into a mirror.

Wanting to know the source for the woman's life, but at the same time not wanting to have anything to do with it, hating it even, Lisa tried to think of something to say. Anything. She didn't want to leave this place, not yet anyway. It was warm, comforting, and this woman was intriguing, to say the least.

"Oh, no. I'm getting soft," Lisa thought. "Not cool."

"Are you okay, honey? You look disturbed about something."

Lisa suddenly lashed out, "You're not like religious or anything, are you?" The words had tumbled out in sudden anger, sharp and pointed.

The woman was silent for several moments. She seemed to be searching Lisa's eyes for something, some sort of clue which might tell her how to respond to this young girl with intense brown eyes. The woman's own eyes grew somber, serious, though not dark.

"Religious? No, not really." The woman paused, seeming to select her words carefully. "Perhaps it might be better for me to say that I do have faith and a hope which comes not from me."

Lisa digested the woman's words. Still intrigued, yet tempted to become infuriated, she gave herself over to anger and let bitter, slicing words pour out of her. "There is no real hope. And faith is the most ignorant thing I've ever heard of--there is no God. And if there is, I want no part of Him. I've never seen anything to suggest that there's a fair God, and people, they'll stab you in the back at every turn! The reality
is that life is hell and death is the only way out. If I were a coward I’d have been out of this hell by now. Or I’d be where you are, believing in fairy tales!"

***

Lisa did not return to the mission for several months. And when she did return, desperately hungry once again, the grey-haired woman’s eyes seemed to recognize her, yet she did not mention their past encounter. Instead she gave Lisa food and chattered some, but not nearly as much as before. Her eyes still glowed, yet something new lingered behind the glow. Lisa noticed it’s presence. For some reason, it made her think about her mother.

Lisa ate in contemplative silence, finding herself developing a respect for this grey-haired lady. She sensed a strength in the lady that she didn’t see in the toughest of street people. A strength that came from within, not one that was put on as a stone cold mask. She felt peace from the woman, too. Peace that spoke of contentment, something that seemed almost foreign to Lisa’s street self. Maybe the lady was a coward for having faith and hope, but Lisa found herself envying the woman for possessing those very detested qualities.

Lisa left that day without saying a word, just as she was to leave several other times without speaking. Each time, the woman continued to give her food and continued to talk in her friendly
chattering way. But always the woman spoke sensitively and cautiously. Always the woman smiled warmly. And never did she push or prod or mention Lisa’s past explosion.

***

It was a breezy October day when Lisa walked into the mission with a purpose which was different than her regular purpose.

The grey-haired woman smiled and inquired as usual, "Hungry?"

Instead of the regular almost imperceptible nod before following the woman to the back of the building and to the familiar food, Lisa looked into the woman’s eyes and softly spoke.

"Yes."
Carelessness

Life, liberty, and the pursuit of everything.

One nation under Self
with liberty and justice for some.

Ask not what you country can do for you,
but what you can do for you.

Did you know that I...
I this...I that...
I I
Me Me
I want, I want, I want
Give Me Give Me Give Me

It's a sad, sad state of sin
When men care less about other men.
Small Wonder

Marlena paced nervously in the small waiting area.

"Have a seat, Miss. Relax. Your friend is going to be fine. Besides we can't afford to replace the carpet."

Marlena tried to muster a smile for the receptionist, but the best she could do was a quick glance before she sank into an empty, well-worn chair. Leaning forward and burying her face in her hands, she allowed warm tears to flow, as she remembered what had happened just three weeks ago.

Marlena and Nadine had been boisterous that night for---it seemed to Marlena now---the last time ever. From the time they had left their seventh hour English class, they had laughed and joked in their usual weekend manner.

"Oh, I just can't wait for Jeremy's party tonight, Marlena. Ryan Moore is sure to be there. And I plan on getting his attention anyway I can. He is so fine. And, after tonight, he'll be mine. Gee, I sure can rhyme." Both of the girls had laughed until tears ran down their faces.

Getting ready together, the two girls had concentrated on looking "sexy." The task wasn't too difficult as both girls were naturally attractive. Their natural youthful beauty was the perfect foundation, and by the time they were ready to go out, the seventeen-year-old high school juniors could have easily gotten into any night club in town.

Marvelling at their impressive appearance, Nadine had
confidently stated, "There ain’t no way Ryan Moore is gonna be able to ignore the likes of me."

Walking away from the mirror, they had both laughed boastfully, for they knew that Ryan Moore wasn’t the only one who wouldn’t be able to ignore Nadine, or Marlena.

"It’s not fair...it’s not fair," Marlena now mumbled through her tears and into her palms. "I wish I would have known then what was going to happen that night, what was going to be happening right now."

A gentle hand rested on Marlena’s shoulder. Looking up, she saw through the blur of her tears another tear-streaked face.

Holding her breath, Marlena waited for her young friend to speak. But Nadine didn’t speak. After a few moments which seemed to Marlena like torturous hours, Marlena let out her breath and rasped an impatient, "Well?" And waited again.

As Nadine stood so still and somber, Marlena began to panic. "No you can’t be. It’s not possible. You’re only seventeen. You’ve got life ahead of you. If you are...oh, if you are...I’m going to kill that dirty, ugly bastard. I’m going t-"

"Marlena, stop. Please. Don’t."

The gentleness of the voice scared the panicked, angry girl. Something was not right. Nadine hadn’t answered her or told her anything, so, of course she had assumed the worst. Yet, here Nadine was, calm and serene.

"You are, aren’t you?" Marlena sounded uncertain, still slightly hopeful.
Quietly and without apparent emotion came the reply: "Yes."

Jumping up, "I knew it! I knew it! That dirty bastard--I'm gonna rip his face right off of his damn ugly head."

"Marlena, stop." Again, the calm voice--it kept throwing Marlena off balance.

Becoming totally quiet, Marlena simply stared at Nadine dumbstruck.

"Everything is going to be fine, Marlena. Believe me."

Marlena allowed her jaw to drop open as she stood silently for only a few moments. Then, floundering for words, she tried to make sense of the situation.

In her own quiet voice, Marlena began, "Okay, you are pregnant. But everything is fine. I don't get it. I mean, you of all people--you're probably going to graduate at the head of our class. You've already had scholarship offers for running track at countless colleges. You've always talked so big, so great. 'Nadine Cummings, Miss Future Lawyer Lady--she shall conquer the world!'" Dropping the volume of her risen voice back down, she stared unconsciously at Nadine. "I mean, like, no comprendo, Nade."

The other girl allowed the corners of her mouth to turn up ever so slightly, the only sign of emotion yet to appear on her face. Quietly, speaking almost at a whisper, yet ever so evenly, she spoke.

"I'm getting an abortion, Marlena."

"You're what?!"
Again, "I’m getting an abortion."

"I think I’m going to throw up." Marlena sank back down into a chair.

"I know how you feel about stuff like this, Marlie. But you’re right, I do have a future ahead of me. I’ll have children later, but not now. It’s only an abortion, Marlie. People get them all the time."

"Only an abortion? Only murder, you mean. People only murder babies all the time." Marlena simply shook her head and stared at the ceiling.

Emotion now began to color Nadine’s words as she spoke forcefully, defensively. "Now is not the time for you to share your ultra-conservative view with me, Marlie. I’ve decided. I am getting an abortion."

"Okay, you’ve decided, you’re getting an abortion." Marlena practically spit the words out. Then, speaking more gently and calmly, she added one word, "When?"

"Next week."

"Next week?! Nadine you have gone totally insane. You decide in less than an hour after you’ve found out that you are pregnant that you are going to get an abortion. And then, you decide to get it next week! I can’t believe this. Can’t you at least think about this? Can’t you at least consider what’s at stake here?"

"What’s at stake here is my future, nothing more nothing less. I am simply taking steps to insure the best possible life
"Your future. Your life. You, you, you. Can’t you think of anything else? What about the baby’s future? The baby’s life. Why don’t you think about that for longer than a minute or two."

"Marlena, get a grip, please. It’s not like I wanted to get pregnant. Hell, I didn’t even plan on having sex. It just happened."

Before the frustrated girl could reply, Nadine added, "Let’s drop it, okay? This isn’t exactly the best place to argue."

Right then, the receptionist returned to the front desk and smiled at the two girls. "Okay, Nadine. What time do you want to come in next Tuesday?"

***

For the next few days, Marlena agonized over the situation. She could not believe what was happening. Her best friend was pregnant. And what was worse, she was getting an abortion.

An abortion.

Marlena had always held a strong opinion about abortion. She didn’t know exactly where her opinion came from; it simply seemed to be so naturally wrong to Marlena, morally wrong.

Murder. She’d been in countless arguments with friends, even family, about the wrongness of abortion. She’d always spoke fiercely, doggedly. But she’d never been so close to anyone who
had had an abortion. Not until now.

"Nadine," Marlena shook her head in wonder, "Why? Why couldn’t you just have the baby? If you don’t want to keep it, you could give it up for adoption. There are millions of people waiting to adopt, wanting to provide a home for a child."

The silence that answered Marlena now as she sat alone in her bedroom, was much the same as the silence that Nadine had answered her with two days ago.

Nadine did not want to have the baby. Plain and simple.

Marlena stood up and went to her window. Looking out she saw children playing across the street. Laughing and shouting, they looked so carefree. Marlena wanted to cry again for what seemed the thousandth time. Or to yell again. She wanted to do something. Anything. But every time she yelled or cried, it only served to remind her of how helpless she was in the situation.

It was Nadine’s choice.

Marlena’s thoughts turned back towards the societal system which allowed people to make such a choice. In the past few days she had found herself almost despising it. People were so bent on getting their proper "rights," that they took away the rights of the innocent, the rights of the uncorrupted. On the one hand, she knew that perhaps the babies were better off unborn, better off unexposed to this world which thoughtlessly slays the innocent. But yet, that is no excuse, no rightful justification for the act of slaying.
Of course, Marlena had become acquainted with all of the arguments. Arguments for choice, for situational ethics, for convenience. Yet none of them seemed strong to her. In her mind, freedom included freedom for the unborn, and abortion was murder, no matter what the reason, no matter what the situation. For most, there are two guaranteed things in life—life and death. For the aborted child, there is only death.

Marlena thought about calling Nadine again. She'd called her several times since they had left the clinic three days ago, but they never talked long. Nadine had grown distant. Her words to Marlena were flat and lifeless. Her former jovial spirit seemed to have disappeared. And whenever Marlena mentioned the possibility of her not having the abortion, Nadine would quickly cut her off, unrelenting and firm.

Marlena quickly thought of her options. She could not force Nadine to have the baby, she knew. But cutting herself off from Nadine would not help anything. In fact, Marlena knew that perhaps the only way she could help Nadine was by being there for her, by helping her get through this awful dilemma. She did not agree with Nadine's decision, but Nadine was still her friend. And Nadine probably needed a friend now more than ever.

Picking up the phone, Marlena thought of what she would say to Nadine, of how she would let her know that she cared.

"Hello, Nadine? This is Marlena. I was wondering if you'd like to go to the mall with me? I want to buy a new compact disc at the music store."
As Nadine agreed, Marlena sighed, relieved. She knew that she might not be able to do anything about her friend’s abortion, yet, still, her chances of doing anything positive only existed if they remained friends.

Hanging up the phone, Marlena spoke quietly and softly, "I love you, Nadine."
Love Poem

Alone, alone, incredibly alone.
The thousand faces stare with grey
And cloudy eyes looking for some reason
To call themselves alive.
Walking with fast step around this cement
World, never really knowing just what
Their lives might mean,
Strangers in the land,
They live and die each day,
Never really finding any piece of peace.

The buildings tall and elegant,
The trees all in a row,
What more to life can there be,
Than this solitary land?
Lacking for no food,
Always warm or cool,
Regulated corpses walk
With faking footsteps,
Under the bright, hot sun.

"All is meaningless!"
Cries the prophet.
Nothing ever lasts.
All passes away with time and wear--
And whoever finds the past?
No profit can be counted on
To get a goat some oats,
And never can one truly say
That the future holds great hope.

Alone, alone, frightfully alone.
The sky will turn to bright-red blood,
And the earth will shake and tremble.
Who will be left to groan and cry
Into the void of endless night?
Endurance and courage will not suffice
For those caught in the midst
Of this eternal blight.
Inward salvation and denial of power
Are unwise follies at this hour.
Turn, turn, turn!
Life is nothing until the turning.
Death runs rampant in the night;
Death sings blatantly in the light.
Turn, turn, turn!
It is not wise to sing the blues
   With passionate glee like those
   Who never take death seriously.

   Death is
   More
   Than
A simple, free floating;
Death is more than a big, black hole;
Death is more than mere ecstasy;
Death is more than a new beginning.
The reality of death is forever,
Forever free or forever bound.
The proud will be brought low,
And the lame man shall fly.
The moans and groans will cut through
The lies
Of the fool
When all come
To kneel
Nakedly
Under
The tree.
Split Decision

"You’re going to do what? Margie, I can’t hardly believe this; after all the hard work, after all the time, after everything that your mother and I have sacrificed these past years just to send you to college; and now--it’s like a slap in the face." The fiftyish, near bald and oversized man, stared fixedly at his young daughter. "We sacrificed our lives for you, our comfort, and now..."

Margie stood with her head hanging low. Entwining her hands together nervously and shuffling her tiny feet back and forth, she looked like a small, slumped child who had just broken her mother’s most expensive piece of jewelry and who was afraid of impending doom from the giant who loomed angrily over her. She started to speak, but her words were not quite formed as they fell softly and humbly to the floor.

"What? Did you say something? Speak up! That’s another thing, if you can barely say ‘boo’ to the world, how in the hell do you think that you are going to be able to save it? You can’t preach--you ain’t got no guts, Margie!"

"Hugh, please," Margie’s until then silent mother interjected quietly and pleadingly. "Let her be; just let her be."

Such simple statements were characteristic of her soft-spoken mother, and Margie glanced appreciatively at her, but received nothing but a blank gaze in return.

"I wish you’d stop sticking up for her, Sally. You worked
just as hard as I did to give her these past five years of education. You know how it feels to have her turn on us like this and throw away her degree. And for what? To be some peon, money-begging campus minister. That twenty-thousand-dollar nursing degree of hers might as well be toilet paper to her. It's downright sinful."

The stress on his last word was meant to slice into his daughter's sensitive heart like a dagger. Margie did wince slightly, but she did not attempt any rebuttal; she simply lifted her bowed head and peered intently into her father's face, as if searching for something that she thought might be hidden under his cold and icy look of indignation. Her own eyes were softly pleading. Her father suddenly looked uncomfortable, and, for a moment, almost vulnerable, but he quickly recovered, and his hard and calloused exterior came crashing back down around him, enveloping him like stone-cold prison walls.

However, his moment of vulnerability did not go unnoticed, and Margie, attempting to bring him back out of his prison, continued to gaze intently into his grey eyes. Instinctively, she reached out a tiny hand and quietly uttered one word.

"Daddy."

But he had already backed far into the corner of his self-made barrier. Looking almost repulsed by her movement, he nearly jumped backwards away from her. With something close to a sneer engraved on his aging face, he too said one word.

"Don't."
After the vibration had ceased from the door which had so abruptly separated the father and the two anxious women, Margie turned to face her passive mother. The average-sized woman sat rigidly in an almost statue-like position. Her eyes were closed and no emotion was evident on her plain-featured face. Margie couldn’t remember when her mother had last looked so old, and she couldn’t help but wonder if she had perhaps aged several years within the past few minutes.

Margie considered speaking to her mother, but after a moment of thought, she silently turned and left the room. Going up the stairs to her elegantly decorated bedroom, Margie fought back the tears which had been threatening to break forth from her cloudy, blue eyes. Despite her efforts, the wet streams of emotion began to flow down her youthful cheeks. As she started to shut the door of her bedroom, she paused, listening to the muffled sounds coming out from under the door which separated her from her father’s study. What she heard made her heart pummel against her breast and her tears flood unbiddingly from the rain clouds in her eyes.

Margie recalled the last time that she had heard her father cry. Her brother Jeff had come home on a steamy July day, the proud owner of a brand new, jetblack Ninja motorcycle. Her Dad had been irate and had yelled in much the same manner as he had moments earlier to Margie. A shy seven-year-old, Margie had hid in the closet under the stairway, cowering in fear of her father, yet allowing curiosity to keep her within earshot of the horrid
scene. She remembered hearing her peacemaker mother saying familiar words to her father, "Let him be; let him be."

Clinching her fists together, she fell to her knees beside her king-sized waterbed. Margie turned the memory off. She did not wish to replay the painful past in her head; she had done that countless times before, and nothing had changed. Her brother was still gone. Yet since that time, Margie had come to grips with the pain, had come to grips with much about life, had even found meaning in her own life. The meaning that she had found brought her peace and comfort which helped her through life's struggles, even through the pain of losing her brother. She often found herself praying that her parents might find that same peace and comfort.

Quivering, she bowed herself over her bed and supported her head with hands. Soft, almost inaudible words began to emerge from her lips. Shortly, her body relaxed, and, laying her head down on the mattress, Margie fell asleep.

***

Margie awoke at the sound of her clock radio droning from the corner of the room. Margie lay still as she thought about the past few days. Life at home had been far from comfortable, as her father had continued to keep his distance from her. Furthermore, her level of communication with her mother had dropped considerably as well. Still, Margie did not despair. She knew the situation was in good hands.

As Margie slowly emerged from her bed, she could smell the
pleasant odors of Saturday breakfast. Smiling, she thought of her mother quietly rustling about the kitchen, humming as she performed tasty miracles each Saturday. But instead of hurrying downstairs to enjoy the wonders of good cooking, Margie first dropped to knees beside her still warm bed.

***

"Those muffins were absolutely the best you’ve ever made, Mom. Your cooking gets better each day."

Margie’s mother returned the kind words with a brief smile and a curt nod. As the older woman started to rise from the table to begin cleaning up the dishes, Margie reached out and covered one of the older woman’s hands with her own.

"Please, mother. Please talk to me. I can understand Dad’s reserve, but, well, I guess I expected you to at least try to understand."

Her mother paused a moment, then, sinking back into the chair, simply shook her head.

"Margie, I don’t know what to think. I don’t know what to do. I don’t like to see your father like this. He’s...well, he’s been through a lot lately."

Margie crossed over to her mother’s side of the table and bent down to give her a hug. She felt her mother’s shoulders tense under her. When Margie looked down into the face of her mother, she saw the same inexpressiveness that she had seen a few days earlier, the day of the argument.

As Margie moved away from the table, her mother abruptly
rose and went to the sink, turning her back on Margie. As Margie lingered for a moment, her mother began humming softly. Feeling dismissed, Margie turned and left the room.

Out by the pool, Margie lifted her face to the sun, letting its emerging rays bring warmth to her.

***

"Goodbye, Mother. Goodbye, Father. God bless you both."

Margie’s voice was soft and quiet as she spoke gently into the air around her. Margie was alone. Her parents had left early that morning. They had convenient plans to visit Margie’s Aunt Rhoda, also a sister to Margie’s father, who lived three hours away. Margie’s parents had insisted that the visit was preplanned much earlier, before they knew Margie would be leaving for the university on that same day.

"We’re sorry, Margie. But we really can’t disappoint Rhoda," Margie’s mother had said only two days earlier.

"That’s okay. I understand."

And Margie did understand. Holding no grudges, but feeling pangs of disappointment, Margie called a cab.

***

The trip to the university was a long one; the bus ride itself took over six hours. But Margie didn’t mind. In fact, when the bus did at last reach Margie’s final stop, she found herself wishing she had a few more hours. Quivering slightly, Margie closed the Bible that had been warming her lap, said a
quick prayer, and prepared herself for what lay outside the small door of the bus.

Margie had spent most of the trip reading her Bible and meditating on the scriptures which spurred her on and encouraged her. The more she read, the more she felt she had done the right thing. Yet, reflecting on the events that had transpired over the last several months and that had led her to her current status, she found herself regretting the separation that her decision had caused in her family.

As Margie stepped off of the bus, the cooler air of the new city whipped against her small body. But as she took in the young faces of students walking by her, with strides that seemed to hold great purpose, she knew she was right where she belonged.
Rock-a-bye Baby

Once upon a
Rock, I stood
Strong and boldly
As my mind ran
Freely through
Meadows and brooks,
In castles and dungeons,
Over mountains,
Under mounds,
To the stars
And then back
To my rock--
My cold and hard
And very real
Rock--
My disenchanted
Rock.
January 6:

I think I'll start writing some of this stuff down. It's all so confusing. Perhaps writing it will be therapeutic or something. Tomorrow. Tomorrow, I will begin.

January 7:

I can't remember exactly how old I was when I first started having the dreams. Must have been around six or so. Or maybe I was nine, my age when my grandmother died. That would make sense, as I was terrified of death after she died; the thought of losing my mother haunted me for a couple of years after that. But however old I was exactly isn't all that important. What's important are the dreams. Or at least that's what my counselor says.

I started seeing Nancy--she's my counselor--a couple of months ago. Actually, I've been seeing her for two months, twelve days, and three hours, give or take a few minutes. I'm not usually a stickler for details like dates and times, but the day I first saw Nancy sticks out in my mind, because it was also the day that Nina walked out on me.

Nina was my girlfriend of three months, two weeks, and four days. Nina was wonderful and I loved her very much, or at least I thought I did, until Nancy told me that I didn't really love Nina, but that I had an obsession for her. I guess Nancy would
know; she’s the one with the doctorate degree and everything. I didn’t even make it through my first year of college. I almost did, but then I met Georgia, and became an artist.

Georgia told me I had talent and promise and didn’t need to finish college. She said she loved me and that she’d support me--she was a model and made pretty decent money. So I moved to Florida and lived there with Georgia for two months and four days. But then she met an actor who could buy her flowers and fur coats. She ended up moving to New York. I would tell you that I loved Georgia, but Nancy doesn’t think that I really did--another obsession.

I guess I’m kind of confused on this issue of love right now. Before I met Nancy, I would have told you that I’ve been in love six times. I’m pretty sure Nancy thinks maybe I’ve only loved once, and that the only person I’ve loved is my mother. I’m not sure I believe Nancy yet, but I’m trying, as she is the counselor. But if I didn’t know any better--of if Nancy didn’t know better--I’d say that I’m in the process of falling in love for the seventh time, with Nancy. I guess I’d better wait before I tell Nancy; I don’t want her to think it’s another obsession. Maybe after we get done talking about the dreams and why my life is so "unstable" as she puts it, maybe then I’ll tell her. Then we won’t be on such a professional level. I wouldn’t want to be unprofessional.

Back to the dreams--I never realized that they were so significant to my life. In fact, I kind of had forgotten about
them until they came up in my third session with Nancy. She asked me if I was insecure as a child and I told her "yes, always" and that I was a "mama's boy."

"And what do you mean by 'mama's boy,' Ted? Were you her favorite? Or did you merely feel extremely close to her?"

That was when I told her about the dreams.

"Well, Nancy," by this time we were on a first-name basis, "I guess you could say I was extremely close to her. I've never thought of myself as her favorite though. She always treated me and my older brother just the same, even though he treated her really badly--I don't think he ever really loved her." I almost started crying then--I still miss my mother. "I cried a lot when she left me to go to work or wherever, and I remember making all the babysitters nervous, because I wouldn't stop crying. I was afraid of losing her, so much so that I even dreamed about losing her. I think that's why I didn't sleep well as a kid. I was always waking up screaming and crying, so I tried to stay awake so I wouldn't dream."

"So you had some pretty scary dreams as a child. Do you remember your dreams? Do you have any one particular dream which sticks with you? Or maybe a dream which happened more than once, even regularly?"

I told her about both of the dreams then. Both of the dreams which had haunted me for so long as a child. I must admit, I felt pretty funny telling her about them. They were strange dreams. But all kids have strange dreams, don't they?
But Nancy sat there and listened to me, saying "aha" and "hmmm" and nodding her pretty brown head. Ever since then, our times together seem to center around those dreams and their significance to my life.

Wow, I’ve been writing for two hours. This is tough. But I’m rather enjoying it. I used to want to be a writer and write novels and mysteries and weird stuff. What better stuff to write about than my own life?

January 8:

I had one of the dreams last night. The grocery dream. Weird, I hadn’t had the dream for thirty years or so, until last night. This stuff must really be getting to me. I think I’ll write about the dream, about last night. Maybe that will help me understand.

Last night I went to bed and couldn’t sleep. Just like old times, when the dreams used to happen, and when I stayed awake to keep from dreaming. I just lay there and thought about everything. I thought about my childhood, my deceased mother, my present life, Nancy, even Nina. When the tears started rolling down my face, softening the bristly hair of my beard, I felt an overwhelming sadness creep into the pit of my stomach. I wanted to throw up, but instead I sang one of the songs that my mother
used to sing to me when I was too frightened to sleep. I sang, "I'm going to the chapel and I'm going to get married," over and over until I finally fell asleep. I think that I fell asleep around two-thirty-two or something like that, but I know that it was exactly four-forty-four when I woke up screaming--screaming just like I did when I was an insecure little boy. Only my mommy didn't come running. Instead, I was left to ponder alone in my bed the awful dream that I had just had. It was the other dream this time, and instead of my mother, the woman in the dream was Nancy.

In the dream I am a small, little boy sitting in the passenger side of a big family-type car. Nancy is driving and she is just getting done ruffling my hair, when she pulls into a grocery lot and parks. She tells me to "be a good, little boy" and to wait in the car for her to return. I wait and wait and wait for what seems like eternity, and then I begin to cry. Then suddenly I stop crying, climb over the console of the car, and drive away. I can barely see over the dash, but I drive well still, and I think now that I am probably happy that I drive so well, because I am smiling. Then I see a policeman parked on the side of the rode. I am so happy that I wave at him. He smiles, waves back, then frowns like he is puzzled about something. Suddenly he hops in his car and starts chasing me. I go faster and faster and dodge traffic like the bad guys--and the good guys, too, come to think of it--do on television late at night. Finally, I lose the police car, and drive into a parking lot. It
is the lot of the grocery store that Nancy had entered. Oddly, right after I park the car, she comes out of the store, gets into the car, ruffles my hair, and says, "I knew you'd be a good boy," and she has a great big, motherly smile on her face. Then, I scream and wake up.

Why I scream at the end of the dream, I haven't quite figured out. I'm hoping Nancy will be able to tell me. I guess I'll tell her about it next week, when I go to see her again. I wonder how she'll react when she finds out that she's in it. And that she replaces my mother. Maybe, if she really believes that the only person I've ever truly loved is my mother, maybe, just maybe, she'll believe that I love her. And that the dream is a sign of my love.

January 12:

I meet with Nancy tomorrow. I'm can't wait. Wish I could write more, but my hand is shaking too much. Guess I'm nervous.

January 13:

I just got back from seeing Nancy. I'm not sure what to think. I was thinking that I might have a chance with her, but after today's session, I'm not sure. I told her that I had the grocery dream over the weekend. She looked surprised. I know it is kind of strange, a grown man of thirty-six having the same dream that he had when he was six or nine, but I don't see what
the big deal is. I told her it was probably only because I’ve spent so much time talking to her about it--of course, I’m going to end up dreaming about it again. She agreed with me. But then, when I told her that instead of my mother being in the dream, it was she who was in the dream, she looked really uncomfortable.

"What?" Her voice was low and soft, but firm. "Are you telling me that you dreamed one of the dreams and that I was in the same role as your mother?"

I nodded. Not exactly the reaction I had hoped she would have. I was really hoping she’d make the connection between my mother and her, and see that I love her--and that she would admit that she loves me, too. But instead, she didn’t say anything for what seemed like forever. I must admit, this was the first time that I had seen Nancy lose her professional mask--she never had looked more beautiful to me than right then. Then she dismissed me, smiled her friendly smile, and shut the door quickly behind me.

It wasn’t until I got back to my room, that I realized that she had dismissed me a whole twenty minutes early. I wonder why she did that. Well, she’s still wonderful.

January 14:

I had the other dream last night. The dog dream. I don’t want to think about it. I feel awful today. I think I will just sleep. But then I might dream again. Maybe if I ask for
sleeping pills, maybe then I’ll be able to sleep without dreaming.

January 16:

Finally, I feel better. I slept for almost two days. I do feel sort of weak. So I probably won’t write much. My hand is kind of shaking. I know. I’ll write about the dream.

The dog dream

I’m at a big carnival with my mother. And we are walking around holding hands. I’m a little boy with a big smile on my face because I have a big batch of purple cotton candy. Then this huge dog comes along, bigger than me, kind of like a big German shepherd, but more like a horse, and it starts growling and chasing my mother. My mother lets go of my hand and takes off running as fast as she can. She starts running up a big ramp and the dog chases her. I stand there and watch the dog and my mother get smaller and smaller until I can’t see them anymore. Then I panic and begin looking for my mother all over the carnival grounds. I can’t find her, so I stand there and cry softly. Then the dog comes up and licks my bare leg which causes me to scream. When I scream, I wake up.

January 17:

I know I’m insecure—I always have been—and Nancy probably thinks that the dreams are evidence of that fact. But I just can’t understand why she only wants to talk about those dreams.
anymore. I sometimes get the feeling that she thinks I'm crazy. I may be insecure, but I'm not crazy. I wonder what I can do to make her realize that I'm just a regular guy.

January 22:

I sent Nancy flowers today--forget-me-nots. If I wasn't sure before, I'm pretty sure now that I'm in love with her--whatever she may say about obsessions--and I hope she'll begin to love me, too. Our session yesterday went really well. She didn't seem at all critical. And when I told her about having the second dream, it didn't seem to bother her. She didn't act like she did the last time, that's for sure. She did ask me if she was in it again. When I told her she wasn't, she smiled very sweetly. In fact, after that, she smiled and laughed at everything I said. Yet something about her wasn't quite normal. Once her voice cracked when she spoke. And she didn't write much today--I think it must have had to do with how much her hands were shaking.

Maybe she's beginning to feel something for me. Maybe she's nervous because she knows she's falling for me. Well, she doesn't have to worry, I love her and I'll take care of her, if she lets me. I sent the flowers to let her know that I am interested. I can't wait until our next session. Maybe by then she'll be ready to tell me how she feels.
January 23:

I dreamed about Nancy again last night. It was the dog dream this time. I really wish that these dreams would stop plaguing me. I don’t think I’ll tell Nancy that I dreamed about her. Not after how she reacted to the grocery dream. I don’t want to do anything to jeopardize our relationship now that it’s finally beginning.

January 25:

I painted a picture for Nancy today. I’m going to give it to her at our next session. I think she’ll like it. It’s kind of abstract, but I find it very beautiful—just like Nancy. It’s done in a rich red color and it resembles a rose in the wind. Fresh, beautiful, breath-taking—that’s what it is—just like Nancy.

January 27:

I meet with Nancy tomorrow. I’m ready. I already put the finishing touches on the painting. I wish I could put it in a frame. But I don’t have one here. If I could, I’d go and get the frame that had Nina’s portrait in it. I’ve decided to move on. Falling in love again always helps me move on.

January 28:

This morning I met with Dr. Brooks instead of Nancy. He told me Nancy is sick. I am very sad. I think I’ll make her a
"get well" card. I bet she'll appreciate it. She's been so kind to me, I can't help but return the kindness.

January 29:

I had a dream about Nancy last night. Not one of the reoccurring ones, but a different one. I dreamt that somehow I was able to go to Nancy's house to visit her. I knew where she lived because I followed her home from the hospital. In my dream she looked kind of pale and sickly, so I guess she was still sick.

I parked across the street and followed her silently up the sidewalk. I had my painting with me. Just as she was opening the door, I called out to her. I'm not sure why, but when she saw me she sort of shrieked. I woke up then.

February 1:

I saw Nancy today. I don't think I was supposed to see her, but I did. I was supposed to take some strange tests today, and they took me to a part of the hospital that I've never been to before. On the way, I accidentally ran into a food cart that was in the hallway, knocking a plate with food on it to the floor. The nurse got really excited--she's new--and began hurriedly cleaning it up. I was afraid I'd get into trouble, so I walked away really quickly. I made it almost to the end of that hall, before the nurse yelled. When she yelled, I got really nervous and ran into a room close by. And there, asleep, was Nancy. I
don’t know what she’s doing here, unless, of course, she’s sicker than I thought. I was getting ready to squeeze her hand when the nurse and a doctor rushed in and grabbed my arms and pulled me away.

I didn’t take the tests today, after all. After they pulled me away from Nancy, I started crying. And I didn’t stop for hours. They told me I’d have to take the tests later.

February 2:

I can’t stop thinking about Nancy now. I hope she’s okay. I’ve been crying again today. Sometimes I think I’m just a big baby still. A thirty-six-year-old baby.

February 4:

I talked with Dr. Brooks today again. He said that he’ll be my doctor from now on. I’m so sad. Maybe I’ll be able to sneak out of my room sometime and visit Nancy. I’m so tired. I have to sleep. I think that shot the nurse gave me is making me tired.

February 5:

Dr. Brooks came into my room today. He told me that I have to go to court tomorrow. I’m not sure exactly but I think that Nina came back and is suing me or something. At least that’s all I can figure out. I bet her new boyfriend dumped her and she wants to come back to me. And when she found out that I love
someone else, she got jealous and wants to try and force me back to her. But I won’t go back. I’m no longer obsessed with her--I love Nancy.

February 6:

I don’t understand what happened earlier today. Nina wasn’t at the courtroom. In fact, no one mentioned her name at all. They just kept talking about Nancy. And they weren’t talking nice. They kept talking about her like she was some sort of crazy person. They kept saying stuff about her "unethical" practices and about "propositions." They asked me a lot of strange questions which I didn’t understand. I told the lawyer who questioned me that I loved Nancy. That I wasn’t obsessed with her. He didn’t seem to care; he just wanted to know about whether Nancy had touched me or kissed me or anything like that. I told him that she hadn’t, but that I wouldn’t have minded if she did. Then he said some really bad things about Nancy. I started crying then. I must have looked really strange up there crying, being a grown man and all, but I just couldn’t help myself. The lawyer let me leave then.

I’m so confused.

February 7:

I asked Dr. Brooks about Nancy today. I told him I didn’t understand what happened in court yesterday. He told me that I would never see Nancy again. He said that she had had a nervous
breakdown and had confessed to doing some strange things. Now she’s going to be staying somewhere else besides the hospital.

I can’t believe that Nancy did anything bad. I’m sure that she didn’t do anything bad. She’s too wonderful. I’m definitely going to miss her.

It seems like everyone that I’ve ever loved has left me. I guess I’m not meant to live happily ever after. Oh, well, at least I can still dream.
Letdown

Warm arms wrapped around me
Sheltering from the unknown;
A loving hand moves softly
Soothing away innocent fears.

Burrowing deeper,
Pressing closer, ever closer
To holy flesh
Which promises love and shelter--
I am safe in my sanctuary.

Content to keep eyes closed,
A babe clinging blindly,
Only vaguely aware of
The steady beat of human life.

Then, with little warning,
Deep from within,
Some strange stirring occurs;
No longer blind,
The child longs to be free.

Arms now the enemy,
Youth struggles against;
Visions of brightness
In back of my eyes.

The arms open up,
Feet hit the ground;
A few steps taken,
No sun to be sighted,
I see only clouds.

The rain beats down on my soul;
I feel the chill of damp air.
I long for the warmth,
But when I turn ’round,
My sanctuary is
Not there.
"You really think I'm ready?"

"Most certainly."

"Why are you so confident?" the younger man asked the older.

"Because."

"That's all? Just because?"

"No, not just because, but simply because." The older man smiled slightly.

Throwing his hands in the air, the younger man grunted, and replied: "You are so frustrating sometimes! 'Simply because,' eh?" He gave the older a hard look, then shrugged his shoulders. "Okay, whatever you say." He turned to walk away.

"Mark, wait. I'm not trying to aggravate you. Really. Please. Believe me." The older spoke each word quietly, yet emphatically, then paused as the younger turned to face him once again. "What I mean is that I believe in you, simply because I do. Please don't look at me like that, Mark. Surely you can understand? I don't have a list of innovative reasons why I believe in you; I don't have to. I simply do." Looking intently into Mark's eyes, eyes which looked so much like his own, he spoke slowly: "I believe in you because I believe in you."

Shaking his head and muttering something which the older man couldn't understand, Mark did not protest, did not walk away. He
simply stood there, in the center of the big, open room. He stood silently for several minutes.

The man with grey hair and wire-rimmed glasses had begun sorting the papers that were on top of the oak desk located in the far corner of the room. When he noticed Martin still standing in the room, he asked: "Well?"

Mark spoke softly, with a searching tone: "So you do think I’m ready?"

"Of course."
"Will you be there?"
"Yes, son, I’ll be there." Though his tone was matter of fact, it held a suggestion of warmth.

The younger man’s voice held a hint of boyish nervousness:
"Dad?"
"Yes?"
"What if I mess up?"
"You won’t." Firm words, very firm.
"But what if I do?"

The father seemed to deliberate for a few moments, then:
"I’ll still be there."
"You won’t be ashamed?"
"Of course not."
"So you do believe in me?"
"Yes, I do."

Mark’s voice sounded once again strong, sure: "Dad?"
"Yes, son?"
"Thanks."

The older man stopped sifting through his papers. Taking off his glasses, he looked directly at his son. After a few moments, he spoke: "No need to thank me, son."

Mark nodded. He understood.

Mark and his father shared a long, lingering look which seemed to speak great volumes.

Then Mark retired to his bedroom, anticipating a long first day as a lawyer in the courtroom tomorrow.