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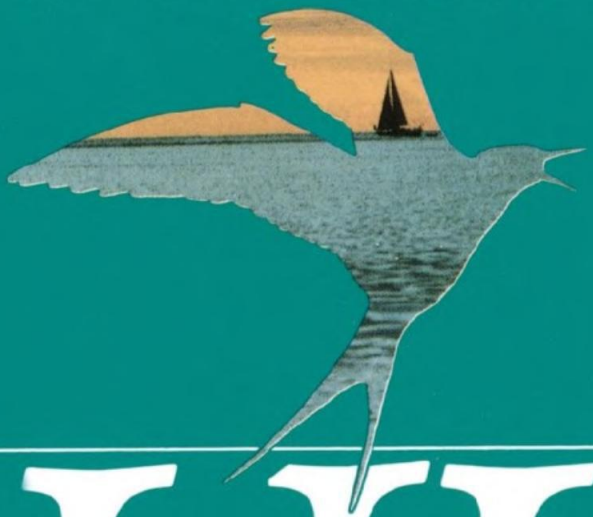

LILA

AN INQUIRY INTO MORALS

Robert M. Pirsig

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BANTAM BOOKS
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LILA

A Bantam Book

PUBLISHING HISTORY

Bantam hardcover edition published November 1991
Bantam paperback edition / December 1992

The author wishes to give special thanks to the Guggenheim Foundation for the grant under which this book was written.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 91-16417.

ISBN 0-553-29961-1

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OPM 19 18 17 16 15 14 13

1.

Lila didn't know he was here. She was sound asleep, apparently in some fearful dream. In the darkness he heard a grating sound of her teeth and felt her body suddenly turn as she struggled against some menace only she could see.

The light from the open hatch above was so dim it concealed whatever lines of cosmetics and age were there and now she looked softly cherubic, like a small girl with blond hair, wide cheekbones, a small turned-up nose, and a common child's face that seemed so familiar it attracted a certain natural affection. He got the feeling that when morning came she should pop open her sky-blue eyes and they should sparkle with excitement at the prospect of a new day of sunlight and parents smiling and maybe bacon cooking on the stove and happiness everywhere.

But that wasn't how it would be. When Lila's eyes opened in a hung-over daze she'd look into the features of a gray-haired man she wouldn't even remember—someone she met in a bar the previous night. Her nausea and headache might produce some remorse and self-contempt but not much, he thought—she'd been through this many

times—and she'd slowly try to figure out how to return to whatever life she'd been leading before she met this one.

Her voice murmured something like "Look out!" Then she said something unintelligible and turned away, then pulled the blanket up around her head, perhaps against the cold breeze that came down through the open hatch. The berth of the sailboat was so narrow that this turn of her body brought her up against him again and he felt the whole length of her and then her warmth. An earlier lust came back and his arm went over her so that his hand held her breast—full there but too soft, like something overripe that would soon go bad.

He wanted to wake her and take her again but as he thought about this a sad feeling rose up and forbade it. The more he hesitated the more the sadness grew. He would like to know her better. He'd had a feeling all night that he had seen her before somewhere, a long time ago.

That thought seemed to bring it all down. Now the sadness came on in full and blended with the darkness of the cabin and with the dim indigo light through the hatch above. Up there were stars, framed by the hatch opening so that they seemed to move when the boat rocked. Part of Orion momentarily disappeared, then appeared again. Soon all the winter constellations would be back.

Cars rolling over a bridge in the distance sounded clearly through the cold night air. They were on their way to Kingston, somewhere on the bluffs above, over the Hudson River. The boat was berthed here in this tiny creek for a night's rest on the way south.

There was not much time. There was almost no green left in the trees along the river. Many of the turned leaves had already fallen. During these last few days, gusts of cold wind had swept down the river valley from the north, swirling the leaves up off their branches into the air in sudden spiraling flights of red and maroon and gold and brown across the water of the river into the path of the boat as it moved down the buoyed channel. There had been hardly any other boats in the channel. A few boats at docks along the riverbank seemed abandoned and forlorn

now that summer had ended and their owners had turned to other pursuits. Overhead the V's of ducks and geese had been everywhere, flying down on the north wind from the Canadian arctic. Many of them must have been just ducklings and goslings when he first began this voyage from the inland ocean of Lake Superior, a thousand miles behind him now and what seemed like a thousand years ago.

There was not much time. Yesterday when he first went up on deck his foot slipped and he caught himself and then he saw the entire boat was covered with ice.

Phædrus wondered where he had seen Lila before, but he didn't know. It seemed as though he had seen her, though. It was autumn then too, he thought, November, and it was very cold. He remembered the streetcar was almost empty except for him and the motorman and the conductor and Lila and her girlfriend sitting back three seats behind him. The seats were yellow woven rattan, hard and tough, designed for years of wear, and then a few years later the buses replaced them and the tracks and overhead cables and the streetcars were all gone.

He remembered he had seen three movies in a row and smoked too many cigarettes and had a bad headache and it was still about half an hour of pounding along the tracks before the streetcar would let him off and then he would have a block and a half through the dark to get home where there would be some aspirin and it would be about an hour and a half after that before the headache would go away. Then he heard these two girls giggle very loudly and he turned to see what it was. They stopped very suddenly and they looked at him in such a way that there could have been only one thing they were giggling at. It was him. He had a big nose and poor posture and wasn't anything to look at, and tended to relate poorly to other people. The one on the left who looked like she had been giggling the loudest was Lila. The same face, exactly —gold hair and smooth complexion and blue eyes—with a smothered smile she probably thought covered up what

she was laughing at. They got off a couple of blocks later, still talking and laughing.

A few months later he saw her again in a downtown rush-hour crowd. It happened in a moment and then it was over. She turned her head and he saw in her face that she recognized him and she seemed to pause, waiting for him to do something, say something. But he didn't act. He didn't have that skill of relating quickly to people, and then it was too late, somehow, and they each went on and he wondered for a long time that afternoon, and for days after that, who she was and what it would have been like if he had gone over and said something. The next summer he thought he saw her at a bathing beach in the south part of the city. She was lying in the sand so that when he walked past her he saw her face upside down and he was suddenly very excited. This time he wouldn't just stand there. This time he would act, and he worked up his courage and went back and stood in the sand at her feet and then saw that the right-side-up face wasn't Lila. It was someone else. He remembered how sad that was. He didn't have anybody in those days.

But that was so long ago—years and years ago. She would have changed. There was no chance that this was the same person. And he didn't know her anyway. What difference did it make? Why should he remember such an insignificant incident like that all these years?

These half-forgotten images are strange, he thought, like dreams. This sleeping Lila whom he had just met tonight was someone else too. Or not someone else exactly, but someone less specific, less individual. There is Lila, this single private person who slept beside him now, who was born and now lived and tossed in her dreams and will soon enough die and then there is someone else —call her *lila*—who is immortal, who inhabits Lila for a while and then moves on. The sleeping Lila he had just met tonight. But the waking Lila, who never sleeps, had been watching him and he had been watching her for a long time.

It was so strange. All the time he had been coming

down the canal through lock after lock she had been making the same journey but he didn't know she was there. Maybe he had seen her in the locks at Troy, looked right at her in the dark but had not seen her. His chart had shown a series of locks close together but they didn't show altitude and they didn't show how confusing things could get when distances have been miscalculated and you are running late and are exhausted. It wasn't until he was actually in the locks that danger was apparent as he tried to sort out green lights and red lights and white lights and lights of locktenders' houses and lights of other boats coming the other way and lights of bridges and abutments and God knows what else was out there in that black that he didn't want to hit in the middle of the darkness or go aground either. He'd never seen them before and it was a tense experience, and it was amidst all this tension that he seemed to remember seeing her on another boat.

They were descending out of the sky. Not just thirty or forty or fifty feet but hundreds of feet. Their boats were coming down, down through the night out of the sky where they had been all this time without their knowing it. When the last gate opened up from the last lock they looked on a dark oily river. The river flowed by a huge construction of girders toward a loom of light in the distance. That was Troy and his boat moved toward it until the swirl of the confluence of the rivers caught it and the boat yawed quickly. Then with the engine at full throttle he angled against the current across the river to a floating dock on the far side.

"We have four-foot tides here," the dock attendant said.

Tides! he had thought. That meant sea-level. It meant that all the inland man-made locks were gone. Now only the passage of the moon over the ocean controlled the rise and fall of the boat. All the way to Kingston this feeling of being connected without barriers to the ocean gave him a huge new feeling of space.

The space was really what this sailing was all about

and this evening at a bar next to the dock he had tried to talk about it to Rigel and Capella. Rigel seemed tired and preoccupied and uninterested, but Bill Capella, who was his crewman, was full of enthusiasm and seemed to know.

"Like at Oswego," Capella said, "all that time we were waiting for the locks to open, crying about how terrible it was we couldn't get going, we were having the time of our lives."

Phædrus had met Rigel and Capella when rain from a September hurricane caused floods to break through canal walls and submerge buoys and jam locks with debris so that the entire canal had to be closed for two weeks. Boats heading south from the Great Lakes were tied up and their crewmen had nothing to do. Suddenly a space was created in everyone's lives. An unexpected gap of time had opened up. The reaction of everyone at first was frustration. To sit around and do nothing, that was just terrible. The yachtsmen had been busy about their own private cruises not really wanting very much to speak to anyone else, but now they had nothing better to do than sit around on their boats and talk to each other day after day after day. Not trivially. In depth. Soon everyone was visiting somebody on somebody else's boat. Parties broke out everywhere, simultaneously, all night long. Townspeople took an interest in the jam-up of boats, and some of them became acquainted with the sailors. Not trivially. In depth. And more parties broke out.

And so this catastrophe, this disaster that everyone originally bewailed, turned out to be exactly as Capella described it. Everyone was actually having the time of their lives. The thing that was making them so happy was the space.

Except for Rigel and Capella and Phædrus the tavern had been almost empty. It was just a small place with a few pool tables at the far room, a bar in the center opposite the door and a lot of dingy tables at their own end. It omitted all appearances of style. And yet the feelings were good. It didn't intrude on your space. That's what did it. It was just a bar being a bar without any big ideas.

"I think it's the space that does it," he'd said to Rigel.

"What do you mean?" Rigel asked.

"About the space?"

Rigel was squinting at him. Despite Rigel's jaunty striped shirt and knit sailor's cap he seemed unhappy about something he wasn't talking about. Maybe it was that his whole purpose for this trip was to sell his boat down in Connecticut.

So as not to get into an argument Phædrus had told Rigel carefully, "I think what we're buying with these boats is space, nothingness, emptiness . . . huge sweeps of open water . . . and sweeps of time with nothing to do. . . . That's worth a lot of money. You can't hardly find that stuff anymore."

"Shut yourself up in a room and lock the door," Rigel had said.

"That doesn't work," he had answered. "The phone rings."

"Don't answer."

"UPS knocks at the front door."

"How often? You don't have to answer."

Rigel was just looking for something to argue about. Capella joined in for the fun of it. "The neighbors will take it," Capella said.

"Then the kids will come home and turn up the TV."

"Tell them to turn it down," Capella said.

"Then you're out of the room."

"Okay, then just ignore them," Capella said.

"Okay, all right, fine. Now. What happens to someone who sits in a locked room and doesn't answer the phone, and refuses to come out when someone is knocking at the front door, even when the kids are home and have turned up the TV?"

They thought about it and finally smiled a little.

The bartender's face, when they had come in, had been completely bored. He had hardly any business. But since they had arrived four or five more customers had come in. He was talking to two of them, old customers it looked like, relaxed and used to the place. Two others

were holding pool cues, apparently from some tables in an adjoining room.

"There isn't any space," Rigel said. He still wanted to quarrel. "If you were from here you'd know that."

"What do you mean?"

"There's no space here," Rigel repeated. "It's all crowded with history. It's all dead now but if you knew this region you'd see there's no space. It's full of old secrets. Everyone covers up around here."

He asked Rigel, "What secrets?"

"Nothing's the way it seems," Rigel said. "This little creek we're on here, do you know where it leads? You wouldn't think it goes back more than a few hundred yards after it completes that turn back there, would you? How far would you guess you could go, on this little tiny creek here, before it stops?"

Phædrus guessed twenty miles.

Rigel smiled. "In the old days, you'd go forever," he said. "It goes all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. People don't know that anymore. It goes *behind* the whole state of New Jersey. It used to connect to a canal that went over the mountains and down into the Delaware. They used to run coal through here on barges all the way from Pennsylvania. My great-grandfather was in that business. He had money invested in all sorts of enterprises around here. Did well at it, too."

"So your family comes from around here," Phædrus said.

"Since just after the Revolution," Rigel said. "They didn't move from here until about thirty years ago."

Phædrus waited for Rigel to go on but he didn't say anymore.

A cold draft hit as the door opened and a large crowd came in. One of them waved at Rigel. Rigel nodded back.

"Do you know him?" Phædrus asked.

"He's from Toronto," Rigel said.

"Who is he?"

"I've raced against him," Rigel said. "They're all Canadians. They come down at this time of year."

One Canadian wore a red sweater, a second had a blue Navy watchcap cocked back on his head and a third wore a bright green jacket. They all moved together in a way that indicated they knew each other very well but did not know this place at all. They had an outdoorsy exuberance, like some visiting hockey team.

Now he remembered he had seen them before, in Oswego, on a large boat called the *Karma*, and they had seemed a little clannish.

"They act like they don't think much of this place," Capella said.

"They just want to get south," Rigel said.

"There's something about them though," Capella said, "like they don't *approve* of what they see."

"Well I approve of *that*," Rigel said.

"What do you mean?" Capella asked.

"They're moral people," Rigel said. "We could use a little of that."

One of the Canadians who had been studying jukebox selections had pushed some buttons and lights now radiated from it and rotated around the room.

A blast of noise hit them. The speaker was set way too loud. Phædrus tried to say something to Capella. Capella cupped his hand to his ear and laughed. Phædrus threw up his hands and they both sat back and listened and drank their ale.

More people had come in and now the place was really getting crowded; a lot of local people it seemed like, but they seemed to mix with the sailors just fine, as though they were used to each other. With all the ale and noise and friendliness of strangers this was beginning to be sort of a great little joint. He drank and listened and watched little patches of light from some sort of disco machine attached to the jukebox circle around on the ceiling.

His thoughts began to drift. He thought of what Rigel had said. The East *was* a different country. The difference was hard to identify—you felt it more than you saw it.

Some of the Hudson valley architecture had a "Cur-

rier-and-Ives" feeling of the early 1800s, a feeling of slow, decent orderly life that preceded the industrial revolution. Minnesota, where Phædrus came from, never shared that. It was mostly forests and Indians and log cabins back then.

Traveling across America by water was like going back in time and seeing how it must have been long ago. He was following old trade routes that were used before railways became dominant. It was amazing how parts of this river still looked the same as the old Hudson River school of painting showed it, with beautiful forests, and mountains in the distance.

As the boat moved south he'd seen a growing aura of social structure, particularly in the mansions that had become more numerous. Their styles were getting more and more removed from the frontier. They were getting closer and closer to Europe.

Two of the Canadians at the bar were a man and a woman up against each other so close you couldn't have slipped a letter-opener between them. When the music stopped Phædrus motioned to Rigel and Capella to notice them. The man had his hand on the woman's thigh and the woman was smiling and drinking as though nothing was happening.

Phædrus asked Rigel, "Are these some of your moral Canadians?"

Capella laughed.

Rigel glanced over for a second and glanced back with a frown. "There are two kinds," he said. "The one kind disapproves of this country for all the junk they find here, and the other kind *loves* this country for all the junk they find here."

He motioned with his head to the two and was going to say something but then the music and the lights started up again and he threw up his hands and Capella laughed and they sat back again.

After a while, it began to feel cold. The door was open. A woman stood there, her eyes combing the room as though she was looking for someone.

Someone shouted, "CLOSE THE DOOR!"

The woman and Rigel looked at each other for a long time. It looked as though he was the one she was looking for but then she kept on looking.

"CLOSE THE DOOR!" someone else shouted.

"They're talking to *you*, Lila," Rigel said.

Apparently she saw what she was looking for because suddenly her entire expression turned furious. She slammed the door with all her might.

"That SUIT you?" she shouted.

Rigel looked at her without expression and then turned back to the table.

The music stopped. Phædrus asked with a wink, "Is that one of the ones who love us?"

"No, she's not even a Canadian," Rigel said.

Phædrus asked, "Who is she?"

Rigel didn't say anything.

"Where's she from?"

"Don't have anything to do with her," Rigel said.

Suddenly they were hit again by another blast of noise.

"TAKE A BREAK! . . ." it blared out.

The colored lights flashed around the room again.

"LET'S GET TOGETHER! . . ."

"ME AND YOU! . . ."

Capella held up an ale can questioningly to see if anyone wanted more. Phædrus nodded yes and Capella went off.

"AND DO THE THING . . ."

"AND DO THE THING . . ."

"THAT WE LIKE . . ."

"TO DO! . . ."

Rigel said something, but Phædrus couldn't hear him. The tall Canadian with the roving hand and his girlfriend were on the dance floor. He watched them for a while, and as you might know, they were good.

"DO A LITTLE DANCE . . ."

"MAKE A LITTLE LOVE . . ."

"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."

"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."

Sensual. Short driving bursts of sound. A black sermon, up from the ghetto.

He watched Lila, who was now sitting by herself at the bar. Something about her really held his attention. Sex, he guessed.

She had the usual junk cosmetics; blond tinted hair, red nails, nothing original, except that it all came out X-rated. You just sort of felt instantly right away without having to think twice about it what it was she did best. But there was something in her expression that looked almost explosive.

When the music stopped the sexy Canadian and his girl came off from the dance floor. They saw her and almost stopped, then went forward slowly to the bar. Then Phædrus saw her say something to them and three people around them suddenly stiffened. The man turned around and actually looked scared. He took his arm off the girlfriend and turned to Lila. He must have been the one Lila was looking for. He said something to her and she said something back to him and then he nodded and nodded again, then he and the woman looked at each other and turned to the bar and said nothing to Lila at all. The others around them gradually turned back to talking again.

This ale was getting to Phædrus. Still his head seemed strangely clear.

He studied Lila some more: Her legs were crossed and her skirt was above her knees. Wide hips. Shiny satin blouse, V-necked and tucked tight into a belt. Under it was a bustline that was hard to look away from. It was a defiant kind of vulgarity, a kind of "Mae West" thing. She looked a little like Mae West. "C'mon and *do* something, if you've got the nerve," she seemed to say.

Some X-rated thoughts passed through his mind. Whatever it is that's aroused by these cues isn't put off by any lack of originality. They were doing all kinds of things to his endocrine system. He'd been alone on the water a long time.

"DO A LITTLE DANCE . . ."
"MAKE A LITTLE LOVE . . ."
"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."
"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."

"Do you know her?" he shouted at Rigel.

Rigel shook his head. "Don't have anything to do with her!"

"Where's she from?"

"The *sewer*!" Rigel said.

Rigel gave him a narrow-eyed glance. Rigel sure was giving a lot of advice tonight.

The door opened and more people came in. Capella returned with an armload of cans.

"DO A LITTLE DANCE . . ."
"MAKE A LITTLE LOVE . . ."

Capella shouted in Phædrus's ear, "NICE, QUIET, REFINED PLACE WE PICKED!!!"

Phædrus nodded up and down and smiled.

He could see Lila start to talk to one of the other men at the bar and the man seemed to answer familiarly. But the others kept a distance and held their faces stiff as though they were on guard against something.

"DO A LITTLE DANCE . . ."
"MAKE A LITTLE LOVE . . ."
"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."
"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."
"GET DOWN TONIGHT!"
"GET DOWN TONIGHT!"

He wondered if he had the nerve to go up and talk to her.

"BABY!!"

He sure as hell had the desire.

He took his time and finished his ale. The relaxation from the alcohol and tension from what was coming just exactly balanced each other in an equilibrium that resembled stone sobriety but was not. He watched her for a long time and she knew that he was watching her and he knew that she knew he was watching her, and he knew that she knew that he knew; in a kind of regression of

images that you get when two mirrors face each other and the images go on and on and on in some kind of infinity.

Then he picked up his can and headed toward the spot next to her at the bar.

At the bar-rail the smell of her perfume penetrated through the tobacco and liquor smells.

After a while she turned and stared into him. The face was masklike from the cosmetics, but a faint smile showed pleasure, as though she had been waiting for this a long time.

She said, "Where have I seen you before?"

A cliché, he thought, but there was a protocol to this sort of thing. Yeah, "Where have I seen you before?" He tried to think of the protocol. He was rusty. The protocol was you're supposed to talk about the places you might have seen her in and who you know there, and this is supposed to lead to further subjects in a progression of intimacy, and he was trying to think of some places to talk about when he looked at her, and my God, it was *her*, the one on the streetcar and she's asking, "Where have I seen you before?" and that was what started the illumination.

It was stronger toward the center of her face but it didn't come *from* her face. It was as though her face were on the center of a screen and the light came from behind the screen.

My God it was really *her*, after all these years.

"Are you on a boat?" she said.

He said he was.

"Are you with Richard Rigel?"

"You know him?" he asked.

"I know a lot of people," she said.

The bartender brought the ales he ordered, and he paid for them.

"Are you crewing for Richard?"

"No. My boat's rafted against his. Everything's crowded with all these boats coming down at the same time."

Where have you been all this time? he wanted to say, but she wouldn't know what he was talking about. *Why*

did you go away in the crowd that time? Were you laughing at me then too? Something about boats. He was supposed to say something about boats.

"We came down the canals together from Oswego," he said.

"Then why didn't I see you there?" Lila said.

You did see me there before, he thought, but now the illumination had disappeared and her voice wasn't the way he had always thought it would be and so now this was just another stranger like all the others.

She said, "I saw Richard in Rome and Amsterdam but I didn't see you."

"I didn't go into town with him. I stayed on my boat."

"Are you all alone?"

"Yes."

She looked at him with a kind of question in her eye and then said, "Invite me to your table."

Then she said loudly enough so that the others could hear, "I can't *stand* the *trash* at this *bar*!" But the two she intended it for just looked at each other knowingly and didn't look over at her at all.

Rigel was gone from the table when they got there but Capella gave Lila a big hello and she flashed a big smile on him.

"How are you, Bill?" she said.

Capella said okay.

"Where's Richard?" she asked.

"He went to play pool," Capella said.

She looked at Phædrus and said, "Richard's an old friend."

There was a pause when he didn't answer this.

Then she asked how far he was going.

Phædrus said he wasn't sure yet.

Lila said she was going south for the winter.

She asked him where he was from and Phædrus told her the Midwest. She didn't have much interest in that.

He told her about seeing someone like her before in the Midwest but she said she'd never been there. "Lots of people look like me," she said.

After a while Capella left for the bar. Phædrus was alone with her, facing up to a kind of emptiness. Something needed to be said but he didn't know what to say. He could see it was beginning to bother her too. He wasn't her "type," she was beginning to see that, but the ale was helping. It obliterated the differences. Enough ale and everything got reduced to pure biology, where it belonged.

After a while Lila asked him to dance. He said he didn't and so they just sat there. But then the tall Canadian and his girlfriend got on the floor and started to dance again. They were good. They really moved together, but when Phædrus looked over at Lila he saw the same look she had when she first came in.

Her face had that explosive look again. "That son-of-a-bitch!" she said. "He *came* with me. He *invited* me on this trip! And now he's with *her*. God, that just *kills* me."

Then the music started again and the disco lights rotated and Lila looked at him in a curious way. It was just a glance, and the disco light moved on but in just that moment he noticed what a beautiful pale blue her eyes were. They didn't seem to match the way she talked or the way the rest of her looked either. Strange. Out of memory. They were like the eyes of some child.

The ale cans were empty and he offered to get some more but she said, "C'mon, let's dance."

"I'm no good," he said.

"That doesn't matter," she said. "Just do anything you feel like," she said, "I'll go along."

He did, and she *did* go along and he was surprised. They got into a sort of a whirl thing. Going round and round with the disco lights and they began to get into it more and more.

"You're better than you think," she said, and it was true: he *was*.

"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."

"GET DOWN TONIGHT . . ."

He was aware that people were watching them, but all

he could see was Lila and the lights whirling around and around.

Around and around. And around and around—red and blue and pink and orange and gold. They were all over the room and they moved across the ceiling and sometimes they shined on her face and sometimes they shined in his eyes—red and pink and gold.

Do a little dance . . .
Make a little love . . .
Get down tonight . . .
Get down tonight . . .

The hesitation was gone and the ale and the music and the perfume from Lila took over and her pale blue eyes were watching him with that strange look of *are you the one?* and his mind kept saying to her *yes, I am the one* and this answer extended slowly into his arms and hands where he held her and then into her body and she could feel it and she began to quiet down from her anger and he began to quiet down from his awkwardness.

Do a little dance . . .
Make a little love . . .
Get down tonight . . .
Get down tonight . . .

Once the Canadian dancer came over and wanted to cut in. Lila told him to "get lost" and he could tell from a change in her body how good she felt about that. After that they both knew that something had been settled, for tonight, at least, and beyond that was too far to think about.

He could hardly remember how he got back to his boat with her. What came through in memory was the beat of the music and that pale, blue-eyed questioning look, and then here on the bunk the way she embraced him, clinging with all her might, like a drowning person holding on for dear life.

Do a little dance . . .
Make a little love . . .
Get down tonight . . .
Get down tonight . . .

He began to feel sleepy.

It's so strange, he thought. All the tricks and games and lines and promises to get them into bed with you and you work so hard at it and nothing happens. And then someone like *this* comes along and you don't try much of anything at all and then *she's* the one you wake up next to.

It doesn't make any sense at all, he thought sleepily . . . no sense at all. And the tune kept playing on and on in his mind—over and over again and again until he fell asleep.

Do a little dance . . .
Make a little love . . .
Get down tonight . . .
Get down tonight . . .

2.

When Phædrus awoke he saw through the hatch that the sky had become less black. Dawn was coming.

Then he realized he wasn't alone. In fact he was blocked physically from getting out of the bunk by a body between him and the boat's passageway. This was Lila, he remembered.

He saw that with some careful maneuvering he could slink up through the open hatch and come around on deck and reenter the cabin from the cockpit.

He lifted himself up carefully and then got through the hatch without disturbing her.

Nice work.

The cold deck on his bare feet really woke him up. He couldn't feel any ice, but the fiberglass coachroof was the next thing to it. It helped to shake off all the alcohol fumes in his head. Nothing like walking around bare-naked on top of a freezing boat to wake you up for the day.

Everything was so quiet now. The dawn was still so early the turn of the creek in the distance was barely visible. Hard to believe what Rigel said; that around that turn a coal barge could go all the way to the ocean.

He went over and checked the lines going over to Rigel's boat. They were a little loose and he took up on one of the spring lines and then tightened all of them. He should have done that before he went to bed. He'd been too drunk to take care of details like that.

He looked around and, despite the cold, a dawn mystery took hold of him. Some other boats had come in since he had, and were rafted ahead and behind him. Possibly one of them was the boat Lila had come on. The harbor looked scuzzy and old in places but showed some signs of gentrification in others. Pseudo-Victorian, it looked like, but not bad. Off in the distance was a crane and other masts. The Hudson River was completely out of sight.

It felt good not to be related to this harbor in any way. He didn't know what was above the banks of the river or behind the harbor buildings or where the roads led to or who the houses belonged to or what people would appear here today or what people they would meet. It was like a picture-book and he was a child, watching it, waiting for a page to be turned.

Shivering broke the spell. His skin was covered with goose-bumps. He went back to the stern of the boat, hung off the boom gallows with one arm and relieved into the creek. Then he stepped down to the cockpit, pushed the heavy teak hatch cover back and let himself down with the grace that came from a familiar motion. It was a "grace" he'd acquired the hard way. When he first got the boat he walked around like it was a house, slipped on some diesel oil, plunged headfirst down the companionway ladder, and broke a collarbone. Now he'd learned to move like a spider monkey, particularly in storms when the whole boat rose and pitched and rolled like a flying trapeze.

In the cabin he felt his way to an overhead light and flicked it on. The darkness was filled instantly with familiar teak and mahogany.

He went forward into the deck forecabin and found his clothes in the bunk opposite Lila. She had evidently rolled over since he left. Her shadowy shape looked about

the same from this side as it had from the other a few minutes ago.

He closed the forecabin door and went into the main cabin where he pulled open a wood bin-cover, took out his old heavy brown sweater and drew it over his head. When he pushed the cover shut, the snap of its catch disturbed the silence. He went back to the companionway ladder, put the hatch's drop-boards in place, and slid the heavy hatch-cover shut.

This place needed some heat.

Next to the ladder, by the chart table, he found matches and alcohol. He carefully brought a little cupful of the alcohol to a small coal stove mounted on a bulkhead at the other end of the cabin and poured the alcohol over some charcoal briquets inside. On the picture-book shore out there everything was done by magic. They got their heat and electricity without even thinking about it. But in this little floating world, whatever you needed you had to get for yourself.

He lit a match, tossed it in and watched the alcohol go "Pouf!" and fill the stove with a pale, blue-purple flame. He was glad he'd loaded the stove yesterday. He wouldn't want to have to do it now. . . . Was that just yesterday? It seemed like a week. . . .

He closed the stove door, watched it for a moment until out of the corner of his eye he saw an enormous suitcase that he had never seen before.

Where did that come from, he wondered.

It wasn't his.

Lila must have brought it with her.

He thought about it as he struck another match at a gimballed brass kerosene lamp. He adjusted the wick until the flame seemed right. Then he turned off the overhead electric light and sat down on the berth under the lamp, his back against a rolled sleeping bag.

As far as he could figure he must have made some sort of deal with her to come on the boat or she wouldn't have brought this suitcase.

Now the kerosene light glowed over all the wood and

bronze and brass and fabric shapes of the cabin and another invisible glow of warmth came from the black coal stove that now made cricking heating noises. Soon it would heat everything enough to make it all comfortable.

Except for that suitcase. What was coming back to mind wasn't making him comfortable at all. He remembered she'd dropped the suitcase on Rigel's deck. Really hard. When they walked across to come aboard he'd turned and told her to keep it quiet. He remembered she shouted, "Don't you tell *me* to keep it quiet!" in a voice you could hear all over the harbor.

It was all coming back: going over to her boat, waiting for her to pack, listening to her talk about that "dirty double-crosser George" and his "*whore*, Debbie."

Oh-oh.

He guessed it couldn't be so bad, though. Just a couple of days into Manhattan and then she would be gone. No harm done.

He saw that her suitcase had shoved all his trays of slips over to one side of the pilot berth. They were for a book he was working on and one of the four long card-catalog-type trays was by an edge where it could fall off. That's all he needed, he thought, about three thousand four-by-six slips of notepad paper all over the floor.

He got up and adjusted the sliding rest inside each tray so that it was tight against the slips and they couldn't fall out. Then he carefully pushed the trays back into a safer place in the rear of the berth. Then he went back and sat down again.

It would actually be easier to lose the boat than it would be to lose those slips. There were about eleven thousand of them. They'd grown out of almost four years of organizing and reorganizing and reorganizing so many times he'd become dizzy trying to fit them all together. He'd just about given up.

Their overall subject he called a "Metaphysics of

much . . . and not enough time in one life to get it all together. Snowed under.

There'd been times when an urge surfaced to take the slips, pile by pile, and file them into the door of the coal stove on top of the glowing charcoal briquets and then close the door and listen to the cricking of the metal as they turned into smoke. Then it would all be gone and he would be really free again.

Except that he *wouldn't* be free. It would still be there in his mind to do.

So he spent most of his time submerged in chaos, knowing that the longer he put off setting into a fixed organization the more difficult it would become. But he felt sure that sooner or later some sort of a format would have to emerge and it would be a better one for his having waited.

Eventually this belief was justified. Periods started to appear when he just sat there for hours and no slips came in—and this, he saw, was at last the time for organizing. He was pleased to discover that the slips themselves made this organizing much easier. Instead of asking, "Where does this metaphysics of the universe begin?"—which was a virtually impossible question—all he had to do was just hold up two slips and ask, "Which comes first?" This was easy and he always seemed to get an answer. Then he would take a third slip, compare it with the first one, and ask again, "Which comes first?" If the new slip came after the first one he compared it with the second. Then he had a three-slip organization. He kept repeating the process with slip after slip.

Before long he noticed certain categories emerging. The earlier slips began to merge about a common topic and later slips about a different topic. When enough slips merged about a single topic so that he got a feeling it would be permanent he took an index card of the same size as the slips, attached a transparent plastic index tab to it, wrote the name of the topic on a little cardboard insert that came with the tab, put it in the tab, and put the index card together with its related topic slips. The trays on the

pilot berth now had about four or five hundred of these tabbed index cards.

At various times he'd tried all kinds of different things: colored plastic tabs to indicate subtopics and sub-subtopics; stars to indicate relative importance; slips split with a line to indicate both emotive and rational aspects of their subject; but all of these had increased rather than decreased confusion and he'd found it clearer to include their information elsewhere.

It was fascinating to watch *this* thing grow. No one that he knew had ever written a whole metaphysics before and there were no rules for doing it and no way of predicting how it would progress.

In addition to the topic categories, five other categories had emerged. Phædrus felt these were of great importance:

The first was UNASSIMILATED. This contained new ideas that interrupted what he was doing. They came in on the spur of the moment while he was organizing the other slips or sailing or working on the boat or doing something else that didn't want to be disturbed. Normally your mind says to these ideas, "Go away, I'm busy," but that attitude is deadly to Quality. The UNASSIMILATED pile helped solve the problem. He just stuck the slips there on hold until he had the time and desire to get to them.

The next non-topical category was called PROGRAM. PROGRAM slips were instructions for what to do with the rest of the slips. They kept track of the forest while he was busy thinking about individual trees. With more than ten thousand trees that kept wanting to expand to one hundred thousand, the PROGRAM slips were absolutely necessary to keep from getting lost.

What made them so powerful was that *they too* were on slips, one slip for each instruction. This meant the PROGRAM slips were random access too and could be changed and resequenced as the need arose without any difficulty. He remembered reading that John Von Neumann, an inventor of the computer, had said the single

thing that makes a computer so powerful is that the program *is* data and can be treated like any other data. That seemed a little obscure when Phædrus had read it but now it was making sense.

The next slips were the CRIT slips. These were for days when he woke up in a foul mood and could find nothing but fault everywhere. He knew from experience that if he threw stuff away on these days he would regret it later, so instead he satisfied his anger by just describing all the stuff he wanted to destroy and the reasons for destroying it. The CRIT slips would then wait for days or sometimes months for a calmer period when he could make a more dispassionate judgment.

The next to the last group was the TOUGH category. This contained slips that seemed to say something of importance but didn't fit into any topic he could think of. It prevented getting stuck on some slip whose place might become obvious later on.

The final category was JUNK. These were slips that seemed of high value when he wrote them down but which now seemed awful. Sometimes it included duplicates of slips he had forgotten he'd written. These duplicates were thrown away but nothing else was discarded. He'd found over and over again that the junk pile is a working category. Most slips died there but some reincarnated, and some of these reincarnated slips were the most important ones he had.

Actually, these last two piles, JUNK and TOUGH, were the piles that gave him the most concern. The whole thrust of the organizing effort was to have as few of these as possible. When they appeared he had to fight the tendency to slight them, shove them under the carpet, throw them out the window, belittle them, and forget them. These were the underdogs, the outsiders, the pariahs, the sinners of his system. But the reason he was so concerned about them was that he felt the quality and strength of his entire system of organization depended on how he treated them. If he treated the pariahs well he would have a good system. If he treated them badly he would have a weak

one. They could not be allowed to destroy all efforts at organization but he couldn't allow himself to forget them either. They just stood there, accusing, and he had to listen.

The hundreds of topics had organized themselves into larger sections, the sections into chapters, and chapters into parts; so that what the slips had organized themselves into finally was the contents of a book; but it was a book whose organization was from the bottom up rather than from the top down. He hadn't started with a master idea and then selected in Joe-fashion only those slips that would fit. In this case, "Joe," the organizing principle, had been democratically elected by the slips themselves. The JUNK and TOUGH slips didn't participate in this election, and that created an underlying dissatisfaction. But he felt that you can't expect a perfect system of organization of anything. He'd kept the junk pile as small as possible without deliberately suppressing it and that was the most anyone could ask.

A description of this system makes it all sound a lot easier than it actually was. Often he got into a situation where incoming TOUGH slips and the JUNK slips would indicate his whole system of making topics was wrong. Some slips would fit in two or three categories and other slips would fit into no categories at all and he began to see that he would have to tear the whole system of organization apart and begin to reorganize it differently, because if he didn't, the JUNK pile and the TOUGH pile and the CRIT pile would start howling at him louder and louder until he had to do it.

Those were bad days, but sometimes the new reorganization would leave the JUNK piles and the TOUGH piles *bigger* than they were when he started. Slips that had fit the old organization now didn't fit the new one, and he began to see that what he had to do now was go back and redo it all over again the old way. Those were the *really* bad days.

Sometimes he would start to make a PROGRAM procedure that would allow him to go back where he started,

but in the process of making it he saw that the PROGRAM procedure needed modification so he started to modify that, but in the process of modification he saw that the modification needed modification, so he started to modify *that*, but then he saw that *even that* was no good, and then just about at this time the phone would ring and it would be someone wanting to sell him something or congratulate him on the previous book he had written or invite him to some conference or get him to lecture somewhere. They were usually well-intentioned callers, but when he was done with them he would just sit there, blocked.

He began to think that if he just got away from people on this boat and had enough time it would come to him, but it hadn't worked out as well as he'd hoped. You just get other kinds of interruptions. A storm comes up and you worry about the anchor. Or another yacht pulls up and they come over and want to socialize. Or there's a drunken party down on the dock . . . on and on. . . .

He got up, went over to the pilot berth, got some more charcoal briquets and put them in the coal stove. It was getting nice and warm now.

He picked up one of the trays and looked at it. The front of it showed rust through the paint. You couldn't keep anything of steel from rusting on a boat, even stainless, and these boxes were ordinary mild-steel sheet metal. He would have to make some new ones out of marine plywood and glue when he had the time. Maybe when he got South.

This tray was the oldest one. It had slips he hadn't looked at for more than a year now.

He brought it over to the table with him.

The first topic, at the very front of the tray, was DUSENBERRY. He looked at it nostalgically. At one time he had thought DUSENBERRY was going to be at the center of the whole book.

After a while he took a blank pad from the back of the tray and wrote on the top slip, "PROGRAM," and then under it, "Hang up everything until Lila gone." Then he

brows and downturned mouth, but when Phædrus had gotten to know him, Dusenberry was actually gabby in a high-spirited, gleeful, maiden-auntish sort of way. It was a slightly "gay" style; tart, and somewhat backbiting; and at first Phædrus thought this was why they were so down on him. Montanans in those days were supposed to look and act like Marlboro ads, but in time Phædrus saw that wasn't what caused the alienation. It was just Dusenberry's general overall eccentricity. Over the years small eccentric differences in a small college department can grow into big differences, and Dusenberry's differences were not so small. The biggest difference was revealed in a line Phædrus heard a number of times, a disdainful: "Oh, yes, Dusenberry . . . Dusenberry and his Indians."

When Dusenberry spoke of other faculty it was with equal disdain: "Oh yes, the *English* department." But he seldom spoke of them at all. The only subject he spoke about with any sincere enthusiasm was Indians, and particularly the Rocky Boy Indians, the Chippewa-Cree on the Canadian border about whom he was writing his Ph.D. thesis in anthropology. He let it be known that except for the Indians he had befriended for twenty-one of his twenty-three years as a teacher he regarded all these years as a waste of his life.

He was the advisor for all the Indian students at the college and had held this post for as long as anyone could remember. The students were a connecting link. He'd made a point to know their families and visit them and use this as an entry point into their lives. He spent all the weekend and vacation time he could on the reservations, participating in their ceremonies, running errands for them, driving their kids to the hospital when they were sick, speaking to state officials when they got in trouble, and beyond that, completely losing himself into the ways and personalities and secrets and mysteries of these people he loved a hundred times better than his own.

Within a few years when his degree was completed he would be leaving English teaching forever and teaching anthropology instead. One would guess that this would be

a happy solution for him, but from what Phædrus heard it was already apparent that it would not be. He was not only an eccentric in the field of English, he was an eccentric in anthropology as well.

The main part of his eccentricity seemed to be his refusal to accept "objectivity" as an anthropological criterion. He didn't think objectivity had any place in the proper conduct of anthropological study.

This is like saying the Pope has no place in the Catholic Church. In American anthropology that is the worst possible apostasy and Dusenberry was quickly informed of it. Of all the American universities he had applied to for Ph.D. study, every one had turned him down. But rather than change his beliefs he had gone *around* the whole American university system to Prof. Åke Hultkranz in Uppsala, Sweden's oldest university, and was about to receive his Ph.D. there. Whenever Dusenberry talked about this, a cat-who-ate-the-canary smile would come over his face. An American taking a Ph.D. in Sweden on the Anthropology of American Indians? It was ludicrous!

"The trouble with the objective approach," Dusenberry said, "is that you don't *learn* much that way. . . . The only way to find out about Indians is to care for them and win their love and respect . . . then they'll do almost anything for you. . . . But if you don't do that . . ." He would shake his head and his thoughts would go trailing off.

"I've seen these 'objective' workers come on the reservations," he said, "and get absolutely nowhere . . .

"There's this pseudo-science myth that when you're 'objective' you just disappear from the face of the earth and see everything undistorted, as it really is, like God from heaven. But that's rubbish. When a person's objective his attitude is remote. He gets a sort of stony, distant look on his face.

"The Indians see that. They see it better than we do. And when they see it they don't like it. They don't know where in hell these 'objective' anthros are at and it makes

them suspicious, so they clam up and don't say anything. . . .

"Or they'll just tell them nonsense . . . which of course a lot of the anthros believe at first because they got it 'objectively' . . . and the Indians sometimes laugh at them behind their backs.

"Some of these anthropologists make big names for themselves in their departments," Dusenberry said, "because they know all *that* jargon. But they really don't know as much as they think they do. And they especially don't like people who tell them so . . . which I do. . . ." He laughed.

"So that's why I'm not objective about Indians," he said. "I *believe* in them and they believe in me and that makes all the difference. They've told me things they've said they never told any other white man because they know I'll never use it against them. It's a whole different way of relating to them. Indians first, anthropology second. . . .

"That limits me in a lot of ways. There's so much I can't say. But it's better to know a lot and say little, I think, than know little and say a lot. . . . Don't you agree?"

Because Phædrus was new to the English department Dusenberry took a curious interest in him. Dusenberry was curious about everything, and as he got to know Phædrus better the curiosity grew. Here to Dusenberry's surprise was someone who seemed even more alienated than he was, someone who had done graduate work in Hindu philosophy at Benares, India, for God's sake, and knew something about cultural differences. Most important, Phædrus seemed to have a very analytic mind.

"That's what *I* don't have," Dusenberry had said. "I know volumes about these people but I can't structure it. I just don't have that kind of mind."

So every chance he got he poured hours and hours of information about American Indians into Phædrus's ears, hoping to get back from him some overall structure, some

Phædrus thought about it and then agreed and asked what the meal was like.

Dusenberry smiled with a kind of arch smile. He said, "One time they were supposed to have the food, you know, from before the white men came. Blueberries and venison and all that and so what did they do? They broke out three cans of Del Monte corn and started opening all the cans with a can opener. I stood it as long as I could. Finally I told them 'No! No! No! Not *canned* corn,' and they laughed at me. They said, 'Just like a white man. Has to have everything just right.'

"Then after that, all night long they did everything the way I said and they thought that was an even bigger joke because now they weren't only using white man's corn, they were having a white man *run* the ceremony. And they were all laughing at me. They're always doing stuff like that. We just *love* each other. I just have the *best* time when I'm down there."

"What's the purpose of staying up all night?" Phædrus asked.

Dusenberry looked at him meaningfully, "Visions," he said.

"From the fire?"

"There's a sacramental food that you take that induces them. It's called 'peyote.' "

That was the first time Phædrus had ever heard the name. This was just before Leary and Alpert's notoriety and the great age of hippies, trippers, and flower children that peyote and its synthetic equivalent, LSD, helped to produce. Peyote back then was all but unknown to almost everyone except anthropologists and other specialists in Indian affairs.

In the tray of slips, just back of the ones on Dusenberry, was a section of slips on how the Indians had quietly brought peyote up from Mexico in the late nineteenth century, eating it to induce an altered mental state that they considered a form of religious communion. Dusenberry had indicated that Indians who used it regarded it as a quicker and surer way of arriving at the condition

reached in the traditional "vision quest" where an Indian goes out into isolation and fasts and prays and meditates for days in the darkness of a sealed lodge until the Great Spirit reveals itself to him and takes over his life.

On one of his slips Phædrus had copied a reference that showed the similarity of the peyote experience to the old vision quest descriptions. According to the description it produces "light-headedness, a state of well-being, and increased attention to all perceptions, sensations, and inner mental events."

> Perceptual modifications follow, initially manifested by vivid and spontaneous visual imagery, which evolves to illusions and finally to visual hallucinations. Emotions are intensified, vary widely in content, and may include euphoria, apathy, serenity, or anxiety. The intellect is drawn to the analysis of complex realities or transcendental questions. Consciousness expands to include all these responses simultaneously. In later stages, following a large dose of a hallucinogen, a person may experience a feeling of union with nature associated with a dissolution of personal identity, engendering a state of beatitude or even ecstasy. A dissociative reaction, in which the subject loses contact with immediate reality, may also occur. A subject may experience abandonment of the body, may see elaborate visions, or feel the imminence of death, which could lead to terror and panic. The experience is determined by the person's mental state, the structure of his or her personality, the physical setting, and cultural influences.

The source Phædrus had taken this material from concluded that "current research and discussion are clouded by political and social issues," which since the 1960s has certainly been true. One slip noted that Dusenberry had been asked to testify before the Montana legislature on the matter. The president of the college had told him not