



TALES OF TC



Gary Nolan

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by Gary Nolan

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This is a work of non-fiction. The author has tried to recreate events, locales and conversations from his memories of them. In order to maintain their anonymity in some instances, the names of individuals and places may have been changed. The author may have also changed some identifying characteristics and details such as physical properties, occupations and places of residence.

Foreword

In 1969, just after I turned 15, my mother remarried. This time it was her current boss, who happened to be part owner of a rather lucrative real estate agency. The only good news (at least for me) was that he had money, something we didn't have much of at the time. Besides being able to go to a decent college, I also got the chance to spend a summer at a cottage he owned on Abaco in the Bahamas. The tropical investment had turned sour and my new stepfather had been trying to sell the place for two years after the Bahamian government turned a bit hostile toward American landowners. Except for sporadic rentals in the winter months, the place sat empty and unsold. So, in early June of 1977, two weeks out of college, I headed out alone to live there for as long as my funds (a few hundred dollars) lasted. I stayed until early September. The place was finally purchased by some Germans in November of that year.

What remains are these words, roughly edited in the ensuing months after my return. At the time, I had great plans to add more detail and include events not documented, but this is all that's left of that rather strange summer.



Gary Nolan and Friends



Summer 1977 – Abaco, Bahamas

A hot, holy sun overhead today... I've talked with no one since a brief trip to the market my first day here – that was more than five days ago. Perhaps there's nothing left to say, yet still I write.... took an early morning swim from sleepy nakedness, out the door, across the still cool sand, and into the tepid shallows. No one in sight - a strange feeling. Only a small black dog trotting along the water's edge paused for a moment to look with a slight wag of the tail before shooting off along the shore.



Lyman, aka Snag, lives a short way down the beach from me and is shackled up with some older woman who Roger and Tootie often called the "old stick", a crude description that wasn't far off. She was skeletal, aged (not like a fine wine), wrinkled, leathery, with wild white hair, but fairly well off and apparently in need of companionship. Snag had evidently applied for that job and got it. My first impression of him was how dark he seemed, even for this part of the world. His tiny hands were in constant motion, even while sitting down, and the small, nervous eyes appeared to be on constant alert for some unseen threat from above.

We had our first conversation at the manager's weekly party (free drinks and food) out by the pool. He threw it all on me in one very long breath, probably because there were a few good looking women within earshot.

"Mon, I know all de places to fucking go, more dan you could see in a month. I could take you out... no mon, won't cost you a ting. We take some big crawfish, real big ones mon, bigger dan you ever fuckin seen. Me and Forty [his friend] go out all de time. Dis boat got everyting mon - booze, stereo, big beds [he glanced briefly over at the women nearby]. We go out and spear all day, den stay out on de water and party all night. Yeah, lots of places around mon."

As the conversation rolled on, I realized he didn't have a boat either, but by then we were both getting lit and I liked hearing about the places around – Chubb Rock, Silver Cay, Green Turtle – and by the end of the night, I liked him too. Despite all the BS, there was something familiar in it all, since I guess I was on the same quest in one way or another.



We treasure what's within us, yet the thought occurs to me that the "within" may only be a peculiar and compulsive neurosis we all suffer.



Tootie had come from Nassau to Cooperstown at age 12 after his mother died. At 16, he got a job at the hotel and was trained as a chef in the main kitchen. Life was good for awhile, but about a year later, Simpson framed him, accusing him of stealing something. A day later, Simpson's cousin, newly arrived from Freeport, had his old job. Tootie did not rant about this, but there was a cool fire in his eyes whenever we mentioned Simpson. By the end of the summer, I knew he'd wait for his chance at revenge, even if it took a long time...



Radio waves bring me another story of a scuba diver lost somewhere in Florida salt waters, leaving no trace of self or phantom-life. Sea rips them away without much thought – static waves stretch out over the horizon, bemoaning an ugly death. Some poor fucker wailing watery bubbles, knowing the end is here and god is no more.



A 17-year-old nymphomaniac seduced Hank not long after I arrived here. Her 19-year-old girlfriend seduced me a month and two yachts later. Fucking small world...



(Five of us sitting in the bar overlooking the pool. Everyone, except me, is trying to remember how a certain old man, named Kid, from Cooperstown died.)

Roger: “Mon, I know. See, de old man was de best dancer in Cooperstown. No, he really de best dancer on Abaco [nods of agreement]. He go out on de floor, start dancin, and just start fucking parkin everybody in de place mon. People just step aside and sit down when Kid on de floor, just parkin dem all. So one night while Kid sleepin, de spirit come. De spirit wake his ass up and make him dance. De spirit try and dance better than de old mon, dey really start workin it, but Kid just dance and dance, no problem. De old mon park de spirit’s fuckin ass right of de top. Kid just smile and try to go back to bed, but de spirit, he all pissed off. De spirit tell Kid he can’t spit up his own asshole. De ol mon look at the spirit real funny and den de spirit bend over backwards and, phht, spit right up his fuckin ass. De ol mon look and den he bend over to try and do better than de spirit. Kid stretch and stretch and stretch and den he fall down fuckin dead.”

Snag: “What you smoke, Roger?” (Laughter.)

Roger: “You all just a bunch a liquor freaks mon.”



Two girls came down from Tennessee over the weekend. Their mother was with them as well. They've ALL gotten screwed by more than a few folks and it seemed to continue up until the hour they left (apparently a busy taxi ride to the airport). The mother is still around. She's now getting screwed by the tennis pro, JP. Private lessons, I guess. He throws big parties at her place, since she pays for everything, and invites us all over to “his” house...



The inherent and fatal flaws of capitalism - businessmen all going to hell. Let's add another circle to Dante just for them – heated iron suits and the like. Owners must choose between employees (people) and money. Are we so certain that man is inherently good-natured and will pick his earthly brother over filthy lucre? Maybe not. More... is a good product rewarded? Something that serves many functions and lasts a long time does not make money. The same is true with people when one considers the "renaissance man" (multi-function) vs. the "specialized man" (single function). Our preoccupation with money may best be gauged by the number of people employed to merely shuffle, count, distribute, or otherwise manage money alone.



Spent a drunken afternoon at the beach hut with Nan, a 21-year-old from back home. She cornered me after hearing where I was from and then kept the drinks coming, apparently so I'd fill her in with news from the north country. As the hours faded away in a haze, I realized both her and her friend, Cathy, were shacking up with Willie, Low, Unc, maybe others, and were now nearly broke. She said they couldn't go home, having pushed their parents over the edge with plans to return to the island and shack up with some of the natives. From the sound of it, the two of them got passed around like party favors since there wasn't much else they could use for collateral. Nan seemed stoic about it, brushing her hand into the wind and shrugging, saying things could be worse. I laughed, thinking she was probably right, since we were both getting hammered on a pristine Caribbean beach and had no immediate need to be anywhere...



Met a woman (in her early 30's) who'd already lost two husbands to heart attacks... later found out she could not wear wind-up watches – her body chemistry somehow stops them in a matter of hours. I ranged from sympathy at first to incredulous musing to, at last, fear.



(Talking about his imaginary, and high, life when he eventually moves to the States...)

Roger: "I'll buy one a dem big boats for Tootie. Sail back here and pick him up right over there [pointing down the beach toward Cooperstown]. An I'll have that shirt for him, yea mon, and on it will be.... what did I say before?"

He turns to me, but I haven't a clue, since this was the first time I'd heard his Amerika rant.

Me: "I don't have any fucking idea, Roger."

Roger: "Yeah... oh yeah, it'll say 'This goes out to my friend... Antique' [Tootie's new nickname]".

Roger just about falls over from laughing.

Tootie: "Roger, by de time you get to de States no one will be wearing shirts anymore. Dey all be wearing robes, mon."

This being the funniest thing I'd heard from Tootie, the 19-year-old sage.



I met Hank, a sandy haired white Bahamian, at a party Roger dragged me to about a week ago. Roger had talked up his friend, saying we should meet, but all I saw was that edgy, dangerous look that emanates from most of the young, white Bahamians here. For whatever reason, they all seem a bit off, as if they're looking at something over your shoulder that no one else can see. Even the rest of his family is strange, though I'm beginning to believe the abnormal is to be expected down here. His old man, Alma, is known to "like his trink" (alcoholic) and chase snatch of any sort or age. He will, without much prodding, apparently hit on anyone and everyone, regardless of looks, age, or wealth. Hank's mom doesn't seem bothered by that particular personality trait of his in the least. I should have figured, she had her own set of peculiarities. Roger introduced me to her at the hotel bar last Saturday night and she immediately pulled me out on the dance floor. Not long into that slow dance, she was grinding her crotch into mine and holding on way too tight. I can't deny she's quite good looking, but I wasn't sure what to make of it all and just kept hoping the song would end. As the night wore on, I realized she acted that way with a lot of men. The strange part was that Alma, Hank, and sister Lynette were all sitting at a table near the dance floor, watching her carry on with one man after another,

apparently enjoying the whole show. Where everyone ended up at the end of that long night is anyone's guess.



“Self-realization”

Move beyond “kultur”

Destroy the referents to it.

Move, continually, toward the heart of darkness, to a place where there is no law or morality is reversed.

Study people who do not want to leave (Emerson?)

“Take your troubles elsewhere”

Live without possessions

Thoughts

Or ego.



Somebody, perhaps Tex, said this place attracts a lot of whores. I guess it's true, though if they're not in that category when they arrive, they seem to have the title when they leave. There appear to be a fair number of white women who have to satisfy that curiosity about trying out a black man. Perhaps it makes the tropical trip to paradise complete for them. The odd thing is that when the boys here find these women, they ALL fuck them and pass them around in turn (presumably without much objection).



Besides free seafood from the ocean, the cheapest things on this island are rum and rice. If I'm willing to eat fish and rice all the time and drink rum every night, I could probably live here for a year on the money I have left.



More people have arrived and our group has grown larger. Two girls from Detroit have shown up... apparently they are both old regulars. Hank, Roger, and I have been with them a lot, mostly because they have a boat at their disposal and Hank used to screw one of them. I was shocked to find out their parents recently died and they're on their own. They must have inherited a chunk of money, since they now own a very nice villa near the marina. Hank keeps saying he's not sure he wants to "get together" with (fuck) Cory again, but whenever Roger or I are around her, he immediately clings to her as if they're some newly married couple. Then he usually starts with the offhand remarks and veiled jokes, trying to make Roger and I seem like either criminals or assholes (or both). In the end, I know he's only directing this shit at me, paranoid that another white man will invade his little fiefdom of young women with boats (a prized commodity in this part of the world). Despite all that, Cory's sister, Liza, seems to like me. I'm not sure where to go with this, in part because of Hank, but also because this girl of 19 or 20 seems a bit neurotic. To make it all worse, Liza told me that Hank's father, Alma, used to "go out" with (screw) her mother... another twisted tale I'm not sure I want to know anything about.



Yesterday I was awoken at 5:30 AM for the Junkanoo parade (to celebrate Bahamian Independence). The actual date is the 10th, but the costumes hadn't arrived, so it was put off until they showed up. I had a bad cold, even a fever, but it rather dramatically ended overnight possibly because of Roger's remedy (drink salt water and rum, then take a fairly deep free dive in the ocean to clear things out). Evidently it worked. Nan was passing out mother's little helpers on the beach as we watched the sun come up and passed around the rum. We headed up toward the hotel and saw a group getting ready with drums and cowbells, donning Mardi Gras style costumes. There were perhaps 12 of us that began following the drummer. We clanged cowbells and blew whistles in rhythm with the percussion section, starting to feel the effects of Nan's amphetamines kicking in. People wandered out of their hotel rooms and villas, smiling with sleepy eyes. No one seemed upset or surprised at any of this – in fact, some just joined wearing whatever they had on at the moment. We were getting very elaborate and intricate rhythms going, with the sound running in time from the front to the back of the line. The beat was getting contagious and more and more people started joining in, until there were about 75 or so following the mad drummer around the island. At about 9 we passed by the liquor store so Roland could open

up and supply us with beverage. Some older German guy bought about four cases of Heineken for everyone, so we quickly drank a few and then all loaded up our shorts with a few bottles and moved on once again. The human train continued for a few more hours, until we ended up at the beach house with over a hundred people following. Everyone started buying drinks and dancing. The whole afternoon was a big beach party, certainly the biggest I'd seen since my arrival.



Lynette and Liza stopped by wanting to go over to the hotel bar. They didn't want to go alone, or so they said. At first, I wasn't sure why Hank wasn't in escort, but in retrospect, realize that Lynette was pimping for Liza, setting me up so that the two of us could be together. After an hour or so, it was clear Liza had made up her mind that she liked me and was available – apparently for anything. Later, we all headed back to my place, but Lynette conveniently departed a few minutes after we arrived. By chance, Roger showed up soon after, drunk and howling, and was soon trying to paw at Liza, which sent her on her way in short order. I was still hesitating about even getting mixed up with Liza. I thanked Roger the next day, though he remembered nothing and just shook his head in an odd way, as if some impostor had shown up last night, not him.



Allure of blue

A flat sea of clear, tepid water

Scent of jasmine flowers outside the door

Gentle swells lifting the ocean toward sky

Magenta streaks rippling soft clouds far out on the horizon

An evening breeze that touches brown skin like a gentle hand.

Everything draws man out

Out of his dark home

Out of solitude

Out over hypnotic cyan and blue

(All the while he is tied to the mast.)



Tootie has headed to Cooperstown to work with his brother. He can't get any work up this way and now he's broke. He's been up once or twice, cooking and selling lunches with him (chicken, wild boar, rice) and I've had them over for a quick drink. Tootie tells me he may be headed over to Nassau to look for work since they're barely making it now. Through it all, he doesn't mention the real cause of all his troubles – Simpson.



Out on the water today – spear fishing once again. At one point, Hank and I spotted some very large turtles moving off the edge of the reef, heading out into open water. Hank started after them, but they were quick and he soon gave up. I've seen Bahamians cutting them up at the marina, but have no idea how they catch them (not that I even want to). After they disappeared, I watched two grouper sliding down the outer reef slope and followed. One stopped just over the reef ridge, perhaps 25 or 30 feet down. I went deeper to see if it would dive more (it did) and I kept going down for a shot, but couldn't get close enough. After another ten feet, I finally got off a shot, but missed. The grouper went under some rocks and I waited. It appeared out about five feet further down the slope, its nose barely visible past a small coral outcropping. I struggled to go down, got off a shot with the Hawaiian sling and hit it, but it shook off the spear. I had to come back up and then go back down to retrieve the spear. I could barely get back down, surprised at how far I'd gone and my head was starting to pound. Hank saw me and said I was probably 60 or 70 feet down - a backhanded compliment from him since it's not even close to the 90 or 100 he (and many of the other Bahamians) can make most any day. My head still hurts, prickly and pounding, but I guess it will pass (rum couldn't hurt).

Liza has hounded me all week. It's been difficult to avoid her since Hank wants me along on their boat when he goes out (which has been almost every day this week). I think he just wants me around in case something happens out on the water or to the boat. For all his craziness, Hank, like Lyman, knows the ocean and understands the responsibility. He would have asked Roger to do it, but he's gotten a small job for the week helping build a new beach hut. So, we've gone out scouring the reefs to the south and stopping off at the uninhabited Devils Cay for lunch and, as it turns out, afternoon sex. Yes, I've given in to Liza, though I almost regret even writing it now. She's stayed over the last two nights and we've gotten along well enough, though the more I learn about her and her sister, the more I question my sanity. Their mother died here last year, though I still don't know the circumstances since Liza seems reticent to say anything about it. Hank is screwing Cory back at their place on the marina. I think he pretty much moved in the moment he realized Liza was staying with me.



How do you throw a trash can away?



Snag talked fast and rolled his words together. On a good day, it was hard to pick up more than half of what he was saying. When Snag got wasted, it was impossible to understand anything he said. At first, I thought it was just me, but then I realized that none of the Bahamians, except Roger, could understand him either. Somehow, Roger could parse out every word and sentence rolling out from Snag's long, slurry monologues. He became Snag's interpreter and often sat patiently while translating the drunken, demonic ramblings of our captain.



How long does it take to "know" a place? Does the mental landscape migrate slowly (and enough) to make the view appear completely different? I wonder if writing makes the distances longer?



I've made it clear to Liza about the extent of our time together. I tell her there's no future in it – she'll be gone to college in Connecticut in a few weeks and my money will be gone soon enough as well. Whatever we have here is it, yet she still mentions vague plans for getting together "later". I can see her fantasies, in spite of my words, perhaps only because she needs someone, anyone. Her neurotic, overly compulsive behavior scares me in an odd way and makes any thought of pursuing things vanish. At the moment, most of her weirdness is pointed towards Cory and Hank – imagined intrigues and vague plots – though I feel that it could all point at me at a moment's notice. We hardly know each other. Maybe it's best that way. I don't think I care to get much closer. It seems like getting involved with anyone down here is a total crap shoot.



Eating the "pistil" (penis?) of the conch – just about every Bahamian I saw open a conch ate this right away.



Roger came over last night and said we had to go to a party. Liza wasn't around and he and I took off down the beach to a friend's house. He knew that a couple of girls were in for a few days – he'd seen their boat over at Green Turtle and heard they were here now. This time it was a couple of young party girls from West Palm – "old friends" of Roger from what I gathered. There was no shortage of drink or pot as we carried on late into the night with a few other of the native boys. The younger, very attractive one stuck to me – I could tell she didn't like the natives sniffing around her. In a whispered voice, she verified that fact, saying she didn't like black men, though it was obvious her friend had no hang-ups along that line. Willie and a couple of the other boys had surrounded her in a chair and were pawing away, fighting for attention, hoping to be the first in line. Roger and I stayed with Regina and kept drinking. After a few hours at the house, I knew Roger thought he was going to have her. I kept trying to discourage him, not having the heart to tell him the truth. He was in prime form and had us both laughing for a long time, but when Roger started getting a little too close, she stiffened and asked me to take a walk with her (down to my place). Roger looked down, but didn't say anything. The realization of what she was thinking came home to him – I saw it in his face. It wasn't the first time this had

happened, though I'd been the one on the opposite end of that stick earlier in the summer, seeing a lot of women who only wanted to try out a black dude. They seemed to have little or no interest in an average looking white boy from the midwest and, apparently, preferred something more... exotic. Still, when it was all said and done, I was just as much a marked man as Roger, getting caught in this whimsical flitting through Regina's islands of men, realizing it wasn't me she was interested in but rather anyone (white) like me who happened to be around. She'd decided to have someone and I was about the only candidate when the time came. Even if I'd thought all this out at the time, I still would have wandered into her stunning beauty and gotten lost in her soul...

She and I strolled along the beach and waded in the crystal water lit by the moon. About halfway back to the cottage it became quite clear what she wanted to do... lost in the moment, her hand wandering around my waist, staring out to the surf, scent of jasmine skin reaching my nose, lost in a quick caress... the night sea, fat moon, clear, Milky Way bisecting the night sky in chalky sprinkles, veering up and down the glowing pitched beach, light reflections from sandy shallows, making it hard to tell where the land and sea meet, inviting us to walk the waters and I did what I said I would not, to swim in the night sea, yet it was transparent, non-existent, dark brown skin

shimmering from waves of light reflecting off the sand bottom, rush of tepid water between my legs, swimming out with her, farther, feeling some supreme sensual ease as she glides up to me and embraces. An absurd exchange – primal, pure moments rounding out to a starry, silent axis cutting the sky in two, cutting me in two, with one half traded with this selfish women and this so thoroughly modern act of mutual masturbation, while the other half seeks heaven and I arc out into blackness, pulled back by the sweet subtle scent of her rolling in waves of fragrance, the aroma of tropical flowers, the full smell of youth, all so natural that it seems unnatural, quietly dispersing out on this great swell of water. This perfect form, both above and next to me now, in my arms, a fluid and silky sense of gentle curves and perfect proportion, light blue eyes reflecting the moonlight of thought within me. I am making love to the sky, to the sky within her, fucking a part of her that she barely knows exists...

A few hours later, in the vague predawn light, she got up from my bed and asked me to walk her back down the beach. As we approached the house, she gave me a short kiss and bid me farewell, saying they were all leaving this morning on their boat (yacht). Her boyfriend from Spain was meeting them in Nassau and had they to get underway. Adios.



Words cannot break the surface tension of memory.



I ate dinner with Cory and Liza tonight, but it all felt cold. I suspected word had already gotten to her about the party last night. I didn't mention it and neither did she. I really didn't care. She asked me to stay, but I told her I was tired (which I was). As I walked back, alone, I realized that I might be getting like the other Bahamians here when it comes to women – cold, thoughtless, untrustworthy.



Snag got me interested in a boat ride over to Ambergris Cay, the thin bump out on the horizon straight out from the beach. It was a still, smooth evening... breakers barely rolling onto the beach, silent explosion of color flashing in clouds out to the west and the illusory scents of jasmine crept around the house. Snag had quietly padded up to the house, suddenly yelling,

"C'mon, mon, quit playin' wit yourself, fuck, we goin' for a boat ride."

For Snag, anything like sitting around and watching a sunset was always and only "playin with yourself". I'd given up trying to explain why some things require a little quiet thought and patience. Snag (also known by other names here such as "Duke", "Puss" - from Snagelpuss, "Captain", and "Little Teeth") nervously swayed in front of me, wanting an immediate response. I understood enough by now to know that these little opportunities came along quickly and disappeared just as fast.

"Where you going so late anyway?" I asked, knowing Snag was a captain without a boat and something had to be up.

"Ambergris Cay mon. You know, dat place I tell you bout - big fuckin house, tree maybe four women up dere. We gonna do some party-ing tonight, mon." He shakes a bit at the last part, evidently

trying to get me excited about going. I just wasn't sure why he wanted me along, though by now we both understood that sometimes having a white boy along helped him do things (like get laid) that otherwise were out of reach. I guessed this might be one of those times.

"Ok," I answered after some thought, "but aren't you forgetting something?"

"No mon, What?"

"A boat, Snag, a boat. Remember, you don't have one."

"What you tink I am mon? Come to the marina mon, you see... you see." he said emphatically, head nodding, as I noticed his olive shirt plastered with little white maps of Florida. He even had on his captain's hat which meant he was serious about this adventure.

Though Snag's grand stories often melded bits from five or six different events and places, he surprised me when he led me up to a large yacht drawn alongside a dock that could only accommodate about half its length. Three young people leaning over the taffrail hailed us aboard and Snag gestured greetings that might have been appropriate for finding a lost brother (though I guessed he had only just met these people in the last day or two). He was going strong straight away, as the group gurgled with excitement about the trip. There was no telling what advance publicity Snag Tour Lines had provided. He gave an overview of our night at sea and even I was

starting to get interested. Two young, willowy women swayed with the patter, evidently unsure about coming along, probably gauging the adventure on some scale I could not grasp. They fluttered in and out of the conversation, whispering those intangibles to one another. The young man, evidently a brother to one or both of the women, grinned with Snag's overly bloated descriptions while the women stared at me and I stared them back. At this point, I explained to the ladies the uniqueness of Ambergris Cay (though I'd never been there), but I knew (from Snag) that there was a single house on the tiny island supposedly owned by some millionaire. Snag looked over at me in almost tearful relief and we were soon heading down to their oversized "whaler" used for side trips from the large yacht.

We shot out of the channel to chase the dying sun and were skittering among the cays like some flat stone skipping gentle swells. Snag stood with legs spread, planted near the wheel, with one hairy hand resting on the wide-open throttle. He was a black Ahab with chiseled visage, flying his converts out to the deep. The women sat up front, not looking back, apparently enjoying the warm night air and the glassy sea stretching out to the horizon. As we bent around the point, Snag locked us on course for the small blip to the west. When we were about a half-mile away, I could discern a long even ridge facing the deeps on the windward side of the comma shaped cay. The

island rose from the end of the coral reefs, just where the ocean dropped off to some unknown depths. In the near darkness, I could make out the outline of roof along the top of the ridge. A few lights twinkled on or near the house. Snag soon eased the boat along side a T-shaped dock at the western end of the cay. Three dark forms stood mutely above us, one swinging a flashlight onto Snag. The women in the front of the boat looked at each other and then Snag, concerned about the cool reception, expecting little Japanese lanterns or perhaps a small orchestra I guess. One of the shadowy figures finally offered a "Hallo", but it sounded guarded.

"What's happenin?" replied Snag with a smile.

"Who are you?" the voice returned.

Oh no, I thought, guessing that Snag had no business being here on someone's private island.

"My name's Duke mon. Is Thorn around?"

"I don't know," comes the return. "June, you seen Thorn around?" But before she could answer, another man came loping down the dock, yelling, "Hey Duke, is that you? What's happenin my good man. Didn't think you'd be coming tonight. I see you brought me a couple of nice ladies, too."

After that, everything seemed ok, with introductions all around. Two young men squirted out from the shadows along with an obese

woman in a large blue kaftan. We headed up the ridge to an ageless clapboard house with a large porch facing back toward Treasure Cay and Cooperstown. Some lights were barely visible, but I was no longer sure what part of shore they are coming from.

We were offered drinks by a younger, blond fellow with huge muscles and no shirt. I could tell the two women we brought were quite interested in his physique and wild-child look. He bantered on, throwing darts lustily at a warped board hanging on the wall.

"Yeah, we're completely self-sufficient. Thorn keeps the generators running and we have plenty of supplies. Of course, we usually just go into our backyard [pointing out to the Atlantic] for our meals."

From his rant, aimed entirely at the women, I gathered they've been on this cay for a few months and barely know the owner. Their wealthy benefactor [not named] apparently preferred that someone, anyone, occupy his little retreat so it stayed maintained and not subject to the vagaries of nature or random thieves in boats. Somehow these "guests" felt they were putting on a good one, having little money or apparent means of support. I had seen enough people in the islands to know these folks were a hanging on the fringe, drifters angling for whatever they could con.

It was also clear that Thorn was the man out here – the "nigger" down the hill from the house, the caretaker who called Ambergris Cay his home. He was in control of everything that mattered and probably understood the nuances of such isolation better than anyone. I guessed the white folks would be helpless if the electricity went or the boat failed to start. Snag had grabbed me soon after paying respects up at the house and we rambled down the long hill in the dark with Thorn. We arrived at a squat wooden house with a thatched roof addition on the side.

"See you're expanding mon." Snag said as we drew close.

"Needed a place to put all that good stuff, Duke." Thorn replied, laughing grandly.

"You got dat much mon?"

"You'll see." said Thorn, smiling.

Soon after we entered the sparse, one room house, Thorn drew back a curtain, revealing his new addition. It contained ten or so garbage cans filled to the brim with pot. Snag smiled and remained silent; it was a religious moment for him. Thorn quickly grabbed a few large clumps and stuffed them into a plastic bag. He then stashed one clump into another bag and handed it to Snag, saying, "This is for you Duke, someting extra, but don't let big June know."

Snag took it, smiling, and put it under his hat. June toddled in the front door a moment later and yelled, "Thorn! What's taking you so long? Are you and Duke ready?"

"All set." Thorn and Snag stood as if they'd been waiting awhile.

June, who looked a bit like an overfed rodent, gave the command of "Let's go" and then waddled out the door. I pulled on Snag's arm to get him to drop back a bit. I motioned a questioning look his way, wondering where we were going.

"Goin to Cooperstown, mon," he whispered, "and I want you to come. Thorn's cool, but I don't know bout de rest of dem."

"What are you gonna do over there?"

"Just drop the shit off at the pier mon, then come right back straightaway, no problem - don't even have to leave da boat."

"I think I'd rather stay here."

"C'mon mon, nothing to it. You want to be up there in the house with dem folks when I leave wit their boat?"

I hadn't thought of that and decided to take another sea trip. Even though I felt uneasy about this whole island, the setup, whatever, I did have an immediate trust of Thorn, perhaps only because Snag seemed to trust him.

We proceeded in silence during the short jump to Cooperstown. Three men in dark clothing were waiting at the pier as Snag cut the engines and cruised silently into the slip. The bag was exchanged for another small package. We pushed off and Snag gently throttled up into the open water. June snatched the package from Thorn and quickly counted what appeared to be cash.

Snag said something to the big lady and she jumped up, almost snarling, but I missed the words in the wind. I walked back toward them and June eased a bit, saying, "I don't care what Thorn told you, I'll only give you \$20."

Thorn tried to intervene. "C'mon June, I told Duke you'd pay him \$40 for all his trouble."

"This isn't even his goddamn boat anyway!" she snapped back and I knew that this remark would really get Snag going. In fact, in the next moment, he jerked the wheel a bit and caused June to stumble a step before grabbing the sideboard.

"Very funny" she sneered back, but Snag just stared ahead to the open water.

"Here's your \$20 captain," she said, holding out the bill before adding, "Take it or leave it."

Snag swung the bow over 90 degrees, aiming us further down the line of cays, but said nothing.

After a few moments, it became clear we were no longer headed toward Ambergris Cay and June finally asked (since no else was going to), "Where are you going?"

"Lady," he started, "I take you down to Black Cay. Dem Haitians be glad to see a big white woman like you, especially free of charge. You don't leave dat place for years, I swear.

"You wouldn't!" she exclaimed. "Thorn, tell him to take us home."

Thorn shrugged as if it had nothing to do with him. I think she actually believed Snag's threat. Even I had heard of Black Cay - some strange encampment of Haitians barely subsisting on an island not suited for habitation. Someone said they were all escaped convicts and had slaves of one sort or another trapped on the island. Two months ago, I would have blown off such a notion, but now...

After a few moments, she peeled off another bill and quietly handed it to Snag. The boat gently swung round and we were back on course for Ambergris Cay.

When we returned to the house, the reaction was not as bad as I thought. Thorn said we went over to Cooperstown to get a part needed to get their boat running, a story that was, at least, half-true. The brother was sleeping quietly in a chair and one woman was talking to another man who I had not seen when we arrived. The

other woman (and wild-child) were nowhere to be seen. Snag and I looked at one another and smiled, hoping that we could find some beer before heading back home.



The Old Ones: Predominantly female, all over 50, widowed, separated, divorced, or running away. They were all alone with plenty of money, which they used to drink away the flotsam and jetsam of their lives. All of them appeared to seek some soulless amnesia or memorial obliteration of their past.



Roger: “One time I work on _____’s boat and he buy me 2 six-packs of beer while I clean de top. Mon, fuckin’ hot, so I believe I drink down one six-pack right off, sit down, fall fuckin’ asleep for bout tree hours, just lying dere watchin de water float fuckin’ by.”



And another lesson, oh yes, when screaming, red-haired Liza had taken off her bikini bottom and entwined her legs around my hips underwater. There was a light rain, a wash of gray across the sky, and no one else in the water or on the beach. She whispered that it should always be “like this” as I watched over her shoulder, longing to be in the house, eating, sleeping, anything... suddenly seeing each of them, mindlessly trailing into some hell with no past, just present torment... vulgar Liza confusing the “eternal” moments with the squish and curl of her naked groin, mistaking my stiffness for reciprocation, when nearly a tear formed in the dripping rain, as she squirmed to bliss and I held on for life... the incredible irony as she whimpered out to sea in my arms not noticing the utter despair in half of her fantasy...



Almost all the white Bahamians around here have the same last name. Could that breeding anomaly explain why they seem a bit “off” and are such walking contradictions (conservative views/decadent actions)?



America seems lost... great empire of consumption, crapping out its insides and dying. Well. The tide of progress... sucking out substance in some potent undertow, setting people adrift, ripping off the sail, revealing the sad flotsam of consumerized wreckage. It's not difficult to see the logical end, the anomaly, all organized under the most contradictory of banners, leading the masses to eventual slaughter.



fish fucking fun, sunlit ice cubes,
pendulous orbs, as I rise from below –
gods talk, sons rise, a great insurrection
of lost life, sun burnt coupling
on a deserted beach, victory legs skyward,
walking along hot, heavenly star roads
to the edge of the wilderness, near the sea –
baptize yourself
and wash all your troubles away.



Roger talked ad nauseum about a Grand Tour of the States. He'd met enough tourists and gotten enough addresses to hit just about every state in the union. There were twins from California, the cheerleader in Texas, a model from Wisconsin, on and on. Of course, he assumed that they would all welcome him with grand parties and put him up for indefinite periods of time as payback for his island hospitality - great party streamers of liquor and women arching across the land. I did not have the heart to tell him that they probably preferred to forget many things they did while they were on this island. He also wanted to try snow skiing now that I had told him that in winter you could ski on frozen water without a boat. His sense of geography was only about as large as this island - he hadn't the faintest notion of the distances involved. A winding drive to Cooperstown took about 40 minutes on rutted Abaco roads and covered 26 miles. Roger figured any trip on the US mainland must be roughly equivalent or maybe a little bit farther. Texas was not far from Wisconsin. Wisconsin was essentially next to New York. New York was only a short ride up the coast from Florida. I couldn't seem to convince him that some of these trips took days, not hours. Anything I told him had no effect and I realized that he knew, at some level, he'd never go to the States, so why spoil the trip in his mind.



Somewhere along the way, the ocean got friendly. The paranoia of sharks sawing off limbs slowly faded with all-day dives and bottomless rum glasses. The collective fears have apparently blown out with habit.

We dove the few wrecks within range. One was a small modern tanker or trawler, sitting alone on a lifeless stretch of seafloor sand. It exuded a subdued, dead light, leaving swirls of brown and grey like a trail of smoke in the current. Even the silver reflections glancing off polished barracuda lost intensity in this boat graveyard. They hovered near the yawning metal hatchways, waiting for another long gone sailor to emerge. Not even the Bahamians were willing to venture inside that hull. There were limits to their foolishness. Still, we found triggerfish outside in the shadows of the hull and swept past large barracuda to spear them with our slings in about thirty-five feet of water. Then, we tried to see who could get to the surface before our fishy friends hacked them off our spears.



Rachel was young, nineteen or so. The boys fawned over her endlessly because her beauty was weakening – sweet fire glimmering behind aqua eyes; two channels of sea inviting the world into her cool soul. I went there, if only for a moment...



Jim was one of the Bahamian bartenders, trading off time between the hotel bar and the beach hut. He seemed like a calm, quiet man of perhaps forty years (note: maybe it's the weather, but everyone here looks about 10 years older than their actual age). He could sling drinks with a dexterity that only came from years of practice. In the short time I'd sat under the palms and sucked smashes or rum & cokes, I rarely heard more than a "yes" or "no" from this tall, smiling, impeccably dressed man. He gave the most cursory answers to everyone that asked a question, but the smile never left his face and I always sensed it wasn't the sulking smile full of hate I'd seen in others down here. Jim seemed genuinely happy, though somewhat shy.

I learned a lot more about Jim after a discussion with Roger very late one night.

Roger (laughing): "Dat guy crazy mon."

Me: "He's like you then."

Roger: "No mon, he tell me he have dis other job here tonight and want me to work it for him."

Me: "What kind of job does a man have at 3 AM on a tropical island?"

Roger: "Tough fuckin job, dats what. He been fuckin' dem two fat ladies in 530 [a guest house not far from the hotel] for maybe two

weeks now. Every night mon – both a dem! He say he need a night off before his dick fall off. He want me to work that job for him.”

Me (laughing): “How’s the pay?”

Roger: “Shit mon.”

Me: “I thought Jim didn’t mess around with white women. Christ, he barely talks to them.”

Roger (laughs): “Jim? No mon, dat guy have every fat lady been through here for years. He like em big, boy, but dat his problem.”

Me: “You serious?”

Roger: “I ain’t kiddin mon. Dat guy get more pussy dan anyone on dis whole fuckin island.”

Knowing Roger's circle of friends, that was quite a statement.

Roger: "Dere be more fuckin fat ladies down here dan you could count boy. Dat guy be workin ALL de time.”

Me: “So when do you start?”

Roger (laughs): “Not me, mon. I likely to fall into to one of dem big ladies and never get found.”

During the next week, I watched Jim with a different eye. One afternoon at the beach hut, the ladies from 530 sat at the bar with their flabby tanned arms jiggling in tune to the reggae music. Jim seemed to be the same quiet man I’d seen before, but as time passed, I noticed

all the drinks he served the ladies failed to get put on their tab and one of the women deftly slipped him an envelope at an opportune moment. Amazing what you can see if you know where to look.



In spite of everything, bits of life start falling away like a skin slowly being shed. Metamorphosis... or so he thought at the time. In his mind, there was a perfect understanding that all must fall before a new individual could emerge. The idea jumped from literature he'd read and, ironically, from the living god of his cast-off religion. The notion was framed in its most elemental form. Through repetition, the idea became refined and tuned until it was, at last, filed away as truth, but never felt. Voices from the East told how a man could make the process begin and mature, but the cost of entry was high - everything must be thrown away. He was trapped in a Western framework, a mindset of collecting death, and he knew it. It was difficult at that time (indeed at any time), to drop everything and stand aside, alone. There was the pressure to conform... the days of nomads, wandering magicians, and minstrels were gone (or so he imagined). He had gleaned reports from the outlands, heard the ascetics chanting and seen the images of travelers on the road in foreign lands. Closer to home, he had seen the beggars kicked on the streets and travelers who spoke too much suspiciously hastened away.



There were low clouds that rolled in with devious speed this morning. It almost seemed dark. Steep breakers curved up the sand, shooting toward trees thrashing behind me. The flat light merged sky, sand, and water. My canine friend, who often accompanied me on these early morning excursions, was further down the beach, running little black dog circles around a sole figure near the water's edge. The outline of someone, a woman, staring out over the sea, slowly came into focus – long strands of whipping black hair angled away from the waves. I heard a few barks – pricks in the heavy wind – before the dog crashed headlong into the surf and attacked the sea because of a momentary wrong color or small fish jetting across the wall of water before it smashed onto the shore... the sanity of Caligula. The woman threw her head back and laughed, too, I suppose. She reached down playfully and admonished the dog who'd slackened pace and fell alongside in a gentle trot. Her head was soon bent down in conversation - words caught in the wind, smashed into the trees. The dog squirted ahead, angling against the wind, plopping down in the sand near the tide line some fifty feet below me. The woman drew near, still directing remarks to the dog before she looked up, surprised, to see me staring back. The black hair flew up again and covered eyes quizzically looked into mine.



Finding out about Shorty was a surprise. His Haitian origins seemed obvious to me (been here too long?). We exchanged hearty hellos, big smiles, yet I got the impression he spoke no English (though I later found out I was wrong). He gave away nothing through his looks, but I found him to be completely likable for some unknown reason. Snag knew him (or so he said) and told me Shorty hailed from Marsh Harbour. He also said he came over from Haiti as a stowaway on a sailboat with four Americans, a tale I found hard to believe having seen the insides of more than few sailboats. When I said that to Snag, he laughed and claimed it was the magic Shorty used (referring to “voodoo”) and he was the best around at it.



There is no vision beyond life in a five-mile radius. No one seems to know anything beyond this island. News, from anywhere, is almost a novelty.



...I finally met Sally, the woman I'd exchanged glances with on the beach the other morning. She turned up with some other people at a party over at the villa of JP's current madame du jour. I'm not quite sure how she'd ended up there, but we sat together for most of the night and, of course, joked about our meeting on the beach. She said it seemed like she had the whole world to herself that morning. I told her that happens a lot down here since the place appears deserted more often than not. Talking to her seemed easy, almost too easy, and I thought about inviting her back home – letting me know, I suppose, I've come to act much like the rest of the boys around here – but as the hours rolled by, all that seemed unimportant. I held back. An anomaly these days.

I met up with her again up at the hotel bar on Friday, accompanied by a family I half knew from helping Lyman out on a snorkeling trip to the reef. Her friend, Cindy, who'd been on that boat trip, just about ran up to Snag and I at the bar asking about getting out to the reef again. I remembered from our trip that she liked the water, seemed to have no fear, and kept up with me no matter where I went or how far down I dove. The only reason we slowed down was because her brother, Greg, was constantly falling behind or asking us not to go down so far.

After the requisite consumption of a few fruity beverages by all attendees, I watched, once again, the inevitable curtain rise at the tropical island theater of the absurd. Sally had hooked onto my arm and wasn't letting go – apparently she'd decided I was okay and I wasn't complaining. Greg was soon working on some older ladies from Michigan who thought he was cute. I remember seeing him escort one of them out the door at some point. Cindy was trying to flirt with Lyman just so he'd agree to take her out to the reef again (no charge). Then Rick, a younger American staying down the beach, heard part of this and started on Cindy, obliging her with tales about the size of his boat. She later followed him out the door, apparently willing to go the distance to get back out on the water. Even Roger showed up with some girl from New York and had everyone going with his elaborate explanation about how to correctly blow a conch shell. I had my doubts that Roger had ever put one of those things to his lips, but it sounded plausible enough that all the women wanted to give it a try (which I think was Roger's original idea, only not with a conch). Sally and I headed back to my place, but just ended up in the hammock out front, swinging to the slow pound of the surf and watching the stars... and so the curtain closed on another night's dramatic spectacle.



On Saturday, Tex was manning the beach hut and let me "borrow" a sunfish so Sally and I could head out on the water for awhile. We tacked southeast toward No Name Cay and ended up snorkeling for a few hours on a small chunk of reef. We then stretched out under the few casaurinas and made love listening to some gulls apparently unhappy about our arrival. It was something close to a perfect day – Sally was all smiles and light, happy with me, happy with the snorkeling and sailing, even though it got a bit rough on the way in. Tex wasn't happy I'd taken the boat (and her) out so far, but I guess I've lost all fear by this point in my stay. A fairly hefty storm came in a few hours later, so I suppose I should worry a little more, since the small sailboat would have been capsized. Even Lyman had told me in the morning that something was coming, though it was calm and sunny until about three in the afternoon. I know I should listen to them, since they're sane about the ocean and the weather if nothing else in their lives.



The Catholic priest here is an oddity, like some evil black robed figured sucking in all the light around him. He springs cheap gifts on white tourists in hopes of handouts (meals, money, booze) in return. I've seen him hanging around the beach houses, hoping to run into someone "by chance". I'm told he built his church in the wrong place... too far out for people without a car (which hardly anyone has) and near a site where some natives were massacred a long time ago. The only draw for the congregation is the air conditioning. The Haitians, all Catholic, go to the church to get cool for a few hours, sing, and steal the holy water for their own magic.



Roger: “Mon, when I was in Nassau, bout 12 years old, I go out one fuckin night mon. I get so fucked up. We all trink tree bottles of some cheap-ass wine and den we smoke a bunch of weed. I get so wasted – can’t even walk – real bad mon. Get carried home an trown in my bed. I hit de bed and right off I have to take a shit real bad. Couldn’t fuckin move, so I roll over away from my brother an stick my ass over the edge... [laughter].”



Our sailboat was once again on some lazy course toward a lone cay in the bay. I was barely steering since the breeze was soft and the water calm. Sally's white breasts were already splotching to red under a crisp sun. She moved closer and, looking out over the water, said, "It's like there's no time here."

I gave her a kiss, thinking that, yes, it was an old, timeless feeling, being on a small craft on the open ocean. At that moment, only the tree-lined coast behind us and a few dots of island farther out toward the horizon were visible. It could have been anytime – five hundred or a thousand years ago – it probably all looked the same.



The state of Haiti: There are many Haitians in the Bahamas, not well liked or given much respect. They are the true "nigger's niggers" to the black Bahamians. Stories about their homeland are not pretty – rampant violence, beatings, death for no reason. The Tonton Macoutes ("boogeymen" in Creole) terrorize the population. Conditions outside the few cities are supposedly no better than they were around 1800. Eighty percent of the people are illiterate. About half the children born in the country die before the age of five.



I once dreamt the woman, long ago. Put her together in mermaid nights of lost bliss, perfect, wise, forgotten until these modern times, under a crisp sun, cracking open every ugly fact like so many rotten seeds.

Was that the day it began? Somehow it slides back, back beyond the ancient dream to another life, to the place where we started our long trip through time. Kindred souls weaving through the ages and space, occasionally crossing paths...

But I know it began not so many years ago, when we met by chance in the midst of our innocent words and faint lingering of the eyes, catching a briefly familiar sense of this labyrinth and history between us.

Moving in and out of time, down tracks to the siding, switching again, hoping to see her, somewhere else, higher, in the mountains, under snow covered pine in that cabin near the summit.

All the elements of a great catastrophe, a tragedy, are now falling all around me, but there is little doubt that it must be pursued to the (logical) end, since it is rarely so right (and all the wrong of a great right implied).



Sally and I laid on the beach of No Name Cay, sans suits, after a round of sex. She squinted up at the hot sun overhead and then at me before asking, "How long do you think we should lay out here?"

"Until you're navel fills up with sweat," I answered without hesitation.

She laughed then and leaned over slightly to peer down at my stomach.

"Looks like you're about half full."



Lyman stopped over this morning, telling me to get my ass moving and help him out. He's finally got the sailboat Forty takes care of, the Cerulean II, and has to take it over to Marsh Harbour and then to Man-O-War Cay for some repair or part pick-up. He said Roger was already on board and waiting to go. This was a trip Lyman had promised more than once, though it meant I'd be a deck hand again for ol' Captain Snag.

The boat is a 41-foot Morgan with two masts, a tidy cockpit, and a lot of room below. We left the marina on one of the calmest days of the summer – there wasn't even a ripple on the ocean as we powered out through the channel. I stood on the bow, staring down, losing sense there was any water at all between the prow and the extremely well defined ocean bottom about 15 meters down. After awhile, it felt like we were flying, not sailing, over a flat field with strange types of fauna.

We pulled into Marsh Harbour with phony looks of ownership on our faces. Snag pretended he owned the boat, talking about it with other yachtsmen on the pier, pointing out this and that. I doubt they believed him, but what the hell. At least no one asked the question I had wondered about – what happened to the Cerulean I? From the

looks of things, the Cerulean II may have been the best looking sailboat in the harbor.

We anchored off shore and went in on the dingy, securing some food and rum to take back. Snag was getting paid for the trip and though he didn't offer me anything, he was buying and I couldn't complain. He and Roger started cooking up the pork chops and rice, arguing about how many women they'd meet and what ingredients to put in the dinner. I sat back in the cockpit with a rum and coke, watching the sun lower down over the masts splayed out in the harbor and listening to them fighting with the alcohol stove below. Snag had gone very heavy on the black pepper (the way he likes it) and Roger and I had to drink a lot to keep our mouths from burning up. By the end of dinner, I felt I could get used to living like this, having everything you need with you in something that rides ocean waves and uses the wind for power. Though I was tempted to sit on the deck, drink, and watch the sunset, Snag wanted to go out right away and we were soon headed for the pier in the dingy.

Roger and I were soon almost jogging to keep up with Lyman, who was tearing down the road all smiles and anticipation. We ended at something like a bar – a one room clapboard house standing alone near some swaying casaurinas. It had open windows (no glass), bare wood walls, a pool table, and an aging juke box. A young girl with

hair curlers and huge boobs smiled at us from behind the bar. Roger and I shot pool while Snag tried (unsuccessfully) to hit on the barmaid. A few guys playing dominoes near the door kept staring back over at Snag, though he acted like he knew them all. A few people wandered in, but no women. Snag at least kept the beers coming for Roger and me, so I sat down to watch some guys playing very fast paced domino games for not insignificant amounts of money. The winners of the moment slapped down the tiles with a loud BANG on every play, letting everyone in the place know who was ahead. After a while, they even showed me the “right” way to play and let me in on a few games with them (no bets).

The night droned on and Snag wandered out to look for some Haitian ladies (probably whores) he knew about. Roger and I passed and instead headed down the road to find another little bar which ended up being only slightly better than the first. Though there were a lot of black women, none of them came too close to me - skittish or just afraid of getting too near a white man while the black dudes were watching. In a way, I thought it was some form of payback for Roger's treatment not so long ago. After downing a beer, I wished him well and headed back to the pier, finally falling asleep in the dingy. The boys were quite drunk when they woke me up and I finally got to be the captain for these drunken sailors.



Snag got laid last night (or so he said) – he has been letting us know all morning, though he's not telling us if he had to pay for it. He said he was going to bring three women back to the boat for us, but didn't think we could "handle it, mon".

"Man, we could a' fucked dem girls, trow dem off and den haul ass in da boat, no problem."

Roger and I just looked at each other and laughed. Captain Snag had let his position go to his head.

He fired up the engines while Roger and I were below and we were soon zipping off as I watched the mast up through the hatch, etching a line across the clouds in the sky. We were headed to Man-O-War Cay to pick up a part. On the way, Snag told me that the place was all white and they liked it that way. No room for "niggers" apparently.

"We gonna pull into the slip and you gonna head over and pick up dat part, mon. Me and Roger gonna stay on de boat – don't want no trouble with dem boys. You can stop by de bottle shop and get someting to trink for us, too."

With that, he handed me over a lot of cash to pay for the coupling and get some liquor. I could tell by the way he talked, he was serious about the people on the cay. If he and Roger didn't even

want to get off the boat, then something was very wrong with this place. I now understood why he wanted me to come along and also understood that Snag was a lot smarter than he often seemed. I half jokingly asked Roger if this was where Hank's family came from and he said yes.

The harbor was tight, but striking and well protected. The banks were full of small shipbuilding yards – there were boats of all kinds in various stages of construction. It was impressive to see, but as I looked at more, I only saw sandy-haired white men staring back our way. Snag was at the wheel looking straight ahead. In fact, all he did was look ahead, not letting his eyes wander to the shore for a second. Strange. Roger was below, which was what Snag had "ordered" him to do. "Don't be sticking you're fuckin head out da hatch mon or we all be wishing we stayed home." With that, I walked out onto the pier and headed down the gravel road in the direction Snag had indicated. A few folks looked at me oddly – my dark brown hair made me stand out anyway, even though my skin was the “right” color. Luckily, I found the part shop in short order and they had everything ready, wrapped up in a neat package wrapped in brown paper and tied with twine. I tried to act like I knew what I was doing and no one said anything. I don't think these men knew the boat was actually here – they must have figured I came some other way.

During the whole visit, I tried not to say anything more than necessary. Snag was all smiles when I came back (via the bottle shop of course) and we powered out of the harbor as quickly as we'd come in.

The wind had picked up and the sea was churning a bit. It was cloudy and rain was possible. Snag hoisted the big main sail along with the foresail so that we were zipping through the water at a good clip. He let me steer for a while as he checked out the moorings and sniffed around the boat, looking for anything amiss. Roger was up near the bow, drinking, laughing, and yelling things at the ocean. He was having fun, but Snag just shook his head telling me that he'd be sorry pretty soon for starting to drink. Sure enough, the seas got rougher and Roger staggered back, looking sick and then heading below. That was the last we saw of him until we got back to the marina. Even then, we had to help him off the deck since his legs were still rubbery.



Sally is gone. She stayed over the last two nights, slipping out early in the morning to get back before the sun rose. I asked her if she could stay, even offered a room in my place, but she has to get back for college. I went out to the airport with her and saw her off, but didn't feel good about it at all. She cried the last morning we were together as we made the early morning walk out to the water's edge. I held onto her, not sure what to say, but somehow felt there was a reason to be sad, to cry, without the words to really understand any of it. Even the dog was far away down the beach, disappearing into the haze shedding off the surf.



The boys often debated an open-ended tale of death on the lovely cyan waters. About four years ago, a family had been out diving the reefs on the far side of Guana Cay. A teenager was the last one in the water at the end of the day and went down for a final attempt at a grouper he'd spotted. He dove while they all waited on the boat, but he never came up. The family dove down repeatedly, but found nothing. A team of divers with tanks came back the next day and searched, but they came up empty as well. The death has remained a mystery...

The reefs can be deceptive. Slits and gaps often lead nowhere, but some appear to be endless caves or holes, trailing down through tons of coral mountains. Grouper often sit poised in these openings, poking out a protruding mouth, enticing a diver for a shot. They slink backward when they sense the threat, sometimes completely disappearing, perhaps retreating to the very heart of the reef. Other times, they may shoot out from another gap ten feet deeper and fifty yards away. It's clear there is often a maze of routes through the reef, sometimes large enough for a man to enter. I've seen enough eels perched in these shadows to know better, but I could see a novice venturing in, especially to retrieve a spear or finish off a fish.

Through the summer, I heard various and more gruesome explanations of the teenager's death. It was a story in which the tellers could supply their own worst fear as a cause. Roger was sure a large Moray had wrapped around the boy and then dragged him into a cave. Hank thought the kid went too far into a cave and got stuck. Snag said he got sucked into an opening by the sometime strange and powerful currents that stream through the reef openings. Later, he changed his mind and said a shark hit him. After a time, even I tossed various bloody scenarios around in my head. It couldn't be helped; it was as if all of our fears were rolled up into this bizarre death, this dark internal dialogue that degenerated into our own demise.



I miss Sally more than I care to admit. I regret...what? Not trying to get some commitment or arrangement for later? Flashbacks to Liza, making me wonder if no matter how these short-term relationships go or what feelings get invoked, there can really be no "later". I suppose I could arrange a visit and manage to meet up with her during the holidays or, perhaps, next summer. The problem is that I don't even know where I'll be. I wonder about any plans or the sanity of even thinking about this; still, we can write and I guess that will have to do for now. I've already sent her a letter. It will probably arrive before she does.



I wax between memories of women and traveling alone – the existential rift (or is it raft?) – the only solace is in the arms of a woman, otherwise I'm considering the darkness (except when in the ocean). Costeau must be an existentialist. The sea heals all; it's now a good and familiar friend. My deepest fears have been exorcised with the running of the tides.

Lonely immensity: letting the past pick its random way through my head. It's an old feeling and the response is always, and only, "I know, I know". Familiar feelings, shooting out the gaping hole in my head, leaving me without ego or self. The emptiness, the immersion into shadows, blackness... What is the cause of this modern disease? It rushed into me as usual – an empty wind of pointlessness, pulsing, breaking me into shattered bits of past, present, and future. Nothing makes sense. I feel lost, but somehow distant from it, as if looking on from the outside at my own existence.

Ultimately (and often), life does not have the slightest hint of coherence. I'm writing, I'm in the Bahamas, I'm alone to face my own existence. Does it matter? I doubt it. Phantoms wisp through life. I fear we're all amateurs, trying to make sense of what's been seen and felt. Wrestle with the void, hold back an image of absurd life, avoid the shadows... nothing to do but sail farther out into the sea.

Notes: Truth is stranger than fiction (obvious, and painfully true). Life is absurd – writing describes and relates it, but is no palliative. Words can describe the movements of the mind, though I doubt there are enough of them to capture it...



Headlong rush of feeling, thoughts of Sally flooding me again... the nagging thought quietly in the background, but now just sadness realizing she's gone, probably for good. I should have done something, anything, to change the outcome, but would it have mattered?

These feelings make little sense since women are not in short supply. I've watched the masters, seen them at work, and now understand if I'm brutally honest, dismissive, almost rude, the ladies come closer. It's contrary to everything I've felt and believe, but there it is, perhaps a reality only created by this strange intersection of climate and lives...

Did I act that way with Sally? I didn't think so, but who knows any longer. Perhaps she was drawn to someone else inside me that I don't really know. Still, we spent long nights talking, even sleeping side by side for hours on hot afternoons before we really pursued anything deeper. Though it was clear what we wanted to do at the beginning, we held back... perhaps we both saw other possibilities at first, but finally just gave in knowing there was no future, no real chance of another time, outside of this place, together... I can speculate endlessly, but it doesn't make me feel any different, or better.



Bite yourself and see, he said, and so I did – lovely sucking pain squeezing guts over the stars – bits of torn flesh under a hard sun, filet of soul frying under the half-moon, the half-man raised by nuns and thrown to the wolves.

We ride a thousand waves every day, all different, but they always take us to the same place. We always return to the same place. Myriad thoughts in the day, washing over us, carrying us for a moment, showing an infinity, here, and there, and there, but the inexorable flow moves us back to the shore...



The death of Jimmy Saunders: Roger told me the tale of Jimmy Saunders, a young kid of about 19, who was once humiliated by Simpson. Simpson had taken his girlfriend, with impunity, like some tribal chieftain who was owed a debt. He had even fucked her on the beach one night in front of many of the Bahamians, in spite of the girl's protests. Jimmy was there too, but that was the last anyone saw of him. His brother Sammy said that Jimmy had left Abaco and headed over to Nassau. A couple of weeks later, the boat brought Jimmy back in a coffin. Supposedly, he'd committed suicide, but Roger wasn't entirely certain about that.

Those who knew Jimmy said he swore he'd come back and kill Simpson. This had gotten back to Simpson, who laughed when he heard about Jimmy coming back in a box, saying something like, "Dat little fucker sure got me!"

A few weeks later, there was some talk about Sammy going out to his brother's grave late at night with some Haitians he'd suddenly made friends with. Everyone knew what that meant, since no one made friends with the Haitians, unless they wanted some of the magic. And Sammy was one of the few hard working Bahamians with a steady job and money to burn, so people knew he had the means to buy some big magic if he wanted. A few people had seen him

hanging out with Po, the Haitian gardener, who everyone knew to be a shaman or whatever they're called down here. But Sammy wouldn't say anything and instead he just gave people a wicked stare when they asked about it. More trips to the grave were reported and it wasn't long before there were rumors of Jimmy coming back and being seen at night in the shadows. Roger said he knew it wasn't true, but he and the others began playing it up with Simpson, since they all hated him so much. They even started stealing little things from Simpson, like a handkerchief or a comb, knowing that he'd think Sammy was using them to make more magic against him. There was even a great drinking bout, where Roger actually matched Simpson drink for drink, determined to wait until he passed out so he could steal anything he liked. I'm sorry I missed that one. Simpson had said he didn't believe in any of that "duppy bullshit", but freaked nonetheless when his belongings started to disappear. He knew what it meant. A few days later at the construction site of the new beach hut, a beam came loose and swung down, barely missing him. No one said anything, but they all started to keep their distance. They didn't want to be a casualty when the magic finally took hold and got him.

Roger thought all of this was great fun and took every opportunity to make Simpson more paranoid and skittish about everything. He said Simpson had actually started going home to his

wife and kids at night, something he hadn't done for years. Everyone was smiling and happy without him around at the parties at night. But then, one night, Roger and some others were out at Devil's Hole, drinking, trying to get laid, when they saw something out in the darkness. One of the men said it looked like Jimmy and they were all soon in their car, racing back toward the long house. Roger said that Sammy looked a lot like Jimmy and was only two years older, but if it was him, he couldn't figure why he was out there, trying to freak them out. There were a few more Jimmy sightings by others, but the sensationalism slowly wore down until people started forgetting about the whole matter. Still, Simpson never got near the girl again.



Rick is leaving Saturday. Even the beach hut is closed indefinitely - it depends when Tex decides to come back from Miami. Money is starting to run low and I'm thinking about a departure date. Today there are clouds and rain, a welcome sight given how I feel. I will fall back on the couch and read *Visions of Cody*.



Memory anomalies: What about an experience shared between two people, but only one remembers it? It's happened to me – mention “that time when” and get back a blank stare, as though it never happened. Thus, I wonder what the other person sees - of the world - of me. Sometimes critical facts gone, so what does the resulting landscape look like without the missing pieces? The synchronization - the shared view is gone. It has become something else. Curious.

This happens more often with the smaller details (trivial bits), yet I often remember them for a long time while for others they are gone, never happened. I tend to think these missing analogues and cues provided by the memories create an entirely different view and perception of things NOW. Perhaps it's a curse of memory or a shackle to our relentless pursuit of maintaining continuity, working to try and fit them somehow, now (and into the future).



Cindy and Greg are around for a few more days. When they leave, many of the people I know will have left. It's almost time for me as well. I feel like I've been here for much longer than two and half months.

Cindy had fucked Rick a few more times – I heard all the gory details from him – though I think she did it only because I was with Sally more often than not. Now that Rick and Sally are gone, she and I have fallen into something of a business arrangement, trying to get rides out on the water. She is intense in the ocean and gets excited about the simple prospect of being able to ride out to some lonesome reef or chunk of coral, anchor, and snorkel for hours. We spent some days together on various boats, getting rides through her flirting or my vague connections through Snag. It became clear we were of the same mind, wanting the same experience, and I considered where it might end up. I could almost see it coming. She was dark, large breasts, and strong (physically and mentally). She knew exactly what she wanted and the moment she looked at me after our tank dive the other day, I knew what was going to happen. SHE had decided.

We hung out in the hotel that night at a table with 2 or 3 other young male tourists, all good looking and seemingly wealthy. Each, in their own way, was trying to impress and hit on Cindy. As she

talked to them in turn, I felt her hand squeezing my thigh under the table, though she never looked at me directly. We went out to the beach much later and waded in the moonlit shallows, before heading back to my place. She went directly into the bedroom when we arrived, not even wanting the formalities I guess. I can't complain, since in the end, our paths had now connected and we were both trying to capture what we could before our last days here were over.



Some golden days with Cindy, out on the reefs, pushing ourselves with some new ocean adventure (as each one seemed to be). We tracked back to this small house each afternoon with some freshly gutted grouper, triggerfish, or perhaps some crawfish just before the sun drooped behind the casuarinas and hints of red and violet flashed across the flat sea. Cindy would stretch out on the couch as I concocted some rum mixture of unknown taste and potency. We talked about our dives and watched the light fade before preparing dinner. Roger or Snag would often stop over, usually offering to cook in exchange for dinner. Later, we'd walk along the beach or go swimming in the pool before heading back "home" to end up in bed. The lazy routine was comfortable, peaceful, almost surreal in its simplicity.



Cindy has gone. She left today – no tears from either of us. We laughed and shared stories about adventures at sea, like the day we sat back to back on the reef waiting for a couple of yellow-tip sharks to stop checking us out.

I am sexually exhausted – perhaps for the first time in my life. A strange sensation. Cindy and I went at it hard the last few nights. She likes sex – a lot. She could go on and on, orgasm after orgasm, each one leaving her breathless for a few minutes afterward. I doubt I could ever give her enough if we were together for long. I'm sure she'll make somebody very happy – and tired. Her openness was refreshing. She was almost clinical about things, like a scientific study or test, but there was always a lot of laughing. We were equals, as though gender was not even involved – I liked the feeling.

We never got to try it underwater with tanks on, though we'd talked about it and she was interested. On the last day, we ended up on a dive boat that Snag had set up, despite the windy weather. During the last dive, we tried to swim down to the far side of a coral hillock along the bottom, but a curious German couple tailed us since they'd seen us find all the interesting stuff on previous dives. We tried to go deeper, hoping to shake them, but they stuck with us. When we got back to the boat, we could only laugh about the whole thing...

We'd intended on going out the day before, but the sea was rough so Forty drove us all out to Devil's Hole for some swimming, drinking, and diving. It's a fresh water pool about a mile from the sea – circular, about 150 feet round, with limestone walls that go straight down as far as you can see. The locals say it's haunted and most refuse to go there. They say animals won't drink from it. No one could tell me exactly why it's supposed to be haunted, except for the fact that there are supposedly no living things in it (no fish or plants – probably no oxygen for whatever reason). However, when I dove down along the walls, I noticed some very small crabs on a few of the limestone shelves. If you swim to the middle and dive, you can't see the sides – the water is clear, but for some reason the visibility is not very good – it just seems to be a very dark shade of blue, if that's possible. Roger said some Russian divers had been there a few years back and also said Costeau had been there in the early 70s. The Russian divers apparently reeled off about 2000 feet of line in the center of the pool, but didn't hit bottom. At about 65 feet, the water turns salty, so the water at the top is probably just rainfall. Also, the tide effects the level of the water, so there is probably an outlet to the sea somewhere. Forty thought it was near the airport.

We brought out some rum on a day that turned out to be very hot. We drank, swam for a while and then snorkeled farther down the

limestone walls. Greg brought his tank and took a dive, though I was little concerned about him going down too far alone. I rode down with him to about 50 feet and he'd give me a hit of air so I'd hang around as long as I could, watching him swim in and out of some limestone indentations and columns that had developed along the sides. At about 65 feet, there was a brownish boundary layer, probably indicating where the water turned salty. Greg was invisible after swimming about five feet into it. He came back out fairly quickly and later said it was impossible to see very far in it. He said it gave him the creeps being totally surrounded and not having any frame of reference. He said if it wasn't for his depth gauge, he could have easily gone DOWN instead of up.



As the summer wears on, I wonder how these men can dash onward to the next young lady as though the last had never (poof) existed. They run from one to the next like some game of musical chairs or, perhaps more correctly, Russian roulette. I suspect there is death avoidance in all this... a dislike for stopping or getting bogged down in anything complicated, the loss of freedom, sidestepping of responsibility, all of which are questionable, perhaps neurotic, reasons. I can't argue there's an ephemeral novelty to these encounters – no preconceptions, no presumption of personality, and no expectations. It has all the elements of fantasy. By not knowing a woman, there is only some projection of ego onto this *tabula rasa*. It can be made into anything in the mind.

“The voice of the herd will still ring within you. And when you say: ‘We have no longer the same conscience, you and I’ it will be a lament and a grief” (Thus Spoke Zarathustra)



I will depart because:

- a. it feels like something inside my head broke
- b. it's like an old time sanitarium - you either recover from a long illness or you die
- c. I wish to avoid this form of ethical suicide
- d. all of the above

I know there are those who would call this escapism – I wouldn't disagree.



Someone mentioned Nan the other night and I asked Roger about her, wondering about her sudden disappearance after Junkanoo. He pulled me away (since Low was around) and told me that Unc had set up a little business with them down in Cooperstown. The girls were turning tricks for the locals and weren't allowed to come up this way anymore.

"Dem ladies be on der backs more dan my grandma... and she crippled," he said in a low voice, shaking his head as he did so. More sinister weirdness in the underbelly of the tropics.



Time “slipping” away, as they say, my best friends dropping to premature ends, slipping on time we so lightly walk on, hoping not to interrupt the flow so that it leaves us alone for that one moment...



I watch the sea from a bed of pine needles and hear the wind pulsing through the casuarinas. In less than a minute, the breeze will rush from the leeward shore, out into the Atlantic and be gone... thoughts rushing across the island, through me, and then winding out across the sea in search of others. But they all come back, full circle... and so I remember all the women here, in this island life, shuffling an old greasy deck of them into suit and rank. All the sun burnt bodies, lined up, snaking down the beach. The Bahamians laughed big teeth, wide grins and, after a time, I understood. The scene was repeated with only minor variations. Halter tops, scorched backs, strange white bathing suit lines plunging into depths of hidden skin, as they gripped sweet smelling drinks and flashed widening smiles. Mounds of brown, oiled flesh slowly turning and cooking under a bombshell of sun... sleeping beauties of lost love, dreaming out on the 80 proof sea. The boys knew the female tourists from years of dark experience – cold, impartial estimation that, for better or worse, I started to understand. In the end, it was hard not to laugh, too.



Another Saturday night – another night of bad reggae – another night of rum-blazed wandering on this little island... the blur of bodies and the scent of perfume mixed with sun tan oil. Alma at the bar with an arm around a woman half his age – Hank at a table with 3 ladies I'd not seen before – Willie and Snag on the dance floor with some new arrivals from New Jersey. I tossed down another drink out on the balcony of the bar and stared at the pool, suddenly feeling lonesome, almost sick. I ended up walking down the beach for a long time, clearing my head, knowing that my time here is done.



I wonder about the quality of time with Sally and Cindy. That is, were we so compatible and open because of our personalities or because time had a definite end for us? If the latter is true, then the meaning is clear: they HAD to leave.



Roger: “De Lord tell me mon, right off de top. I know what it like up there – see, we can only see de bottom of it, the stars. Up there... uh, it just da same as down here, but there’s no bad people. No sir, dey ain’t gonna be der.”

Snag: “Den where you go, mon?”

Roger: “No mon, I gonna be der.”



All that's left... the last day I ranged out to capture them all (on film), as they were, on another sunny Abaco afternoon... Roger pissing in some bushes, his head pinned back in laughter, a sparkling arc shooting skyward... Willie posed in feigned macho stance, beer in hand, shirt half open revealing a golden chain, his dark shades impenetrable, reflecting me back... Antique's tapered finger pointed skyward, his eyes wide with enlightenment, mock Socrates, a Bahamian stoic... Snag at the bar with some younger woman, his shifty eyes stealing a glance my way just as I shoot, telling me to go away, mon...

Gary Nolan is a visual artist, photographer, and programmer. He currently works in support of the U.S. space program. In a prior life, his written work appeared in a few regional journals (most of them now apparently defunct) and he earned a BA in English from Kenyon College. Evidence of his current mental state can be viewed on Flickr (<http://flickr.com/photos/phase33/>).