

Really Butch

I heard the sound before I opened my eyes. In that brief moment between awakening and becoming completely conscious to the world around me, I could feel my heart within and sensed its having been filled to overflowing. Then, soft crystalline notes from a stringed instrument filled the air. Upon first slowly opening one eye, and then the other, I saw Gregg seated on a chest by his bedroom window, softly strumming on what appeared to be a lute. A lute? Although I had never, other than in pictures, seen a lute, it certainly appeared to be one. Yes, that strange curved neck meant that it was indeed a lute.

He then began to sing softly in an unfamiliar language, though it sounded somewhat like French. On a nearby table I saw a tray. It contained two exquisite squat cups and a shiny metal coffee pot, which, without questioning, I knew contained Espresso. For the second night in a row I had consumed what, for me, was an inordinate amount of alcohol and yet there was not even a trace of what should have been, under normal circumstances, a horrendous hangover. The music, which Gregg was playing, as well as his voice, was ethereal and though I certainly didn't understand the words I seemed to understand that it was a ballad of love. As he finished, he paused briefly and without saying a word, though his sparking eyes spoke tomes, he began singing another ballad. Though this time it was in English, I recognized that it was obviously an English ballad from the past in that many of the words were odd and some of the sentence structure archaic sounding.

As I was sipping that robust coffee, and this time it was no pale 'instant' imitation of the real thing, he explained that some years ago he had become interested in medieval literature and then the music of that period. He, as he put it, *'had lusted after having a lute'* and eventually found one. Since he had earlier learned to play the guitar and bouzouki, learning to play the lute was no particular problem. The larger problem lay in searching out the music of the period, that of the wandering minstrels of love, the troubadours. But that too was eventually resolved.

He then confided that when I had first entered the room on Friday evening, looking slightly bewildered and confused, that he had looked into my innocent green eyes and he had become completely entranced. At that very moment he had longed to sing me a medieval love ballad, but hadn't, *"for fear of scaring the living shit out of you and there's probably nothing more distasteful, as well as downright disgusting, than a member of the military with shit running down his leg"*.

This last statement reflected yet another facet of Gregg's personality that I was beginning to cherish. His ability to speak the most impeccable English and then intersperse phrases or vocabulary that normally only a sailor would use. He continued, *"Instead of singing to you I began talking about myself and although I knew that I was babbling, I couldn't stop. This nonsense—this idiotic drivel, just kept tumbling out of my mouth.. I couldn't stop it. I've had several infatuations and minor affairs of the heart, but obviously I had really never before fallen in love. At first I thought that perhaps I'd quite*

literally gone fucking bonkers."

"By the way, the ballad I was singing as you woke up is one of my favorites. It's in old French, of the twelfth century, and begins: 'It is through the eyes that love attains the heart...' Well, obviously what my eyes experienced was enough to send one of those hot-line messages to my heart, 'This is It, buddy' There was absolutely no doubt in my mind that it was,that it is!. I know it seems like we hardly know each other, but two nights ago I discovered what 'love at first sight' means. Before that night the phrase was nothing more than a group of words, cleverly put together, but they had no profound significance for me. Now they do."

Before he had finished I motioned for him to come over to the bed. I took his hand as he sat down and explained that exactly the same had happened to me. It was as instantaneous as a thunderbolt from heaven and infinitely more powerful. It wasn't anything I could explain to anyone, least of all to myself. But that was of little importance. The most significant thing was that it existed—that he existed and was at that very moment next to me.

With that now familiar twinkle in his flashing eyes he began, *"Do you know the Greek myth as told by Aristophanes and recounted by Plato in the Symposium about 'our other half'? It's charming and like all myths I somehow believe that it points to a truth beyond its surface appearance. Anyway Aristophanes tells that in the very beginning there were creatures that were composed of what are now two human beings. And they were of three sorts: male/female, male/male, and female/female. Then the gods, in one of their capricious moods, split them all in two. But after they had been split apart, all they could think of was to embrace each other again in order to reconstitute their original units. So, according to the myth, we spend our physical lives trying to find and re-embrace our other halves."* He paused, smiled that knowing smile, and we both knew that we had finally encountered that missing part. *"Do you want to hear it in Greek? It is incredibly beautiful in the original."* I sat there fascinated as he recounted it once again, in what had to be one of the most beautiful languages I had ever heard.

Gregg then asked, *"Are you hungry? I think it's about time for some food, but then for Italians, and especially Greek-Italians it's always time for food! Let's shower and then go downstairs."*

The remainder of the day was to be enveloped in a mantle of enchanting magic with non-stop opera at a volume which would have indeed probably irritated his "dear grandmother", whom he claimed was the epitome of all iron-fisted Italian matriarchs, attempting to manipulate and rule everyone and everything she encountered.

Some weeks later I met this grandmother; a charming, sweet little old lady. Though apparently charming and sweet, I had been warned that 'nonna Bela' was not someone to tangle with. He told me about the time she had slammed the refrigerator door shut on his arm and nearly broken it, because he was spending all his time with his friends, obviously didn't love her any more and only came home to rummage through the refrigerator and eat her manicotti. Evidently Paolo, Gregg's uncle who still lived at home, wasn't quite so lucky. Gregg still didn't know exactly what had happened, since neither Bela

nor Paolo would discuss it, but she had managed to break his leg. Bela's only comment was, *"I closed the door. His leg was in the door. So?"* Must have been a transgression of a major type.

After the first time I met Bela I had told Gregg that I thought she was really sweet and had wanted to hug her. Gregg's face was suddenly covered with a horrified expression and he exclaimed, *"Oh Bleedin' Jesus, don't ever, EVER, do that! She's quite capable of jamming her knee in your crotch, screaming rape and then calling the cops—all before you even know what's happened. Now if she hugs YOU, immediately get down on your knees, and give thanks to the Blessed Virgin, because for whatever reason she has decided you are one of the Chosen."*

Evidently everyone in the neighborhood knew exactly what side of Bela's fence they were on: The Chosen or The Rejected. And evidently there were a considerable number of those unworthy of her attention. Imagine my surprise when one day a few weeks later, she reached over and grabbed me. Remembering Gregg's comments, my heart immediately started skipping a few terrified beats, and then, as she was giving me a resounding hug, she gently kissed me on the cheek. Since Gregg was standing slightly behind her I could see the bewilderment and utter shock on his face. I was sure he was going to pass out. It was one of the few times I had seen him completely speechless; his mouth was hanging open but not a sound was coming out of it.

After showering, and another cup of espresso, we went downstairs. Gregg effortlessly prepared a magnificent brunch. While we were eating, it was about the middle of La Bohème when Rodolfo and Mimi realize that they are in love, that Gregg asked I how long I had known that I was gay. Not certain I understood the question I asked, *"Gay, you mean like happy?"* He chuckled, shook his head and smilingly replied that I was much more innocent than he had realized. Then came his explanation of society and homosexuality—people who are 'gay'. I'd read enough to know that homosexuals existed and I felt that I was undoubtedly one of them, but until Gregg's revelations I had no idea that within society there existed a shadow world which was much, much larger than I'd realized.

"In fact, he continued, if current psychological research is accurate more than five percent, maybe much more, of the entire human race is, by genetic coding, homosexual; though most, because of social and cultural prejudice, don't openly admit it. We don't consciously decide to be gay, we come this way my friend,—it's in the genes, the same as being born with brown eyes or black hair. I'm certainly not ashamed of it, it's just who I am. And I'm glad that I know who I am. I also know that I, we, have to be careful because of the society in which we live. Our relationship with the people around us depends on our being discreet and hiding who we really are; concealing the feelings and emotions that are inside and an integral part of our being."

"It's sort of the shits at times to live in such a fucked up world that still insists on maintaining prejudicial attitudes about so many different things. Can you imagine how depressing it must be to be a Negro and know that probably half of the white people in this country feel that you are inferior only, ONLY, because your skin color is different? So we, who are born homosexual also know some of that prejudice, but fortunately we can hide behind a mask and keep our little secret to ourselves."

Thus began my education under the tutelage of one of the most erudite teachers I would ever encounter. His knowledge seemed limitless, but unlike many teachers it was not composed of isolated facts since Gregg had that rare gift of being able to see, sense and feel the connections which exist between all facets of the individual and the society in which he lived—not just blindly focus in on their separate components. Like all true teachers he was insistent that the pupil learn to inquire and then make his own connections. In time I noted that 'the teacher' was also very much involved in the learning process and that even those areas in which he felt he was well versed, no idea or concept was so sacred that it could not be examined or questioned; again and again if necessary.

After brunch I introduced what for me was one of the most touchy of all subjects and one which had caused no end of conflict; namely 'The Church'. It had been established that both of us came from Catholic families so I felt, hoped, that he might have an "instant enlightenment kit" and solve all my difficulties with a few magic words. I explained about my sexual contact with my cousin George and then the two years of remorse and personal struggle knowing that it had been about the biggest of the Church's long list of sins.

At that moment the phone rang. After a short greeting in English, Gregg immediately began speaking in beautiful, fluid French. Not just French but perfect, liquid Parisian French with that gorgeous soft guttural 'rrrrr'. I remembered that when I first began taking French in college I had spent hours attempting to duplicate that difficult sound. After several weeks of constant practice, my mother's patience had evidently reached the breaking point. One morning, after I had spent an inordinate time practicing, she informed me that if I didn't immediately stop that 'odporný' noise' that she was personally going to rip out my tonsils. 'Odporný' in Slovak meant repulsive or ugly and was about the closest Bozhena ever came to cursing. Rip out my tonsils? In the first place I didn't think my tonsils had a lot to do with the sound I was attempting to master. But I thereafter confined my practice to the privacy of my bedroom.

When Gregg hung up I immediately began to question him about how, when and where he had learned to speak such perfect French. He explained that it was difficult to pinpoint how it began, but as a teenager he had heard recordings of Edith Piaf which had made a lasting impression. When he first started at Boston University he overheard two French exchange students talking among themselves. He explained that suddenly he felt that he was overhearing two people 'sing' to each other in place of way in which most people speak.

"It was lyrical, it was musical though not in the traditional sense. Later I began a study of the medieval troubadours as a project for a literature class and of course most of them were French. I decided that I wanted to study their language so that I could sing medieval songs in the original. Well, the language they spoke was a forerunner of modern French and so an oblique way of doing it was to study Modern French first. Had a couple of excellent French teachers at Boston U. and at the same time I attempted to meet and talk to every French person I could find."

He also commented that it had been phenomenally easy for him almost as if he already knew it but just hadn't used it for a while. *"And did you know that it was because of the Troubadours that.... Oh, yes, you wanted to talk about the Church—actually the Church all but wiped out the Troubadours*

because the Church got really pissed off at them. Did you know that? But, as I said, another time. Now back to your problem with the Church. Yes, I had to deal with it too."

Gregg began, *"But first of all, I want to preface what I'm going to say with something important. I love you. 'S agapo'. I love you because you are you, and I don't want to change you. If we agree on things, great, if we don't agree, well, we'll find some way of working around it. Okay? I believe wholeheartedly in the integrity of the individual to be whoever it is that they are.*

My mind was in perfect agreement and my heart continued to swell with admiration for this incredible individual. In the first place he was so physically handsome that even looking at him sent shivers throughout my body. I was in awe of nearly everything he said and had felt giddy since I opened my eyes that morning and heard him singing. Now, even his speech seemed to be a song.

He continued speaking softly, yet firmly, *It's also natural to become enthused about an idea or concept and want to share it. But when anyone, or any one group decides that they have the only available truth and it's their duty—and it's even worse when it's a 'Divinely Directed Duty',—to force it on someone else then I get upset, and a little sad. For as long as I can remember I have been interested in learning, knowing as much as is humanly possible. In my short twenty three years of life I have also learned that it is almost impossible to talk to certain individuals and groups. For example the Jesuits and Jehovah Witnesses—and believe it or not they seem to come from the same mold.—fanatics, fanatics with blinders."*

"So the only thing I will ever suggest is to always keep a constant vigilance that while you weren't aware of it the 'blinders' have somehow slipped into place. And I think this is important also. There isn't some invincible outside source that fits us with those blinders, like with horses, where man is the agent. No, we do it to ourselves!" He smiled and rolled his mirthful eyes from side to side, as if checking for some invisible self-blinding device.

Gregg jumped up and went over to the phonograph. *"Well Verdi is certainly not adequate for this particular discussion."* Some arias from La Traviata was just finishing. *"What we need is something a little heavier, and believe me there's nothing heavier or more ponderous than Wagner. I think this calls for Götterdämmerung, The Twilight of the Gods. Just some of the highlights."* My ears were about to be assaulted by German sopranos, weighty baritones and music that could indeed be called 'ponderous', though in time I learned to appreciate its supremely unique beauty.

Gregg explained that he was actually the product of two branches of Christianity, for though his father was Catholic, his mother was Greek Orthodox. From early childhood he had heard parental discussions about which was the 'true church' and had attended services in both. He admitted that he also loved both, though probably for reasons that many would not consider to be the most spiritual. For him the importance lay in the magnificent show that they put on: incense, beautiful robes, candles, flowers, more incense, lots of shiny gold but most of all the music; in fact while still quite young he voiced the opinion to his folks that there wasn't nearly enough music.

Once as an adolescent he had gone with a friend to a Protestant service and immediately decided that it *"must really be boring to have to go that place every Sunday. The 'show' was almost non-existent, the music was less than mediocre and in general the whole thing was about as dull as dishwater"*.

Another foray into the vast unknown world of those 'other' Christians was when he, on his own, attended a Four Square Pentecostal church. One Sunday morning, in passing he had been intrigued by their blinking neon sign and had entered, *"just as the band struck up. Now that was fucking pandemonium! Someone was banging on a piano to the raucous accompaniment of trombones, a really loud trumpet and lots of shaking tambourines. Just as I sat down someone in front of me leaped up and began jabbering, almost screaming, in an unknown language or maybe they was just animal-like sounds and began gyrating around like he was either possessed or was celebrating having recently escaped from a mental institution. That person was soon joined by others with the same glazed eyes and equally psychotic behavior. I got the hell out there as fast as my legs would move for fear that whatever it was that they were afflicted with might be catching."* And in the background Wagner continued with his mighty themes that were leading to the demise of the Gods.

It was at about this point in his life that Gregg had begun to question the validity of all the Christian churches. Confession had never made much sense in that its only purpose seemed to be a preoccupation with all the 'bad' things he'd done during the week and he was never once asked about all the beautiful thoughts or nice things he'd done. The Catholics had the 'truth', and their butchers known as the Inquisition had murdered countless thousands to prove it. The Protestants obviously didn't have this same 'truth' since they wouldn't even accept the Pope, and everyone, at least every Catholic, knew that the Pope was the one infallible human being alive. In addition none of the Protestants could agree with each other since each of the thousands of differing groups had been given some type of divine revelation which the others had missed out on.

The Greeks were occupied with ways in which to slit the throats of all the Turks—with God's help of course. And the Turks knew that Allah, who by the way had originally been the same Hebrew God they were now bent on destroying, was on their side in their attempt to slit the throats of all the Greeks. During World War II the Allies were calling on God to help defeat their enemy, the Germans, who in turn were appealing to the very same God to help wipe out their enemies, the Allies. Not only were they all attempting to enlist this God's aid, but they all knew that he was there to assist them. According to Gregg, God would have to be completely schizophrenic to even get mixed up in any of humanity's vicious games.

"So one day, I think I was about 16 or 17, I just said 'fuck it'. I have experienced God in a sunrise and a sunset, I have heard Him in the music of Verdi, Puccini, Mozart, Bach, and the cricket outside my window, I have seen Him in the eyes of an innocent young child, I have intimately known God in a thousand ways, and my experiences have nothing to do with 'theology' or 'dogma'. I decided organized religion, that whole multitude of churches with its hordes of backbiting fanatics, was all bullshit and geared at nothing more than a desire to control, a lust for power. Did I believe in God? You bet your sweet ass I did, and still do, but I didn't think he lived in any specific church, no matter how grandiose, or deliberately humble, it might be. But of course that was just a personal assumption, the ideas of an adolescent. As a human being everyone was free to believe anything they wanted and I

had decided to form my own opinions."

He explained that he would not attempt to convince anyone of what they should believe, but that it really helped to read history, compare everything which one read with something else and then attempt to come to discriminating, logical conclusion. He felt that in separating myth and religious stories from actual documented fact one could then begin to form a rational opinion.. *"Unfortunately the way most 'religious' people think runs something like this: 'If I believe it then it's 'history' —THE TRUTH — but if it's different and someone else believes it then it's undoubtedly a myth.' All too often people put on their ethnocentric blinders and well, its basically downhill from there."* In the background, Wagner's massed French horns, clashing cymbals and thunderous kettledrums announced the twilight of the Gods, the end of their time on the earth and a return to Valhalla, their eternal resting place.

During those final passages of Wagner's epic, Gregg had closed his eyes, listening with rapture to the musical rendition of the Nordic myth of the separation of man and the Gods. The final notes died away.

Gregg got up, put on some soft harp music and continued, *"It didn't take long for me to realize that my adolescent rebellion at the Church, and in fact religion in general, was more than a bit juvenile and simplistic. However anyone who becomes aware of his interior, has listened carefully during moments of meditation or during that quietness, when the priest or his equivalent isn't babbling, is aware of his connection to the divine. We do know of our connection to the Divine Spirit and each knows of that potential for personal realization. We intimately know that we are much deeper than our surface appearance."*

"What I am living is but a fractional inkling of what is really within me—what gives me life, breadth and depth. And when that moment of realization occurs we know what all the religions of the world have been attempting to convey. God doesn't care if my skin is black or if I'm an oriental or if I am a male who loves other males. I think whatever that 'spirit or god might be' glories in my uniqueness!" From the intense expression on his face, and the certainty in his voice I knew that he wasn't just mouthing words, he was relating personal conviction.

Gregg went on to explain that there is a marvelous illustration, which is often used, in oriental literature of the person who, traveling with a companion, suddenly becomes enraptured with the ethereal beauty of the rising moon and points to it with his finger. The companion sees the pointing finger but becomes so fixed on the image of the finger that he completely misses the object that the finger is pointing at. Gregg felt that all the world's religions were pointing to the Infinite, the Divine Spirit, but man in his preoccupation with his daily problems was usually never able to see beyond the pointing and hence had little or no idea of what was beyond. Then Gregg began chuckling, *"And you know, it is so fucking bizarre, but even the clergy, who are doing the pointing get so caught up in looking at their dainty, pointing fingers that most of the time they never see what they're pointing at."* By this time he was softly laughing.

"Now this is just a brief outline of some of the things I discovered for myself. If I can offer any advice it is to question everything, including what I've just said. Remember it came from a person who has viewed and interpreted things according to his own personal perspective. Read as much as you can get your hands on, then search and look some more, —then armed with that information come to your own conclusions. I've often thought that humanity's biggest problem is that of being lazy. It's easier for most people to accept someone else's ideas or opinions rather than think for themselves."

Gregg also mentioned that one of the most enlightening experiences of his life was a series of lectures he attended at the University of Boston, which were given by Dr. Joseph Campbell, the author of several books and well known authority on mythology. For many years Dr. Campbell had been teaching at Sarah Lawrence College in New York and had become somewhat of a legend with the East Coast university students. Not only did Dr. Campbell substantiate Gregg's personal discoveries and decisions about organized religion but added a wealth of new information and insights about how 'myths', in the broadest sense, continue to shape human institutions and actions and motivate human behavior. According to Gregg, Dr. Campbell was the most stimulating speaker, and writer, that he had ever encountered. In the months, which followed, Gregg and I read his newest book entitled *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* as well as several monographs and other papers, which Gregg had obtained. I was in complete agreement with my new mentor's opinion.

Gregg paused, and at that moment, my admiration for this incredible creature increased to the point that I felt my heart would burst. Within the period of an hour or so he had magically helped me to resolve internal conflicts that had been the bane of my existence for years. While he had been talking I suddenly realized that the Church was not the Absolute Authority and I could indeed question it. Somehow, of everything he had said, that was the message that had come through and was of most importance to me.

The word 'brainwashing' had just recently entered the English language due to some unsavory practices on prisoners in North Korea and I made a connection. That was how organized religion operated; probably how they had to operate if they were going to stay in business. When I mentioned this mental association that I had just made, Gregg smiled his very special smile. He reached over and patted me on the hand, obviously pleased to see that I was beginning to make my own connections. It was also at that moment I realized that as humans we are capable, and often do, question just about anything. The one thing we usually neglect to question are those beliefs that are closest to us. We never seem to touch those most important, though usually invisible, ones. And he had claimed that he didn't have an 'instant enlightenment kit'! Now I knew otherwise.

Later that afternoon he took me to visit a couple of nearby friends and even his favorite aunt, Giovanna—Gina. I felt an immediate attraction to Gina; she and Gregg were very much alike. Alive and vivacious, she was beautiful and charming, friendly and once again it seemed like I had known her forever. At one point Gregg went to the supermarket and I stayed to chat with Gina. She mentioned that after the death of her brother and sister-in-law, Gregg's parents, she had sort of served as a surrogate parent. Gregg had been fourteen years old when his parents had both died in an automobile accident. Now I knew why he lived with his grandmother. He'd never mentioned the death of his parents. Gina's love and affection for him was more than evident. She went on to tell me about her work as an executive with a large insurance firm in Boston; the difficulties of being a professional

woman in what was basically a masculine dominated culture. More prejudice—and I made the mental connection that it was undoubtedly based on the Hebraic-Christian concept of God being male. Though my heart might be pounding with love and making me somewhat giddy, my mind was abuzz with new ideas and connections that I had never before considered.

Gregg returned from the store and related that he had encountered a friend that he hadn't seen for several months. His bubbling enthusiasm, about everything, never abated and I began to understand how it was that he was able to consume such vast quantities of rich Mediterranean food and not swell up like an over inflated balloon. Maybe he used up all those extra calories in his ever constant talking and the copious amounts of Italian gestures, which accompanied his discourses about anything and everything.

All too soon it was time to return to Fort Devins. Tomorrow would be our first day of classes.

When we got back to the barracks that night it was ablaze with lights and chattering voices, evidence that the rest of our group had arrived. Gregg also stopped by Sergeant Castorini's room to drop off a small package. Before leaving home Gregg had gone into an Italian bakery and picked up a couple of pieces of an incredibly rich, white cake. Well, it sort of looked like wedding cake. This young man was exceedingly clever and was already preparing for future favors, in case the need arose.

Gregg had almost immediately fallen asleep, but my head, and heart, were still aflutter. I got up without turning on the lights, grabbed a piece of paper from my desk, and went to the bathroom. There I wrote him a small note, just a couple of lines. It seemed important to put in writing this momentous occurrence in my life.

*"On Friday, March 6, at 5:30 pm. Gordon fell in love with the most
incredible person in the entire universe!"*

It was the singularly most important event of my life and I hadn't been completely aware of it when it happened. Guess I'd been expecting flashing lights and the heralding of blaring trumpets. I folded the paper, went back to our room and put it on Gregg's desk, then softly kissed him on his forehead.

On Monday, after an orientation session, we began our classes. I was disappointed to discover that the group had been divided into two sections, A and B. Gregg was in Section A and I was in Section B. It was the same for everyone in the barracks; each two-man room had individuals from different sections. Although both sections studied the same materials they were given by different instructors. As we later discovered, while doing our nightly homework, the instructors often had different ways of imparting the material. It was a very intelligent and progressively educational means

of organization for optimum learning. The evenings also us allowed time for discussions of a more personal nature, that is when "Mr. Gregarious", as he came to be known, wasn't off visiting with anyone in the barracks willing to listen to his near constant barrage of opinions. And at the same time he baited nearly everyone with questions so that he could partake of their ideas.

I learned to love him for his very gregariousness and became aware that human interaction is a very necessary part of the process of discovery. We became friends with nearly all the other guys in the barracks and spent a lot of time chatting with them. Though many nights were for just the two of us, alone with each other and the ever-constant music. He had brought a large number of records from home during our visit there and music became an integral part of our existence together; a binding element since it was something that both of us not only enjoyed, but also actually needed. It was a time of growth and each day seemed to herald the joy of discovery.

Bruce and Tom were the guys in the next room. As different as night and day and though fairly good friends they also seemed to spend a great deal of time arguing and bickering. Bruce was from Wyoming and had spent his life on the family cattle ranch there. Blond, blue eyed, tall, chunky and muscular. During the second week at Fort Devins he had received a 'dear John' letter from his girl friend and seemed to have a rather low opinion of women thereafter. Tom was short, rather thin and with dark hair and beady black eyes. He was from the Los Angeles area and his family owned several small grocery stores. He wrote to his girlfriend every day. Sometimes he managed to write her two or three times within a twenty-four hour period. Bruce contended it was a waste of time and she'd probably dump him before he got out of the service. That was the most minor of the things they found to daily, sometimes hourly, disagree about. Bruce liked country western music and Tom preferred schmaltzy romantic ballads. Fortunately they both liked to read. Bruce preferred western novels and adventure or spy stories. Tom occasionally read historical dramas, but also spent a lot of time pouring over business manuals such as Cost Accounting. Since they couldn't even talk about what they were currently reading, much of their six months in each other's company was spent in a sulking silence.

Gerald was one of the few black guys at Fort Devins and the only one in our group. He had an incredible sense of humor and had been a pre-med student before enlisting. His father was a well-known surgeon in Cleveland. Gerald loved classical music and spent a lot of time in our room listening to Gregg's records. I had noted that for all his laughter that he seemed a bit melancholy. One evening Gregg was stretched out on his bunk reading while I was doing my homework and I suddenly thought about Gerald and mentioned my observation of his somewhat hidden, but intrinsic sobriety and sadness. To me he was like the clown Pagliacci. Gregg replied, *"Well of course. How would you feel if you were a black and gay and had to live in a white dominated heterosexual society? That would be enough to make anyone depressed."*

I'd never thought of the possibility that Gerald might be gay and questioned Gregg. He responded that his 'antenna' had picked it up the first time he'd met him. I wanted to know more about this imaginary antenna that Gregg claimed he had, and which gave him access to this type of information.

He smiled and his dimples were more pronounced than usual. *"Well now we're delving into the*

realm of the mysterious, but I honestly believe that we all have telepathic contact or something of the sort. It's like in a large room full of people at party, the two people who are accountants or actors or whatever almost seem magnetically attracted to each other and begin talking."

"It's the same with being gay. When I'm introduced to someone for the first time I usually know in an instant if they're gay or not. And if the feeling isn't definite there are always certain telltale signs, things that probably no one else but another gay person would notice. They're definitely there if you are observant. Oh, occasionally I'm fooled, but not often."

I couldn't resist the temptation and immediately asked, *"And did you know about me at the very beginning, I mean, like when I walked in the room?"* He smiled an even broader grin and at the same time put his index fingers over his head and began to wave them around in small circles, *"Sweets, I knew about you before you had even knocked on the door! There was this electric charge in the air that said 'Here I come, innocent and eager.'"* Before he could finish I was on top of him and knowing how ticklish he was I quickly put a stop to his nonsense.

Then one evening I got him to talk about the troubadours again. He began by explaining that due to several factors it was rather complicated. At first the troubadours were the Nobility of Province in France, but then later they were not solely those of noble birth and were prevalent throughout France and Germany. In Germany for instance they were known as the Minnesingers, 'the singers of love'. Minne was the old German word for love. They were also the poets of their age.

"As you undoubtedly know the medieval church was very powerful and its clergy was also very corrupt. There was one group that began to protest the blatant corruption and since the troubadours also had a beef with the church, Pope Innocent III instituted the Albigensian Crusade to get rid of both groups of troublemakers at the same time. The Albigensian Crusade, by the way, is considered one of the bloodiest and most monstrous crusades in the history of Europe. The troubadours really instituted the transformation of love and were slaughtered because of it." As usual I was fascinated when Gregg began another of his explanations and with all of the connections which that entailed.

I asked what he meant by the 'transformation of love'. *"The troubadours were the first ones in the Europe who really thought of love the way we do now—as an individual person-to-person relationship. Before that it was your family, or the royal court, or the Church who decided who would marry whom. Love? Well love was purely physical, a crotch thing. Impersonal. It was the troubadours who introduced the term 'amour',—love. And with 'amour' it turns into a personal affair. A gentle glance, a meeting of the eyes and cupid's arrow hits the spot. Remember that troubadour poem that begins, "So through the eyes love attains the heart...."*

"That poem is in the manuscript that I've been writing,—putting together, for a couple of years now. If you want, you can read it next weekend when we go to the house. Anyway, this was completely contrary to everything the Church stood for. The troubadours were proposing love as a personal, individual experience. The church as a monolithic system is a machine system, every machine works

like every other machine that comes from the same shop. Good little Christian soldiers. —And never forget buddy, that there are a lot of them right here in this barracks. The Church did not want to lose their control. Amour was a heresy, it was dangerous."

He stared off into space for a few moments, lost in thought and began again. *"God, I wish I had the recording of Wagner's 'Tristan und Isolde' here. Do you know that story. It was written during this medieval time and was complete heresy. It seems that Isolde is engaged to marry King Mark, though they have never seen each other. King Mark sends his aide, Tristan, to fetch Isolde and bring her back to the castle. Isolde's mother prepares a love potion so that King Mark and Isolde, who are to be married, will have real love for each other. This love potion is given to a nurse who is to go with Isolde. The love potion is left unguarded and Tristan and Isolde, thinking it to be wine, drink it. Actually they had already fallen in love, but didn't completely realize it. The love potion just touched it off.*

Gregg continued, *"The problem, from the troubadour point of view is that King Mark and Isolde are not really qualified for love, since they haven't even seen each other. The true relationship is the union that springs from the recognition of identity in the other, and the physical union is simply the sacrament in which that is confirmed. It doesn't start the other way around, with the physical interest that with time then becomes spiritualized. It starts with the spiritual impact of love — Amour. This idea was what was upsetting the Church's apple cart for they were justifying marriages that were simply political and social in character. And then along comes this movement validating individual choice. The Church was about to lose its control, its power. "*

"Now when the young couple had drunk the love potion and the nurse realizes what has happened she goes to Tristan and says, 'You have drunk your death.' And Tristan replies, 'By my death do you mean this pain of love? If by my death, you mean this agony of love, well that is my life. If by my death, you mean the punishment that I am to suffer if discovered, I accept that. And if by my death, you mean eternal punishment and the fires of hell, I accept that too.'

"Now considering the time in which that was written it was big stuff, because Tristan was saying that love is bigger even than death and pain, than anything. This is an affirmation of the pain of life when smitten by love. He was also saying that the realization of love is nature's noblest work, and that he, and others of his time, were going to take their wisdom from their own experience and not from any dogma, politics, or any current concepts of social good."

He then concluded, *"Well, I think that's enough for an introduction, though it is but a small part of all of the intrigue and self discovery that led up to a massive retribution by the church in an effort to stamp out this dangerous threat to their power structure. But then the Church, Christians in general, as well as other religions, but especially the monotheistic groups originating in the middle east, have been attempting to obliterate each other since time immemorial. All done in the name of God. Poor God, he's had to take the rap for an awful lot of bad shit."*

As usual I sat there in awe and amazement at his knowledge and enthusiasm in sharing it. His

eyes began to twinkle and a sly smile graced his face. *"If you want you can read the research that I've been working on and I also have a number of books which relate to that period of history. I've got a great idea! You can spend next weekend reading and I'll spend the time playing the lute and singing love songs to a very special person in my life. No, not in my life, who is my life!"*

One evening I was doing my homework for our current phase of study, cryptography. The first few days had been quite easy with simple letter or number substitution. This evening problem was more difficult since it involved using prearranged words and phrases that carried specific encrypted information. Gregg had done his homework earlier while I was finishing a science fiction novel that had been loaned to me by one of the guys downstairs. While I was still reading Gregg had gone out. In finally getting around to my homework, somehow I just couldn't arrive at a solution to the problem that had been assigned. Gregg wasn't around to help me. It seemed that he had recently been spending a great deal of his free time visiting with the other guys in the barracks. As the hours passed I became more frustrated with the seeming impossibility of the homework and I began to get angry. When Gregg finally showed up I vented all of my pent-up hostility and frustration at him. My previously hidden possessiveness also made its first appearance. In a particularly ugly scene I accused him of having lost interest in me, of not wanting to help me, of being off looking for a new conquest and a number of other unsavory accusations.

He had quietly let me rant and rave and when at last I fell silent he finally responded. *"We have many things in common, not the least of which is our mutual love. But we are also very different. I enjoy talking to other people, interacting with them. It's a part of my personality. I know that you don't have this same necessity, nor have I ever insisted that you adopt that form of behavior. I love you for who you are, not who I want you to be. If you need assistance or comfort or anything that I can do to help you, just let me know. But please don't accuse me of being responsible for your imaginary hurts. Talk and communicate your needs. I will always be by your side for anything you need. Now do you need some help with the homework?"*

Everything he had said was so logical and reasonable. It sounded just like Bozhena, my mother, giving me one of her frequent lectures. At that moment I wasn't ready for, nor did I need, anyone's advice. Nor help. Retreating even more, I declined his assistance. Bozhena had often commented on my stubborn streak. Well, it had just blossomed anew. Taking note of my pouting silence and without another word, Gregg went to bed and within a few minutes was making his soft little cat-like snoring sounds. I was really pissed, most of all at myself since I knew he was right. I worked until sometime around midnight, but I finally made sense of the homework and completed it to my satisfaction.

Just before I crawled into bed I went over and kissed him every so gently on his forehead. He immediately reached out, grabbed me and whispered, *"Don't ever doubt that I love you more than life itself."* He hadn't been asleep at all and had been waiting all that time for me to finish my work. It was the first time we had actually had an argument. Although it was risky because of the occasional 'bedcheck', and something we had made a point of not doing, that night we slept together.

The next afternoon when we returned from classes I proudly showed Gregg that I had gotten all of my 'crypto' problems correct. In fact I was the only one in my group to have done so. There were a

couple of variables called 'false assumptions' which most of the guys had not recognized and accepted as being valid, but which, had in fact invalidated all their work. Gregg got sort of squinty eyed and showed me his paper, at the same time saying, *"You really are a stubborn little shit; and also a smart ass. Nearly everyone in my group, including me, got them wrong!"* Needless to say, I felt very proud of myself, but after the previous night's dramatic little performance, I didn't dare say a word.

The months passed and spring was now in full, magnificent bloom. Every weekend was spent in exploration. The mountains of nearby New Hampshire and Vermont offered opportunities for weekend trips and a chance for me to share some of my interests and botanical knowledge. Gregg had, like most people appreciated nature from a distance, and I helped him to discover, at times with our noses pressed to the ground, the joy and excitement of examining a minute flower with a hand lens. I pointed out the relationships between plants; how some, though related, had taken on surprisingly different forms during their evolutionary changes. We spent hours on our backs looking up at the complex ecosystems that existed in the tree branches above. Most important were the connections between all the differing species of plants, insects and animals. They existed together in an environmental wholeness. Man, unfortunately, seemed to be the only creature, within that totality, bent upon its destruction. Once again, due to man's blinders, he couldn't see that it would also mean his own destruction.

Gregg was ever so quick to point out that once again it was related to western religion. In the Bible God created everything and then as his crowning glory he created man and 'put him in charge' of the things on the earth. According to the creation story in the Bible, man, unlike the other species, wasn't a part of the totality and dependent upon the delicate interlocking balance, but rather stood apart in the role of conqueror. I could tell that Gregg was both concerned and saddened to realize that few people, because of their blinders, could see and comprehend this fact. Just then a deep blue butterfly fluttered by and decided to land on his forearm. As it opened its wings completely we both gloried in its magnificent markings. It was so still and stayed there for such a long time that I mentioned that it looked like he had a tattoo. Abruptly it decided to investigate the nearby picnic basket loaded with delectable morsels and a couple of bottles of wine. Our trips were as gastronomic as they were exploratory.

Each day was more magical than the one preceding and it seemed that our mutual admiration and love increased proportionally to the amount of time spent together. How was it possible for something that was absolutely perfect to become more perfect? Neither of us questioned this seeming contradiction, but rather basked in the ever-present joy, beauty and completeness of the moment.

Then it was July, and we had a three-day holiday weekend for the Fourth of July. Gregg made arrangements for us to spend it with some friends of his who had a home on Cape Cod. Before we arrived at their home, Gregg explained that George and Bob had lived together for over ten years. Both had highly successful careers and had learned to completely accept their homosexuality, that is after George divorced his wife of several years. Their magnificent home was on a slight bluff overlooking the ocean and reflected the owners' magnificent taste in everything from the furniture and art to the smallest detail. I had sort of expected to be introduced to two campy fairies and instead was pleased to discover two fine, sensitive and intelligent gentlemen, who, to all but the most discerning, would never

have been suspected of being gay. George was a well-known writer and I had read several of his articles in Harper's and the Atlantic Monthly. Bob was the president of an international corporation whose offices were located in Boston. I was impressed by their qualifications, though they never once gave the impression that they were anything other than two individuals who, after many years of living together, were still very much in love.

It was a very special three days filled with excellent food, stimulating conversation, wonderful music and I became even more comfortable with my sexual orientation. In fact I was becoming proud of it, however as George pointed out, we were part of a very small minority and prejudice against homosexuals was of the most vehement and unreasonable type. His advice was *"to know who you are, to be inwardly satisfied with your being and outwardly to be constantly vigilant, and always wear a mask"*. He also noted that obviously both Gregg and I had been discriminate in the past or we certainly wouldn't be in the Intelligence Service, since the screening process for our security clearance was done by the FBI, and they were known to be quite thorough. It was evident that both George and Bob adored Gregg and seemed especially pleased that Gregg had finally found *"his other half."*

That Sunday evening, as we were driving back to Fort Devins, Gregg explained that he had admired his two friends since first meeting them, and had hoped and dreamed that someday he too might find someone to share the rest of his life with. As he squeezed my hand, his beaming face was evidence that he believed his dream had come true. We began to talk about our lives together when we finished our time in the military. Gregg wanted to live on the East coast and I opted for Southern California.

He mentioned that he had visited southern California once several years ago. *"One week was all I could stand and I can't envision anyone actually living there in that cultural desert. Nice climate, and pleasant people, but they don't even have an opera house,"* was his means of explaining that the people there were just one step away from being savages. Noting my silence he apologized and suggested that it might have some redeeming features that he just hadn't encountered due his short stay there. I then suggested that San Francisco or the general Bay Area might be an alternative and pointed out that they did have an opera house as well as a number of fine museums and there was even a large Italian section in the city. In just five more weeks we would have finished our training here and both of us would be heading for the National Defense Language School at the Presidio in Monterey, and which was located in northern California.

We had received our advance orders and whereas I would be studying Russian, Gregg would be studying Korean. He had been hoping for something a bit less exotic, but was intrigued since he knew very little about the oriental cultures or languages. I pointed out that Monterey was only a couple of hours from San Francisco and we could visit there frequently during our year at the language school. I just knew that he would fall in love with the area, even if it did mean giving up being near the Metropolitan Opera in New York. I had never been inside the San Francisco Opera House and hoped that it would meet with his approval. I knew that he still wasn't convinced, but I also knew that I had something in my favor since he detested cold weather. In that regard we were both in agreement.

Suddenly it was our last weekend at Fort Devins and naturally it was spent in the now familiar

Greek section of Boston. Most of Gregg's friends and relatives now accepted me as their friend also. The evening was spent in joyful wishes for the future and tearful farewells with lots of toasts for a speedy return. So many toasts in fact that I began to wonder if I would ever see the future. I felt that I had been bathed in a river of Metaxa. Gregg suddenly had another of his brilliant ideas and almost immediately we took leave of our Greek friends with a promise to return shortly.

We were now walking toward Scully Square, a bustling somewhat seedy part of the city, primarily filled with sailors on shore leave. In overhearing bits of passing conversations I knew where Gregg might have picked up some of his colorful language habits. On the way Gregg had explained that after finishing our training in Monterey, the two of us would probably be sent to differing countries. He would undoubtedly go to Korea, perhaps with luck to Japan. As a Russian linguist I would probably be sent Europe. He explained that our internal connection, our mutual love, would be with both of us at all times, but he wanted something external, something he could look at daily and know that I was with him.

I thought to myself, *'so it's time for family photos?'* He interrupted my slightly inebriated cogitating with, *"What do I think of this one?"* And I realized that we were standing in front of a small tattoo shop. The window was filled with enticing designs. Several more possibilities and then he spied what was obviously the one and only—a nice, relatively small Eagle with soaring wings. *"Yea, that's it. What do you think of that one?"* I thought he'd lost his beady mind, that's what I thought. He decided that we would both get the same tattoo as a binding external indication of our union. When finally convinced, I opted for the upper arm where it wouldn't be so visible, but he was adamant. No, he insisted that it had to be on the forearm so that, *"We can see each other every moment of every day. And after all it was your idea."*

"What do you mean it was my idea?" I asked, a bit confused. Then I remembered the day up in the woods of New Hampshire when I had mentioned that the butterfly that had landed on his arm looked like a tattoo. God, not only did he not forget anything, he was also capable of attempting to turn anything to his advantage.

It really didn't hurt much, but then the copious quantity of Metaxa inside our systems served as a general anesthetic. Leaving the tattoo shop he was obviously proud of his new acquisition and smilingly remarked, *"Well we may be fairies, but now we're going to look like really butch fairies."* I couldn't help but think how incongruous that statement sounded. He was probably one of the most masculine appearing guys I had ever met. In fact I was positive that he couldn't possibly be spotted by even the most astute 'antenna detector'.

As we returned to be with our Greek friends the warm, humid night air was caressing in its velvet softness, and I realized that I never wanted for this particular night to end. I'd come to love Boston and all that it signified — enchantment, magic and the love of my life, Gregg.