

# THE ENGINEER OF MOONLIGHT

*Don DeLillo*

Eric Lighter, a mathematician

Diana Vail, his third wife

Maya, his fourth wife

James Case, his assistant

## Act One

*Day.*

*The sun deck of an oceanfront house. There are two levels, connected by a short flight of stairs. The upper level is recessed and narrow. The lower, or main level of the deck, is considerably larger.*

*There are two recliners and several upright chairs on the main deck. Small cube tables. Books and magazines. Shrubs in long handmade cedar boxes.*

*On the upper level is a table with a large bright umbrella. Single chair. Beach towel draped over the rail.*

*The deck wood is weathered.*

*[Diana Vail, in a swimsuit, stands on the main level, applying suntan lotion to her shoulders and arms. Her sandals and a large straw bag are nearby.]*

*Diana is forty.*

*James Case emerges from a sliding glass door onto the upper level, which is partly shadowed by the large umbrella. He is wearing trunks, which sag, and a T-shirt and fisherman's hat. He carries books and sunning equipment in a transparent plastic shopping bag.*

*His nose is solid white, covered with protective ointment. James is twenty-nine.*

*He watches Diana for a moment, then comes down the stairs and busies himself at one of the recliners, getting set up.*

*Diana sits on the other recliner, where she begins to work on her legs.*

*James, standing, does his face, careful not to disturb the white coating on his nose.]*

DIANA: The nights are strange. I heard him again. Counting. She's good to put up with it.

JAMES: She does more than put up.

DIANA: She thrives, I suppose, in a way.

JAMES: She generates.

DIANA: Seventy-one, seventy-two, seventy-three. Very slowly.

*[James sits, still wearing his hat and T-shirt, and begins to apply lotion to his arms.]*

JAMES: Counting.

DIANA: He counts.

JAMES: I almost see the point. Natural numbers. There's a curious satisfaction in counting. It's something we retain, isn't it?

DIANA: You find it touching.

JAMES: I almost see how someone can believe in that.

*[Diana begins to work on her face.]*

DIANA: How is it a question of believing? Belief. He is sitting in there counting. He counts through much of the night, evidently. Strange, no? A trifle worrisome. At least I think so. It seems to me.

JAMES: Think of it as a formula. It's a recitation, a sacred formula. Eight hundred and seventeen thousand, four hundred and eleven. Eight hundred and seventeen thousand, four hundred and twelve. You see how reassuring.

DIANA: I want to imagine James Case being direct, right-minded, wholesome and true. One level of intent. This is what I want to imagine. No more split meanings. No veiled glances. None of those deadpan monologues of yours.

*[James does his legs.]*

JAMES: Do you want me to take a vow?

DIANA: You couldn't live without your structures. Not that we'd want you to try. We need your voice.

JAMES: Who's being ironic now?

DIANA: No, honest. There's so much damned reverence around here. She is good. I'm sure he needs her and wants her and depends on her. But she creates a kind of awe and dread. Although that's not it exactly.

JAMES: You're working up to a wisecrack.

DIANA: Yes, but nothing really good comes to mind. Guess I'm off my game today. I want only to sit and sun. Fry quietly. There's something so satisfying about this kind of indolence.

*[James reclines; takes off his hat.]*

JAMES: Heat seeping in.

DIANA: So gradually and evenly and well.

JAMES: Radiant energy.

DIANA: The flow.

JAMES: The propagating waves.

*[Diana puts the lotion aside; reclines.]*

DIANA: I love hot weather. How do people stand the cold? Why do people explore those regions? Ice barriers, tundra. Always testing. I've never felt that kind of urge. Drive on, press ahead. Heat is the animal, isn't it? Where you let things disperse. Thoughts, memories, selves. Don't you think? The opposite of concentration or convergence. Cold focuses. You go to the tropics to lose yourself. To the polar regions to seek.

JAMES: Too early. I can't keep up.

DIANA: You're right. Much too early.

JAMES: Very early.

DIANA: But I do adore this feeling. Warm for awhile. Then wet and hot. Hot and dizzy and wet. Then, it happens. The ultraviolet begins to penetrate. Sensations of color. Intense little half dreams. Near delirium. A sense of swimming in pure heat. Oh, wonderful.

JAMES: Erotic, too.

DIANA: No, more than that. Beyond that.

JAMES: Life, then. Sun, heat, life. It's life-enhancing.

DIANA: Life-enhancing. Oh, I like that.

JAMES: So glad.

DIANA: Schooldays. Days like today were worst of all. Sunny and warm. Forty little girls and boys waiting for the bell. Leaning. The room was full of colors. Our crayon drawings on that thick rough paper, hanging everywhere. Windows, walls, cloakroom doors.

JAMES: Did you have cloakrooms?

DIANA: We also had the old desks with fancy ironwork down below and a hole for ink. Inkwells.

JAMES: Inkwells. What else?

DIANA: Window poles. The end of the pole had a little hook-like thing that you fitted into a circular arrangement on top of the window.

JAMES: In this way, by maneuvering the pole, you opened or closed the window.

DIANA: It was assigned. So was clapping erasers. You took them outside and clapped them. Fridays. Rain or shine.

JAMES: Cloakrooms. I'm fascinated by the whole concept. Were there sliding doors?

DIANA: Also assigned. Every other person in the first row. You gripped the indentation in your part of the door and then all pulled at the same time.

JAMES: The doors slid open.

DIANA: Bang.

JAMES: You were granted access to the cloaks.

DIANA: Our drawings resembled cave art. Stick figures. Flowers and long dogs. And there I am, leaning toward the window, trying to look outside, and there is Sister Edgar at the desk, wiry and quick. We're in color and she is in black-and-white. And she's asking a question, some fine point of theology which twelve-year-olds were expected to be versed in, those medieval days, and of course she spots me gazing out the window, Sister Edgar does, and she says in her chalky voice, "The answer isn't under that tree, Diana."

JAMES: Of course that's precisely where the answer was.

DIANA: Precisely.

JAMES: Under that tree.

DIANA: "You won't find the answer out there, Diana."

JAMES: Did you tell her that's precisely where it was.

DIANA: I said nothing, no.

JAMES: "Where would the answer be, Sister Edgar, if not out there?" You could have pointed this out, politely. "Under the tree. Don't you see? Anywhere but here." You could have explained it to her. Maybe she'd have seen.

DIANA: And we memorized and memorized and memorized.

JAMES: I like nuns. Nuns are fabulous fun.

DIANA: Bolivia: tin. Argentina: beef. Did you have to memorize? In your day?

JAMES: We had to interact. We interacted.

*[He takes off his T-shirt. They lie rigidly.]*

Tanning.

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: Getting a tan. Being tan.

DIANA: I know what you mean.

JAMES: The point at which it begins to take.

DIANA: Exactly.

JAMES: You're past the early phases.

DIANA: It's no longer tentative.

JAMES: Suddenly—

DIANA: You're tan.  
 JAMES: You look at yourself.  
 DIANA: Exactly.  
 JAMES: All you have to do now is keep it.  
 DIANA: Make time for it. Fit it in.  
 JAMES: You're constantly surprised, walking past a window, a reflecting surface. You catch a glimpse, looking left.

*[They are rigid.]*

*A figure appears on the upper level. This is Maya, a small, dark and very young woman—no more than twenty years old.*

*She wears a faded caftan, under a denim vest, with ankle socks. She sits at the shaded table, opens a book and begins quietly making notes.]*

DIANA: Clara Barton, the Red Cross. Commodore Dewey, Manila Bay. *i* before *e* except after *c*. Manifest Destiny. Dred Scott. The Spanish Armada.

JAMES: Istanbul was Constantinople.

DIANA: My whole life long, whenever someone says Bolivia, I think tin, tin!

JAMES: North Dakota—Bismarck. South Dakota—Pierre.

DIANA: What was it Magellan discovered?

JAMES: The Strait of Magellan.

DIANA: What a lovely coincidence.

*[James realizes Maya is there.]*

Whenever I come across a reference to the Boxer Rebellion, it conjures the same picture it did when we learned about it in school. Large dogs running through the streets of Peking. Interesting how we stay in touch with our own childhoods. There's a perennial updating of stupidity. The image remains the same but our foolishness deepens and mellows and matures. It becomes autumnal. Large brown dogs foaming at the mouth. People in rickshaws fleeing toward the coast. Ten sixty-six. Battle of Hastings. Twelve fifteen, the Magna Carta.

JAMES: Where would you live if you could

live anywhere?

DIANA: I don't know the name of the place. Just the weather and the scenery, and how people talk, and what they wear. I'd like to wake up to fog. Fog early on. As morning progressed, it would gradually lift and all the sketchy outlines come clear. A steeple, I think. Water of some kind. Small boats reflected. Wavering colors. Fishing. A sense of men going out in the morning, in dories, coming back with a full catch at sunset. Old colors. Old gold, terra cotta, ochre, rust. And hot. Hot all the time.

*[James gets up and goes into the house. Maya does not look up.]*

*Diana waits, eyes closed, facing into the sun.*

*He comes out with a reflector; returns to the beach chair and holds the reflector to his face.]*

I'd want a breeze in the evening, of course. And deep shadows. A mood. People in the shadows of old buildings. Lovers in motionless embrace. That's what I'd want. And some kind of spectacle, periodically, I think. Religious. Something you'd take visitors to, house guests, and watch their faces, and then gently explain to them that this is simply an aspect of the local—

Something *we* can only—

That kind of thing. Religious fanaticism. Some custom that you have to accept without guilt or loathing because it's simply so old and so much a part of the living fabric.

Their ways are their ways.

Self-flagellation, perhaps. Public penance. Something shocking and grotesque but at the same time—

Remember, we're the outsiders here.

Or pilgrims who've crawled great distances and you watch them trying to climb the final steps on their knees, bloody, with bells ringing out everywhere.

And dessert on the patio with fresh cream. And plank floors and soaring birds. A marketplace. Streets that wind and criss-cross, uphill from the market. I'd want a restaurant stuck away in this maze that no one's heard about. You go in an unmarked door and they know you and genuinely like you and there's candlelight and native leathers and beautifully handcrafted tables and chairs. And horseback riding in the hills.

JAMES: Eighteen oh three.

DIANA: The Louisiana Purchase. You did memorize, didn't you?

JAMES: Not really, no. I was set apart much of the time.

DIANA: To do your mathematics.

JAMES: Yes.

DIANA: John Peter Zenger, freedom of the press. Eli Whitney, cotton gin, click. You did solid geometry while your pals were still messing around with crayons and paste.

JAMES: Not really.

DIANA: Something less ordinary then. Something intoxicating.

JAMES: Numbers is all. Classes of numbers. Number systems.

DIANA: How a bill becomes a law. A bill becomes a law, etcetera, click, etcetera. Funny how you're the same as he is on the subject. Identical.

*[James places the reflector on a table; puts his T-shirt back on.]*

JAMES: Maya is here.

DIANA: Come down, Maya, and sit in the sun.

JAMES: What subject?

DIANA: Mathematics. The tone of your voice. The look you get.

JAMES: I wasn't aware.

DIANA: Oh yes, that look. Which says, We are entering rarefied spaces; the ultra pure; best not waste your breath speaking; this air can kill. Come down, Maya. We're being indolent today. We are not going to involve ourselves. Not in thought, word or deed.

JAMES: Much too early.

DIANA: Very early, yes.

*[There are still some areas of shade on the main level. Carrying the book and a note pad, Maya comes down and sits in an upright chair on the shaded side, where she continues to take notes, on and off.]*

JAMES: Maybe later we'll get around to it.

DIANA: We'll get around to levels.

JAMES: To ironies and interpretations.

MAYA: He's up, you know.

DIANA: Good. Let's bring him out. I want to see him.

MAYA: He's alert today.

JAMES: He had a bad night, Diana thinks.

DIANA: I heard him.

MAYA: Yes?

DIANA: Counting.

MAYA: It's something we do. A way to learn languages.

DIANA: He was counting in English.

MAYA: He's half mad, you know.

DIANA: We want to see him.

JAMES: I'll get him.

DIANA: Bring him out, James, would you?

MAYA: He won't come now. A little while. He'll be along.

DIANA: James, get him, would you please? I'll be leaving at four forty-five sharp. I'd like some time.

*[He goes inside.]*

He seems older, this visit. Disturbing. Eric's the only person I've ever known who's able to age willfully. Don't you think? He gets older before your eyes.

MAYA: Everything we do is an appearance. If that's what you mean, Diana. It's all layers. It's film. You put on, you take off.

DIANA: You're doing research, are you?

MAYA: But Eric less than most people. Least of all, Eric. He's trapped in what he is. If he seems to get older before your eyes, then that's what's happening.

DIANA: A trick of light. A mood. What are

you researching?

MAYA: The fifteenth century.

DIANA: One of my gaps, the fifteenth century. What happened exactly?

MAYA: The lepers disappeared.

DIANA: Are you studying for a degree?

MAYA: I'm not intelligent enough.

DIANA: Please.

MAYA: I'm unintelligent. I insist on that. And I don't have the background. My background isn't in the pattern.

DIANA: Is it easy, living here?

MAYA: Very easy.

DIANA: When the weather changes.

MAYA: We all change with it. The sea goes hard and gray. James moves indoors.

DIANA: It must be beautiful.

MAYA: There's never anyone else. James makes hot chocolate and wears reindeer sweaters.

DIANA: He's had those sweaters since we've known him. Probably long before. And Eric?

*[James returns with ice water and glasses on a tray.]*

MAYA: Tonight we count in Sanskrit. I'm teaching him Sanskrit. What little I know. Number words. A few phrases.

JAMES: Just enough to get by.

DIANA: James, no.

*[He stands with tray.]*

JAMES: So he can say, "I lost my traveler's checks; where is American Express; I want a double room with bath; have you a road map of this region; my wife is bleeding from the mouth."

DIANA: Aw, James.

JAMES: Is it too early?

DIANA: It's barely noon.

*[He puts the tray on a table; sits on the recliner.]*

JAMES: "Waiter, we would like to try your

local Sanskrit wine. I see you are delighted that I speak your language. I find a few phrases work wonders. A wet towel, please, for my bleeding wife."

DIANA[*to Maya*]: Don't you get tired of this?

MAYA: No more than James.

DIANA: He does it to tire himself. You're right. It's exercise.

MAYA: Eric says I lack humor.

JAMES: He does not. He says nothing of the kind.

MAYA: When he was in Lake Haven, he became upset with me because I didn't think the chess tournament was funny. Those who played chess were made to take part in a tournament.

DIANA: What is Lake Haven?

JAMES: What is Lake Haven.

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: You're here only two or three days at a time. Months and months go by and we don't see you or hear from you. Then you come for your day or two and ask—what is Lake Haven?

DIANA: Did he have a breakdown?

JAMES: I'll spare you the details.

MAYA: He couldn't understand why I didn't think it was funny. He was disappointed in me.

JAMES: You're making this up.

MAYA: He kept saying I'd missed the point of this or that.

JAMES: She does this all the time. She wants people to believe she's a type.

DIANA: Give me your suntan lotion. I want to know everything.

*[Maya transfers the lotion; starts to leave.]*

JAMES: He went. There's nothing to know. We took him in the car. You pass a lake and soon you're there. His room was on the second floor.

DIANA: I don't want to be spared any details. *[To Maya]* Don't go. I want to be told.

MAYA: I hear him.

JAMES: She hears him.

*[Maya goes inside.*

*Diana slowly applies lotion to the backs of her hands, the insides of her arms.]*

They communicate beyond the range of other intelligent beings.

DIANA: As you and he used to do.

JAMES: In what sense?

DIANA: In the sense that I didn't always know what you were talking about.

JAMES: That was mathematics.

*[He reclines.]*

DIANA: In the sense that my sky-high IQ was totally useless.

JAMES: Those occasions were few, far between. We all talked. We enjoyed a comradeship. Three of us. It was damned rare in *my* life.

DIANA: What has been happening?

JAMES: You're never here.

DIANA: I don't want to avoid knowing. We were husband and wife.

JAMES: And love each other still.

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: It's the same. Nothing has changed.

DIANA: Not the same. Obviously.

JAMES: The same but different.

DIANA: I want to know how bad it's been.

*[She puts the lotion aside.]*

JAMES: He has good days. This, apparently, is a good day. You heard. He's alert.

DIANA: Is that what you two do? "He's alert today." "Did he have a good night?" "He looks well rested." "Mind, he likes his tea precisely at four."

JAMES: It's wonderful fun. We find new meanings all the time. This is the point, isn't it? You mix and work the commonplace.

DIANA: Give me some of that ointment and tell me everything that's happened.

JAMES: First tell me what it's called.

DIANA: Stop. All right?

JAMES: You know what it's called. You just don't want to work. You were always lazy that way. You never did the work.

DIANA: Zinc.

JAMES: See? You knew.

DIANA: Zinc oxide.

JAMES: Just a question of working.

*[He gives her the tube.]*

DIANA: Didn't realize I knew. I'd see people with their white noses—

*[She applies.]*

JAMES: And you'd feel a sense of—

DIANA: Incompleteness. All up and down the beach. White noses.

JAMES: And you didn't know what they were white *with*.

DIANA: I'd feel—

JAMES: Incomplete.

DIANA: But now I know.

JAMES: You knew all along. You simply weren't willing to work.

*[They lie rigidly. Lights go brighter.]*

He was in seven weeks. I don't know what to call it, technically. Overwhelming depression. Sense of deepest futility. He'd sit and moan. Ramble on sometimes in some funny little animal language. Do you want to hear this? Even if I tried, I couldn't make it sound nearly as bad as it was. It's awful to have to see someone you know, you've known for years, and he's just not there. Even the outline if different. The physical outline. The silhouette. You don't recognize his walk. He lacks all the important things that made him who he was rather than someone else, or no one at all. Refused food. Couldn't sleep without the usual agents. Told the doctors his stomach was floating in blood. He could feel it moving back and forth. And he'd sit there all sort of beaten down by some enormous inner force. All

folded over. I don't know what he was seeing out of those eyes. His eyes were in some tunnel. And he'd talk to himself, moan a little, shake a little. When it appeared to subside, they sent him out on furlough. Their phrase. He's been furloughed to custody of spouse.

DIANA: They don't give it a name?

JAMES: I've read the clinical summary. It's full of highly compressed phrases. Like the names of automobiles. I saw him and heard him. Doesn't matter what they call it.

*[They lie rigidly.]*

Chevy Vega Hatchback Camaro Supreme. That's what he's got.

DIANA: Seven weeks.

JAMES: It was quiet here. The two of us. Dead of winter.

DIANA: The landscape.

JAMES: Stunned. Very immediate. One color.

DIANA: Firewood.

JAMES: Chopped our own wood. Went into town for groceries and mail.

DIANA: Not another soul.

JAMES: Snowed in twice.

*[They lie rigidly.]*

*Eric Lighter appears on the upper level. He's about fifty-five, a bit stooped, wearing faded old clothes. He carries a small canvas seat, folded up.]*

ERIC: Here they are—the white folks.

DIANA: Eric, come down here.

*[Descends.]*

ERIC: Savoring the last illusion.

DIANA: Help him with that.

JAMES: He can do it.

*[Opens chair; seats himself in the last bit of shade on the main deck.]*

*Diana takes a towel from her straw bag;*

*wipes the ointment off her nose.]*

DIANA: What's the last illusion?

ERIC: Sunshine is healthy.

JAMES: Maya says you're alert today.

ERIC: It was the last remaining edge the white folks had. You could sit in the sun all day and be better for it. Self-improved. It would make you healthier, sexier, more beautiful.

JAMES: Maya says you've been learning languages.

ERIC: It would make you less white.

DIANA: But it's not an illusion at all. It's life-enhancing. We've agreed on that. James and I. He in his way. I in mine.

ERIC: Everything that enhances life also causes cancer. That's the bloody nub of it.

JAMES: Facile. Very facile.

ERIC: Food, water, sex, sunlight, air.

DIANA: James is right.

JAMES: The remark of a man who desperately wants to believe he's alert.

ERIC: The kid likes to snipe at me. That's his compensation for the hazardous duty around here, so it pretty much evens out.

We work later, Jimmy.

JAMES: Good.

ERIC: I want to work today.

DIANA: What are you working on?

ERIC: My papers. They're helping me with my papers. Where's the lemonade?

JAMES: You're looking at it.

DIANA: We both want lemonade.

JAMES: It's water.

DIANA: We both want it.

*[James pours water; hands out glasses.]*

ERIC: I was up early, walking.

DIANA: I wish you'd called me. I'm always leaving, it seems. There's never time.

ERIC: All the time is back there. We have space. This is space. Cities have the time. Not only present time. More than they can use of the past. All those exhausted segments. That noiseless hum. Everything's digital. The city's a device for measuring



time. That's all it is. That's its blood-tie to death. This is what happens to broken-down mathematicians. We become visionaries.

JAMES: Eric has a chilling vision. You don't want to know about it.

DIANA: Of course I do.

JAMES: Not for city dwellers. Too close to home.

ERIC: She already knows. She lives there. She sees it all around her.

DIANA[*to Eric*]: Don't you want to sit in the sun?

JAMES: She's changing the subject. It's too close and she's too close. She doesn't see.

ERIC: The cities are so much crap and statuary out of the Middle Ages. Wasted maniacs are in the streets. Police sirens: *wow wow wow wow*. Rust-colored dog shit. The future doesn't so much elude cities; it guides cities back; it leads them back. True future is the open space.

JAMES: Little by little, the argument goes, the insane are being returned to the streets. This is because we're so preoccupied with violence we no longer see the insane.

ERIC: Only the violent threaten.

JAMES: Only the violent threaten.

DIANA: Sit in the sun, for God's sake.

JAMES: Yes, drink your lemonade.

ERIC: We don't have to finish this.

JAMES: She ought to know. If she's going to live there.

ERIC: She knows. She lives there.

JAMES: It's all around her. She's in the middle. She doesn't really see. You don't always see what's around you.

*[James gets the beach towel draped over the rail of the upper level. He reclines, covering his legs with the towel.]*

ERIC: This epidemic of violence. Every kind of sleepy-eyed killer. This is all we see. We don't see mental illness. Lunatics no longer threaten. Every day hospitals release them by the hundreds.

JAMES: All but the violent. We see the violent. They stand out.

ERIC: This is well-grounded historically. The lepers disappeared. When leprosy diminished, back whenever, it occurred to people to lock up the madmen. Streets were full of madmen. Suddenly they stood out. Into dungeons with them. Chains. Freezing water.

JAMES: Today they're dumped in the streets. They're coming out.

ERIC: Welfare hotels. So-called local facilities. The cities swarm. Everywhere, Diana. They're back out in full force. They're on the loose again.

DIANA: Give me some more water.

JAMES: It's lemonade. Why don't we call it lemonade?

ERIC: Lunatics of every stripe.

JAMES: Maniacs.

ERIC: Depressives.

*[James gets water for Diana; goes back to recliner.]*

JAMES: Compulsives.

ERIC: Hysterics.

JAMES: And he's one of them.

ERIC: I'm one of them.

DIANA: This is so stupid.

ERIC: They let me out.

DIANA: Of course they let you out. You're better. You're feeling much, much better.

*[Eric moves his seat a bit closer.]*

ERIC: People have to learn to deal with it. For centuries we let this task fall to doctors and their henchmen. No more. The mad are everywhere. So many, you'll have to learn their language. They talk to you already. All the time. Don't they?

DIANA: Now and again.

ERIC: In lobbies, on elevators, in stores, in libraries. They're in the libraries.

JAMES: They're in the subways.

ERIC: They've always been in the subways. The subways are their English club.

JAMES: Their Turkish bath.

ERIC: They're in the railroad stations and bus terminals.

JAMES: They like to travel.

ERIC: They like to talk. They talk *out* to people. This is their way. They talk from inside out. They don't use what's around them. They don't gather data. It's what's inside. They use themselves. That's why the language is so hard to understand. There's as many dialects as people who speak.

JAMES: Eric evolved these notions in Lake Haven.

ERIC: A fella I played chess with. We used to talk about it all the time.

JAMES: Alfred Bleier.

ERIC: A goddamn whiz. Little fella. The ward officers would carry him around. Heft him like a bag of sticks. Physicist. An authority on white light.

DIANA: White light.

ERIC: White light. White-light holograms. He had it all in his head.

DIANA: This is tiring.

JAMES: You ought to go for a swim.

DIANA: I don't want to swim.

JAMES: Eric went. First time in years. Last week. You missed it. He walked in backwards with his arms way out.

DIANA [*to Eric*]: You used to swim.

JAMES: Glancing over his shoulder. It was like a hostage drama. We didn't know whether we'd get him back.

ERIC: Jimmy does routines when he's restless. That's his compensation. He gets an edge on.

JAMES: We watched him recede. His arms going higher and higher.

ERIC: I'm giving him a course in women.

DIANA: I'd like to hear.

ERIC: In order to round him out. It's plain enough he lacks perspective. Not that he isn't out there, looking. We see him wandering among the half naked women on the beach.

*[James puts his hat over his face.]*

We see him hunkering. Sniffing out the prospects. In order to settle him down. He likes to pick up sand and let it slip and slide through his fingers. Like a Bedouin scout. Ssssand. Not that he's there to spy on their breasts. He talks to the ladies. We see the words forming in his throat. But it's all fly by night, these play-games. Show me yours, I'll show you mine. Where, here. Who, you. Small mean wars of attrition. None of the scope of real relationships. The panoramic carnage. He needs a course.

DIANA: And what is the course? What do you tell him?

ERIC: What you already know.

DIANA: For the sake of review. Let's hear. What do you teach?

*[James removes his hat; sits up.]*

JAMES: A course in women. Women will make you feel spiritually corrupt. They do this without trying. It is simply in the nature of relationships. The deeper your involvement with a woman, the more corrupt you will eventually feel. The more mean-spirited. The smaller and uglier. The more power-hungry. This does not happen because women are necessarily better than men. It simply happens. It is in the nature.

*[Eric moves his seat closer.]*

ERIC: They know what's happening. Women. Make no mistake. They know how low you are. Deep down. They know.

DIANA: Which of your wives inspired this course? Or was it all four? All three. Not Maya, certainly.

ERIC: It's theory. Straight out of the ozone. Ideational.

DIANA: Baloney.

JAMES: And they despise you. They despise you not only because they know you despise yourself but because you've become a despicable object. This is the first day of the course.

DIANA: It sounds like a course in men.

JAMES: It's a course in men. She's right.

ERIC: You look wonderful, Diana. You've always been so damn healthy. How long were we married?

DIANA: I sit in the sun.

ERIC: And never sick, never out of sorts. Most women get things. Rashes, shadows. Funny little day-to-day vexations. Arcane.

*[Diana gestures, absently.]*

JAMES: Second day of the course. Secrets of the body. Women's bodies are centers of espionage and intrigue. Every woman a postwar Vienna.

ERIC: What is it about the way she moves her arm? Midsummer.

JAMES: Languorous.

ERIC: A midsummer gesture. Languorous. A wistful quality. It's something you don't see other times of year. It's a gesture that belongs to a particular time and place.

DIANA: You'll force me to get my robe.

ERIC: Summer is pure reverie. Haunting, painful. But soft. All the terror is distant. And there's fragrance that only later turns to rot. Summer storms. The sweetest-smelling danger. I need Maya now to describe to me how these things affect her senses. My own aren't the sharpest anymore. Things seem to happen in pale space. Not everything reaches me. We stand down by the surf and she describes. So much she sees and hears. What is it about women, the way they reach the deepest part of you with a simple gesture?

JAMES: But that's it, you see. It's not a gesture. It doesn't express or signify.

ERIC: Do it again, Diana. We want to argue about it.

JAMES: It's not a sign.

DIANA: Third day of the course.

JAMES: A course in women. Women will make you feel they love you more than you love them. No one knows how they do this.

DIANA: Dead giveaway. Women will make you feel. It's a course in men, obviously.

ERIC: I'm beaten back. I grope for the exit.

DIANA: Which of your wives?

ERIC: Which of my students? Which of my doctors?

*[He stands]*

"Which hand, doctor, is my left hand, if there are no mirrors?" Trying to provoke the man. He spoke in pauses. You know the one I mean. The flesh-colored one.

JAMES: Dr. Block.

*[Eric folds up his seat; moves toward the stairs.]*

ERIC: He was flesh-colored. "Who were you, doctor, before I walked in this room?" Trying to get a rise out of him. Last few days. I was feeling cute. Right away he started pausing. A man eating an egg sandwich. That separate and distinct face. Round, bland—floating in the air. He'd found his buddhahood. He would pause, hum a little, pause some more. A master of spaces.

JAMES: They have to be.

ERIC: Flesh tones.

DIANA: Are you coming back?

*[He is on the second level.]*

ERIC: Work to do. Some catching up.

DIANA: I'm interested in these papers of yours. What kind of papers are you working on? Are these personal papers?

ERIC: Mathematical papers.

DIANA: They're not personal then.

ERIC: What kind of personal papers would I be working on, Diana? I don't have personal papers.

DIANA: You have personal papers.

ERIC: Nary a bloody postcard.

DIANA: Eric, you have personal papers. Of course you have. In abundance.

ERIC: What's she saying?

JAMES: You didn't keep her letters.

DIANA: More than letters. And not just mine. There were cartons-ful. Diaries, correspondence, there were manuscripts. You

were in touch with some of the greatest names of the century, for God's sake.

ERIC: You know I can't deal with this kind of accusation.

DIANA: I'm not accusing.

ERIC[*to James*]: My first two wives were relentless brutes. Affection, tenderness, sweetness, lightness, love. Jeez, it was grueling.

JAMES: They kept after you, did they?

ERIC: They wanted, they needed.

JAMES: Because they'd given. They loved you, Eric. And wanted a return. What's fairer than that?

ERIC: You'll be coming back soon, I hope, Diana. We look forward to your visits. Don't stay away so long this time. Come in the fall. Before the snow hits. We'll walk along the dunes. The marshes just inland are pretty then. We'll walk along the marshes. It's good weather for that, fall is. Good walking.

DIANA: We'll do that. I want to.

ERIC: Later we work, kid.

*[Eric goes inside.*

*Diana and James rearrange themselves.*

*Lights go brighter: the main level is completely in the sun.*

*Diana and James are rigid.]*

JAMES: Getting old.

DIANA: He's not all that far along.

JAMES: I wasn't thinking of Eric really. Just getting old. Being eighty-three, say. What's it like? Living alone in a small gray moldy hotel. People shuffling past your room. I look forward. So many possibilities are closed off. You go from A to B to A to B. And that's it. There you are. All the ragged edges trimmed away.

DIANA: Is James serious?

JAMES: Deadly.

DIANA: Let me ask. Do you do original work these days?

JAMES: I work with Eric. I assist Eric Lighter. As always. Eric Lighter's work

was a revelation, we mustn't forget. He did unexpected things. His work is full of surprise. And yet profoundly connected. Deep strata. There's a preconscious quality. He showed us what we'd always known was there, at some untapped level. But that was long, long ago. It's a young fella's game, as he'll tell you himself, when pressed.

DIANA: What do you mean, long, long ago? What was he doing when we were married, if not mathematics?

JAMES: He was teaching some. He was administrating. He was writing, traveling, lecturing. He wasn't *doing* mathematics.

DIANA: These disclosures never seem to end. These fine points. I begin to wonder.

*[James puts the reflector to his face. They are rigid.]*

JAMES: This heat is perfect.

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: Heat.

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: Do you know what I mean?

DIANA: Heat.

JAMES: Do you see what I'm getting at?

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: Think of it as a unit of pure sound. Take it out of its casing. See what I mean? Heat.

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: It's perfect, isn't it?

*[They are rigid.]*

DIANA: Which seven weeks, James? When to when?

JAMES: What's the difference?

DIANA: I want to know where I was when he was in that place. What I was doing.

JAMES: You want to link it up. It won't go. It's not part of your experience. You want to add a little emotion to those weeks of your life, retroactively, a little density, in the south of France, the north of England. You want to see yourself again. Doing whatever you were doing. Only differently this time.

Knowing what you know. Eric strapped to a bed. You think there's meaning there. A deeper, richer experience. It won't connect.

DIANA: How you enjoyed that.

JAMES: But you agree.

DIANA: You jumped in so wholeheartedly.

JAMES: It won't connect.

DIANA: Never give James an opening.

*[They are rigid.]*

JAMES: How goes life back there?

DIANA: Goes well.

JAMES: Do the office phones ring all the time?

DIANA: I'm pleased with the way things are going.

JAMES: And Charles. How is good old Chas?

DIANA: Brussels. A little business.

JAMES: But it goes well. All's well.

DIANA: To the extent that I don't look forward to being eighty-three, yes. A prime number, eighty-three.

*[James puts the reflector aside. He takes the towel off his legs, removes his T-shirt and turns over on his stomach.]*

JAMES: Do my back.

*[Diana kneels at the head of his recliner and applies suntan lotion to his back.]*

DIANA: To me, mathematics was always an occasion for faith. I could penetrate just so deeply and then no more. I could understand historical developments well enough. Even the philosophy after a fashion, and the abstract nature of the thing, and the logical foundations. And that nothing useful ever comes out of pure mathematics. You use it for nothing.

*[She applies slowly.]*

And that there's no such thing as a mathematician being good or competent or proficient. You are great, aren't you, or

nothing. Past a certain point, there's no getting better. No working up to some isolated moment of power and beauty. It's there, isn't it, or not there.

*[She applies.]*

But I could see just so far in. Those intersections and symmetries. Bladelike, you once described them. Embedded in permafrost. I caught only the dimmest sense. So faith was very much involved. When things are withheld, you see. When things are not shown to their fullest. The mind that readily connects this to that doesn't know what to do without its toys.

*[She returns to her recliner.*

*James props himself on an elbow, facing her.]*

JAMES: These papers. They're not papers in mathematics, you know. They're not personal papers. They're notes on madness.

DIANA: What are they?

JAMES: They're notes on madness. Everything we do here centers on Eric's state of mind. His attempts to describe and examine what's happening to him. Now, this moment. And what happened in the past. All the past. Whatever he's able to recall. We have scores of notebooks. We have thousands and thousands of pages. Impressions, outpourings. We have numerous tapes. Eric Lighter on tape, waiting to be transcribed. We have cabinets—stacks of research materials. And we constantly revise. He's determined to get things right before we file them away. We file everything away, carefully. We organize everything.

DIANA: What do you mean?

JAMES: Clear enough, isn't it?

DIANA: What is actually on paper?

JAMES: It's not easy to summarize.

DIANA: What is an outpouring?

JAMES: Everything's on paper. That's the point. Smallest change in body temperature. This is recorded. Detailed analysis of some

conversation he overheard on a bus ten years ago. If he thinks it has a bearing. He thinks everything has a bearing.

DIANA: On what, a bearing?

JAMES: His condition. His state of mind. This is the central fact. And we type. We revise. We file it all.

*[They lie rigidly. Diana on her back. James on his stomach.]*

DIANA: New Zealand.

*[He props himself up; looks at her.]*

JAMES: Sheep.

*[He reclines again, face down. They are rigid.]*

Curtain

## Act Two

*Night.*

*Austere main space of the house's interior. Cathedral ceiling. Loft area at rear, with bed. An unrefined sparseness—natural, lived-in, lacking finish.*

*Central grouping: a sofa, some chairs, a low table. To one side, downstage, a larger table, covered with the remains of dinner. To the opposite side, a fireplace.*

*To the rear, we see stairs to the loft; a kitchen door; two bedroom doors. Between the bedroom doors, an old wood file cabinet. Beyond the stairs, the front door.*

*The wood throughout has been exposed—furniture, stairs, doors—and there are still traces of unremoved paint. This bared wood is the predominant color. Where there are traces of brightness, we sense an Indian and Tibetan tone—the pillows, the crude bowls and artifacts.*

*[Eric and Maya sit by the small table. Coffee pot and cups. James sits on the rail of the loft, holding a drink.]*

MAYA: What do you mean?

ERIC: What do I mean, Jimmy?

JAMES: The way it forms you. It's conclusive. It forms you in a way that's almost merciless.

ERIC: There's nothing quite so final as small town life in America. You're never free of it. As you get older, you see how much it's meant to your terrible self-awareness. That endless funneling. How much it sticks.

JAMES: The front porches. The old two-story porches. These are basic to the situation. The occasional brick sidewalk.

ERIC: How much you've tried to go beyond. But the verdict's final. It is part of you unlike anything else you've ever known. Ordinary days and nights. But a sense, a density, that's extreme.

JAMES: There was always a dog that limped. One would disappear, another turn up. A dog with a game leg.

ERIC: There's nothing so endless as those particular days. Everything so slow. We're in some area beyond pace or sequence. Everything stretches beyond the limit that nature sets for it. We're in the mind. Amazing

how the properties of things are enhanced. Things loom. They range outside their boundaries. *[To Maya]* I wish you could see.

JAMES: Fans turning in the five and dime.

ERIC: All the mysteries were there.

JAMES: The iron gates. The train depot. The timeless Sunday afternoons.

ERIC: How deeply people lived there. Inescapable, the everydayness of things. Cities fade away. You inhabit surfaces only. The small town is absolute.

JAMES: The front porches with their vines and ivies. The occasional sloping lawn. The high sidewalks, lopsided. The blue glass on barber shop cabinets. The front porches with their carved posts.

ERIC: The fanlights above the doors.

JAMES: The front porches with their white latticework. The rocking chairs. The carved posts.

*[Maya pours coffee for Eric.*

*James swings his legs over the rail and crosses the loft.]*

MAYA: You should go back, James.

*[James comes downstairs.]*

JAMES: Aren't I happy here?

MAYA: Go back and teach.

JAMES: Don't I have—everything?

MAYA: You'd make a wonderful teacher. Loving the subject. Isn't that what it takes above all? Of course we'd miss you. Eric is too inventive for one person to keep up with. Already the days get shorter. Too short to do all the things Eric's mind devises. We'd miss James. We'd have to mail your notebooks to James in Nebraska. I could never organize your notes myself.

*[James takes a small piece of pie off the table; holds it as if his hand were a plate.]*

JAMES: When people tell me I ought to teach, I get irritated as hell. It's the look they get. People think teaching is redemptive.

I've committed some gothic crime.

MAYA: I don't want to irritate you.

JAMES: People think my life here is some kind of disguise or evasion or penalty. Just the opposite. You know that, if anyone does.

MAYA: I don't. Tell me.

*[James takes a bite of the pie; tosses the rest back onto the table.]*

ERIC: They need you in graduate school, Jimmy.

JAMES: Besides, go back to what? I grew up in a dull suburb. The only small towns I know exist in movies. Old issues of *Life* and *Look*.

MAYA: Cruel bastard.

ERIC: Teach them how to use their wee wees without getting the floor wet.

MAYA: You only diminish yourself.

JAMES: I'll teach them how to walk like ducks.

*[Maya goes to the dinner table and begins to put things on a tray.]*

ERIC: It's hard, growing up. You realize at a certain point that all your secrets are common knowledge. Everybody knows who you are.

*[James sits at the dinner table.*

*Diana enters from one of the bedrooms, dressed casually.*

*Maya takes the tray out by way of the kitchen door.]*

JAMES: All arranged?

*[Diana holds up two fingers.]*

ERIC: What about work?

DIANA: We don't have work. We have proposals. We have contingencies. Nobody works, as such, anymore. It's arranged. I stay two more days. Any decisions, they know how to reach me. I owe myself this extra time.

JAMES: Is it yourself you feel you owe something to?

ERIC: Leave her alone.

DIANA: James needs his levels. We concede him that.

JAMES: Although "owing" isn't quite right. Attachment. Why are we all so grimly attached to the man? Is it because he's Eric Lighter, or once was? They want me to go teach. Talk about levels.

ERIC: We don't want you to go anywhere. We want you here. And Diana here. Two extra days. A crowd. Crowd noise. The old gang.

JAMES: She can be our laundress. We lack distinction in that area.

*[Maya enters, puts the remaining things on the tray and leaves through the kitchen door.]*

DIANA: We want to discuss what's been going on here.

*[She circles the dinner table.]*

I've been thinking, and thinking, and getting more, and more, upset. It's hard for me to accept the fact that Eric spent nearly two months in that place and no one thought to inform me. No one said a word. It may be partly my fault, granted. I should have made it my business to stay in closer contact. Over and done. From now on, I want to hear whatever news. I can help financially, for one thing. And I know people in the profession. And people who know people. That place may or may not have been the best possible choice. Therapy, whatever medication, this can be looked into. Other opinions are available. There are telephones, and people at the other end. I wish you'd confer with me from now on. Maya isn't going to resent anything I can do to help. She's not like that. You'd agree.

ERIC: She's beyond that.

DIANA: Absolutely.

ERIC: She's traveled in the high Himalayas.

DIANA: There you are, you see.

*[James takes her hand.]*

JAMES: You ought to know what obtains. If you're staying. What the routine embodies.

DIANA: Two extra days.

ERIC: Two days, Jimmy. That's all. She's been here two. She stays two more. We don't have to get all wound up over it.

JAMES: I know the way Diana's mind works. I think she's ready. When she starts getting imperious, it means something. When you begin to feel the corporate presence. It means she's getting ready to re-scale her life somehow. Several times today. Unlike her. There's a tension at work.

ERIC: We don't have to go into this at all.

JAMES: If she's going to stay, it's best we go into it. I know Diana.

*[Maya enters with a sponge, which she uses to clean off the dinner table.]*

*Diana crosses to the fireplace.]*

DIANA: You know less than you think about any number of things.

JAMES: Diana is staying.

MAYA: I know.

*[Maya leaves by way of the kitchen door.]*

JAMES: The routine changes from time to time. Who does what. It all comes down to Eric's ability to work during a given period. His notes. His footnotes.

ERIC: She doesn't want to hear this. You don't want to hear this, do you?

*[Maya enters with a bottle of brandy and three glasses on a tray. She sets the glasses around the large table. Silence. She leaves.]*

JAMES: It's only fair you know. If you're staying. We function as a scholar and his small crack team of assistants. We sometimes fall behind, Maya and I. Eric is hard



to keep up with. He overflows with ideas. When he feels up to working, that is. When he's at all able to think in the usual sense. When he's rational.

DIANA: You say things in threes. When, when, when. You think in threes.

JAMES: The limit of primitive comprehension.

ERIC: Jonah in the whale three days and nights.

JAMES: One, two, three—many.

ERIC: Accidents happen in threes. Three on a match.

JAMES: We are a noncounting people. One, two, three—heap. Big pile. Maya thinks in twos.

DIANA: Diana is like James.

JAMES: Of course. What else?

DIANA: I'm interested in these notes.

JAMES: You're frightened by them.

DIANA: I want to look at them.

JAMES: "I'm interested in this growth on my neck. What an interesting shade of black." They're notes on madness. I told you. We had this conversation. They're impressions. They're memory. Whatever comes out of him.

*[Maya appears at the kitchen door.]*

DIANA: I wish you'd stop using the word madness. You're so free with it. It has force, I know. It's medieval, it's resonant. And technical terms are an evasion. We all know and agree.

JAMES: She uses it, too. Madness.

DIANA: But there's something too easy about the way you use it. Self-important.

JAMES: He uses it all the time.

DIANA: Is the situation that dark? Maybe you're overindulging in something.

JAMES: He loves the word. It's probably his favorite word.

DIANA: Anyway you work on this material, don't you?

JAMES: What material?

DIANA: These notes.

JAMES: Whatever comes spilling out.

DIANA: That's my point. However random,

you *do* work on it.

JAMES: We organize his formulations. Type, file, so on. And we transcribe his rantings and ravings. They don't always coincide. I specialize in rantings. Maya does ravings. We're way behind on the tapes. You can help us there. When you're not doing the laundry.

*[Maya goes into the second bedroom.]*

ERIC: Leave her alone.

JAMES: She wants *in*.

ERIC: Let's play. Time to play. Game time.

*[Maya enters with a game board and box.]*

*At the dinner table she opens the box and takes out ivory counters, small bamboo sticks, a set of dice and a timing device. She distributes the counters and sticks.*

*Everyone takes a seat around the table.*

*Simultaneous chatter. Arrangement of pieces.*

*Diana reads intermittently from the set of game rules.]*

DIANA: "The first player sets a color value by turning up a white tile."

MAYA: The time is—

*[Overlapping speech.]*

DIANA: "White Dog yields to the Skater, except when two or more syllables are on the grid." Who am I?

MAYA[*to James*]: You're way too slow.

JAMES: The Skater is deliberate. That's his classical stance.

MAYA[*to Diana*]: You're the Java Man.

DIANA: What do I do?

MAYA: You do nothing. Java Man does nothing.

DIANA: "Java Man does nothing until the syllables reach one. When this happens—"

JAMES: I want some color here. Less shape, more color.

ERIC: You think you want color.

MAYA: He wants Nile blue.

ERIC[*to Diana*]: Color doesn't mean color.  
[*To James*] Come on, sound the bones.

JAMES: I'm studying the board.

DIANA: "—Java Man is permitted to move two sticks and one word tile, but not within the same quadrant." When do the syllables reach one?

ERIC: Sound the bones.

MAYA: The time is—

[*James tosses the dice. Pause. They study the board.*]

*Eric pours brandy into the three glasses—his own, Diana's, James's.*

*They study the board.  
Eric sips his brandy.]*

JAMES: Is that the Woodcutter?

MAYA: White Dog.

ERIC: She's right.

MAYA: Speak.

[*James sips his brandy.*]

ERIC: Nothing is what we say it is.

JAMES: Korzybski.

MAYA: Two sticks.

ERIC: Woodcutter's reply.

DIANA: "The Woodcutter, a surrogate of the Dead Gypsy, is always transient."

ERIC: When we observe something, we change its behavior.

MAYA: Pass.

ERIC: When we observe something, we change its behavior.

JAMES: Heisenberg.

MAYA: One stick.

JAMES: They're conspiring against the Skater. One stick. They envy his grace.

MAYA: The time is—

JAMES: The Skater's nature is to be precise. He's a technician, essentially. One stick in white.

[*James sips his brandy.*]

History is the lie commonly agreed upon.

MAYA: Voltaire.

ERIC: Seek simplicity, and distrust it.

JAMES: Whitehead. We are compelled to deny that this table is any one particular color.

ERIC: Russell. All truths are half truths.

JAMES: Whitehead. People used to believe that a thing changing is in a state of change, and a thing moving is in a state of motion.

ERIC: Russell.

JAMES: This is now known to be a mistake.

ERIC: That beanpole son of a bitch.

MAYA: We're down to one. One speaks.

JAMES: The source of all.

[*They sit back, sip their brandy, study the board.*]

*Eric takes his glass to the sofa.  
Diana consults the rules.]*

MAYA: Where is White Dog?

JAMES: White Dog's gone.

MAYA: Lost Dog.

JAMES: Up and gone.

MAYA: White Dog's gone.

JAMES: The bastard, he's memorized the board. He wants us to know he doesn't need the board in front of him.

DIANA: Is this intimidation? A tactic?

MAYA: Every stick, tile, color and shape. All the values. Every player.

[*Eric sips his brandy.*]

ERIC: Funny little people running around in my head. Those chess games were fantastic. They'd carry the players to the tables. Silent comedians. Shriveled little people on the backs of ward officers. Black men with beards. Players slung over their shoulders.

DIANA: Is this part of the game?

JAMES: Play the game.

ERIC: Totally spaced, these people. Drugged into other forms of existence. Sea life. Life in deep space. Being carried to the tables to

play chess.

JAMES: He's making this up.

MAYA: No, he's not.

ERIC: People from the back wards. Droolers, shitters. And the rock-hard blacks. The administration scours the streets of the worst slums for black men with small arabic beards.

JAMES: Comes the humor.

DIANA: I still don't know. "All quotations must relate."

ERIC: Small arabic beards. These men become ward officers. They're paid to carry the frailest and most sedated of the patients. Not that you don't see the same thing on the outside, Diana. All the time. Better parts of town. Rich old retired bankers bundled up in wheelchairs out for their ten minutes of wintry sun, pushed along by silent blacks. Or women with canes, and wearing bright lipstick and powder, wearing rouge, painted for the streets, and who do we see holding this bent form by the elbow, helping her cross from here to there, immaculately detached from the matter at hand—some black nurse murmuring, "Yez now, come on along, doing fine, doing fine." Talking in rote. Counting. "One step, two step, three step. Step number four, close the door." You have to watch the faces of the ward men. This is classic theater. I used to sit with this fella Alfred Bleier and we'd sit there, watching. Rock-hard, every last one. We held out hope for a fat one. We wanted to see rippling fat. It would have meant so much. Alfred liked to reminisce about life in the suburbs. He was the driest little guy.

"I'm late for the office, dear. What's for breakfast?"

"Greens and reds."

"Greens and reds. Did you pack my lunch?"

"Gray today."

"Just one?"

"Gray."

"Did you pack a snack?"

They carried him everywhere. There was something about him that made the ward

men want to pick him up and take him somewhere else. An authority on white light. You'd see some bearded black moving through the ward with Alfred on his shoulder.

JAMES: We're at one, Eric.

MAYA: Java Man, turn this disc, move that over to here.

ERIC: The time is—

MAYA: This determines the color value.

JAMES: Sound the bones.

*[Maya tosses dice.]*

DIANA: "This determines the color value, although color does not mean color."

MAYA: White Dog.

ERIC: The word is cold. The word is cold.

JAMES: All right, I need a second.

MAYA: The time is—

JAMES: Do I want to trade for shape? They envy the Skater's cunning.

ERIC<sup>[to Diana]</sup>: Shape doesn't mean shape. It's like charm in physics. <sup>[To James]</sup> The time is—

MAYA: The word is cold.

ERIC: Now!

*[Maya sets the timing device.]*

JAMES: The word is cold. Cold. We strip it down to phonetic marks in order to see what is really there. Cold with a K and a long o. Kold. If you see what I mean, Diana.

*[He wanders through the room.]*

MAYA: Faster, please.

JAMES: It becomes utterly different. Imagine it. Cold with a k, a long o. Kold. Its intrinsic nature is revealed. What it is. How it works. We see it in its nativeness. Somewhat Nordic, isn't it, and how fitting, how perfectly appropriate. Definitely Nordic. The k. The long o. We see it as it exists beyond the human speech apparatus and the written form. We've changed it radically. We've unencumbered it.

MAYA: Falling behind.

JAMES: We can begin for the first time to

imagine the anarchy of absolute zero. The lawlessness that would prevail at absolute zero, were it obtainable. Zero degrees Kelvin. Zero K. Again, Diana, how appropriate and suitable and fitting. This is more than inner structure. We approach something utterly strange. The k. The long o. Kold.

MAYA: Too far afield.

ERIC: Too damn private.

*[James takes his seat.]*

MAYA: The time is—

ERIC: Java Man.

DIANA: One stick, one tile.

ERIC: Atta girl.

JAMES: Then this goes here.

MAYA: Move this.

DIANA: I'm getting the hang.

JAMES: Now what does this tell you?

MAYA: The time is—

DIANA: "We are playing for repeats. The Skater leaves his quadrant."

JAMES: This is tricky now.

DIANA: I think I see.

ERIC: White Dog repeats.

MAYA: White Dog is transient.

ERIC: If the lady insists.

DIANA: It's all beginning to fit.

JAMES: Now watch. This is tricky. The Woodcutter *[indicates Maya]* becomes Painted Skull. We're getting very esoteric here. We're bordering on the mystical. White Dog *[indicates Eric]* becomes the Engineer of Moonlight.

MAYA: The time is—

*[Diana tosses the dice. They study the board.]*

*Eric gets up from the sofa and stands behind Diana.*

*She sips her brandy.*

*Lights go dimmer.]*

ERIC: I like the feeling in this house right now. Diana's doing. She rounds things out.

MAYA: The Engineer. Where is he?

ERIC: We're none of us related by blood. Yet a family in most of the ways that matter. We set each other off. There's a natural balance and ease. I like the feeling. You can sense when a house yields up its mysteries to the right people. It's not often in my life that a place has been more to me than a physical structure. It's like climbing the attic stairs, childhood, on a still afternoon. The very wood is history. There's dust in the air.

DIANA: Is this the game, still?

ERIC: Homes are supposed to be full of things we value. This is what I'm feeling tonight. People talk about living spaces. Environments. I want to feel a little like home. The way familiar things deepen our time among them. And voices, shapes. Things around us—a mysterious stream of associations. And all of us and everything woven together in time. Time-factored. Time is what steadies love. Tones down the shine. Here we're a set of generations, almost. Personal histories that aren't vulgarized by tedious goddamn biographical detail. Am I making any sense?

*[Diana reaches back to take Eric's hand.]*

We're a closed system here. Diana's worldliness, strength. Her sure sense of how things work. I think we need this. How to get things done. It rounds us out.

MAYA: Time to put you to bed.

ERIC: Diana remembers how things would overtake me sometimes. She knows how hard it was to break out. The absolute bottom of a cave-in. Silence becomes the key to being.

*[James goes up to the loft; out of view.]*

What am I saying, Jimmy?

MAYA: You know what happens. If you don't go in now, you won't sleep.

*[Slowly, Maya puts the game pieces in the box.]*

ERIC[*to Diana*]: We weren't always good for each other. But somehow we were necessary, weren't we, each to the other. That kind of thing always has to give. You were my strength.

DIANA: You were my weakness.

ERIC: We were too damn intense. It was exhausting.

DIANA: Not by design.

ERIC: It was just the way things were.

DIANA: On the verge.

ERIC: We were always on the verge.

DIANA: On edge.

ERIC: Too bound up.

DIANA: Frictions.

ERIC: Too goddamn meant for each other.

DIANA: James remembers. What a nuisance it must have been. We were like a small dust cloud. We got in his eye, constantly.

ERIC: Jimmy remembers different.

DIANA: Our better moments.

ERIC: He thinks fondly back. He tells me. We weren't the only ones in pain, ending it.

DIANA: Where is he?

MAYA: He likes to disappear.

ERIC: He isn't anywhere.

MAYA: He slips away. It's recent. He thinks it leaves a hole in the conversation.

*[Maya folds up the game board and takes it with the box into the bedroom.]*

ERIC: I used to wonder how we'd end. I could never see beyond the next hour and a half. I never imagined this, for instance.

DIANA: Surprising we still get on. It's the unnecessary relationships that mend well. We're the exception somehow.

ERIC: Wives.

DIANA: People walk around wondering. Who is this person? How did I get into this? Divorce opens new pathways. They discover each other.

ERIC: Not us.

DIANA: We knew each other from the start.

*[James comes down.]*

*[Eric crosses to the fireplace.]*

ERIC[*to James*]: I saw every face wives make. They build faces in a little workshop in some secret part of the house. Voices come in the mail. They send away to Minneapolis for voices. But it was damned valuable. I wouldn't have missed a minute.

*[James sits on the sofa.]*

DIANA: It's interesting that when a man acquires and discards many wives, he is viewed as having lived life to the fullest.

JAMES: Supreme sophisticate.

DIANA: Yes, as having drunk from the cup. An old campaigner. A dasher and dancer.

JAMES: Been there and back.

DIANA: Yes, but a woman—a woman with husbands in her wake. No, no, no, no.

JAMES: Adventuress.

DIANA: Man-eating bitch.

JAMES: True.

DIANA: A jade. A worn-out horse. *[To Eric]* It's exercise. We need it to sleep.

JAMES: Why all this attention to marriage? Isn't it enough to have done it total of seven times between you?

DIANA: Marriage is a sacrament. The sacrament of matrimony.

JAMES: How many sacraments are there?

DIANA: There are seven sacraments. Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Holy Orders and Matrimony.

*[Maya appears at the bedroom door.]*

JAMES: What is the sacrament of matrimony?

*[Diana stands.]*

DIANA: Matrimony is the sacrament by which a baptized man and a baptized woman bind themselves for life in a lawful marriage and receive the grace to discharge their duties.

JAMES: What are their duties?

DIANA: That part is hazy.

*[She sits down.]*

JAMES: You were out sick that day.

DIANA: I must have been running a fever. "Dear Sister Edgar, please excuse my daughter Diana from school yesterday, as she was running a fever." *[To Eric]* We need to tire ourselves, James and I, or it's difficult to sleep.

JAMES: We need exercise. Running in place. This is the whole point. People running in place.

MAYA: Time to put you to bed.

ERIC: Then I'll say goodnight.

*[Eric leaves, with Maya.]*

*Lights go dimmer.*

*Diana moves to a chair near James.]*

DIANA: Where would you live if you could live anywhere?

*[James finishes his brandy, slowly.]*

*Maya comes in.]*

JAMES: Will he sleep?

MAYA: I don't think so.

JAMES: Diana's staying.

MAYA: I know.

JAMES: She's ready to confront. To scale down. She feels it's finally time for that. Perfect here, isn't it? The days, the nights, the same. Walking with measured step. She'll deny it, of course, but it's what she's been waiting for. How sad and how perfect. We'll have to redivide the work load.

DIANA: Late, James.

JAMES: It'll be interesting for a while. Then boring.

DIANA: It's late. Much too late.

JAMES: We'll wish she'd never stayed. We'll think back to the old simple ways. Crouching by the sea. Beating smooth stones together. The old life. Naked to the waist.

DIANA: From which direction?

JAMES: Scanning the sky for pelicans.

MAYA: Do you do crossword puzzles?

DIANA: Yes.

JAMES: You see—we're doomed.

MAYA: Then you also read mysteries.

DIANA: By the armful.

MAYA: Once you start a book, do you feel duty-bound to finish it?

JAMES: How can we crouch by the sea, knowing she's inside, setting goals for herself?

MAYA: Do you set goals for yourself? By the page, by the minute, by the dollar, by the mile. When you have two things to get done—one hard, the other easy—do you always do the hard one first?

JAMES: The hollow knock of stone hitting stone. The seaweed in our hair. The mass suicide of the pelicans. The pelicans hurtling toward Pelican Rock. Smashing their horrid bodies. None of this the same.

DIANA: It's foolish to pursue, even jokingly. It's a false issue. It's one of your levels, James.

JAMES: What's the real issue?

DIANA: There is no issue. Just mental activity.

MAYA: No.

DIANA: The spinning of little wheels.

MAYA: No, deeper. Go deep.

JAMES: I wish people wouldn't feel so at home in my subconscious.

*[Diana stretches, gets up to leave.]*

DIANA: All this fresh air.

*[Maya gestures that she will leave instead.]*

MAYA: James wants company.

*[Maya goes into the bedroom. James stares into space.]*

DIANA: What's an average day?

JAMES: He dictates or writes. We organize the results.

DIANA: What comes out on paper? I want an idea.

JAMES: We had this conversation.

DIANA: We're having it again.

JAMES: Eric is obsessed by his own condi-

tion. He keeps going *in*.

DIANA: Is that the way out, do you think?

JAMES: Don't ask me.

DIANA: He feels obsession cures or cleanses.

JAMES: Does he?

DIANA: Throw off disguise and ambiguity. Come smooth.

JAMES: You don't want to romanticize.

DIANA: I want to be careful.

JAMES: He suffers considerably.

DIANA: I don't want to put it to music, do I?

JAMES: He's outside narrative or design. But your presence can only help. We want you to know we appreciate. It's true: you round things out.

*[He goes up to the sleeping loft.]*

DIANA: Two days. You'll have your room back.

*[He stands at the rail.]*

JAMES: I prefer it here. Don't have to listen to their counting.

DIANA: I never did his damned laundry when we were married.

JAMES: She knows you're staying. Don't let her fool you. She's not the little house sparrow she wants you to believe she is. The little *dakini* who escorts people to higher planes.

DIANA: I never believed.

JAMES: She wants you to believe she's a type. Well, she's not a type. At least not that type.

DIANA: Unobtrusive. Seems to say much in few words.

JAMES: The type that simply appears.

DIANA: In a doorway, in mid-sentence.

JAMES: Look up and she's there.

DIANA: She's not just that.

JAMES: She's his wife—up, down, in and around.

DIANA: It begins more and more to seem there's a degree of correspondence. We're three.

JAMES: We type, we file, we change the ribbons. When there's a mess to clean, we clean his mess.

DIANA: Forty-eight hours. If not sooner.

JAMES: When he gets the slow shakes. When he seems to be breaking down, literally. Jangling. Getting smaller. When he refuses to speak, days and days, except to Maya, in code. You've never been here for that. When he takes the wrong pills, willfully. His experiments with medication. When he vomits on your hands and clothes. His worst days are terrific ordeals. Maybe you ought to reconsider.

DIANA: Who'll keep you company? James wants company.

JAMES: Eric is so far beyond us. I tremble sometimes, watching him when he doesn't know I'm in the room.

DIANA: You've outgrown certain feelings about yourself.

JAMES: Some, maybe.

DIANA: What's happened to your leer? For a young man, you had the worst sort of insidious smile I'd ever seen. It was unsettling at first.

JAMES: I used to think everything that was funny was also sexy.

DIANA: No matter what the subject, you'd leer.

JAMES: Your jaw used to shift. When somebody said something odd, you'd do this little swivel with your jaw.

DIANA: You still tilt your head.

JAMES: And your eyes would narrow. Thoughtfulness. An edge of disbelief.

DIANA: You used to pace whenever you talked on the telephone. We'd watch you in the living room move in and out of our field of vision. Attached to that black cord.

JAMES: You did some things lefthanded, some righthanded. I could never arrive at a formula.

DIANA: Instead of doing things, you used to say the words.

JAMES: What do you mean?

DIANA: Instead of grumbling about some-

thing, you'd say, "Grumble, grumble." Or when you were hit—I remember clearly—Eric accidentally hit you in the stomach when he turned with a stack of firewood. You said, "Grunt." I recall distinctly. "Grunt."

JAMES: I was grunting.

DIANA: You weren't grunting. You were saying, "Grunt."

JAMES: You liked loose clothes. Your dresses swung.

DIANA: The outer harbor, James. I'd totally forgotten until this moment. Maine. In the dinghy that day. Remember the current. We couldn't get back in. It was frightening, trying to move against that force. It was almost dark and no boats in sight and we were heading steadily out to sea. And you sat there with an oar, and I had an oar, and you were saying, very softly, "Cries for help." At the time I was so scared it didn't register. You were saying, "Loud and prolonged cries for help." But you didn't cry out. You just clung to your oar. A calm voice—I suppose secretly panic-stricken. "Urgent shouts." "Horrorific cries in the night."

JAMES: I guess I still do that.

DIANA: I'm not staying, James.

JAMES: There were times when you were happy in a certain way, playing with a neighbor's dog, a wet Friday. That's excessive, isn't it? A wet Friday. We don't need that. There were times that caught you at a point of separate and exceptional joy. Times I could see you as a girl. It would come bursting out. It would spring to life, wildly, in your face and eyes. You couldn't contain yourself. That's the correct expression. It's no more than accurate. Seeing something in a shop window, an old toy in some antique shop, turning toward us, you'd show that unexpected brightness. Seconds, only, window-shopping. Or those dolphins off the point we sometimes saw. It would be there in detail. That spirit in your eyes of immediate and singular delight. Times I could see that springing out of you. Caught, bursting, so

unprepared and beautifully true. This is excessive, I realize. We don't need all this. It was like knowing you twice. You were there twice, simultaneously, in detail. This schoolgirl, Canton, Ohio, smiling out of the middle of your face.

DIANA: Is this a balcony scene? Should we change places, do you think?

*[James puts on a bulky sweater.]*

JAMES: Nights I walk on the beach. Never miss a night. Come on along, why don't you?

DIANA: It's been a long day.

JAMES: The air.

DIANA: Fresh air knocks me out.

JAMES: In the morning then. On the deck.

DIANA: Not too early.

JAMES: On the deck. Have to soak up those rays. It's all a question of angles. Propagating waves.

DIANA: On the deck then.

JAMES: In the morning.

*[Diana goes into the bedroom.*

*James puts on his fisherman's hat, comes down the stairs and walks out of the house.*

*Lights go dimmer.*

*Eric comes out of his bedroom, wearing a robe, and goes into the kitchen. He comes out with a glass of water and sits on the sofa.*

*He takes a bottle of pills out of his pocket. Puts one in his mouth, drinks; a second one, drinks.*

*Maya comes out of the bedroom.]*

ERIC: Hearing your own voice. That's the message. Always there.

*[She is wearing a shift, which she buttons as she crosses to the fireplace. She sits on the hearthstone and watches him.]*



Sleep. God, what I'd give sometimes. So simple. The simplest thing. Insomnia's pure time. A room in the city. Alone in time. Hum, hum, hum, hum. That's the bloody disease.

MAYA: Do you want me to tape? Are we working?

ERIC: No. Later maybe.

MAYA: You'll be asleep.

ERIC: No, I won't.

MAYA: Did you take two caps? What did you take?

ERIC: Caps.

MAYA: What did you take?

ERIC: Tabs.

MAYA: How many?

ERIC: Two.

MAYA: How many, Eric?

ERIC: "No amount of talk, doctor, will make this table float in the air."

MAYA: You had brandy.

ERIC: I took caps. It's all right. Two, just two.

MAYA: Do you want to try sleeping again?

ERIC: Pure time.

MAYA: Let me tape.

ERIC: Nothing gets in or out.

*[She sits with him.]*

MAYA: Diana will be here. It can only help.

ERIC: Remarkable woman.

MAYA: She wants *in*. She wants *here*.

ERIC: She's a positive force, Diana. She knows how to clear away the muddle. She can talk to doctors. Not many people know how to do that.

MAYA: There are some things we ought to talk about.

ERIC: You've been wanting to talk.

MAYA: I haven't been able to concentrate as much as I'd like. Certain things will help me. I'd like to eat only one meal from now on. Before noon. I want to concentrate and this is a point. I'd like not to take meals with the rest of you. Eat by myself, early, very sparingly. This will help. And I'd like to

have periods of silence. If I spoke only between certain hours. I want to concentrate. We can decide with James and Diana which hours would be best. Work out a schedule. Fasting after the hour of noon. And periods of silence. This will help me. ERIC: You're my body. It's through you I know the world.

MAYA: Together we'll clarify.

ERIC: Touch-of-things. The simplest pictures even. Reds at sundown. I depend on you.

MAYA: The reds in Peru.

ERIC: God, yes.

MAYA: Remember.

ERIC: The waves.

MAYA: They approached so evenly. They were perfect. And the light way out. So many depths and degrees of the color red.

*[Eric speaks as if addressing James in the left.]*

ERIC: It was the closest I've come to seeing the world as a system of thought. Waves sweeping in. The *first* waves. Waves in some purer light. The world shedding numbers. One more, and one more, and still one more. Press against the desolation. With numbers, we aspire. We do more than make sense of things. We play toward the infinite. *[To Maya]* Goddamn, goddamn. The world *is* beautiful.

MAYA: Outside a refugee camp in Sikkim, I saw a holy man standing in the snow. I wish you'd been there. He wore only cloth and a strip of goatskin. Prayer flags streaming in the wind. He was very still, a Tibetan, an exile, standing, snow to his waist. He looked into me. I could feel tears freezing on my face.

ERIC: He'd found a way to become something else.

MAYA: It was a powerful world, Tibet, before the Chinese.

ERIC: Become snow. Become mud.

MAYA: I wore the headdress of a Khampa woman.

*[Eric, as if addressing James.]*

ERIC: We return to the world, one way or the other. Even on the sheerest edges, out there, I'd feel an element of contact. A *wish* to return. At very least, at minimum. The brain is part of what's outside it. That's the bloody riddle. It's involved. It's implicated. Warm, pulsing, solid, criminal matter.

*[She moves closer to him.]*

MAYA: Say after me. Eka.  
 ERIC: Eka.  
 MAYA: Dvi.  
 ERIC: Dvi.  
 MAYA: Tisrah. This is the feminine form. Tisrah.  
 ERIC: Tisrah.  
 MAYA: Catur. This is four. Catur.  
 ERIC: Catur.  
 MAYA: Panca.  
 ERIC: Panca.  
 MAYA: Sas. After me.  
 ERIC: Sas.  
 MAYA: Sapta. This is seven. Sapta.  
 ERIC: Sapta.  
 MAYA: Asta.  
 ERIC: Asta.  
 MAYA: Nava.  
 ERIC: Nava.  
 MAYA: Dasa.  
 ERIC: Dasa.  
 MAYA: Ten. Dasa. Say.  
 ERIC: Dasa.  
 MAYA: Now, from one, count.  
 ERIC, MAYA: Eka. Dvi. Tisrah. Catur. Panca. Sas. Sapta. Asta. Nava. Dasa.

*[Lights go dimmer.*

*Maya puts her hand inside his robe.]*

MAYA: And I would like a straw pallet. This would be helpful. It's time for me to stop using a raised bed. A pallet is clearly best. We'd still be next to each other. You need only reach down and touch. It's important for me at this stage, not to sleep in a raised bed. I want to concentrate.

*[James comes in.]*

ERIC: We ought to do some work, Jimmy.  
 JAMES: All right.  
 ERIC: I feel like working.  
 JAMES: Good.

*[James goes to the file cabinet along the rear wall and takes out folders and notebooks.]*

ERIC: Typewriter.  
 JAMES: We'll wake the others.  
 ERIC: Maya's here.  
 JAMES: Diana.  
 ERIC: She may as well get used to it.  
 JAMES: She'll be hearing it all the time, won't she?  
 ERIC: She may as well find out.

*[James opens a second drawer and lifts out the typewriter. He carries it to the dinner table and sits down with the other material.]*

*Maya curls up at the end of the sofa.]*

JAMES: What do we want to do?  
 ERIC: We want to revise.  
 JAMES: What we did this afternoon?  
 ERIC: We want to do that over.  
 JAMES: If I can read your handwriting.  
 ERIC: Take off your hat.  
 JAMES: Stay a while.

*[Takes off the hat.]*

ERIC: We'll do it over and type it up. I want to start typing the handwritten stuff. We have a backlog. That can be a project above and beyond.  
 JAMES: All right, fine.  
 ERIC: It has more authority.  
 JAMES: Typed.  
 ERIC: The characters ring out.  
 JAMES: Do you want me to read this aloud? You can dictate changes when I've finished.  
 ERIC: I feel strong. We work through the night.

*[James reads from a sheaf of papers.]*

JAMES: Notes on memory. How we step outside the action. External views. The density of intervening years. Regret, etcetra. What we see. This is what I want. The static picture.

Notes on objects. The deep force of objects in empty rooms. There's no one in the rooms. The external view. Objects have a dense aura. I want to say consciousness. Matter is consciousness. The emotion and tone of years. Or intrinsic to the thing. The rooms stand empty. It's always late afternoon. The writing table is small and dusty. Bands of dust in the air. Everything is still. We're in the mind. The light blue smudge above the line of ink inside the bottle. The ink bottle's squared-off edges.

Notes on the rooms. The rooms stand empty. Brown light. The kitchen is full of names. Products in boxes, cans, bottles, tins. Words for. Letters of names for. The oilcloth on the kitchen table.

ERIC: That belongs in "objects." I put it in "rooms." Mark it for now.

*[James makes a pencil mark; reads on.]*

JAMES: What a sadness it is to remember the look and feel of that oilcloth. And the long wide bars of Ivory soap. And the flypaper hanging in the back room. And the curve in the banister near the top of the stairs. What a sadness. The ordinary wood.

ERIC: All that belongs in "objects." Mark it.

*[James marks; reads on.]*

JAMES: Notes on memory as a form of madness. All longing is pathological.

Notes on insanity in things. The rooms stand empty. It's late afternoon. We're in the mind. I want to say limits dissolve. That's what no one understands. Matter is consciousness. They're not prepared to see this. How it can be everywhere. In the photographs in the hall. In the closets in the rooms upstairs. In the suits and dresses. In the pockets. Inside the shoes. In the dust in the air. Under the sheets. Between the knees. Along the thighs. In the openings and closings. Boundaries become part of the things they divided. Boundaries become part of the things they divided.

ERIC: Take off your hat.

*[James reads.]*

JAMES: The photographs in the hall. Roundish, squinting, fair-haired women. Spare men. The men are lean, standing a little crookedly, felt-hatted, white-shirted, clear-eyed, principled, confined in an ancient rage. The women half-smile, some of them, or are lost in the shadows of their hats, on some burning lawn. Americans.

ERIC: We'll go over that line by line and then type it up. It has the look of something final, when it's typed.

*[James puts carbon paper between two sheets and inserts them in the typewriter.*

*He looks at Eric, waiting.*

*He picks up a pencil, ready to correct the handwritten notes.*

*He folds his arms across the typewriter and leans forward, watching Eric.]*

*Curtain*