

Letter from "Joan Anderson" to Jack Kerouac - Dec 17 1950

To have seen a specter isn't everything, and there are deathmasks piled, one atop the other, clear to heaven. Commoner still are the wan visages of those returning from the shadow of the valley. This means little to those who have not lifted the veil.

The ward nurse cautioned me not to excite her (how can one prevent that?) and I was allowed only a few minutes. The headnurse also stopped me to say I was permitted to see her just because she always called my name and I must cheer her. She had had a very near brush and was not rallying properly, actually was in marked decline, and still much in danger. Quite impressed to my duties, I entered and gazed down on her slender form resting so quietly on the high white bed. Her pale face was whiter; like chalk. It was pathetically clear how utterly weak she was, there seemed absolutely no blood left in her body. I stared and stared, she didn't breath, didn't move; I would never have recognized her, she was a waxed mummy. White is the absence of color, she was white; all white, unless beneath the covers, whose top caressed her breasts, was still hidden a speck of pink. The thin ivory arms tapered inward until they reached the slight outward bulge of narrow palms, and the hands in turn bent inward with a more sharp taper only to quickly end in long fingers curled to a point. These things, and her head, with it's completely matted hair so black and contrasting with all the whiteness, were the only parts of her visible. Quite normal, I know, but I just couldn't get over how awfully dead she looked. I had so arranged my head above hers that when her eyes opened, after about ten minutes, they were in direct line with mine; they showed no surprise, nor changed their position in the slightest. The faintest of smiles, the merest of voices, "hello." I placed my hand on her arm, it was all I could do to restrain myself from jumping on the bed to hold her. I

saw she was too weak to talk and told her not to, I, however, rambled on at a great rate.

There was no doubt she was over-joyed to see me, her eyes said so. It was as though the gesture of self-destruction had, in her mind, equalized all the guilt. The courage of committing the act seemed to have justified her to herself. This action on her conviction, no matter how neurotic, had called for all her strength and she was now released. Free from the urge, since the will-for-death needs a strong concentration of pressure to fulfill itself and once accomplished via attempt, is defeated until another period of buildup is gone through; unless, of course, one succeeds in reaching death the first shot, or is really mad. Gazing down on her, with a grin of artificial buoyancy, I sensed this and felt an instant flood of envy. She had escaped, at least for some time, and I knew I had yet to make my move. Being a coward I had postponed too long and I realized I was further away from commitment than ever. Would hesitancy never end? She shifted her cramped hand, I looked down and for the first time noticed the tight sheet covering a flat belly. It was empty, sunken; she had lost her baby. For a moment I wondered if she knew it, then thought she must know-even now she was almost touching her stomach, and she'd been in the hospital for ten days-surely a stupid idea. I resolved to think better. The nurse glided up and said I'd better go; promising to return the next visiting day, I leaned over and kissed Joan's clear forehead and left.

Off to the poolhall, back to the old grind; I seemed to have a mania. From the way I loafed there all day one would scarcely believe I'd never been in a poolhall two short years before; why, less than six months ago I still couldn't bear to play more than one game at a time. Well, what is one to say about things he has done? I never again went

back to the hospital to bless Joan, oh, that's what I felt like; blessing her. Each day I lacerated myself thinking on her, but I didn't go back. "Sometimes I sits and thinks. Other times I sits and drinks, but mostly I just sits." I must have been in a pretty bad way.

Anyhow, two more weeks went by in this fashion, my inability to stir from my poolhall prison became a joke, even to me. It was the night before Christmas, about five PM, when a handsome woman near forty came inside the gambling gaol's gates and asked for me. I went up front to meet her, as I came closer I saw that she was better than handsome, a real good-looker and despite her age, making quite a stir among the boys. She introduced herself, said she was a friend of Joan and invited me to dinner. My heart bounced with guilty joy, I accepted and we walked the five blocks to this fine-though-forty lady's apartment without talking. The fatherly taxidriver opened the door, my hostess said it was her husband and that Joan would be out in a minute. Preparations for a huge dinner were in the making. I sat on the sofa and waited. The bathroom-ugly word- door swung out and before my eyes was once again the gorgeous Joan, "second" of Jennifer Jones. Fresh from the shower, mirror-primped, stepped my heroine resplendent in her new friend's housecoat. Just when you think you've learned you lesson and swear to watch your step, a single moment offguard will pop up and hope springs high as ever. One startled look and I knew I was right back where I started; I felt again that choking surge flooding me as when first I'd seen her. I started talking to myself, determined to whip the poolhall rut and drag my stinking ass out of the hole.

Over the prosperous supper on which we soon pounced hung an air of excitement. Joan and I were leaping with lovelooks across the roastbeef, while cabby and wife beamed on us. And we planned, yesir, all four of us, and right out loud too. I was kinda embarrassed at

first when the host began without preamble, "Alright, you kids have wasted enough time, I see you love each other and you're going to settle down right now. In the morning Joan is starting at St. Luke's as a student nurse, she's told me that's what she would like to do. As for you, Neal, if you're serious I'll get up a little early tomorrow and before I go to work we'll see if my boss will give you a job. If you can't get away with telling them you're 21- the law says you gotta be 21, you're not that old yet are you? (I said no) so that you can drive a taxi, you can probably get a job servicing the cabs. That okay with you?" I said certainly it was and thanked him; and everybody laughed and was happy. It was further decided that Joan and I stay with them until we got our first paycheck; we would sleep on the couch that opened out into a bed. Gorged with the big meal, I retired to the bathroom as the women did the dishes and the old man read the paper. (By golly, it seems everything I write about happens in a bathroom, don't think I'm hungup that way, it's just the incidents exactly as they occurred, and here is another one, because-) A knock on the toilet door and I rose to let in my resurrected beauty. She was as coy as ever, but removed was much fear and embarrassment. We did a bit of smooching, then, seated on the edge of the tub to observe better as she parted the bathrobe to reveal an ugly red wound, livid against her buttermilk belly, stretching nearly from naval to the clitoris. She was worried I wouldn't think her as beautiful, or love her as much now that her body had been marred by the surgeon's knife performing a Caesarian. There might have been a partial hysterectomy too and she fretted that the production of more babies- "when we get the money" -would prove difficult. I reassured her on all counts, swore my love (and meant it) and finally we returned to the livingroom.

Oh, unhappy mind; trickster! O fatal practicality! I was wearing really filthy clothes but had a change promised me by a friend who lived at 12th and Ogden Sts. So as not to hangup my dwarf cabbie savior when we went to see his buddyboss next A.M., my foolish head thought to make a speedrun and get the necessary clean impediments now. Acting on this obvious need- if I was to impress my hoped-for employer into hiring me- I promised to hurry back, and left. Where is wisdom? Joan offered to walk with me, and I turned down the suggestion reasoning it was very cold and I could make better time alone, besides, she was still pretty weak, and if she was to work tomorrow the strain of the fairly long walk might prove too much,- no sense jeopardizing her health. Would that I'd made her walk with me, would that she'd collapsed rather than let me go alone, would anything instead of what happened! Not only did the new promise for happiness go down the drain, and I lost Joan forever, but her peace was to evaporate once and for all, and she herself was to sink into the iniquity reserved for a certain type of beaten women!

I rushed my trip to the clothes depot, made good connections and was quickly on my way back to the warm apartment and my Joan. The route from 12th and Ogden to 16th and Lincoln Sts. Lies for the most part , if one so desires, along East Colfax Ave. Horrible mistake, stupid moment; I chose that path just to dig people on the crowded thoroughfare as I hustled by them. At midblock between Pennsylvania and Pearl Sts. Is a tavern whose plateglass front ill-conceals the patrons of it's booths. I was almost past this bar when I glanced up to see my younger blood-brother inside drinking beer alone. I had made good time and the hard habit of lushing that I was then addicted to pushed me through the door to bum a quickie off him. Surprise, surprise, he was loaded with loot and, more surprising, gushed all over me. He ordered

as fast as I could drink, and I didn't let the waitress stop, finishing the glass in a gulp; one draught for the first few, then two for the next several and so on until I was sipping normally by the time an hour had fled. First off he wanted a phone number- the reason for his generosity I suspect- and I was the only one who could give it to him. He claimed to have been sitting there actually brooding over the very girl on the other end of this phone number, and I believed him; had to take it true, because for the last five months it had become increasingly clear that he was hot-as-hell for this chick- who was my girl. I gave him the number and he dashed from one booth to the other. I had cautioned him not to mention my name, nor tell her I was there, and he said he wouldn't. but he did, although he denied it later. The reason for his disloyalty, despite the fact that it cost me Joan, was justifiable since as one might when about to be denied a date of importance while drinking, he had used my whereabouts as a lastditch lure to tempt her out. He came back to the booth from the phonebooth crestfallen, she had said she couldn't leave the house just now, but to call her back in a half-hour or so; this didn't cheer him as it would have me, he's richer and less easily satisfied. He called her again, about forty five minutes after I had first been pulled into the dive by my powerful thirst, and she said for him to wait at this joint and she'd be down within an hour. This length of time didn't seem unreasonable, she lived quite a ways further out in East Denver. I thought everything was going perfectly. Bill got the Girl, I got my drinks and still had a short period of grace in which to slop up more before she showed (I certainly didn't intend to be there when she arrived) and I'd only be a little late returning to Joan where I'd plead hassel in getting the clothes. O sad shock, O unpleasant time; had I just not guzzled that last beer all the following would not be

written and I could end this story with "And they lived happily ever after."

Whoa, read slowly for a bit and have patience with my verbosity. There are two things I've got to say here, one is a sidepoint and it'll come second, the first is essential to the understanding of this story; so, I gotta give you one of my Hollywood flashbacks.

I'll leave out the most of it and be as brief as possible to make it tight, although, by the nature of it, this'll be hard- especially since I'm tired.

Number 1: On June 23, 1945 I was released from New Mexico State Reformatory, after doing eleven months and 10 days (know the song?) of hard labor. Soon after returning to Denver I had the rare luck to meet a 16-year-old East Hi beauty who had well- to- do parents; a mother and a pretty older sister to be exact. Cherry Mary (Mary Ann Fairland) was her name because she lived on Cherry Street and was a cherry when I met her. That condition didn't last long. I ripped into her like a maniac and she loved it. A tremendous affair, countless things to be said about it- I can hardly help from blurting out twenty or thirty statements right now despite resolution to condense. I'm firm (ha) and won't tell the story of our five months' intercourse- with it's many incidents that are percolating this moment in my brain; about carnival-night we met (Elitch's), the hundreds of mountain trips in her new Mercury, rented trucks with mattresses in back, at her cabin, cabins I broke into, day I got her to bang Hal Chase, time I gave her clap after momentous meeting between her and mother of my second child (only boy before Diana's), time I knocked her up; and knocked it, mad nights and early A.M.'s at Goodyear factory I worked alone in front from 4 P.M. to anytime I wanted to go home, doing it on golfcourses, roofs, parks, cemeteries (you know, dead peoples' homes) snowbanks, schools and

schoolyards, hotel bathrooms, her mother's vacant houses (she was a realtor), doing it every way we could think of any-old-place we happened to be, in fact, we did it in so many places that Denver was covered with our peckertracks; so many different ones that I can't possibly remember, often we'd trek clear from one side of town to another just to find a spot to drop to it, on ordinary occasions, however, I'd just pull it out and shove- to her bottom if we were secluded, to her mouth if not, the greatest most humorous incident of the lot: to please her mother she'd often babysit for some of their socially prominent and wealthy friends several times a week, I drove out to that particular evening's assignment, after she called to let me know the coast was clear, (funny English joke; man and wife in living room, phone rings, man answers and says he wouldn't know, better call the coast guard, and hangs up, wife says, "Who was it, dear?" and man says, "I don't know, some damn fool who wanted to know if the coast was clear," har-har-har) and we quickly tear-off several goodies, then, I go back to work; in Goodyear truck, don't you know. We'd done this numerous times when the "most humorous" evening came up. It was a Sunday night, so no work, I waited outside 16th and High Street apartment till parents left and then went in and fell to it. I had all my clothes off and in livingroom as she was washing my cock in bathroom, (let this be a lesson to you, men, never become separated from your clothes, at least keep your trousers handy, when doing this sort of thing in a strange house- oops, my goodness, I forgot for a second that some of you are out of circulation and certainly not in need of "Lord Chesterfield's" counseling- don't show this to your wives, or tell them that I only offer this advice to pass on to your sons, or, if that's too harsh, to your dilettante friends, whew!, Got out of that) there's a rattling of the apartment door and into the

front room walks the mother of one of the parents of the baby Cherry Mary is watching, so fast did this old bat come in that we barely had time to shut the bathroom door before she saw us. Here I was, nude, no clothes, and all exits blocked. I couldn't stay there for what if the old gal wanted to pee, and most old women's bladders and kidneys are not the best in the world. There was no place in the bathroom to hide, nor could I sneak out due to the layout of the apartment. Worse, Mary suddenly remembered the fact that this intruder was expected to stay the night. We consulted in whispers, laughing and giggling despite all, and it was decided Mary would leave the bathroom and keep the old lady busy while suggesting a walk or coffee down the street and still try to collect my clothes and get them to me; no mean feat. My task was to, as quietly as a mouse, remove all the years-long collection of rich peoples' bath knick-knacks that blocked the room's only window, then, impossible though it looked, I must climb up the tub to it and with a fingernail file pry loose the outside screen. Now, look at this window, it had four panels of glass 6" long and 4" wide, it formed a rectangle of about 12 or 13" high and 8 or 9" across, difficult to squeeze through at best, but, being modern as hell, the way it was hooked to it's frame was by a single metal bar in direct center! which when opened split the panes of glass down the middle and made two windows.

I could hardly reach outside to work on the screen- since the window opened outward- but I pushed and making a hellova noise, split the screen enough to open the window. Now the impossible compressing of my frame for the squeeze. I thought if I could get my head through I could make it; I just was able to, by bending the tough metal bar the slightest cunthair (in those days I cleaned and jerked 220 lbs.) and of course, I almost tore off my pride-and-joy as I wiggled out into the cold November air. I was damn glad I was only on the second floor, if

I'd been higher I would have been hungup in space for sure. So I dropped into the bushes bordering the walk along the side of the building, and hid there shivering and gloating with glee. There was a film of snow on the ground, but this didn't bother anything except my feet until some man parked his car in the alley garage and came walking past my hideaway, then, much of my naked body got wet as I pressed against the icy ground so he wouldn't see me. This made me seek better shelter sine it was about 9 P.M.- I'd been in the cold an hour- and a whole string of rich bastards with cars might be putting them away. I waited until no one was in sight then dashed down the walk to the alley and leaped up and grabbed the handy drainpipe of a garage and pulled myself up. The window I'd broken out of overlooked my new refuge and if anyone went in that bathroom they'd see the havoc wrought the place and be looking out to see me. This fear had just formed- I was too cold to be jolly now- when I saw Mary at last come into view. She had my pants, shoes, and coat, but not my T-shirt and socks, having skipped those small items as she bustled about in front of the cause of my predicament "straightening up." The woman had only noticed my belt and Mary had said she had a leather class in school and was engraving it. When I'd bashed out the window Mary had heard the crashing about, (the old lady must have been deaf; while I was escaping kept talking about Thanksgiving turkey!) ***and had come in the bathroom to clean up, close the window and otherwise coverup. I out on my clothes and chattering uncontrollably from my freezeout walked with Mary to the Oasis Café for some hot coffee. And so it goes, tale after tale revolving around this Cherry Mary period; here's just a couple more:

At first the mother of this frantic fucking filly confided in me and, to get me on her side, asked me to take care of Mary, watch her and so forth. After awhile, as Mary got wilder, the old bitch decided

to give me a dressing down, (I can't remember the exact little thing that led up to this, offhand anyhow) and since she wasn't the type to do it herself- and to impress me, I guess- she got the pastor of the parish to give me a lecture. Now, her home was in one of the elite parishes and so she got the monseigneur- it was a Catholic church- to come over for dinner the same evening she invited me. I arrived a little before him and could at once smell something was cooking. The slut just couldn't hold back her little scheme, told Mary to listen closely and began preaching a little of her own gospel to warm me up for the main event. The doorbell rang and her eyes sparkled with anticipation as she sallied forth from the kitchen to answer it. The priest was a middlesized middleaged pink featured man with extremely thick glasses covering such poor eyes he couldn't see me until our noses almost touched. Coming toward me across the palatial livingroom he had his handshake extended and was in the midst of a normal greeting, the mother escorting him by elbow all the while and gushing introduction. Then it happened, he saw me; what an expression! I've never seen a chin drop so far so fast, it literally banged his breastbone. "Neal!! Neal!, my boy!, at last I've found my boy!" his voice broke as he said the last word and his Adam's apple refused to articulate further because all it gave out was a strangled blubber. Choked with emotion, he violently clasped me to him and flung his eyes to heaven fervently thanking his God. Tremendous tears rolled down his cheeks, poured over his upthrust jaw, and disappeared inside his tight clerical collar. I had trouble deciding whether to leave my arms hanging limp or throw them around him and try to return the depth of his goodness by turning to it. Golly and whooooeee!, what a sight!! The priest's emotion had been one of incredulous joyous recognition, Mary's mother's emotion was a gem of frustrated surprise; startled wonder at

such an unimaginable happening left her gaping at us with the most foolish looking face I've ever seen. She didn't know whether to faint or flee, never had she been so taken aback, and, I'm sure, didn't think she ever would be, it was really a perfect farce. Mary and her sister- who was there to lend dignity to her mother's idea- were as slackjawed as any of us. Depend on sweet Mary to recover fast, she did, with a giggle; which her sister took as a cue to frown upon, thereby regaining her senses. The mother's composure came with a gasp of artificial goo, "Well! what a pleasant surprise!!" she gurgled with strained smile, feeling lucky she'd snuck out from under so easily. Oho! But wait, aha! She'd made a mistake! Her tension was so unbearable- and she had succeeded so well with her first words- that she decided to speak again, "let's all go into supper, shall we?" she said in a high-pitched nervous urge. The false earnestness of her tone struck us all as a most incongruous concern and she'd given herself away by being too quick- since her guest was still holding me tightly.

The ecstatic priest was Harlan Fischer, my Godfather when I was baptized at age 10 in 1936. He had also taught me Latin for some months and saw me occasionally during the following three years I served at Holy Ghost Church as altar boy. At our last meeting I was engrossed in the lives of Saints and determined to become a priest or Christian brother, then, I abruptly disappear down the pleasanter path of evil. Now, six and a half years later, he met me again in Mary's house as a youth he's come to lecture. Well, he didn't get around to the lecture, it never seemed to enter his head because it was too full of blissful joy at finding his lost son. He told me how he'd never had another Godson- it just happened that way- and how he'd prayed every night and day for my soul and to see me again. He could hardly contain himself at the dinner-table, fidgeted and twittered and didn't touch his food. He

dragged the whole story of the long wait for this moment out into the open and before the sullen-hearted (she gave me piercing glances of pure hate when Father Fischer wasn't looking) mother actually waxed moistly eloquent. When the meal was over the dirty old bitch knew her sweet little scheme had backfired completely for Fischer at once excused himself, saying he was sure everyone understood, because he wanted to talk to me alone, and we left. We drove to his church and then sat in his car for two hours before I got out and walked away, never to see him to this very day, now five years since. He started in with the old stuff, and I, knowing there could be no agreement and not wanting to use him unfairly, came down right away and for once I didn't hesitate as I told him not to bother; I was sorry for it, but we were worlds apart and it would do no good for him to try and come closer. Oh we did a lot of talking, it wasn't quite that short and simple, but as I say, I finally left him when he realized there was nothing more to be said, and that was that.

The other incident I wanted to tell you about can wait, I must cut this to the bone from here on out because I haven't the money for paper. Anyhow, the reason for this little glimpse into the months just prior to meeting Joan was to show there was some cause for what happened to me in the bar with my younger blood brother. Mind you, I haven't seen Mary's mother for at least a month before this night in the bar, although I'd seen Mary about two weeks earlier. Ah, what's another few lines, I gotta break in here and tell you that other funny little thing about C. Mary. It is this; she was such a hypochondriac that she often played at Blindness. Now wait a minute, this was unusual, because she never complained of illness or anything else, in fact, she didn't complain about her eyes either, just the opposite, she played at having a true martyr complex toward them. Often we'd spend

12-16 hours in a hotel room while she was "blind." I'd wait on her hand and foot (and cock) during these times. They'd begin casually enough, she'd simply announce that she couldn't see and that would go on until she'd just as quietly say she could see again. This happened while she was driving- I'd grab the wheel- while we were walking- I'd lead her- while we were loving- I'd finish anyhow- in fact, this happened any old place she felt like it happening. It was a great little game, she didn't have to worry, if she smacked up the car, or anything, the old lady would come to the rescue with lots of dough, wouldn't she? Oh enough!

Continuing then, from about 1,500 words ago, as to why Joan and I didn't live Happily Ever After; Very simple, we were given no chance.

You see, as I drank the last Blood-Brother beer- I remember deciding in all seriousness that it was definitely the last one- 2 plainclothesmen approached, asked if I was Neal C. and promptly hauled me away! It seems Cherry Mary's Mother, listening on the phone extension to my friend give my whereabouts, had called the police- and she was politically powerful! Why, why, after release on statutory rape with testifying flatly refused by panicky Mary and not a shred of evidence otherwise- flatly panicky, I continued to be held in jail charged with suspicion of Burglary! Of my poolhall hangout yet. Because the charge had a superficial plausibility, since I racked balls there a couple of times and knew the layout- I knew a lot of fearful moments before Capt. Of Dicks admitted he knew I was clear all along, released me finally weeks later.

Joan had disappeared completely!