

PERSONAL ENTRIES

IT IS TWENTY-TWO BELOW OUTSIDE and across the lake at the public beach, about a half-mile away, I see a lone girl in a bright red bikini standing there frozen stiff. I imagine how lovely she is, but her being there does not make a whole lot of sense to me and even less to Llilly, who thinks I am entering another of my periods of cerebral zero anyway. So I get out my eighty-power telescope, which is really a lunar scope and doesn't give very good resolution at distances under two hundred and fifty thousand miles. I can see, however, that it is either a frozen girl in a red bikini or a post with a few scraps of red material on it; I prefer to think it is a frozen girl. Then a dog trots up and does a number on it and Llilly says, You see?

The doctor said I should keep a journal. Purgative therapy, he said. Help you keep track of what you remember and what you don't, he said. Emerson kept a journal, you know, he said. Emerson is the local Cadillac dealer, I said; would he keep a journal? Keep your head in the game, he said—the doctor, I mean. Put down whatever comes to mind—an experience, a thought, a wish, a fulmination, a recollection, an observation. The above about the frozen girl in the red bikini is my first. I may not do this every day and I hate putting down dates because they slip away from me, so I think I will not even keep track. What I'll do is just make a paragraph whenever I feel like it and each paragraph will be a day—whatever day it is—and may not follow one from the other, world without end. Amen. I am not a religious man, as I remember. But maybe I am and just don't remember. Or maybe I put that amen in there just to make me think so.

My father had an affair with the organist at St. Paul's. My mother had an affair with the doctor who brought me into the world. My wife had an affair with her father's attorney. I had an affair with my wife's cousin. These vagaries of conduct affect the affluent. Not that I am affluent, but some of us are. I think this is Thursday, but it doesn't really trouble me.

It may be that Llilly has abandoned me. It has something to do with my making fun of her for putting all those l's in her name. It is not natural, I said. She says, I can put all the l's in my name I want to and four does not seem too many because the first doesn't really count because it is a capital and capitals don't count. I say, Who says capitals don't count? She snorts. She says, If Lloyd can begin his name with two l's, why can't I? Who the hell is Lloyd? I ask. She snorts again. So her nightgown hangs there on the

back of the bathroom door, where she put it, and it looks as good as new, but empty. My mind is being stolen, cell by cell. I am certain of that.

Llilly is not my wife's cousin. My wife's cousin is Holly Waleskowski. I think the affair was not worth the trouble and Holly agrees, but is friendly enough. Don't ask me how that name got hung on the family tree. I told her once that her name rolls off the tongue like a batch of bricks.

Boredom leads to anxiety and that leads to desperation and that leads to the doctor's office and that leads to frustration because he, on his better days, is a stupid bastard. Llilly purges me of my mental deviations better than all the rest, anyway. Put together. Better than this writing it all down which infuriates me because my pen keeps drying out.

I called Llilly today to suggest that she eliminate two l's in her name and spell it simply Lily. She suggested that I eat corks.

Today is the anniversary of the day it all happened. With my father, you know. That was on a Friday, though. And this isn't, I'm almost sure, because I looked it up a little while ago. So I won't go into all that. What bothers me more is that if there is a trend here, I fail to see it. There is supposed to be a trend. He said there would be. Llilly called today and I told her I couldn't see a trend and she said I wouldn't know a trend if it had spurs on. The reason she called was she thinks she has lost her virtue somewhere and did I see it around the place and if so send it back. I found it under the bed and sent it to her by special messenger. Well, it *looked* like hers. It was pale pink. Maybe my imagination is rampant again.

When I was a small child I was afraid of nearly everything, but I got along pretty well with frogs. I just thought of that and I guess it must be significant. Everything has significance tucked away somewhere in its guts.

My doctor says that traumata such as mine are not usually causative but often exacerbate pre-existing proclivities. When I get well I hope I remember to exacerbate that sonofabitch.

The affair my wife had with her father's attorney was trifling, she said, in her own precise way. She has no influence on the rising and setting of the sun—I understand that now. Someone does, though.

Llilly called to say that the messenger arrived with my dispatch but it was not hers so she gave it to him and he seemed pleased and looked as if he could use it but she is still without hers. That's the way it goes, I said. I also told her I think of her now always as Lily, with only two l's, and she told me to blow it out my navel.

It wasn't so much that my father was enamored of the organist at St. Paul's, I think, as it was his abiding belief in the charm of organs in general. She took it all in good temper, and a few hundred shares of AT&T as well.

I skipped a few days there. They can't run my life. Anyway, I have nothing much to put down except this: There are two beautiful sisters. Both married well. One is rich and has no children. The other has no children and is wealthy. Which of them is better off? You're wrong.

My wife's name is Agatha. Can you beat that? Who would name a kid Agatha? I keep wondering if there is a plan. I often suspect there is, and I fear someone will sneak in here and read this and fall down laughing. That would make me angry and I must take it up with Llilly.

I have not seen Agatha in over a year. She took off shortly after I hit that tree, but I was out of danger by that time. There is some comfort in knowing that she has not seen me, either, in over a year.

When things come together all at once they clog my mind, and I begin to smell freshly cut grass and see the dappling shadows of the sun through the ailanthus trees along the creek where I nearly drowned when I was very young. And then there is the fragrance of a woman's cheek and I don't think I have ever met the woman who owns that cheek. This is all very normal for someone in your condition, he said. I suspect he wears lace-trimmed shorts. I'm talking about my doctor here.

Llilly says over the phone, Of *course* there's a plan, dummy. And would I please return her nightgown. Despair. Despair.

My mother told me once that when I was born I weighed eleven pounds and had a full head of hair and three teeth and an erection and it was a very difficult delivery. I think she was just making small talk.

I know a lot of people who are considered smart and most of them don't have sense enough to pour piss out of a boot and my doctor is one of them. I don't know why I think this, but I sit here worrying about myself and quivering like a pile of jello and I wish someone would explain it to me. Clinically or whatever it takes. Draw pictures?

I bought twelve balloons and a package of over-the-counter sleeping tablets at Walgreen's today, and the high point of the trip was the look on the cashier's face. I went in a taxi and told the driver to wait and to take me back where I came from, and for a minute there I was afraid he would, you know, back there.

Lilly called today to say she had received the nightgown and would I please in the future refrain from marking packages with descriptions such as CONTENTS: DIAPHANOUS NIGHTIE, since it causes talk among the delivery people, who have up to now held her in high regard.

Agatha did not like touching except once in a long while, and then only after a few drinks. Lilly is a good toucher. Which is better than not.

Agatha writes from Mexico that she is busy exploring the ruins of Tzingtao province. That's Agatha for you. Or else I missed something back there somewhere.

When it rains I sometimes remember the little girl next door and how we got caught in their chicken house during a rainstorm and got lice, but we were friendly and scratched each other a lot. If the doctor thinks this is tangential memory, he is wrong. Her name was Spider Enwright and she was a toucher, too.

Lilly called to say that if I would like to ask her to lunch she would accept. I told her that I am not leaving the house much these days because of the trilobites. She said that was all in my head but she would put on her high boots just in case and come on over with salami sandwiches. I told her to bring her diaphanous nightie and she hung up.

Holly Waleskowski flits in and out of my mind a lot these days. I can't imagine why unless it's because she's schizo and so am I in a way. She has a bright mouth. I remember that. And good knees.

My mother's affair with the doctor who brought me into the world was fairly innocent, I think. I had a reason for wanting to get that in here.

The salami picnic with Lilly was a great success. We drank wine the color of old blood and poked each other in the ribs and laughed. But after she left I was melancholy and played some old 78-rpm Benny Goodman records and even cried some. Which is not often.

Coriander belongs to the parsley family. I have just come into this information and hasten to put it down before I forget it. It will come in handy during a lull in the conversation sometime. This is also Veteran's Day, according to the calendar. I am not a veteran but a lot of people are.

I note the entry about coriander with a certain amount of wonder. Is it possible that my spirit also has died unbeknownst?

Holly Waleskowski called today and said, How's it going? And I said, *Poco a poco*. And she said, No need to get huffy. And I said, That's not huffy. And she said, I know huffy when I hear it. And she also said, It is my

opinion that the general unwell feeling endemic in the land today is due to an erosion of a belief in miracles. No argument there, I said. And she hung up.

When my car hit the patch of ice coming down Stinocher's Hill and killed that tree all I could think of was how many things I had not finished and here I was about to die. And a question I had forgotten to ask Llilly, too, but I have forgotten what it was. Perhaps she knows. I answered the phone today and a lady said, Do I have a wrong number? And I said, I think so—this is 3717. I am 37 but 17 is not at home. She said, *I have to go to the bathroom.* And hung up.

I have never been afraid of the dark until now. Llilly has many tenderesses and understands this and she called just in time and when I told her she said, Oh, fudge!

I went to see the doctor. Llilly went with me because I could not remember where his office is. We took a Yellow Cab even though it is not Llilly's favorite color.

Llilly tells me the doctor said I am fine and progressing well. He didn't tell *me* that. He old *me* the Cubs were having a good season. They haven't had a good season since Gabby Hartnett for god's sake. Doctors are often liars. Llilly has a gorgeous mouth. Agatha's is mooshy. Holly's is okay too but not as much. Besides, the baseball season is over.

There was turkey and candied yams and succotash and pumkin pie. It made me think of the days when I was a kid and it was all right to eat too much and be sick afterward. Anyway I got through that.

I first met Llilly at a carnival and we had our fortunes told by an old lady who was not very clean. She said that I was about to come into a valuable happiness and that Llilly would be a part of it. For five bucks that was okay and satisfied me. Later Llilly was very nice and fairly philosophical about everything and said that people should always do his or her best, as the case may be, to be agreeable. Her best was pretty fine.

When I was a small boy I went skating on Cherry's Pond. They used to cut the ice up and store it in the icehouse nearby and deliver it to our house in the summer because my mother would put a sign in the window with the 100 side up and that meant she wanted a one-hundred-pound block for our enormous refrigerator. Once I fell through the ice where they had cut out the chunks.

I think it is Sunday because of the bells. I ordered a little gold thing for Lilly from a place where the cheapest thing in the book is a personalized gold paperclip for \$89.95 plus \$3.63 postage and handling. She will like it and I will give it to her tonight, if I am able without weeping because I think it is not only Sunday but also Christmas Eve and I may cave in.

Lilly came last night and stayed and held my hand and told me there are worse things than switching on and off involuntarily. She liked her gift, but said, What the hell is it *for*? She also told me that when she was a little girl she thought the priest made all the babies because everyone called him father. I forgot I ordered the paperclip. I meant a pillbox.

When the shakes get bad enough Lilly says I can rent myself out as a blender. Agatha called from Cuernavaca today to say Hello. I said Hello, too, and that was it.

I don't think my mother ever had an affair with the doctor who brought me into the world. An examination or two, maybe. Which is getting fairly personal after all, come to think of it.

It is getting a little too much for me. I feel as if I had been wrapped in blue tissue paper and left out in the rain. My mind is all right, but there are other things.

. . . .

I have been away for a while but now I am back, but I don't remember much about being away except some things. Some things I want to remember and can't. In and out, up and down, sometimes sideways. Lilly called to say, Welcome home. Do you remember? And I said, No. And she said, Good, don't even try because trying too hard may be harmful.

I wish all of this helped me remember what happened when, but I suppose that is too much to ask. My head aches when I think about things. Agatha, and even Lilly. Sometimes even when I don't. This is probably someone's birthday. You know that? Sometimes I remember more than I think. More than I can bear.

I am very good at self-deception but I may be coming around in small ways. Lilly makes it all seem worthwhile and she has not yet abandoned me, although . . .

Once when Lilly and I were walking along the shores of the lake we saw thirteen wild geese swimming along in formation and there were many

gulls wheeling and dipping above and it was very beautiful. Llilly said, Where is the fourteenth? The mate? I could not imagine. I get a sense of wonder out of all this. I *do*.

My marriage to Agatha was one of unclear distinctions but mostly like the difference between *invalid* and *invalid*. Is that clear? My father likes Agatha, but then he likes women in general and always has. The first two or three weeks were all right but then carelessness set in. Always a bad thing but not all her fault.

When I was young I walked the railroad right-of-way out of Quimby Falls. It was a good thing to do and I admired the rock ballast between the ties and the simple beauty of the spikes that held the rails in place and still showed the violent blows which had driven them into the ties. Once in a while I would find a broken boxcar seal and I had a whole bunch of them. My mother threw them all out. Once I found a doll's head. I was astonished and very sad about it.

We had a small summer place in the woods about ten miles from town. The railroad went out that way. I liked that place, but often had the fear that I would suddenly go crosseyed.

I still don't remember what it was like when I was gone back there. I remember what it is like to *be* gone but not what it was like when I *was* gone. Llilly said, Naturally because when you were gone you weren't here. She is a very clear thinker. I wish I could think that well.

I met Llilly unbeknownst to Agatha. Unbeknownst is one of the words which always turns out right for me. My imagination was captured at once. By Llilly, I mean. Parts of me have always been, but never my imagination before Llilly. I probably should tell her that.

Another thing I don't remember is what my car looked like after I hit that tree. I remember hitting the tree but not what my car looked like after.

Llilly should come back to me because I feel it would be the right thing to do.

She is tall and slender and blonde and her eyes are hazel and she smells good and there are many tendernesses about her. I think I will just copy that down for tomorrow's entry, too, so I won't have to think about what to put down tomorrow.

Sometimes I think it would be a simple solution to go bad and drink a lot and do drugs and tear up piano bars. But then I think that Llilly is a

stabilizing influence and would see that I do not do that. I think it possible, I mean.

Agatha seems content to do what she is doing, whatever it is. She writes that she has at last found direction in her life but she does not say which. Probably up.

Lilly brought her nightgown today and hung it on the hook on the back of the bathroom door. It looks comfortable there and gives me a sense of tranquility but not always.

Lilly believes the worst is over but she is always optimistic and the worst of it is in me and not in her and it comes at three in the morning and how can she know? When I try to sleep my eyes keep snapping shut and waking me up.

I am upset. I went to town by myself today to the Plaza where everything is plastic and they want your money most of all. I got lost and had to call Lilly at work but I couldn't remember her number and asked the operator for help and she was very short with me like I was some kind of nut case and I was almost in tears when Lilly found me and I was shaking some too. Lilly said, There there!

What does it mean when you put two and two together and get less than five but more than four? This is a red-letter day for me, but I won't say why. Some things are better not said. Crimenently!

Lilly says, Forget the business of the Plaza. It could happen to anyone, she says. But it happened to me, you see, and she should be able to understand that. No criticism of her at all.

I remember this date, too. From somewhere. And at least Lilly has not abandoned me as I feared she would. Or might.

When I have the feeling that I am getting in over my head I think of what John Ruskin said about landscapes. Look it up. I am not the only dummy in the world.

I have an appointment with the doctor tomorrow. He is acquainted with fear only as a symptom, which makes him relatively ignorant and me relatively wise.

Lilly is going with me today to say, Braceup! Braceup! Which is what she always says. More when I get back unless I don't live through it.

I didn't have the starch when I got back to write more. The doctor told Lilly that I have passed into a normal/dangerous stage and said it is better than critical. I told him all about his relatives and Lilly kept saying, *Shush!*

Lilly says I am beginning to show signs of my old self again. And I said, I had hoped to be my new self. She said, You have to be your old self first and then new and then new-improved. That's the progression, she said. Small victories are best, she said. It was quite an exchange.

This is a significant day because it is the anniversary of our love, Lilly's and mine, the fourteenth. She reminded me. She is a great comfort in many ways. She knows it.

I told Lilly today, Goddam it, I don't have time to put all those l's in your name all the time. And she said, Shoot! I said, I assume that is not meant to be a threat. She said, Of course not, silly, it was only a cute remark and your perspective is faulty. I said, Perspective is always faulty. And she said, You do not have a firm grip on the truth. For some reason that satisfied me. But I guess we did not resolve the matter of the l's.

I remember Paul Revere. Imagine that. When everyone says, I woke up in the middle of the night . . . What *is* the middle of the night? Is it variable? For me it is always three o'clock in the morning, but I suppose it must be halfway between sunset and sunrise but I hate being reasonable about it. Three o'clock in the morning suits me fine.

I told the doctor that sometimes I get these spells and it is sort of like an acid flashback. He said to take a few Tums. I said, You are incredible! and he said, Thanks. If I am going to get well I am going to have to do it on my own. I can see that. With Lilly's help. I know I do not have both oars in the water. That's for starters.

When I got that knock on the head I saw lights. Like the aurora borealis. I told Agatha. She said, How about that? Lilly said, Wow! I liked Lilly's better.

Agatha has unlimited funds from her grandfather. Mine are in a trust. Lilly is comfortable but prefers to work. I don't know how Holly is fixed. Or even that she *needs* fixing, but I think so.

This is my birthday. Lilly remembered. So I asked her if she'd marry me and she said, Of *course* not, dummy. And I said, Why not? And she said, Agatha. Forget Agatha, I said. She said, Don't you wish!

The bump on the head left some dead brain cells around in there. They didn't tell me that. I just know. I was improving until that blowout back there in December or whenever it was. That killed some more and they didn't mention that either. But for some disconnected reason I feel better than I did before. I don't think I slip gears quite as often. The doctor said,

That's impossible. Whatever it was I asked him. Llilly went with me. I remember most of the answers but sometimes not the questions.

I said to Llilly, Before I met you I was alone and it was not very good but now everything is translucent and lovely. And she said, You are crazy in a nice way. And kissed me. I like it when she does that better than not.

I hang by a slender thread and feel as if it's the thirtieth of February. Agatha called from Mazatlan today and said, Down here everything is ruins ruins. And I said, Same here. She said, Are you all right? And I said, Partially. Groovy, she said and hung up.

Llilly has a dimple in an unusual place and it delights me. When I remarked about it she said, That's an appendix scar, dummy. It still delights me. Llilly says simple pleasures are best.

I knew Llilly before, I think. She says yes, anyway. Remember the fortune teller, she says. And I say, Oh, yes, I forgot, but most fortune tellers are all wet. Probably from standing out in the rain, she said.

As I went off the road back there, I thought I was certainly buying the whole nine yards, and my entire life flashed before my eyes. I don't remember all that flashed but most of it was not very pretty. I remember that.

Holly called today to say that she has given up meditation in favor of personal assertiveness. I said, Come on over and we'll do some of that. And she said, Now hold it right there, Buster, we did all that and it was a total piffle. And I said, Hell, Holly, I didn't mean nothin'. And she hung up. There is something about Holly which causes me to break out in a rash of philistinism. I told Llilly about it and she said, If you can say big words like that there's nothing much wrong with your lobes. I said, I'd appreciate your leaving my lobes out of it if you can.

Llilly reads to me a lot and most of it is junk. Like the story about Prometheus who brought fire to earth for the first time. I have the impression that there has always been fire, ever since the big pop or whatever. But I don't know about that for sure. Llilly says I am both logical and intuitive and I think it was splendid of her to say so.

When Llilly is here everything is quiet and faithful and gentle and today she said, Well, hell! Why don't I just bring my things over and sort of settle in? And I said, What if I blow out again? And she said, All the more reason and anyway you probably won't besides which everyone goes shaboom once in a while because it is a very common human experience. She never

punctuates what she says and sometimes I have a little trouble sorting it all out. But after she said that and I got it translated in my mind I felt a charming warmth inside.

I called Agatha in Mazatlan today and Llilly helped me and I told her about Llilly who was on the extension but didn't say anything and Agatha said, Absolutely divine! You want a divorce while I'm down here? And I said, I don't give a shit one way or the other and hung up on her. Llilly said, That's telling her, Bosco! Bosco is not my name. Llilly knows. She tells me but I forget. It is a thing I don't want to remember, I think, like how close I came to dying.

I said to Llilly today, I love you. And she said, I know. And then I said, You never say that to me. And she said, I say it in a thousand ways every day. And I said, I know.

Now when I go to the Plaza Llilly goes with me and I am okay. Her arms are like silk and as strong as steel. She calls me dummy and I know what she means. I will concentrate on her tenderness and on nothing else and I will give up this journal crap. I don't want to think about anything else but Llilly. I will concentrate on her tenderness and on nothing else. Even when my head hurts to beat all I will remember her tenderness. For all of me she can have as many l's in her name as she likes. Say eleven, as long as they are distributed evenly.