

Strangers

When I think of the interest Jerry always had in religion and magic, I sometimes recall the story his mother used to tell about how, as a baby, he loved to stare at light bulbs. She was worried enough about it to ask the pediatrician what, if anything, she should do. He advised her to do nothing, and not to worry: Jerry wouldn't hurt his eyes, and he'd soon grow out of it.

He never grew out of his fascination for other realms, other states of being, ritual magic, revealed languages, arcane knowledge. When I met him, he was already a member of the American Order of Rosicrucians, and he was working his way through the lessons that arrived regularly from San Jose. I used to leaf through the beautifully bound and printed volumes he received from the AMORC, occupying myself while he finished typing answers to the questions that were promised to lead to the "Mastery of Life".

As was the case with everything he set out to do, Jerry excelled as he worked his way up the Rosicrucian ladder. At some point, even before I got to know him, he had felt called to disseminate some of the ideas, the wisdom, he had acquired. Years later he told the story of how he tried to start a church to a Canadian interviewer (and fellow composer), Gordon Monahan:

"I began putting notices up: 'All Truthseekers Write to Post Office Box Blah-blah and Receive Further Information.' And I would carry them around and put them in libraries and in community centers and stuff like that, and pretty soon I had a mail-order church going. I had a group of people who were sending me between \$5 and \$15 a month.... Here I was, 13 years old, living in the suburbs of Dallas, Texas, with my mother and father out in the front on weekends in Bermuda shorts doing the lawn, while I was in the back in my bedroom at my typewriter answering letters from the devotees. And the funny thing was, I think I was of help to people."

One day an elderly couple showed up to meet the "Master." How they traced Jerry to his house always remained a mystery, but Mr. and Mrs. Hunt were alarmed to be confronted by these earnest seekers of their teenaged son and soon put a halt to his

missionary activities.

I think Jerry's parents were pleased, perhaps even a little relieved, to see Jerry make friends with such a nice, ordinary boy as I must have seemed. They made me feel like one of the family, inviting me to stay for dinner many more times than I was able to, or wanted to. And I had—still have—scant interest in religion or the occult. They saw the typewriter in Jerry's bedroom be put to use in producing our little magazine, *Lachesis*, as the mail from unknown people and distant places gradually stopped coming for Jerry. I was obviously a good influence on him.

Perhaps in some small way I did 'regularize' Jerry's life during our early years, but, of course, I was the one being influenced. The music and ideas, the food, the play, the sex—I was being led, and following with delight, into a world of greater possibilities, of heightened imagination.

We'd ride to school with Mother, who had to be at work in the cafeteria almost an hour before the school bell rang. We'd sit in the car until then, finishing homework, studying for tests, and making plans for things to do after school, or on Saturday—talking, arguing, being silly. School itself was pretty much something to be got through, one way or another... and that often meant making "cheat sheets" for Coach Mitchell's world history tests, great stapled clumps of mimeographed sheets asking for names and dates and culminating in the bonus-points scrambled word that the coach would reveal on the blackboard by jerking up the rolled-down map that had hidden it (e.g.: LEASH UP CUB = BUCEPHALUS, Alexander the Great's favorite horse).

Good boys making good grades, growing more and more adept at duplicity. If we hadn't known how much our parents loved us, we would surely have felt contempt for them: we got away with so much for so long. Later, in high school, we imagined ourselves quite the sophisticates, Jerry reading Sartre, me smoking pastel-colored Egyptian cigarettes.

By the eleventh grade our cheating had reached a high pitch of refinement. We shared only one class that year, Mrs. Worsham's English. We both liked her a lot and would get to her classroom as soon as we could to have a few minutes' private chat with her as she stood in the classroom door. She had a wry sense of humor, an appreciation of irony that struck

us as cynical, if not world-weary, and that was quite alluring. (I later learned that her husband had just abandoned her, leaving her with a mountain of bills and a mortgage on their new home.)

It must have been that one day we happened to notice a copy of the College Outline Series volume *American Literature* on her lectern, so when we ran across that same book (indeed, two copies of it) at Harper's Bookstore downtown, the solution to the tedium of note-taking seemed obvious. And she stuck pretty close to the text. We got away with it for weeks, sitting near the back of the room (where we always liked to be so we could pass notes to one another), underlining precisely what Mrs. Worsham read. "The Transcendentalists were noted for their high thinking and plain living—isn't that what your book says, Jerry?" she asked with a mischievous grin one day. So we went back to note-taking.

This was one of our last shared experiences in school. Something was happening to us, something that we did discuss in later years but never really understood, or agreed on. We were growing apart, making other friends, seeing one another less often.

By the last years of high school, Jerry's piano playing had become exceptionally good. Mr. Hunt arranged occasional gigs for him at the country club, and Jerry continued performing in classical recitals. But what really took off, and made Jerry quite a bit of money, was the playing Jerry did for Dick and Patty Hill, a musical duo that performed in clubs around town, he on trumpet, she on drums, both singing as Jerry accompanied them.

Before Jerry was old enough to get his driver's license, they'd come by the house to pick him up.

Jerry also performed from time to time in a combo made up of his peers. They played rock and roll at young hang-outs, and Jerry quickly developed a reputation for being a wild man, in addition to being a dazzling pianist. When he began to drive, he'd take his mother's old Country Squire station wagon, which Jerry called "The Brown Goose," to various gigs across town, and as word spread about how well he played and how keen he was at discerning what made both the other performers and the audiences happy, he began to get more offers than he could handle.

The most lucrative gigs were at the strip joints,

notably the Montmartre Club. Jerry enjoyed these, with their eager-to-be-pleased clientele and the strippers who fawned over him, much more than he did the hotel ballroom or veterans' groups dates with the drunks hanging around the piano, making the boozy requests that they were barely able to sing along with.

His origins as a performance artist are in these club experiences, as Jerry himself acknowledged. Almost thirty years later he gave a concert with our longtime friend the dancer Sally Bowden at Roulette, in New York City. His demeanor toward her, as she moved about the space, was reminiscent of the subtle but domineering role the accompanist can play when working with a stripper, as he becomes a kind of Stroboli who urges and exploits, all the while remaining in the background, pulling the marionette's strings. (There was an element of all this, I believe, in Jerry's work with Karen Finley at the Kitchen.)

His interest in magic had by now led him to Alistair Crowley. As he told the Canadian interviewer: "I really went full speed, full blast for a couple of years on magical practice of the arcane kind, where you do the ritual of the pentagram, you cut the pentagram in blood. I used to make beetle cakes, compounds of ground wheat and raw honey and butter and just choking spices. I used to do invocations to planetary intelligences, for example, and stuff like that.

And it may have been Crowley, or Aldous Huxley, or both, who piqued Jerry's interest in drugs. He had money in his pocket and he ran in the circles where they were easy to come by, so he experimented with peyote, hashish, marijuana, and amphetamines.

Although he certainly got high on occasion, I don't believe Jerry ever had a problem with drugs. He explored with them, under their influence, but he never depended on them, unlike some of the people he ran around with at that time.

In addition to taking him to gigs, "The Brown Goose" also took him cruising. He visited the places where boys used to hang out, waiting to be picked up. And I heard later that he became notorious, for a while, in that huge car of his, speeding down the streets and talking a mile a minute.

I never knew who, exactly, blew the whistle on him. We didn't often talk about those years; they were painful for both of us to recall. It may have been

some boy's parents who called Mr. and Mrs. Hunt—that story has a familiar ring—but they had to confront the fact that their son was homosexual, and flagrantly so.

This was a time when serious family problems had to be hidden. Just as a good friend of mine's parents were soon to send her away to a 'home' to have an "illegitimate" baby to be put up for adoption, so Jerry's parents prevailed upon him to undergo an evaluation at a psychiatric hospital in Galveston. Jerry always loved to tell the story of how the attractive young psychologist questioned him and tested him and concluded that if Jerry was determined to lead that kind of life, there wasn't really anything to be done about it—especially since Jerry himself didn't seem to have a problem with it (be "conflicted," as we'd say today). The psychologist, whom Jerry remembered liking quite a bit, relayed all this to Jerry's parents, and he returned home if not "cured" at least not pronounced "ill." As far as I know, nothing more was ever said to Jerry about the subject.

It wasn't long before Jerry went away to college. He had one semester only, at North Texas in Denton, where he studied music, partied, and missed classes—even a recital he was supposed to play on (and when his teacher ran into him in the hall later, she squeezed his cheek, hard, and said, "You're good, honey, but you're not that good").

In Denton he made friends with a young lady who was to become very close to us both. Peggy was studying music too, and was quite an accomplished pianist herself: she and Jerry performed Bartok's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion on a couple of recitals. She came from a Catholic background in Wisconsin, and she could be as intense as Jerry, whether in practicing or partying; they also had a similar taste in boys. Peggy was probably there the night Jerry chased the naked boy through the neighborhood, the acolyte who'd been in on the magic around the altar Jerry had built in his apartment and who'd partaken of the drugs, but who'd apparently experienced a sudden fit of apostasy. The police were called, and Jerry was evicted the next day. He always said the police had tried to run him out of Denton, but I suspect he exaggerated that for effect.

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I had begun to feel that I couldn't keep up with Jerry, although I'm sure I never quite put it to myself that way. Playing violin in the high-school orchestra and French horn in the band gave me the opportunity to make new friends, and I began going to Dinah's house, or Robert's, in addition to Carol's. I saw Jerry more and more infrequently.

Dinah soon became my new playmate, and she remains a very close friend. We have a similar sense of humor, streaked broadly with a capacity for silliness that has kept us exchanging mad,

Rube Goldbergian invention ideas over the decades. Being with Dinah today recalls the simple good times we had in our last years of school and evokes the wholesome, supportive feeling I always had in her and her family's presence. We toiled around town in her jalopy, taking popcorn to the outside terrace of the Love Field Airport to watch the planes land, visiting restaurants with only change in our pockets and making a meal off the complimentary tortilla chips and hot sauce and, perhaps, one order of guacamole—always laughing and singing and probably commanding attention (and if so, loving it).

Our restlessness and boredom with the life of a teenager in the late '50s and early '60s, with the rounds of the fast-food places like Charco's and Princess's and the Pig Stand (all with car-hops) led us away on two remote adventures that I remember. We drove (Dinah drove us) to a little town about 30 miles east for dinner, and we returned without anyone knowing how far we'd been. And that excursion emboldened us to drive to Houston, over 250 miles away, to spend the night. Each of us had an alibi, and we might have gotten away with it had we not received a speeding ticket in New Waverly, just north of Houston.

I used to love to go to Dinah's house, to sit in the butterfly chairs in the living room and talk about books with Dinah's mother, or to go to Dinah's and her sister Leslie's bedroom and play board games and listen to music and talk. Dinah had a party at her house one night, and she invited Jerry and Diane, the girl he was running around with then. They put in an appearance, and I remember feeling very awkward around them—embarrassed, almost, for them to see me there, enjoying what was probably a fairly typical teenage get-together for the times.

Diane took me aside and asked, "What are you doing here with these people?" She and Jerry left soon after.

I would run into Jerry from time to time at school, and he was almost always with Diane. Although I don't remember actually using the word to myself, I believe I felt jealous of her. She was a striking girl even then, poised and self-confident, tantalizingly aloof, almost arrogant in fact. As far as I know, she was the only female Jerry ever had sex with—at a wild party,

I believe. Jerry used to tell the story of how he once prevented her and another boy, both drunk, from having sex because they were not using condoms.

Ten years later I re-encountered Diane in graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin. She was working on her PhD in Old English, riding a motorcycle, and in love with a bookstore manager, British by birth. We shared camembert and apples and hot chocolate at the house she was renting. At school, I stood in the doorway of her cubicle marveling at the piled-high clutter of books and papers on her desk that had forced her to work on her lap. She later married the book man and moved to Houston with him.

Jerry and I stayed in fairly close contact with her for several years. We once went by to see her at home in Houston.

She had taught English briefly at the University of Houston, but something had happened—I gathered at the time that her liberal ideas and her candor had won her enemies. She had just recently had a child and she showed us the detailed charts she was keeping to record the infant's feedings and bowel movements. The three of us sat at a cluttered table drinking Constant Comment tea, Jerry and I no doubt taking it all in: Diane domesticated. "I imagine the two of you find all of this rather squalid," she said. We laughed about that statement for years, long after we stopped hearing from her altogether.

As much as I enjoyed being with Dinah, we never became romantically involved. She had her boyfriends, her "dates," and a quality of independence that took her, alone, to the World's Fair in Flushing, New York, as a resident employee. But I did find love with a girl and I still look upon this experience as one of my life's saddest, and most

shameful.

The question as to whether I had a girlfriend came up more often in my young years than it ever did in Jerry's, I'm sure. He already had an eccentric's reputation among his parents' friends and relatives. But my aunts and uncle and cousins did bring the subject up, and I was embarrassed by their doing so and by Mother's uneasiness about it—an uneasiness she tried to disguise, or dispel, with comments like, "Oh, the right girl will come along some day."

There was certainly no doubt in my mind that I was attracted to boys and men. Jerry and I had demonstrated that to our mutual satisfaction over and over. My Monty Clift scrapbook had grown huge, and I had seriously thought of contacting his sister, who lived in Houston at that time, to try to get some insiders' information about his private life. (I had no idea then that he himself was homosexual). I think, though, that my sexual orientation, my sexual identity, was so closely associated with my relationship with Jerry, as my erotic mentor, that I believed that if he were not intimate in my life, I had the space, the freedom, to explore alternatives. And I wonder yet whether my efforts to do so weren't really a kind of defiance of him, an "I'll show you" that might release me from an emotional and intellectual dependency on him that had come to trouble me.

In self-defense I hasten to say that none of what happened was planned. I was 18 and being propelled through life by feelings. And I discovered a fellow romantic, Carol—a friend from junior high-school days—who, for her own reasons, was eager to have a special friend, and who shared my love of music (she, too, played violin in the orchestra and French horn in the band).

We lived only a few blocks apart and began visiting one another regularly. I got to know her mother well (the two of us went to a travel lecture once at SMU); her father was a stiff, taciturn man who sat in their living room in his recliner behind an oriental screen, removed from the lives of Carol and her sister and mother—or so it appeared to me then. Even though there was often tension in their home, I enjoyed visiting Carol there, eating delicacies like smoked oysters and withdrawing to her room to talk and ... neck.

Carol visited me more than I did her, perhaps because the atmosphere in my home was a more relaxed one. My parents, grandmother, and sister were quite fond of her, and I know they were all very much interested in this girl I was taking so seriously. We'd go to my bedroom and talk, listen to music, and neck.

With money I received from graduation and some I'd saved, I decided to buy a stereo. Carol went with me to Titche's downtown, and we auditioned several consoles using the record I'd brought along for the purpose (Bach's two- and three-keyboard concerti, played on harpsichords). We selected a Magnavox: two separate cherry wood cabinets, each with a woofer and a tweeter—a superb unit for the time that was to see over 30 years of continual use, and that was transported to eight locales, including Houston.

Carol and I also wrote letters to one another, spinning a web of words around our relationship and our feelings for one another.

We analyzed our moods in close detail, typing to the music of Wagner or Tchaikovsky, enjoying the highs and lows of our adolescent affairs. And we began to talk of marriage, talk my parents heard and rather liked, although they wondered if perhaps we might be a little young.

As this growing intimacy with Carol acquired a life of its own, I cared less and less how much Jerry knew about it. In the beginning, however, it was important to me that he be aware of the new direction my life was taking. I even admit to myself, now, that a part of me sought his guidance. I remember two disturbing incidents involving Jerry that happened at my house at about the time Carol and I had begun "seeing" one another. Jerry had come by after school, and we began arguing in my room. I left to go to the bathroom, and when I returned, he wasn't there: he had crawled out a window (opening the screen to do so) and gone home, a few blocks away. It was embarrassing to have to try to explain his flight to my mother and grandmother, who naturally expected that he'd stay for dinner.

And another time he told me he'd be by one Saturday night. I waited for him for hours, too proud to call his house, listening resolutely to all six sides of Bach's *Art of Fugue*, the volume low enough to let me hear the phone. He never came, or called, or explained

what might have happened. We didn't see each other after that, except by accident, for some time.

In spite of all the years that have passed since then, it hurts me still to think of that night. Hearing any exercise from the *Art of Fugue* brings back the feelings of wounded pride, anger, and desolation that Jerry's not coming caused. I must have also felt that I was really on my own then, and it isn't surprising that that incident, with my stubborn, hopeless waiting, would haunt me during the nights immediately following Jerry's death.

However much I liked—loved—Carol, I was using her, and this fact shames me even now. I am also angry to think that unrealistic expectations and prejudice are capable of driving people to such deceit, and to such self-deception. She was a bright, gentle, sensitive girl, from a family whose affection for one another wasn't much in evidence (unless toward Carol's younger sister, who wore braces from polio). I took control of her emotions, of her imagination—yet I withheld much of myself, my true feelings.

I had begun working full-time with my father at the produce company after leaving school at mid-term of my senior year. I needed two courses to have enough credits to be graduated, and I took those (English and commercial geography) at a night school in downtown Dallas. There was a Sheraton Hotel near the school.

My plan was to have Carol meet me at work and then go to classes with me later—after we had spent a few hours together in the hotel.

She met me at Ben E. Keith's, having taken the bus to town. I remember walking with her through the warehouse, where she caught the attention of the dockhands and drivers—much to my delighted satisfaction. We walked to the hotel, nervously checked in as a married couple, and went to our room and drew the curtains. We necked, as we so often had, and I was quickly aroused. I thought of the men who had looked at her with so much interest at work. I thought of my new friend Kirby, with whom I had gone roller-skating and to the movies a few times. And I thought of Montgomery Clift in *Raintree County*. But nothing worked; I couldn't do it.

Carol and I pretended to have been satisfied—she even seemed to buy my excuse that I hadn't wanted

to take advantage of her before our marriage (and she was wearing the engagement ring I'd given her). But I knew uncontestedly then that it was hopeless, that I simply wasn't attracted to girls—and not for want of trying to be.

With good fortune for all of us, for Carol and me and our families, her father was soon transferred to Tulsa. She and I corresponded a while, trying at first to sustain the commitment to one another, but eventually giving up the pretense. I wrote to her, telling her a little about Kirby. She returned the ring. I didn't see her for six years or so, until we ran into one another on the campus of the University of Houston, where she had just come from a French language lab conducted by a man who was soon to become her first husband and, later, my best friend.

Kirby and I had known one another in high school, but we didn't really become close until the summer after graduation. He liked movies as much as I did—more/so, I think now—and we'd get together for dinner and a film almost every weekend. We also enjoyed roller-skating and shopping (he had a job at a department store near his house, working to save money for college next fall). My parents liked him (as they liked everyone I brought home), and I felt very welcome at Kirby's house, where we'd go back to his room to talk, his younger brother sticking close by.

In contrast to Jerry, and Carol, Kirby must have seemed refreshingly uncomplicated to me then. He was also a good-looking young man with an ingenuousness about him that I found very appealing. In all the time we were friends, a little over a year, I never sought any kind of physical intimacy with him, although I certainly wanted it. (One day we were about to cross a street in downtown Dallas, and a gust of wind blew the top of his shirt open, revealing a hairless upper chest. "Your top button's undone," I helpfully pointed out. "Who cares?" he replied.)

His parents had bought Kirby a little Nash Metropolitan to take to college—a junior college in Paris, about 100 miles northeast of Dallas. I got a kick out of going places with him in that tiny two-seater, our legs almost touching, his face so close to mine. When the school year began, I missed him violently, waiting impatiently for the next weekend when he'd be home, stealing moments in the

stairwell at Keith's to moon over the picture I carried in my wallet.

I took a couple of courses at Dallas College (SMU's downtown night school) and began thinking about enrolling somewhere full-time the coming spring. Paris Junior College didn't at all appeal to me. It seemed, from everything Kirby had told me about it, to be a close version of high school. But East Texas State University in Commerce, on the way to Paris, looked better, and I decided to go there.

About the school itself or the teachers, I recall very little: piano lessons with a young woman who was determined to make me read the notes, dictionary drills with Dr. Tarpley, an American history text with musical illustrations, slide identification on a botany exam, and the delicious hamburgers (with lots of mayonnaise) that I ate almost every day, while reading *The Dallas Times Herald* to keep up with the movies in Dallas and plan Kirby's and my next weekend home.

I lived in a dorm with three other boys; my roommate was an ag major with whom I had nothing in common. I began to long for the Dallas weekends when Kirby would come by for me in the Metropolitan and take me compactly away to the big city. The Sundays of our return to school were depressing, relieved only by the nighttime ride back and the forced intimacy the little car provided; I can still see the reflection of the dashboard lights in Kirby's eyes, accompanied on the radio by the slow ballads he liked, the country roads leading us relentlessly on toward parting.

There came a time when I wanted Kirby to know how I felt about him. I had already decided not to go back to East Texas. I wanted to work, to get a car and some nice clothes. We were home for the summer, going to movies, and skating still, I think, but I remember feeling that Kirby was pulling away from me somehow; he sometimes had made other plans when I called to arrange a date.

It was on one of those occasions when he wasn't available that I decided to act. I wrote him a letter telling him that I'd come to love him and took it to his house, leaving it with his brother to give to him. Kirby's parents intercepted the letter—I realize now that they had had their suspicions about me, and I think also that they had begun to worry about Kirby

—and I heard nothing for several days.

Finally a letter came for me from Kirby in the mail. He told me how upset they had all been to read what I'd written, that his father had actually cried—which he'd never before seen him do.

He also urged me to go to my parents with my "problem": "That's what they're for."

Thirty years later a librarian from my old high school visited the downtown Dallas Public Library where I work part-time. I reminisced a while with her about my years at the school, and when I asked about my favorite English teacher, she told me about Mrs. Worsham's failed marriage and her eventual death from cancer. I had learned a few years earlier that Kirby was teaching English (and coaching drama) at the school. The librarian told me he was still there, and when I inquired, added that no, he had never married. After she left, I looked his name up in the phone book and discovered that he was living in an apartment complex near my family's old home. I hope he doesn't live alone.

While continuing to work with my father on the produce market, I began looking for an office job, with the aid of an employment agency. After a few weeks I found one in the mail room of Fidelity Union Life, in downtown Dallas. I enjoyed delivering the mail to various offices on several floors, often stopping to chat with people and make friends. One of my favorites was Ellen Puckett, an older lady who loved music, especially the violin, and who often traveled to Houston to hear symphony concerts there, especially when Zino Francescatti performed.

One office was always intriguing to visit. Carr P. Collins, Jr., was a vice president of the company and a consul for Italy, and his suite was filled with paintings and sculpture and had an altogether unbusiness-like atmosphere. I'd pick up the letters his secretary had typed for him, the envelopes unsealed for subsequent closing and stamping by our machine in the mail room. Sometimes I'd read the more interesting-looking letters, those that didn't seem to pertain to the insurance business. I always read his letters to his son at one of the Ivy League colleges; Mr. Collins regularly felt the need to exhort his son to study harder, to do better.

One day during the Christmas season this young man

came down to his father's office. I met him on the elevator and rode a few floors with him, closely observing his corduroy jacket and his reading matter (*David Copperfield*, in the fat Penguin paperback).

I remember wondering what it would be like to be him, to live in his world. And I resolved, on the spot, to go back to college as soon as I could.

I was seeing Dinah fairly regularly during that period, and she introduced me to a fellow I'd seen (and admired) in school, a clarinet player in the marching band who looked like a choirboy. Robert and I became friends, and before long I was well into the most emotionally turbulent period of my life. I became obsessed with him over the next year or so, reaching a point where I thought about little except the ups and downs of our relationship.

Robert came from Mississippi. He lived with his mother and younger sister (who wasn't always at home) in the same neighborhood as I did. He loved to have fun, and I remember with pleasure how I could make him laugh, his deep-set eyes twinkling beneath the fringe of hair that hung low over his forehead.

He wasn't at all moody, and he was a dependable son and brother frequently called on to help his younger sister out of some kind of trouble (she was on probation at one time). He had learned his way around the kitchen (out of necessity, I see now), and he had furnished his bedroom in Early American style, buying items piece by piece from a neighborhood store.

He liked clothes and liked to be seen, and we often went out to fashionable restaurants like Ports o' Call and then to a movie in one of the downtown theaters. He drove a sporty car with a "champagne" finish and a black interior, always sitting up perfectly straight behind the wheel, his eyes fixed on the road ahead to avoid accidents and the hikes in insurance premiums they brought.

On occasion we went to gay bars (the Mercy Mary—or was it just Mary's?), and he loved to dance and to be admired while doing so. He might have looked the naif, but he could "get down dirty" in such a way as to command the floor's attention. I stood back captivated, and probably basking a little in the indirect attention.

Because he had his own car, we were able to take two trips together. We went to Turner Falls, Oklahoma, where my family and I had sometimes gone when Judy and I were kids (and where I later took Mother and my older niece, Jenny). After spending a few hours at the falls, we rented a modest cabin in the woods. I was looking forward to having him alone with me for the whole evening, a welcome change from the hurried sex we were used to having at his house before his mother or sister arrived.

We didn't have much money to spend, so our meal was probably hamburgers. I think we must have had a few beers, though, because at one point after we'd gone to bed, I conceived the notion of carrying him, nude as we both were, into the woods. I didn't make it far before falling—and badly skinning my knees on the rocky ground. And to that injury was added the embarrassment we suffered the next morning when we found we didn't have quite enough money to pay for the cabin (we'd forgotten the tax), and I had to leave my watch as a surety bond.

Robert and I also went to New Orleans, where we drank Hurricanes at Pat O'Brien's to the accompaniment of "Roll Me Over, In the Clover." At a gay bar we visited, I remember standing by the piano and watching Robert dance, drinking more than I really wanted to. By the time we finally got back to the Monteleon, I was too drunk to negotiate the revolving door: someone (why wasn't it Robert?) had to stop the thing and lead me out. Quite stupidly I wove my way over to the Carousel Bar for another go-around. We took a short cruise into the Gulf the next afternoon, and I fought hangover-induced nausea the whole trip.

As much as I hated to be separated from Robert, I attended the University of Houston in the spring of 1963, renting an apartment within tolerable walking distance of the campus, and rushing home each day to check my mail, hoping for a letter from him. Those I received I carried around with me in my texts and notebooks, and I often took them out to reread during dull lectures or the bus ride to and from my downtown class at the University night school.

Robert drove down to visit me once and I took him with me to that downtown English class. I remember looking down at my book and letting my eyes wander over to his legs, seductively close in their tight white jeans. We were reading Milton that night, and I expect I contributed more than my usual share of comments and answers just to impress Robert. On our way home he said, "You really like that stuff, don't you?"

The semester grew long, and I managed to work myself up into quite a state, thinking night and day about Robert—even going to stand from time to time on a nearby street that happened to have the same name as his did in Dallas. I wrote a sonnet to him, an acrostic beginning "Robb'd of Nature's transcendent Gold" (I had his hair in mind, I think), and I sent it off to the gay *Der Kreis* (who published it, to my delight).

I became more and more miserable, finding it almost impossible to concentrate on my studies, desperate for help in dealing with the anxiety our separation and my growing uncertainty about Robert's feelings for me were causing. I made an appointment with a psychologist in the University's Office of Counseling and Testing.

Mr. Browning was a man in his thirties who, after putting his feet up on the edge of his desk, asked me what the matter was. I stared at his pink socks and told him about Robert, asking him—tearfully, I imagine—what I should do about him, about dealing with the problem that he had become in my life. Mr. Browning wanted to talk more about my being homosexual than about Robert.

I remember clearly perceiving a distinct distaste on his part for the details of my "affair". After all, he wasn't an advisor for the lovelorn but a trained professional, and the problem was my being queer. And so it may have been—but not in the way Mr. Browning understood, and not at that moment, with my notebooks stuffed with Robert's ragged letters. I never went back, calling to cancel the appointment they had set up for me the following week.