

## THE LAST NIGHT

; —*And I, forsooth, in love!*

(*Berowne, Love's Labours Lost, the  
Bard*)

**O**ne never believes the last night, even as it's happening...

I'd met her through a friend—a man who was the cook at the resort where I was working as well. Both he and I were featured readers at a poetry workshop that first night; in those days our resort's motto was



*time out*—for not only special writing weekends and artist exhibitions but too massages, nude sunbathing and other sensual feasts for body and mind.

Afterwards I'd wandered, and she'd found me, on a moonlit "Grasshopper Bridge." The day's faineant heat hung still. I was leaned against the newly oiled redwood rail, watching the stream's lambent murmur below.

For the way the new footbridge pierced midway into the other bank —the criss-crossing span some twenty feet above the stream bed, looking like a railroad trestle, its scale far more vast than the rope and plank crossing it'd replaced—the staff had taken to calling it *The Bridge Too Far...*



She'd found that bit of info funny. I was fairly sure that my friend had kept her apprised of the resort politics; the owner had gone from a Sixties's *peace & love* Esalan-Big-Sur-style guru to a born-again capitalist—just as clichéd with his grandiose new schemes for the place. It was billed as a “modern mega-European spa.” It was fueled by the overnight success of his “addiction therapy” once-a-month program—catering to well-to-do, stressed-out casualties of Silicon Valley. What it would mean was that our sleepy, turn-of-the-century hotel, with its thick, cool stone and stucco walls, sweeping verandas, kerosene lanterns and wood-burning stoves for the bone-drenching winter night downpours, would be razed and replaced.

Sycophantic former clients of the good doctor, no lack of Iagoian iniquity in the *sportive devising* of each, now surrounded him as constant coterie; the resort's history of artists-in-residence, bohemians, naturalists all to be swept into some sanitized future with such a shaky financial basis as to cast the entire matter, in the minds of those who lived and worked there, as ambition destined to be *gain which darkens*.

So that night, curiosity unwisely peeking forth from my stoic's countenance, I asked her what her connection with the good doctor was. Her face assumed that demure, smooth-cheeked visage I would come to find impenetrable. Then a smile, the smoothness of her lips parting over the teeth 's even beauty. *Quite frankly you're the one who worries me... I'm told you're the dangerous kind...*

I shrugged, said *I'm sure I don't know what you mean.*

Another smile, her eyes—crystalline, deeply azure—twinkling as she panned her gaze unto the stream...

**T**ruth be known, I did know what she meant. I'd been part of the resort's outdoor staff for two years now. Three days on, four days off. On weekends I was the relief shift—the resort's on call emergency man. Our grounds were part of an old Ohlone Native American powerspot on the Central Valley side of the Mendocino Coastal foothills. We advertised in all the *New Age* journals circulating the San Francisco Bay Area as a nice, gentle place to unwind. Big redwood decks by the tubs for "clothing optional" sunbathing, miles of surrounding open space for hiking ...



*Breathe!* as the owner's constant mantra went.

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A very unique place, but, too, very isolating. So at least once a month most of the staff would see fit to visit such former stomping grounds as Berkeley—the favorite target for sarcasm among the addicted *yup's*, who'd sneer, *Oh, I see— still living in Berkeley...*

On summery weekends, in some counterpointed yet correlative



way, those seeking us out as a nice, gentle place to unwind would be northbound, on the twisty two-lane canyon road that was our sole access. Passing, without knowing, the southbound staff—seeking a little *Peet's* coffee in Berkeley while perusing the weeklies offering way

too many choices of things to do...

Winter, of course, was another story. Not a single storm passed in which I wouldn't have to get the big three-quarter-ton four wheel drive truck and, at some mudslid point of our seven mile dirt access road, pull some guest out of the ditch. Poor guy and his wife or girlfriend he was seeking to impress would show up at our lobby—soaked, muddy, shivering to the point of speechlessness after trekking miles in a darkly whipping storm—and nod with sheer gratitude when I'd ask, *So, looks like you got stuck*. Made me more popular than our guru of an owner himself...

**T**hat it was my other duties piquing perhaps too much interest in me has become all too plain to me since my exodus. On the weekends, when our three, twenty-foot long concrete tubs filled with naked bodies glistening with the slick, mineral water, checking tub temperatures three times a day fell to me. Gravity flowed the 140 degree water from the bubbling source, down a pipeline into a holding tank and then through the tubs in sequence, the water cooling along the way. A flow-valve from the holding tank regulated the rate at which the water would circulate through each tub in turn before draining into the creek. Too fast a flow and those sunburned would really feel scorched; too slow and the lukewarm waters would never loosen those bunched and corded muscles.

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While waiting for the thermometer to register in each tub, one could not help but notice its occupants. As this was the early 1980's, before those obnoxious sexually-transmitted diseases reared ugly heads, we were host to a number of single women who, while



professionally secure, seemed, nonetheless, unable to find a decent guy for companionship.



At least that line was what I was told. When the coolness of the evening arrived in the summer—the fine dust of the road, browned hills all around still shimmering heat—off in the distance the coyotes would wail. While doing the evening temp check, I loved to walk onto the rear deck and await them. Sometimes all that stirred were the tall stalks of bamboo, from the bank below, beneath an immense ink-blotted sky; at other times a touch gentle as a breeze would manifest to my side and a towel-wrapped woman still exultant from her bath would ask *why do the coyotes cry so?*...

Still, that night with my curious new woman, I told her that I was afraid she'd heard wrong. The last six months or so I'd been holing up like a hermit on my days off—I had a cozy room off the main veranda, and I'd built a custom desk out of the antique bits and pieces remaining on the resort from years before. My little battery-powered LCD typewriter hummed away one sweetly silent hour after another. A kerosene lamp flickering in the hints of breeze, the ever-present sound of crickets outside, I was finally writing the way I'd envisioned—as if the hills cradling our resort had granted me infinite support as well...

Not that night, but the summer she and I spent together. Her schedule as an RN at a local hospital was hectic, but we escaped whenever we could. Hiking among huge sun-heated boulders, with her two sons who'd visit spangling like salmon in the Sierra stream; climbing fire lookout towers...Camping where our only neighbors were bears.



At our resort, what had once been Paradise had now become overrun with huge grasshoppers. Among ourselves we joked (in protective whispers, of course) that it was a Heavenly sent *plague of locusts* due to the good

*doctor's* born-again greed. But the fact remained that these whirling clouds of winged furies were, day after day, descending, covering everything—countless tiny mandibles chewing up the entire grounds...



The good doctor flipped out. From a “no chemicals” hip and cool policy we’d had suddenly he was ready to call in an army of exterminators—big trucks to roll over everything with huge, rear-mounted spraying nozzles...

A musician Resident Artist made a wooden, lacquered plaque of a three foot grasshopper, with Japanese *B-movie* multifaceted, eerie looking eyes, and we rechristened our new trestle as *Grasshopper Bridge*. When one of the good doctor’s entourage, now present with his obnoxious clients two weeks a month, made discovery of the new plaque the good doctor was infuriated. During a marathon staff meeting he demanded to know who was behind this bit of treachery. We all expressed wide-eyed innocence. Afterwards the tensions at our once peaceful little sanctuary remained at a low boil...

All these newly unfortunate matters were forgotten when I was with her. Backpacking brought a certain luminescence to her eyes. She wasn’t one for a lot of conversation—you’re the word person, she’d say, that faint, inaccessible amusement dawning, for

just a brief gleaming moment, on her cheeks.

As I learned to read her gestures—more reliable, I found, than our collection of trail maps we'd transverse—she managed to take apart, chink by unnoticeable chink, my big *tough guy* armor. Bits and pieces that—after I'd bailed out of the academic hothouse of graduate school—I'd tossed together along the way...

My escape had almost seemed logical. One day, mired in the existential angst perquisite to grad students, I'd seen a flyer on my writing mentor's bulletin board for the Naropa Institute's *Twenty-Five Years of On the Road* celebration of Jack Kerouac and the Beat Generation. Though my mentor had managed to break me of my journalism "bad habit"—*do you want to write puffery or do you really want to write?*—this one looked too good to pass up. I wangled a press pass from one of my former editors and headed to Boulder, Colorado. Afterwards, I never made it back to the East Coast—instead I traveled on, through the Southwest and into Mexico before making my return to the Bay Area.

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Times were tough, the *big chill* of the early '80's had hit hard; the only journalists left from my old crowd were hack sportswriters. A friend told me about the resort's Artist-in-Residence program; when I completed that three-month residency another artist—the plaque maker—and I managed to upgrade into a half-time staff position each. Like the Randy Newman song we loved to sing, *My life is good...*

And then one day, as if *woe had been forerun with woe*, all came to change. A wan look keening her brow, she announced that *no longer would she nurse the sick, the dying, the monstrously ungrateful*. She'd found she no longer had any time for her painting—so she

was moving to Homer, Alaska, where she'd been accepted into an artist's colony.

Neither of us cried our last night—though if I'd finally showed some real emotion, it would have been too late. Her house let to friends, we were camped in her back yard. She gave herself to our lovemaking with such frenzy that afterwards the night air stilled into pure *suchness*...

Summer nights as that one sometimes I fall silent. In the quietude I see her walking a comely-curving beach amid moonbeams of gently breaking sea foam...

*I see her happy...*