

# Praise for the Marq'ssan Cycle



...SF on a broader scale...its metaphors apply to a very human tangle of loyalty and betrayal, politics and idealism—Wells and Orwell updated....

—*Locus*, June 2005

The third volume of the Marq'ssan cycle, *Tsunami*, confirms what the second volume, *Renegade*, made clear: the narrative drive and sheer invention of the work is more than up to the size, scope, and ambition of this extraordinary project. What a grand job! What a great read! It's been a long time since I've read science fiction with such a dramatic grip on the political complexities of our slow progress toward the better world we all wish for.

—Samuel R. Delany, author of *Dhalgren* and *Trouble on Triton*

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—Amy J. Ransom, *NYRSF*, April 2007

“...easily one of the best science fiction series I've read in years. It strips bare the arbitrary structures of our world (sexuality, gender, government) and rebuilds them in complex, new structures that are strikingly at odds with our experience...”

—Sean Melican, *Ideomancer*, March 2007

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—*Asimov's*, June 2006

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—*NYRSF*, December 2005

“Politically savvy and philosophically relevant, this title puts a human face on today's problems.”

—*Library Journal*, June 15, 2005



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The Marq'ssan Cycle

*Alanya to Alanya*

*Renegade*

*Tsunami*

*Blood in the Fruit*

Edited by L. Timmel Duchamp

*Talking Back*

*WisCon Chronicles, Vol 1*

*WisCon Chronicles, Vol 2*  
*(with Eileen Gunn)*

# Stretto



Book Five of the Marq'ssan Cycle

by L. Timmel Duchamp



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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, organizations, places, events, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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for Kathryn Wilham  
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In Chapter 10, Alexandra Sedgewick ponders the words of Friedrich Nietzsche. These are to be found in *Twilight of the Idols*, which Nietzsche wrote in 1888 not long before his forty-fourth birthday, just shortly before his physical collapse and complete mental breakdown.

It gives me great pleasure to thank the numerous individuals who, over the course of the two decades since I first drafted *Stretto*, read the novel in ms and offered me usefully frank comments on it. Among these I especially appreciate the efforts and support of Tom Duchamp, Professor Ann Hibner Koblitz, and Elizabeth Walter. The critiques they offered were a labor of love; I will always be grateful to them for their engagement with my work. Kathryn Wilham, who edited and typeset *Stretto*, was absolutely key from the beginning; her confidence in my vision for the Marq'ssan Cycle was vital to my completing and then deciding to publish it. I'd also like to thank Lynne Lampe for designing the covers for the Marq'ssan Cycle.



“Political claims rely on the ability to exercise imagination, to think from the standpoint of others, and in this way to posit universality and thus community. The universality of such claims depends on their being not epistemologically justified, as most feminists have tended to assume, but taken up by others, in ways that we can neither predict nor control, in a public space. This space called the world is an ever-changing one in which, positing the agreement that may or may not materialize, feminists discover—daily—the nature and limits of community.”

—Linda M.G. Zerilli, *Feminism and the Abyss of Freedom*

“All questions of politics, the ordering of society, education have been falsified down to their foundations because the most injurious men have been taken for great men—because contempt has been taught for the “little” things, which is to say for the fundamental affairs of life...”

—Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*



# Chapter One

Sedgewick's Island, Maine  
Thursday, January 12, 2096

Dear Elizabeth,

I'm charmed by your magnificent (not to say munificent) gift. I confess your largesse took me entirely by surprise, not least because of what happened with the last girl you sent me. I'll warn you right now, there's little hope I'll behave more properly this time; I hope you don't think I'll be shamed into it? We both know I'm beyond shame. But as for the girl herself, she's irresistible. How did you guess I prefer them cool and reserved? Her air of *noli me tangere* ravishes me. And for a service-tech she's amazingly elegant.

And so here I am once again facing the anniversary of Kay Zeldin's death. (Assuming—and one would be a fool to take my father's "facts" as unquestionable—that he gave me the correct date.) I always faithfully observe the old rituals of going out to stare at the statue and trudging up the stairs to the top of the house to that ghastly room. (If he never showed it to you, you must let me take you up there sometime, since you know as much about that room as I do.) I don't, however, get paralyzingly drunk. That's one, at least, of my father's vices that I eschew.

I should gracefully end this letter now and fall silent for another several months. That's the formula, isn't it. But this time I'll risk boring you, my dear, dear jailer. You once spent a couple of months stranded here with my father. Think of it, Elizabeth: I've been living on this island in strict exile for more than five years. Did you know that the Romans punished their political enemies with exile from Rome? Absence from Rome, you see, signified a kind of annihilation.

I can't say I miss DC. I never gave a damn for the power games that so obsessed my father (and still obsess you). But I am only





twenty-six, and my unlived life stretches endlessly before me. Am I meant to stay here until I'm ready to join my father and Kay Zeldin in this island's earth? You've granted me an idyllic life, some would say. I enjoy infinite leisure and access to scholars and books and such small luxuries as can be procured at a distance—through your generosity, of course. (Never, my dear jailer, would I forget such a paramount fact.) But I find myself increasingly disturbed by the effeteness of this life. Certain aspects of my personality grow stronger and more dominant the longer I stay here. For instance: I'm being devoured by solipsism of the most narcissistic sort. Can't you, for godsake, give me some insignificant non-security-related job? I'm not your political enemy, Elizabeth, nor have I been at any time in the past. I haven't the faintest desire to usurp your power or regime. Nor do I complain about our arrangement vis-à-vis the Sedgewick Estate.

If it isn't a question of trust, then I must assume it's a matter of punishment. I presume the idea of trapping me here with the traces of my father all around me, to surround me with the guilt of his death and a constant reminder (as if I needed one) of his presence in my life, once appealed to you. Does it still? When shall I have been punished enough? You didn't say when you offered me the terms of this exile.

Elizabeth, I beg you. Consider a new arrangement. I'm not asking for total freedom. I would agree to any restrictions you might choose to place on me in other circumstances. Even a short stint at one of the other houses and limited access to social and cultural activities would make a vast difference to me. The fact is, I fear that if I don't have a change, I'll crack up.

Respectfully yours,

Alexandra

Washington, DC

5 January, 2096

My dear Alexandra,

The note of pathos in your plea was well achieved. Nevertheless, let me remind you of the alternative to what you call "exile." If you should choose to exchange the relative freedom of your island for a private cell, you have only to inform me and it will be done at once. Whatever you may think, punishment does not concern me. I've al-



ways found retribution to be a distraction that is often dangerous and at the very least a sapping of resources better spent. People do punish *themselves*, my dear, don't they—to the extent that they can ever be “punished.” As for the matter of your trustworthiness, that is not—and probably never shall be—clear. Consider, Alexandra, the *facts* that I have to go on where you are concerned:

(1) You freely chose to cut yourself off from our women's world. You have not spoken to your mother in more than seven years, and you continue to refuse to see her and your grandmother. Now I can hardly cast the first stone when it comes to maternal relations, for I haven't seen or spoken to my own mother in more than thirty years. Nevertheless, taken with everything else (your father's overt attack on all career-line women, for instance) it is merely one more sign of your estrangement from the values most executive women share.

(2) I have no information by which to analyze your possible reasons for deserting your father as you did. In the Company we follow a general rule of thumb that defectors and renegades are never to be trusted. Sound rule, don't you agree? Although you did not precisely defect from your father, at the end you chose to take my terms rather than share exile with him. You may think it unfair of me to hold this against you since it was I who offered that choice to you, yet you must see that it suggests an intrinsic lack of loyalty in you. Need I remind you that in earlier times I stood by your father in his darkest hour? I did not “betray” him until *he* had first betrayed *me*.

(3) If you genuinely want this favor of me, it was maladroit of you to drag Zeldin into your letter. Yes, I can verify that she died on January 12, 2078. But as I've mentioned to you before, I don't appreciate your introducing her into our intercourse.

I'm glad the girl pleases you. I contracted with her for an extravagant sum precisely *because* of the nature of your sexual tastes. She knows what to expect. I wouldn't dream of sending you someone who didn't. I may not share your tastes, but I can sympathize with such a long drought for one as accustomed to sexual activity as you are. It's to be hoped you won't tire of her as quickly as you have of the others. (In other words, don't expect a replacement when you've finished with her.)

Elizabeth



Wednesday, 2/1/2096

Very well, I'll do it. In this book. With the full understanding that it may be read without my consent—for I know, Elizabeth, that the girl is your spy. Not that you especially needed to add her to the crew already surrounding me. But she freely penetrates my bedroom, doesn't she.

After all these years I must have acquired enough detachment to be able to poke around & see what I can see. How to explain to Elizabeth what I myself don't understand? She of course was being disingenuous in her letter. The reason she keeps me here is not concern for any treachery I might be capable of but that she fears what I am. I know her father killed himself. When she saw me turning my back on Rbt & thus—according to her—instigating *his* suicide, it rang bells long muffled & buried in her psyche. (It must have!) & then from what she had told me shortly before I made my decision to desert him, Kay Zeldin's murder-suicide (whatever is one to call such an event?) was certainly on her mind, & she associated his death with Zeldin's.

If ever I'm to find a way to escape this bleak, futureless existence, or—should escape prove to be impossible—to discover a way of coming to terms with it (& therefore with myself), I must discover who & what I am, as well as comprehend Elizabeth's attitude toward me. To convince Elizabeth that I'm trustworthy, I need to understand a multitude of things that I've blocked off.

Though I'm surrounded by people who either guard or serve me (usually both), I'm essentially devoid of close human contact and communication. Which is my own fault, I suppose. I could cultivate the tutors, for one thing. Even though they *are* paid. They aren't in the same category of employee as Sally, though they are paid to amuse me. (& spy on me.) Each of them engages passionately in work on research projects that give meaning to their lives—a far cry from Sally's life here. She's here only to amuse me, her sole interest the handsome recompense Elizabeth bestows upon her. In short, she's a parasite.

& so I begin this book with the clear purpose of understanding. Which first entails forcing myself to *remember*. It will be painful, yes. But every day I lived in my father's house I suffered such pain. Perhaps it will be easier for me now, given the distance of years & the fact that



however vividly I remember, I am, physically at least, out of his reach, now & forever.

Where to start? I thought I needed to do this four years ago, when I requested a psychoanalyst of Elizabeth. [Knowing how Rbt would turn over in his grave at the very idea: the equivalent of throwing myself into the arms of my paternal grandfather, the final betrayal.] But the request horrified her. *We must preserve silence at all costs on your relationship with your father. I've done my utmost to protect your reputation, Alexandra. Don't be an idiot about this.* She never did tell me what she did with the med-tech who assisted her with my loquazene exam. I'd put nothing past her. Consider what she did to Wedgewood when it came time to hand him over to the human rights vultures. Anything to preserve the family secrets, right, Elizabeth? Maybe that's your real reason for jailing me here, maybe I'm a deep dark secret you want to keep under wraps. From yourself, even. What you really wanted to say in your letter is that you can't trust a taboo-breaker. It's nothing to do with my lack of loyalty to my father. But of course you can't say that since you pride yourself on your open mind. Proven, you no doubt believe, by your sending me Sally in spite of the flavor of my sexual vice.

But chattering at Elizabeth isn't the point of this book. The point is to unravel the past. (At twenty-six I can speak of a "past": but at what cost? Can I imagine speaking of a future? Can one think of an unending infinity of exile on this damned island as the/a future?) Where to start? With my birth? With the Blanket? With my father's tearing me out of my grandmother's (island) womb? With my becoming my father's lover? Or do I start before my own birth? After all, many things that happened before my birth directly influenced the shape my life took, though not to the extent that *he* liked to claim.

*I know you better than anyone ever could. I know you better than you know yourself.* Bullshit. & god how boring that repeated assertion became. *What a front you put up for the rest of the world, Persephone. But you are my secret.* Yes, that said it all, Rbt. That someone as naive as I was should fall into your hands...

Can you really blame me for my mistakes, Elizabeth? If you'd called me at any time during those years, I would have gone to you like



a shot. The dreams I had about you. The fantasies. That you would sweep me away, that you would save me for myself... Did I think of it that way? Probably not. Except that for a while I thought I could still find the self I once was. And then I knew it was too late. After two years of that life of insanity, going tamely off to Sarah Lawrence and studying piano and child development? No more could I do such a thing now, even if you allowed it.

Fuck it. Here I am writing to *her*. This is for myself, this book, this accounting.

Yes, *accounting*. I want to render an accounting, to understand what has happened to me, to find what I am. You mistook me, Rbt, for I do have the guts for it. But then why look at me any more fully than you ever looked at anything in the whole damned world? Blind old man, you lived a fantasy that you dragged the rest of the world into.

I swear on my executive womanhood that I will never drag more than one person at a time into *my* fantasies. Alas poor Sally. But she's getting paid handsomely for it.

Thursday, 2/2/2096

I take a surprising amount of pleasure in simply staring at Sally. But now it's time to disturb the texture I've woven so deliberately between us. I shall explore a new pattern tonight. Slowly, slowly. I will not be caught by her. Is that what Elizabeth intends, sending me someone so cool, so visibly detached? Does the girl herself imagine she can snare me? But why else should Elizabeth send me girls at all but to trap me emotionally? Why should it matter to her? She's devious. Yet so am I, so am I. I had a *lot* of practice with Rbt.

Let them both be devoured by curiosity, wondering at my intent, my reactions, my interest. By the time I'm through with Sally she will give up even trying to comprehend. & Elizabeth will grow frustrated and—*perhaps*—realize that whatever it is she wants to know she will have to seek firsthand for herself.



Saturday, 2/4/2096

Last night I shook Sally's equilibrium. She's been with me for over a month & so far I'd required nothing more from her than Swedish massages, the care of my clothing, & small, trivial services. I haven't even required her to dress my hair, since Jenson shampoos and trims it twice a week like clockwork, & god knows it takes no more than a few swipes of the hairbrush to maintain. So it struck me as amusing to assign the girl all the housekeeping duties for my bedroom suite. I was fairly certain she'd never touched a robocleaner in her life & so was hardly surprised when this morning a bewildered Lavoisier came to me & wanted to know whether I really intended Sally to have such an important responsibility, given the fact that he would have to instruct the girl on even the simplest aspects of the robocleaner & its functions. The staff is used to my vagaries. They'll jabber for a time about this new whimsy of mine but will soon be taking it for granted.

As for the girl herself: start with the fact that though Elizabeth briefed her on what to expect from me, I've been nothing but civil (if cool). Then add the kind of lifestyle she is undoubtedly accustomed to & the sorts of services she specializes in. Result? One confused service-tech. Those lovely green eyes opening wide in surprise—she's been waiting, though not, I'd be willing to bet, for orders to do *housework*.

But I'm stalling. Today I'm to start the project. Do I muse stream-of-conscious? Or do I set myself specific questions with which to grapple? How to go about analyzing myself & my short life? The basic outlines are tediously obvious: I hate my mother, loved/hated my father, & was probably responsible for his suicide. I killed him—I wished him dead. So where do I go from there?

I can't seem to think. I'd rather read Nietzsche, truth to tell.

Wednesday, 2/8/2096

The damned fog seems to have settled down over the island permanently. The tutors are not only depressed from the dismal atmosphere, but are also upset at being cut off from the mainland. (Sylvia especially.) Little did they imagine a year's sabbatical on an island off the coast of Maine could be so deadening. Jameson of course makes a big



production about how much work he's getting done poring over his epigraphic data. But then classics scholars are *supposed* to be oblivious to their surroundings.

But Sally, yes. The iron maiden now quivers like jelly at the very sight of me. Whatever *did* Elizabeth tell her? [Sally, if you should be reading this book for Elizabeth, I doubt you'll enjoy it, considering where you and I are headed. I'm tempted to wax pornographic just for that possibility.] Between Sally & my studies I've left no time for anything else. With unconscious intent, no doubt, since no one holds me to a schedule. I pay them; they are here for my amusement.

Rereading my letter to Elizabeth, it struck me how Elizabeth's & Rbt's political styles at least superficially conform to different historical styles. Rbt always prided himself on following Machiavelli above all other political theorists. Metternich, Treitschke, Mao, Schmidt, and Kissinger—the Big Five of Modern History—are all, according to Rbt, irrelevant to the post-Executive Transformation world. (& of course I tried on more than one occasion to tell him Machiavelli was irrelevant to the post-Blanket world, but each time, the very suggestion sent him into a rage.) His preferred method of dealing with enemies was excision. Either that or stripping them of their rank & fortunes (where possible). With his most powerful opponents, excision was easier than depriving them of power. While Elizabeth, on the other hand, doesn't stick at excision—after all, one can safely assume she arranged Wedgewood's—she prefers the old exile method. Rather like the methods of the *ancien regime* in France. Oh hell, what would Kay Zeldin, a *real* historian, have to say about all this? Her book on what happened between the onset of the Blanket & the Civil War was fascinating enough. (I bet it was Elizabeth who sent it to me: Rbt so furious at this anonymous “gift”—never having read it himself—or so he said—then wildly bingeing after doing so.)

What is it that Kay Zeldin has to do with me or, rather, with my “story”? My intuition tells me that she is a link between Elizabeth & me. I'd like to talk to Elizabeth about this, but there's no chance of that. Some of what the three of us share in common is obvious. & do we add Rosemary Sedgewick to the chain? Elizabeth, we *are* a chain: don't



you see? But you don't like the hands that forged us, so you'll deny the connection.

Shit, how can I get anywhere when everything leads back to my trying to talk to that absent quondam mentor of mine? How different everything would have been if Elizabeth hadn't gone renegade. I'd have been utterly different myself. Was I really so sugar-&-spice nice, or was that only the customary self-protective veneer forced onto executive girls? [Do you know, Mama, Grandmother, why I won't have anything to do with you? It's for what you did to me, both of you. Worse than what *he* did, far worse. Between you, you crippled me, hobbled me, maimed me. While he only warped what was already diseased.]

I'm raving mindlessly, off the track. Is that why I wanted a shrink? To complain about my upbringing? But shrinks always take the side of the parents, always accept an environment as given. I'd have gotten no sympathy there.

Is everyone this lonely? Rbt denied his loneliness—only to find himself completely alone, without the illusions my existence provided him. *Is* that why he killed himself? Because he finally had to face his solitude, a solitude he'd spent a lifetime denying?

Loneliness is something I've known from the time he summoned me from Barbados to the Georgetown house. I shared his illusion for a little while after we first started playing together, but it didn't take long for me to figure out that basically nothing had changed, that I was still alone & would always be alone—only that now I'd be more finally alone, since before we started fucking I had naive ideas about Mama and Grandmother. After my eyes were opened, I could see the desperation of his illusion. [Elizabeth, you knew, didn't you. So how come you weren't clever enough to play it for all you could get? You tried, I suppose. But somehow you couldn't manage. No wonder *I* couldn't. You were (& are) so much smarter & stronger than I.]

Illusions, illusions...& what illusions am I weaving for myself now? I'm alone. & I appear to think that if I can get off this island I won't be alone. I want to believe that. I so long for that mysterious women's world I've never belonged to, a world now in the thick of everything Rbt considered important. Five women Cabinet officers... It must be





killing George Booth. I laugh in your face, bastard. Where are you now, I wonder? Sunk in oblivion, certainly...

You're so perverse, Alexandra, gloating at another's obscurity when you yourself are lost in the fog of this godforsaken island wilderness. Gothic fantasy, indeed. A woman's home is her prison.

Meanwhile, Elizabeth's living in the Georgetown house, having appropriated it for her own use—since *this* Sedgewick will never have any need for it. But I don't care about that. I don't care about the damned estate. Did you think that would bother me, Elizabeth? Sure, it would have driven *him* wild, but I'm not *him*. It was never mine to play with in the first place, for all he made so much of making me his heir. Anyway, I can have my tutors & Sally & Nicole's cuisine & any object that can be shipped here without straining your fucking security arrangements. But you don't believe I don't want that power, do you. You're as bad as he is in the cynicism of your assumptions.

But let's get serious. I was born on Vashon Island, Mama always said. My chromosomes were immediately dealt with, wiping out all those ticking time bombs lurking in my genes. The image of those genetic diseases—running in which blood? Sedgewick blood? Raines blood? Dunn blood? & then all my vaccinations. Against small pox, tooth decay, & a host of other diseases I've never heard much of. The filter installed. & then the bliss (one assumes!) of being breastfed by Mama herself. On demand. Daniel, she says, was livid with jealousy.

But perhaps I should have started the account from conception? With the shocking fact that the last time my father ejaculated before fucking me was to conceive me? He particularly liked that fact. For some unexplained reason it made him feel more powerful than almost anything else could. Over & over & over this fact had to be remarked upon & discussed... & then from Vashon Island to the winery house, & from there to the Colorado house so that Mama could ski. & from there her memory of the legendary itinerary breaks down. A lot of time spent in the Georgetown house, with summers on Vashon Island. My first memory, though, is not of Mama, but of Marie. Marie was with Mama for a long, long time. She taught me French, & she tried to make my life easier vis-à-vis Daniel. I don't remember Rbt at all. Not a single memory of him until at age fifteen he sent for me. Once he dragged



out some photographs of me with him, to prove that he had paid me some attention as a child. Hah. Any attention he chose to spare to his children all went to Daniel. Shit, I couldn't win. Naughty or obedient I lost that game. Mama claims I was always manipulative, that I was always angling to draw attention away from Daniel onto myself. & where's Daniel now? Probably permanently hooked up, never to stir again. It's amazing he's still alive. But then being a Sedgewick he has people to see to that for him.

Off the subject again, Alexandra. But in my own defense I was actually *trying* to think about childhood. Mama says I was strong-willed & manipulative, Rbt that I was precocious, very intelligent. Grandmother that I was alternately sweet & wilful. (She *would* choose those poles—by which she defined how to treat me from moment to moment. Smothered in affection when “sweet,” banished to my room when wilful. “Control, little girl, you must learn to control your mouth. No retorts, no comments, all that is required of you is respect & deference. No one is interested in hearing your blather.” If I talked back after such a summation, off to my room with me. If I lowered my eyes & said a nice controlled “understood,” then I could sit with Grandmother & after a while babble my grievances—provided they were put in the correct tone of voice & as an attempt to amuse her—to my heart's content. Mama was the same way, only not so quick to forgive. Talk about *cold*: she fairly froze the marrow in my bones when she meant to cut me off. Maybe that's why I found Rbt's contemptuous moods so crushing? In some ways, it was Mama all over again.

Control, control, control. & then Rbt came along with his games violating everything I ever learned about control, while insisting that outside of the games everything must go on as usual. It makes sense to me *now*, but at the beginning I thought I'd go crazy with the mood swings the whole business induced in me. I can remember so sharply, so distinctly, that slap when I began screaming at him in the corridors of that Security Central basement, out of my mind with wanting to escape that horrible Wedgewood scene, & somehow what he said to me then clicked as it never had before, even though he'd repeated it often enough to me. I forbid you to lose control, he said, I will not have it, this is reality not play, I will not assume responsibility for controlling



you outside of our games, you *will* control yourself.” All this said so low, right into my ear, so that none of the creeps on hand could hear a word. Though god knows enough of them saw the slap to ensure a major buzz of gossip around the whole damned Company. Through my fury, fear, & humiliation, what he had been trying to tell me for all those months finally penetrated. & so then I tried & tried & tried to cut myself into pieces. To draw lines. To compartmentalize. But Rbt didn’t help. When it came right down to it, he only pretended to himself to draw lines. Which, from what he’s told me about Kay Zeldin, is where he went wrong with her all those many many years ago.

Oh hell. I can’t take this. I’ve done enough for one day. As long as I make myself write more tomorrow, there’s no need for marathon sessions with this book.

Monday, 2/20/2096

So much for my claiming to write here daily. But I just can’t drag myself to this book when there’s anything at all else to do. Or to think about. (Sally, for instance. Or the philosophy course I started last week with the morosest of the tutors.) The twentieth anniversary of the Blanket came & passed. To tell the truth, I find it hard to imagine this world before the Blanket, I even find it nearly impossible to imagine the world without that faint, nearly invisible, alien presence. It is said in the newspapers that two of Elizabeth’s Cabinet officers have had personal contact with aliens... It is maddening how little seems to be known about them. Well, perhaps that will change now that Elizabeth has instituted a new Executive Department devoted exclusively to studying & relating to the aliens.

Last night Sally finally broke down in all-out hysterics. How divine it was, soothing her, calming her, caressing her into tentative security. Afterwards, when I gave her the fur-trimmed leather coat, she suspected a trick, suspected that I’d take it from her, that it was a cruel joke I was playing. Is she lulled? Superficially. The fear peeks out sometimes in the sidelong glances she gives me, her forest green eyes glinting like sun raining through translucent leaves in the woods in summer. She’s quite beautiful—no wonder I spent her first few weeks



here simply staring at her. Slowly, slowly. I must go slowly this time. Think of it as delayed gratification.

I've become obsessed with the fact that Elizabeth has not come to see me even once since dumping me here. Sometimes I think that if I could see her in the flesh we would work things out. But she wants no face-to-face contact with me. Why? I need to figure that out—if it's possible to do from a distance. If I can figure it out, I might be able to induce her to come to me & thence negotiate new terms with her. It *must* be possible. I *cannot* spend the rest of my life here, living this way. I *cannot*.

So, today I'll write about Elizabeth. Elizabeth & me, I mean. I think of my first acquaintance with this room, called the Small Study. That first year I hated this room over every other place in the house (with the exception of that bizarre room at the top of the house). Every afternoon, tea in this room with a man half-dead & horridly disagreeable. Sometimes he'd lie on that sofa, drunk, & demand things from me I barely understood. Mostly I didn't understand anything of him that first year. I'd sit by the fire & fantasize Elizabeth's being here, rescuing me from the tedium, the tyranny, the humiliations. Because she had once rescued me from him before she went renegade. & then the letters & packages she sent me (all of which stopped after Rbt's reinstatement & my appearing publicly at his side) sustained a wild hope in me that renegade or not, she would rescue me. And with all the speculation about what she was "up to," she became a romantic figure for me. What really fired my imagination was what we learned from the naval intelligence man returned by the terrorists to the Pentagon. For his debriefing, Rbt insisted upon what he called "deep interrogation," which elicited details that utterly enthralled me: Elizabeth being made to cease her on-the-spot torture of him by her companion, obviously a lover, threatening to leave her. Hazel was the name the naval intelligence officer revealed. Hazel. Later Rbt came up with the information that the secretary Elizabeth took with her was named Hazel Bell. He doubted the story, saying that Elizabeth would never make important decisions to please a service-tech lover. (Undoubtedly he thought the incident a bad example to everything he'd been trying to teach me about relations with service-tech sexual partners.) But I



believed the story & savored it, & went over & over & over it with the greatest pleasure. And would say that name, over and over: *Hazel Bell*. I don't quite know why it gave me so much pleasure. But I think it must be considered an important factor in the shaping of my feelings for Elizabeth.

She seemed everything to me—so confident, controlled, pleasure-loving, competent—all at a time when I was floundering in bewilderment & fear at my father's tearing me out of the womb & thrusting me into his big, cold world. Elizabeth offered a link between the two worlds. A link between my parents, too. Rbt listened to her where he did not give Mama the time of day. Rbt *respected* Elizabeth, an attitude rare for him when it came to women. She'd stride right into that house & take control, yet was never narrow & cold & contemptuous the way Rbt was to the world around him. When it came to the staff, for instance, he wanted as little to do with them as possible. He'd accept direct service from at most two or three persons per household—including his valet—while Elizabeth generally saw to everything & was fairly good-natured and persuasive in her approach to management. (Except that one time when she fired someone in my father's house for neglecting me while I was under room arrest.)

Once Rbt got me involved with his work, I continually asked myself what Elizabeth would do in my situation. To be honest, if she'd asked me at any time to betray Rbt for her, I probably would have, except during that one mad patch when I first started fucking him. I would have joined her band of renegade women. (Ah, romance.) But once she wrote me off as Rbt's creature, she never gave me a thought. Think of it, all that time I was secretly cheering her on, tickled at each new slap she delivered at the Executive as Rbt fumed. & when they discovered the location of her HQ & planned that commando raid on it, I was beside myself trying to decide what, if anything, I could do to save her from it. Elizabeth, you'll never know my sense of relief—& ecstatic delight—at hearing the news of how your people repelled the commando force (taking a third of it prisoner, too), shooting down the air support that as a matter of last resort was to bomb you out if all else failed... It was a humiliation for the Company that had Rbt in a rage for days, berating & demoting the three executives who had been



given the honor of taking you out. He wanted you alive, did you guess that? Did you guess that they wouldn't try excising you until finally they decided that was the only way of stopping you?

But I'm doing it again. I've degenerated into talking to Elizabeth. I should be talking to myself. Isn't that the point of this book?

Sedgewick's Island, Maine

Friday, February 24, 2096

Dear Elizabeth,

I've been pondering the problem the Executive appears to be having with the human rights lawyer working with unionizers arrested in workplace incidents. All three of the dailies I take (the *Ex Times*, *The New York Times*, & *The Washington Post*) have given extensive coverage to her activities, & the *Ex Times* recently profiled her. Though the *Ex Times* urges you to have her debarred and charged with sedition and jailed, naturally you hesitate to do that, given her contacts with the aliens and her national standing as a leading human rights spokesperson. It would surely cast doubt on your claims to have created a government willing to accommodate dissent and eager to ease repression.

May I offer a suggestion that I think will suit what I can make out of your political style? I suggest you co-opt her into the Executive. Either by giving her a job with the Justice Dept., or—which there's a better chance of her accepting—making her a Federal Judge. Though the latter would generate resentment among executives (since executives have, after all, held a monopoly on judgeships since the Transformation), the controversy would be weatherable and ultimately preferable to battling this woman. From what I've learned of American History (which, you know, has become a passion with me in the last five years), usually this kind of cooptation succeeds beyond one's imaginings, although at the outset it does entail some risk for the establishment. Key here is the fact that institutions always win over individuals. Espin would soon feel certain invisible collegial pressures she'd be bound to respond to. But as it is now, she's clearly very clever in her understanding of how to manipulate the law. And in your game, Elizabeth, manipulation of the law is everything, since you've chosen law and subtle persuasion as your media of control. (I



especially appreciate your new pop-culture movements—obviously someone’s stroke of genius.)

Best wishes,

Alexandra

Saturday, 2/25/2096

It will be hard writing in this book today—though I feel I must, to get my mind back on track—because things are getting more & more interesting with Sally. Last night I took a bold step: I caressed her genitally, bringing her to orgasm several times while maintaining my rule forbidding her to touch or kiss me. We were in the Small Study on the rug by the fireplace, the first time I allowed her in there (where she’d no doubt like to penetrate in order to get her hands on whatever I might have lying around to read for her reports to Elizabeth). I invited her to drink cognac with me & then asked her to undress. (I did not remove my own gown.) She’s even more beautiful—what a flush!—coming than crying. I gave her a solid gold bracelet afterwards, which she handled curiously, as though she’d never touched gold before. It bewilders (&, of course, undercuts) her, my not allowing a so-called reciprocal sexual intimacy. But in order to keep her from thinking anything had changed, I added another rule to those I’ve already given her: that she must stay in my bedroom suite from eight until four every day, even when there’s no task for her to attend to. (& here she was probably hoping I’d change my whimsical mind about making her do the cleaning in my suite: it being, perhaps, the keenest humiliation of all that she has to bear.) However, her only response to hearing the new rule was to lower her eyes & say “yes madam.” She’s a quick study—I doubt she’ll try taking liberties with me no matter how felicitous our relations might occasionally be.

But let me think where I was in this project...I was musing over my hero-worship of Elizabeth. Yesterday morning in bed I kept wishing I could ask Elizabeth what it is she thinks I should have done—spent all those years shut up at the winery house? I had no reason to believe he’d ever lose that power over me, at least not while I was defying



him. The only way I could possibly have dealt with him was to do as I did, for it gave me a slight measure of power over him as well as some slack. But I always knew my very survival depended on my playing his game, by his rules. The only alternative was to run away: but to where? To whom? If I'd run to her—& god knows I thought about it often enough—Elizabeth would have suspected me of spying for him. Sometimes I imagined contacting the Austrian ambassador & giving him a letter for Elizabeth. But then I'd think of how vulnerable that would render me to blackmail from the ambassador, not to mention anyone else who might get hold of the letter—even from Elizabeth, though that lay only in the back of my mind, for I always believed she would care for me as though I were her own. It was Elizabeth I wished were my mother, or at least my sister.

Rbt once told me that Elizabeth was three years younger than he.

I seem to be getting nowhere in examining that side of the equation. Perhaps it's time to look at the negative. To look at my relationship with Rbt.

That's about the last thing I want to do. But not today. I need to get drunk to take *him* on.

Sunday, 2/26/2096

It's a curious thing about Sally—how she's never attempted the slightest familiarity with me. I suspect this is due to Elizabeth's briefing her about my vices—& perhaps, too, to my not once in those first few weeks having laid a sexual finger on her. But now that I have, she apparently still does not feel free to call me by my first name, probably since I haven't specifically invited her to call me something other than “madam” or “Ms. Sedgewick.” I shall keep it that way, even now. This experiment with Sally shall be as much for Elizabeth's benefit as my own. Is there possibly a strain of voyeurism in her sending a girl like Sally to spy on me?

Why why why *bother* with it? It just doesn't make any damned sense that I can think of! What should it matter about me personally—the stuff she can't get out of the gorillas or the tutors or the staff, I mean. Can it be she's actually thinking of letting me off this damned island,





provided I pass some test she's concocted for determining whether she wants to let me go free? But if that's the case, why rebuff my request for a change of arrangements as harshly as she did in her letter?

Monday, 2/27/2096

I know when I first hated him. It was in October 2087, about two weeks after my seventeenth birthday, on the third occasion in my life that I tried to defy him. A few weeks after starting classes at Yale—seizing every occasion I could to stay overnight in the apartment he'd bought for us there—I first began avoiding sex with him & then outright insisted we stop for good. He appeared to accept my decision, in line with his eternal claim that my pleasure was the sole reason for our ever having sex. I remember that birthday his watching me in that way he had. When he wasn't sure of me, his watchfulness took on a cool, almost suspicious cast. Otherwise it probably appeared to outsiders as indulgent fondness—though never was it that—but no one ever suspected much less understood the nature of our relationship. Oh how excited I was at this other life I led apart from him! Staying alone in that apartment (alone except for staff, that is), I first tasted freedom. & I began to get ideas. Also, I met a few other executive women attending Yale & occasionally dined & frequently lunched with them. One of them introduced me to a charming girl named Darlene, who was at the time without a contract. So I conceived the idea of forming a contract with her. Maybe I had visions of living during the week in that apartment; I suppose I thought I could convince Rbt to let me give up the constant commuting.

At any rate, one night when were alone at dinner, I raised the subject, revealing to him I'd already moved the girl into the New Haven apartment. As I recall I brought up the subject for the explicit reason that I needed the correct legal formula for wording the contract & thought it would be easier to do it through him than to go to the family's attorneys myself (who would have required his approval, anyway). Easier? I must have been out of my mind. His face went into its dead-fish mode. In front of the butler & a service-tech he announced that if I brought a girl on contract into any of his residences he'd have her thrown into the street. *& is that clear, my dear?* I understood immedi-



ately that he was jealous. Naturally, I was furious. (I am, after all, my father's daughter.)

I sat through the rest of dinner stony silent—as did he. I began to plot how I could get my own back. (That's how I thought in those days. I was a petty little bitch, alright.) When we were alone he said that the TNC project was flailing, that I hadn't been keeping up with the work, & that consequently we would be going into the office that evening to review the current status of the project together. I couldn't protest that I had too much school work since I never went to New Haven on Thursdays, & he knew it. (How I regretted having the responsibility of that project—once school had started I'd found it increasingly onerous & had finally taken to ignoring it.)

So in we went to the office. I always hated going there at night. The building was pretty forbidding even by daylight, but at night...at night the full complement of fluorescent lighting flooded the corridors & the guards made themselves more visible. That night as we stepped into Rbt's private elevator I informed him that I'd be spending Christmas vacation on Barbados—with Mama & both grandparents. Did I have amnesia, that I didn't think of how he'd blocked me that first spring I spent with him? At any rate, it hadn't occurred to me that he would prevent my going to Barbados. I simply assumed he'd fume & feel hurt (my revenge for his denying me Darlene). The only reason I hadn't spent much time with my mother or grandparents that summer had—I honestly thought then—been my wanting to please him. It had always seemed to be my choice. But when I made this announcement, he stared at me for a long time & then said, “the hell you will” in that tone of voice that sounded as final as a gavel slamming following delivery of a verdict. I decided to leave it at that—to make my arrangements without arguing about it.

Right.

He set me up at the conference table with the last few weeks' reports on the TNC project & then went to his desk & made some calls. He pitched his voice so low that I didn't hear what he said. Probably I wasn't trying to hear, either. I preferred to know as little as possible about what he did as Chief of Security. & then he sat at the table with me, & for the next three hours we toiled over the project & what



needed to be done about it. Since he was pissed at me he frequently hammered me with questions & lashed me with his most cutting criticism. I thought the session would never end. All I wanted was to get away from him. At one point I said something about having been up since five-thirty, working all day & attending four classes. That, of course, only earned me a dose of his primest sarcasm.

We stopped when the phone interrupted. After Rbt hung up he said we were going “downstairs.” I thought he meant we were going down to the garage—& thus home. But when we got into his elevator he punched in one of the basement levels, not the garage. Because his face had gone rock-hard and flat, I didn’t dream of asking him why we were going to a basement level.

A gorilla met us at the elevator & led us to a room in the south block. That section of the building was cold & smelled. Of chemical of some kind, & maybe of sweat and urine. Was this an illusion of mine? I don’t know, I may be projecting backwards. Still, I found the unrelied concrete depressing, dismal, bleak. We went into a room with a table & chairs; one of the walls was glass. We sat almost in the dark, while the room we could see through the window was brightly lit. Rbt told me to sit in a chair facing the window; he stood behind me, irritating me by resting his hands on my shoulders, occasionally kneading them. By this time I was feeling so intimidated that I refrained from asking him what we were doing in that room. I didn’t want to know, I just wanted to get out of there.

What happened next...even now I can hardly bear to think of it. Nor can I describe it. I’ve thankfully forgotten most of the details (which I recall, plagued me for weeks afterwards). The bald fact is that Rbt had ordered Darlene picked up from the New Haven apartment & brought to DC. While I watched, she was dragged into that brightly lit room on the other side of the window & five gorillas beat & raped her. I shouted & screamed at Rbt to order them to stop, but he clamped one hand over my mouth while pinning me into the chair from behind with the other. I dissolved into nearly hysterical crying. The realization of why he was doing it hit me like a sledgehammer. When after what seemed an eternity he ordered the thing stopped, he took me back upstairs to the office.



By the time we reached his office I had begun to recover—somewhat. Enough, at any rate, to turn on him the minute we were alone in his office. I hurled at him every abuse I could think of, calling him a bastard, railing at him for his sadism, telling him that I hated him. Big mistake. His response was to go to the phone & order another assault on that girl. How did he put it to me? I think he said something like *I see you learned nothing from the lab. We'll simply have to repeat the experiment until you're able to pass the quiz.* That was the metaphor he used. He added something caustic about my lack of control & how he refused to take the responsibility of controlling me, that I was old enough to control myself.

I burned with hatred. (It later occurred to me that the way I burned with rage when being forced to listen to him psych up his shock troops was nothing to the way I felt that night—which is when I realized the vastness of the difference between hatred & outrage.) But though I burned, at the same time I chilled down fast. (Hatred can be a cold burning, too.) I had to think about that girl down there & what she must be feeling & how it was only her connection with me that had landed her in such a nightmare.

There was this horrible silence in the room with us as he waited for me to take it all in.

I pulled myself together because I had to. I apologized, said how wrong I'd been. In short, I offered him total abjection. When he showed signs of softening, I went to him & put my arms around him. I kissed him. & then he was demanding declarations of love from me, declarations of sexual desire. . . . He said he didn't want to share me with anyone. I told him everything he wanted to hear. & then I wheedled him into countermanding the order. "Wheedled"—yes, it was all of that & more. It was delicate. But of course we both knew that was the payoff. So he picked up the phone & ordered Darlene released—to be dumped in some remote area of DC. Needless to say, she'd never know who'd abducted & assaulted her or why. I didn't dare ask him for the further favor of returning Darlene to New Haven—I feared pressing his now mellowed mood. He fucked me on that long mahogany table. & then we went home. All the time a terrible hatred burned in me, while I played the role of passionate lover & dutiful daughter, sick with the



most intense nausea. That's when I first really hated him. He never knew. No one knew. It was just another one of my deep, dark secrets.

Washington DC

27 February, 2096

Alexandra:

How the Executive chooses to handle Espin is none of your business. If, in the future, I receive from you any more such pieces of meddling, I will return unread any subsequent letters you should favor me with. I hope I make myself clear.

Elizabeth

P.S. As far as I'm concerned, you are the consummate amalgam (monstrous as that necessarily must be) of the worst character traits found in each of your respective parents. Should you get too bored with your current circumstances, there's always a cell waiting for you. I advise you to bear that in mind when you're reading the newspapers and playing hypothetical power games.

Thursday, 3/1/2096

What was it he jeered at me that forever cured me of tears? Oh yes, I have it verbatim in my memory, I can just hear the nasty drawl in his voice—*Poor little Alexandra, poor dear, she's hurt herself and now she's indulging the luxury of tears. A nice soft lusciously masochistic feeling, how sweet it is to lose control. The perfect belly-soft, slime-slick response. So there's just little Alexandra in the whole wide world, and not letting anyone or anybody else in, that'll show 'em.* And then, when I only glared at him, he added through his teeth, *All crying is a damned stupid ploy for going out of control.* And god knows one dare not go out of control except in designated situations... Nothing so infuriated him. *I refuse to take responsibility for controlling you. You, my dear, will control yourself!*

Yes, & so I do, & so I do.



I went into the Music Room & for the first time in more than five years opened the piano & stumbled sentimentally through some Beethoven. My fingers, though trembling, though uneven, remembered the pattern of notes... It sounded like shit, but it felt...comforting. For a while. Until frustration & disgust at my own ineptness made it impossible to continue the exercise. Ended up slamming the lid back over the keyboard (did I beat my fists on the keys first? I seem vaguely to recall doing that, only everything is a blur). Wine, I drank a great deal of wine in the late afternoon & evening. The Syrah slid easily enough down my throat. Still, I have no desire today to touch even a drop of alcohol. Elizabeth missed that: unless she counted his drunken binges one of his *less* obnoxious traits?

At some point I summoned Sally down to the Small Study where I was doing my drinking (right in his fucking footsteps, woman). I was lying on the sofa & had her (naked, of course) kneel beside the sofa on the rug, with her head on my breast while I fingered her labia. Got to thinking about Sally's probable relation to Elizabeth (Elizabeth not unnaturally being on my mind). Let my anger shift onto Sally, Elizabeth's paid spy-whore. "Do you want me to send you back to her?" I asked, probably not very nice in my tone of voice. "Whenever you've had enough, you're free to go. You've only to say the word." I'd been pretty rough with her before dinner, when my mood of self-pity had metamorphosed into self-hate and general rage. (Childish, I know. I can't seem to properly grow up.)

"No," she said, "I don't want to leave." & then she turned her head, & I felt her lips pressing through my gown against my breast.

A spear of pleasure-pain streaked through me. One of *those* moments. & with her, yet. I grabbed her hair & yanked her head back—to call attention to her transgression of the rules. To punish her I said, "Elizabeth must pay you exceedingly handsomely." The gifts I'd given her wouldn't have been enough to hold her through two miserable months (assuming she isn't a masochist) without the salary Elizabeth was paying her making it worth the pain & humiliation.

Her eyes, the color of steamed spinach, flinched from my gaze. "Yes," she whispered, "the pay is good."



I finished the wine in my glass & had her refill it. “If you’re going to cry,” I told her, “go away. I’m not in the mood for it.” Actually, I haven’t enjoyed her tears for a long time now.

Her long, graceful body (soft the way only the most parasitical service-techs’ bodies are) poised for flight, yet she seemed indecisive. Like a deer frozen, waiting to determine the safest route for escape. “Do you want me to go?” she asked in that hoarse throaty voice she acquires at times of stress. I had the urge to shake her & yell at her to stop being such a worm. Sometimes that weakness gets to me, makes me want to prod it into outright defense. But of course she’s beyond prodding. These days it doesn’t take much to reduce her to a quivering, gelatinous mush.

I should send her away before I lose control of myself. What is it I’m doing with her, anyway? I wanted to pass the time. That’s how I thought of it when she arrived the day before Christmas. But if she stays much longer...god knows what will happen. Can she be *that* greedy? Yes, of course she can. Some people will do anything for money.

Elizabeth. Damn her. I should have known about her savagery. She managed Rbt all those years, there’s no way she could *not* be tough. As for what this means about her attitude toward me... No. I can’t think about that now.

Oh christ that she muzzles me...it’s an end to any hope, any hope at all. She doesn’t care enough about me even to make it likely she’d give attention to any attempt I might make to explain myself. To her, Alexandra Sedgewick is only a remnant of an opponent she once had to overcome. *A monstrous amalgam*. But she hasn’t talked to me in ten years! She doesn’t know me!

But she doesn’t care to know me.

*A monstrous amalgam*. As though I’m trapped in the tentacles of my parents’ lives, beings, genes...as though I don’t exist as a real self. Just a little leftover piece of Rbt. Alexandra Sedgewick never did exist. God knows there’s no one even to remember *her*—only him. People will remember him, all right. & he’s left me behind as his ghost. Some life. It’s almost as good as being dead.



Monday, 3/5/2096

Yesterday Sally sent me into a rage. One of those states I so seldom fly—fall?—into: insensate, wild, unreasoning anger that blocks out all else. Typically, this obsessive state of mind dominates me until I have a chance to dissipate it. Rbt was the main object of my rages in the past, which I usually dissipated by finding ways of making him suffer. (Easy enough to do—though there was always a special price to pay for the pleasure.) Oddly enough, that’s not how it worked this time. Oh, I did take it out on Sally, but doing so didn’t dissipate my rage.

It all started with her faking orgasm. I’d been caressing her for a long time, but she proved elusive. Perversely, I insisted on continuing, though it should have been obvious after a certain point that we’d be getting no joy this time. & then she pulled this ridiculous stunt of trying to fake it. As though I wouldn’t know what she was doing! Surely her other lovers haven’t let her get away with *that* particular form of manipulation? I was so incensed that I grabbed her by the hair & slapped her. And she actually looked surprised! All I could think about was how I would punish her for the deception. I shouted at her demanding to know how stupid did she think me etc., & she turned fiery red & mumbled something about how sore she had been getting, about how she knew she would never come, that once she got sore & dry it was hopeless. Etc. etc. When her words penetrated my fog of rage, I understood immediately what she was saying. How could I not remember similar situations with Rbt—when I *did* fake it—successfully. No matter how familiar men are with women’s bodies, they know next to nothing about the female body. Everything’s guess-work for them. Familiarity helps, but approaching the female body as an object that can be scientifically understood leaves gaping chasms in what they choose to call “comprehension” or “understanding” of female sexuality. Rbt was no exception. How could he be? He could be a good guesser, yes. But that was all.

This bizarre identification was disorienting. There I was one moment, out of my mind with anger at her trying such a thing with me, & the next remembering my doing the same thing to Rbt, remembering how bored & irritated I’d get at his attentions at such times, wanting only to bring the whole tedious exercise to an end. & somehow Rbt never





could grasp that it might be possible to be irritated on one occasion by the exact same thing that had produced ineffable pleasure on another. & I never knew how to make him see that. So there I was remembering the irritation finally driving me to put an end to it in the only way Rbt would accept...& realizing that Sally had felt the same. There's no doubt she felt little confidence in my reaction should she simply come right out & say that any further attempts would be futile... A terrible jarring, this juxtaposition. So I got to my feet & poured myself another glass of wine & sent Sally away. There was no point in being angry at her. All I could do was tell her not to try it again, that she needn't think I'd put up with that kind of insolence...

So now I have to wonder if she despises me. Why else would she think she could pull it off? Well if it should happen again, she had better ask me to stop instead of trying to dupe me. I might give her a hard time for it, but I certainly won't be anything near as hard on her as I'll be if she tries faking it again.

Oh hell. Elizabeth's paying her a fortune. Why bother trying to be decent to her? Girls like her deserve everything they get.

Sedgewick's Island, Maine

Tuesday, March 6, 2096

Dear Mama,

I won't blame you if you refuse, but I'd like it very much if you would come see me. I miss you terribly. I've been spending a lot of time lately going over the past, trying to understand what's become of me. In the process I've uncovered a great yearning for you. Please, Mama. Please come visit. I know I've been unforgivable. But he's dead now. And all that is—must be—past. I was so young, Mama. Please remember that as you judge me. If you can't forgive me, I'll understand—with infinite sadness. But I'm hoping your heart is large enough to give me another chance.

It's a sad commentary on the state of our relations that I don't even know where to send this. But I'm sure Grandfather will see to it that you get this.

Your loving

Alexandra



Thursday, 3/9/2006

The weather's cleared, the wind is high, & the sea & sky are glittering blue. I've taken to walking every afternoon along the edge of the water, circling the island. I'm trying to find if not peace, then some new source of hope. (The resignation that got me through the first five years seems to have deserted me.) When will she get my letter? It could be weeks. First it has to pass muster with Elizabeth's office. And then be sent to Grandfather. And he then must forward it to Mama. Will she even answer me? I responded so angrily when she made that single request to see me after Rbt's death that I never heard from her again. Or Grandmother, either. But Grandmother long ago lost the will to forgive me my infinite transgressions. She declared me ungrateful the last time I saw her: for Mama's sake rather than her own, I think.

Can anything come from rapprochement? I *must* try. It's all I have left. I'm so testy lately the entire household is on edge. Except stolid icy disapproving Nicole: she knows she has me where she wants me; & except for the guards, of course—for though the estate pays their salaries, Elizabeth is their controller. I'm merely the object of their scrutiny & precautions, hardly their employer.

Which brings me around to Sally. Of course. Always to Sally. I'm beginning to worry that writing about her is my real reason for scribbling in this book. She's in the room with me now as I write. I've let her glimpse this book, I want her to take note of it—for I write in it only in this room, & it looks very different from all my reading notebooks, which I leave lying around open to inspection. Let her wonder, let her speculate...in her reports to Elizabeth?

Yesterday I took her walking with me. The guards of course followed us every step of the way, never letting us out of their sight. But I care little about privacy now. Nothing I do with Sally need be kept secret in the way that *all* sex games with Rbt had to be.

I walked on the outside, closest to the water, with my left arm around her waist, delighting in the feel of the wind on my face, the smell of the ocean, & above all the sunlight. The ocean, at least, makes life almost bearable here—I must be thankful Elizabeth allows it



to me. Though god knows it's hard to think about it that way when life stretches so endlessly before me. When we came round onto the stretch of beach overhung by the cliff, I backed Sally against the cliff wall and stared into her dazzling eyes, which had turned a lovely blue green, the color of the sea on less brilliant days. "How can you be so greedy?" I demanded of her as I caressed her neck.

She gave me a worried look. "Have I done something wrong?" she asked in a throaty voice.

"To stay here when I treat you so badly," I said. "Only greed could be motivating you."

She lowered her eyes. "Yes, madam. I suppose I *am* greedy."

Her tone of voice left me oddly disturbed. Was it sadness? Or no, perhaps resignation would be a better way of describing it... At any rate, I was swept by an overwhelming desire to kiss her, something I had never done, so I put my lips to hers & did a little exploring. I found her pliant & her mouth deliciously warm & sweet, like moving into a patch of sunlight. How strange to find again the cave. But when I became aware that her arms were around me, her hands stroking my back, & her tongue in my mouth, I disengaged. I raised my hand to slap her, then stopped myself. My heart was racing ridiculously. I took a deep breath & said as calmly as I could, "You've violated my rules. You'll have to be punished." She said nothing, only implored me with her eyes, so compellingly I could hardly tear my gaze from them. But I strove to regain control of myself & at last indicated that we would resume the walk. I took her arm & felt it trembling. We walked without speaking until the tide crept too high for our booted comfort.

She sits now on the rug in front of the fireplace, staring at the flames, her face pensive & calm. She cannot be thinking about my abuse of her last night. So what is it she's thinking about? What could it be other than money? What Judith MacLaury all those years ago referred to as "delayed gratification" as she endured a life serving a master she detested... Judith managed it, somehow. I suppose for some, enduring me is no worse—and it is, after all, a relatively short-term thing. While Judith knew her bondage would go on for years before paying off.



I never pitied Judith. I certainly shall not pity Sally. She may be free of me whenever she chooses. While I shall never be free of this exile, ever.

Wednesday, 3/14/2096

It has been eight days since I sent the letter to Mama. Will she answer? But of course the damned thing's probably still sitting in Elizabeth's office. My correspondence is low priority. Who reads the letters, I wonder? Elizabeth herself? Or a trusted PA? What nonsense to waste my time on. I should instead think of what I should say if Mama *does* decide to see me. (Perhaps she'll come out of curiosity—to see the one residence Rbt never let her near.) *Can* I forgive her for raising me to be so vulnerable, so weak, so unprepared for the life I was thrust into? Her only notion was to make me feel as guilty as she could for living in semi-harmony with Rbt. For refusing to fight him. What the hell did she expect of me? My entire girlhood was designed to make me as docile as possible. Or at least sufficiently self-censored in my speech & deeds to make me appear to be docile. Not that she was ever around for most of it. My father was right when he accused her of dumping me on Grandmother. That's *exactly* what she did. Because he wasn't around to hold her more tightly to her contract. Contract! That's all I ever was to her: a means to an end. What counted was that juicy trust-fund that was to be hers upon my twenty-first birthday, provided I turned out reasonably acceptable. Well, thanks to my intercession she *got* her trustfund. Not that she has any idea he ever seriously intended to refuse it to her on grounds of non-compliance with the contract. She felt she earned it. Daniel, Rbt, myself: we were the bondage she had to endure for the sake of delayed gratification. Oh christ. At least he never leveled *that* at me, though now I can see it for myself, plain as day: it was all for the money—giving birth to me, raising me. It explains a lot. (*Girls are so difficult to raise!*) I must have understood this all along. That must be why I knew Rbt was more likely to love me than she. At least with him I could tell. There was nothing there for him to get out of it. He could be (& was) as honest as he pleased. *She* has always been a supreme manipulator. & she worked to teach me her ways. Touché, Elizabeth.



Monday, 3/19/2096

& now what? That things have come to this—it's so bad I've spent the day running back & forth to the toilet, my bowels—no, my whole body—in turmoil. I must *think*, must think *carefully* before setting anything more into motion. (God knows I've done enough damage already.) That I could have made this kind of mistake sickens me, horrifies me...& *frightens* me.

Part of it must be in some way connected with this godawful nerve-racking wait to hear from Mama. (*If* she even bothers to reply.) I have to face it, I've been totally obsessed with thoughts of Sally's greed. Going further & further, trying to find a limit to what she would take. Last night she seemed almost to the point of breaking. Having just knocked her to the floor, I shouted at her, "For godsake girl, what in the *hell* is she paying you?" & that started the whole thing unraveling before my horrified eyes.

My shouting this at her scared her out of her wits. She only gaped at me, &, when realizing I meant her to answer, choked out, "A lot. She's paying me a lot."

I ordered her to get up off the floor, then sat her down on the sofa beside me. "How much?" I demanded, determined to know the exact figure & the arrangements for payment & so on. I wanted to know every last grimy detail. That's how wild I was.

"A lot," she repeated.

I slapped her hard. "Give me the numbers," I ordered.

The look of sheer panic on her face should have told me something. When I raised my hand to slap her again, she cried out a figure. The figure was ridiculously low, slightly less than what I used to pay Nicole in the days when I handled the estate's finances. (She probably makes twice that now, all things considered.) "You expect me to believe that?" I scoffed, furious at her for lying to me.

"I'm sorry," she got out, her voice so hoarse I kept wondering if she'd be able to form words with it. "I wanted to impress you." & then she named a figure *half* of that she'd originally given!



I took her so small-boned, so delicate wrist in my hand—using one of Rbt’s old tricks for helping to assess the truthfulness of responses. “You’re lying to me, Sally, & I want to know why. Shall we see if I can make you tell me?” Her pulse speeded up even faster. It must have been 200 beats per minute.

She gasped for breath. “I can’t tell you,” she choked out. “No matter what,” she added, bracing for another blow.

By this time my mind had begun to work (god knows it seems to go on idle whenever I’m with Sally). The most significant implication of her lie was that though she wanted to convince me Elizabeth was paying her, she hadn’t the faintest notion of what a girl like her could be paid—even for non-extraordinary circumstances. Say, to serve my mother. But for *these* circumstances, the figure would be off the scale—a scale she seemed to have no notion of. Elizabeth was careless here—she attended to so many details to make the girl authentic, but she omitted the most obvious, even though she’d assured me she was paying the girl an extravagant amount. “Let’s calm down,” I said as non-threateningly as I could, & with my free hand stroked her face. The contact at first was difficult for her, but after a few quiet moments she steadied a bit, and her pulse slowed to perhaps 100 beats per minute. So. Now I had something to work with. “You’ve never done this kind of thing before, have you,” I said, watching her face for any revealing tightening. Her pulse picked up somewhat.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“You’ve never served an executive woman before, have you,” I said very gently.

Her eyes dropped. “Yes I have,” she whispered.

“You’re lying,” I said. “And you’re a lousy liar. You can’t even look into my eyes with that lie, can you.”

“I did serve one, sort of, for a month,” she blurted out. “It’s not entirely a lie.”

“But you’re not a whore,” I rapped out.

She swallowed. “No.” She lifted her eyes. “You’re going to send me away now, aren’t you.”



“Who are you & what are you doing here?” I demanded. She lowered her eyes. “Now listen to me, Sally—if that’s really your name—I knew from the beginning that Elizabeth sent you here to keep an eye on me. I even told her I knew that when I wrote thanking her for such a thoughtful Christmas present.” She looked up, startled. “You’re a Company girl?”

She swallowed again. “Yes,” she said, and her pulse leaped back into wildness.

“That’s a lie,” I said. “I bet you don’t even know what the Company is, do you.” She looked stricken. “Tell me the truth, Sally.”

Her eyes squeezed close. Tears followed, then silent heaving sobs she could not control. After awhile I prompted her. Still she didn’t look at me. “I might as well,” she sobbed. “It’s gone too far...I’m useless now... Everything’s finished.” She was crying so hard that she could hardly choke the words out.

There was a way I had of holding & stroking her that I never used with her at any other time than to comfort her, & this I used now. She responded to it because she unconsciously associated it with a temporary spell of tenderness she could count on lasting for hours & hours. (Oh the things my father taught me...) When I’d soothed her into quiet peaceful tears, I crooned to her, “Tell me everything, Sally, I need to understand.”

Essentially she told me a tale of how Elizabeth was blackmailing her into spying on me. That if Elizabeth was satisfied—& there was no time-limit or real goal, for Elizabeth apparently wasn’t looking for anything specific—then her lover, a service-tech who’d given assistance to an underground member of some terrorist group, would be released from prison & given a full pardon with the felony charges expunged from her record. Sally herself was an actor—she played the soaps, mainly (& I’ve checked this out with Nicole, who now seems to recognize her as someone who played a minor role in one of her favorite soaps for three years not too long ago). She’d been judged suitably talented, motivated, & attractive for pulling off the job. Elizabeth had personally briefed her on what I would like & had had her train with an executive woman for a month. From what I can make



out, Elizabeth seems interested in getting an in-depth picture of my emotional & intellectual states, as intimate & detailed a portrait of me as possible. Since the guards & some of the help regularly report more superficial things to Elizabeth, I suppose it makes some sense... Though it still seems a little crazy. Why in the hell would Elizabeth want to know about me—especially considering how she's gone out of her way to profess total indifference to my existence here?

So what do I do about Sally? I writhe at the thought of all I've done to her. After she finished telling me her story—which I believe without reservation—I apologized & assured her I would try to find a solution to her problems. That she has suffered at my hands for love of another—I'm sick at my own cruelty. I can never make it up to her. But perhaps I can come up with some way for her to satisfy Elizabeth. In the meantime, we must keep from alerting Elizabeth's other eyes & ears in this house. Her restrictions are to be lifted—with the cover story being that I am suddenly infatuated with her. When this morning I ordered Penderel to restore the old arrangements for the cleaning of my suite, I could see the wheels turning in that repulsive old head of his... Think of it. The strength & courage & utter determination of that girl—who knows more about love than anyone I've ever met. Elizabeth is right: I *am* a monster.





## Chapter Two

Sunday, March 11, 2096—Seattle

It's getting harder and harder to keep things straight with myself. Last night's party at Venn's... I've dutifully written a detailed description of who was there and what was said. But all the same, I have a terrible uneasiness about it, as I always do when I have to write about Venn's parties. A lot of the things I report are clear-cut. But where Venn is concerned... No, I have to be honest. That's the whole *point* of this diary.

It's just so hard to put into writing. I could say that I admire her tremendously. And I do. But her politics confuse me. I try to leave any evaluation of them to smarter heads than mine. I mean, what do *I* know about politics? But anyone can see that this situation can't go on forever, now that everything's changing. In all honesty, I never believed that Weatherall, Lise, and Mott would succeed in their crazy struggle against the old Executive. But since they did, I have to take their plan to oust the Co-op and take back the FZ seriously. How can anyone doubt, now, that Weatherall will succeed in accomplishing anything she sets out to do? She's changed everything, and Lise assures me there's more to come. The woman is simply unbeatable—lucky for us, I suppose, though not so lucky for Venn and her friends.

But to get back to Venn. I can write it here, what I can tell no one. Sometimes my keeping my feelings for her secret feels shameful. At least with Alice my shame was more a matter of knowing she was unattainable. But while Venn is unattainable (triple so—given that she has a lover, she is heterosexual, and she's too far above me to give me a thought), there's also this other problem: where my relations with her are concerned, I'm mostly dishonest. I write about her in my reports, constantly, without ever revealing my feelings. And of course I have



to make everyone here believe Lise is the great passion of my life in order to give us a reason for continuing to meet at such frequent intervals. It's such a silly cover story that I wonder anyone still believes it. Oh yeah, it's the great tragedy of my life, being unable to live with my lover because of the personal tyranny of my lover's boss... But then people here don't take me all that seriously. (People anywhere, Anne: be honest.) They may suspect *Lise* of an ulterior motive, but not me. I'm too wide-open and guileless to be devious with them. I should, Lise sometimes says, feel very clever. But somehow, putting off a lie on others—others who are basically willing to take the people they meet at face value—doesn't seem very creditable, or clever, either. I know how smart some of the women around here are—how could I feel clever compared with them, just because I've been lying to them for years?

Venn always has an interesting mix of people at her parties—and being invited to join such people always makes me feel a little flattered. But to tell the truth, I'd rather not be around her lover like that, it makes him too real. I'd gathered from the other times I've been to her parties that Miguel is non-American, some kind of Hispanic. (Well that's obvious, isn't it.) But I didn't know any of his personal history until last night. I suppose it came out because of who was there—that woman from São Paolo, the two New Zealanders, the two women from the Free Zone in Asia, and the couple from Martinique—it was a more cosmopolitan and politically active bunch of people than usual.

I keep wondering about the things Miguel said about what happened in Cuba when Military took it over. Everyone's heard the stories about how horrible it was in Cuba under the Communists. And Miguel says he wasn't a party member, just "an ordinary university professor." (Are university professors ever ordinary?) He claims that at first he was determined to stay, to "fight in defense against the ideological campaign being waged against the values of the people of Cuba" as he put it. According to him, the reason Cuban professionals—academics especially—were offered lucrative positions (or sometimes two-year grants) at universities outside of Cuba was to lure the most articulate upholders of "Cuban values" out of Cuba and thus open positions in the professional structure for SIC-sponsored professionals



who would be the vanguard for an American propaganda campaign. He kept talking about “Cuban values,” which I know must mean the Communist party line. When I pointed out that even if what he said is true, at least the occupation forces had not violently purged Cuba, as many other occupation forces would have, he gave me an intense look and said that I was mistaken if I thought that blood had not been shed. He said that he had decided to leave because all those who spoke out against the occupation were losing their jobs and were sometimes even found dead. His wife, he said, had been imprisoned for refusing to teach a revised version of twentieth-century history to her secondary school students.

I kept my mouth shut because I didn’t want to give myself away. But I can read between the lines on *that* little story. *I’ve* heard some of the lies they taught Cuban school children about the US. It was propaganda designed to make their first Commie dictator look like a hero and the US a persecuting monster. It’s a cinch our government was never that stupid, or the CIA that inept (in their lies about the supposed Bay of Pigs invasion attempt or the supposed assassination attempts that Miguel was saying the occupation forces demand be suppressed). But Communists always have distorted history for their own ends, whether deliberately or because their ideology misguides them.

I guess the thing about Venn’s parties that I find the oddest is that she usually has men at them—and not just Miguel. Also, she frequently has as many professionals as service-techs—not surprising, I suppose, since she herself is professional. But how is it that as a service-tech going to her parties I don’t feel uncomfortable? Is it because this is the FZ? Or because I’m so hyper-aware of how I’ll be writing everything down in my report afterwards?

Venn is so very different from *everyone* I know—most of whom fall into two categories—anti-Executive and pro-Executive. All those women I recruit for Lise’s media organization are of course pro, but discreetly so. (This *is* the FZ.) They make no bones about being anti-Co-op, though: every one of them belongs to organizations devoted to the downfall of the Co-op. But the Executive is so unpopular, so bad-mouthed around here that declaring yourself to be *for* it is unthinkable. Even the first few times I talked to these women they were kind of embarrassed about coming out with positive statements about the



Executive. It's strange the way things can be so different. That there can be this force-like thing that changes the way people feel, and all so intangible. It affects even me. One thing, though, is that the reorganization of the Executive has perked up a lot of people: there isn't the whole human rights thing to fight now. I always felt it emotionally obfuscated the picture. People got so worked up about human rights that they weren't willing to look at the system as a whole. Focusing on the abuses of individuals is one of the anti-Executive ideologues' main tricks.

What I don't want to face most of the time is that Venn *is* one of the main anti-Executive ideologues in the FZ. She has a lot of influence. Not only do people listen to her and repeat what she says, but she also makes decisions about what is to get published and herself writes books and essays. I'd never try to argue with her, that's for sure (even if I didn't have to keep my political opinions and objectives secret). She's so intelligent and so incredibly educated that she could probably run circles around almost anyone who tried to argue with her. She's always reading very detailed history, in order to make highly abstract patterns and of course ideological points. (History is something anyone can use crookedly.) Not that I'm saying her integrity is crooked: I don't believe that. She's gotten off on the wrong foot, that's all. Before the Blanket she specialized in Social Policy Studies. That tells you a lot right there about what kind of abilities she has. But she never achieved the final stage of tenure—for ideological reasons, she says. Also, according to her, they—at least in the past—trained more graduate students in Social Policy Studies than could be employed by the universities, with the understanding that a large percentage of the new PhDs would be steered into Security Services, the Dept. of Health, and Com & Tran, all of which hired PhDs in SPS as “policy projection analysts.” (They still do, according to Lise.)

Now take this as an example of Venn's reasoning: she cites these facts as points showing how evil the Executive is, how the Executive has a “strangle-hold” over everything going on “in the academy” (as she likes to put it). But what she fails to acknowledge is that the whole point of having Social Policy Studies in the first place is a practical one: to train people to analyze the sorts of things the Executive needs to know in order to make the best policy decisions possible for



the entire country. Instead, Venn is indignant about it, saying that apart from doing as she did around the time of the Blanket—teaching one-third time and editing for a publishing company two-thirds time—her only alternative would have been to work for one of those three Executive departments running data collection and extrapolation programs according to formulas supplied by supervisors. She said the reason they'd have hired her to do that would be that then she'd be no trouble to anyone, taking away the voice she had as a teacher and researcher, while not allowing her any decision-making responsibility whatsoever.

These people have developed a very complex but weirdly distorted view of reality, Venn included. I find it hard to understand how such intelligent people can do this, but I suppose their intelligence just makes them all the more ingenious in elaborating the details of their theory. What they can't see, after a while, is that they've started out with a distorted set of assumptions to begin with. (Because they're swallowed up in the details.) No matter how intelligent you are, if you accept certain things on faith you'll always go wrong. Their Number One premise is that the Executive is evil. And for some of them, that *any* form of government is wrong. Everything else follows from these premises. They have really closed and dogmatic minds when it comes to the Executive.

But Venn is wonderfully kind and well-meaning. That shines through her efficient exterior—it's in her eyes, and all the little things she notices. She never says condescending things. I guess that's what I've noticed the most. About condescension, I mean. I never realized how condescending most people are to others who are socially inferior to themselves. Maybe it's a bad thing, though, that I'm picking up on it now all the time? I'm afraid it's making me overly sensitive. I don't want to turn into one of those people constantly affronted, constantly having their dignity wounded. But take a simple little thing like the word "girl." I hadn't noticed it before I started living among these FZ people. But they *never* use the word girl except to refer to females (of any social class) below the age of fifteen or so. (Not that there are that many of them around.) People here refer to me as a woman. Now I'd gotten more or less in the habit of thinking of women as always being executive or professional! And the weird thing is that I hadn't even



realized that until I heard people saying “women” all the time around here, and it struck my ear as odd. But the more I got to thinking about it—and the more used to it I became—the more it felt natural. And “girl” started to make me self-conscious. I remember once asking Lise how the “girls” were—Lacie and Ginger, I meant—and then feeling strange about it. I guess that’s when I realized about this condescension thing. Then I began listening carefully to the way different people talked, and it was clear as day!

Why didn’t I hear the difference before? I suppose because no one in my life ever referred to me as a woman. First of course my mother and father and teachers and schoolmates always said “girl.” Well that’s what I was. But as soon as I got out of school I started working as a secretary. And then I became one of the girls. It just never occurred to me. Until I started working for Venn, that is. There are so many subtle little things. It gets confusing. I sometimes don’t know anymore what’s right and what’s wrong. And talking to Lise about it doesn’t help. She gets that look in her eyes. Questioning my loyalty, maybe. And I can’t talk to anyone else about this stuff.

I’m caught in the middle.

And then there are all those twentieth-century novels (and other books) Venn has stocked the Rainbow Press’s library with. I don’t look very much at the nonfiction (some of it is sort of interesting, though again sometimes boringly ideological), but the fiction...that’s something else. What a bizarre world those twentieth-century people lived in! A lot of the books are about heterosexual relationships. Which can be a little difficult to take sometimes (though surprisingly many of such novels *are* readable). But there’s a lot of stuff about women getting upset about language in them, too. Those are the really angry books. I can’t take that much of *them*. It’s all very puzzling. I wish I could talk to someone about these things. But I guess not being able to is what I get for leading a double life.

Wednesday, March 14, 2096—Seattle

Depressed. Irritable. Not in the mood for reading. And not willing to put myself out to be amusing to another person. So I guess I’m stuck with myself, here, alone. Why is the price of other people’s



company so high? You have to be in good shape to have it; but when you're in good shape you don't really need it. Thinking of how characters in books always get to pour out their woes to some understanding soul who's genuinely interested in how they're feeling... Hunh. Guess I don't have the right kind of friends.

Friends? Sometimes I feel that "friend" is the most absurd word in the English language. Especially living here like this. How could I claim to be a friend to any of the people I write about in my reports? As for those I do the spying *for*... Do I have friends among Executive people anymore? I see Lise about twice a month solely so that I can pass her my reports. We make love in this apartment, never saying anything that couldn't be overheard by a suspicious enemy, proceeding as we do on the assumption that my apartment is bugged and that it's an opportunity for us to bolster my cover. Which is crazy. It makes me feel used. How can there be anything real between Lise and me when mechanically, like clockwork, she comes to pick up my report and have sex for the benefit of real or potential eavesdroppers? And then when we do go out and walk it's mainly to talk about business. Lise's job—I know that's what it is, it's so damned clear—is to make sure I'm psychologically on base, still loyal, etc. etc. So that I can be reeled in if I start to waver. But why bother to keep me here? I don't have access to anything important. Lise insists I'm a "well-placed mole." Hah. Venn hardly ever goes to Steering Committee meetings. While I do—as almost anyone can. Hardly anything could be more boring than Steering Committee meetings, as Venn likes to point out when people chide her for not going.

The trouble is, these FZ people just like to hear themselves talk. Everything around here is a subject for debate, an excuse for people to get all puffed up with their ideas, forcing them on everybody else. Take half the people today at the afternoon break. I was feeling a little anxious. During my lunch hour I finished that novel I'd been reading—one from Venn's collection—and was feeling strange about it. Queasy, and maybe angry, too. I hardly slept last night because my head was filled with its images and ugly language. What I really wanted at break was to talk to Venn about it. I'm sure she's read it. (She's read almost every book in that collection. I've yet to mention something to her that I've been reading that she couldn't meaningfully



comment on.) In some ways it was a beautiful book and very compelling. On the other hand, I was sort of embarrassed to bring it up to her. I mean that's not the kind of thing you're supposed to talk about. But in so many ways Venn is different—she has so many books in that collection that I've glanced at that have to do with the subject (the twentieth century is like an alien culture, so primitive and wild and *blatant*, and of course hate-filled), that I'm pretty sure Venn has *thought* a lot about the subject whether she's ever *talked* about it with anyone else or not.

Well, break is probably not the right place for such a conversation. But still, I wonder how she can sit there and listen to all that tripe without telling them how absurd they are. If I were she I would. And I *wish* she would. It would be so much better if *she* were to talk instead of them. But she keeps a low-profile at break.

One time when I asked her about this she said that break is “for everyone.” And that anyone who wants to talk should feel free to do so—which they wouldn't if she were always doing all the talking. And that furthermore she was a co-worker, not a professor with students. Well there I wanted to tell her she was wrong: because she's the boss, not a co-worker. Typesetters can't possibly compare to editors. And anyway she's so educated. I wish sometimes she *were* a professor and I a student.

Well I think we should boycott them, argued one of them. Well I think we should go farther than that and get the Water Co-op to turn off his water and drive him out of business, argued another. But then someone else said those measures were too strong-arm and that it would just be better to persuade someone else to open up a competing laundromat. How stupid to spend the whole break discussing what to do with someone's overcharging them for the use of washing machines and driers! Just because the laundromat people didn't lower their rates when the price of water dropped last year when the last of the big water clean-up projects were completed, the women living in that neighborhood are plotting against them, furious at their “greed.”

Not that I think it's great for these people to be making a whopping profit (if piling up barter credits can be called “profit”) now that water is so cheap (and who has their own washing machine, anyway?)—but to spend all that time going on and on and *on* about which





methods are most ethical and effective for dealing with the situation seems absurd to me. I'd rather continue with the old way than have to endure these kinds of "discussions." And what did Venn say? Very little. She asked a few questions to bring out points (ironic points, I thought) that she felt were being neglected, but didn't offer any suggestions herself. But then everything gets done by committee around here. It's true what the anarchists have been saying all along: there are no leaders in the FZ.

But this book... Well, it's a real love story, between two women. Two very poor women. (We don't have people that poor anymore.) They're black women. And all through the book that's stressed. Which is, I guess, why I can't talk to Venn about the book...but is why I'd like to. Racism is such a delicate thing. What was it Mom said to me when I was little and curious about differences in skin color and hair and all the rest? *We don't talk about such things in a civilized society, Annie. In the past people were very ugly to one another. Which is why it's so impolite ever to refer out loud to somebody's race or ethnic background. Or even their religion, unless they volunteer it. Words are so dangerous that people have killed other people because of them. So be careful, Anne Lydia Hawthorne. For all our sakes.* It was something like that. Those kind of things stick in your head. Especially when spoken in that thundery kind of voice Mom would sometimes get into. And of course people never *do* talk about such things, not in polite company. The only exceptions I can think of were those men who raped me... and once some men coming out of a bar I was passing, when they saw me and the girl I was with walking arm-in-arm...and then that first time Weatherall spoke to me about infiltrating and how I could say I was attracted to the Co-op because some of its leaders were black.

What if I gave that book to someone else to read? But who? Not Lise! And anyway, giving it to someone else would be like talking about it. But why do I want to talk about it? I guess because those characters made such an impact on me. What a strange name, Shug. But then people used to like strange names in past centuries...



Sunday, March 18, 2096—Seattle

Lise just dropped me off and is on her way out of town. I wonder what will happen now? Could be nothing, and we'll just drag on as we've been doing for the last ten years.

Lise is angry with me about it. *That* I don't understand—why *she* should be angry. Her eyes have been guarded with me for ever so long, but today...today I could read nothing in them but a kind of cold withdrawal—though a watchful one. I wouldn't be surprised if she recommends an evaluation. I haven't been evaluated in a long time, so they wouldn't even need an excuse. I can't blame them for being cautious. People in my situation have been known to double.

It started the moment Lise arrived for her visit. We do everything by routine. First the sex. Then the meal at the executive women's club. Then the walk. And finally Lise drives off—unless she's planning on staying the night, in which case we go to the executive women's club from the start and stay there until morning. This time as she started going through the usual crap about having missed me, I asked if we couldn't take a walk. Muttered something about a headache (for the presumed bug) and how some air would help clear my head. Once we were out walking I said flat out, "Isn't there a way we can do without the sex charade? It's really starting to bother me that we do this performance twice a month for the sake of a microphone that might or might not be there."

Lise stopped dead in her tracks and stared at me—her eyes just about boring a hole in my face, they were that intense. Her face clenched, then got very still and rigid. "You'd better tell me all about her. And what you've told her about me."

Her voice was tremulous, which worries me: it probably means she thinks I'm in trouble. But I was also confused by her question, because I couldn't figure out who she was talking about. "Who do you mean, Lise? I never talk about you to anyone!"

She took my arm and started us walking again. "Who do you think I mean?" She sounded oddly close to tears. "Your new lover!"

I just gaped at her for a few seconds, she so took me by surprise. And then I said, "I don't know where you get that idea from, but I haven't had a lover since you, Lise. I knew I couldn't handle it, not



living this double life. It would tear me to pieces trying to love someone under these circumstances. So mainly I keep my distance. I have casual encounters on occasion, but not often.”

Lise stopped again to look at me. Her lips pursed, and I realized she was angry. “Just when did you stop thinking of me as your lover?” she asked in a frigid voice. It was at this point that I really felt the chill coming from somewhere behind her eyes.

I decided to tell her the truth. (I suppose because I’m sick of keeping it to myself.) “I guess it was when everything happened in that house. You know. When Ms. Weatherall talked to me about everything.”

“I don’t understand. Why should you have stopped thinking of me as your lover *then*? Because we asked you to infiltrate the Co-op?”

It was embarrassing to be talking about this stuff. I hadn’t thought about any of it for so long. It hurt me terribly for a long time, but now I don’t care. It really doesn’t matter any more. “*You* know, Lise,” I said, hoping Lise would nod and say she did. But she didn’t. So I tried to explain. “I was pretty upset that you were asking me to leave you only months after I’d gone renegade for you. Well...Ms. Weatherall just pointed out the facts of life to me, and said that I was an adult and was responsible for myself. That I couldn’t hold you responsible for making a major decision like going renegade. Well that was true, and I knew it. And then she said that she knew you better than anyone else did and that you had been in love with someone else for a long time, even before you met me, and that you had always felt an obligation to be kind to me, because I was in such bad shape after the rape. And that it had gotten to be a habit, being kind to me, and an easy habit at that. I saw that what she said was true. The fact of the matter is, I’ve always chosen to be in love with women who are kind to me but don’t reciprocate the feeling. It’s one of my worst faults. I know I was pretty pathetic over Alice. And then you. So, after Ms. Weatherall said these things to me, I could see that what she said was true. That I’d made my bed and would have to lie in it. What choice did I have? I couldn’t go back. And I couldn’t stay there. So I just learned to accept it.”

Lise got very angry with me for all this. I suggested she find me a new controller, someone I wouldn’t have to have sex with. That there must be easier ways to do this. And that besides, wasn’t she a little too busy now to be running out here to Seattle twice a month just to pick



up my reports? After that we didn't talk much, just went to the club, where I gave her the new report and she gave me the direction she had been instructed to pass along.

What I'd really like would be to be called home. But I didn't ask. Lise long ago made it clear that Mott is insistent I stay here.

Home! I don't even know what home would be now. Imagine if I'd stayed, if I hadn't gone renegade...I would have continued working for Alice. Unless, of course, I'd been purged simply for having been Lise's lover. Would I have gone with Alice to the Chief's office when Sedgewick took over again? What a strange thought! But if I went back now, would there even be a place for me? Who's there now to go to bat for me? Though Alice is apparently still working in the SIC—Weatherall hardly purged at all, Lise said—she wouldn't want me back. The idea of living the way I did all those years before meeting Lise—sharing cramped quarters with a whole bunch of girls, scarce water and tubefood, barely getting by from month to month. And no more longevity treatments. (Perhaps the best thing about living in the FZ is being able to have longevity treatments.)

I feel like an orphan.

Monday, March 19, 2096—Seattle

Ran into Venn in the Press's library today—I was returning *The Color Purple* and planning on finding another book, hopefully by the same author. Venn was there, sitting cross-legged on the floor, reading. She saw the book as I checked it back in and shelved it. She sort of half-smiled, then said something about what an “extraordinary” and “brave” book it was. Then she asked me if I'd appreciated it. (I'm glad she didn't ask me if I *enjoyed* it!) I blurted out something about how I hadn't been able to put it down or, once having finished, stop thinking about the characters, even though it was such a painful book to read and think about. I think I also said something about how awful the twentieth century sounded, if such novels were anything to judge by. And about how people were certainly a lot cruder—they are in *all* the twentieth century novels I'd read. Venn got a little pink in the face and said “You mean because they brought things out into the open more than we do now. They didn't consider it bad manners then,



you know.” “Yes, but that must be why there was so much violence?” I asked. Venn disagreed that the violence had anything to do with “speaking the truth.” She half-argued—I couldn’t tell whether it was one of her “academic” arguments for the sake of arguing, or whether she believed it—that not talking about things like racism just covered them up. But whenever I think about the kinds of things people had to put up with hearing others say about their racial and ethnic backgrounds, I *know* Venn’s argument is wrong. Because at least there isn’t that horrible rudeness now. I mean, there used to be *jokes* people maliciously made on the subject. When I said something about this, Venn said yes, the way they still joke about women’s sexuality, but that even if they didn’t make those kinds of jokes and call women rude names there’d still be the same underlying problems that women have to put up with in most places. (Less here in the FZ, she implied.) Anyway, Venn picked out a new novel for me that she said I’d probably like since I “took” so strongly to the Walker. This book is by an author I’ve never heard of. I wouldn’t have found it by myself, except accidentally. I’m going to start reading it tonight. It’s so thin I can probably read the whole book in one sitting.

Wednesday, March 21, 2006—Seattle

Lise called last night—most rare of occurrences. I am to ask to take my vacation as soon as it can be arranged—so that I can “visit” her in DC. I know what that means. (I’m not stupid.) Damned honeyed conversation—just in case someone was bothering to tap my phone. So I asked Marlene and Janice today if it would be convenient for me to take the next two weeks off, and it’s fine with them, they can cover without me. I just won’t take another book project. God how I wish they’d just transfer me back to my old job. But that’s not possible, is it. Even if so many former renegade executives are in powerful positions now, my case isn’t like theirs. I have a feeling being a renegade service-tech is considered quite different from a renegade Weatherall. Or a renegade Allison Bennett. Weatherall always did have it in for me. And Alice—who oddly enough hasn’t been booted out, even though she and Weatherall have always been enemies—Alice wouldn’t give me the time of day now. It was her I walked out on, wasn’t it. And I



know very well I can't count on Lise. Not now. What was it that made her so angry? It can't have been my saying out loud what we've both been thinking for months (no, years!), could it?

But even so, surely they'll be fair with me. I'll have hours of debriefing and then a loquazene exam. My old reports will all be trotted out. And then they'll decide whether to keep me in this position, and if they decide yes I'll return here and possibly they'll assign me a new controller. Or not. And if they decide not, then it will be a question of why not that likely determines what happens next.

