Beautiful Losers

Leonard Cohen

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LEONARD COHEN

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS



blue door

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Somebody said lift that bale.

RAY CHARLES singing 'Ol' Man River'

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BOOK I

The History of Them All

1

Catherine Tekakwitha, who are you? Are you (1656–1680)? Is that enough? Are you the Iroquois Virgin? Are you the Lily of the Shores of the Mohawk River? Can I love you in my own way? I am an old scholar, better-looking now than when I was young. That's what sitting on your ass does to your face. I've come after you, Catherine Tekakwitha. I want to know what goes on under that rosy blanket. Do I have any right? I fell in love with a religious picture of you. You were standing among birch trees, my favorite trees. God knows how far up your moccasins were laced. There was a river behind you, no doubt the Mohawk River. Two birds in the left foreground would be delighted if you tickled their white throats or even if you used them as an example of something or other in a parable. Do I have any right to come after you with my dusty mind full of the junk of maybe five thousand books? I hardly even get out to the country very often. Could you teach me about leaves? Do you know anything about narcotic mushrooms? Lady Marilyn just died a few years ago. May I say that some old scholar four hundred years from now, maybe of my own blood, will come after her in the way I come after you? But

right now you must know more about heaven. Does it look like one of these little plastic altars that glow in the dark? I swear I won't mind if it does. Are the stars tiny, after all? Can an old scholar find love at last and stop having to pull himself off every night so he can get to sleep? I don't even hate books any more. I've forgotten most of what I've read and, frankly, it never seemed very important to me or to the world. My friend F. used to say in his hopped-up fashion: We've got to learn to stop bravely at the surface. We've got to learn to love appearances. F. died in a padded cell, his brain rotted from too much dirty sex. His face turned black, this I saw with my own eyes, and they say there wasn't much left of his prick. A nurse told me it looked like the inside of a worm. Salut F., old and loud friend! I wonder if your memory will persist. And you, Catherine Tekakwitha, if you must know, I am so human as to suffer from constipation, the rewards of a sedentary life. Is it any wonder I have sent my heart out into the birch trees? Is it any wonder that an old scholar who never made much money wants to climb into your Technicolor postcard?

2

I am a well-known folklorist, an authority on the A——s, a tribe I have no intention of disgracing by my interest. There are, perhaps, ten full-blooded A——s left, four of them teen-age girls. I will add that F. took full advantage of my anthropological status to fuck

all four of them. Old friend, you paid your dues. The A——s seem to have made their appearance in the fifteenth century, or rather, a sizable remnant of the tribe. Their brief history is characterized by incessant defeat. The very name of the tribe, A——, is the word for corpse in the language of all the neighboring tribes. There is no record that this unfortunate people ever won a single battle, while the songs and legends of its enemies are virtually nothing but a sustained howl of triumph. My interest in this pack of failures betrays my character. Borrowing money from me, F. often said: Thanks, you old A——! Catherine Tekakwitha, do you listen?

3

Catherine Tekakwitha, I have come to rescue you from the Jesuits. Yes, an old scholar dares to think big. I don't know what they are saying about you these days because my Latin is almost defunct. 'Que le succès couronne nos espérances, et nous verrons sur les autels, auprès des Martyrs canadiens, une Vierge iroquoise – près des roses du martyre le his de la virginité.' A note by one Ed. L., S.J., written in August 1926. But what does it matter? I don't want to carry my old belligerent life on my journey up the Mohawk River. Pace, Company of Jesus! F. said: A strong man cannot but love the Church. Catherine Tekakwitha, what care we if they cast you in plaster? I am at present studying the plans of a birch-

bark canoe. Your brethren have forgotten how to build them. And what if there is a plastic reproduction of your little body on the dashboard of every Montréal taxi? It can't be a bad thing. Love cannot be hoarded. Is there a part of Jesus in every stamped-out crucifix? I think there is. Desire changes the world! What makes the mountainside of maple turn red? Peace, you manufacturers of religious trinkets! You handle sacred material! Catherine Tekakwitha, do you see how I get carried away? How I want the world to be mystical and good? Are the stars tiny, after all? Who will put us to sleep? Should I save my fingernails? Is matter holy? I want the barber to bury my hair. Catherine Tekakwitha, are you at work on me already?

4

Marie de l'Incarnation, Marguerite Bourgeoys, Marie-Marguerite d'Youville, maybe you could arouse me if I could move out of myself. I want to get as much as I can. F. said that he'd never once heard of a female saint he wouldn't like to have screwed. What did he mean? F., don't tell me that at last you are becoming profound. F. once said: At sixteen I stopped fucking faces. I had occasioned the remark by expressing disgust at his latest conquest, a young hunchback he had met while touring an orphanage. F. spoke to me that day as if I were truly one of the underprivileged; or perhaps he was not

speaking to me at all when he muttered: Who am I to refuse the universe?

5

The French gave the Iroquois their name. Naming food is one thing, naming a people is another, not that the people in question seem to care today. If they never cared, so much the worse for me: I'm far too willing to shoulder the alleged humiliations of harmless peoples, as evidenced by my life work with the A——s. Why do I feel so lousy when I wake up every morning? Wondering if I'm going to be able to shit or not. Is my body going to work? Will my bowels churn? Has the old machine turned the food brown? Is it surprising that I've tunneled through libraries after news about victims? Fictional victims! All the victims we ourselves do not murder or imprison are fictional victims. I live in a small apartment building. The bottom of the elevator shaft is accessible through the sub-basement. While I sat downtown preparing a paper on lemmings she crawled into the elevator shaft and sat there with her arms around her drawn-up knees (or so the police determined from the mess). I came home every night at twenty to eleven, regular as Kant. She was going to teach me a lesson, my old wife. You and your fictional victims, she used to say. Her life had become gray by imperceptible degrees, for I swear, that very night,

probably at the exact moment when she was squeezing into the shaft, I looked up from the lemming research and closed my eyes, remembering her as young and bright, the sun dancing in her hair as she sucked me off in a canoe on Lake Orford. We were the only ones who lived in the sub-basement, we were the only ones who commanded the little elevator into those depths. But she taught no one a lesson, not the kind of lesson she meant. A delivery boy from the Bar-B-Q did the dirty work by misreading the numbers on a warm brown paper bag. Edith! F. spent the night with me. He confessed at 4 a.m. that he'd slept with Edith five or six times in the twenty years he'd known her. Irony! We ordered chicken from the same place and we talked about my poor squashed wife, our fingers greasy, barbecue-sauce drops on the linoleum. Five or six times, a mere friendship. Could I stand on some holy mountain of experience, a long way off, and sweetly nod my Chinese head over their little love? What harm had been done to the stars? You lousy fucker, I said, how many times, five *or* six? Ah, F. smiled, grief makes us precise! So let it be known that the Iroquois, the brethren of Catherine Tekakwitha, were given the name Iroquois by the French. They called themselves Hodenosaunee, which means People of the Long House. They had developed a new dimension to conversation. They ended every speech with the word *hiro*, which means: like I said. Thus each man took full responsibility for intruding into the inarticulate murmur of the spheres. To *hiro* they added the word *koué*, a cry of joy or distress, according to whether it was sung or howled. Thus they essayed to pierce the mysterious

curtain which hangs between all talking men: at the end of every utterance a man stepped back, so to speak, and attempted to interpret his words to the listener, attempted to subvert the beguiling intellect with the noise of true emotion. Catherine Tekakwitha, speak to me in *Hiro-Koué*. I have no right to mind what the Jesuits say to the slaves, but on that cool Laurentian night which I work toward, when we are wrapped in our birch-bark rocket, joined in the ancient enduring way, flesh to spirit, and I ask you my old question: are the stars tiny, after all, O Catherine Tekakwitha, answer me in *Hiro-Koué*. That other night F. and I quarreled for hours. We didn't know when morning arrived because the only window of that miserable apartment faced into the ventilation shaft.

– You lousy fucker, how many times, five *or* six?

– Ah, grief makes us precise!

– Five or six, five or six, five or six?

– Listen, my friend, the elevator is working again.

– Listen, F., don't give me any of your mystical shit.

– Seven.

– Seven times with Edith?

– Correct.

– You were trying to protect me with an optional lie?

– Correct.

– And seven itself might just be another option.

– Correct.

– But you were trying to protect me, weren't you? Oh, F., do you think I can learn to perceive the diamonds of good amongst all the shit?

– It is all diamond.

– Damn you, rotten wife-fucker, that answer is no

comfort. You ruin everything with your saintly pretensions. This is a bad morning. My wife's in no shape to be buried. They're going to straighten her out in some stinking doll hospital. How am I going to feel in the elevator on my way to the library? Don't give me this all diamond shit, shove it up your occult hole. Help a fellow out. Don't fuck his wife for him.

Thus the conversation ran into the morning we could not perceive. He kept to his diamond line. Catherine Tekakwitha, I wanted to believe him. We talked until we exhausted ourselves, and we pulled each other off, as we did when we were boys in what is now downtown but what was once the woods.

6

F. talked a great deal about Indians, and in an irritating facile manner. As far as I know he had no scholarship on the subject beyond a contemptuous and minor acquaintance with my own books, his sexual exploitation of my four teen-age A——s, and about a thousand Hollywood Westerns. He compared the Indians to the ancient Greeks, suggesting a similarity of character, a common belief that every talent must unfold itself in fighting, a love of wrestling, an inherent incapacity to unite for any length of time, an absolute dedication to the idea of the contest and the virtue of ambition. None of the four teen-age A——s achieved orgasm, which, he said, must be characteristic of the sexual pessimism of the entire tribe, and he concluded, therefore, that every other

Indian woman could. I couldn't argue. It is true that the A——s seem to present a very accurate negative of the whole Indian picture. I was slightly jealous of him for his deduction. His knowledge of ancient Greece was based entirely on a poem by Edgar Allan Poe, a few homosexual encounters with restaurateurs (he ate free at almost every soda fountain in the city), and a plaster reproduction of the Akropolis which, for some reason, he had coated with red nail polish. He had meant to use colorless nail polish merely as a preservative, but naturally he succumbed to his flamboyant disposition at the drug-store counter when confronted with that fortress of bright samples which ranged the cardboard ramparts like so many Canadian Mounties. He chose a color named Tibetan Desire, which amused him since it was, he claimed, such a contradiction in terms. The entire night he consecrated to the staining of his plaster model. I sat beside him as he worked. He was humming snatches from 'The Great Pretender,' a song which was to change the popular music of our day. I could not take my eyes from the tiny brush which he wielded so happily. White to viscous red, one column after another, a transfusion of blood into the powdery ruined fingers of the little monument. F. saying: I'm wearing my heart like a crown. So they disappeared, the leprous metopes and triglyphs and other wiggly names signifying purity, pale temple and destroyed altar disappeared under the scarlet glaze. F. said: Here, my friend, you finish the caryatids. So I took the brush, thus Cliton after Themistocles. F. sang: Ohohohoho, I'm the great pretender, my need is such I pretend too much, and so on – an obvious song under the circumstances but not

inappropriate. F. often said: Never overlook the obvious. We were happy! Why should I resist the exclamation? I had not been so happy since before puberty. How close I came, earlier in this paragraph, to betraying that happy night! No, I will not! When we had covered every inch of the old plaster bone F. placed it on a card table in front of a window. The sun was just coming up over the sawtooth roof of the factory next door. The window was rosy and our handicraft, not yet dry, gleamed like a huge ruby, a fantastic jewel! It seemed like the intricate cradle of all the few noble perishable sentiments I had managed to preserve, and somewhere safe I could leave them. F. had stretched out on the carpet, stomach down, chin in hands supported by wrists and elbows, gazing up at the red akropolis and the soft morning beyond. He beckoned to me to lie beside him. Look at it from here, he said, squint your eyes a bit. I did as he suggested, narrowed my eyes, and – it burst into a cool lovely fire, sending out rays in all directions (except downward, since that was where the card table was). Don't weep, F. said, and we began to talk.

– That's the way it must have looked to them, some early morning when they looked up at it.

– The ancient Athenians, I whispered.

– No, F. said, the old Indians, the Red Men.

– Did they have such a thing, did they build an akropolis? I asked him, for I seemed to have forgotten everything I knew, lost it in stroke after stroke of the small brush, and I was ready to believe anything. Tell me, F., did the Indians have such a thing?

– I don't know.

– Then what are you talking about? Are you trying to make a damn fool of me?

– Lie down, take it easy. Discipline yourself. Aren't you happy?

– No.

– Why have you allowed yourself to be robbed?

– F., you spoil everything. We were having such a nice morning.

– Why have you allowed yourself to be robbed?

– Why do you always try to humiliate me? I asked him so solemnly that I scared myself. He stood up, covered the model with a plastic Remington typewriter cover. He did this so gently, with a kind of pain, that for the first time I saw that F. suffered, but from what I could not tell.

– We almost began a perfect conversation, F. said as he turned on the six o'clock news. He turned the radio very loud and began to shout wildly against the voice of the commentator, who was reciting a list of disasters. Sail on, sail on, O Ship of State, auto accidents, births, Berlin, cures for cancer! Listen, my friend, listen to the present, the right now, it's all around us, painted like a target, red, white, and blue. Sail into the target like a dart, a fluke bull's eye in a dirty pub. Empty your memory and listen to the fire around you. Don't forget your memory, let it exist somewhere precious in all the colors that it needs but somewhere else, hoist your memory on the Ship of State like a pirate's sail, and aim yourself at the tinkly present. Do you know how to do this? Do you know how to see the akropolis like the Indians did who never even had one? Fuck a saint, that's how, find a little saint and fuck her over and over in

some pleasant part of heaven, get right into her plastic altar, dwell in her silver medal, fuck her until she tinkles like a souvenir music box, until the memorial lights go on for free, find a little saintly faker like Teresa or Catherine Tekakwitha or Lesbia, whom prick never knew but who lay around all day in a chocolate poem, find one of these quaint impossible cunts and fuck her for your life, coming all over the sky, fuck her on the moon with a steel hourglass up your hole, get tangled in her airy robes, suck her nothing juices, lap, lap, lap, a dog in the ether, then climb down to this fat earth and slouch around the fat earth in your stone shoes, get clobbered by a runaway target, take the senseless blows again and again, a right to the mind, piledriver on the heart, kick in the scrotum, help! help! it's my time, my second, my splinter of the shit glory tree, police, firemen! look at the traffic of happiness and crime, it's burning in crayon like the akropolis rose!

And so on. I couldn't hope to write down half the things he said. He raved like a lunatic, spit flying with every second word. I guess the disease was already nibbling at his brain, for he died like that, years later, raving. What a night! And from this distance, how sweet our argument now seems, two grown men lying on the floor! What a perfect night! I swear I can still feel the warmth of it, and what he did with Edith matters not at all, indeed, I marry them in their unlawful bed, with an open heart I affirm the true right of any man and woman to their dark slobbering nights which are rare enough, and against which too many laws conspire. If only I could live in this perspective.

How quickly they come and go, the memories of F., the nights of comradeship, the ladders we climbed and the happy views of simple human clockwork. How quickly pettiness returns, and that most ignoble form of real estate, the possessive occupation and tyranny over two square inches of human flesh, the wife's cunt.

7

The Iroquois almost won. Their three major enemies were the Hurons, the Algonquins, and the French. 'La Nouvelle-France se va perdre si elle n'est fortement et promptement secourue.' So wrote le P. Vimont, Supérieur de Québec, in 1641. Whoop! Whoop! Remember the movies. The Iroquois was a confederation of five tribes situated between the Hudson River and Lake Erie. Going from east to west we have the Agniers (whom the English called Mohawks), the Onneyouts, the Onnontagués, the Goyoqouins (or Goyogouins), and the Tsonnontouans. The Mohawks (whom the French called Agniers) occupied a territory between the upper reaches of the Hudson River, Lake George, Lake Champlain, and the Richelieu River (first called the Iroquois River). Catherine Tekakwitha was a Mohawk, born 1656. Twenty-one years of her life she spent among the Mohawks, on the banks of the Mohawk River, a veritable Mohawk lady. The Iroquois were composed of twenty-five thousand souls. They

could put two thousand five hundred warriors in the field, or ten per cent of the confederation. Of these only five or six hundred were Mohawks, but they were especially ferocious, and not only that, they possessed firearms which they got from the Dutch at Fort Orange (Albany) in exchange for furs. I am proud that Catherine Tekakwitha was or is a Mohawk. Her brethren must be right out of those uncompromising black and white movies before the Western became psychological. Right now I feel about her as many of my readers must feel about pretty Negresses who sit across from them in the subway, their thin hard legs shooting down from what pink secrets. Many of my readers will never find out. Is this fair? And what about the lily cocks unbeknownst to so many female American citizens? Undress, undress, I want to cry out, let's look at each other. Let's have education! F. said: At twenty-eight (yes, my friend, it took that long) I stopped fucking colors. Catherine Tekakwitha, I hope you are very dark. I want to detect a little whiff of raw meat and white blood on your thick black hair. I hope there is a little grease left in your thick black hair. Or is it all buried in the Vatican, vaults of hidden combs? One night in our seventh year of marriage Edith coated herself with deep red greasy stuff she had bought in some theatrical supply store. She applied it from a tube. Twenty to eleven, back from the library, and there she was, stark naked in the middle of the room, sexual surprise for her old man. She handed me the tube, saying: Let's be other people. Meaning, I suppose, new ways to kiss, chew, suck, bounce. It's stupid, she said, her voice cracking, but let's be other people.

Why should I diminish her intention? Perhaps she meant: Come on a new journey with me, a journey only strangers can take, and we can remember it when we are ourselves again, and therefore never be merely ourselves again. Perhaps she had some landscape in mind where she always meant to travel, just as I envisage a northern river, a night as clean and bright as river pebbles, for my supreme trip with Catherine Tekakwitha. I should have gone with Edith. I should have stepped out of my clothes and into the greasy disguise. Why is it that only now, years past, my prick rises up at the vision of her standing there so absurdly painted, her breasts dark as eggplants, her face resembling Al Jolson? Why does the blood rush now so uselessly? I disdained her tube. Take a bath, I said. I listened to her splashing, looking forward to our midnight snack. My mean little triumph had made me hungry.

8

Lots of priests got killed and eaten and so forth. Micmacs, Abénaquis, Montagnais, Attikamègues, Hurons: the Company of Jesus had their way with them. Lots of semen in the forest, I'll bet. Not the Iroquois, they ate priests' hearts. Wonder what it was like. F. said he once ate a raw sheep's heart. Edith liked brains. René Goupil got it on September 29, 1642, first

victim in black robes of the Mohawks. Yum, yummy. Le P. Jogues fell under the 'hatchet of the barbarian' on October 18, 1646. It's all down there in black and white. The Church loves such details. I love such details. Here come the little fat angels with their queer bums. Here come the Indians. Here comes Catherine Tekakwitha ten years later, lily out of the soil watered by the Gardener with the blood of martyrs. F., you ruined my life with your experiments. You ate a raw sheep's heart, you ate bark, once you ate shit. How can I live in the world beside all your damn adventures? F. once said: There is nothing so depressing as the eccentricity of a contemporary. She was a Tortoise, best clan of the Mohawks. Our journey will be slow, but we'll win. Her father was an Iroquois, an asshole, as it turns out. Her mother was an Algonquin Christian, baptized and educated at Three-Rivers, which happens to be a lousy town for an Indian girl (I was told recently by a young Abénaqui who went to school there). She was taken captive in an Iroquois raid, which was probably the best lay she ever had. Help me, someone, help my crude tongue. Where is my silver tongue? Aren't I meant to speak of God? She was the slave of an Iroquois brave, and she had a wild tongue or something because he married her when he could have just pushed her around. She was accepted by the tribe and enjoyed all the rights of the Tortoises from that day on. It is recorded that she prayed incessantly. Glog, glog, dear God, hump, fart push, sweet Almighty, slurp, flark, glamph, hiccup, jerk, zzzzzz, snort, Jesus, she must have made his life hell.

9

F. said: Connect nothing. He screamed that remark at me while overlooking my wet cock about twenty years ago. I don't know what he saw in my swooning eyes, maybe some glimmering of a fake universal comprehension. Sometimes after I have come or just before I fall asleep, my mind seems to go out on a path the width of a thread and of endless length, a thread that is the same color as the night. Out, out along the narrow highway sails my mind, driven by curiosity, luminous with acceptance, far and out, like a feathered hook whipped deep into the light above the stream by a magnificent cast. Somewhere, out of my reach, my control, the hook unbends into a spear, the spear shears itself into a needle, and the needle sews the world together. It sews skin onto the skeleton and lipstick on a lip, it sews Edith to her greasepaint, crouching (for as long as I, this book, or an eternal eye remembers) in our lightless sub-basement, it sews scarves to mountain, it goes through everything like a relentless bloodstream, and the tunnel is filled with a comforting message, a beautiful knowledge of unity. All the disparates of the world, the different wings of the paradox, coin-faces of problem, petal-pulling questions, scissors-shaped conscience, all the polarities, things and their images and things which cast no shadow, and just the everyday explosions on a street, this face and that, a house and a toothache, explosions which merely have different letters in their names, my needle pierces it all, and I

myself, my greedy fantasies, everything which has existed and does exist, we are part of a necklace of incomparable beauty and unmeaning. Connect nothing: F. shouted. Place things side by side on your arborite table, if you must, but connect nothing! Come back, F. shouted, pulling my limp cock like a bell rope, shaking it like a dinner bell in the hands of a grand hostess who wants the next course served. Don't be fooled, he cried. Twenty years ago, as I say. I am just speculating now what it was that occasioned his outburst, that is, some kind of smirk of universal acceptance, which is very disagreeable on the face of a young man. It was that same afternoon that F. told me one of his most remarkable lies.

– My friend, F. said, you mustn't feel guilty about any of this.

– Any of what?

– Oh, you know, sucking each other, watching the movies, Vaseline, fooling around with the dog, sneaking off during government hours, under the armpits.

– I don't feel in the least guilty.

– You do. But don't. You see, F. said, this isn't homosexuality at all.

– Oh, F., come off it. Homosexuality is a name.

– That's why I'm telling you this, my friend. You live in a world of names. That's why I have the charity to tell you this.

– Are you trying to ruin another evening?

– Listen to me, you poor A——!

– It's you who feel guilty, F. Guilty as hell. You're the guilty party.

– Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha. Ha.

– I know what you want to do, F. You want to destroy the evening. You're not satisfied with a couple of simple comes and a nice poke in the hole.

– All right, my friend, you've convinced me. I'm perishing with guilt. I'll keep quiet.

– What were you going to say?

– Some fabrication of my guilty guilt.

– Well, tell me, now that you started the whole thing.

– No.

– Tell me, F., for Christ's sake, it's just conversation now.

– No.

– God damn you, F., you are trying to destroy the evening.

– You're pathetic. That's why you must not try to connect anything, your connection would be pathetic. The Jews didn't let young men study the Cabala. Connections should be forbidden citizens under seventy.

– Please tell me.

– You mustn't feel guilty about any of this because it isn't strictly homosexual.

– I know it isn't, I –

– Shut up. It isn't strictly homosexual because I am not strictly male. The truth is, I had a Swedish operation, I used to be a girl.

– Nobody's perfect.

– Shut up, shut up. A man tires in his works of charity. I was born a girl, I went to school as a girl in a

blue tunic, with a little embroidered crest on the front of it.

– F., you're not talking to one of your shoeshine boys. I happen to know you very well. We lived on the same street, we went to school together, we were in the same class, I saw you a million times in the shower after gym. You were a boy when you went to school. We played doctor in the woods. What's the point of all this?

– Thus do the starving refuse sustenance.

– I hate the way you try to end everything off.

But I broke off the argument just then because I noticed that it was almost eight, and we were in danger of missing the entire double feature. How I enjoyed the movies that night. Why did I feel so light? Why did I have so deep a sense of comradeship with F.? Walking home through the snow my future seemed to open me: I resolved to give up work on the A——s, whose disastrous history was not yet clear to me. I didn't know what I wanted to do, but it didn't bother me, I knew that the future would be strewn with invitations, like a President's calendar. The cold, which hitherto froze my balls off every winter, braced me that night, and my brain, for which I have always had little respect, seemed constructed of arrangements of crystal, like a storm of snowflakes, filling my life with rainbow pictures. However, it didn't work out that way. The A——s found their mouthpiece and the future dried up like an old dug. What was F.'s part in that lovely night? Had he done something which opened doors, doors which I slammed back in their frames? He tried to tell me something. I still don't understand. Is it fair that I don't

understand? Why did I have to be stuck with such an obtuse friend? My life might have been so gloriously different. I might never have married Edith, who, I now confess, was an A——!

10

I always wanted to be loved by the Communist Party and the Mother Church. I wanted to live in a folk song like Joe Hill. I wanted to weep for the innocent people my bomb would have to maim. I wanted to thank the peasant father who fed us on the run. I wanted to wear my sleeve pinned in half, people smiling while I salute with the wrong hand. I wanted to be against the rich, even though some of them knew Dante: just before his destruction one of them would learn that I knew Dante, too. I wanted my face carried in Peking, a poem written down my shoulder. I wanted to smile at dogma, yet ruin my ego against it. I wanted to confront the machines of Broadway. I wanted Fifth Avenue to remember its Indian trails. I wanted to come out of a mining town with rude manners and convictions given to me by an atheist uncle, barfly disgrace of the family. I wanted to rush across America in a sealed train, the only white man whom the Negroes will accept at the treaty convention. I wanted to attend cocktail parties wearing a machine gun. I wanted to tell an old girl friend who is appalled at my methods that revolutions do not happen

on buffet tables, you can't pick and choose, and watch her silver evening gown dampen at the crotch. I wanted to fight against the Secret Police takeover, but from *within* the Party. I wanted an old lady who had lost her sons to mention me in her prayers in a mud church, taking her sons' word for it. I wanted to cross myself at dirty words. I wanted to tolerate pagan remnants in village ritual, arguing against the Curia. I wanted to deal in secret real estate, agent of ageless, anonymous billionaire. I wanted to write well about the Jews. I wanted to be shot among the Basques for carrying the Body into the battlefield against Franco. I wanted to preach about marriage from the unassailable pulpit of virginity, watching the black hairs on the legs of brides. I wanted to write a tract against birth control in very simple English, a pamphlet to be sold in the foyer, illustrated with two-color drawings of shooting stars and eternity. I wanted to suppress dancing for a time. I wanted to be a junkie priest who makes a record for Folkways. I wanted to be transferred for political reasons. I have just discovered that Cardinal ——— has taken a huge bribe from a ladies' magazine, have suffered a fairy attack from my confessor, have seen the peasants betrayed for a necessary reason, but the bells are ringing this evening, it is another evening in God's world, and there are many to be fed, many knees yearning to be bent, I mount the worn steps in my tattered ermine.