



JENNIFER
STONE'S*
NOTES***
FROM*THE
BACK*OF*
BEYOND**



"I'm moving into Prose, U.S.A.,
a small unfurnished room."

— Joanna Griffin

14 May 1983

This village by the bay doesn't like its name in the papers. That's OK by me. I've been here three days now and the beach is beatific and so are most of the people. I want to feel I've found a holy hideout, I want to keep its secret beauty untouched. Of course beauty must have its flaw. Yesterday evening as I sat on the rusty remnant of a decaying pier and watched the ponderous pelicans dive for their dinner, a graying professorial type approached me with a shell in his outstretched hand. Did it remind me of the female genital, he wanted to know. What would he have thought/felt had I approached him and interrupted his evening meditations waving a kelp bulb in my hand, asking him if he thought it resembled a phallus.

15 May 1983

The beach is a sand blast one day, a Zen garden the next. Found my first fossil this morning: a black stone

sand dollar. Actually I found my first fossil last night in the local bar, but I'm on heterosexual hold.

16 May 1983

Coffee in the cafe. The young woman who brings the croissant tells me she's just been East and heard the poets June Jordan and Carolyn Forché. She doesn't feel these women speak to her experience. She thinks/feels the women's movement has gone too far. Too far where? I ask, quoting the horrific statistics on the feminization of poverty. She tells me her boyfriend has told her you can't trust statistics. A sea of innocence, she expresses fears for a future in which women will no longer exist, in which we'll all just be people.

Remember Virginia Woolf's prediction, made in 1928 in A Room Of One's Own: once liberated, she suggested, the pressures on women will be as devastating as those on men. Women will die off so fast that people will go about saying, "I saw a woman today," as one used to say, "I saw an aeroplane." Virginia was joking of course, but even she believed that women enjoy some patriarchal protections, the comforts of the cage, which must be paid for with the corsets of conformity. My waitress tells me that she wants to work to bring men and women together, not to do anything that might separate them. That's good, I tell her. We talk about our children. She has a little boy but she left him with her mother because he was upsetting her relationship with her new boyfriend.

17 May 1983

This morning it's chilly and damp. I get the kerosene heater working and warm the rolls. Use the immersion heater to make coffee. No money left to eat in the cafe. Last night the mosquitoes dive-bombed me on the beach. This morning there's a minus tide and the kelp stinks of iodine. The sea and sky are laquered green and blue. I collect volcano shells to make a rattle for my Celtic rites. The White Goddess is sympathetic, but she laughs at the pretentious sign on my door: The Hecatage.

18 May 1983

Again this morning I am on the beach in the first light. The fog boils soup thick off the sea. Walking the shoreline, I can't see my feet. I find two cowrie shells and a shark's spine for my rites. In the village, someone has run over the dentist's dog. A local is yelling at the driver of the car. The driver is cross, says the dog was in the road. The local is furious, yells hell, man, dog don't know road! In a shop, I buy an old army jacket to wear on the beach. In the pocket is a matchbook cover with a phone number and a message: 'let me take you out to dinner, no strings.'

19 May 1983

I burn the matchbook cover along with several of my old poems. I cut my hair and mix it with the ashes. I

bury this mess in the roots of a Druid oak tree, hoping new poems will grow. It's an old spell I learned from the Goddess Hestia.

Outside my window the honeysuckle twines with the mingles of nasturtiums and the hummingbirds are no bigger than butterflies. Bluebirds pull at the Spanish moss on the trees. Frogs croak in the creek as it grows dark.

20 May 1983

I break my tooth. Sitting in the dentist's office, saying I'm sorry about the dog, I leaf through an old Village Voice. In an article written for the February 1, '83 issue, a Ms. Munk quotes George Orwell:

"One sometimes gets the impression that the mere words 'Socialism' and 'Communism' draw towards them with magnetic force every fruit juice drinker, nudist, sandal wearer, sex maniac, Quaker, 'Nature-Cure' quack, pacifist and feminist in England."

Would it were so, George, would it were so. Ms. Munk goes on to state that it is reductive to say Orwell was an Edwardian in Socialist clothing, or that he had the fantasies of a misogynist, as well as a mildly S & M ex-cop paranoid loner, regressive idealist, and self-pitying pessimist. After all, he was also a humane and cheerful anarchist on his good days. Remembering my own notes on Orwell, I recall he was dying when he wrote 1984, which might account for certain elements in its tone. Be that as it may, 1984 will be my fiftieth year and I

don't look forward to it with a grin.

The dentist gives me a fragment of my filling. It's not as good as a real tooth, but I keep in anyway, to use when I'm ready to cast my next spell. I put it in a box which contains the fingernail parings and pubic hair of one of the two males presently enrolled at U.C. as undergraduate majors in women's studies.*

21 May 1983

No work today. Typewriter in trouble. The letter a is stuck. I decide to clean it. To accomplish this, I sacrifice my One Night Stand toothbrush, which is to say the tiny spare toothbrush I carry in my backpack in case I find myself in a foreign bed all night and have no morning minister . . . perhaps it won't be missed.

22 May 1983

Last night the ghosts in my dreams were made of cobwebs. Then the dream drifted and I was sitting on the top floor in a house of burgundy, asking the women there if we could all stop wearing lipstick together.

On the beach at dawn, a young woman with hair the grilled-cheese color of her horse, rides nude into the sea, letting the waves slap her face and breasts.

* This year, 1983, at the University of California at Berkeley, 1,200 students attend classes in women's studies. There are 50 undergraduate majors. Two of these are men.

23 May 1983

At the library table, I spread out my notes. Got to write something for money. I haven't a popular thought in my head.

24 May 1983

There's a lot of Zen and alcohol hereabouts. The word Zen has become an adjective. Zen fascist, that sort of thing. A local who's had too much to drink, explains to me the difference between Zen and Christianity, or as he sees it, between East and West. In the West, our choice is 'to be or not to be.' In the East, the goal is 'to be and not to be.' I buy him a beer and tell him that for me to bed by ten means more than Zen.

25 May 1983

Back down the cliff to the beach for the last night. I grow old, I grow old, the center will not fold . . . Dover Beach blues? A blue plastic Pampers diaper washes up by my feet. The sky, stones, clouds, sand, are all a painterly sunset pink. Pelicans, gulls, cormorants, sandpipers, sandfleas, the usual crowd. A seal floats on her back, gliding with the tide as it rushes into the lagoon. I sit outside a sea cave, a sacred grotto.

After awhile, Demeter's mother, Rhea, sits beside me. We watch a seahawk circle the bay like a Japanese kite. We strike a few moral black matches. She points to the rusted barrels on the beach, the ones the kids roll in and out of the water and ride on in the shallows. Nuclear waste from the dump site near the offshore islands? Death by technology now, she says, like the Black Plagues of the Dark Ages. As the medieval mind blamed God for human suffering, so the modern mind blames 'the system' for the industrial blight and plague of technology.

I agree with her that it's later than we know. History can't last much longer. But then, neither can I. I mean to use the time that's left. Oh sure, dear, she says. All we need for happiness on this earth walk is apples and orgasms. Just make do with what comes old girl.

Rhea's always been glad to see me at the seashore. She hugs me and says. "It's Herself again, Apple Annie, the Sweetheart of Forever High!" I miss her when she isn't there, when I've had too much yang and not enough gin. Tonight fires glow among the rocks and the gold horsewoman swims on the crest of the wave just off shore. Emerging from the foam, she too might be an ancient one, one of the tens of thousands of mothers behind me, one of

the countless women of past generations who were my
mother.

The full moon rises from behind a cypress tree.
From the cliff far above my head, a beer bottle pitches
down, the amber glass shattering on the rocks.

Journal entries in May 1983

-- Jennifer Stone

Berkeley CA

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