

The Dungeon

—Unable to wake up this morning. Dream-haunted. The muscular intensity of dreams, straining of heart, organs. Eyes. Yet without the release of visions. And never any color—do others lie, bragging that they dream in color? The images are black-white-gray. Recently there have been no images. XXXXXX praised me for my ability to distinguish between subtleties of color, teased me about being tone-deaf in regard to music (which I am not), yet the dreams are vaporous and disappointing. Unable to wake for hours. Most of the day. Headache. XXXXXX is so sweet—reminds me of my sister as she *should have been* & of course was not.

—Went for a long walk to clear my head. Demons, small leaping jokes of demons, can't be taken seriously. Golcando Blvd.—grotesquely-named—buses, trucks, cars, renovation, mess, dust, dirt, people. Things blowing this way, that way. Look of desolation beneath all the activity. Smells in the air, promiscuous, swirling gaily together, as the sun came out taking everyone by surprise. Nevertheless, breathed in pollution & grime & even a blast of foul perfume from some creature striding past me, middle-aged but face painted like a mannequin's, a bad joke. A high school boy in tight rust-colored trousers, pedaling his bike past me slowly, very slowly. Stranger. Cigarette stuck in his mouth, hair bursting out all over his head, looked part-Negro somehow. Looked at me so strangely!—seemed to know me. But impossible.

—XXXXXX the sister of my soul. Unmistakable. Put her hands on my forehead today, to ease the headache, small cool delicate hands, incredible. So sweet, so playful. Intelligent. Not like XXXXX and the disgusting XXXXX. But dare not sketch her for fear the *Forbidden* would creep into it . . . & she would guess at once.

—Sly hideous twist the pen takes, sketching any subject I know to be innocent. Can manage horrors like XXXXX and his pal XXXXX but not the others. Nature no risk: total abandonment to beauty. Trees, birds, landscapes. Creatures both natural & mythological. But a girl like XXXXXX is defaced, brutalized, broken, by the cancerous urge in me.

—Cannot deny the intensity of the pleasure. The Secret. The costumes, scenarios, dialogue. Irony glimpsed only on one side—mine. Always in con-

trol. I respect her—never doubt that!—but can't deny the fits of giggling that sometimes overtake me, afterward. Cruel, even crude. Hideous thought that I might end up in a few years like that ugly old XXXXXX cracking dirty jokes about an ex-wife some of us have our doubts ever existed. No, I must be more careful. She is truly a match for me: our conversations, our laughter, the eager darting movement of our imaginations when we are together. Of course she is not talented, as I suppose I am. Yet in her way she is gifted. Just the tone of her voice, her green-gray eyes, her manner of lightly touching my arm as if to call me back to "reality" . . . not wanting people in the park or other customers in *Rinaldi's* to overhear. Voice shrill, laughter shrill. Must guard against excitement. . . . A true gift, such women possess: "artistic arrangement of life" a phrase I think I read somewhere. Can't remember. She wants to understand me but will not invade me like the others. Sunshine: her hair. (Though it is brown, not very unusual. But always clean.) Sunshine: dispelling of demons. Intimacy always a danger. Intimacy/hell/intimacy/hell. Could possibly make love to her thinking of XXXXXX or (say) the boy with the kinky reddish hair on the bicycle . . . but sickening to think of. What if. What if an attack of laughter. Hysterical giggling. And. Afterward. Such shame, disgust. She would not laugh of course but might be wounded for life: cannot exaggerate the dangers of intimacy, on my side or hers. The Secret between us. My secret, not hers. Our friendship—nearly a year now—on my footing, never hers. Can't deny what others have known before me, the pleasure of secrecy, taking of risks.

—With XXXXXX etc. last night, unable to wake this morning till after ten; already at work; sick headache, dryness of mouth, throat. But no fever. Temperature normal. XXXXXX so bitter, speaks of having been blackmailed by some idiot, but (in my opinion) it all happened years ago, not connected with his position here in town. Teaches juniors, seniors. Advises Drama Club. Tenure. I'm envious of him & impatient with his continual bitterness. Rehashing of past. What's the point of it? Of course, he is over forty (how much over forty is his secret) and I am a decade younger, maybe fifteen years younger. Will never turn into that. Hag's face, lines around mouth, eyes. Grotesque moustache: trying to be 25 years old & misses by a mile. . . . Yet my pen-and-ink portrait of him is endearing. Delighted, that it should please even him. & did not mind the CA\$H. Of course I am talented & of course misused at the agency but refuse to be bitter like the others. XXXXXX lavish, flattery and money. I deserve both but don't expect everyone to recognize me . . . in no hurry . . . can't demand fame overnight. Would I want fame anyway???? Maybe not. With XXXXXX's hundred dollars bought her that \$35 book of Toulouse-Lautrec's work, dear Henri, perhaps should not have risked it with her but genuinely thought she

would like it. Did not think, as usual. She seemed grateful enough, thanking me, surprised, said she'd received only a few cards from home & a predictable present from her mother, certainly did not expect anything from me—"But aren't you saving for a trip to Europe"—remembers so much about me, amazing—so sweet—unlike XXXXXX who calls me by the names of strangers and is vile. His image with me till early afternoon, tried to vomit in the first-floor lavatory where no one from the office might drop in, dry heaving gasps, not so easy to do on an empty stomach. Mind over matter???

Not with "Farrell van Buren"!

—A complete day wasted. Idiotic trendy "collage" for MacKenzie's Dairy, if you please. Cherubs, grinning teenagers, trophies. An "avant-garde" look to it. Haha. Looking forward to lay-out for the Hilton & Trader Vic's, at least some precedent to work from *and resist*. . . . Could send out my Invisible Soldiers to hack up a few of these bastards, smart-assed paunchy hags bossing me around. Someday things will be different. (Of course must bow to Reality Principle. "Farrell van Buren" will never be recognized in this armpit of a town. "Maiden of the Great Lakes"—cannot be parodied, such jokes.)

—Took her to *Rinaldi's*. Fascinating, her ability to switch from gossip at work—her anecdotes about that employer of hers are first-rate satire, could she only draw or sketch!—an eye for detail like Hogarth's—not exaggerating—to remarks of a higher nature ("There are times when you ask yourself who has been here before you—as if someone else preceded you, everywhere—and you were the shadow this person threw"). I had trout stuffed with shrimp, pasta on the side, she had ordinary baked lasagna; shared an immense tossed salad in one of those wooden bowls. Red napkins, red tablecloth. Flickering light from the candles on the wall. Could talk with her for hours, hypnotized. Sometimes it is not even her but someone else. She laughs so easily, would never hurt me . . . never pinch me, the way my sister did. . . . And my mother's raw-red arms, roughened elbows. Not her fault, that she had to work so hard. Whose fault? My father's? . . . Died over the weekend in a hospital, bleeding ulcers, just bled to death & nobody's fault but my mother blamed him, of course; the insurance was so meager; could have been worse I suppose. . . . Told her about such things & she about things in her Past. (She's twenty-six years old & "still Catholic" & must be intimidated by me, to feel she should apologize—not that I would mock her tho' my own faith is long-vanquished.) One unpleasant note: three men in a booth on the other side, drunk, giggling, one of them in a bright yellow jersey & his head somehow shaved, anything to attract attention, & when we left she stared at them, could see her expression go

cold, hard. Coarsen. In the parking lot I made some small joke, nothing important, referring to a movie that'd been playing at the Capitol—across the street—for 6 months now & she misunderstood & thought I referred to those men. Made a face. Small pale prim. “Well I pity them” or words to that effect.

—Bled to death. It gushed out of any available hole, I suppose. Mouth, nose. Ears? Out through the bowels? It's life-blood, precious but cheap. If you give blood they store it in sacks, drain it out of you. I was too young, to help my father. Wouldn't have mattered. But then!—he was an ignorant bastard, so weak helpless & stupid, the insurance premiums all screwed up like that. . . . Wasted an evening doodling, drawing, “Farrell van Buren” bleeding to death from various pores. Why do I maintain the fiction of that name? (My real name is XXXXXX.) Rhymes with Farrell anyway. If I were to show her these notebooks. . . . If something happened to me they'd be found here in my apartment & confiscated & possibly sent to my mother with the rest of my belongings. Not that she'd read them anyway. Probably can't read, except newspapers. My sister, married to that smart-ass doctor. “Your brother-in-law has bought into a practice in Bar Harbor isn't that wonderful” blah blah. Stared at me first time we met, Thanksgiving, my sister pretending to be proud of me (“Had a show of his own at one of the galleries only twenty years old”), his handshake quick and almost cringing. *He knew*. But said nothing or so I assume. The filthy son of a bitch, to avoid me like that. . . . Some doctor, imagine what he tells his patients, makes me want to puke. Argument with my sister, argument with my mother. Nothing goes right. In *Rinaldi's* I went to help her with her coat, imagined she shrank from me, her shoulder sloping away. Well I pity pity pity.

—Drove to Point Garry. Lighthouse, blacksmith's shop, phony little boutiques. “Open air artists' mart” a laugh. . . . Met XXXXXX and his friend XXXXXX; hadn't seen since last winter (???). Looking good. Little red Fiat, XXXXXX must have gotten promoted, looked tan, healthy. His friend claimed to be a sculptor but shut up fast when he learned I was an artist. Out late. Talked me into staying overnight. Forget name of motel. A dump: smelled of sewage. . . . Reddened nostrils a giveaway, will recognize in future, not my world at all. What if raided, arrested. What if arrested for possession of. & she would learn of it & the agency & my life blotted out.

—Never again.

—Pretty good chance for a one-man exhibit at the Cooperative; showed that

big gal, Lucy, my “Dungeon of the Flesh” series & was absurdly pleased, her reaction. I intend to show Eleanora this journal & will not blot out her name from now on. If the drawings are exhibited she will certainly see them & the shapes there on the wall may argue eloquently for me; if not, the notebooks should explain. I have faith in her. I have faith in you, Eleanora. . . . Told her about “dungeon” experience but was afraid to come out with the truth. We talked & talked. She is shy but at the same time surprises me—a roll of her eyes, a grin, dimpled cheek, like those high school girls in the coffee shop at noon, can’t always predict her. But won’t blot out the name from now on. Eleanora? . . . Here is the quotation behind the series of pen & ink drawings, so hard to explain to one who stands firmly in the day:

O dear children, look in what a dungeon we are lying, in what lodging we are, for we have been captured by the spirit of the outward world; it is our life, for it nourishes and brings us up, it rules in our marrow and bones, in our flesh and blood, it has made our flesh earthly, and now death has us.

—Jacob Boehme

—Long-distance call from XXXXXX, three in the morning, hysterical as usual. Eighteen months since we talked last. Same tone, same high-pitched querulous voice. Demanding. Accusing. Or is it a pose—the “controlled hysteria” meant to reveal the depths of his soul? Everyone has turned against him. Friendless now. Enemies—“perverts.” Someone left a note for him at work, in his mailbox, simply the word *Queer* in red ink. The possibility that his psychotherapist at the clinic is keeping secret records & will blackmail him. (When he taught for the U.S. Army, in the Orient, the same terrors plagued him: the G.I. students in his composition class taking notes on him, on his behavior, the army base psychiatrist turning his records over to the Army and to the director of the overseas program.) Sick—sick—sick. Sick. Expecting me to sympathize with him—console him—join him in obscene curses against the “enemy.”

—After that call, could not sleep the rest of the night. My fate? Our fate? I am swimming through a tunnel of filth, holding my head high, my mouth shut, grim. Terrified. To be “liberated” like XXXXXX—is that all I can hope for? “Liberation”? Mania of the repressed breaking free into consciousness? —yammering, snivelling, boasting, whimpering now in public? One of my worst nights. Then at work that thick-calved pimply beast hung over my workbench, friend of a friend of Eleanor’s. What is her game???? Chewing gum, a woman in her thirties. Ugh. The ring of my friend’s hysteria in my

ears all day—only dispelled when I telephoned Eleanor—thank God for her sweet light manner—the saving grace of unserious conversation. Relief just to hear the girl’s voice. No edge to it. None of that “knowing,” *I despise those who know me*. My secrets are life itself, the breath of life. . . . Do you wish to know the artist?—take yourself to the artist’s dungeon! Eleanor does not know me & I map the future for both of us. But if the drawings are exhibited. But. *O dear children* etc. . . .

—My bright green sleeveless sweater. Green & white silk shirt. & the white blazer, for the hell of it. The good trousers with that reliable crease. Eleanora playing “little wife,” greeting me in the vestibule, hair pinned up somehow behind, ringlets around her ears . . . smelling of perfume but very very sweet perfume, not offensive like the others. The old lady on the first floor with the six cats peeking out at us; thinks I am E’s lover, eh? Old bitch! Yellow-faced old bitch! It stinks of cats, passing her door. But Eleanora likes her, calls her “Miss Lawrence,” feels sorry for her because she’s a widow. (I could tell her a thing or two about widows.) She wore a paisley dress, aqua and green; shoes with buckles. The dinner was lukewarm but delicious—poached fillet of sole—some kind of French sauce—grapes (???) in it. & whipped potatoes. Must have remembered my mentioning them. & angel food cake with apricot sauce poured over it, hours of work, Eleanora so flushed & pleased. . . . I squeezed her hand. Very happy, excited. The wine went to my head. (*Should not drink.*) Fascinated with her hair—light brown, bangs over her forehead, those curly ringlets, other curls arranged in back. How do they do it? My sister’s coarse red hair, like twine. Dyed. To mock the bitch I bought a \$7.98 synthetic wig at the drugstore, bright red, almost a match for hers; jammed it on my head & put on her Easter coat & waddled into the dining room shaking my hips & the nasty thing could not see herself but only screamed at me, at *me*. & my mother also. Without imagination, without humanity. Eleanora got a little drunk, unused even to sweet red wine, giggling about some nuns at her school, how the girls were warned against sitting on boys’ laps for fear of getting pregnant. “In trouble.” Could I believe it. Could anyone believe it. Such rot, such craziness. I told her the nuns ought to have been stripped—their heads shaved—made to march naked in the streets, the nasty things. So nasty, nasty. A nun in our school, with the odors of her body trailing her; shameless.

—My sister thought she was *Beau-ti-ful!*

Married The Doctor (only a G. P.) & bought the most laughable mock-Tudor house on the country club drive (of course). Never had me over to

admire their carefully “weathered” oaken beams, eh? I was only in the dungeon overnight, in fact only six hours. A single telephone call & bond arranged & the informing officer frightened with a suit for false arrest tho’ nothing came of any of it. They push us a little, we push back. There is a wildness in me never explored, not even in my dreams.

—Tomorrow I will show Eleanora my notebooks. . . . Have you read this far yet???? “Judge not lest ye be judged.”

—I love you.

—Decided to show her the notebooks next week. The one-man show fallen through; Cooperative can’t make April’s mortgage payments. Lucy a *genuinely nice woman*. . . . So few of them. Without the pressure of the show felt invigorated, did a half-dozen sketches on Saturday, one of them (modest self-portrait!) the best likeness I’ve ever done. Hair floppy, forehead just right, my pug nose—which I hate—and the slight cleft of my chin & even the slope of my shoulders which I guess I must live with. One of Eleanora’s front teeth slightly crooked. Brownish stains on the bottom teeth—is that tartar? (Says she drinks a lot of tea.) Nobody’s perfect. Arranged in my room are the two dozen drawings . . . some of them rather graphic . . . sleepy young men, athletic young men lazy & muscular & cruel-eyed . . . & one of the boy who passed me on the street, hardly more than a glimpse of him & I captured his essence. Such mysteries in the street. . . . Long langorous limbs, hairy bodies, smooth bodies, eyes risky because so deep, so detailed. The eyes in my faces threaten to sink back into the skull, someone once said. Scholarship. Prizes. Promising. Next week will show Eleanora the notebooks, maybe ask to wait while she reads them—reads this—I have tickets for the University Players on the other side of town for Thursday evening, perhaps a good time. Good as any.

—Eleanora’s face bobbing close to mine. The bangs, the baby skin, the mascara on the eyes; the arched eyebrows; the sly wink. *She knows*. I crouch before her as if before a mirror, adjusting the wig on my head. Damn thing, why is it so slippery? But with bangs it’s easier to fix, you can hide half your face practically. Is that why women wear their hair in their faces, to hide them? Haha. I made up my face to mirror hers, not much of a trick to it, except the eye-liner is hard to manage. Dangerous, so close to the eye. My hand jerked with hatred for the face I was creating, I was trembling with disgust for it & myself but how else to show her what it’s worth, her cute little personality. Wiggling her bottom. *Beau-ti-ful*. In the dream I began shouting & crying & when I woke it was the middle of the night & raining

out, sleeting out, & I was all alone. Very upset. Heart going like crazy. They say you can die in such a state of sleep—they say that old men die of heart attacks in such a state—possibly infants die too, crib deaths, so-called “mysterious deaths” where the heart stops. *Jesus was I frightened*. . . . Turned on the light, went to my workbench, hand shook so that ink spilled but I doodled & drew till I was calmed down again. Drawing her face & my own & the faces of the others. That slight coarseness around her mouth. . . .

—A luncheon today, junior staff & even some of the girls. I wasn’t invited. At the Red Fox. I’m positive there was a luncheon. Certain people are out to get me—envious of me—whispering about me. The gum-chewing witch in the pants suits; she’d better watch out. Who wishes to understand me had better watch out. XXXXXX dropping by & I wouldn’t let him in. Told him I couldn’t trust myself, had dreams of bashing in his skull (yes! little gentle Daryl can be melodramatic too! like everyone else!) & calling the police & putting an end to it. The End. . . . Thursday, I’ll let her read the notebooks. We’ll see. I won’t judge her ahead of time. I won’t judge her/you. Nor will I plan ahead. My cruelty cannot be planned—has not been given enough freedom. How do I know what I will do? The *Forbidden* guards me too closely.

—Friday. I am writing this in the reference room of the state university library—drove 150 miles this morning—called in sick at work could barely disguise the contempt in my voice (*I will not endure* a life of conjured-up “truth” for the sake of fools & half-witted tramps)—got in the car & pressed down the gas pedal & waited to see where it would take me, what the hell would happen, & got the old bitch up to 100 mph occasionally which isn’t bad for an eight-year-old car with half the fenders rusted off. Law-abiding little Daryl with the pug nose & eyes that brim too readily with tears & the *precocious* talent that brought him at the age of thirty to such acclaim & fame & MONEY!!!! Because I was law-abiding & wept for mercy & had no record whatsoever not even a traffic ticket (I do believe the judge sneered at me, because I was so “innocent”) they deemed me worthy of returning to Reality that morning & graced me with \$500 bail; not so fortunate the other creatures hauled in the night before. One of them with nose broken . . . bleeding & laughing . . . hideous.

What has this to do with Eleanora/Eleanor?

Refrain of “I don’t understand” & strained little smile & “I just don’t understand” & “You’re frightening me: it’s late” & a toss of her cute little head & pleading smile & charming crooked teeth & nervous playing with the pearls

she wore (imitation). Brought along a few of the drawings, in the portfolio; left them in the car during the play; couldn't concentrate on the play except to try to laugh when the audience did ("What's wonderful about you is your sense of humor—you laugh so easily at things—") tho' what is amusing about Brecht, about the disasters accumulating off stage & in history & even in the audience is beyond me. Still, you must laugh. ("You seem a little sad tonight or subdued." "You're not so funny anymore." "What's wrong?"—stray idiot comments from an ex-friend, after the Saturday night lockup of five years ago & constant memory.) Dragged the portfolio up to her room. She wanted to see the drawings first, I wanted her to read the Notebooks first, almost a childish tug-of-war, *for Jesus Christ's sake don't do this to me!*—actually shouted at her. I am not crazy but am being forced that way. I am not a pervert & not even a radical & not out to change the world & tho' they laughed at me for my Constant Guilt & Sense of the Unclean, why should I care?—having my talent & my own soul & intellectual/spiritual preoccupations to sustain me. Am a classicist, almost. Yet am forced each day of my life to enter into moronic melodramas—skits vulgar & pornographic in a spiritual sense—tug-of-war with portfolio—mix-up with tickets (bought weeks ago yet wouldn't you know—our seats not together; the usual story of my life)—the Cooperative evidently bankrupt & worse (rumors of theft by committee members) & on & on. Shouted. Tears of anger (?) or despair. . . . Gave in to her whims, showed her the drawings. Silence. Silence. . . . Eleanora frowning like a schoolgirl & frightened to death & slack-mouthed (actually!), you wouldn't know she was a woman of twenty-six, even with a sheltered life or whatever she claims (probably hypocritically), pretense of virginity & "not getting" certain jokes or puns. . . . Then the Notebooks but I doubt she read them . . . skimmed them . . . silent, her pretty face gone stupid, frowning, blinking, the hypocrisy of looking for art in what I was offering her. Yes, yes, I am an artist or might have been—maybe will be, yet—I'm not defeated yet—but offer myself too—offer myself for interpretation & possibly even affection & love or at least friendship—must have someone to talk to, to talk with; the other is not enough. It is friendship I crave FRIENDSHIP HUMANITY CIVILIZATION & my life clogged with enemies & the tunnel gushing sewage higher & higher & I must swim through it without drowning. There are beasts with tufts of fur on shoulders & chests & stomachs, broad grinning tanned faces, leering at us from the covers of news-stand magazines—nothing intimidates them or disgusts them—certain of my own drawings perhaps perpetuate this myth—lie—illusion—dream. Embarrassed little Eleanor one of the safe soulless tidy ones, little bitch, aren't you Eleanor, are you reading this far Eleanor, so prudently withdrawing your "friendship" from me as if I DID NOT EXIST any longer. One minute we are friends (& you hoped perhaps for an en-

gagement ring, I suppose—to show your envious pop-eyed friends), the next minute we are ex-friends. How simple, how neat. But you won't get away with it. The perusal of a half-dozen pen and ink drawings. No more than two or three minutes. And afterward everything changed, changed irreparably.

—Tried to see it as art, did you. Aesthetic reaction. Yes of course it is art—is meant to be, at least—but it is also LIFE & SORROW & INARTICULATE YEARNING out of the dungeon—where you daylight people never go—“They're very interesting. They're very well done. . . . I don't quite understand them.”

—(“Why are you so upset, aren't they friends of yours? I mean, don't you all share the same interests?—hobbies? Why should you mind getting insulted by the police, pushed around a little to terrify you into catatonia, why should you mind actually being *arrested* . . . ? Dragged to the lockup with your friends, reduced to a quivering mass of fear-flesh, weeping before the judge, why should you mind, isn't it part of your subculture, why should *you* be offended, of all people? Aren't you an artist? Can't you probably use these adventures for your art?”) Freaks perverts queers broken-nosed dying alcoholics pitted faces rheumy eyes the insult of being thrown in among them & fainting in their stink. . . . Yet an acquaintance said why should you mind, why so upset, aren't they . . . aren't they friends of yours . . . & anyway can't you exploit such pain for your art . . .

—Shall I murder you all?

—What an enormous room, this reference room. Row after row of long tables . . . row after row after row. . . . Desk lamps at the tables, at about the height of one's head, the effect being (visually) to cut off the heads of others in the room. Freakish. Trick of the eye. Students are jammed in this place as always: the revolutions of the 60's must have failed: media-hype, perhaps. Anyway here they are. Here we all are. Students taking notes vacantly & contentedly. I am the only creature in the room writing so quickly—perspiring—hand aching with the violence of the words in me. Others are sleepy, lazy, idiotically content, taking notes on note-cards . . . professors' assignments . . . pointless, harmless . . . decade after decade . . . & here they are, still, in the same ceremony. A boy in a university sweatshirt across from my seat, sprawling, sniffing (no Kleenex), docile, eating a tangerine. The tart sharp smell of it is distracting. The boy is taking notes in green ink, red ink, & blue ink. Must be different subjects, topics. Unshaven, a little coarse but fairly attractive (except for the perpetual sniffing & wiping of his nose

on his fingers). If he glances at me I will glance away. I am nervous, heated, too exhilarated . . . glasses sliding down my nose . . . perspiration must show on my face. Why did I come here? A mistake. Pressed the accelerator down as far as it would go . . . half hoping for . . . concrete pillars, the median divider, side-swiping one of those diesel trucks. . . . But no. No. I am not going to kill myself. That would be your victory, Eleanor.

—In this room of dizzying space I will calculate the future. Our future. Eleanor, it will not be that easy to forget *me*. There are many marriages & not simply the one you aspire to. Wise people know this fact but simple-minded secretaries (“I’m an executive secretary!”—oh my) do not. I foresee the friend of a friend of a friend transmitting secrets . . . across town . . . I foresee your inability to keep a secret & a corresponding intensity in their plots against me . . . deliberate “misunderstandings” in the office . . . “didn’t you get the memo about the luncheon/conference” etc., etc. Insult to my intelligence, such trashy tricks. They have happened before. I have resigned jobs before. **BUT I WILL NOT CONTINUE TO DO SO.** That would be your victory.

—I did not judge you ahead of time. I was fair, absolutely fair. Now the *Forbidden* slips easily into my consciousness, teasing & prickling my skull. Shall I send my Invisible Army over to maul & rape you as in your girlhood fantasies you desired (Real Men! Soldiers! Masculine 100%) . . . or should I keep my distance in amused pity, knowing myself superior to you in every way . . . refusing to be hurt by you & your kind . . . or should I mail you certain drawings of Eleanor which I attempted in all good faith but which reveal you in your twisted hideous deformity, hidden from the outside world. Or. If. And. (Could buy a cheap wig with curls & idiot bangs & a paisley sack-dress & witches’ shoes with brass buckles. Could clump over to your place & bang on the door & give you a good look at yourself. Could surprise you at work in the same costume . . . face made up to resemble yours including the grotesque eye paint & the rosebud mouth . . . & shame you before the entire office. Do you see yourself? Bitch!)

—The boy in the sweatshirt has left, I was writing so furiously I hardly noticed. The odor of citrus fruit remains. I am alone, and so free! Exhilarated now. . . . My mouth is watering.