview Report" of this meeting we are having right now. But as I just told you, this will be kept in a separate file. I keep that file in my own home. You must understand, John, that so much of what I have done for you is strictly forbidden. You could snitch on me. Did that ever occur to you?"

He thought about it. “That other letter you gave me from Frank? And the one I gave you to give him?”

“Strictly forbidden.”

“You read them?”

“Your letter to Frank, yes. Not his to you.”

“You made a copy of that letter I gave you for Frank?”

“It’s in my separate file, yes. It’s secure.”

“You’ve got secret files on everyone?”

“Only you.”

He was weighing all of this carefully, balancing though off balance, his hand still extended to receive Parker’s letter.

“The point is, John, you have run out of good will here, and I can give you no more special attention. It is out of my hands from this point forward. If you insist now on remaining in High Broder out of this stupid pride of yours, you will be destroying yourself. And I offer you now this opportunity to see what you will be doing to Frank. Read this letter. I saw him, John. I saw him. You must read this letter. You must do all you can to get him out of that place. He tells me in it to remind you about the Army of Lovers. An army starts with one soldier, John. You can’t imagine what he’s like now. If you don’t ...”

I left the rest of the sentence unspoken. But he understood it.

After a moment he jerked his fingers at me again, his hand still outstretched toward the letter that was still in my hand, facing him. I put the envelope in his hand and went to the window, turning my back to him to give him privacy to read the letter. I could see his reflection

in the glass of the window, and I could hear the rustle of the paper as he withdrew the letter from the envelope.

All was quiet for a moment until from Baron came the most terrible noises that I could ever imagine, a horrible sobbing and gasping, and a shuddering, sputtering sound, animal kinds of noises that I cannot even describe. I turned to see him stumbling toward the wall of my office and collapsing into the small sofa there, his hands to his face, crumpling the letter in his fists against his eyes. He was utterly within himself and helpless and vulnerable. The horror that Franklin Parker has become, in his words on the pages, had struck this boy with full force and brought him down to his knees on the sofa.

There was no way for me not to go to him now, he was in such pain. I slid into the sofa beside him and put my hands gently on his hunched shoulders, and he turned into me so violently and held onto me so tightly, his head buried into my neck, that it was very painful. But I kept my arms around him, kept patting his shoulders and back as he convulsed in my arms, wave after wave of spasms and sobs racking his body and causing him to clutch me ever more tightly. I don't believe I have ever been so terrified. We seemed frozen together like this, I don't know how long. I had not imagined anything so dreadful as this.

After some moments, I looked up and saw Mr. Bandy's face through the window of the door. I have no idea how long he might have been watching. I shook my head at him and grimaced toward Baron still weeping in my arms. Mr. Bandy, to my relief, turned away and left the two of us to each other.

At some point, I don't know how long, John had drawn his knees up to his chin as he continued to weep, still helpless, me still with my arms around him, helpless to help him. I

began trying to compose this memorandum in my head in order to have the words ready to give Bandy. What a horrible woman I am, I thought, to be composing my own defense in the grip of such misery. But still I composed the words.

At some point still later John and I had now become just two people sitting on the same sofa. I don't know how we came into this position. He had straightened up and withdrawn from me to the far side of the sofa. He appeared completely cried out and quiet now except for a soft hiccoughing and occasional shudder. I still said nothing. I did not dare to move.

He smoothed out the letter and began to read it again, this time with me watching him from my end of the sofa.

"Okay," he said as he read. "Okay. Okay. Okay." Then he looked for the envelope which had gotten lost in the cushions of the sofa and he tried but failed to put the letter back inside. "I can keep this?"

"He wrote it for your sake."

"But not to me. He told you not to let me read it. But you did. Can I keep it?"

"Yes, of course."

I got up now from the sofa and went to sit behind my desk. He remained on the sofa, fiddling with the envelope in his hands.

"You'll agree to go home with your parents?"

"Anything."

"You'll live with them through the time of your parole? You won't see Frank again?"

"Anything. Just get him out of there. You think we can do it?"

“An army of lovers, John. Your parents will join you, and I will join you, and KupKake. And Johnette, John. I went to see her in Frank’s apartment. She’s lovely, John. The apartment is lovely. It’ll be waiting for you, after your parole, for you and Frank.”

He raised his eyes to me for the first time, the blue of his pupils in the bloodshot whites terrible to see, and there was such pain in them, such longing. I so wanted to go to him again and put my arms around him again and offer him a better shelter. But business came next. And I did so want to accomplish it before Mr. Bandy returned.

“So, shall I telephone your parents then? For you? It starts with you.”

“Yes. Call them now.”

“Do you want to go back to your room or—”

“No. Call them now.”

I began to look up the telephone number, but John supplied it. As the telephone rang at the other end of the line, I offered, “Things will be better now. You’ll see. An army of lovers. And we can get justice. That’s what we’re here for.”

“Are you getting a new job? Are you leaving High Broder?”

I said, “Your father’s on the phone,” and indeed he was. I told Rev. Baron the news which he received with obvious relief; but quiet relief; I think he expected it. He asked if he might speak with John and was surprised to hear that John was in my office at that very moment.

“Your father would like to speak with you,” I said, handing John the receiver.

John put it to his ear and said, “Hi, Dad.”

I have no idea what transpired in the rest of the conversation because John’s face was expressionless during it, and his end of the dialogue consisted of the single word “Yes”

which he was made to say several times. Upon hanging up he said dully to me, “May I be excused?”

I gave him permission to go and without another word he walked to the door, opened it and was almost out when he turned back and uttered what I realize with terrible sadness will probably be the last words he will ever share with me; whatever our goodbyes, whatever might lie before us, the last real words.

“We’re done?”

“Yes.”

djt: 7/16/79 — 3:40 p.m.
Move the Baron File to the Inactive drawer.
Copy all documents and consolidate them with
the documents in Verso, at home.

THE END