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# Pompa: A Book of Hours

by Hakim Bey

## I

i. Dear friends, it's a letter I want to write & not a poem – or say rather a poem, but only for you, an audience of two with whom I share the strangeness which is the subject of the letter, in which art must be used only that you privately may share the strangeness of the poem. Dear Mahmud & dear Abu'l-Jihad, in order of age (& length of acquaintance), for age gets the respect in a letter that only extreme youth gets in a poem – in this case a boy named June "J-U-N-E, like the month". It's December sixth, less than a week after I last saw you, I can just make out one palm tree from the window of my room in this El-Sleazo Hotel, which must be abandoned as soon as possible in favor of something with a bit more elegance & running water, but here it is still June, a city with the weather & some of the smells of Bombay – though I have not seen much of it except for this hotel room, which despite its inelegance I shall remember, & will therefore describe – a New Jersey motel interior magically transported to the tropics & long since peeling at the edges from moist heat, containing two aspidistras in bamboo baskets & a sign which says No Smoking in Bed in English & Japanese – & myself writing high on Baluran grass & jet-lag & still the taste on my tongue of the milk of June.

San Francisco Airport, gate six: I am one of a dozen or so gringos in sight, the rest are Balurans on their way home – & of them, about one in five is a beautiful young boy, in appearance various mixtures of Malay, Chinese, Spanish and American. Is this an omen, or would any flight to Balaba contain the same percentage? Airport & airplane time is a kind of nasty parody of the mystical state – timeless but fifth rate. Outside the sweat-bath of the Balaba airport customs shed, bright sun, palms, still-cool tropical morning, I throw away my second-hand New York overcoat – waiting for me are a fat taxi driver with a scraggly mustache & vivid shirt named Johnny & a slick but reasonably pleasant hustler-guide in his late 20's named Donny, who claims to have been in New York and San Francisco. Trouble finding a hotel – all the recommended ones are fully booked. The buildings are new – Balaba was destroyed in World War II it appears – but seedy-looking. You could be in

the Baluran ghetto in Los Angeles if there were a Baluran ghetto in Los Angeles (& if there were, I would have reached it by train in the same amount of time it took me to get here). Garish movie theaters & discos, "Horrys" (by-golly-genuine old Harley-Davidson Electrogliides with enormous rocketshaped sidecars capable of squeezing in half a dozen delicate Asians – every bit of metal is *chromed* to blinding futuristic perfection – lights, reflectors, lamps, foghorns, silver statuettes of famous fighting cocks, alloy mermaids, jujus & metallic idols screwed onto every non-moving part – mad drivers like surplus war heroes vrooming throatily in & out of traffic – that fine old Harley bass!), the Palace of Culture (the usual third-world concrete bunker), the American Embassy (pure white, overbearing but more chic), and palm trees everywhere. Finally in desperation I settle for the Hague Hotel, located on the upper floors of a desultory shopping arcade. The driver with his aloha shirt pulled up over his fat stomach to beat the heat is paid off & dismissed. In the taxi we had discussed the availability of marijuana & girls. Now I ask Donny to buy me some of the former, & tell him that I'd like to meet some young boys. His face lights up. "You come to the right place, Hakim," he beams. "I can arrange that easy." We're talking *young* boys, I ask, eleven, twelve, thirteen? "Yes, very handsome, long hair... but expensive. About fifty dollars." Everything here is expensive, it seems; a decent hotel is going to cost twenty-five dollars – but did I come all this way to argue about rupiyah? All right, he'll be back at four o'clock with the grass & the boy – don't leave the room – Don't worry, I'm not going to leave the room.

A bath, brought up in buckets – a nap – at four exactly a knock at the door. Donny has returned with a tiny packet of grass sealed in cellophane, & the wrong boy. His name is Allan, he's seventeen, too old, not attractive. He is dismissed with a tip for his trouble. I explain again, Donny exaggerates the difficulties in finding what I want but promises to try. Wait here till at least six, he asks. But less than a hour later he's back again, with June. This time he got it right.

ii. The light in this room is dim – an electric fan is the only thing keeping me from dissolving in steam – not that it's so hot, but my soul is very steamy, my soul or my vital essence or whatever layer of consciousness and/or being is in question here – & of course there is some disco nearby somewhere providing an underbeat to the fan's dark whirr, a few crummy saxophone notes occasionally reaching up to the fourth floor – but that makes me think of your quartet, Mahmud, as if I were one of the melodic lines woven into it – can you hear me?

I just got back from dinner in a dim restaurant, a browned-out cafe with zealous whitecoat waiters – some fish from the South China Sea, I forget its name – & a fresh mango (sucking on a mango is very much a metaphor for pubescent cock) & walk around the neighborhood pululating with whores & pimps, neon signs & tourists (what on earth would an ordinary tourist come here for, rather than, say Times Square? The war monuments? On the plane they showed a travelogue about Balaba which emphasized war monuments & nightclubs). Anyway, Aphrodite Rules OK, oh yes, a venereal swamp, a city quaking on quicksand by the sea, the South China Sea.

June in December. Donny is paid off & politely disappears. The boy remains, a bit shy but ready to undress. How old are you? "Fi... thirteen!" Ah, fifteen. Don't worry, I don't mind the two extra years in the least, you're a very beautiful boy. The face is handsome rather than pretty: black hair cut in bangs, black-irised eyes, wide mouth, more Malay than Chinese, honey-tinted skin slightly cool, slightly sweaty, slender & exquisitely formed body, not a single thing wrong with his shape, I swear – off come the tie-dyed tee-shirt, the shoes & socks, the slacks, he comes & sits next to me in his red briefs on the bed. The boy is a whore all right, his caresses are feigned – none of the excitement of love but also none of its apprehension – I have instead the excitement of a pilgrim about to witness the *lingam*. Do you like to be kissed? Yes, he knows how to kiss, with the tongue, thick, filling my whole mouth. My hand is between his legs, caressing the scarlet bulge. Are you going to get hard for me? Would you like me to suck your cock. Oh, yes.

He stands up & strips off the briefs. His buttocks & genitals are perfectly created, nothing but a few tiny wisps of hair over the cock, he lies back on the bed for more kissing, I suck one of his very tiny nipples, kiss his flat belly (when I told him again he was beautiful he caressed his belly & said, but I'm too thin, I don't get enough to eat. What a ploy!) – I slide to the floor between his knees, I take off my kimono, I kiss his thighs, I suck his testicles – rubbery, hairless, cool – into my mouth – and then his cock – still soft, but it begins to swell almost at once till it stuffs my mouth – just long enough that not quite all of it will fit, maybe five or five and a half inches but thick, almost wedge-like, with a small crown surrounded by a short thick foreskin. The taste, the taste is excellent, as is the flavor of his thighs, his balls, the space between his scrotum and his asshole – his legs grasp my sides, smooth, very strong, then lift up over my shoulders – I see his asshole, small & pretty, & give it one kiss.

Do you make come yet, June? What? You know, like this?

(pantomime) Oh, yes. What do you call it? Milk. Are you Muslim or Christian? Christian. I suck, I tongue, see how much I can swallow without choking. I stop, he masturbates while I stroke his thighs, his stomach, his tits, squatting on the rug between his strong legs, admiring his hand jerking at his cock. I push it away – I want to eat your come, your milk. I am very hungry & my jaws ache. He lies back, eyes closed, sweating. He masturbates while I kiss his balls, the shaft of his cock, the tip – suddenly he comes, there are three little drops of jizm on his belly, I suck his cock, still hard, tasting more of his come, I lick the drops off his belly – warm, viscous, slightly salty, musky or musty – he shows me his hand: more come on his thumb & forefinger – how generous, like sharing candy.

He goes into the bathroom & shuts the door – I hear him pissing. He comes out rubbing off the sweat with a towel – he's annoyed there's no water (I'm equally annoyed, or would be if I could feel annoyance) & badmouths the hotel. If you move to the Malabu Mansions, there is pool & airconditioned, then I come & stay with you, sleep with you. OK, June, great idea, I'll do it as soon as I can, tomorrow if possible. You like smoke marijuana? he asks. He has five or six thin joints in his wallet. Don't get dressed, I like to see you naked. He sits on one bed, I on another, passing the joint back & forth. I didn't expect this, how nice – June gives me cream, he gives me ganja that tastes like cream, he snorts the smoke up one nostril, very sophisticated, I finish the roach, he goes to look out the window, he comes back, sits on my lap, tells me he has to go, I can find him next day at MacArthur Plaza, don't go to the Fisherman's Cafe, too many bad boys there, one of them cut me with a knife (an old scar, could be a botched vaccination) – OK June, you're a good boy. *I am* a good boy! He dresses – he tells me his shoes are two years old (a hint) but they are excellent shoes & I feel the tips, there's plenty of room for his toes, he grins, they're my brother's he says, my brother is hippy with long hair like you. You're the hippy, June, since you like to smoke marijuana so much. He laughs. We could be friends, probably – I'd like that – I'd like a lot of other things too. June the saki, the cupbearer. I kiss his neck, he turns around to say goodbye with a kiss on the lips, I'll see you tomorrow, I hope? Will I see you tomorrow? Yes. Bye-bye.

iii. It's ten o'clock, the drums & brass are still boiling up from below, I finish the roach, drink water from an old bourbon bottle, hallucinating over & over, more or less continuously, the taste of June's penis & the warmth of his semen, like some sin committed in the starchy back-room of a Chinese laundry, the South Sea sticking to the roof of my mouth, the mer-boy's

secretions.

Someone on the plane said we "gained" eighteen hours – the nighttime lasted the whole of the Pacific – across the aisle from me sat a beautiful eight-year-old Baluran boy with powdery-white Chinese skin, dark-amber bangs & black slanted eyes, continually smiling, playing backgammon with his father – what does it mean, to gain eighteen hours? The story was told too short, there should be more details, for example the fact that my kimono has thin blue vertical stripes on a white background, that June wears on his left wrist a bracelet of what looks like American Indian beadwork – I should remember the Bahasa-Baluran word for milk, which he told me – more travel notes —a good description of his ass – the surface, the surface. What are his buttocks the objective correlative of, what complex of emotions, archetypes & penetrations does that ass represent? It's a secret. Perhaps I could tell it, perhaps not. But this tropical climate limits one to the surface. No hermeneutics. And I have no idea whether I'll be able to sleep tonight or not, maybe I'll toss theology & turn psychology all night, a cock-sucking bodhisattva. And suddenly, on cue, an explosion of rain on the tin roof outside, can't help thinking of "weather-as-orgasm", tropical downpour, monsoon-flavored, the greenish black cave of sleep.

## II

i. Somewhere out on the twenty-three islands which make up this country, which at the moment seems weirder to me than any place could actually be in reality, there must exist one island at least where I could live the sort of life I'd like to live, some place with wild sufis, good grass, little boys, "sun, sand & sex" as P\_\_\_\_\_ says – and cheap. It would have to be cheaper than Balaba, because if I stayed here & spent money at the rate I've spent it so far I'd have to come home & go on welfare in a couple of months. I'm in a new hotel this morning – the Balaba Manor – a vast & costly improvement over last night – and tomorrow will move around the corner to the Malabu Mansions, which has a swimming pool. June should be here at four or five o'clock, & my breath & heart go out of synchronization when I anticipate him. This morning Donny explained to me that prostitution is illegal here, but the law covers only girls – anything to do with boys is legal by default, as long as it's between consenting partners – the only way one can get into trouble is if the boy claims to have been raped or abused in some way, which leads to the necessity of bribery all round – so Donny urges me to be careful if I pick up anyone on my own. But buying marijuana, he says, is much more

dangerous & difficult than buying a boy.

The difficulty with finding that island is the same difficulty I might experience in staying on here – lack of companionship. Cosmic Injustice: in NYC my friends are the best, the most intelligent & loving anyone could want, but there is no hope of living the life of the senses (except at the risk of forty-year jail sentences); here, as long as I can afford it, sensuality overwhelms... but... I went out shopping this morning (for a tube of K-Y among other things) & had coffee in a gigantic luxury hotel – across from me an American was breakfasting with a Baluran girl & he was wearing a tee-shirt which said "I'm so happy I could shit"; then there was a bored & rich looking French couple... the problem is that I'm no longer satisfied with the casual ships-that-pass-in-a-cloud-of-hash friendships of hippyism, although if there are hippies here (are there anywhere anymore?) I suppose they would still be preferable to the tourists. The real problem is that neither of you are with me.

In a bookstore this morning I saw a paperback called *Balaba: Sin City* – skimming through it gave the impression that my feelings last night were accurate, & that this place has been chiefly famous as a gigantic whorehouse since the end of the war – which makes it a great place to visit, but not, I would think, to live. There are plastic Xmas trees everywhere, & in the hotel coffee shop Johnny Mathis singing "Little Altar Boy" – is it sentimentality or disgust that moves me, or both? Since this part of the manuscript is all letter & no poem I'll indulge in a bit of psychology: looking down as deep as possible I note not only the above-mentioned sensations but also lust, nostalgia, sadness, happiness, paranoia, exultation, irony, serenity, detached curiosity & bliss – in no particular order. About par for the course, I guess, given the bizarre situation. What's next, what's next!? Four o'clock is next, or so I pray ("Little altar boy, let me hear you pray") – amen.

ii. Short time with Roberto. So now, yes OK just now about half an hour after he left I'll write about it with my hand still shaking & again the mixed taste of semen & cannabis in my mouth, because it would seem that writing about it is part of the perversion, or at least just now – wait – at 4:45 PM Balaba time says the watch – elbow on the pillow where he rested his head – writing about it perhaps to make it real (make it art, make it real), this bizarre scene which however much I anticipated it I can now just barely believe is real, *Balaba Call Boys* I'll call it – a 42nd Street thriller – on the cover a scene in my hotel room, which now that I

look at it under the influence appears very much like a rather bon-ton brothel: fake bamboo painted white (no, wait, it's probably *real* bamboo – why not?), dark scarlet carpet, violet bed-spread, cream curtains over a wall of windows which look out over a vacant lot grown virulently with tropic weed, eight palms in the distance – two white walls & one in striped gray wallpaper, lady's dressing table, the mirror mounted in bamboo & rattan wicker, flanked by two mendacious lanterns – & lying on the bed, Roberto, with a hard-on. It's better to picture him alone, eyes closed as if sleeping, having a wet dream perhaps, anyway REM-erect, and I, the author, his succubus, invisible (*i.e.* not in the photograph, except perhaps as a quick unidentifiable blur massed next to the bed).

Who is Roberto? Shortly before four, Donny showed up with two boys (neither of them June, whom he could not find today) – Roberto & Joseph. I could pick whichever one I liked, or have both at once "at a special discount". Roberto is the slightly smaller & prettier of the two, but Joseph has a charming smile – on the spur of the moment I decide to keep Roberto (but tell Joseph I'll see him again) & in a moment I am alone with him – about five feet or five feet two inches tall, a smaller version of June, very slender, wearing a striped pink gray yellow green purple shirt open almost to the waist (mole on his right breast), baggy turquoise pants with a striped cloth belt tight around the waist, the end dangling, & rather grown-up pointed tanned shoes with laces (I'd guess that sharp shoes are in fashion in his set) – the same husky voice & funny accent as June, but more childish. He's thirteen (this time I believe it), he's quit school, he wants to know where I'm from, how long I'm going to stay, when I'm going to go back, how old I am, while I unbutton his shirt, he's impatient, stands up & undresses quickly in front of me (the belt presents a problem though) down to a pair of wildly colored bikini briefs, plops down on the bed, shows me he knows how to soul-kiss (tho' not as professionally as June). His body, again, is a small more delicate version of June's, almost skinny, almost diminutive, with a small but wonderfully shaped ass. Again I fondle a bulge in a pair of briefs, but this time the response is immediate: at once the bulge begins to enlarge & harden & take on definition – I have to pull down the briefs immediately – it's true, I have as yet little finesse at this, I'm over-anxious. No hair (only a bit of peach fuzz), about four & a half inches long, now nearly completely erect, the fleshy foreskin drawn back over the little corona, perfectly defined brown testicles. Now I want to know, does he like to be fucked? No, he's never been fucked, he's afraid of it. OK, don't worry Roberto, I won't hurt you – I'd like to suck your cock, all right? Yes please.



I slide down onto the floor, take off my shirt (but not my black pajama trousers), I get him to turn over on his stomach – look: on his right leg, where the leg, hip & buttock meet, is a tattoo! an initial, B, and a name, EDIE – surrounded in blue green scroll work – an excellent little piece – What does it mean? I ask. But Roberto's explanation is so confused I gather there's some secret about it – fine, I love secrets, I want to kiss his buttocks & lick his coccyx & turn him over again, kiss him on the mouth again, tell him how beautiful he is (he smiles happily), kiss his breast, his navel, masturbate him, suck his balls, & now that he's quite erect – Do you make milk, Roberto? Yes I do – I don't want to talk at all or do anything except blow him. True, there are a myriad other games I'd like to play, but this is the ABC of it, this is what he expects & this, when you get right down to it, this is what I want to do. Some paedophiles only want to masturbate their boys, just fondle them, some want to suck their cocks – these are the ones whose chief pleasure is in pleasuring the child, & perhaps I am one of them. Pretty as the rest of Roberto is, my attention is totally centered on his extraordinary looking organ, the loose prepuce giving it almost a winged appearance, a little hawk of pink brown flesh, a little fox cub, the perfect length (I can get the whole length in my mouth, the crown sliding into my gorge), I could suck this for hours, the strange sensation of the foreskin sliding back & forth over the stiff shaft, the smooth snake head in my throat – then letting it slip out from between my lips, using my tongue up the length of it & on the crown. Roberto's not so energetic as June, he doesn't thrust his hips up & down to drive himself deeper into my mouth or lock his legs around my neck or sides, but lies back almost sleepily, twitching with pleasure, caressing my arms from time to time, & when I look at him he smiles. The feeling of his cock in my mouth mirrors the thought, I am sucking the cock of a thirteen-year-old boy. I'm going to come now, he says, & I go down on him quickly, sucking hard for thirty seconds or so, he jerks, there's a slight taste of come, his cock loses a bit of its stiffness, it slips from my mouth, he squeezes it between thumb & forefinger & shows me a tiny pearl of semen, I eat it, I squeeze for more, but Roberto is only thirteen, he has no more to give, & because his penis is still hard, I must suck it again for a little while. Afterwards he smiles & caresses my arms and my hair ("It's very long, your hair, it makes you look rough." Is that good or bad? "That's good! We like that!")

iii. Amazing occurrence: Roberto just telephoned to invite me to go dancing with him. (Good lord!) No, not tonight Roberto, I'm too tired,

but thank you for asking me – (his voice over the phone sounds sweeter & higher than I remembered it, a bit babyish). OK, he asks, I see you tomorrow? Yes, definitely – come to the Malabu Mansions at four o'clock – OK – and if you see Joseph you can bring him too if he likes to come – If I don't see him I come alone? Yes, yes, you come alone, that's OK too. OK he says, I love you. I love you too baby, I answer bewilderedly Click.

So indeed, you think this is reality? You don't think there's some kind of an outre & dangerous Time Space Warp operating somewhere between Honolulu & Balaba? You suppose this place exists at all? Oh yes it exists, you know, I can taste it. But do you think you could go dancing with a thirteen-year-old catamite & still believe you're living in the same dimension you intend this letter to reach? Better stuff it in a bottle & toss it in that South China Sea with the tramp steamers lying out in the roads – hope it floats back to earth somehow – right? Um um, I guess so.

iv. (Back to the strict narrative sequence) Roberto's departure: first pulls on his briefs, then his shirt, then stuffs his shirt-tails into his briefs "to make my cock look bigger. You think I have a big cock?" Big for thirteen, Roberto, just right for me, I goose him & he giggles. I comb his hair for him. When he's fully dressed I tip him with large bill & give him a coin – at his specific request – for the horry. One, two, three big kisses & a promise to see me again next day, & he vanishes into the gloomy corridor.

It's six thirty & dark already – outside the window the huge modernistic hotel where I had coffee this morning is trimmed in Xmas lights, which are blinking on & off in random sequence – or perhaps in coded espionage messages – I'm sure Balaba is as crammed with spies & terrorists as it is with whores – here I am again, Havana, Tehran, Saigon, Calcutta, sinking cities, corrupt Venices of the brain, curfew, martial law – but not for tourists – here we are Under The Hill, under the sign of Kali, or Tara & Chinnamastra, inside the vulva of the galaxy, on the eve of revolution, everyone's fucking someone, no doubt the palm tress swaying to corny rhythms, mobs of Catholic penitenti lashing themselves & nailing each other on crosses (it says so in the guidebook) – and for just this while, just this week or so, I'll spin to the city's speed & remember old Mr. Biswas in Darjeeling who initiated me into Tantra, all this I offer to Tara, the gray blue dwarf woman, color of the monsoon – this dance I center on her as archetype, as *ishta-devata*, tuning myself to her mad grin, her protruding blood-thirsty tongue – queer for Kali, cocksucker to the angels.

v. Codicil at dawn, December 8, unidentifiable alien trees moving against purple gray sky. This hotel is playing host to a conference of Asian trade unionists, an array of exotic names on the mimeographed sheet stuck up next to the elevator (including one Harun al-Rashid). In front of every hotel & almost every shop there is a uniformed armed guard, including in some cases dowdy looking women with night sticks (is that the right word? I mean police clubs) – and at the huge hotel they were checking people's bags at the door. I'd planned to find an old tramp steamer heading into the Sulo "Autonomous Zone", the muslim-dominated islands to the north of Balaba – but it seems the civil war or revolution there has made it much too dangerous – "Every day shooting in the street, bang bang!" The Philippines have the Moros, Balura has the Sulos, Commie troublemakers, circumcised boys dreaming the death of the obese Silurian Sultan Zahir, the cataclysm of social justice. Oh, well. Every taxi driver knows "nice girls" – one even mentioned "students", by which I take it he meant schoolgirls. There are beggars in the street, though nothing like so many as in India, & street urchins galore (most of them too dirty to attract me, despite their cute smiles). It's not in India, where people are starving, that one can expect revolution, but in a place like this where food is available & where business is booming: the "Titanic" with four full orchestras blaring away, headed for an iceberg of resentment. I'm sure H. H. Sultan Zahir al-Idrisi would tell me that visiting only the red light district of Balaba has jaundiced my view – "get around & see the *people*", he'd say – but in Tehran, in the end, the junkies nodding in Shahr-e Nau were a better barometer of what to expect than all the "emerging middle class" hovering about with glazed expressions hoping for chunks of mutton fat to drop from the table – there was a story that in Rahst, the junkies had their own demonstration shortly before the revolution, marching in the street & chanting "We don't want the Shah, nor Khomeini – We want opium, we want it free!" – keep up at that rate, pretty soon you have gimlet-eyed insects in black turbans going around hanging police agents, homosexuals & Jews – & the heroin just keeps on getting purer & cheaper – ah, social justice. And everywhere, no matter what, till the last plane pulls out of the National Airport, the last helicopter from the roof of the US Embassy, right down to the penultimate burst of sub-machine-gun fire, busloads of Japanese tourists will be photographing each other in hotel lobbies, yellow clicking beetles in the woodwork of the world, impassive snap-shooters of their vision of perfection, rows of glasses & teeth posed in front of all the forgotten war monuments & neglected frangipani trees.

### III

i. The Malabu Mansions At Last: to continue this secret vice, writing it as it happens. Action prose. Direct recording of immediate reality – only instead of going to zoos to "write portraits" of the beasts, the chronicle is of events, extraordinary events in the light of "ordinary life" – adventures. High Class Travel Writing. And it's the beast writing the portrait this time. The Wolf's Revenge on World Literature ("wolf" is hobo slang for boy-lover). Balaba is still out there, bubbling away – it really *is* so hot out there it's like being caught between Earth & Sky when they're fucking. But my two-room apartment in the Malabu Mansions is air-conditioned. Brown wood. Bamboo curtain-drapes woven with red & black cloth. Seedy but cool. Outside: a view, a panorama of that old South China Sea with its rusting hulks (do they ever go anywhere? and if so, what do they smuggle?). Upstairs on the roof a swimming pool, where I was just about to settle down with the *International Herald Tribune* (the exile's consolation), having swum a few laps, at one-thirty, when Roberto showed up – unable to wait, it seems, till the afternoon. There were other people at the pool – I was too stunned to notice if they were watching us with suspicion. Roberto hadn't got his swimming trunks with him, so we adjourned downstairs, where a bourgeois Chinese family watched us slip through the door of 709. Oh well. Roberto turned on the television at once, then started undressing (the belt took so long this time I threatened to open it with a pair of scissors). I asked him if he liked to smoke marijuana & he said yes, sometimes. He was sweaty. I asked him if he'd like to take a shower. He would – he took a shit & a shower, in fact, & came out with a towel around his waist. We sat together on the bed & shared a joint of my superpotent Balabanganja (again, snuffing it up the nostrils) & he climbed on top of me & began kissing me – very, very well, much better than yesterday – in fact, I feel that we are both more relaxed now – the grass helps too – the towel gradually comes off as he squirms around on top of me – he shows he's already hard – he looks up & says, You won't be mad at me if I ask you for something? No indeed. Would you buy me some shoes & trousers? Of course, anything you like. More kissing (he really seems to enjoy it – I can scarcely believe he's so well trained as to be able to fake it *completely* – in fact, I know he's not) – and then, as I am lying on my back with my head propped up on the pillows, I ask him to kneel with his legs straddling my chest & thrust his smooth jade stem into my mouth while I stroke his ass. After a while I lay him down on the bed ("I like *this* way," he explains, stretched out on the blanket, ankles crossed, sleepy little boy) –

I can feel that the grass, & the gentle atmosphere, have made me less frenetic, I can explore new, more subtle techniques of licking, tonguing, deep-throating – I keep it up for about fifteen minutes, then begin alternately masturbating him & blowing him till he says in his candid childish voice, "It mus' come." – & in a little while he does come, like yesterday, a little taste, a little jewel of semi-translucent syrup (there should be a special slang term for this fresh pube-essence, to distinguish it from grown-ups' come) – & I soothe him into a little trance, gently licking the half-stiff organ, his belly button, his tits, caressing his smooth tan skin. Till he looks up & asks, "Can I sleep with you tonight?" If you like. "I like." He's still hard. You want more now, Roberto? No, not now, tonight. A few moments later he gets up & looks through the door into the other room. A Bahasa-Balura movie has been on the television all this time. He wants to watch. We sprawl on the couch together, my arm around his waist so I can play with his cock. A film set in Old Balaba about a gang of pickpockets & pursesnatchers – romance too of course – hammed up like an Italian pot-boiler – great scene in an opium den, looks totally authentic – somehow the mixed dialogue of Bahasa & English gives it a slightly surreal interest. Not as much interest as Roberto's cock however – he plays with it constantly, manipulating his foreskin, stretching it, pinching it, rubbing it, jerking it – half soft half hard – and all the while transfixed by the television set. I masturbate myself – he doesn't seem to notice at first, then I expose myself & ask him to jerk me off. It's plain that he doesn't really enjoy it, & when I come – quite violently – he flinches away lest the sperm splash onto his naked skin (this is my evidence that he's not "well-trained") – I wipe myself off with a towel & collapse against him till I catch my breath – I ask him, how old was he when he had his first man? Only last year. Has he had any other foreign friends? Only one, named Dieter (a Kraut?).

At length he announces he'll go out & buy his new outfit. He leaves. I shower & begin to write.

ii. At about four o'clock, Donny shows up, saying Roberto can't make it today. Oh, but Roberto was here already I say, letting the cat out of the bag. Donny is angry. Roberto lied to me, he said he had to visit his family today! I calm him down. I request a fuller explanation of what precisely is going on.

Well! We have a boss, it seems, an Air Force officer who keeps an apartment where all these boys sleep & eat, & are sent out on calls to blokes like me. Did I give Roberto any money? Yes, enough for a pair of shoes. I tell you truth now Hakim, don't be angry – you have to pay

me, same like before. OK, don't worry about it – & don't give Roberto a hard time. I talk to him only, I don't do anything bad, don't worry. OK, talk to him but don't tell the boss – he's probably not such a nice guy, right? No, he's very strict.

We go out, change money. I chat up Donny, making him feel better – I also pour on the charm for the two girls at the black market exchange – visiting writer, expert on Muslim-Christian relations – indeed! A big tip for Donny. He's mollified, we chat of this & that. He drops me off at the hotel, promising just to talk gently to Roberto tomorrow. No sooner does he vanish than the little culprit appears – an unbelievable knock-out in baggy canary yellow trousers, brown perforated shoes with blue transparent plastic Cuban heels, a carnation-red pull-over with a green shawl collar, short sleeves trimmed in yellow – and a new bright blue canvas belt. He prances around the room in his blinding outfit, not sparing the kisses – at length decides the pants' legs are too long – he needs... GARTERS. I go buy, you wait for me. OK, he's off. God knows if he's really coming back. Instantaneous transmission of all this into the chronicle. Many things now clear to perspicacious reader, no need to belabor the obvious. However, also many questions arise, lines for further research. Or further reasons to hasten departure. It's "allowed" to keep Roberto overnight, same price. I must certainly try this. It is also possible, I would guess, to visit the infamous apartment & witness the Major (I have no idea if that's his rank but it seems appropriate) & his harem in person. Meanwhile all this is costing me over \$100 a day, so it will not go on too much longer in any case. The point is to enjoy it while it lasts, enjoy the fact that it's so totally alien, so different from anything I've ever experienced before, let it go, like a dance, just to the right point – and then leave for Taiwan (perhaps a period of seclusion in some Taoist monastery in the mountains?)

Still no Roberto – how long does it take to buy a pair of garters? Actually, if he shows up, great. If not, all right too. I feel like one of those minor Chinese deities, cheerful, spiritually fat, uncaring, detached, grinning (although in this climate I've lost interest in food entirely – have to remind myself to eat – no inclination to try local specialties – feel like I could subsist on boy-syrup alone, like a yellow alchemist on mercury & dew.). Petronius Arbiter Meets Fu Manchu. Fiendish plot to take over occidental gray matter. Sun sinks slowly behind tramp steamers, row of palms along the esplanade. Ah, roundeyed whiteman, velly ancient civilization, vices undlearned by Queen Victolia. Postcards, put it all on postcards: American haiku, breathless & unintelligible. Not far away,

lost tribes have yet to discover fire.

iii. Six o'clock, telephone rings, Roberto is downstairs with his brother who wants to meet me. The brother is about nineteen I'd say, thin college-student type with glasses & transparent polish on his fingernails. They are the only children in the family – the last name is Sanchez and don't worry, he won't tell mother. They want to go to a gay disco. We chat, watch TV. Roberto is extremely affectionate, puppyish, showing off to his brother Joey his conquest & meal-ticket, but really sweet, dancing, preening, prancing, hugging & kissing, making me feel his crotch (hard-on). No garters by the way – a rare item it seems. The subject of Donny comes up. I reveal all, emphasizing the fact that I have paid to keep Roberto out of trouble, that I will give him presents *and* pay off the boss.

What boss? There isn't any boss! That man lie to you. Only my mother & father are boss (what kind of household can *that* be?). I am on my own, you shouldn't pay to that man any money. Well, what can I do? If I don't pay him he might make trouble. What kind of trouble? With the police. No, if he go to police I say you not do anything to me. Well, we'll see. Donny is coming here tomorrow at ten to take me to find religious pictures ("idolos" – the local popular religious art form) – maybe it's better if you're not around then. OK, Roberto will disappear till two o'clock or so, then I will buy him a pair of swimming trunks & we will play in the pool, & he will stay with me till I go home. How many days you stay? One month? Two weeks? One week? I can't stay long, Roberto, this is all too expensive for me. Then don't pay money to Donny, otherwise you will be poor!

Joey is supposed to be an English student but can't seem to speak a word of English. He's shy, Roberto explains not too shy to show off a few astonishingly raunchy disco maneuvers however. A nice boy no doubt, but as Roberto says, "too big for you." Roberto can't stay still, he's either hugging me or dancing or joking at the TV, cracking his knuckles, combing his hair, fussing with his clothes. Did Donny bring a boy to you when he came today? No, why? Because I'm jealous, don't go with other boys. Whatever you say, remarkable little dictator. I ask if they're hungry – no, but Roberto would like a mango juice (!) & Joey a beer. I'm a bit hungry, I didn't eat yet today – only coffee & some fruit. Why you not eat? asks Roberto. I forgot. You must eat, call room service! A steak is brought up by a friendly & obliging waiter who raises not a single eyebrow. As if every room in the Malabu Mansions

contained a thirteen-year-old peacock & a bearded expatriate, at the very least. Do you know how to dance? Not really, Roberto, I like to watch *you* dance. So: dancing boy with supper, my private finger-snapping twirling entertainment. At last they decide I don't have to come to the disco with them if I don't want to – I'm just as glad to be left off the hook – I finance them & give them a note to be let back into the hotel after midnight (Joey wants to sleep on the couch in the front room). Kiss kiss & they're off. Maybe tomorrow I'll have a look at this gay disco, but what bores me in NYC is just as likely to bore me here. (Grown men a-go-go. Gack.)

And so, who's telling the truth? Both Donny and Roberto are quite plausible, yet only one of the two basic stories can be, at least, mostly true. Right? Or is this dimension so bizarre that Nothing Is True, Everything Is Permitted? Who cares? What an improvisation, what a script! I get to help produce it & co-star in it, but who the devil is directing it is beyond me at this point. The Major, Donny, Roberto, me, the devil, God? Who cares? (A man checking into the hotel at the same time this morning as me was named Mr. SIN). Anyway, whoever thought of the tattoo gets an extra round of applause. And whoever designed Roberto's Chinese eyes & girlish smile gets a cosmic kiss, even if I have to go into samadhi to deliver it.

iv. Roberto's face in sleep is unbearably beautiful – a flower, a very little boy. He is lying on his back on one bed & I am on another writing his portrait. He is totally naked except for a gold chain & black bauble around his neck – his usually carefully combed hair is in disarray – one hand rests on his heart – his flat stomach moves with his breath – his cock I suppose is never entirely soft at any rate it's large in proportion to his body, now resting curved over the bone of his groin – & the sac beneath it is soft & flaccid, one testicle hanging lower than the other – one skinny leg half-cocked, the other stretched out, the arched foot with its widely spaced toes half-hidden under the white linen sheet.

Joey & Roberto returned from the disco about eleven, just as I was starting to nod out. Roberto has cooked up this scheme that tomorrow we must not wait for Donny to show up, but leave early & visit Roberto's family in Nagal – it seems that Joey is only a half brother – there is a mother & some other siblings, very poor, & we are to go shopping & then descend upon them. Roberto is in high spirits, posing & dancing – puts on my kimono & wears it like a dress, imitating a fashion model – bosses Joey around (he is obviously a great deal more alive & intelligent than the older



boy), calls up room service to order a steak, makes me roll a joint for dessert, asks about yoga – have I ever done it? (Yes) – Will I teach him? What is it exactly? The food is a long time coming – Roberto is getting horny – we order Joey into the front room & close the door – Roberto strips off the kimono & climbs on the bed in his briefs – we kiss and caress – Does your family know what you do, I ask. No, I tell them I am tourist guide. But I am really guide in sex, tourist guide in bed. Ah, yes – my guru. He pinches my nipples – I play with him till he's hard – I pull down the briefs (the pattern is of dominoes, they're sweaty & a bit piss-scented) – he's eager, pulls them off entirely, asks, Do you want to suck? Do you want to come? I demand, & he nods happily – needless to say, we're just really getting under weigh when the door buzzes, it's the food – groan...

Have to wait while Roberto consumes his steak (offering me bites off the fork) & Joey his Chinese Spaghetti – we smoke a joint and a half of grass – I learn a new technique whereby one smoker reverses the J between his lips & blows smoke into the other smoker's mouth – Roberto insists on clearing the table – finally jumps up, pulls me by the wrist into the bedroom & locks the door, rips off his towel & nearly drags me into bed. He assumes his favorite position – I suck deliriously, playing new tricks (nibbling the underpart of the prepuce between my lips, opening the eye of his cock & licking the exposed urethra.)

At one point he suddenly looks up & asks if I really know yoga. I do. What is it? It's thinking very hard, concentrating on one thing – Could you make that chair rise up in the air, he asks. No, I say, that's magic, not yoga. But can't you make things move with yoga? No – I can only make my heart move – you understand? Yes, he says gravely, & I really believe he might. Do you want to learn magic? But you *are* magic. Yes, I am magician. Roberto is a magician & *this* is his magic. Yes, he smiles, my magic bird.

He wants to masturbate & be masturbated – I enjoy watching him jerk off but I'm fixated on the satiny taste of his penis – I think he's enjoying all this much more now that we're a bit better acquainted – but, because he's already come once today he needs to use his own hand to make himself climax again. When it comes I speak you, he offers with a grin. But I don't want him to come just yet – I insist on blowing him a bit more before I allow him to wank himself off – this time his face registers real pleasure – finally he whispers "now", & I apply the coup – my mouth is laved with what tastes like the most cream I've had from him yet, & several more drops dribble out onto my tongue – but he says, Not so much, because two times today. But it was delicious, I insist,

pulling myself up to lie beside him, & at once he gives me a long hungry tongue-sucking kiss, as if curious to taste it himself – then softly softly falls asleep in my arms.

## IV

i. Nagal, ancestral home of the Sanchez family – entr'acte of pure pathos.

Almost no sleep last night, too entranced watching Roberto change position, go erect in REM sleep, etc. – till about two or three A.M., then woke again at dawn – couldn't bear to wake him up – at 9:30 Donny arrived – awkward moment. Donny suggested I pay for four days at once, & avoid the embarrassment of his repeated presence. He bowed out of his engagement as guide for the morning, had a brief private word with Roberto (oh for a smattering of Bahasa to eavesdrop with), collected his gelt & departed, much to Roberto's satisfaction – Whatever's going on, it's not bringing those two any closer together – Roberto appears outraged at Donny's skinning me for a pimp's fee – if Donny's story is true, why should Roberto put up this show? One obvious answer: he doesn't want me to know about the Boss, he wants to retain an amateur status in my eyes because he's ashamed. Another possibility (still assuming Donny's right, which I doubt) is that Roberto is ambitious, not satisfied with mere room & board from the Boss, wants his own private source of gifts & favors. Although Roberto would probably not believe this, I would not care much if Donny were right & the above hypothesis were correct. I've decided (a) I leave on Saturday, and (b) till then, money is as water. Two reasons: one, Roberto is worth anything. Two... Nagal.

Nagal: at about ten A.M. Roberto & I said au revoir to Joey & sped off in a taxi, to MacArthur Plaza, a grotesquely enormous American style shopping center. Roberto was dressed in the clothes I bought him, & I cannot deny feeling a bit conspicuous as his escort. I fancy a few leers, frowns & vulgar expressions came our way – Roberto, after all, in that outfit, looks every inch what he is, an expensive Balaba callboy. I also have to admit I dug it, I felt proud & dangerous. We did our shopping in an astoundingly accurate reproduction of a California supermarket, Roberto pushing the cart, me following behind & noticing his choices with great interest: tins of lunch meat & cheap sausages, pounds of macaroni, sugar, processed cheese – poor people's food – and some tinsely Xmas candy for the brothers & sisters – five shopping bags full – Roberto's Xmas present

to his family.

A bargain was struck with a pleasant young taxi driver outside the Plaza, & we set out for Nagal, about fifty kilometers away – this is the first time in three months Roberto has visited his family – he's happy because he's going to see his mother – & obviously, because he's going to appear as a hero, a bread-winner. On the way we talk about school – Roberto has finished the sixth grade, which is as far as free public education goes, so he says – next comes high school, & it costs money. I urge him to try to continue his education, since he is so obviously intelligent – he confesses he enjoys studying English, science & math – he'd like to go back to school – he'd like to go to school in America – I promise to look into it for him – he holds my hand the whole trip.

The landscape begins with horribly poverty-stricken suburbs of Balaba, goes on to a superhighway complete with toll-gates, past a region of industrial blight looking like a cross between New Jersey Turnpike & the road from Allahabad into Delhi – finally begins to rustificate a little bit – green fields, distant views of water & a single sacred-looking mountain in the distance (Nagal is about ten k's from this mountain) begin to appear between the factories & sullen skyscrapers. Finally, Nagal: a strong feeling of India here, shabby two-street town full of impossibly dilapidated houses, hovels, shacks, tea-houses, saved from total desolation by the profusion of flowers & greenery & the view of that mountain – streets squawking with horrys, equatorial pedestrians, chickens, pedlars. Roberto directs the driver to a side street – near the end of the lane we stop in front of an extremely picturesque (*i.e.* totally impoverished) two-story shed, with spectacular views of palm trees & iridescent fields – almost jungle.

Roberto leaps out & runs to greet his family, his mother & a horde of brothers & sisters, aged thirteen (a rather handsome brother named Danillo) down to about two. Incidentally, it turns out that Roberto is actually fourteen – he forgot he was supposed to tell me he's thirteen because he wanted it to be known that he's the oldest in the family). I lurk embarrassed by the taxi – he runs back & pulls me by the hand to be introduced to the family, all of whom (including timid infants won over by smiles) insist on shaking hands. The bags are unloaded & carried into the house. I am made to sit on a bench in the main room (the ceiling is so low I have to duck in) – & watch while with great glee (but dignity) the bags are unpacked, the items appreciated (especially of course the candy) & stored away, & the bags carefully folded up to save. It was at this point that I nearly broke into tears (but being part bloody Anglo-Saxon of course I didn't) – and Roberto must

have misread my expression because he whispered, don't be angry, & I answered that I was not angry, I was happy because he was happy, & that this day was his day. Indeed, he seemed very happy, running around organizing his brother to fetch beer for me, helping his mother prepare lunch, chatting & showing off his clothes to a bench-row of neighbor ladies & children (including some beautiful boys) who all seemed to smile with approval, admiration, friendly respect towards me despite my strangeness to them – the usual routine in underdeveloped countries you know, ordinary humanity at its most polite – & a long long way from Balaba. The room was hung with a couple of ill-printed calendars & religious prints, otherwise it was Tobacco Road, plain & simple. Neat & clean but devastated. Roberto's mother a tiny woman of 37 (but seeming older), thin, plain, worn out with children, more Spanish-looking than Roberto, quiet, friendly, but a bit shy, happy at this moment. Cooking was performed outside in the yard – places set for me & the taxi driver & Roberto – eggs, rice & sausages & a very tasty stew of beans, garlic & slivers of fat already prepared by La Sanchez – Roberto eats voraciously for once – the driver & I chat – he works for a friend who owns the taxi – it's not a bad job, but dangerous – especially long trips like this – the country is full of bandits & highwaymen – I tell him It's all in God's hands, introducing a note of kismet which always goes down well – after a while Roberto suggests we go to visit the house of the local national 19th Century hero – so we drive there but it's closed – then back to the Sanchez house for a last goodbye – & finally back to Balaba in the noon heat, sleepy & holding hands. Well, you may feel that this narrative change of pace is out of place – sociology instead of porn – you weren't bargaining for any harsh reality or third-world fear & pity – as for me, my feelings are these: a touch of guilt of course, sexual colonialist that I am (& if Roberto calculated on this, even subconsciously, I have no objection); a touch of Dickens, & all that that implies; a bit of very clean pain, & a bit of perhaps tainted pain in the form of sentimental sadness; a bit of detached admiration at the simple tangibility of the actual scene as it transpired; & thanks to Roberto's affectionate secret winks & smiles, a sense of complicity: the wolf-cub's protector, the financial power behind the playlet; a bit of religious awe, for some reason; and a stab of something like love for Roberto, who is of course like all important people a great mystery – in this case a mixture of innocence & shame, sensuality, conniving intelligence, warmth, unfathomable dreams, adolescent exuberance, oriental inscrutability, supernatural power, grace, beauty, sadness. Over the taxi radio a rock song with the chorus "he's an angel" – Roberto looks at me and says, "I'm an angel". And I am the totally gullible & beguiled existentialist, the bewildered nomad, the leaf

on the wave of this story, stunned & enchanted, adrift, satisfied with a prognosis of unbearably hard-core radiance.

ii. Back at the Malabu Mansions, an afternoon of swimming, messing around (but not to orgasm) & reading Bahasa comics – of which I hope to secure a few samples – & watching Joey & Roberto practice disco dancing & try on each other's clothes. Back to decadence. The boys have gone out to score some grass – Roberto insisted on going too because he wants to meet Joey's connection – Roberto is a real hustler – and tonight, he made me promise – a visit to the disco.

A note on smells: Roberto has his own particular odor which like all such cannot be precisely described – it's foreign, mammalian, young & slightly spermy – the pillow is permeated with it. This afternoon a bottle of scent appeared called Mme Rochas ("I am Mme Rochas," declared Roberto) & he sprayed both me & himself with it, & rubbed Nivea cream all over his arms & hands – perhaps, like a young musk-deer, there's a gland near his genitals that secretes a psychic odor as well – not much, just as his glans still does not secrete much opalescence – not much, but we could bottle it, say under the trade name "The Incontinence of Angels" (what's that in perfumer's French?) – or "Esboyonage".

iii. I realize now why I've become so concerned with time & timelessness – the time I spend here extends so far in, so deep into itself that it exits from time altogether – so many emotions, so much gravity & hilarity, so much desire, so many desires fulfilled – also the feeling of acting out the intentions of the archetypes – not swept into the illusion that this is something denser than a dance – to tell truth, as the Balabans say, in the very midst of the maelstrom is E. A. Poe's point of dry sand – I am the whirlpool & the calm at its center – the emotion, the madness, the lies, the melancholy, the happiness & the depravities are all heart-real – and yet, so is the point of union – I felt it come to me a little tonight when we walked along the esplanade & I gave Roberto a lesson in yoga – sitting on the sea-wall, facing the reflected black damp sea, I taught him the full lotus – he struggles to get his feet in position, asks about concentration & says, "only the heart should move, right?" – & I tried to teach him the *yoni mudra* – (I wonder how long it will be before I can sleep again?) – and, uh, inadvertently activated some kundalini-like potency while showing him, to his ardent fascination, how to draw down power through meditation with this gesture – not a specially sexual aspect, more like the state of those the sufis call the *rendan*, who can act sober when intoxicated and intoxicated when sober – the "clever"

ones. (Say, what do you think of this Balaban grass? not bad, eh?)

Events include: dinner at the Duke of Windsor, a restaurant famous for local cuisine, where I daresay we were rather conspicuous, & had our pictures taken at table (thank heavens, now I have some tangible proof of all this). Then, after the esplanade, the gay disco.

Perhaps I haven't yet made it clear that Roberto is a princess, a very young effeminate homosexual – perhaps it wasn't quite 100% clear to me till tonight. I knew he loves bright colors & extreme styles, walks with a graceful swagger half boy half precocious girl – that he adores mirrors – that he's ruthlessly charming – but tonight at the disco I met some of his role models – he being the youngest boy there of a group of friends who are all outrageously pretty queens ranging up to sixteen or seventeen years old, identically dressed in their own micro-cosmic fashionableness – Roberto's wardrobes are however much the wildest in color (he even tried to make me up into the right image before we left the hotel, fussing about with my shirtsleeves & belt like a little tailor) – the group included one gangly hoyden whose name I missed, who was vamping everything in sight, including me – much to Roberto's annoyance – also the beautiful Joseph, all in white with two gold chains at his throat – & a very funny extraordinary boy maybe sixteen named Carlito who seems to be Roberto's special friend & dancing partner – he introduced himself to me by saying, "Roberto's my best girlfriend" – a magnificent dancer, he leads Roberto in the girl's part, whirling him around in ever-increasingly complex patterns, both of them grinning ecstatically – Balaba is packed with queens & transvestites, but this youthful crew is something quite out of the ordinary – these boys are Baluran shamans, though they don't realize it – boys chosen to play the androgyne's role in order to balance out the inequilibrium between male sky and female earth – the central rite is dancing – alcohol & drugs to induce trance – all disguised as a chintzy discotheque where gays & paedophiles can score & boogy. But to me there were intimations of something else – Carlito-the-dancer's hand on my leg, breathing into my ear his polite thank-you for buying him a beer – not trying to steal me from Roberto, just being supportive – & I flashed on what it would be like to be *friends* with this group – to live in their ambiance, to know them – an impossibly expensive dream, I fear. I danced once with Roberto just to see if I could do it. I enjoyed it – might be a mild spiritual buzz to it, as well as good exercise, if it weren't that most of the music is just not musical enough.

Finally left about eleven – came back to the hotel – Joey too drunk – Roberto over-tired & not too interested in sex, but willing to do his duty

– constant interruptions from Joey – Roberto quite peeved – me, too, on one level – but in another way, curiously exciting – Roberto coated with sweat, his cock slightly salty – again, after some fifteen minutes of blowing, he insists on masturbating himself, then allowing me to finish him off, his penis swelling at least a half-inch in my mouth – this time he spasmed, even cried out just as he seeded my tongue – and when I let go & stopped sucking, sensing that I was almost hurting him, he squeezed himself, first around the shaft, till a final drop appeared, which he offers to me to lick – then almost at once he got up & went to the toilet to piss – he'd been drinking mango juice all night & pissing every twenty minutes – this time I followed him into the bathroom – he was holding on to the sink to support himself, breathing heavily – I embraced him from behind & let him lean against me – his heart fluttering – I held his cock & milked out a dozen long spurts of nearly colorless urine.

He complained of the cold – put on his briefs again – I tucked him into bed – sensed he was upset about something – begged him not to be angry – he swore he wasn't & put his arms around me & clung to me for about five minutes, pulling my head down to his shoulder – I whispered into his ear, among many endearments, thank you for taking me to Nagal today – he gave me a quick smile & embrace (which struck me as the most sincere gesture he's made so far). Unfortunately more trouble with Joey, which took both of us to calm down – broke the mood – at last I tried to coax Roberto to sleep, kissing his fingers, caressing him, stroking him – and he's sprawled out now on top of the covers, hands on either side of his head, palms up, fingers loosely curled, face still slightly shiny with sweat – bulge beneath the domino bikini, tattoo half-exposed, every so often twitching as a puppy does in sleep, his fingers on lips.

Are you thinking, the kid's a mercenary, Hakim's being taken for a ride? I forgot to mention the game of the grass this afternoon – Joey & Roberto came back with twenty rolled joints for 60 pesos, five less than Donny's packet which yielded maybe six joints. Roberto made a Big Point of how they took so long because they wanted to get the cheapest & best for me, Donny's a crook, this grass is very very strong (true, as it happens) – and so on. Really transparent. Also the growing routine about my returning to Balaba next year & taking Roberto to America with me (I've promised to see if I can get him into a private school, & I *will* make inquiries – not much hope though I imagine) – or writing to him to explain how he can do it – he boasted about it to his rival at the disco – I now understand about all those Baluran "houseboys" in Chandler-era Hollywood – but he also told me today not to give him any

big present but instead make a gift to his mother (I'd already thought of it) – but after all, what would an affair with a boy prostitute consist of, if not paradoxes like these? and money games, & control games – elaborate pavanne of coins & flesh & drugs – but under a spell (which I'm trying to augment) of incredible grace – in the disco Roberto wore a super baggy pair of blue pants sewn with silver thread which sparkled in the strobe lights – Roberto fascinated as a six-year-old by frost patterns on a morning window – Roberto: a poem for hire. His inscription on the back of his photo of himself, for me, "To my LOVE, Please keep this picture. If you are alone in your room just kiss my picture. I love you. Roberto Sanchez". In the photo, his hand, beneath the table, is groping my crotch.

## V

The Practice of the Contemplation of the Unbearded, called by the Persians 'Witness-Play'. Now Roberto is taking a nap – he allowed me to caress, massage, stroke, embrace him to sleep. He is wearing a red teeshirt with thin blue green & yellow horizontal stripes, & red "satin" Wrangler bathing trunks – both gifts from me. Also a new watch, ditto, with a pretty gold band. Metaphysical. Unity & physical manifestation are, from the point of view of realized consciousness, one & the same thing – to the "eye" of such consciousness, to the intuitive "tasting" bestowed by this awareness, there appear certain key points in manifestation which embody this identity of the One & the many. We say these points "bear Witness to the One" & so we call them our Witnesses. In effect, the Witness could be any object or physical being which in itself appears to us thus "unveiled" – for example a flower, a landscape, a work of art, a piece of music; or it could be something "Imaginal", an image, an archetype brought into consciousness-play by the Creative Imagination – but in practice, this art of contemplating the Witness belongs especially – by tradition – to boy-lovers – & thus in sufi terminology "Witness" stands for the beloved boy. Through love – experienced as a force for liberation – & through meditation on the beauty which inspires such love – he who contemplates the Witness *becomes* the Witness – that is, comes to see for himself. In fact this is a sort of yoga which makes use of the Imagination to orchestrate the elements of a love affair, both for the sake of love & pleasure & for the sake of realization, which in this context are identical. The power (shakti) bestowed by this realization flows back into the love, the love



into the power, till each becomes the other – & then, if the boy or his lover says *ana'l'haqq* ("I am the Truth") he is right – both are right. By claiming to be my angel, my guide – & by inviting me in turn to teach him "yoga" & to adorn him in beauty – Roberto has effectively made this claim, which I accept – & which I *use* in order that I too may make the claim, if only for this moment, in the Other World of Balaba, & in relation to this particular boy. I believe that this Imaginal Yoga can be practiced without any debilitating fake romanticism – without "Idealism" – that it can be carried out in spite of all the "negative" aspects of a given love affair – in fact it can even make use of such aspects to add more power to itself – what Tantriks call Riding the Tiger – once darkness is accepted as the necessary dancing partner of light, "perversity" can be experienced & accepted & used. Simple as this formula may be, & long familiar to me from Tantrik & sufi writings, I rehearse it here because I am now convinced by experience of something which up till recently I doubted, & only recently was able to accept on faith: that the Witness-Play need not be chaste – & in fact may be much more effective without chastity. Most sufis believe that the relationship must be chaste, not only because homosexuality is condemned by Islamic Law but also on the assumption that sexual energy should be retained & transmuted to spiritual energy. Even some Tantriks take this line – & in any case, homosexuality has no place in "orthodox" Tantrism, obsessed as it is with Feminine Power. My hypothesis – *i.e.* that a sexual relationship with a boy can be a valid Witness-Play – was based on a synthesis of certain aspects of sufism, Tantrism & Ismailism. From Sufism I took the idea of the Witness, from Tantra the idea that pleasure is a force for liberation, & from Ismailism I took the idea that pure esotericism must transcend & even "violate" any moral, jurisprudential, religious or ethical code whatever its status as "revealed truth" – since the direct experience of the One cannot be defined by any limitation, & also because "breaking the law" in itself confers a certain Power. Which explains Hassan-i Sabbah's saying Nothing is True, Everything is Permitted. Despite the intellectual appeal of this synthesis for me – since it was worked out in terms of the symbol-paths to which I have felt the strongest attraction – I had no experiential confirmation of the hypothesis. Now I think I can make certain assertions, based on the experience of the last few day/aeons in Balaba. Of course the "perfect" love affair that everyone dreams of would undoubtedly also be the most perfect Witness-Play – but the affair with Roberto is precious in its own right (*i.e.* in the mere surface of the course of events) precisely because of its decadence, pathos, elegance & perfumy perversion – because the surface transforms itself magically into

depth – & the Witness is present. I'm not saying I think about metaphysics while sucking Roberto's cock or buying him things (in fact, I'd like to jettison the term metaphysics, which smacks too much of dualism, as if there were a "physical" realm & something else "beyond the merely physical") – all I'm saying is that the whole thing is ecstatic – & ecstasy unveils the One, not in a logical or temporal progression, but simply "as is". (The word ecstasy will also have to go, since it means "standing outside oneself" whereas what I'm talking about has more to do with "being with oneself"). By the way, this might explain why I'm getting along on so little sleep, I who usually need eight or nine hours a night – it's always seemed to me that if the real physiological reason for sleep is dreaming, then the nearer one comes to "living one's dreams" the less sleep one ought to need – I'm talking about breaking down barriers between levels of consciousness. Also: the self-image that Roberto projects has a certain iconic aspect: colors, perfumes, music, & a willful confusion of "ordinary reality" such that at any moment anything might suddenly become something else – all these are characteristic paraphernalia of mystic/ecstatic art forms. Roberto, the exquisitely beautiful effeminate fourteen-year-old boy, has "made himself up" into a very potent icon – which explains why he, like God, spends so much time in front of a mirror – & also why, like God, he costs so much.

ii. The first part of the day went like this: at 10:30 A.M. Roberto is still sleeping, & I've been staring at him since dawn again – can't take it any longer, rouse him to half awake state, climb onto the bed with him & caress him back to sleep, gently squeezing his morning piss-hard-on under his briefs, running my fingers between the cheeks of his ass, finally just holding him.

After breakfast off to Mac Arthur Plaza to shop: Roberto insists on helping me pick out a whole new wardrobe for myself, & a watch for himself – other errands concerned camera & film, a girl's shoulder bag labeled "Precious", the above-mentioned teeshirt – & a book for Roberto to read to help improve his English (he picked out a romance called *Princess Daisy* – perhaps I ought to send a copy of this letter to the author, as a sort of profile of a typical fan) – a fruit juice at a cafe inside the Plaza, & generally just strutting around leaking money. Roberto enjoys spending money because he's afraid of poverty – perfectly natural point of view, & I'm glad I can give him what he likes – he adores the watch, his Xmas present, wishes me a merry Xmas too & says he'd buy me a present if he had any money of his own – naturally I tell him he's enough of a gift by himself.

Everywhere that Roberto goes he gets noticed. Young ladies, especially pretty ones, take to him immediately, beam at him, cater to his demands –

at the cafe, two typical examples were sitting at a table next to ours – one of them took out a cigarette & Roberto leaned over to give her a light from his red lighter – a chat ensued in Bahasa – bursts of giggles – Roberto explains to me grinning impudently, "She thought I was a girl!" – then puts on his little princess voice & says, "Well, thanks for *that!*" – & regally allows the girls to admire and touch his clothes. People reach out and touch him often, as if he were a good luck token – & unless I'm being paranoid, men often direct lewd glances & vulgar expressions our way – children sometimes look at him admiringly or bewilderedly – taxi drivers, guards, queens, waiters, the life-guard at the pool upstairs – seem to find him & his entourage (me & Joey) amusing & even slightly touching – on the whole I get the eerie impression that Everyone Knows What's Going On, & mostly don't care much about it. Certainly by now half the hotel knows I'm keeping a boy in my rooms, but the service is still smiling & efficient. When I came back to the hotel at one point without him, one of the staff asked, "Where's the little boy, isn't he coming back?" as if to express at least a mild hope that he *was* coming back. (He was visiting his father, who is also Joey's father – but "I am angry to my step-mother because she took my father away from my mother" – who however is also re-married, to a man about whom Roberto has said very little other than that he occasionally works as a driver. How all this fits together I haven't quite yet figured out, since Joey is older than Roberto – more conundrums.)

At about four, when they returned from this visit, we set out to dine at a pricey Baluran restaurant. The steamed seafood, which Roberto & I both ate, the coconut milk & mangoes were excellent – but the service was poor, & at least several of the waiters were rude about Roberto – who however took it as a great joke & was rude right back at them. I was almost sorry the place was so empty, as I am quite fascinated by the sensation of shepherding – or rather being shepherded around by – this extraordinary child, who lights my cigarettes, offers me tastes of his food off his fork, fondles me in public, manages my money, directs taxis, translates when necessary, combs my hair, chooses my clothes... (by the way, I had "sworn" not to cut my mustache until Khomeini was overthrown or died – but I clipped it today because it gets in the way when kissing various parts of Roberto, who obviously prefers me well-groomed.) On the whole, Roberto plays the part of the kept boy extremely well – his passivity in bed in a way only adds to the image – for example I was feeling him up on the couch today as he sprawled across my lap – he lit cigarettes for both of us (his brand is Philip Morris mentholated king-size), turned on Joey's cassette machine to a disco tape, & started grinding his hips, in time to the music, into my crotch – all the while

looking just a little bit distant.

Earlier in the day I told Roberto that if & when I return to Balaba I want to be able to find him without Donny or anyone else cutting themselves in, & he at once told me that he & Joey were planning to take a room together in Santa Inez, a suburb of Balaba. Would I pay the rent deposit & help him get the place fixed up nice with curtains & whatnot? Sure, what the hell. So I will be able to find him & by implication know that he is safe from pimps (is he running out on the Boss? *Is there a Boss?*) So after eating we taxi to Santa Inez, to a street bearing a close resemblance to some lane in Bombay's red light district, say Sukalaji Street – noisome & noisy, crowded with all sorts of people obvious & devious, gangsters, extended families, queens & sidewalk gamblers – the house is a hovel on the level of the Sanchez place in Nagal – hot, dark, decayed & cramped – the landlady a strange gypsy-looking type. Half jokingly I told Roberto I'd come back & live with him there – a week or so in that neighborhood would be *really* bizarre. It's hard to take in such a seethingly rich scene in such a short time, but I would guess that every square inch of that street is worth writing about.

Back at the Malabu Mansions, time for relaxing, kissing & caressing, getting high, fondling & groping, gentling Roberto into his nap – at seven P.M. he wakes up raring to start – I decide he & Joey should go to the disco by themselves this evening, to have fun on their own & give me a chance to write. Roberto very pepped up by this idea, bullies Joey into action (he's stoned on downs) & forces him to dress, prepares himself with great care, combing & primping – the shirt has to billow out over the belt just so, the belt has to be tied just so, the trousers have to be tight around the waist & ankles & baggy as possible in between, the hair has to be perfect, huge clouds of Mme Rochas have to be sprayed all over everyone, including me – jokes are cracked, hot kisses bestowed along with a promise of sex when he gets home at eleven or twelve, demands that I do nothing but write poetry & wait for him (like God), & the intention to buy a new bright sexy "shocking" (key word) pair of briefs – pocket full of money, admonitions to Joey to drink no beer (Joey is Roberto's audience, stooge & family – last night he swore "If Joey weren't my brother I'd throw him out!" – but he's a necessary presence, the Bahasa Bozo), more passionate kisses – & at last they're off.

iii. and back at twelve – Roberto seemingly in a very winsome & charming mood (tho' without briefs), sweaty from dancing, wanted to

take a shower & generously agreed to let me watch & help dry him – then after a bit of kissing we join Joey for a puff of grass & chat – Joey in mellow mood, says he's happy when he sees the two of us together, & that he thinks I'm "kind" – at last, Roberto, cool and & soft from the shower, pulls me into the bedroom, lays the towel underneath his buttocks & lies back to be kissed & blown – following the pattern I've learned he seems to enjoy the best: being fondled & licked to hardness, then gently sucked, then masturbated, sucked & so on – but we discover a new trick – Roberto likes having his balls "kissed" – *i.e.* vigorously sucked, tongued, stretched, mouthed & pulled – while he masturbates himself – kept on demanding more – happy to oblige – suddenly, almost frantically he stutters something incoherent, demanding to be sucked, shoots violently into my mouth & with a cry of mixed pleasure & pain quickly sits up, grabs my head – I gentle him back down again – Did I hurt you Roberto? A little bit, he smiles. I'm sorry, I say – but not entirely sincerely – Roberto I think is a bit afraid of sex & of showing emotion & pleasure – I think (maybe) I gave him pleasure, & that hurt him "a little bit" – & I relish it enormously. I kiss him & he opens his mouth willingly – I see that his cock is still hard, & quite a large drop of cream has dribbled out onto his groin – which I carefully tongue up – then together we squeeze out one last dewdrop – and – I have to pee, Roberto says, with a grin & a slightly inviting tone – I follow him again to the toilet & hold him & his stiff penis while driblets of that pure white refined mango juice splatter out into the bowl. Then he wraps himself in the towel & we go out to smoke a cigarette with Joey, he sits on the table & I sit on the floor beside him, resting my head against him, shamelessly embracing him in front of his brother – at last Roberto cheerfully takes me back to the bedroom & asks me to massage his body with Nivea – which I do with the utmost pleasure – first his shoulders, back & sides, then the soft-slender buttocks (running my finger over his rectum till he giggles & tells me No) – his legs, his feet – special attention to the left calf, which has an ache – then eagerly he turns over onto his back – handful after handful of lotion rubbed into that skin which is the color of the smell of ginger – till it is absorbed, leaving the flesh soft & glowing – his thighs, his belly, his breasts – & his cock, still half stiff, responds to the salve – he shows me *precisely* how to masturbate him, slippery handful of stiff prick & cotton-candy foreskin (I've been told that Baluran boys are circumcised in a peculiar way – the foreskin is simply slit along the top, but not removed – I think this is what was done to Roberto – a Catholic boy – & the result is that intriguing flap of brown membrane bunched under the exposed crown & over the nerve of orgasm –

must be very sensitive) – till finally he tells me he can't come a second time, he wants to sleep – I rub the last of the cream in till it vanishes & then I rise, dripping with sweat like a Triton with spume from my labors – to watch him softly glowing, stretched out unselfconsciously naked at his rest.

Some hours later. I am so roused by this sight I must masturbate – sleeping boys have always been sacred & erotic to me – the flat exquisite features, the body of a cafe-creme Eros with genitals of marzipan, the curve of his hip & belly, the delicate rib cage, urchin's skinny legs – harmonious bundle of life, fantastic eidolon. If I do not insist on Roberto's bringing me to orgasm in some way, it's because I find I want only what he wants – & that if I could unlock the secret of whatever gives him his ultimate pleasure I would do it – he wants to be worshiped? I am a willing adherent – *credo* because it is beautiful. There are I'm sure boys who like to be fucked & I would enjoy fucking them – but Roberto, like a statue of Krishna, wants to be anointed, to be thought of as a spring of alchemic waters, or perhaps as a girl with a penis. He's wearing his watch to bed. The whole trip is somehow under the sign of Chronos – time which is bright gold against warm Malay flesh, precious metal against precious skin.

iv. Codicil, deep hours of the night – still contemplating his body. Suddenly I notice his breathing is uneven, & his testicles are retracting – sign of fear – astounding thing to watch – his eyes open, but unfocused, he moans, then cries NO! – I leap from bed, kneel at his side, take his head gently in my hands & whisper, Did you have a bad dream? Yes, very bad, he sobs, & flings his arms around me like a six-year-old – I whisper endearments & reassurances in his ear – gradually his grip loosens, eyes close, breathing becomes more regular as I stroke his hair, smoothing it back rhythmically over his forehead – finally I gingerly untangle myself & leave him asleep again. The incident unfeigned, almost totally unconscious, makes me very happy in one way but still more enigmified in another way: why was he dreaming in English? What was he dreaming? To know a person you have to know his monsters too; as for Roberto, I know one of them is poverty, but his nightmares I do not know, may never know. It occurs to me I might construct an amulet to protect him from baleful psychic influences, & that, because he probably believes in magic, it might work – confront his mystery with my own mystery, put a slight binding spell on him, not so as to make him unhappy without me – just to remember me.

## VI

i. First thing in the morning after his shower & before breakfast Roberto suddenly remembered his nightmare & described it to me: devils with horns wanted to put him into the fire – & he screamed NO! Catholic upbringing does wonders for the dark side of the unconscious – supplies stock archetypes of guilt & fear – we post-Protestants have to make up our own out of nursery shadows. I told him he was an angel & thus stronger than any devils. He was interested & even pleased that he had been dreaming in English.

Off to the Plaza for a few odd items Roberto "needs": a shirt & light jacket – the shirt in pale blue stripes with navy-blue collar, the jacket with multicolored vertical stripes on white background, red collar & cuffs – & six pairs of briefs. All the girls in the Underwear Dept. crowded around to have fun with Roberto – I can see why Baluran girls are popular too, so pretty & cheerful – one of them looks at me with mock-outraged smile & pointing to Roberto, tells me, "He says... *she* says her name is Pompa!" (Did he really tell her that? I get the impression he doesn't like me to think of him as a real queen – even though it seems that's the part he plays in Balaba society – pavlovianly I encourage his effeminacy, & more & more of it emerges in response.) Gales of giggles from the shopgirls as I shell out for the panties. The pair he chose for today is leaf-green with brown-gold fleurs – so inflaming I had to kiss his crotch. New clothes: he likes them better than sex, I think. He & Joey have gone out to do a few errands, then we are going to take a tour of Surigan – to see the War Monuments! – by hovercraft – Roberto's idea, not mine, to be sure. Talk about "coming out" – maybe there'll be hordes of Japanese tourists to goggle at us & maybe even *snap* us – a local curiosity.

ii. Roberto had told me that the boat to Surigan goes under the water, like a submarine. Of course when we got there & found that Joey had been pulling his leg we all had a good laugh (though Roberto was a bit embarrassed to be caught in such a display of innocence).

No Japs, but plenty of Americans & European tourists, studiously avoiding looking at us – all except for one lone old Australian who smiled at Roberto several times, perhaps remembering the pleasures of war. How I'd love to know what they all thought – entertained myself wondering about it all through the tour – I find the fact that we are so obvious an entourage quite exhilarating – after thirty-five years in the closet, so to speak – on the one

hand I'm fascinated by the more or less easy acceptance of us by most native Balabans – & on the other hand I enjoy acting outrageous, something I've missed since I gave up being a hippy (never in my heart though!). The tour itself would have been a crashing bore if not for this aspect of it, & the fact that Roberto seemed to enjoy it, especially the hovercraft ride there & the big canons – appealed to the little boy side of his character – I took his photo in front of a number of rusty guns & ghastly War Monuments – I suppose this comes under the heading of Basic Irony – my one constant thought was that Roberto was the only representative of the Life Force on the whole island – although I make no claim to mediumistic abilities, I've rarely had such a strong sensation of ill-buried spirits – very oppressive – I think it even got Roberto down a bit without his being fully aware of it – as for me, I'm so strung these days I'm sure I could turn tables if I put my mind to it – I really wouldn't like to spend the night on Surigan – but I'll remember Roberto kissing a little spray of pink vine flowers I picked for him – & Balaba Bay with its fishing junks & freighters & a crescent moon overhead in the dusk on our return.

I've always suspected that money *can* buy you love, *pace* John Lennon, r.i.p. (whose works I requested from Joey's tape recorder today & which played throughout the scene I'm about to describe) – after we bought our tickets & with time to kill before boarding the hovercraft (the formalities having been disposed of completely & competently by Roberto, much to the amusement of the hovercraft staff) we sipped a mango juice & went for a walk over to the BICC, Baluran International Convention Center, a monstrous affair in the High Modem Paranoid Style (appropriately enough, since this is where a terrorist bomb went off just before I left America, killing a gaggle of tourist wallahs). As we strolled, a young beggar accosted not me but Roberto – I could intuit the conversation – "Share the wealth", the kid demanded – Roberto sweetly came across with some rupiyah, the kid patted him on the ass & said, "Thanks, Pompa" – Roberto gave a wry pout – Pompa I suppose must be the Bahasa equivalent of "Mary". At the BICC we sat on grass next to a fountain with our music. A carload of huge whitemen drove past, one of them staring in outrage at us – Roberto said, They're the Mr. Universe finalists, I saw them on TV – I roared with laughter – Roberto wanted to know if they're gay, & I said probably – he asked why I don't go in for muscle-building – I said, Too much work – then suddenly Roberto says, Tomorrow is our last day together – I will cry, You'll see – & begins choking back tears (or trying to produce them perhaps – if so, a good act). He says, I love you, I'm happy when I'm with you, because you understand my life – you have been to Nagal – you have given me so much: clothes & watch & rented



room, I will be very unhappy without you.

I promised to come back (I did so in good faith, since I hope this is not going to be my last visit to Balaba) – and persuaded him that if he had to be unhappy at least he must put it off for today – that I would be unhappy too, & I would be sure to write to him, etc., etc. Then he treated me to the purest display of boyish affection I've ever experienced, holding my hand, touching me, insisting that as we walked the three of us link arms & hold hands, with Roberto in the middle – said that we were all brothers – all this in between singing snatches of Beatles songs & dancing about – alternatively adolescent boy & precocious princess – & finally, back at the dock waiting for the boat, he lay down with his head in my lap (because the grass we smoked before leaving the hotel was so strong, he said) – right in front of all them tourists – this mood carried on into the boat, both the sensuous affection & the boy-spirit – he was up & down exploring the boat with Joey, constantly looking back at me & smiling his most charming smile, secure in the knowledge that wherever he was my eyes would be on him – enjoying his first boat trip ever, "thanks to you". But all this exuberance couldn't survive the heat of the day & the ghosts of Surigan quite intact. By suppertime back in town at the Duke of Windsor he was more subdued – I'm a bit worried about his health too – he's complained of a sore throat several times, & this morning the glands under his chin were painfully swollen – suggested he see a doctor, but he was sure it would go away if he took medicine for it – which he did – might be tonsils, I fear. And the high life I've been laying on, & the sex – all this is tiring him – he is quite frail, really, skinny almost to emaciation, has a variable appetite & doesn't eat enough – when he sleeps his pulse flutters at his throat – he drinks too much & sweats & pisses constantly (on Surigan at one of the camera stops he says shyly, "I must urinate", as if asking my permission to do it in the bushes – which he does – pisses on the tropical flowers). He's nervous, often twitchy, cracks his knuckles constantly – I find all this touching & highly erotic – as also some of his habits which betray his lower-class origins, such as spitting indoors & picking his nose quite shamelessly – once he caught me looking at him picking his nose, & blushed – I kissed the tip of his nose. On less than a week's acquaintance it would be foolish to think I've noticed all the pertinent evidence of his character, or that I really *know* him at all well – and yet I do understand his life & cherish his human complexity – love can cross the fathomless abyss between cultures to a certain extent – even this strange love between a whore & patron, which has to cross barriers of class & race as well – the psychic contact we've made, apart from or parallel with the sexual

contact, & aside from the mendaciousness inherent in the very structure of our affair – this psychic touching has brought Balaba to life for me as a city imbued with left-hand shamanic emanations of the very sort which I sought and which I now see as central to my path. On the lawn in front of the BICC I read his palm, & after a few stock comments on long life & intelligence, I took in the shape of the hands – the long thin delicately tapered fingers & perfectly proportioned palms are not unusual in Balurans, but in conjunction with what I know of his character already I interpreted them as essentially artistic hands, & suggested he would have success as a painter or designer – Oh, a designer! he said, beaming happily (Donny tells me transvestites in Balaba often run boutiques – & there's no doubt of Roberto's originality of taste within the framework of local gay fashion, his flair for "shocking" colors & his total dedication to dressing up). Surprisingly he asked if he would marry & have children – according to the palmist's hype he will have no children, so I told him as much. He pointed to the mole beneath his left eye & said, In Balura we say that a mole under the eye, like a tear, means that your husband or wife will die before you. Do you think it's so? Could be, I answered – & touching the big mole on his left breast, asked What does this mean? Nothing, he laughed – or no, it means I have a big heart! (Just what I was going to say.)

Roberto is part confidence-trickster – but not entirely so. He's used charm & wit to pull himself up from brutal poverty, he has a vision of beauty – but he is also a very odd little boy with a great craving for affection. Money symbolizes all these things for him – not because of greed for money but out of love for the beauty & romance it can buy. I have given him affection, kindness, even respect – & plenty of money – & as another little boy once told me wisely, Money can't make you happy but it can make you half-happy. The measure of the happiness I've given him, therefore, really has awakened some love for me in his heart, more gratitude than passion – but not totally unreal. Or at least that's how I assess it just now. And as for me, money has bought me a great deal of happiness. And bought me madness & inspiration & freedom from the sorrows of many years. The question of whether one ought to approve or disapprove of boy prostitution is really beside the point, or at least so unobvious a question as to be unanswerable. Ideally, of course, it wouldn't exist – but ideals do not exist. Ideals like social justice & free love end up producing terrorist schizophrenic counter-Utopias (one can feel it coming in Balura: The Sulos in the north, marxists in the universities, death-poverty of the peasants, greasy fatness of Baluran bourgeoisie, distant ka-boom of frag-

grenades or bombs in the evening like psychic thunder – shades of the Naxalites in Calcutta or cries of Allahu Akbar & machinegun noise in midnight Teheran – why am I always getting swept up in Third World violence? Does life only spark into sweetness on the very verge of chaos? What about boy-love *after* the revolution? Won't the socialist puritans & mullahs wipe out sex-tourism & lock up all the Robertos & Carlitos in Youth Detention Centers?) – idealism sweeps away complexity, rare shades of existence in which the hues of shame & sorrow blend with the colors of Joy & freedom – and at the same time it misses the simplest simplicity of all – the is-ness of being – in its impure passion for structures of Value. I would have to say I "approve" of boy prostitution because it brought me Roberto ("Why did you come to Balura?" he asked me today. To meet you, I answered.) Our affair is based on the fact of prostitution & so it would be somewhat beside the point to compare it with a "true love" supposedly devoid of mercenary motives. In love there are always degrees of control & submission – always an energy exchange of some sort. If this subtle exchange is solidified through the medium of money – love for sale – why would it not still be love?

After supper we sent to buy a Bahasa-Balura primer, so I can – according to Roberto – learn to speak it before I return to Balura again. As a language it sounds like it ought to be spoken by a race of sea-pirates – roots & stems culled from Sanskrit, Chinese, Spanish, Tagalog, Malay & Californian – a language of glissandi & gongs. We also bought three toothbrushes because Roberto has a sudden inspiration that we should all brush our teeth regularly. Earlier Roberto had wanted me to come with him to the "other gay disco" but then he decided I was "too tired" – which is true. Too tired for disco certainly, & as usual I feel we both need a few hours to be on our own, me to write & he to relax from his taxing role. His usual order – "You wait me!" – sealed with a kiss as the vulgar expression, current in my high school days, has it. "Boy," as Diana Ross put it, "you turn me upside down inside out & round round" – beautiful Roberto.

iii. Roberto has the true characteristics of the boy who is *created* to be loved – he can be both cruel & kind, sincere & deceptive, close & strange, sensuous & detached, offering union & separation – all in the same breath. Tonight, just as I was beginning to pine for him, he returned from a Bahasa movie ("about a girl") & dancing – in a poor mood, angry with Joey about something, something to do with tomorrow (one word I recognize in Bahasa – always one of the first words one learns in any oriental language). Joey is going to turn into an addict of some sort – "he always crazy" as Roberto puts it. Anyway, after a shower he mellowed a bit & modeled his

briefs for me – said he was hungry, so I told him to call the coffee shop (what a strange place, that restaurant – early one morning about seven, Roberto still asleep, I went down for an orange juice & the place was packed to the slats with petit bourgeois Chinese, a dozen to a table, pigging down rice gruel & garlicky meat by the tureen-full) & then fondled him while we waited. When the buzzer sounded both Roberto & Joey slipped into the bedroom – first time they've ever avoided the help (I hope we're not in trouble over something) – till the waiter was gone. Roberto ate chicken, offering me pieces from his dainty fingers, then sat sipping mango juice & smoking – got angry with Joey again, yanked me imperiously into the bedroom. Needed to be cheered up – so I told him how much I admired him for his courage & intelligence, living alone at his age & surviving still so sweet & beautiful – & how he soaks up flattery! (completely sincere on my part, only the timing was calculated) – what happy smiles. The very restrictions he puts on sex are in themselves erotically stimulating – the demands he makes create a sort of master/slave situation which sparks its special excitement by being the exact opposite of the outward & seeming structure of the relationship – one thinks of a kept boy as a sex slave, not as a child tyrant – but I am the willing servant of his desires. I suck when he says suck, I "kiss" or fondle his balls when he asks for it & smiles & says how good it feels – at last when he said it was taking him a long time to come I let him masturbate while I watched – please touch my balls, it's nice that way – until the order came to swallow his discharge – then hug & kiss him – I'm sorry it's not always good for you, I say. What? he asks. Sex, I say. Oh, but it is, I always like it, he protests – as if this were too obvious to really need mentioning – and wraps himself around me like a warm octopus, soothing me, stroking me – and how wonderful of him to kiss with his tongue while the taste of his own come is still in my mouth. But then he sits up & tells me gravely that he knows I can't sleep with him in the room, he wants to stay with his brother tonight because the grass he's smoked will keep him awake, & he wants me to get a good night's sleep. I tell him that although I can't bear to be without him, I will do as he wants because I love him – only let me hold you a few minutes more – and promise me that tomorrow night you'll stay with me all night. I promise, he says, tomorrow night very special because last night for us. First we go with Carlito & other friends to disco, then I stay with you, we not sleep *all* night – & as he says this he kisses me as if he were my lover, his whole being becomes feminine, his voice salty & husky, he keeps coming back for one more kiss, telling me to sleep well.

The deepest level of his fascination is his hermaphroditism, which seems

rooted in some ancient ritual perpetually refreshed in the liminal stages of certain pubescent souls – here in Balaba one feels that the deepest archaeological layers would release – if excavated – the spirits of primitive child androgynes, tribal totems, loved by certain fortunate sea-wandering mystics – to the utter destruction of all their defenses against the madness of undivided power. I realize now that I was born not so much under the sign of the Boy as that of the Boy/Girl. The most destructive passion I ever experienced in my life, when I was about sixteen or seventeen, was for a boy very much like Roberto, a dark-haired & slender boy from the Maryland Eastern Shore, typical of the Welsh-eyed beauties of that region – who later turned out to be a raving glitter-queen & side-kick of the transvestite Divine. I have at last released myself from that sorrow – how could I have ever dared to dream I would find such a boy except in my poetry? – by realizing this perhaps deepest of all obsessions – to be the besotted patron of a little girl who bestows dribbles of semen like consecrated wine – who cannot stop dancing – who smokes "damo" with me & then becomes the lord of intoxication in my eyes – slender as smoke, stretched out naked on the bed, re-creating the universe with his right hand – alchemical urine of the Androgyne – languid & pure as a palm tree in the moonlight in the red-light district of this city, these goblin islands – only to vanish with a smile, a flicker of the tongue in the devotee's mouth – naughty schoolgirl's goodnight kisses. Listen & I'll confess that I'm ludicrously proud, I feel infinitely superior to everyone who has not loved Roberto – & as for those who have been his lovers, if they are queens then I will love them too – & as for the men who like me have paid for him, I pity them because they did not understand what it was they purchased.

Roberto is my soul – he could buy nothing half so precious as the stuff he sells – the sleep of the lover is better than the prayers of the faithful – & the waking of the believers is but death, compared to the awareness I nurse from Roberto's erection – & that is my lawless dervish boast – that is the bewilderment for which I have given myself up – sold my head & pawned my turban to buy wine, white wine.

iv. Friday, 8:30 A.M. – Roberto was right – I managed to sleep about five hours, feel much refreshed – he & Joey still sprawled out on a blanket on the floor of the other room, sleeping quite comfortably in the stifling dark. Another week at this rate might put me in the hospital (or then again it might not – fact is, I feel perfectly well, & several minor bits of NYC unhealthiness have cleared up – such as dry skin & frequent tension headaches) – but it would certainly put me in the poorhouse. Even if I could afford to keep

Roberto in the style he's become accustomed to expect from me, I simply cannot afford what amounts to \$50 a day blackmail for Donny. That link must be broken no matter what. Besides, seven days is a traditional perfect unit of time for such a trip to the Outer World.

A note on language: in speaking to Roberto of love, I make use shamelessly & not altogether insincerely of numbers of awful romantic clichés – because it pleases both of us, being part of the game we play for each other. When I speak them they are "true", but they are only a patch on the outside skin of our affair. Hopeless infatuation, the paraphernalia of true romance – these are symbols we both use to express & at the same time mask the *intentionality* of our affair – with that first phone call he set out to seduce me into becoming his patron, & I set out quite willingly to be seduced – it's like a dance, & language is the music we dance to – our absurd pidgin English with which we manage to say what ought to be said, & leave unsaid what profits us not.

## VII

i. Donny shows up for his last cut this morning – Roberto & Joey still asleep, I go outside to pay him off – he may be my Don Cupid but he's a rapacious son of a bitch.

Back in the dark room I snap the cigarette lighter to make sure the boys are present & OK – the flash must have roused Roberto because a few seconds later he trails sleepily into the bedroom dressed only in a towel, gives me a good morning kiss, pushes me into the bed, wraps himself around me & dozes off again.

By the time he was asleep & I was unwrapped & sitting beside him inhaling his perfumed uncombed hair the whole thing just got to me & I burst into tears. Happy, sad, shit, I don't know what I am... still crying.

There are boys in America who know nothing about anything except television & school. Roberto is six, he is fourteen, he is a thousand.

Fourteen – according to Ibn 'Arabi the perfect age for a Witness (I can't recall his abstruse numerological explanation).

Seven days. Room 709.  $7 + 0 + 9 = 16 = 7$ . And  $14 = 2 \times 7$ .

By the time Roberto & Joey managed to wake up, shower & dress it was about eleven thirty, so instead of Room Service we went to the Duke of Windsor for brunch. By day, with the ceiling fans whirling, half open to the

street, crowded with middle-class Balabans & a number of overt homosexuals of all types & nationalities – waiters rushing around with enormous servings of unidentified native dishes – it really does seem to be Balura's Most Popular Restaurant – the waiters surround Roberto like flies, grinning, touching, asking rude questions – Roberto flirts with them, seeing that it amuses me. Later I asked if all the waiters were gay. No, he said. They just like you, I suggested. He smiles.

He notices a European queen at a neighboring table & speaks to Joey in Bahasa – a phrase with the word "Pompa" in it – obviously "Look at the foreign Pompa!" – he sees I've understood, & leans over to tell me, "I don't like to sleep with him – he's too..." (limp wrist gesture). "It is like making love to the furniture!" He chewed wads of gum while waiting for his steak, chain-smoked, begged coins for the jukebox. Then we went to MacArthur Plaza to have a formal portrait made. The girl photographer was young, good-looking, charming & educated – she took to Roberto at once, began clowning with him, scolding him. "I tell him, You're too small because you smoke too much," she says to me, making him stand on two telephone books. They argue & discuss poses for nearly an hour, Roberto giggling, pretending to be a model, the girl concerned to get a good shot emphasizing boyish wistful qualities & stunning smile – after nine poses are shot, Roberto gracefully offers her a cigarette & lights it for her – a wonderful show.

And now the perverse pleasure of buying him a bottle of perfume & the usual scene with fascinated shopgirls. A note on MacArthur Plaza: my advice to anyone interested in boys is to stroll about here, any time of the day or evening, & take your pick – effeminate or at least pretty boys are everywhere, singles, pairs, little packs. Today I ran into June again – he was with four or five other boys, none older than fifteen, his arms around a creature who looked like a thirteen-year-old girl but who I think was a boy. He asks if I remember him & I say of course I do – he points to Roberto & asks, "Is that your boy? Pompa?" Yes, I answer – touch his hand & say I'll see you some other time – OK, he smiles & prances off with his pals (Roberto very sportingly makes no comment). A Dutch informant says Balura is paradise for boy-lovers – no more than sober truth I now perceive – which makes MacArthur Plaza the Lote Tree of the Utmost Limit.

It occurs to me that this phenomenon of the Plaza weighs heavily on the side of Roberto's story against Donny's – how could there be a Boss with a string of *call* boys who lets them wander about on their own? My project of making Roberto happy has been expensive, but I'm sure that if one managed to figure out a way of settling here for a while, one could have a

varied & fascinating sex life for about what it would cost in NYC (or a bit less) – if there were any boy prostitutes in NYC – & the general cost of living is a bit less than in America, say two-thirds. With a steady income of between one & two thousand a month you could live like a Pasha. Balaba is full of purely sensual sensations, I discover – under Roberto's magic spell – food, perfumes, baths, idle strolls, mindless entertainment – all rather gentle & tropical (with the feeling of potential violence everywhere) – what one imagines Bombay or Shanghai was like in say 1910 – not culturally as interesting – but somehow caught in a decadent mood of late colonialism, soignee, stifling hot – the sort of place where American poets ride around in decaying taxis everywhere with little boys – & where your cafe or nightclub may be suddenly blown up with a fragmentation grenade, Sidney Greenstreet at the next table, so to speak, fanning himself & chuckling greasily – Lascar sailors skulking about – & without doubt there is opium here, my sensitized nerves detect it. How is it no one in America seems to know about any of this? Or is it just that I didn't ask the right people? Maybe the Californians know. Don't tell too many people about it, we don't want to "spoil" the place, heh heh.

Afternoon at the swimming pool, photographing Roberto in his red trunks, eating apples & sunning himself – sullen Arab & European male guests, trying not to stare (what are they doing in Balaba?) – then I suggest that the boys leave me alone for a while to write & rest – Roberto says they will visit their father & go to a movie. In the room he showers & dresses in a pair of white briefs – dances with his cock stiff beneath the tight cloth for me to admire. Once he is dressed to his satisfaction he asks my advice on whether to part his hair or not, allows me to spray him with the new perfume – his dressing is erotic to me not only because he himself finds it so exciting, but also because he fulfills fantasies I've despaired of long years since – things Beardsley could only dream about in *Under the Hill* – the only thing to top it would be complete transvestism (I imagine this could be arranged in Balaba, but I would never demand that a boy do it – in order for it to really please me he'd have to want to do it himself) – I sit beside Roberto as he combs his hair, touching his cock, & the drops of water splashing on me from the comb cause me to moan – painfully cool as molten lead is painfully hot. Roberto & Joey want to smoke grass before they go out – after the first joint Joey asks Roberto to ask me for another joint – he speaks in Bahasa but I understand – & produce the joint before Roberto can open his mouth – he is amazed – You understand Bahasa but you didn't tell me! he pretends to pout. He is very high, very happy, drenched in scent – I hold him in my arms & Joey "shotguns" huge hits of grass first into my



mouth, then Roberto's, then mine, then Roberto's – brotherhood envelops us – & Roberto sucks my tongue.

Roberto, agent of chaos: if it weren't for the industrious & ever cheerful roomboys, the place would look like ten cyclones hit it. Every night we strew sheets, towels, cigarette butts, clothes, wet bathing trunks & bottles of scent & lotion all around the apartment – a whirlwind sweeps about Roberto in order that he, at its center, might be impeccable.

Strolling out to pick up some photos – sky nicely clouded over – please walk slower, Roberto once asked me – & I realized I was still going at NYC speed – now I amble, cooler, less visible for going at the Balaba rate – stoned on the vibrant "damo", picking out smiles, graceful children, lovely women, old Chinese hags, beggar boys, fighting cocks – stoned to the molecules, everything glowing with Roberto's presence – unable to read the *Tribune* except for the comics – the only items able to penetrate my universe just now – or even half-way intelligible – the taste of kalamansi juice however is real enough.

In spite of the fact that I shall miss Roberto very much, I feel I'm leaving at the right time. I came here hoping for sexual experience & I could have had scores of boys – but instead something much better happened. So intense & yet so fragile, this relationship – another week could dim it, & I would rather possess it whole & flawless. Seven days sounds like so little, but I feel I've been through such an area of timelessness that "short time" has no meaning at all. Whole years have gone by with far less significance. Leaving on the crest of the wave that has borne me through the week satisfies my aesthetic sense of the affair & its meaning to me. If I come back things will be different – perhaps even more intense, who knows? – but different. Right now I'm flabbergasted. I'll need time to absorb new realities – psychic discoveries behind the Palm Curtain.

ii. What a shithook I've been. Shit: to turn this whole thing into a literary exercise – how wrong I was about the meaning of the whole thing – but how could I have believed the truth? Now that I know I feel it wrong to write – but I have started & I will finish – there is so much to say if I am to make you understand – & I am fainting from lack of sleep – & I am sitting in the airport crying – have been crying all night it seems – but I started out to tell exactly what happened & cannot help but finish – anyway I am so proud & full of joy that I couldn't stop anyway – I must tell you – or do you know already? – what it means to love & be loved at the same time? & what does

that make out of my literary exercise? Shit. Only saved by one thing – that it will contain the story of Roberto Sanchez.

Last night he came back with three friends – Carlito & two other sixteen- or seventeen-year-old boys named Edwin & Philip. Can they come in? he asked – I wanted to make a party for your last night – Of course, I said, very glad to have a chance to be with this group of young queens, to try to be their friend for his sake – & for the sake of the pleasure of it too. I ordered juice & beer for them, passed around joints – unfortunately they also had a number of bottles of cough syrup with them, & Roberto drank some of it too. Oh yes – Carlito had rung up my room & asked if he could wait for Roberto with me – I felt it might not be a good idea, & told him to come at nine, knowing that Roberto would be back at 8:30. Somehow they all met outside however, & arrived ensemble. Now – while Roberto squealed delightedly at the photos of himself which I had picked up from the developer that afternoon – I said to Carlito that I was happy to see him again. I could tell he was hurt by my refusal to allow him to come up to the room earlier – Thank you, he said a bit coldly, but I know you are just saying that to be nice. Spontaneously I decided that the only way to handle this "party" was to be completely open about all my feelings – so I said, No, Carhto, that's not true – I really do like you a lot – not the same way I like Roberto, of course! And he laughed & said, I understand that, I understand everything. For a while the boys politely ignored me, still not at ease with me – I just watched them camping & talking back to the television – Roberto proudly showing off in front of them, draping himself around me. At last however the TV was turned off – for some reason Roberto disappeared into the bedroom for about ten minutes – Carlito began caressing me, staring into my eyes with his big & extremely liquid eyes – again, not to seduce me but simply because he thinks with his skin, & wanted to show me he now believed that I actually like him. While Roberto was out of the room I began to draw Carlito out on the subject of their friendship. What he told me amounted to this: When Roberto was about twelve his step-father threw him out (presumably out of the house at Nagal) because he is queer – "queeny" as Carlito put it. Roberto arrived in Balaba penniless & in rags. Because he was so pretty & charming he ended up at MacArthur Plaza, where Carlito more or less adopted him. People say we look like brothers – same hair & eyes – we look more like brothers than Joey & Roberto do, don't we? – Roberto now came back into the room & demanded to know what we were talking about – when I told him he crowded into a three-way embrace with Carhto & me & spoke of their friendship – how Carlito

taught him everything, how to dress beautifully, how to dance, how to act, how to live. He is my real friend, Roberto said – Philip & Edwin are just boys from MacArthur Plaza. I knew that as soon as I saw the two of you dance together, I told them. I knew that Carlito was your real friend & teacher & I am glad that you have a friend to help you. How old are you, Carlito? Sixteen. Yes, I knew that too. A sweet moment – till Roberto whispers in my ear, "If he asks you for money you not give." (What a life! his best friend! Can you see what money means to him? Anyway, I take it all in, judge nothing & no one.)

Come, we go for a stroll, Roberto announces. The others object – but – "Who's the Boss?" Roberto demands of me, & I tell them, "Roberto". So we debouch through the hotel, this bearded middle-aged American & a gaggle of pretty Baluran callboys – into two taxis, to speed off to Iturbi Park. Look over the Bay, lightly softened by the tropical mist – an exact replica of my feelings, embraced & kissed by Roberto in the car, touched & smiled at by the other boys – cocooned in soft feminine flesh, laughing young boy/girls. I feel I belong – & they feel my feeling & begin to respond to it, in between their bouts of obligatory bitchiness & obscenity (some of it quite funny) – & we arrive at the Esplanade arms linked all together, an invading wave, me & Roberto the double spearhead, me the queer MacArthur.

We find seats under a palm tree – Roberto announces that all of them will go to buy drinks except me & Carlito. You will talk, he says. And so it is. Carlito tells me more about how he taught Roberto. For example, how to act when you enter the lobby of an expensive hotel – not to be "queeny" but *to imagine that you are rich* – & thus you will automatically act in the right way. And who taught you? I asked. I have known everything for a long time. I am very mature now. (This slender highschool-sophomore-aged boy now caressing my arm.) And he confirms my opinion of Roberto – of all the MacArthur Plaza boys he is the most intelligent, the one with the most heart. And Hakim, you have made him happy for the first time – you have helped him, & perhaps now he can go back to school (a wistful expression) – not public school, it's not good, the teachers just sit there reading out of books – but a private school – or maybe even to America. (The way I've been throwing money around it's no wonder these kids think I could afford to arrange something like that.) I have a friend who wants to take me to Switzerland, says Carlito – & he tells me some of the details of how one can expatriate Baluran boys (& yet how could these flowers outlast our winters? How could Roberto be admitted to an American private school, & how could he be happy there? These are lost boys, unhappy in Balaba but surely unable to survive anywhere

else.).

As the others came back with paper cupsful of soda, Carlito suddenly turns away from me – Roberto looks at him & whispers urgently to me, Why is Carlito crying? I think it's because he likes you, I answer, loves you as a brother. (Well, I know why Carlito is crying, & I guess that's part of it.) Roberto sets out to jolly him up, pinches him, kisses him – but it takes Carlito a long time to recover, & when he recovers he clings to my arm as if he & not Roberto were my special friend – or as if he & Roberto were one & the same person. The boys think I look like John Lennon – or Jesus Christ. Doomed figures.

Here in the Park Roberto remembers our talk about "yoga" – it seems all the boys are interested, & ask to be shown the full lotus & *yonimudra*. All of them get it very quickly – only Roberto, to his frustration, finds it hard to do – despite his grace he is rather uncoordinated in some ways – but at last he makes me sit next to him on the sidewalk & help him. I wonder how it all looks to passersby? That is, *now* I wonder. At that point I was totally absorbed in Roberto & what he was doing. I told them to concentrate on something they liked very much or found beautiful – a flower, or the moon – to think of nothing but that, putting everything else out of their minds, until they could see the object clearly with their imagination, as if it were real. And suddenly Roberto begins to gasp & shiver, expressions of pain & bewilderment crossing his face – I touch him, his spine, whisper to him to relax, breathe slowly – caressing him back to himself. "I not know where I am go," he says – & the more articulate Philip interprets: "He means he doesn't know where his spirit went to." (Did you think my images of shamanism were mere fantasy? Did I think so? No, they are real. Roberto – or perhaps any one of these boys, stoned or not, could be entranced in less than a minute, & I am utterly convinced that this characteristic is culturally rooted.)

Finally I learn what "Pompa" means. Pompa is Roberto's nickname (or "mixname" as Edwin comically mispronounces it). Finally he admits to me, "They call me Pompa for joke – but my real name is Roberto!" Pompa! That is why I've heard the word everywhere we go. Pompa *is* Roberto! – Pompa is here!" he announces a moment later with an exultant flourish of his arms & a dance step. And he is in my arms, embracing me & kissing me in front of his friends & the whole blind night.

All evening, no matter where we are, Roberto is in my arms. We kiss in the taxis & hold hands on the street. From time to time he tells me, I love you Hakim, I am unhappy without you, I do not want you to go away. I have never been so happy as I am with you. Over & over again he wants to be

reassured of two things – that I will give him the money for the room – & that I will come back.

(The plane just took off. I dared it to crash, thinking, I don't give a shit – would be willing to the – & the happy.)

Next stop is the "carnival" – while waiting for a cab the boys point to a part of the park & tell me they cannot go there – "too many bad boys there". What kind of bad boys? "Extortionists." Petty hoods preying on boy prostitutes. At the carnival they ride the Octopus (all except Joey, who's too high already) – Roberto & Carlito in one car together, Edwin & Philip in another. Every time Roberto whirls by me he shrieks like a little girl then grins at me – towards the end of the ride Carlito has to hold his head in his arms – I fear Roberto looks a bit sick. They're all a bit white & woozy when they get off, but claim they feel fine. And it's time to go to "the other disco", the Coco-Balaba. Six in a taxi, sprawled & linked together like puppies. The boys are all stoned on syrup – their hilarity is fading into nods – Roberto clinging like a limpet, pushing my hand into his crotch.

In a desolate intersection armed police are stopping all traffic. What's going on? H.H. Sultan Zahir al-Idrisi is about to pass by. The Fat One must be back from a triumphant visit to the ineffable Aquino – or to cowboy George, plump hands outspread to beg for guns & butter & CIA advisers – or perhaps he's just on his way from opening a factory which will undercut some American market with cheap labor. Where the hell *is* he anyway? The night is clammy, dead, stagnant. The Sultan is whizzing through the darkness in his aircooled limousine – grease runs in rivulets down his porcine features. Stuck at the crossroads we bubble & squeak in bitter tropical heat. Wait, wait. The motionless car is stifling – this must be the hottest most airless corner of the city – we're turning green & dripping with sweat – for a moment I'm afraid Roberto is going to be sick. At last a cavalcade passes by – no cheers – and finally the car moves again – air! – that at least gets a mild cheer. Thus my one contact with Baluran politics.

The "other" disco is fancier, slicker. Lots of transvestites. The boys seem to find them amusing. A boy of about fifteen dressed in pink knee-britches approaches our table – his face completely made up. The boys order him to get lost – they seem to despise him because he uses cosmetics. They are too stoned to dance very much, & Roberto seems a bit embarrassed by the stares he's getting – more amazement than desire. Carlito offers himself unsuccessfully to a foreigner, who grins in disbelief at our group – too high even to finish their drinks – Roberto cuddled in my arms, eyes unfocused, semi-consciously drawing my hand to his crotch, kissing me almost hungrily. At last he announces that he, Joey & I will return alone to the hotel.

Carlito, half-asleep, grasps my hand as I kiss his cheek, follows us unsteadily outside to wave goodbye.

Roberto undresses at once, but his cock is soft. I tell him to stay away from liquor & opiates as much as possible. Drugs are no good, dangerous. Are you sick? I ask. No, why? Because you can't get a hard-on. Yes, because of the drugs. Drugs are not good, right? With grass, I tell him, usually you are hard all the time. But to be truthful, it wouldn't have seemed quite right to make love to him now, this last sad night. Just hold me, like this, he says – and we lie together gently kissing, exchanging vows of love. But Roberto cannot sleep. I cannot sleep. Joey cannot sleep. So at last Roberto invites me to massage him with lotion – in media res, Joey bursts into the room – Roberto curiously shy about his nakedness, doesn't want Joey to see his cock – for a short while, under my stroking hands, he seems to doze off – but no, he still cannot sleep. So he gets up & announces, No more sleep. He packs & dresses. I pack & dress. We agree that he must not come to the airport with me, because it will be too sad – & besides, Donny is driving me there. Joey is banished to the outer room again, & I give Roberto his rent money, & some extra "pocket money". Gravely he thanks me & chastely kisses me – I urge him not to tell anyone about the money (quite a large sum) until it's safely paid over to the landlady – but he understands the danger better than I.

Now comes the hard part. I have the impression that Roberto is embarrassed & wants to leave at once – so as diplomatically as possible I tell him that if he wants to go now he can go. He pretends not to understand me – but the problem is not linguistic. He's afraid I'm trying to get rid of him. At last I manage to explain myself. With a little sob he tells me that he does not want to go till morning (it is now about two A.M.) because "you will think I only go with you for money." Suddenly I realize just how badly I've misjudged him. I love you, Hakim, he says, in his saddest voice. It's not just sex for money. I understand, I tell him. It was like that at the beginning, but not now, right? Am I right? But his look seems to say, no, you're wrong. And I wonder. That first day when he called me at the Malabu Mansions to invite me to go dancing, & ended the conversation by saying "I love you" – could it be that even then it was not just for money? Oh, shit, oh shit, what have I done? I take his head in my hands & force him to look into my eyes (he never meets my eyes for more than an instant) & I almost yell at him – "I believe you, Roberto, I believe that you love me. I believe you!" & then I am huddled against him, weeping. Don't cry, don't

cry, he repeats softly (but afraid), patting my shoulder awkwardly. Just as Joey bursts in again I manage to get myself a bit under control & light a cigarette. Roberto, desolate, sits on the edge of the bed, unable to respond to Joey's questions. Tears are streaming down his face, making his delicate eyelashes sparkle – he mops them up with a pillow – great blotches of dampness on the white linen – I sit beside him & hold him but he cannot look at me – & I cannot beg him not to cry because my heart is overflowing (sorry for the *True Romance*, but fuck literature) – & in a way I am enjoying it.

I am not happy, he says – & I tell him, Without you I am nothing. And now without words we know what to do – we lie back on the bed, fully dressed, legs intertwined, holding hands, kissing – he strokes my bare arms & chest – Joey is wandering around in a daze but I don't care – at last Roberto half-dozes off & I look at him, his sacred sleeping face, & realize that despite everything, everything, there is some truth between us, & love. And all night I weep for us, trying not to wake him with my shuddering but unable not to hold him. There are no other miracles. I must come back, I think, I must not betray.

But at six A.M., pink dawn at the windows, we must rise. I order breakfast, ham & eggs, his favorite – but he cannot eat more than a bite before he pushes it away to sip his mango juice & smoke. Gloom, gloom. I get up from the table & go to finish packing – at seven he comes in & embraces me, *thanks* me, kisses me forlornly. Have a nice trip. I cannot, because without you nothing is nice. (One believes such things when one says them, which makes them at least as "real" as most philosophy, religion, etc., etc.) I cannot say goodbye because I will come back, I promise – I swear it. Goodbye & God bless you, says Joey in English. Have a nice trip, Roberto whispers again, looking like a ghost. At the door a last kiss, & I cannot help myself – I begin sobbing. It's as if I've stabbed him – his face crumples, tears begin streaming down his cheeks again. I close the door & lean against it, crying quite a lot – when suddenly the buzzer rings. It's Donny. I just saw Roberto in the elevator & he was crying. What's the matter, he's sad that you're leaving? Umph, I say. And Donny realizes that I too am in tears – and for once he is silent. No talk of money. You'll have to come back, he says. Yes, I answer. Are you packed? Yes. Shall we go to the airport? Yes.