



Takes on a Blue Set

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*for Gail and Alan*

## **JUBAL & TOBY**

### *Flowers at Night*

The house is small, blue, with a metal roof. There is a sun porch off the kitchen, a bedroom and a bath off the living room. Archuleta Creek runs through the property, and the creek is a buffer to the playground adjacent to the City Housing Project next door. Sunflowers grow by the door of the little house, and the sunflowers listen to Toby and Jubal talking at the kitchen table. Toby has on a Guatemalan tunic and jeans. Her feet are bare. She rolls some loose tobacco in a rice paper and lights it with a kitchen match. Jubal sits in his chair like a champagne cork, ready to pop.

Toby blows a puff of smoke, and says, "My parents wonder why I'm spending so much time with an older man."

"And what do you tell them?" Jubal asks.

"I tell them we are friends and have other channels besides sex, that we are working on a video together."

"How do you really feel? Are you interested in me in other ways?"

"I'm not sure what to feel about my feelings," she says. The teapot on the stove hisses, and Jubal gets up to prepare tea. He pours hot water into two cups with sunflower patterns at the table with a sunflower print tablecloth.

"Black or herb?"

"Herb."

"Peppermint, ok?"

"I'm always curious," she says, "but I'm trying to get over this sex thing. I've had way too much for someone my age."

"Peppermint?"

"Oh, sure, peppermint. How about you, do you feel there is something more between us?"

Jubal pauses, dipping the teabags, and says, "There's something, no denying it, some primal instinct, something wild. I'm trying to curb this, too."

"I agree," she says, "I have the same feeling. I know I've sent out signals, but I'm trying to get it under control."

Jubal sets a cup and saucer in front of Toby. "Hot," he says, "be careful."

Toby stubs out her cigarette in a copper ashtray, shaped like a cowboy hat. She runs her hands through her short, blonde hair. "Like that hug you gave me," she says, "it was loaded with sexual energy. We can't touch without it being sexy. It's like saying one thing and doing something else."

Jubal sets his cup back in the saucer with a click. "It's hard to keep my desire for you under control. There are forces at work here. Love is like the electro-magnetic force. Opposites attract. Current is running between us. Hunger is like gravity; it's everywhere and affects everything. Curiosity is the strong force; we must learn in order to survive. And craziness, craziness is the weak force. I need to be clear about my intentions. I want my relationship with you to be grounded in respect."

Toby says, "I respect you, Jubal, I really do, but I think it's harder for you. I'm comfortable just talking. Just having sex is no accomplishment for me. I can feel your crush."

"My crush?"

"Like when you hold me and caress my arm. I'm scared of falling in love. I don't know if I have a crush, too. Sex is confusing."

Jubal moves his tea cup around in the saucer, a release of nervous tension, while he speaks. "Toby, I sense confusion. At any rate, I feel something awakening. We share ideas. You're talented. I totally admire you. I want to transmute or transform this vortex of sex energy into something creative, so we can accomplish something and not just sleep together and that be that. Something real, not just emotional lust."

"Yes, I can relate to that," she replies, softly. Her gaze moves over his face. "I just need space right now from this sex thing

because I'm feeling shitty about myself and want more of a spiritual life. You seem to understand this, but..."

"But?"

"But there is still worry, tension, sex tension. I feel real uncomfortable. There's a difference between sexy and sexually active." Toby looks at her lap, but then she looks up and trails the backs of her fingers along the side of Jubal's cheek. "I'm tired, tired of losing people."

The sunflowers listen to the story. Jubal takes her fingers in his. Holding them, he kisses each finger tip. Then, he leans forward and kisses her gently on the lips. He kisses her again. Harder. She feels his hands tighten on her arms. She reaches towards him, putting her hand on his chest, a purely reflexive act of defense. This slows him for an instant, just enough for her to get to her feet and move beyond his reach.

"I need to learn to trust again," she says. "I've been hurt so often. It's going to take some time."

"What do you want, Toby?"

She shrugs. "I don't know, to hide. It seems like I've spent most of my life hiding. My feelings are closed up like flowers at night."

"Very poetic."

"Just a figure of speech. It's hard to explain how I feel. I try, but there is always something I am afraid to reveal, something I want to censor, some betrayal or lie that I stumble on that is embarrassing. I have a hundred things I want to tell you, but when I start to open up, everything gets watery around the edges."

Jubal stands there, taking deliberate care not to touch her. "A dramatic soul, I'd say, with a touch of the poet," he remarks.

"I love being with you, Jubal, because you can push all my buttons."

"I haven't been near a woman who responded to me like you do for quite awhile. It's flattering and amazing and intriguing all at the same time."

"It's very real. My body is reacting very much here."

"Can I talk a little without everything I say being taken totally as definitive. Will you let me explore a little bit? It frightens me some."

"Sure, Jubal. You mean you are not sure what frightens you?"

"Yes, if I free-associate, I may say something you don't want to

hear or I don't want to say."

"Go on, Jubal, explore."

"I'm going off in a lot of directions along the paths of my fears. Some of this has to do with my fear of being possessed by a woman. I'm always afraid of being smothered or mothered or even loved. I've always fled from bonds of matrimony and relationship. I know I have responsibilities, children, vows, but I won't abide by the rules. I have the spirit of a sprite or a satyr. I've been like this since I was a child tunneling under the house. I found a secret room once, but later, when I went back I had grown bigger and couldn't get in there. I've had four wives, loving wives, one that's a Buddhist on the path, a Dharma sister, one that's a Sufi, one I am trying to be civil to, and one who simply zapped my energy entirely for love affairs. And, then...then, there was my daughter dying, and other deaths around love and close relationships, then, and continuing into now. No more wives for me. And since I haven't been able to figure out how relationships should work, I've sworn off having girl friends as well. There are gaping holes in my psychic armor, and someone like you is very likely to find your way through, and you have, and we have become close. Can you dig this?"

Her smile is warm and totally unexpected.

"All I'm asking for, Toby, is to find out if we can make it work."

"Yes," she says, realizing she wants this as much as he does.

The sunflowers nod in agreement.

### *Awake*

Toby said that even though others might see her as energetic and full of charm, inside she saw herself as dysfunctional and blocked, a heart full of hate and pain, feeling selfish and afraid to commit to anything, to a person, to a cause or even to pushing herself in a more relentless way towards self-discovery.

She had a boyfriend. His name was Jubal. She liked him very much. They very seldom disagreed. She could tell him her most secret thoughts. They seemed to be made of the same stuff. Seeing her in a slump, Jubal asked her how she felt. Toby said she felt blue, that nothing seemed to make sense. She wished something would make her come alive and dry out her soggy soul. Jubal said

he was hungry, and if she would walk with him to the deli, he would tell her a story.

They walked along a residential street with plane trees. Jubal lightly held Toby's hand. He spoke of a time before they were together, of a previous love affair, of a time when he was often drunk and rowdy. After the breakup of this romance, he said his drinking increased dramatically and that he had dived into a cesspool of self-pity. He remembered being invited to a friend's birthday party, and at the party he drank red wine in the kitchen with his buddies, one of whom made a wisecrack about Jewel, the woman with whom he had broken up. The guy's name was Jerry, and Jubal said he punched him, but it was a sloppy blow, and the fight quickly turned into a wrestling match on the kitchen floor. He said they were pulled apart, and in the process, his shirt was ripped, and he felt humiliated standing there in tatters and being asked to leave.

The street Jubal and Toby were walking on was poorly lit and the passing lights reflected off cars parked along the curb. Coming into the business district, they stopped briefly in front of a shop window of a pet store displaying an aquarium that contained exotic fish.

Thrown out of the party, Jubal said he and Jerry had gone their separate ways. His way led to a ramshackle house that slanted in every direction from the center. He had hung an old army blanket over the window in his bedroom to keep out the light from a street lamp, and with the door shut, the room was pitch black. In the early hours he was awakened by an attack.

Toby's hand tightened on Jubal's.

Jubal said he had read about a yogini who spent many years in a dark retreat. Sealed off from sunlight, she had developed the ability to experience "clear light," which is not only the ability to see in the dark but is the clarity and lucidity of pure space, of emptiness, the direct, intuitive understanding of events.

Jubal didn't know what had awakened him; he only knew that he stretched out his hand to stop a blow from an ax handle that was descending. Thwarted by his hand, the ax handle cracked from end to end, and Jubal said he felt the reverberation from his soles to his soul. Jerry dropped the ax handle and ran from the house, and Jubal

lay back on the bed and fell asleep until dawn. Then, Jubal got up and dressed, picked up the ax handle he found on the bedroom floor and began to search for his assailant.

There was a long silence. Then, Jubal returned to his story.

The streets were deserted, as he walked uptown, he said. Passing an alleyway, Jubal saw Jerry on the next block, so he hurried up the street to the next alley and hid behind a telephone pole. When Jerry passed, Jubal tapped him on the shoulder. Jerry was startled, and Jubal told him that they could go on playing tag like that forever, but it would be better to "bury the ax" and move on. He said he was aware of something in Jerry that was suffering and that it evoked his own pain.

He said he also understood in this moment that he could not go back to the way he was living, to the anger and drunkenness and confusion and turmoil he had been creating and perpetuating. He wanted calm, health and clear understanding. He felt the relief that comes from no longer feeling the pain he had been inflicting on himself. He was awake in a way he had never been before and realized this precious condition is a continual process rather than a final accomplishment. Not everyone is going to be hit on the head. This is for hard cases. But everyone is going to awaken at some point, if not in this lifetime, in another.

Toby asked why awakening is so difficult? And Jubal told her it is because it requires a great deal of effort, and it is hard to come up with the energy to accomplish this and have a sense that the effort will be worth while. Hard to get an "if" to become an "it," to have an idea of what the success will be like until you have tasted it. Jubal said he had looked at his faults and that he didn't trust himself. He couldn't be calm or give and receive love or trust life or find the right way to live. He was stuck because he knew if he thought he couldn't change, he simply wouldn't change. It followed, then, that if something was wrong, and he felt he deserved the blame because he was flawed or at fault, it would require a entirely new perspective to get out of this thought loop.

He remembered an axiom in logic: if you begin with a false premise, anything can be proved to be true. This means a chain of ideas can lead you into despair. If you begin with the thought of being flawed, you will prove this to yourself over and over. There's

no way to dial 1-800-Buddhas and receive enlightenment. The trick is to see that at your source you are indestructible lovingkindness and that you must be your own infallible guide along the path of self-discovery. Maintaining a calm state and having confidence in this push and shove life we live, then, is the work.

Crossing a parking lot, Jubal paused to look at a newspaper on the stand. He shook his head, put his arm around Toby, and walked into the deli. The headline he had contemplated read: *President promises to protect environment; more lies ahead.*

### *Coitus Interruptus*

There's a party going on upstairs, but Jubal is enjoying the company of friends in his apartment downstairs. Dan is staring out the window at a large oak tree in the middle of the street. Art, who sits across from Dan on the same window seat is passing him a joint when a phone beeps. Jubal pulls the phone out of his jacket pocket and answers, "Jubal, here."

"Hi, it's Toby."

"Hello, sweetheart."

"I'm longing for you, despite my push against it."

Dan passes the joint to Jubal who takes a toke and holds the smoke until he feels the pressure in his lungs start to burn; then he exhales and passes the joint to Art, saying, "I can sense I'm being called to a different plane."

Toby says, "I have a precarious hold on things at the moment."

Jubal: "I can tell you are in a very tender state of mind, tonight."

Toby: "Your heart rays pierce me."

Dan takes a few short tokes on what is left of the joint, touches the burning end on his tongue to put out the ember and eats the roach. "That tree is called 'Annie's oak,'" he says. "The city wanted to remove it so they could straighten the road, which was probably just a dirt road then, but Annie Maybeck, the wife of the architect, Bernard Maybeck, and some of her friends got in a wagon and drove down to the city hall and protested. And the tree is still there."

Jubal, who has been slouching in a wicker chair, stands up and walks through an open set of French doors onto a small balcony. "I



can feel you trembling over the phone," he says.

Toby: "Lets dance, Jubal." This is Toby's code for talking about love.

Jubal: "I dance with you between marble pillars under an effulgent sky. You are very light on your feet."

Toby: "Oh, take me, whilst I faint."

Jubal: "I have a bottle of ether."

Toby laughs. Art and Dan get up from the window seat and leave the apartment.

Jubal: "I mean ammonia. I whiffed it to be sure."

Toby laughs.

Jubal: "Another whiff, just to be doubly sure."

Toby: "I want you in my chair."

Jubal: "This dance leads to a chair?"

Toby: "Oh, yes, sit."

"I'm seated," Jubal says, leaning against the balcony wall.

Toby: "I bend to you...in this chair...I bend over you... across from this chair...we twist around this chair...our bodies surrounding this chair..."

Art comes into the apartment with a fire hose, and he stands with his legs apart, pointing the fire hose into the middle of the room. "Watch this," he shouts, no doubt expecting water to gush out, but he looks defeated when only a trickle appears. A small puddle is forming at his feet, when Dan rushes in and says, "We sorta gotta problem."

"Hang on," Jubal tells Toby, "I've got to check something out. Be right back. Don't move a muscle."

Jubal steps into the hallway into a wall of water pouring down the stairwell. He climbs the stairs three at a time, following the hose past the lady who lives in the apartment above standing in her doorway wearing rubber boots and a bicycle helmet.

"Burning down the house?" she asks snidely, as Jubal bounds for the faucet. The hose is ripped open, and her Persian rugs are afloat from the gallons of water guzzling along the corridor.

Jubal has just turned the faucet to off when he is handcuffed and marched downstairs by a police officer. One of Berkeley's finest. The arresting officer doesn't want to hear a story or take the time to sort things out. Jubal asks him, "Officer, would you allow me to

finish a conversation with my girlfriend?" The officer obliges.

Jubal: "Toby, I don't have time to explain, but Art and Dan and I are being arrested, and I hope you can come down to the police station and bail us out."

Toby: "What's happening? Jubal, are you all right?"

Jubal: "I'm fine. Just help us if you can. Bye."

Art, Dan and Jubal pile into the squad car and are driven downtown. Damp and irritable, they are booked on charges of malicious mischief and destruction of state property. It is state property because the building belongs to the University of California. Heavy charge, destruction of state property. Toby is there in a short while, and after bailing them out, she drives them back to Jubal's apartment.

Comes their day in court, neither Art nor Dan has an attorney. Jubal's attorney advises him to plead not guilty to the charges. Dan, wanting to avoid a return to court, pleads guilty, and Art, indecisive, says he doesn't know. The judge looks at them sternly and says they need to enter one unified plea, so Jubal convinces Art and Dan to ride his coat tails and plead not guilty.

The attorney calls the head of the housing office from the University to the stand, but he does not really want to press charges because of the fire hose being rotten and the building falling apart. The lady from the flooded apartment comes off vindictive and shrill. The officer who made the arrest admits he acted hastily because he had been called back to the same building twice that night for disturbances. The judge lectures the officer about correct procedure and dismisses the case. In the general cheer surrounding the acquittal, an apology to the lady for flooding her apartment is overlooked.

Back at the scene of the crime, there is a small celebration. Everyone is on the balcony toasting Toby for her timely rescue. Toby is sitting in a chair, and Jubal is standing in front of her. He leans forward to kiss her, setting his wineglass on the parapet, and the whole wall crumbles and falls into the garden. This becomes a familiar motif in Jubal's life.

If he thought back, Jubal didn't know Bruno and Sandy were a couple until the night Sandy phoned him and asked if he could help her rescue Bruno.

"He's stranded on the highway outside of Durango. He told me to bring some large plastic garbage bags and some duct tape. Do you have any?"

He told her he did.

She said, "I'll pick you up at your place."

He had his digs in a bunkhouse, which was really a converted tack room, in a barn on a small horse ranch. The barn had stalls and a hayloft and a workshop and housed an antique ski museum. There were 200 pairs of skis dating from the 19th century to the 1940s. They belonged to his landlord, who exhibited and rented the skis along with period costumes. Jubal particularly liked a WW II commando outfit. He was looking around the workshop for some duct tape, when Sandy pulled up in her 4X4.

"What's with the garbage bags and duct tape?" Jubal asked her.

"He didn't say, but he told me it was important."

"Kind of spooky, if you ask me. Maybe we're going to dispose of a body."

"Oh, Jubal, don't be silly."

They drove down the gravel road to the highway. There wasn't any moon, and no stars were visible because of the cloud cover. It was winter, and there was winter stillness.

"So, what's up with Bruno? Why do we have to pick him up in Durango?"

"Not in Durango, a few miles outside, at an all-night convenience store. He was stopped for a defective tail light, and the cop told him his driver's license had expired and warned him not to proceed by himself."

They found Bruno at The Pit Stop. He looked miffed. Said Jubal would have to drive his van for him. Wanted to talk to him private like. He seemed embarrassed about something. Walked him out by the pumps, while Sandy went to the ladies' room. He told Jubal that he had been living in his van and had developed a case of body lice, and that if Jubal was going to drive his van, he would need some kind of protection.

"This is what the garbage bags are for?" Jubal asked.

"Yeah, it'll be ok; you'll see. We'll wrap your arms and legs and tape you up, so nothing can get on you."

"Ah, this is nuts," Jubal exclaimed. "This will give me the willies, driving along wrapped in plastic, thinking, what if I get pulled over for the same faulty tail light, and the cop sees me in this outfit, taped in black plastic with a beat-up cowboy hat on my head, and what about these lice, just what I need is a case of body lice, right when I've started a new relationship."

Jubal had met Toby. She was from Idaho, and she was a waitress at The Hog's Breath, or as it was affectionately called, The Dog's Dick, a steakhouse and bar with a dance floor where the cowboys and cowgirls can show off their shit kickers. Toby's and Jubal's feelings began to run both ways from the first time she served him a beer.

"So, you're seeing someone?" asked Bruno.

"Yes, a lady, named Toby, I met at The Dog's Dick."

"You sleeping with her?"

"Well, there's a hiatus, at the moment. We're waiting for the results of an AIDS test we took. We want to be sure we're safe. It's the 90s, dig? How about you, you and Sandy a number?"

"Well, we might be, if I could find a place to live, and if I ever get deloused. I'll have to take all this stuff to the Laundromat and bathe in creosote," he said.

"Good luck," Jubal told him, but it came as a surprise a week later when he got a call at his bookstore from Toby saying she saw Sandy looking at white dresses in a boutique.

"Weird," he told her, "because Bruno was here in the shop, and he wanted to borrow a couple of rings, those cheap silver ones with the Tibetan mantras on them."

"Borrow?"

"I told you, I thought it was weird, but you know Bruno, so I said sure, take them on a trial basis, bring them back if they don't fit, but what was strange is he took one that fit himself and a smaller one. They must be getting married, right?"

"I'm at Cafe Cuenavaca, at the pay phone, and they are coming up the steps right now, and Sandy has flowers in her hair. I'll phone you back."

In twenty minutes Jubal got a call telling him to meet her at the

courthouse. He put the 'Gone Fishin' sign on the door and headed over the foot bridge that crosses the river to the downtown area. By the time he arrived, a few friends had gathered for a civil ceremony in one of the judge's chambers. He stood next to Toby, and he could see that ancient spark in her eye.

Spring soon. Still winter. Still winter stillness, but the brown ground moves. Capricious horses graze on pure mountain air. The horses laughed at him as Jubal pulled into the barnyard. He could feel that mythical river cascading down a mountain slope into his lifestyle. The excitement, the adventure, the turmoil of a seduction is one thing, but marriage is something else. He couldn't miss that *you are mine forever* look in Toby's eyes, but he was having a hard time seeing beyond the honeymoon.

He wondered if his change in perception occurred after Toby told him she had a nose job. He had thought her nose was a touch too perfect. And now, whenever he looked at her, new noses began to appear, a beak, a snout, a proboscis. Maybe his change in perception came after they had gone back to the clinic to get the results of their blood tests, and he got the impression the nurse was giving their relationship a benediction. It had all the trappings of a post-modern marriage ceremony.

"Jubal," he told himself, "you just don't want to get hitched."

All the same, they spent time together, and everything seemed to be flowing, until one night he said he felt too tired to make love, and she told him she thought she was pregnant. Up until that moment he felt they had a special deal on Love, nothing down and 0% financing. Now, there looked to be an imminent balloon payment coming due.

As it turned out, she wasn't pregnant, but she said she wanted to take a small vacation alone.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I'm going to Santa Fe, to visit my cousin," she said. "I need some time away from here to think things out."

"Well, I was thinking about taking a retreat with John Big Elk, so I guess we can both do some thinking," he replied.

Jubal camped on John's land beneath a stand of old growth Ponderosa pines. He sat in meditation on the first day and asked, "What am I doing here? Am I here because I need to prove

something to myself? Do I need affirmation that what I am doing is right? Where is my inner teacher?" He was a nest of questions.

That night, at the fire circle, John Big Elk moved his feather fan through the flames and spoke to the group from his heart. He told one girl she had an important decision to make right away, and Jubal knew she had to make up her mind whether to stay in retreat or leave for Boulder to enroll in school.

He nodded toward Jubal and said, "You are always standing back, watching. Are you a teacher?"

Jubal answered, "No."

"Don't be so quick to answer; you have more to offer than you know. You need to come to the front and be acknowledged, but you must learn to give yourself credit for who you are." To Jubal, these words were like thunder.

John kept a few horses on his spread, and Jubal was invited to take his pick. He took a liking to a little chestnut Missouri Foxtrotter, a horse that was sure-footed in the rugged hills and had an interesting extra gate, a sort of sashay between the walk and the fast trot. He took a long ride, but it didn't help him make up his mind about staying with Toby.

When the weekend was over, he went back to his bunkhouse, and when he walked in, he found Rhonda there. He asked her what she was doing, and she told him she was shortly to leave on a road trip and didn't have a place to stay. She had expected him back before long and figured she would hang out until he returned.

She was wearing his bathrobe and sitting on the edge of his bed. The covers were pulled back and the sheets mussed up, and as he looked the scene over, the robe fell open and her marvelous breasts made a grand debut.

Jubal had met Rhonda at a poetry reading. She told him she had just gotten her MFA in creative writing from Harvard and was heavy into *deconstructionism*. He knew he had better make the right decision or Toby or Rhonda or both of them would deconstruct him.

Rhonda didn't make any move to close the robe, and as he was standing close enough to touch, she put her hand on his jeans where the bulge was most pressing, and then...then, what followed revealed that some people are incapable of being loyal to a

relationship.

## TAKES ON A BLUE SET

### *As Above, So Below*

He wants to know what time I was born for an astrological chart. I thought I knew where I had put my birth certificate, but when I look I can't find it, although I find the kids' Social Security cards and the numbers I need for my loan.

He's saying a Gemini generally has a lot of boyfriends and goes steady with one (if not two or three) each week, something about searching for a soul-mate or an elusive other side to myself.

He's laid back against the door of my closet and holds a glass of white wine. He twirls the liquor in the glass with the Gemini twins painted in gold and tells me what I need in a lover.

He'll spark new ideas, take me to a midnight flick at the Liberty, remember the words to "Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band," tell me I'm the most beautiful woman in the world when I look like a dead horse. This guy is hot for me and wants to wait on me hand and foot.

I'm chain smoking generic lights, and I can hardly breathe. I'm weirded out. I can feel the bones of my skull in my head. I wish I could dissolve into nothingness in peace.

### *Risking the Barriers*

There is somewhere I want to go, so I push the limits of the visible. I feel a barrier, weird, yet familiar to the touch. No birds are singing—is this some kind of warning? I pass a car burning beside the road where I meet a crone, who claims she is the guardian of the way. She throws bones in the dust and asks me who I am and why I have trouble making up my mind. I know if I pass, I cannot return, but what more can I loose? I change. I have no eyes. I have no sex. Hostility saturates me. I see everything underground, and I yearn

for whoever can understand my pain.

### *Curve of Wind*

Rosco and I wait for the fishermen to return. I sit at a wooden bench near the store at Mt. Baker Resort and watch the clouds change shape. Rosco has my belt around his neck and an eight-foot tow chain hooked to a tree. Dogs must be on a leash. Ducks and rabbits are loose.

An attractive teenage girl wearing white shorts and a pink short-sleeved top sunbathes in the light breeze. I see one cloud as Tristram reclining and a small round cloud as a cup he is proffering to Isoude. The girl listens to her Walkman and glances my way from the crook of her arm. I cannot reduce her pubescent curves to mythological planes.

A tall, burly boy with his gray tee-shirt cut along his ribs comes carrying an armload of boxes and kicking a couple across the grass to the fire pit. A dramatic and disruptive act.

Above them the clouds move ahead in a larger current. The breeze off the lake takes up the huge cardboard ashes from the fire and sprinkles them on the girl.

"Thanks, Ron," she says, getting up and shaking her towel.

"I'm just trying to help out," he replies from his red pickup truck.

A couple of tame rabbits hop by. Rosco can't even lift his head with the weight of the tow chain. The rabbits disappear under the porch of the store. Still no sign of the fishermen. The cloud that was Isoude has become a free spirit and will not drink from the cup.

### *This Script Has a Butt Shot*

Shooting video in Echo Canyon, picking up voices of Mexican children, bouncing off the walls I dance freeform in the piñon pines, spooking a murder of crows.

Cut to Ghost Ranch, wearing black, a man with a briefcase walking through the desert, I work out a bit where my clothes are a rippling specter floating on a mirage lake, I jump out of my suit, drop my briefcase and run in a flash of flesh toward the highway, a



car passes in the distance.

Dissolve.

Accidentally left on, the camera sways, catching our torsos at odd angles, hands rolling a cigarette, smoke and mirrors, hands driving, we discuss our present commercial and progressively degraded mode of being.

A wrap, after we shoot the sunflower room, sunflower wallpaper sunflower hot pads clock calendar cups curtains, Jillian in a sunflower apron cooking plastic sunflowers, serving up sunflower soup, her brightness and pulse in every spoonful.

### *All Mimsy Are the Borogroves*

Feeling queasy having eaten a handful of oriental party mix and a dozen gingersnaps. Just moved into this house. A new sound—a grasshopper that lets out a single chirp. He's adopted me.

2 a.m. I'm paranoid. My dope sits in the open, and I get a head change discovering the grasshopper in a crevice of my coffee table right beneath my stash. I can see this dude clearly, and my paranoia vanishes because, now, I know I'm not bugged by the narcs.

I sit down to a thunderclap in the south from the firing range where the Army plays war games. Laser wars. Fluorescence and weird harmonics. The wind picks up. A helicopter passes overhead. Sirens sound downtown. Maybe they've contacted Venus.

I meditate on my psychedelic posters. *Andy Warhol and His Plastic Inevitable Plus the Mothers of Invention \$2.00 Friday May 27 Fillmore & Geary Streets*. I'm relaxed and feeling a new groove.

The grasshopper chirps.

### *Vacuum Plus*

Near the museum's entrance, there's an unshaven man pushing a shopping cart filled with bags of cans, stuffed animals, coat hangers and the dust from clocks—a bag man in a raincoat with the back torn out, beneath that is a splotchy trench coat, beneath that a molting overcoat, beneath that what people passing by fear he might expose from an alley along a dark street.

Not at all, he exposes it right here, now—in the sunken recess of his body glow the high-polished parts of a machine, and raising his eyes to the sky, he croons, "You may think I have a vacuum, but this is a multipurpose machine, a vacuum, a rug cleaner, a shampooer. It dries hair and sucks dead skin from your mattress, a drill, a sander, and now, a breakthrough in technology after years of research—the power-driven dildo and buggy whip."

Vagabond, my brother, you rise up like a ghost. I quickly split.

### *Mutiny Is Fate*

Five times I've left Berkeley. First, after my dad told me not to show my sorry ass at his door, and I split for the Big Apple. Again, after I got a 0.9 grade point average for my year of free speech protest, and I regrouped in the seaside village of Aptos. After my bust for redistribution of capitalist wealth, when I sold a copy of *Macroeconomic Theory* back to Cal Book Exchange without first buying it. After a jealous husband took my scalp but left my eyes, just for the glow. And on my own—kissing the sidewalk at San Pablo goodbye, I drove away. Then, the weird poem of my life formed. A sign says Hillside, but I should be bayside. I see an emblazoned *Blockbuster Video*. I ask a clerk how to get to Richmond. She says, "I hardly ever leave Pinole." Where's Pinole? She asks if anyone knows about the freeways. A dude in a stocking cap with an earring through his eyebrow steps forward, and I know that I'm in a timewarp. Up the hill, the Parkway has four lanes with a street lamp every couple hundred yards, no cars, and everywhere outside the road in total darkness—signs pointing left or right to Sanitation Depot or Landfill. Listening to *Mister Mysteroso*. Around a bend, there she is, legs up to her ass, tight mini-skirt, bare midriff, a tousle of hair and hip bent as she throws her whole body into a wave to hook a ride. I see the glitter of the *Chevron* plant as I sail by, and I know where I am, but does she know where she is and why she is where she is and what the odds are of getting carjacked. By then I'm a long way down the road, and she's a memory, bright lit against the cyclone. Months later, I'm water chasing logs on a small island in the Tongass Narrows, and I remember her—never could a girl make my dreams like she did.

