

RAINY DAY

SF Highrise: "Washington Plaza"
November 1983

I

Wind. Finally some decent rain. Something you can walk around in lost and unseen. Not foretelling the Great Daze of anything. Not even an amazing duck scrawling up the bank to stardom. Not even the usual calcified adze to tope up the bar with. Heist these mittens gents, uproarious to the end, kittens bawled out, foreplay deregulated, freshmen picking up their computer consoles for the prom.

I am inconsolable. Squibs and driftage. Somebody told me once to serve myself. Nobody else was there! What brief city this. Once it was only dunes for miles. Armies draw and quarter. Green eyelids luck. Walk away a few months and not recognise her. Running with a new crowd, a running crowd.

Crowd at daybreak coming down the elevators. *There's that doll from the 21st floor....maybe after work she'll jazzercise on the roof again. I'll pretend to be waiting for a guy to play racquetball but he doesn't show up.* Whose thought was that? Here it is, Morgan Guaranty Cal Federal Bank of the Milky Way. I can't seem to make a withdrawal, your branches are a little far from here. If you want to live in a twenty-six story filing cabinet, fine. I'm only sorry somebody has to spend their next three years building it.

Right around here it gets hard to go to work, just now, with the sky so grey, wind rushing about, rain slanting & waving. *Oh once in a while we'll gird up in boots and rough coats, and spend a few days hauling firewood or repairing the roof. Then go down naked and sit on ice floes dreaming. Moon in winter frost, trees in the snow.* Ok, I think I remember. Everytime I felt heaven I paid for it a day or two later. Last night...mmmm...and now here? What does this mean? It never happened at all? It happened, but because of my *peculiarity* it seemed iridescent? It happened, but I scared it away by rhapsodizing it? It happened and that's the way It does happen, It is followed by a trough, just like the surf, *just like it.* Someday all of my life will appear like that to me, in a flash as beautiful throughout... and then...unspeakably painful to leave.

II

Do you think you are risking your life for Something? How about a 26-story Condominium? Not enough stories for a whole life. Still, I think I ought to get on out on the very edge at the 24th story to rip loose the old safety gate. Augie's ready: *I'll get a torch, burn those steel stanchions along the bottom while you steady the whole thing.*

First, take a long look over the edge. Just very calm, step up close and slow, make yourself gaze down and *realize* how it would be to sail down there, understand why those cars look so small. Now that your spine is softening, but just before the onset of flight-quivers and dread, turn away and take that rush of energy right now and just swerve it into the assignment. Telling your hands and feet: *now you know, and*

now I expect total concentration for every normal slang of step or grip . Breathe steadily. As if you are working on the ground, nothing so different except that every cell has been put on red alert and sworn to secrecy.

My feet squirm all over the inside of my boots, searching out the firmest leverage, dividing up the little depressions and wrinkles in the sock in such a way as to compensate for the thickness of the soles; something that always bothers me a little and contributes to a slight insensitivity to placement in the normal walking of work. They are pretty thick in all directions, just now when I wish I had moccasins or track shoes or nothing. Suddenly all the disadvantages fuse and disappear as the plasma finds the way that gives a terrific stubborn planting of force through the precise dullness of these boots. Testing, I realise it would take great force to dislodge me. Then I check if I am ready to withstand *suddenness*. Yeah, I am.

Now a mischief surges through me, a cockiness, certitude, and I even say something to Augie to brace and assure him we can do this thing. All this has taken five seconds. Now to get a good hold on that sucker and a blur of geometries passes before my eyes, all the ways the weight and vectoral tendency of the ungainly gate will try to make it plummet. All the possible unforeseen twists, a forgotten stapled wire, a chance the torch will ignite the four-by-fours, the factor of sudden wind, the center of gravity of the whole piece, the combining stress and leverage possibilities of the relative placement of *two* hands. I choose a way that will counter all twisting, upending movements and theoretically hold the gate right where it is when the torch cuts through. One last review and calculation of how far I will go trying to catch hold should it start to fall. At one full step forward I will be teetering. A half step would have to take into account the momentum and fear-jolt. How far then to just save the company a lawsuit? But what if someone were below? It would completely annihilate them. I have to take the half-step risk. OK, Now I cut that off, because of the danger of auto-suggestion, and dark prophecy magic-involuntaire. This all takes two seconds. Now my partner wants to know: *You got it man?* I say *yeah, cut it!*

Augie lights the acetylene and flips down the mask. Augie doesn't give a shit, he really doesn't. He died a few dozen deaths in Nam and later as a mercenary jungle fighter. Augie takes all the roughneck work with relish; I can see how he comes alive to be in danger. A crazy brightness comes over him and he is arrogant and invincible. So much so that he can't remember that death is something other people are not ready for. *If the gate falls, too fucking bad, their time was up.* As the metal starts to cook into lava and flames spout up and the sparks explode in all directions, he is grinning. A firefight. Fuck the shrapnel. Little fires erupt on the floor, flames light up his face, tiny people walk down on the sidewalk directing craneloads of steel.

The bay is foggy and whitecapped, with Alcatraz sailing into Oakland and the great downtown towers all around us opposite are breathing slowly, wondering where they will fall in an earthquake. *I think I'll tip over into North Beach.....*

You got it? Yells Augie, somehow sensing my rapture and slackened tension. *Cut that sucker Augie, I got it.* Because I have. I can feel, now that he's cut through one of the legs, that my stance and grip are easily controlling the weight. But I like that Augie noticed the change. It wasn't that anything moved; and I enjoy doing this kind of shit with him, looking at death through these thick boots and welding goggles.