

## *Della*: from Chapter IX

I've been trying to call her all night, but she's not home. I'm a little worried. But I have faith. It's just that I've been reading my writing and it has me bedazzled.

The only thing that really worries me is that she likes me so much. I said some wicked things in this novel. It's a good thing I was talking about a fictional character.

She wondered if my wife really said, "Is that all you think about?"

Maybe Della's worried about me. Maybe she thinks I'm cracking up. Is she being gentle because she's afraid I'm on the edge of a breakdown?

Why was she talking about mental telepathy? We both had the idea I would accept her one way and think of her another. A few of the things I said were just what she did say when I asked them.

There's something so beautiful about my writing. I just fall in love with it. I'm easily satisfied. I can love almost anything. I didn't say I was going to talk all the way through about Della. I may have said all I'm going to say.

I'm at peace with the world. Nothing seems to be bothering me. Lassi-tude. Sometime in the near dim future I'll see Della. Except that I almost never see her on Tuesdays. She's with me in my thoughts every hour. Is that right? Yes.

I forgot to wear my glasses today. I came to school without them.

Let's run away together. I can't stand to live without you.

It's a pleasant day. The sun is warm. A summer day in March. Cool wind with a touch of winter and a hot sun. A bright hot sun. Will I see Della today? It begins to look like I won't. I'm supposed to be going to school. I'm supposed to be studying. But what good is school? Except if you want to plan your life? I want to plan my life. I can't flunk any more courses. In my checkered career I've flunked too many.

Don't ask me what I'm doing. I'm having fun through life. Can you think of something more worthwhile? I believe in being kind and gentle. I forgot to say that. I have fun being kind and gentle and I'm not always kind and gentle when I'm having fun.

In my career as a failure I've muddled through a lot of things. I've stumbled on to my share of delights. My relationship with Della is one of these delights. My wife is the most delightful thing in my life.

It's delightful to write, to get up early and to go to bed late. It's delightful to have this climate. It's nice to know so many people—even when I pay no attention to them. It's nice to have so many books—even though I don't read them.

I don't know what to tell you . . .

If only I could get some coffee I'd be fine. I've had too much coffee already today—but I'm impatient to see Della. I'll be back after I get some coffee. I'll probably be so loaded with coffee then I won't be able to write. What form will that take?

I'll smoke a cigarette first. The next time I go over I'd like to eat lunch. Am I a fool like everyone says I am? No—I've got something on the ball. I have faith. Anyway—I love to do this. I love my art. It seems like play to personal friends who know what I'm doing. It's like play to me. They grant that it could be arty. An unfortunate term. It seems not to be a serious term. There's judgment built into that word. They judge it to be unrealistic endeavor.

Maybe that's why it's so much fun. Because it's so unreal. My writing is a dream world—an escape from reality. I don't mind this. A doubt crossed my mind. I took up the doubt, turned it over, cast it aside. I enjoy my escape from reality—even if this is all it is.

I'm no longer in that quietly exhilarated mood. No longer in that mood. Now I'm in a tragic mood. I feel I might be missing something. I have tried to fail all day. I've timed it just right so I wouldn't be there when Della was there. Why do I do this to myself—if I'm doing this to myself? I'm afraid maybe that Robbie will be there. So? So—if she wants to see me she'll come up here. She'll never do that. I'm not her lover. Perhaps she thinks I know when her free hours are.

When am I ever going to study? I'm a mass of jelly. I have this feeling. I can't be stern. Of course I can—but I'm dodging it. Why did I work it out like this—so that I would be writing while she's there? We could be eating lunch somewhere.

That would give me pleasure.

Well—there are so many things up in the air. One of them is my novel I worked on last year. The novel I was working on the last thing I knew. That is a confused jumble and mess.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

"I'm going to the rest room," she said. Then she started in on a lot of things I couldn't follow. She seemed to be in a hurry and I seemed to leave her.

I don't know what time it was then.

I've got to take it easy. My mind is slipping. Spectres are beginning to loom on the edges. My vision is going. Hands are pulling me down and down, grasping hands, myriad hands, and I've gone below.

"So where's here, boss?"

"Hush for a moment."

"I don't get you, boss."

"Be quiet, I said."

"I know you said that, boss. But I want to know what the hell you think we're doing here."

"For the last time, be quiet."

I don't know. Everything is everything. Nothing is nothing. You should know what I'm telling you. Help is where your mother is. It gets harder and harder to tell you something. I'm crying. I'm pitiful . . .

## James Mechem: The Gentyllle & Parfait Knight / Carol Bergé

### *MECHEM'S MECHEM-AS-HERO*

James Mechem's writing persona is a swashbuckling romantic hero who evolves ritually from the fourteenth- to the eighteenth-century novels of manners and from the medieval romances. His step could be minuet or gavotte; the ritual is that of carrying a lace handkerchief in the visor before the joust. His hero-figure moves among women as Count Mechem of a radio soap opera or an MGM historical spectacular, replete with cape and heart-on-sleeve; he's Doug Fairbanks and Errol Flynn and J. Bond, quaffing Polish vodka, speaking in clear puns and ever bowing to the ladies, who are chauvinistically regarded as goddesses of a nearby planet and thus to be treated with awe, deference, and tweaking envy. The I of his writing is different from Steve Katz' or Fielding Dawson's, two of my other favorites: Steve's I moves in a future fantasy of transmutation and omnivorous glitziness; Fee's persona has power of total recall in boyish larger-than-life present and recent past, concerned with the aura of the Forties and Fifties—contemporary mores meticulously described and displayed like finds in an archeological dig. All these men use their hero-figure to shrive a dull youth and thereby create a mythos. Mechem's Mechem is as far as possible from the author's own workaday world of business computers and multi-kid family and long-term monogamy. His actual self writes names in bright, large flowing script on envelopes, covering love-letters of admiration to women he has not yet met or knows only professionally; sends volumes of love-poetry by earlier people to his admired woman-friends; picks up the phone in the middle of the night just to say his affection and greetings, from mid-country to any coast—Beau Geste in modern drag, courtly and in love with love as a classical way to be beautiful to each other. Mechem's