

Yes, he sighed. California must be all I heard. And more. Phalli -
fornia. Two months and it will be Texas A & M. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~

" But there are principles to be kept. These principles will keep
me in shape. They'll keep my feet on earth." Henry thought so, as he also
resolved to go to church every Sunday, join the youth group, and abstain
from alcohol. Marijuana and drugs were things he didn't even think about.
These were things only hoodlums would know, he thought.

On the third day in Los Angeles Henry was filing cards for the
Gas Company. He soon discovered that he could doubly enjoy his lunch hour
by eating outdoors, at Pershing Square. He would then buy a sandwich and
a drink and leisurely eat and drink while taking the sun on the lawn.

If pigeons and squirrels were fun to watch, more so were the
characters who flocked to the square. Little old ladies in flowered hats
who would stop their knitting to pick up gum wrapper dropped by a child
and walk to the nearest bin to throw it in. Fanatics who extolled on
the pleasures of heaven and evils of hell. Pacifists, winos, pansies,
and hippies.

Back in Lubbock there were hippy parties, but ~~xxxx~~ these were
all kids he knew, and they were only dressing for a party, acting a role
they perhaps would like to live. Come to think of it Gary Sayers even
did leave home the year before to join a group in the Village. He remembers
the scandal it was and how his parents never forgave him. Even after he
talked to them on the phone and tried to come home for Christmas.

These hippies must be the real ones, Henry thought, and somehow
they intrigued him. "Born free". He didn't remember the film, but that
song haunted him every time he stared at the free hippies doing their
thing at Pershing Square. Their naturalness, unworried look, easy smile,
made him stay awake late, reviewing each one he saw each day, looking for
an answer to ~~xxxxxxx~~ such confidence if they were outcasts like the
Sayers' boy!

The church group had been friendly. He had now moved to a
single room at the Y and there were activities he enjoyed with the
other fellow residents. But somehow he wanted to be there, with those
careless, giggly hippies.

Sunday night he left church to go directly home, but as he
approached The Crown Jewel he was too tempted not to go in. He knew it
was a gay bar, but he vouched not to take liquour.

The dancing of the boys, their sarcastic or fleeting remarks
kept him amused and prodded Henry into having a beer. He had tried it
before. The only time he tried and the only time he had been drunk. He
knew one would be the limit.

Three beers later Henry was dancing with "the spitting image
of Mr. Harmon, a friend I used to have..."

Back at the Y he swore not to return to the Jewel, nor any
other place like ~~xxx~~ it. His eyes were red from the smoke, his head

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dizzy from the beer and sounds, lights and the struggle between good and evil.

Louise Thomas was living in a development for "singles only" near Wilshire Boulevard. She invited Henry to a party they were having Saturday night but asked him: "DoNT mention ~~xxxxxxx~~ it to any of the kids in Church. You're the only one of the group I'm inviting. Be sure to bring your swimming gear..."

Henry couldn't help associating objects, situations and people with songs he had heard. Louise, for him, was like the ~~girl~~ "Girl from Ipanema", though she was actually from Kansas City. She had come to L.A. a year before, for the summer. She was supposed to return and attend William Jewell, but took a job as a typist and was now a stenographer with Texaco. Not greatly ambitious, but conversant, pleasant and a woman any man would be proud to be with.

Past the palm trees, into a courtyard, the swimming pool shining blue. Lo3 C was the third door down. Seven p.m. exactly. Henry pressed the doorbell. He heard a click and could see he had been watched by someone through the magic eye. A stronger click and the door was open. Louise, in a transparent negligée asked him in: "I haven't put on my bathing suit yet. I'll be out in a minute."

She dashed into the bedroom, leaving Henry with the impression that there would be no party, except one for two. But then, why did she run away like that if she wanted to seduce him? After all, she was only twenty and even with a year in California couldn't be so degenerate as to grab him the minute he walked into the room. Questions and doubts. "Why don't you go into the bathroom and change, Henry? Or do so in the living room. I'll holler before I get out."

Henry changed in the bathroom, and the two joined the swimmers and played like children until hunger brought them back into the apartment.

"This party is only for the two of us, Henry. I know you've guessed as much. But I did fix you a lovely salad, and in a minute the steaks will be ready. Did you know that in Japan they consider beef a very erotic food? I read a book by a Japanese where the old man ate a steak every day in order to be always potent. Wonder if it's true?"

"I think I'll change my clothes," Henry answered.

"We can swim some more later, Henry. The pool is open 24 hours for residents and friends..."

"I don't think beef can be erotic. "

"That's funny coming from a Texan. I thought you'd boast. Remember, in Kansas City we only pack it. You send it to us..."

~~xxxx~~ "What?"

"Meat," Louise tried to say it casually, but her intention was felt through and the two of them laughed.

Soon after he told her about a Guyanese singer and his folk song called "One meat ball, no spaghetti."

Louise's openness, without being fresh, frankness, without being pushy, made Henry relax and enjoy every moment they shared. It was not seduction. He was captivated. Until writhing in bed, panting, her nails

heard at school

clutched to his back, she tried for a moment to hold her breath, but it exploded out: "Impotent!"

If only they drank, smoke cigarettes, or could talk after that. The two bodies lay on the bed but they were not there. They were suspended, there was a void everywhere in the room. Four eyes staring at the Christ figure on the dressing table. Henry, suddenly hearing his Sunday School class: "Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so..." He no longer could fix his eyes on the Christ figure. Hazy it was. Tears rolled down his cheeks, and Louise realized she had not thought a word. She had said it.

"Sorry Henry. My inexperience. I know, from books, this happens all the time. Nothing wrong with you. It was wrong of me to do that..."

It seemed, somehow that he was that kid back ~~xxx~~ the cottage in Oklahoma. Only ^{this was} more beautiful, ~~xxxxnewxxxxxxxhadxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ Louise's eyes looked earnest, her body became tense, her mouth shaked as ~~xxx~~ worried face leaned over his. Instinctly Henry ~~xxxxx~~ ^{put} his arm around her, delicately caressing her back, assuring her he wasn't hurt. The sincerity of both was a chain bringing them closer and closer, more and more excited until Louise had to laugh and say: "Henry, I do think beef is an aphrodisiac..."

"Hallelujah!" Yes, Handel, "Hallelujah!"

There was no Sunday School, sermon or Youth meeting that Sunday. Throughout the day, however, Henry kept thinking of the verse: "In my Father's house there are many mansions. I shall prepare a place for you!"

Before he left, Monday morning, ~~xxxxxxx~~ although he knew it, Louise told him: "You are the first man, Henry. The first one I had." Later, just before she closed the door, she pulled him close to him again and whispered: "But I never said anything about the women..." She said that slowly, but so fastlike. He barely heard it and the door was shut!

He hesitated for a moment, ~~bhen~~ rang the bell. He felt her body lean against the door. Henry rang again, and again. The door was opened.

It was his turn to talk, and after ~~xxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxx~~ a long preliminary he came around to Mr. Harmon. Only then did Louise really listen. After that, ~~xxxxxxx~~ the floor was hers. Of how she was put in a Convent School for a year while her parents were abroad, and there, she was initiated by a novice. Of how she became a protestant as an escape from herself, her past. Of why she decided to stick it alone in Los Angeles, hoping to meet someone, and that from the beginning she felt Henry was that "one".

For the first time in a year Louise missed work. At nine fifteen she called in to report a sudden ill. Ten minutes later Henry was ~~xxxxxxx~~ telling his boss "it must of been the food I had in Chinatown last night..." At ten thirty Henry and Louise were listening to the Beatles and the Supremes, pushing a cart, bumping into people, ~~xxx~~ ^{while} inspecting every shelf of the the Wilshire Supermarket. Henry couldn't resist the impulse, and plucked a flower from the display on shelf number 8: "Your seeds can grow to look like this."