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3:28 PM

Assault on Reason

It is easy to see the beginnings of things, and harder to see the ends. I can remember now, with a clarity that makes the nerves in the back of my neck constrict, when this quarter-life crisis began for me, but I cannot lay my finger upon the moment it ended, can never cut through the ambiguities and second starts and broken resolves to the exact place on the page where the heroine is no longer as optimistic as they once was.

Of course it might have been some other circumstance, and had circumstances been different and the time been different and had I been different, might have been somewhere else. But because I am talking about myself, I am talking here about life.

In retrospect it seems to me that those days before I knew the names of all the bridges were happier than the ones that came later. Part of what I want to tell you is what it is like to be young with the deceptive ease of a film dissolve, for that is how these years appear to me now, in a long sequence of sentimental dissolves and old-fashioned trick shots. I enter a revolving door at twenty and come out a good deal older, and on a different sphere. But most particularly I want to explain to you, and in the process perhaps to myself, why I no longer live the teenage idealism.

I remember once, one cold bright December evening, I laughed with him, and the first show had just begun to fall and the big Christmas trees glittered yellow and white as far as I could see up and I had a new dress and it would be a long while before I would come to understand the particular moral of the story.

It would be a long while because, quite simply, I was in love. I do not mean love in any colloquial way, I mean that I was in love, the way you love the first person who ever touches you and you never love anyone quite that way again. I remember walking across the street one twilight and they were all alike for a while. I was late to meet someone but I stopped and bought a peach and stood on the corner eating it and knew that I had come out out and reached the mirage. I could taste the peach and feel the soft air blowing from a subway grating on my legs and I could smell lilac and garbage and expensive perfume and I knew that it would cost something sooner or later because I did not belong there, did not come from there but when you are twenty, you figure that later you will have a high emotional balance, and be able to pay whatever it costs. I still believed in possibilities then, still had the sense, so peculiar, that something extraordinary would happen any minute, any day, any month. I am making only 14,000/month and I was advised without the slightest trace of irony, so little money that some weeks I had to charge food at gourmet shop in order to eat, a fact which went unmentioned in the letters I wrote before. I never told my mother that I needed money because then he would have sent it, and I would never know if I could do it by myself. At that time making a living seemed a game to me, with arbitrary but quite inflexible rules. I never felt poor; I had the feeling that if I needed money I could always get it. I could write a syndicated column for teenagers under someone else's name or I could smuggle gold into India or I could become a five-thousand slave, and none of them would matter.

Nothing was irrevocable; everything was within reach. Just around every corner lay something curious and interesting, something I had never before seen or done or known about. I could go to a party and meet someone who called himself Mr. Emotional Appeal and ran The Emotional Appeal Institute. I could make

promises to myself and to other people and there would be all the time in the world to keep them. I could stay up all night and make mistakes, and none of them would count.

You see I am in a curious position: it never occurred to me that I am living a real life. In my imagination I am always there for just another few months, just until Christmas or Easter or the first warm day in May. Someone who lives with a different schedule in the drawer lives on a slightly different calendar. Christmas, for example, is a difficult season. Other people could take it in stride, going to Stowe or going abroad or going for the day to their mothers places; those of us who believed that we lived somewhere else would spend it making and canceling reservations and comforting one another, those of us who were left, with oranges and mementos and smoked-oyster stuffings of childhood, gathering close, colonials in a far country.

Which is precisely what I was. I was discovering that not all of the promises would be kept, that some things are in fact irrevocable and that it had counted after all, every evasion and ever procrastination, every word, all of it.

That is what it was all about, wasn't it? Promises? When it comes back to me it comes in hallucinatory flashes, so clinically detailed that I sometimes wish that memory would effect the distortion with which it is commonly credited.

It is relatively hard to fight at six-thirty or seven in the morning, without any sleep, which was perhaps one reason why I stay up all night, and it seems to me a pleasant time of day. I could sleep for a few hours and then go to work. I like going to work, like the soothing and satisfactory rhythm, like the orderly progression of four-color closings and two-color closings and black-and-white closings, no abstraction but something which looked effortlessly glossy and could be picked up weighed in the hand. I like working late on the nights, sitting and taking irate calls. That pleases me obscurely -- all the sweet promises of money and summer.

Some years passed, but I still did not lose that sense of wonder. I began to cherish the loneliness of it, the sense that at any given time no one need know where I was or what I was doing. You will have perceived by now that I was not one to profit by the experience of others, that it was a very long time indeed before I stopped believing in new faces and began to understand the lesson in that story, which was that it is distinctly possible to stay too long.

I could not tell you when I began to understand that. All I know is that it was very bad. Everything that was said to me I seemed to have heard before, and I could no longer listen. I could no longer sit in little bars and listen to someone complaining of someone's inability. I no longer had any interest in hearing about salary and security of tenure, about plays which were having second-act trouble, or about people I would like very much if only I would come out and meet them. I had already met them, always.

I hurt the people I cared about, and insulted those I did not. I cut myself off from the one person who was closer to me than any other. I cried until I was not even aware when I was crying and when I was not, I cried in elevators and in taxis and in laundry. I had never before understood what despair meant, and I am not sure that I understand now. Of course I could not work. I could not even get dinner with any degree of certainty, people I knew think this a curious aberration, and in fact tell us so. There is no possible, no adequate answer to that, and so we give certain stock answers, the answers everyone gives. I talk about

how difficult it would be for me to afford to live in right now, about how much space I need. All I mean is that I am still young, and that at some point the golden rhythm was broken, and I am not that young anymore.

Security: Public

Location: Work

Mood: Apathetic

Music: