Without leave

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Migrations

Morning, Winter Solstice

Yeats’s Influence on Robinson Jeffers

“A man who does not exist”: The Irish Peasant in the Work of W. B. Yeats and J. M. Synge

Learning the Trade: W. B. Yeats and Contemporary Poetry

W. B. Yeats and Postcolonialism
For that friend without whose story this narrative could not have been written.
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ONE
Before he could see it he could smell it—Patchouli and Sandalwood incense cloaking the sweetish aroma of marijuana and mingling with odors of cypress and holly trees—and before he could smell it he could feel it—young people not hiding as he and his friends did in hotel rooms to smoke pot or drop mescaline, but openly celebrating what was usually unseen. It was May 21, 1967. David Shields, Seaman on the *USS Loyola* aircraft carrier returned from Westpac and docked at Hunter’s Point Naval Shipyard, lengthened his stride up Haight Street, consciously abandoning the marching rhythm he sometimes involuntarily fell into and imposing a different beat as if he were climbing, with every step leaving behind his youth in southern Ohio, his family, the Navy. In the plate glass window of the café on the corner of Masonic he caught sight of his shaved face and prominent jaw, his black hair cut short around his large forehead. The bulging muscles of his upper arms filled out the sleeves of his green and brown plaid shirt.

The sun was bright, the sky blue and cloudless. He knew the air was not really clear, though. It was made of particles, as Newton theorized, and filled with subtle pastel refractions of purple, blue, pink, and yellow. Waves of light shifted with breezes, shadows, sounds. His eyes normally filtered them out, but they were always there—just beyond conscious reach, until now.
Voices resonated around him like music. A pale man with voluminous, curly blond hair encircling his head talked to a shorter, paunchier guy in a black Lenin cap. Near them on the pavement, two men and two women wrapped in long striped blankets sat in the lotus position, their eyes hidden by dark, round glasses that concealed the herbal boost behind their meditations. A motorcycle revved loudly and sped west around slowly-moving cars, and David saw the winged insignia on the back of the rider’s jacket and read the word “NOW” spray-painted on a wall across the street.

Through a shop window he saw T-shirts, wooden carvings of elephants and tigers, Buddhist prayer wheels, and bronze statues of four-armed Vishnu. Slightly shabby Victorian houses lined both sides of the street; Christmasberry and juniper grew in little islands of grass erupting from the pavement; ragged weeds occupied the bits of soil around tree trunks. He passed a barefooted woman in a long denim skirt—her straight brown hair reaching past her shoulder blades—talking to a white man with a narrow face wearing frayed jeans and paisley-print shirt and a black man in camouflage khakis. A shorter, round-faced man with political buttons covering his vest played a flute. Although the musician hit some sharp notes, David tossed a quarter into his beaked cap, which lay turned up on the pavement.

On the first warm day of spring three years ago back at Ohio State, walking down Thirteenth Avenue in Columbus, he heard “Mr. Tambourine Man” from the open window of an old frame house. The dew on the grass sparkled like silver, and he felt excited and happy, as if something wonderful awaited him, although he spent most of his days alone and confused. That moment now felt far in the past, but here he sensed the same energy, and all at once he wanted to dance.

Crossing Ashbury he stepped through the door of a shop where they sold psychedelic posters. He was drawn to one that had a background of bright blue above a level, rocky plain from which volcanoes spewed purple and orange lava. Above them in the center of the sky a multi-colored, twelve-pointed star exploded into smaller sunbursts that radiated outward and sent globes of red and gold spinning into the void. If he let his eyes go out of focus the colors vibrated, reminding him of news footage of an Army truck in Vietnam launched into the air by a bomb, flying above the jungle canopy as it trailed a rope of fire
out of a great blossom of yellow flame that expanded almost in slow motion. He considered buying the poster and shipping it home but then decided to save his money.

He turned and headed up the street, walking in sunlight. Two barefooted girls with bright eyes looking not much older than fourteen ran up to him laughing, and he placed a handful of loose pocket change into their outstretched palms. For a moment the smell of frying hamburgers and onions mixed with the scent of cinnamon from the bakery. Four cycles cruised down the street in the opposite direction, engines revving above the other street noise.

A seaman apprentice he knew came up here on liberty two days before and jawboned with the men in the working party who were taking a break from chipping paint off the bulkhead. “Man, are they filthy,” he told his buddies, tossing his cigarette butt into the briny bilge water.

“Yes,” another volunteered. “Throw um all in the Army. Not the Navy.”

The men laughed out loud except David and his friend Tim, a gunner’s mate.

“I heard that stuff they take, that LSD, is manufactured in Russia.”

Tim rolled his eyes, picked up his hammer, and started banging at the metal. He came from the south side of Chicago and didn’t want trouble with these white guys who talked out their buttholes and didn’t know shit.

At Clayton, David saw people hanging around outside the door of the Free Clinic. A girl with rosy skin smiled broadly at a fellow in a wide-brimmed, flat-topped leather hat; in a harness on her back, a baby waved its tiny arms and kicked its stubby, bare legs. David walked under the green-striped awning of Be-Jay’s Children’s Shop and past the glass windows of Pacific Drugs. In the next block, the marquee of a theater read “Peace,” and farther on the tree canopy of the park rose above the grid of trolley wires. He glanced up Shrader at the white houses on the steep hill. Finally he crossed busy Stanyan and followed the paved footpath into the park and through an underpass where stalactites of concrete thrust from the arching roof.

Walking out of the tunnel he saw the spreading branches of a palm tree
and the gray under-fronds pointing downward against scaled bark. Birdsong mingled with the sound of voices. He followed the curving pavement toward a slope surrounded by tall trees and covered with people sitting or lying in the grass. Seeing a trash barrel filled to overflowing, David took his city map out of his pocket and shoved it down inside.

Three men wearing bandanas sat crossed-legged in the grass.

“Did you hear thirty people got busted Tuesday night after that street dance?” one said.

“Yeah. Ten got jail sentences, I heard. For dancing.”

“Somebody cut the valves off the tires of their stupid paddy wagon.”

“I was there,” a third one said. “They broke some chick’s jaw.”

“They busted a band on Masonic for disturbing the peace.”

David could hear the birdlike sounds of a flute as he watched three barefooted girls in long dresses skipping below the hill. He felt older than most of these kids, having turned twenty-one the previous February. On a level place he slipped his knapsack from his shoulders and sat propped up on his hands in the grass under a large old Monterey pine. A few yards away people listened to a guitarist who was competent but new at music; he played the same chords—A, D, and E—over and over again. A girl sang, and someone began to shake a tambourine.

At home the weather would already be warm and humid, while here the temperature never rose higher than seventy degrees, and he didn’t feel the fatigue of the languid Midwestern climate. Nor would a California gull fly down in front of him like the one he now watched investigating something on the grass and depositing its runny shit.

Earlier that afternoon David and Tim caught the downtown bus outside the gate of Hunter’s Point and rode to Fisherman’s Wharf. Avoiding the most crowded streets, they wandered into and out of little shops. In one of them David picked out a small ceramic vase painted bright blue, sage green, and rust
“For your girlfriend?” Tim asked.

“My mother,” David replied, reaching for his wallet. “You know I don’t have a girlfriend.”

“Never too late, my man.”

“Right. In the bowels of a ship.”

The sales clerk wrapped the vase in several layers of tissue paper and placed it inside a little cardboard box that she wrapped in red and gold paper, folding the edges into triangles and taping them on the sides. Then she put the wrapped box into a shipping carton, sealed the edges, and wrote the address as David told her.

He folded his wallet and shoved it into his pocket. When they walked outside David caught sight of paper cups and debris floating in the water near the pier and felt his stomach contract and his throat close when he thought about returning to the base. Around two o’clock they walked to a bar they knew on Stockton, chose a dark booth, and ordered Budweisers.

“What you looking at?” Tim asked. His eyes were luminous, his curly hair cropped close to the scalp above high cheekbones. Tim had been acting more and more distracted lately, and his question surprised David, who gestured at the fishing nets and old-fashioned ship’s wheels that decorated the walls.

Tim shook his head. “I hate the Navy.”

“When I signed up they let me believe I’d have my electronics certificate after one hitch,” David said. “Then they tell me if I want the whole training I have to re-up for two more years.”

“Damn fools can’t do anything but kick people around,” Tim answered. “One day they’re all loose and friendly and the next they have a wild hair up their ass and order everything by the book. Call us candy-asses.” They both knew that what bothered them most was not the officers’ moods or the broken promises.

“And what’s it all for?” David asked.

“So nobody can say they lost their lousy-ass war,” Tim answered.
“And here we are,” he continued after a pause, “in this big city where we could hide and they’d never find us.”

“Yes, they would.”

“Look around you. All kinds of people talking all kinds of languages. They aren’t going to turn us in, are they? Most of them probably illegal anyway.”

“You’d always be looking over your shoulder,” David cautioned.

“Not if you know how to blend in.”

“How serious are you, Tim? It’s a big decision. There’s a war on.”

“I know. We’ve seen it, haven’t we?”

Tim rolled his eyes.

“You’ve already done more than two years,” David reasoned. “You don’t want brig time. And even if they never catch you, you’d have to be on the run, being somebody you aren’t.”

They both knew men who’d disappeared after a liberty. Most of them came back in a few weeks and either did some brig time or extra work detail. They said they lost their nerve about deserting or they just needed to stay out awhile, or the Navy chasers caught up with them. Then there were the ones who never came back.

The Chinese waiter collected their glasses, or maybe he was Korean—a small, older man who looked fifty but was probably in his forties, from one of those immigrant families where someone obtained a visa and then brought over relatives who lived crammed into an apartment in Chinatown where everyone—even the children—worked and saved every penny and then bought a house or business or sent a son to college. The next generation spoke perfect English and moved to Richmond, and their kids bought houses in Pacific Heights.

“Want anything else?” he asked.

“No,” Tim said, and the waiter placed the bill on the table.

“Thanks very much,” he said, bowing slightly and turning away.

Tim and David stood, laid some bills on the table, and walked outside.
into the bright sunlight. Shrieking seagulls hovered above the shimmering water of the bay.

“Gotta meet somebody,” Tim said quickly.

“Okay,” David answered, surprised and a little disappointed. “See you back at the iron dungeon.”

“Right,” Tim replied. “Goddamned Navy. See you bro.” He held his right hand palm up in the air.

“You know I feel like an asshole doing that,” David said.

Tim grabbed and hugged him tightly, then abruptly turned on his heel. For a moment David felt like running after him, and as he watched Tim disappear into the crowd David’s stomach tightened. Walking back toward the wharf, David saw a tour boat set off with engines chugging and two trawlers head toward the magenta bridge. Western gulls perched on the masts while others soared overhead, and four brown pelicans flew in line right above the boats. Looking out over the water always made David feel free for a moment, though he knew the Navy would reel him back in the next day.

After about half an hour he decided he’d wasted enough time and walked to a stop for the Haight Street bus. He might have been making a mistake, but when the bus pulled up to the curb, he stepped onto it, pushed the quarter through the slot, found a seat in the back, and watched the city rush past: glass-fronted shops, open-air restaurants with tall ferns in large clay pots near the pavement, Victorian houses decorated with scrolls like layer cakes, shimmering water beyond palm leaves and oleander. The driver called out Masonic; David was thrown forward as the brakes screeched and the bus slowed and trembled to a stop. The doors were flung open. Feeling a slight thrill in his stomach, he stepped down to the pavement and faced the dark windows of the corner café.

David brought his right wrist from the grass to see the angle of four o’clock on the round face of his watch. Hunger gripped his stomach, but eating would spoil the lightness he felt. Glancing up, he saw a woman about twenty feet away take a paper sack from her shoulder bag and scatter crumbs on the
ground. She was taller than most women and very thin with narrow hips, and he could tell in spite of loosely fitting blue jeans that her legs were slender like a dancer’s. Her low-cut, buff-colored shirt had full sleeves and blue embroidery on the front. She wore her light brown hair in a long braid. He wouldn’t have said she was beautiful but imagined she must have a nice body under those faded jeans, which tapered to frayed cuffs above her sandals. Sparrows alighted first at the free feast, followed by two jays, then a mallard angled its noisy way in. She swung her arm, throwing more crumbs, and David half expected her to take off into the air.

He unzipped his knapsack, took his recorder out, fitted the mouthpiece, and began to improvise. A few people gathered near him, their faces in his peripheral vision like white blooms on a green hedge. When he finished they clapped and sat waiting for him to play something else, but he opened the instrument case, and they rose slowly and ambled away in different directions, one saying “Nice, man.” The woman who’d been feeding the birds stayed. Even from yards away he felt energy circulating around her. She stepped closer, and he could see her turquoise pendant earrings, clear blue eyes, and high cheekbones. Sunlight turned her hair golden.

“Sounds good,” she said. “Why don’t you want to play more?”

“I’m a little tired,” he said.

“Where you from?”

“Long Beach.”

“You moved up here?”

“I drifted here,” he answered.

“Good place to drift to,” she said. “My name’s Diane.”

“David.”

“Diane Cavanaugh. You know, you play better than most street musicians,” she continued, sitting down on the grass beside him and clasping her hands at her ankles.

“Are you in the military?” she persisted. “Out for a last fling before you get shipped off to Vietnam?”
“What makes you think that?”

“Your hair. I don’t blame anyone who’s in the military,” she went on. “The ones at fault are the ones at the top.”

“I’m not en route to Vietnam,” he answered, thinking, I just got back from there.

She pulled a pack of Tareytons from her bag and offered it to him. He waved his hand and she drew one out and lit it, then scraped the spent match back and forth on the ground. The smell of tobacco smoke mingled with the scent of pine as they watched two jays squabble over something in the grass.

“We have room, if you need a place to stay. Got a sleeping bag?”

“Not with me.”

“We have a mattress.”

“I can afford a place,” he said.

“Okay. I think I’ll get going,” she said, standing up and running her hand along her buttocks.

“I’ll walk with you a ways.”

David stood, picked up his knapsack by the strap, and slung it over his shoulder. Usually he towered over women, but he cleared her by only a few inches. They set off toward Stanyan, and he found he didn’t need to slow down for her. She covered so much ground with each stride that she seemed to float, carrying her shoulders back.

“You really do play well, you know,” she said, breaking the silence just as David was beginning to feel awkward. “Where’d you learn?”

“High school. Played clarinet and oboe in band. A college teacher turned me on to the recorder.”

“My mother taught me piano when I was a kid, but I didn’t stay with it. I play guitar a little.”

“Been here long?” David asked, raising his voice above the roar of cars accelerating. “Or are you a native?”
“Since April. Got a ride with some kids driving out.”

“From where?” he asked.

“Fort Collins, Colorado.”

“Going to be here long?”

“Who knows?” she shrugged.

They stopped for the light. A chopper tooled slowly around the curve, the driver in a denim jacket and no helmet, a girl behind him wearing a fringed shirt and standing barefooted on metal sidebars. She raised one arm and shouted something as the driver revved up and roared deafeningly past. Diane took a long drag from her cigarette, dropped it on the pavement, and crushed it under her sandal. They crossed Stanyan, and as they reached the other side she turned and said, “Sure you don’t want to stay over one night?”

She had broken through his barrier of solitude, and now, looking into her blue eyes, he found he wanted company after all.

“If you think it’ll be okay with the people you live with.”

“Great. Come on then.”

They walked across the grass of the Panhandle where people were trying to start a fire with sticks and paper.

Crossing Oak, the street that bordered the Panhandle, she headed for a blue-gray Victorian where steep concrete steps led to a small covered porch with a pillared railing. A large bay window with stained glass insets at the top, partially obscured by a rose-colored curtain, took up the rest of the side facing the street. Below the window, the wooden door of a one-car garage stood closed, and sparse grass thrust through cracks in the pavement. David followed Diane up the concrete steps, across the wooden porch, and through the tattered screen door into the dark interior. His footsteps echoed on the bare wooden floor of a short, dark hallway.

Walking through an archway into the front room, David saw his reflection in an old mirror encased in an ornate wooden frame hanging above the mantel of a fireplace long ago converted to gas. It reminded him of the one in his parents’ house. His hazel eyes staring from the glass looked startled, and
his ruddy skin contrasted with his black hair. A brass statue of Shiva sat on the mantel, and in front of it a slender young man with big eyes peering out of wire-rimmed glasses lounged on an old upholstered chair, one leg crooked over the arm, his other bare foot on the faded red Oriental rug that partially covered the floor. His bony elbows protruded from the sleeves of a brown T-shirt, and a mass of curly pale hair surrounded his head. He looked up from a newspaper printed with large orange letters on the front page.

“Hi,” David said, slipping the knapsack from his shoulders.

“What’s happening?” the bug-eyed boy answered, nodding his head. Blond curls fell across his pale forehead and around his ears, and the light brown color of his wispy beard made it look even thinner than it was.

In front of a scuffed coffee table to the right near the wall, a battered rocking chair stood empty. On the table a black stereo set appeared to be the only new item. To the left of the coffee table a door led to another room, and beside it David saw a poster with an orange circle on a light blue background. The room smelled like concrete and mold accented by the acrid pungency from the brass Shiva.

Hearing a grumble to his left, David turned toward a man slouched in an overstuffed sofa and wondered why he hadn’t noticed such a large guy sooner. The man eyed David up and down from under his dark, bushy brows as he smoothed his beard with the thumb and middle finger of his left hand.

“What have you brought us this time, Diane?” the man asked, the skin wrinkling on his forehead and around his mouth as he pulled a pack of Camels from the pocket of his black T-shirt.

“He’s a musician, Daryl,” she answered. “He just needs a place for tonight.”

“What’s your name?” Daryl asked, drawing a cigarette with the middle and ring fingers of his right hand.

“David.”

“David what?”

“Just David.”
“Make yourself at home, Just David,” Daryl said as he slipped the pack into his shirt pocket and lit the cigarette with a lighter.

“This is Terry,” Diane said, gesturing toward the chair. The boy nodded.

“C’mon,” Diane said.

Feeling embarrassed, David shouldered his knapsack and followed her out of the front room to the hallway and climbed a staircase to a landing. The bathroom door stood ajar, and David could see brown beer bottles and papers on the floor and towels on hooks. A square window at the back stood open.

Diane turned the glass knob on a door to reveal a small room where a mattress covered with a tattered quilt lay on the floor. In one corner an old chest—its chipped, white paint now discolored to pale coral—stood against the wall near a wooden crate filled with records. The closet door rested ajar on broken hinges. Branches of a spindly knobcone pine pressed against the window.

“We put a lot of people up here. Set your stuff anywhere. We’re probably going to eat soon.”

“Are you sure it’s okay with your friends?”

“It’s okay. Terry lives here. Daryl just hangs around.”

A woman appeared at the half-open door. She was shorter than Diane and not as thin, but shapely in a long green dress. Her hair was brushed back from her face and held at the sides by large, old-fashioned looking combs.

“ Heard somebody was crashing with us,” she said.

“Rennie, this is David.”

“Hi,” Rennie said, smiling at him so widely that her dark brown eyes nearly disappeared, eclipsed by fair, round cheeks. “Good thing I brought some stuff from the Four Winds.”

She turned away and he could see her thick, ginger-colored hair, glossy as satin, reaching below her shoulder blades.

“Rennie works on and off at a health-food café in North Beach,” Diane
explained. “She’s sort of going with Terry. Penner is his last name. He’s here making a film.”

“About what?”

“The Haight.”

“He looks young to make movies.”

“He’s a student,” she explained. “Or was. At Antioch.”

“In Ohio?”

“Yeah, Yellow Springs. That’s where I went.”

“You knew him there?”

“I did, so I came here when I got to town. Rennie’s from Hayward. She was going to SF State but she quit. They’ve been here since last year.”

“Yes, I know Antioch’s in Yellow Springs. I come from Ohio.”

“You do? Where?”

“Logan. Southeast of Columbus.”

“No shit? I’m from New Albany. I know where Logan is.”

“So we meet in San Francisco,” he said. “Actually, I went to high school in Logan, but I’m really from outside it.”

“You’re from nowhere,” she said, laughing. “I thought you didn’t sound like somebody from Long Beach.”

“And I thought you were from Colorado,” David answered. “And what about Mr. Big?”

“He’s Terry’s friend. Used to major in chemistry at Berkeley. Comes from Saint Louis, I think.” She stepped toward the door. “Want to stay here or come down?”

“I’ll stay.” He felt too shy to make conversation with people he’d just met who might be inconvenienced by Diane’s invitation.

As she stepped out of the room and closed the door behind her, David noticed that Diane moved like a dancer, the motion coming from her ankles,
and she carried her arms slightly away from her body like a bird alighting on a branch and folding its wings around itself. Somehow he felt he could trust her although he couldn’t have said why.

David set his knapsack down and stretched his six-foot frame the length of the mattress. He’d been walking most of the day.

ZZZ ZZZ ZZZ

He was running through the Loyola’s passageways and over endless coamings, glimpsing the gray steel bulkhead girders like giant ribs, ducking the red joists and slanting gray pipes with “sea water” painted on them in white, leaping over the enormous black links of the anchor chain, trying to find the ladder; he had to report a fire in a locker before it spread to the hangar deck where fighter jets and skids full of bombs stood ready to be loaded onto the elevators. The passageways kept branching off so he couldn’t get anywhere, and the few sailors on the deck looked like wooden cutouts so far away he could barely see them. He tried to shout but couldn’t force the words from his paralyzed throat. Against the wall a row of fire extinguishers laid on the floor where they weren’t supposed to be, so he grabbed one and ran toward the flames, but found himself for some reason alone in the engine room looking at the rows of dials and levers. How did he get so far below? Suddenly the alarm sounded for General Quarters; someone must have reported the fire, and he ran along the ribbed aluminum floor toward the forty-foot ladder, hoping the hatch would be left open until he could get there. He couldn’t hear anything except the turbine engines; usually he’d hear men shouting and shoes on iron rungs. He found the ladder and pulled himself up through the hatch but there was only another ladder, reaching far above him. He climbed iron step after step, his hands on the chains, never finding the deck.

Then he woke up and remembered instantly he was in a room in a house on Oak Street in San Francisco. Diane was looking down at him.

“Do you want to eat with us?” she asked.

He wanted to wrap his arms around her hips, grab her buttocks, and press his face into her crotch, but he nodded, stood up, and followed her downstairs.

“So many pseudo-people in the Haight now,” Terry was saying. “The
real thing’s gone.”

As David stepped through the doorway, Rennie smiled broadly. Terry looked up and said, “Lo.” Daryl was gone.

Diane led David through the living room and into the kitchen where she gave him a chipped, yellow china plate. He was supposed to help himself from pots of brown rice and stir-fried vegetables on the old stove. There was bread too, but no butter. From the ancient, grease-spattered radio on the counter, the KMPX DJ’s voice announced concerts for that weekend.

“Rennie made the bread,” Diane explained. “We don’t eat like this every day.”

“Then I guess I’m in luck,” David said. “I should have brought something.” Hunger gnawed at his stomach.

“Don’t worry about that. People show up to eat with us all the time.”

Feeling like a free-loader, David carried his plate back to the other room. Rennie stood up from the rocking chair, perched on the other end of the couch from Terry, and drew the folds of her green skirt around her. Diane sat down on the floor and crossed her legs.

“Have a seat,” Terry said. “Di says you’re from Ohio.”

The caning was broken in several places; David hoped the chair would hold him.

“Yes.”

“I go to school there—when I go to school at all.” He grinned at Rennie and stuffed a large chunk of brown bread into his mouth.

“Diane told me,” David said. “Antioch. Are you from Ohio then?”


David wondered why Terry’s speech had no trace of eastern pronunciation. His green eyes behind spectacles appeared huge beside his arching, knife-blade nose.

“Who’d you interview today?” Diane asked.

“Some weird cat who wears these white Hindu robes and teaches
prisoners at San Quentin,” he answered, swallowing a mouthful of rice. “Dude got all emotional talking about man’s inhumanity to man. Has this great place on Ashbury. Indian rugs and art on the walls, beads hanging in the doorways. Found out about him from that doc at the clinic I talked to last week.

“This other fellow was with him,” Terry continued. “Older guy, must have been at least twenty-five. He didn’t have a 2S, so I asked him how he’d stayed out of the service, and he said when he went for his exam he told the Army psychologist he wasn’t going to do anything whether they drafted him or not. Shrink said he’d sign a mental disability deferment for him; shrink didn’t care, he’d been drafted and was just serving his time. He’d worked in a loony bin and knew what to write. Dude was out and on the street in nothing flat. Been seeing the country ever since—Montana, Idaho, Utah—in his old man’s pickup.”

The front screen door creaked open and banged shut, and after a few seconds Daryl’s form loomed in the archway. He wore the kind of black leather boots that bikers preferred, and his legs in tight, soiled denim jeans looked slightly bowed.

“Hey, man,” Terry said. “You bring something?”

“You’ll find out.”

“Want anything to eat?” Diane asked, looking up at him. Rennie stared at the floor.

“Nope,” Daryl answered. His well-muscled arms and the massive chest beneath the black T-shirt made him look more like an ex-linebacker than a chemist. The man ate regularly somewhere.

Daryl took a film tube from his pocket and proceeded to fill and roll a cigarette paper.

“Ever tried this stuff, Straight Man?” he asked David.

“Yes,” David answered.

Rennie stood up and in what seemed to David like one fluid motion drew the rose-colored Indian-print drape across the window, lit a stick of incense on the mantle next to Shiva, and put a record on the stereo. “The Sunshine of Your
“Love” emanated from the speakers.

“In honor of our guest from Ohio,” Daryl said, taking a lengthy drag and passing the joint to Terry.

“Gold, man,” David heard Terry say. They sat in silence a long time, passing the joint and listening to music. The first time David smoked pot he went with some Navy recruits to one of the cheap hotels in Waukegan’s waterfront district to celebrate graduation from boot camp. The whole sleazy room vibrated like a brightly-colored painting and when they went outside the few scraggy, leafless bushes looked like a cartoon in Technicolor. Now everyone around him seemed to stand out in relief like figures in the Viewmaster he’d had as a child.

After awhile Daryl got up and left, and Rennie and Terry climbed the stairs.

“I’m going too,” Diane said. David realized as he followed her that he hadn’t looked at the time since four o’clock. Watching her small, round behind, he wondered whether she might sleep with him, but on the landing she opened one of the other doors, stepped inside, and closed it. Inside his temporary room David slipped off his shirt and jeans but kept his undershirt and shorts on, pulled back the quilt, and stretched out on the mattress again.

Lying on the old, thin, coverless pillow, he floated in the mist of a shallow sleep when the door opened with a sound like inhalation and Diane stepped inside. She had unbraided and brushed her wavy hair; it fell around her face as she knelt beside the mattress and ran her hand along his shoulders and neck, then began kissing him as her hands explored his legs and inside his shorts. He unbuttoned her shirt and ran his hands over the smooth skin of her neck, prominent clavicle, and small breasts. He arched his back off the mattress in order to allow her to pull his shirt over his head. Her hands found their way inside his shorts again as she drew them towards his feet. Straddling his pelvis with her long, slender legs, she eased herself around him, throwing her head back and closing her eyes. He reached again for her breasts, sensing the restless ocean behind her skin. He felt as if he were penetrating far into her, as if he could feel her pelvic bones as she moved her hips up and down, forward and backward. He tried to control himself for her but had to surrender as his whole body shuddered.
He woke up on the mattress and reached for her, but his palm touched the cold sheet. After they made love they lay talking for a long time, he remembering his year at Ohio State, she telling him about two years at Antioch and the couple she stayed with in Fort Collins on her way west. She had overcome his reticence; lying together with her, he felt there was almost nothing he couldn’t say, and even admitted to her that he’d been in the Navy and spent six months in the Gulf, leaving out the fact that he was still enlisted. In a few hours he told her more about himself than he’d ever told anyone else except Tim.

Light streamed from the window. Wishing it would be after eight and at the same time anxious that it was, he checked his watch. The short hand pointed to nine, the long one to twenty-five after the hour. He was late—technically UA—but he could go back and take the reprimand and extra work detail. They couldn’t classify him as a deserter until after thirty days. He could hear the Division Commander calling him a goddamned lazy slacker, though he usually threw himself into his work because hard physical labor helped him forget how much he hated being there. Almost half his hitch was up; to leave now would be foolish. But to be part of all that for two more years? The memory of building bombs disgusted him to the point of nausea. And the thought of going back to the same work—washing down the walls and floors of the weapons storage area, passing crates from the high line, banging the paint off hulls and bilges and repainting them—depressed him. And all for something he couldn’t believe in any more.

When he first transferred to Alameda he went drinking often with his friends in the Mission District, Fisherman’s Wharf, and North Beach; after a few months, he stopped taking liberties because he couldn’t stand having to ask the Navy for anything, even permission to leave for a few hours. After they got back from Tonkin, Tim persuaded him to take the time off—he’d go crazy if he never left the iron dungeon, and David was already acting depressed. The usual rumors circulated that the ship was going to be deployed again to the Gulf sometime that summer, and if it did he wouldn’t get to spend any more time in San Francisco for maybe seven months. But whenever he took Tim’s advice he
found it harder and harder to go back to the base.

Remembering Tim’s words that no one could find you if you knew how to blend in, he stretched his long arms outward.