die so they could squander what money I have left; then when I do die, come back reincarnated as a dung beetle.

A: Well, I've got to go. Call you tomorrow — if I make it home.
B: Good to see you. I'll be here — if I last the night.

HONEY, I'M BACK

here in the Cottage of Suspended Desires. After two weeks in the Mansion of Agonizing Need, what a relief to sink, clam-like, into this worn chair and not think of the hammocks and peeled grapes and dancing girls limber as ferns, which are the good points of the Mansion, the bad being that the girls are lesbians, can run faster than I, and have razor blades in all my favorite spots.

With any luck I'll just stay here, lulled by the scent of last night's casserole, sipping warm beer and looking forward to the postman's bringing the occasional ad for auto parts or a limited edition set of pewter frogs, but no more tickets to the Mansion or the House of Desperate Longing, no maps leading to the Palace of Skull-Crunching Despair.

GATHER YE ROSEBUDS WHILE YE MAY (BUT WATCH FOR PLASTIQUE PETALS)

The worst thing about disasters is not that they're so bad, but that they're so damned unexpected. I don't mean popular stuff: the Big California Quake, or standing on Ground Zero, or even learning that your latest headache is brain cancer. I mean you're in your livingroom watching The Love Boat, when a runaway freight train cuts off your legs;

you're

thirty feet from your apartment
in your rented Porsche, and you make the turn you've made a thousand times, but this one time you clip a fire-hydrant, which blows like Old Faithful, your car's rear end falls off, you forgot to buy insurance, and a drenched mafia hit-man is standing right there, scowling at it all.

Somewhere, sometime, someone cooking dinner got his brains splattered by a meteor; and though they always say "You have more chance of being hit by lightning . . . ," someone has been hit by it, or stepped on a live grenade in his back yard, or been crushed by a falling pop machine, after kicking it, trying to get back the quarter it just screwed him out of.

Right this minute I've got whiplash suffered listening to the Lakers in my parked car. I know a guy who broke his back slipping on a Rhinoceros Beetle; a guy who cut his prick off by accidentally closing it in his dresser drawer.

So, when you say that you like sex with me "too much," and think about me "much too much," and even think we should "back off," get "less involved," it makes me crazed. My suggestion, my sweet but timid love, is that you tell me what you like the most, and let me do it now and every chance we get, before the bomb an insane woodcarver stashed in your four-poster explodes, or your sheets spontaneously combust, or the first verified flying
sauces in earth's history
crash-lands below your panty-line, seconds before my tongue.

BOB

Everyone laughed at the horse's name: Bob. They laughed louder to learn it was my turtle's name — or possibly, to learn I have a turtle. I laughed too, remembering April days in Houston, finding turtles in the woods as spring broke open like a sweet red melon.

Rich as Scrooge McDuck, I rode around, bike basket full of turtles. I built elevators to my treehouse for them, ran up and down my backyard, swooping turtles through the air with wing-feet flailing, routing Nazis to the Stars and Stripes Forever.

Even in 1955, I knew that there was something fine, something primarily decent about turtles: their slow walk and patient eyes, the gentle way they nipped their apple-cores and lettuce, licking with their ancient tongues.

The 50s changed to 60s, 70s, and 80s. Heroes changed from strong and silent to flashy and loud — Muhammad Ali, John McEnroe, Prince. I quietly watched the Apotheosis of the Asshole, and kept turtles: tolerant, easy, fearless enough to crawl off tables, tough enough to hit the floor and walk away.

The starting gun blasted. Bob stumbled from the gate, dead last. halfway around the track, he was still last. "A turtle," I moaned. "I bet on a fucking turtle."
My friends were still laughing