

did they do the do
Curt Eriksen

it would have been different had he left me the keys and I spent the first days thinking about this although I knew a trick the problem not being starting so much as stopping chatting smiling steeling the volatile nerves and then starting again speculating wondering if they would ask at the border want to see demand be bribable and discreet yet venal on either side of the bridge or both sides perhaps the papers as well as my passport suggesting that I kindly turn the engine off for a moment sir while they had a good look sir staring too hard and too long sir at the very different names on the pair of documents the question forming in the slow viscous matter of their brains the most malleable of organs conditioned in this case to defer to the anonymity and intellectual vacuity of authority any authority all authority and the system of glorified rules and regulations laws they're called which are designed to support and uphold such without exception other than that provided for in special clauses legible only to the initiated scrutinizing the photo which even I could see didn't look much like me although it had to be me who else could it be their shifty eyes safe behind the dark lenses of the regulation shades darting back and forth between the image and myself as the adrenaline begins to pump and flow through all of us but in fundamentally opposed directions causing my palms to sweat dissolve become liquid and their tongues to flick across their lips wetting them enough to say smoothly would you mind opening the trunk sir

on the other hand if they were to simply nod smile and wave me on say *buen viaje* on one side and have a nice day on the other I could drive into Texas enter self-propelled

or at least self-directed and of my own volition an aspiration that had pestered me ever since my early adolescence

so while I waited I decided that rather than while the time away I would have a look for the papers something anything not having ever realized or considered how large and well-niched a modern vehicle like the one I had been lodging in can be made to be searching everywhere and finding nothing but maps in panels that appeared to be seamless not even riveted the sound when I rapped with my knuckles hollow and suspicious but which amazingly when I bumped against certain features of the dashboard sticks and knobs and streamlined switches that must have been double-jointed moving in ways they shouldn't and allowing the panels to slide open revealing the maps crisp and clean and neatly refolded large scale maps of every country south of the border with unofficial routes leading into the mountains marked in soft leaded pencil all of them covered with a thin film of white dust and haunted by a smell that pricked a point somewhere above the roof of my mouth and beneath these bound by large rubber bands in groups that pertained to the same year a collection of dog-eared journals dozens of them all the same size in the same hand full of the same ideas dressed in the same language he had used to get us there all that day and night as well as the sketchpads in which he had apparently tried to illustrate his ideas give to them some form and visual depth although the drawings if you could call them that were no matter how sympathetic one might want to be with the man for whatever reasons not only bad but miserable pathetic renderings really crude forced indeterminate lines and graceless dishonest curves that scribbled across one stiff page after another and succeeded in expressing if anything

only the frustration he must have experienced at completely having failed to give shape and the appearance of substance via the medium of drawing to the sounds in his head

I spent the rest of that last morning and part of the afternoon reading through the journals which unlike the drawings were pretty good entertaining in parts funny at times with a nervous edge particularly those that dealt with the end of his life in the abandoned village where he described in convincing detail his encounters with that brute of a presence as he called it and the dreams of the little girls beginning to understand the nature of what might or might not have been a case of pedophilia if not its origins which I could have looked into as well there being sufficient journals going back years and years tracing the evolution of his spirit of his soul of his awareness of his here and nowness as he variously referred to it depending upon whom or what he happened to be reading at the time he was writing but by the time it got really hot again the heat having accumulated on the roof all day the temperature inside the jeep rising far beyond bearable the ceremony of sweat had begun with every pore in my body opening stretching gasping like the tiny mouths of infinitesimal minnows for air for oxygen for the cooling effect of vapor the stinging saline liquid pooling into my eyes blinding me to the pages that greedily absorbed every drop of perspiration that fell from my chin or trailed down my forearms in fine fast rivulets and it was then in the middle of that fourth Mexican sauna that I decided at last that it was time to go that I had waited and dehydrated long enough so I put the journals and the maps and the sketchpads back every touch of my finger soaking through smearing the old ink and blurring the soft lead of the drawings inside the panels and fumbled around with the dashboard my fingers slipping on and off the secret switches until I had managed to close and reseal all the secret compartments

I left the jeep and tried to fix its place on that treeless street I had never seen from any other perspective other than from within looking out in my mind so as to return if necessary one day there being no street signs or names of places or any other landmarks of any sort all the low clapboard houses and cinderblock buildings around there being identically seedy and pockmarked with decay the same weathered and crumbling-into-ruin structures and façades with gapping glass-fanged windows around there leaning against each other or separated by lots of dusty vines strangling rusted auto parts limbs of bicycles rotted planks and the odd discolored and split or broken plastic toy and roamed around and soon found not very far away a poorly lit room in a cheap hotel with a mattress that sagged and sang the sad story of its many curious stains every time I sat or moved on it and as soon as I had checked my bag to see what was or was not in it I took a shower that should have been cold but was rather tepid instead the first time any liquid other than sweat had flowed over my body since that night I fell into the ocean the memory of which the ocean Marimar and all he had said to me then I had since that night successfully kept at a distance great enough to like the light of dead stars find difficult to believe

but having recalled now allowed to reenter that light of a memory so successfully kept away it was as if I had opened a flood gate the light the water the memories pouring unchecked into me filling me the way a narrow-necked bottle fills from a spigot slowly yet steadily then suddenly nearing the top gurgling full and spilling over in a rush of volume and pressure which wets your hand and the floor or the sheets depending upon where you are when it fills you just then I was lying on the bed trying not to think about Marimar again not to remember the way she used to lay about so lazily so dreamily on

any number of beds like this half or jay naked on her stomach or her back depending on the heat and her mood talking to me sometimes in broken English though most often in Spanish raising her slender arm and letting it fall telling me about her mother and especially her father whom she didn't know but had heard about everywhere constantly in the shops on the streets in the town where she grew up in the north of Spain anywhere voices were abruptly lowered but always a moment too late as if people took delight she said in all innocence of how much delight in salting the wounds of others slandering and vilifying and improving upon the shreds and tatters of preferably scandalous information the glimpses of suffering of people known too little to be familiar with yet just enough not to be complete strangers either always speaking as if they cared but invariably maintaining a space of indifference sufficient to inure themselves to any real risk of empathy

in an effort to break the train of these images of Marimar lying about which always led sooner or later to the related images of the two of us lying intertwined about I stood up quickly dressed and walked out of my room down the dim close hall past the vacant desk with the keys hanging on nails driven into the wall behind it and into the slanted light and the stagnant heat of the end of the afternoon where I turned left and walked in that direction concentrating on anything and everything but her to no avail because she was with me now and now I saw of course not her eyes so much as the way she looked straight through me when I stood up to go to the toilet the last time I saw her that night we found out she was pregnant and tried to drink our fear and confusion away and I felt the extremely uncomfortable though improbable sensation that she was seeing me now looking straight through me now wherever she was as if I were made of glass as

if I were transparent and empty inside and she were filled with if not me at least some undeniable part of myself

knowing that only in drink would I begin to be able to hide from but never defend myself against that other ruthlessly critical part of myself that kept kicking me in the ass I followed what might be considered if not by biologists at least by drunks a third chemoreceptor neither independent of nor limited to those of taste and smell listening for the leisurely sounds of people at their ease somewhere between whatever waking obligations they might have regardless of the nature and legality of these and the sleep that no one can avoid sooner or later milling about and vaguely anticipating whatever it was that the evening and later the night might bring if only it be relief from the heat of the day looking as I walked along for the gradual accumulation of a crowd on the streets ahead turning one way then another as I lost my way in another ugly unknown border town walking slowly enough to limit the sweat to my armpits and groin but quickly enough to get there sooner rather than later

turning a final corner I saw not far ahead on my side of the once paved street small gatherings of molted boys and girls loitering in the last brass wash of the light of that day turning in turn as they saw or were nudged to look in my direction at me moving in closer and passing among them noting in passing such details as the dirty sandaled feet and the bellbottomed trousers with the frayed hems and rubbed seams and the seats like the key-pockets worn smooth and nearly through the thin sleeveless smocks taken in sewn here or there to fit a shape still in the process of defining itself yet loosely like a summer dress the wide-collared button-down shirts stylish twenty or thirty years ago lacking most buttons and the imitation black-market wristwatches adorning the snaky

wrists of the boys smoking cigarettes down to the stubs the unmarked bottles of dangerous looking liquor being glugged before being reluctantly passed around and the cocky postures and poses the multiple brown eyes like a baby's fingers or the arms of a squid moving hungrily exploratively over me when I heard from across the street the boom boom boom of the bass with high-hat and Jim Morrison singing directly from his by that time large and unbecoming gut *wEEEEEEEEEEll I've been down so goddamned long tah tah tah that it looks like up to me* followed by the *wow wow wawowow* of Robby Kreiger's guitar a noise striking and stimulating precisely that unclassified sense I had been following drawing me across the street and into a room so velvety dark inside that I had to stand silhouetted in the doorway blinking my eyes until my irises had dilated enough to enable me to see and feel my way to the bar where just as I bumped into the counter Morrison screamed *come on...let the poor boy be*

as far as oases go this was my idea of shade and relief a treasure-trove of sorts the drink being cheap but good tequila of export quality not yet discovered by the greedy intermediaries who will eventually make secure and staggering sums of money for themselves and the department concerned with tariffs while the music was great an underground and almost seditious export from the States one of the greatest contributions that eternally adolescent culture which on the surface swings in its tastes and pleasures from one commercial-break moment or mood of relative national optimism to another while underneath brood and squirm and occasionally blow out in fits of despair anger frustration or simple youthful distrust and dislike of the inherited world order a subterranean stream of creative power a rebel's pride expressing itself popularly in such strains of simple yet true vibes as Motown produced the soul rhythm and original blues of

the black masters the mythical greats who wailing away in southern and South End dives for the price of a drink inspired every single cut of pre-digital remake rock and roll the come on Jim and set me free revolutionary declaration of independence to which I raised my glass in a rush of nostalgia for what if not Marimar here by my side sharing in these not so terribly old yet somehow sadly naive and remote sounds the tunes of a time like nursery rhymes to which we only belong once and that briefly

I set my glass down and pushed it towards the bartender a short man with long hair who emerged from the shadows behind the bar and promptly refilled the glass and pushed it back to me before retreating into the shadows again where he faded out L.A. Woman and switched the output track bringing in young Clapton with Cream singing *thinking 'bout the times you drove in my caaaar* certain now that if and when I turned away from the bar I would be able to see within the range of my peripheral vision whom but him *thinking that I might have drove you too faaaaaaaar* sitting in one of the bar's many deep padded black-lit recesses drinking god knows what and eyeing me the way a predator eyes its prey his glass held between thumb fore and middle fingers in an offering of cheers which I didn't see any harm or choice in acknowledging so I raised my glass as well and we feigned a toast which he followed with a wave inviting me to come and sit with him while Clapton crooned *I told you not to wander out in the daaaark*

I might have known better I might have refused the invitation to join him I might have run out the door and down the street and lost myself in the slums south of the Rio Grande but Howling Wolf jowling *now some folks built like dis some folks built like dat but you know the way I'm built honey don't you call me fat* especially the refrain *because I'm built for comfort I ain't built for speed* reminded me that I would never be able to

move fast enough to get away from him so I walked over and accepted as is often wise and necessary to do that which we cannot change nothing quite so rigid and determined as fate but rather the very fabric and nature of all things including ourselves

as I approached him he stood up and offered his hand which I unwillingly shook cringing a little at the insubstantial touch *I ain't got no doubt I ain't got no blow* all I had was the drink in my hand which I finished before I sat down telling him I would be right back that I needed another one but he insisting that I stay still and once I did pulling a cord surely attached to a bell somewhere that summoned a tall thin man with no hair who turned on his heels as soon as he saw us and went for a pair of mescals Howling Wolf with the bongos the harmonica and the samba beat now shifting gears hoarse and full but smoothly *my baby caught the train left me all alone my baby caught the train left me all alone she know I love her she doin' me wrong* and he not even having the courtesy and consideration to grant me the small pleasure of allowing my tequila to settle and spread as I soaked in the brave misery of the blue hurting sounds asking me if I missed her and then when I didn't answer him asking me what I was going to do about it and when I didn't answer that saying I heard you got a ride and when I didn't say anything to that either adding but you're not there yet

I started to get up just as the mescals arrived but rather than pass up a free drink decided instead to stay where I was listening to the lament *well who been talkin' tellin' everything I do* wondering precisely that not for the first time nor surely the last but again and with it why why this creature sitting here beside me puffing with such self-satisfaction on an American cigarette his face like a mirror in an unlit room catching and releasing the occasional glimmer of light that passes through a window or an opened door

suggesting the way shadows that move at night suggest impossible uncanny resemblances and likenesses as if form and content were perfectly interchangeable two aspects of one although never the same like masks of each other grinning in the dark hearing him say I am assuming you're interested against the penultimate pre-take recording of Little Red Rooster the volume just high enough to hear Howling Wolf agreeing to play acoustic with the eager English voices who want to accompany him explaining by example how to do it *you change* and demonstrating *always stop at the top see don't stop up here* he asking me if I had heard him and repeating what he must have said already that they crossed the border yesterday

I looked at him as I've looked at him on so many previous occasions trying to really see him determine what was there after all while Howling Wolf and the lads got started drumsticks clicking time *uh' one two three four* the guitars bending all notes with ragtime piano through a couple of rounds getting good and loose before the corn-liquor voice comes in and fills it out *weeeeellll I got a little red rooster too laaaaaazy ta crow today* and asked him why he was telling me this to which he laughed in reply and I scoffed and said he had a strange sense of humor which apparently offended him because he became very serious leaning across the table and saying you've got a lot to learn yet you might think you've seen some things but I'm not so sure you've even had your eyes open meaning what I asked and he sat back lit another cigarette and waited for the lines *ahwatchout stray cat people little red rooster's on the prowl* to pass before asking me if I knew anything about the man which man I said which man do you think he said and when I didn't say anything he said the man she went off with do you have any idea who he is did she know him or pausing before adding sarcastically was he a complete stranger

to her the latter more a challenge than a question and a possibility he no doubt knew I had briefly entertained more as a hope than a likelihood because both he and I knew that I knew as we know those certainties we dread precisely who he was not a name or a place or even a time but a happening like a seed buried in the prematurely strained and much abused soil of her past something that had taken root there and had stubbornly grown surviving every summer's drought and winter's freeze to return and thrive again each spring *weeeeellll if you see my little red rooster* I know where they are he said tapping his cigarette or at least where they're going to be *pleeeaaase drive him home* if you're interested if you want to know

you seem to assume I said after pulling the cord again the mescal in there now mescalating with my mind that every relationship that begins must necessarily be taken to its end must reach some conclusion lighting one of his cigarettes as if love were logic chuckling smoke as if our hearts our genitalia our lives and what we do with these functioned in strict accord he interjected with certain axioms without considering I continued another possibility that of a love that begins but never ends dwells unresolved breaks the rules he interrupted yanking the cord spins out into space and drifts around there orbit-less the paths of our lives I tried to explain might cross only once but he pointed out that crossing might be crucial and sufficient no more so I said than any other depending he said on what happens when the paths in question meet noticing Hendrix now the volume turned up very very loud calling to his friend *heeeey Joe awhere you goin' with that gun in your hand* tell me he said lighting another cigarette and then leaning across the table so that I could hear him do you have any idea why she went *heeeey Joe I said where you goin' with that gun in your hand* do you understand the

force of that shall we call it attraction or perhaps it was fear since we can't rule out coercion *I'm goin' down to shoot my ole lady* physical or otherwise *you know I caught her messin' round with another man* do you know what it is that a woman might hold *oh yeah* might have to bear inside of herself throughout her entire life *I'm goin' down to shoot my ole lady* how a woman might protect a wound *you know I caught her messin' round with another man huh* defend her deepest scar *and that ain't too cool now* as if it were a living part of herself *weeeeeeey Joe I heard you shot your woman down shot her down down* nurturing it while biding her time patient and faithful to her heart's demand as Penelope *heeeeeeey Joe I heard you shot your lady down shot her down in the ground* thanking simultaneously the tall man with no hair *yeah* placing the next round of chupitos on the table *yes I did I shot her you know I caught her messin' around messin' around town* tall clear shot-fulls of the magic liquid that each of us raised to our lips thoughtfully *yes I did I shot her you know I caught my ole lady messin' around town* I'm not in any hurry I shouted *and I gave her the gun* sipping the alcohol *I shot her* which seemed to embody the words with weight and a certain acerbity because this love isn't going anywhere no he shouted back at me but by the looks of it *all right you are she shouldn't have walked out on me* and we both laughed a little but sadly it seemed and for different reasons before he asked me what she had told me what do you know he said leaning across the table again about him and then taking his time *yeah* as if he were trying to choose his words *aaah dig it* or remember something very specific a date or a name or perhaps some detail of a particular face not looking at me anymore and finally saying simply what has she told you about her father what did she *saeeeeeeey Joe I saida where you gonna run to now* Jesus I sighed *where you gonna run to* and he there you go

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again it's a figure of speech I shouted *heeeeeeey Joe I saida where you gonna run to now* sure he shouted back at me *where you gonna go* but figures of speech are figures *well dig* nonetheless *I'm goin' way down south way down to Mexico way* and when I didn't even smile all right at that he raised his chupito and said courage *I'm goin' way down south waaay down where I can be free be brave* he added *ain't no one gonna find me* while Hendrix wailed out the last *ain't no hangman gonna he ain't gonna put a rope around me*

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