

CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPRESS

"Everyone defines peace differently. I think my idea definition of peace is the space time to think. People think that thinking can be done anywhere at any time but I don't find that to be true. My surroundings affect my thinking, even my ability to think at all. There are occasions when I want to be not thinking, there are space times where thinking is impossible. This love made thinking impossible. I followed him everywhere. This was archetypal passion, the kind you read about in novels. My personality totally merged in his being. I was in a constant state of arousal. I didn't have a cogent peaceful thought for two and a half years. Even when he was gone, and he traveled as part of his business, he was in the fibers between my cells, in my blood, dans ma peau. Amazing feelings, I wouldn't trade the experience, but I wouldn't want to do it again with someone I couldn't talk to. There are women who can tolerate a symbiotic life, I'm not one of them.

"He had other lovers. He was not ashamed of this. He wasn't possessive. He encouraged me to sleep with, fuck, other men, which I did. These noncommittal encounters, dips, into men's lives, casually, never felt good. I did it because he told me to. He told me I wasn't good enough in bed. "You need more practice." He didn't have the time to waste catching me up to his level. I capsized my ego, like a nun for Jesus, I committed myself to an unrequitable love.

"He was a fantastic lover, if you look at it strictly in physical terms. I was dizzy for the two years we were together. I can't remember what the sex was like, which seems weird because it was so vivid at the time. When I try to recreate it, to describe it, to tell anyone about it, all I can remember are surrounding details. A moon arcing through a dense blue sky, picture framed by the clean white suburban window. The sky dark, all life and death could emerge from there. Sex endures while the moon crests, sex exhausting and energizing. I am never sore. He is always gentle. He never rapes my body. Mentally and emotionally he takes great advantage, his pound of flesh, of my trust and naiveté. The snow falling softly makes songs, patterns of sound, delicate, on the roof, blends with the resounding insistent persistence of his touch. Screaming with pleasure, holding hands, marking my calendar in code for every time we made love, had sex, fucked, often three times a day, sometimes five.

"Sex and love were all mixed in the smooth, sweet batter of life. I floated from reality to dream time, seamless, without stopping to pass go, collect anything, no pit stops. I never initiated. Towards the end I noticed this. We only came together physically when he wanted me. When I reached out for him, towards him, he had something else to do, somewhere else to go. I wanted him to love me more than I have ever wanted, had ever wanted, anything in my life. In his

way he wanted me too. But his way did not involve my personhood. We never spoke in a way that addressed my interior life.

"He never asked my advice. He left me for a cold dominant drunk who insisted he carry a beeper. He was at her beck and call. They married. They had five children. I sent him Christmas cards for years. She intercepted them. One Christmas his eldest son found one of my cards before she could destroy it. He gave the card to his father. I got a call in the middle of the night. I could barely believe my ears, but I recognized his voice instantly. I was between chapters in my life. He left her for me, role reversal, I was the other woman now. I reconciled myself with the thought that he knew me first. Sounds infantile doesn't it? There is something to that, about passion being infantile, involving primal, preverbal needs. Eventually he faded back to his beeper. Later he did leave his wife, for an equally dominant but younger woman, someone who'd shape his life, organize his time, and perform well at B-B-Q's.

"No one has ever charted the depth and breadth of loneliness. Even though billions of explorations have been sent into the territory over the millennia. We do have a few detailed maps of some specific localities, several charts tabulating the altitudes of hysteria, the parameters of paranoia, but we have no definitive map. We still get lost in there.

"Doctors give people pills called anti-depressants. These chemicals are meant to trigger a knowing deep within the hologramatic brain. This knowing is supposed to calculate a route to guide the patient out of isolation, back to joy, social responsibility and meaningful activities. The pills don't work. The pills distort the senses. They permit a false sense of security. Now, not only is the patient lost, she is hallucinating that she's not lost. She's more lost than when she began, but at least she feels ok about it. The medication has allowed her mind to create a parallel universe. The universe parallel to loneliness is also loneliness, through a glass darkly perceiving daily goings on, participating blandly in an acceptable fashion. I didn't think while I was medicated. I couldn't think for seven years, by then there were no peaceful places I could find inside me. Every morning I gave myself a pep talk. Then even the pep talks lost their meaning, I became ridiculous to myself. Nothing mattered any more I thought.

"I was living with someone. He was cruel. I was numb. One day I woke up and couldn't move. Way back in the rivulleted recesses of my mind's memory, I heard a bird tune. It pleased me. I lay listening. All day, except to go to the bathroom, I lay. I forgot to call in to work. My boyfriend was furious. He lectured me on the critical importance of cash, social responsibilities, personal mental hygiene. I wasn't shaping up. I was a brain dead drug addict. I was probably a dike. He should have known better than to get mixed up with someone from a mixed family. *Mixed up blood*. The door slammed. Slammed. And slammed. He'd lecture me, leave the room, slam the door, return and start again. Our bed faced the window and the door. I had hung crystals to reflect the

light. Miniature rainbows flew around the room, little Tinkerbells teased me. *Fly away. fly away. Follow me.* I listened to the bird. I watched the fairies dance. At night the lights in the room, which he flicked on when he came in, hit the crystals sweetly, comforting me with their magic rainbow dancers, while he yelled and bullied and nagged. The bird and the magic deflected his attack. But I was in a parallel universe so his words couldn't find me to kill or maim me. I couldn't find me. I lay there. Sometimes he yelled so loud I couldn't hear the bird, then I was sad.

"I tried to get up. I wanted to show him that I could. I couldn't. He kept yelling and slamming, flicking the lights until he realized what time it was. He quickly calculated the optimum amount of sleep necessary for his optimum job performance. He climbed into bed beside me.

"He slapped me, hard. That slap saved my life. No man had ever hit me before. He asked me if I wanted some. "Hanky panky." I laughed because the phrase struck me as childish. I was supposed to be the one refusing my adulthood. I laughed because I hadn't spoken in so long, I couldn't find the words. I thought he was ridiculous to want to have sex with someone he hated. I laughed because the situation struck me as absurd. I laughed because his sadomasochism was suddenly apparent and just as clearly pathetic. I laughed because I didn't know what else to do.

"He slapped me.

"I stopped laughing.

"He said, "See what you made me do?" turned over and went to sleep.

"When he was snoring I moved. I got up. I made and ate a huge tuna fish sandwich. I thought about my self.

"I remembered once being on a long bus ride into town from the country. A large boned, large bodied, older couple I assumed were simple but realized as the trip progressed, were immigrants, were chatting merrily, back and forth. Short sentences. One word replies to three word questions. Mumbblings. Agreements. As we approached the city proper, steel and concrete waxing, the buildings increasing in height, we rolled onto a long grid bridge. The female stiffened. "I'm scared," she says, "I am scared of bridges. " She spoke firmly, simultaneously shriveling into her seat He looks at her. There is no sound. Then he talks. A constant stream of anecdote and flows over her. Love in sound. She manages an occasional curt response. He babbles on. I have traveled this way many times. It is, I realize for the first time, a very long bridge. Traffic is congested, slow. The bridge goes on. The man talks. The woman is immobile, for the most part, silent. We reach the other side, we are on firm ground. She speaks. He answers. As if nothing has happened. And I considered them

simple, this group of two, this large boned man, this scarf around the head woman, loved each other in a way I had never before witnessed. The beauty of this love was in its simplicity. To be steadfast in times of confusion. To respect. To honor. To be honest about fear. No attempts at self justification. No defensiveness. To live in the moment. To ask for help. To ask for what is needed. To give what is asked. To give what is needed. This memory came floating back on the pungent after taste of tuna fish and mayonnaise in a yuppie kitchen eerily illuminated by one somber 60 watt light bulb pooling its pale luster through a puce patterned lampshade onto flecks of silver and gold embedded within the beige formica counter.

"This drug is too good. I can't think. I want to be calm but not this calm., This isn't calm, this is dead. I was lonely without myself in my head. My head was a big house, empty of children, echoey rooms, neatly made, untouched beds, toys put away in proper places. Yuch. Ask. Who could I ask? Give. Who could I give to? Ask. Ask who? I circled inside my haunted mind house. The phone rang. I answered it on the first ring. It was the middle of the night. The two thoughts I had simultaneously as I picked up the phone were tantamount to a crowded New Year's Eve party blooming suddenly out from the vast nothing in my skull.

"The thoughts were Angels and Death. Either the angels had come to save me from my drug induced self imposed purgatory, or someone was dead, or nearly dead. I squeezed out a trepidacious hello.

"The voice on the other end was an artist friend of mine. She had run away from home when her father excommunicated her. Her father was a priest. He was convinced that she was possessed by the devil, because she could draw so well before she had lessons. He was the senior head honcho priest in their church. We had been best friends since first grade but the times of our meetings and speakings had become fewer and farther between. I was living in a different neighborhood, had, in fact, lived in seven different neighborhoods since I left home, but I had never left the city itself. My identity was linked to the city herself.

"I'm in trouble" she said. I said, "What?" I wasn't sure I was hearing right over the fresh cacophony in my head. "I'm in trouble, Jacqui, I need to talk to you."

"I didn't say anything. The noise in my head was really bothering me. Maybe if I took a pill I could hear her better.

"You can't help her. You're a mess. Who do you think you are? You should be asking her for help. I thought there were going to be angels. Where are they? When do the angels come? I told you: Somebody is dead. She's killed somebody, hit them with her car, I bet.

"Jacqui are you there?"

"I think so."

"Did I wake you up?"

"I hope so."

"Are you tripping?"

"This is a lot weirder than tripping."

"What?"

"Self-confrontation in the middle of the night after too many sequential days of anti-depressants, a sado-masochistic boring boyfriend with a bent dick who only comes in one position, counting his thrusts as if they were coins, is weirder than acid."

"It was the most cogent thing I had said to anyone in months. I was awed by myself. The New Year's party was rocking. I felt the comfort of angels."

"What can I do for you, sweetie?" I said "I'm not much good right now but your wish is my command." Or something to that effect. We talked for a long time. I never paid the bill. I was gone before it came. He came after me. But everything had been in his name. His credit rating was more important than mine. So he could pay for the phone bill. I had to call her back. She was in a phone booth on Venice Beach. She had run away from a guy who was beating her up with greater and greater frequency. She left when he pulled a gun on her.

"We compared lives for awhile. We decided we needed help. I found a therapist. I changed my job. I wanted to meet new people. My resume was beginning to look eclectic, but I needed to make a break, start fresh, feel clean. She left California, went back to art school, became one of the Gorilla Girls. Did you hear about them? They were women artists who would go to art openings that invariably did not include many women. They'd go to the openings to protest. But they worried that protesting would hurt their careers so they went wearing gorilla masks. Not bad."

"I was miserable. I lived months of monstrous days. Days strung in a rosary of misery. The therapist called it work. I kept asking, "How long will this last?" She kept saying, "I don't know." She said, "You can do it." I said, "I don't know." When I was feeling a little stronger she suggested I join a rape survivor's group. I was shocked. I had never been raped, well, not really, not very much. She did her sweet smile silent nodding routine for a few weeks while I prevaricated, decried, speechified, whined and denied."

"When I calmed down enough to ask her if she thought it was a good idea, she prevaricated. The personality profile in Heaven for The Good Therapist must be awfully like that of The Enlightened Aikido Master. They must be able to step out of the way, at just the right moment, to allow us to do all the work ourselves. So we can learn who's really in charge. The patient student person must tangle herself up, untangle herself, push herself down, hit into herself, stand, walk, stretch, trip. All the while, The Aikido Good Enlightened Therapist Master looks on, moves this way, that way. We think we're having a conversation with someone who can help us become a better person. What we're really doing is throwing ourselves around the room, hitting walls of our own making, fighting enemies of our own design, using every available excuse not to see that our road to mastership is waiting to welcome our first step onto its firm surface. The Enlightened Good Aikido Therapist Master is a good audience.

"I was off the pills. The pain had been undimmed for quite awhile. I felt that my whole self, my body, my being, my intelligence, my sensibilities, had been asleep for a long time. Walking around was an egregious act done with the most fearfully tingling pain. The return of sensation is a terrible feeling. When the life force renews itself into a system, there are blockages it must push through. Nature abhors a vacuum.

"If life is not moving through us at the speed of light, which is love, then lower energy vibrations, energies which are not love, can build their nests, their empires, their towers inside us. Nature is pure creativity. Nature doesn't care whether it builds life or death, nature builds regardless. When sensation atrophies, there is no feedback loop in the system. The brain, the mechanism which records data, can remain accurate in its estimates only when sensations send clear and constant signals.

"When sensate information is again welcomed within a system, at first the brain, the bureaucracy of the organization, is bewildered. The influx of information is not matching previous data. The brain will attempt to prioritize. Brains have no shredders. Brains cannot lose information. Brains store everything. Forever. The brain organizes information, creates priorities via availability whether to place a nano-second in an easy access dimension or to relegate it to cold storage. If the life pouring in is strong enough and consistent, if the natural but slower structures have not sucked the system of its vital force, the system can re-adapt to love, reform itself along lines and speed of light.

"The present is not a fact but a sensate presence.

"The rape survivors' group was a turning point in my life. It was all women. The therapists told us that, even though there are men who have been raped interested in group work, same sex groups move faster and women, who had been raped by men, had a hard time being open with men about how they feel, about what they feel.

"This namer, work, was used to mean the acts involved in facing feelings, naming them, and accepting them. We were told that it would not be necessary to understand what had happened to us, no sense in analyzing, comprehending, blaming, judging, or punishing. It would be required to share our stories, our feelings about our experiences. We were going to break the seal of silence, this would release the atrophied sensations which would allow us to examine the keystone of our self destructive inner lives, shame.

"The theoretical foundation was Freudian in the sense of tying present numbness, our inability to enjoy our lives and love freely with our past experiences. We had all pushed our feelings down. The weight of these unexpressed feelings acted like an anchor. The boat of our being was weighted to these secrets. Neither wind nor waves could move us. Nothing external would ever move us until we let ourselves be in the being, feel the feelings, release the emotions associated with the dread times.

"I came to hear.

"I came to speak.

"I gave up conquering."