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Yet Once More

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Abstract
Wendel phones to ask if I want to have a drink and meet his girl friend from the West. I am just about to continue reading The Pursuit of the Millennium, but Wendel hasn’t phoned me to have a drink for five years. For eighteen months there has been a slight demilitarization, a slow process, with cautious surveillance. So of course I will go and have a drink because in these bad times it is good to hold on to the sustaining things again. It is not that I think we have waited so many millennia for the millennium that a few hours reading will not make any difference. Because there have been signs before does not mean that this time the signs don’t herald the last days. It is because the signs are so persuasive of the last days that I choose friendship before the book. ‘There is traditional knowledge, which is attained by reading or by the instruction of others, and not practical but leads to an idle life; and this is not good.’ I roll a smoke and feel better and roll another one for the road and then I am ready for a drink. Also for the girl from the west.

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Wendel phones to ask if I want to have a drink and meet his girl friend from the West. I am just about to continue reading *The Pursuit of the Millennium*, but Wendel hasn't phoned me to have a drink for five years. For eighteen months there has been a slight demilitarization, a slow process, with cautious surveillance. So of course I will go and have a drink because in these bad times it is good to hold on to the sustaining things again. It is not that I think we have waited so many millennia for the millennium that a few hours reading will not make any difference. Because there have been signs before does not mean that this time the signs don't herald the last days. It is because the signs are so persuasive of the last days that I choose friendship before the book. 'There is traditional knowledge, which is attained by reading or by the instruction of others, and not practical but leads to an idle life; and this is not good.' I roll a smoke and feel better and roll another one for the road and then I am ready for a drink. Also for the girl from the west.

A huge dark moth flies down the path to his house. It is a narrow way between wooden fences, leading behind the street front blocks to a quiet place, and the moth disappears with its slow hypnotic wingbeat beneath the great something or other tree. We used to climb up it when the parties required climbing up from. Sometimes we would invite people up. Sometimes we would refuse to come down.

Wendel is in his lair with a huge dog and a fridgeful of beer and the girl from the west. They have wet hair. That means a shower after fucking. You can't swim in the water round here because of the pollution. Though it is probably no worse than breathing in the air. The flying fish probably figure you can't fly in the air round here because of the pollution, if there are flying fish round here. We certainly never see them.

I sit down and try not to ripple the atmosphere too much. It is sexual. I guess it's all right fucking in the shower if you're not worried about the fluoride and chlorine in the water. There is a choice of beers. The girl
from the west is barely drinking. Wendel drugged her with a new anti histamine because she was keeping him awake in the night with her asthmatic reaction to the atmosphere. It put her to sleep and twelve hours later she is still drugged. Wendel couldn't get back to sleep. 'Maybe you should have taken the anti histamine,' I tell him. After a few beers he mixes martinis and we get a blast from them. These are strong measures.

Wendel says 'Phone your sister' but she's left it too late and no one answers. 'Phone her at that pub,' says Wendel, but in the end she doesn't. It could be her sister doesn't drink regularly at that pub, or she wanted to leave it too late. Or both. So we go to the jazz cellar without her sister. We drop back in home so I can roll a couple of smokes for the road and one for an emergency, any emergency. Wendel brings a beer along with him. The girl from the west doesn't smoke. Maybe she is keeping her wits about her. After the anti histamine. Once it used to be belly dancers, now it is jazz cellars, soon it will be opera.

We park several blocks in the wrong direction because of the martinis and the smoke and because Wendel hasn't been allowed to drink for six months and because I haven't been in this part of the city much for some time. Or any part of the city. The girl from the west is being given the history of each block as we pass it. Some of the stories are about the 1890s and some are about the 1920s and some are about the 1960s and they all interweave into an inextricable inexplicable historic present. There is a continuity and we follow its threads through the dark tunnels. They take us to strange places and sometimes it seems like they break and leave us stranded. But if you trust in them they will take you where you want to be. They are the filaments from your own gut reaching out before you that you follow. Everywhere is redolent with stories, they leap from windows and beckon from gratings. These are the bars, those the alleys. Stories hang around us making the air thick to move through. I feel we are choking her with our stories, already short of breath she will gasp and sink beneath them. They blot out her air, they form a network between the high buildings and the clear air blows above, beyond her reach. Stories settle on us like pigeons at a national memorial. She tries to shake them away unobtrusively, but they come back and peck. They follow us down to the jazz cellar, stuck to our clothing like burrs. We are all apprehensive.

One untold story to explain the apprehension, the true story of the girl at the bar is reading Jack Kerouac:

The girl behind the bar is reading. There are so many books she could be reading, and she is reading Kerouac. I talk to her about them all, all
the possible books. The conversation is interrupted while she pours beers. But generally she returns to continue it. She writes. She needs advice on where to publish her writing. I would like to ask her what time she gets off work.

Wendel comes into the pub. He says, 'We could start a magazine just to publish you. That would be its raison d'être. We could even name it after you.'

She does not fall for that; she retains the mystery of her name. But she is impressed by the splendid gesture Wendel has announced. A whole magazine. International distribution. Hand made paper. Contributions from Rio, Acapulco, Manila, Carlton, Paris, Warsaw, Bolinas, Newcastle upon Tyne, the East Village, Venic, Venice Ca., London, Copenhagen, Balmain. Offsetting her own work.

'Do you start magazines?' she asks Wendel.

I would laugh, I could say, 'Sometimes he finishes them,' but I do not want to draw attention to his presence. I buy us all dri drinks. She drinks tonic water.

Wendel takes his drink to a table by the window. If I do not join him it will be obvious I am trying to pick up the girl behind the bar. I am, and she knows I am, but I would not like her to know it so obviously. If I join him it will look as if I am not interested in her, which will mean somebody else will come in with charm and publishers' contracts and pick her up; also, I would rather continue to talk to her than to Wendel. But I feel that to stay and talk to her at the bar is no longer possible with Wendel's distance underlining my intention.

We drink beside the window and sometimes the girl comes over and wipes our table, why not our brows, and empties our ashtray.

Wendel's woman arrives. I did not know this was to be one of those evenings. We all smile at each other and I get up to buy us all drinks. Wendel tells his woman that I fancy the barmaid. Wendel's woman puts her down. 'We have been discussing literature,' I say, 'she writes.' 'One of those,' says Wendel's woman. I think perhaps Wendel and his woman will go off for dinner and I can return to the girl behind the bar and ask her what time she gets off.

Wendel announces he has a dinner engagement, that he must leave us. He is dining with his magazine lady.

There is a lot of ill feeling and tension over the drinks.

'Perhaps you two would like to have dinner together in town,' he says, generously offering us each other.

He leaves and we decide to have dinner in town. Now the girl behind the bar will think this is my woman and I am unavailable, or if available
double timing and untrustworthy. While Wendel will be the literary knight in shining armour, probably sneaking back later.

We go to a restaurant and I have to return to the pub where I have left my wallet. The girl has kept it for me. 'What about something for the finder?' says an older woman who is now working with her. 'Let me take you out to dinner,' I say. 'That's not allowed,' says the older woman in disgusted tones. 'I don't want anything,' the girl says. The chaperone inhibits me from talking to her, I wave goodbye because I cannot think what else to do.

I return to Wendel's woman, who is bitter about the magazine lady. I am bitter too but am not sure whether to reveal the extent of my bitterness. I would rather go back to the pub and pick up the girl; I would rather screw the magazine lady, but it looks like I am going to have to screw Wendel's woman to make up for her bitterness. But I don't of course. This is already a familiar situation. We lie on the bed and she says, 'I expect to hear him come breaking through the door any minute.' I don't. Maybe some time in a few days' time. But not right this minute. He doesn't need to, his presence is already with us. We give up.

There are other stories that could be told here too but the general point is clear enough without them.

After we are the last to leave the jazz club we walk down the many blocks to the car.

'You two go ahead while I get my mail,' he says, 'and then pick me up on the way back.'

'We can wait,' I say. I have been here before. And not only to the mail.

'No,' he says, waving us on.

'I have been here before,' I say to the girl from the west. Even the tv programme guides indicate a repeat. (Rpt). We walk down to the car with our arms round each other. It is the least we can do. Then we drive back to the general post office and pick him up.

It is good that there are still some things unresolved. That will give us the energy to move forward through these times of the emotional plague.