

The Risk of Being Ridiculous

A HISTORICAL NOVEL OF
LOVE AND REVOLUTION

guy maynard



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THE RISK OF BEING RIDICULOUS

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The Risk of Being
Ridiculous

May the passion, the experience, and even the faults of my fighting generation have some small power to illumine the way forward.

—Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*

For all of us. You know who you are.

THE ROCK FELT GOOD IN MY HAND. *Smooth. Fit easily in my closed fist. As the cops started moving slowly down the street, their steps in time, their clubs up, I rolled it in my hand like a baseball pitcher looking for the right grip. I didn't know where Mike and most of the other guys were, but now it didn't matter. Patrick and hundreds of other freaks were beside me and this was as good a place as any to make a stand. We held our ground as the rhythmic marching, the ringing thud of boots against the street, slowly closed the ground between them and us.*

The whole swirling world narrowed with the shrinking space between their straight blue line and our ragged and fluid throng. It came into focus, clear and certain. It was all right here and I knew what I had to do...

~CHAPTER ONE~

December 27-28, 1969

I-74 BOLTS EAST OUT OF CHAMPAIGN-URBANA. Straight and flat through the browned dead cornfields of Ogden and Tilton and then a quick hump over wooded hills past Lake Vermillion and right on through Danville to the Indiana line. Point and go. Me, Barry, and Stu flying on hash and wine and beer and the high-octane impulse to go, Barry's beige VW bug eating the throbbing white lines that dance in the spot light glow of our headlights, as Champaign-Urbana becomes a smaller and smaller dot behind us. Home, shit. Moving from here to there is the only place I know to be anymore. Has to be the right direction.

Barry's driving. Stu is sprawled across the back seat. I'm in shotgun trying to keep the pipe lit and the radio tuned. We talk. We laugh. We know we have eighteen hours in this tin can car, and we grab the rushing energy of the blur we are painting to speed us along our way across this flattened landscape. And in that blur, I float.

I was a stranger in my own hometown. Lost on streets I'd traveled hundreds, thousands, of times before on foot, on bikes, in cars riding and driving, with my parents, friends, sisters, band mates, girl friends, cops, alone, giddy with a kid's excitement, heavy with an adolescent's dread,

2 *The Risk of Being Ridiculous*

strong with a young man's certainty, stoned, feverishly alert, as a thief, as a young Republican, as a rebel, drunk, daydreaming, scheming, tripping, depressed, joyous, jealous, in love, skipping school, going to work, going nowhere, wet, sweaty, scared, freezing my ass off, totally oblivious to everything but the wild thoughts in my head, at every hour of the day and night. Those were the paths that led from my parents' house out into my teenage world. I knew them so well that I stopped knowing them as anything outside of myself. They were still all there, exactly the same but strange now, and distant.

Flickering thoughts, shitty radio. Hard to find a static-free station, never mind a decent song. "Come On Down to My Boat." Bubblegum bullshit. I-74 veers to the southeast toward Indianapolis, and we fly through the sudden day-like brightness of the Crawfordsville Lights—a bank of powerful yellow-glowing towers that mark a point of passage on the Champaign-Boston run. Underway: cruising altitude and a sudden shift in reality. We weren't there anymore.

They were my friends, always my friends: Scotty and Alexander and Robin and Mitch and, even, Mary. But, man, I just didn't know how to make it real for them, to get them to take me seriously, to take the revolution seriously. "King protester," shit, that's what Scotty called me. Like it was some game. They are all against the war, for sure, done everything you can imagine to stay out of the army. Even more, they were against the lives we were supposed to be leading: high school, college, jobs, marriage, kids, debt, cocktails, and TV, and quiet compliance to the insanity. But it was more than just not fighting in the war or refusing to live phony lives. There was a battle to be fought, a revolution, a fucking world that had to be changed so there would be no more wars to fight and better lives were possible. It was more than just saying no to all the bullshit, we had to find something, build something, to say yes to—and then fight to make it real. That time was coming. Fucking serious shit—our lives, man, all of our lives.

The radio sucks. “I Think We’re Alone Now.” Hardly any cars on the road. Flat, dark farmland turns to bright light city as we curl around a sleeping Indianapolis. We are a small ball tumbling free through these wide quiet lanes. We pick up I-70 on the other side of Indianapolis, now pointing straight east again.

And my parents, shit, what was I supposed to tell them? My mother was so sad when I said goodbye to her, as my father slept, numb from whatever combination of drink and pills he’d chosen last night. “Your father really was hoping to have more of a chance to talk to you,” she said. My father and I had shouted our way through my week home, but he still held out some hope that he was one good talk away from straightening me out. “We worry about you so,” my mother said. “Don’t, I’m OK,” I said. “I wish I could believe that,” she said. She *knew*, but what was I supposed to say? “You’re right. There’s some serious shit ahead, and I plan to be in the middle of it. There’s almost no chance I’ll ever be anything you want me to be.” Shit.

My parents, each in their own way, had been proud of the idealism that I’d gravitated toward since I was just a little kid: the American Revolution and the dreams of liberty and real democracy that grew out of the same New England soil that we came from, the rugged individualist conservatism of Barry Goldwater, the nonviolent protest for civil rights and against the Vietnam War. After winning my class presidency as a high school sophomore on a platform of longer lunch hours, I had lost the same office—by three votes—as a senior, after delivering a speech assailing racism and other intolerances. That speech stunned the auditorium full of my classmates who were used to skits and frivolities at the class election assembly and who, after what seemed like a long silence when I finished, slowly rose as one and, with the teachers joining in, gave me an extended standing ovation, also unheard of at that event. Of course, I lost to the kid named Campbell who had dancing soup cans as the highlight of his assembly presentation. But my parents had been so proud when word filtered back to them through teachers and other parents about my speech and its reception.

But my idealism was no longer the fuzzy, cute stuff of a kid playing with big ideas. Reality was now fighting back and it was getting fucking heavy.

Indiana rushes by. Greenfield. Cambridge City. Richmond. Bright beacons of exits that glow for miles as we approach, then are suddenly gone, behind us. And here's Ohio. Lewisburg. Brookville. Vandalia. Springfield. Columbus. We grab Interstate 71, heading northeast toward Cleveland. The bubblegum just won't stop: "Sugar and Spice."

Shit. But it keeps away the silence of this no-time zone between late night and early morning, gives a beat to the jam inside my head.

And Mary, sweet Mary, shouting in my ear at the Red Lion, while a band of old friends played tinny loud versions of "Light My Fire" and "Sunshine of Your Love" and I was surrounded by a blur of familiar faces of people I didn't know anymore. I want too much. I give too much. I wouldn't know what to do if it was easy. That's what Mary, an old love who was never quite my girl friend, had said when I told her about Sarah. I didn't ask what she meant by that. She acted like I should know. When I was flailing around trying to win Mary's heart, she and Scotty, I found out later, were just casually fucking. Shit, I couldn't blame her—Scotty was so many things that I wasn't, tall and cool, and he knew how to let things come to him. Man, I'd love it to be easy. I just don't know how to make it easy, because it's always so fucking hard. How do you know how much to want? How much to give? How can you tell how much some other person wants and how much they want to give? Or how much they want you to want or give. Shit. It's just not easy. Not for me.

The radio crackles as I search for a clear signal. The reward is clear crap: "I'm Henry the Eighth, I Am." Mount Vernon. Mansfield. Wadsworth. There is a roll to the road now, like we are riding great swells on a vast sea.

The first time I saw this part of the country was in 1963 driving with my father in his flag blue Buick LeSabre. We were moving from New

Bedford, Massachusetts, where I'd lived my whole life, where all my friends were, where everything I knew and wanted was, to the desolate frontier of Urbana, Illinois. My mother and sisters flew. The boys drove. On a hot late August day, as my Dad and I moved west across Ohio and watched the landscape shift from the rounded hills of the East to the stretched flat horizons of the Midwest, we listened to a speech that a southern preacher gave to a rally in Washington. I got chills when I heard him talk about a dream he had for our country. He made me feel proud to be an American because, like him, I believed his dream could come true in America. Then, I could balance the American Revolution and Barry Goldwater and civil rights in my head because they all were part of this great American promise that I cherished. Even my dad believed in that dream, I think, in 1963. I was thirteen.

We had a good time on that trip, eating ham and cheese sandwiches and following our progress on a Triple A TripTik. I didn't understand why we were moving, but I knew my parents were troubled. And as it turned out, all the things they had tried to leave behind in New Bedford—my father's drinking and pervasive sense of failure, my mother's anger and sadness at the life she'd been dealt—followed us and kept eating away at our family. Conservative individualism got lost in racism and war. And the dream that Martin Luther King had inspired us with turned out to be no more realistic than my parents' hope of a new place bringing a new life.

We sail onto I-90, past the stink and lights of Cleveland, and reach to the East through Mentor, Painesville, Ashtabula. Finally, a decent song. At least top forty radio had to play the Beatles every once in a while.

Hey, Jude, don't make it bad, take a sad song and make it better.

The fucking Beatles. Thank god for the Beatles. Here we are on this deserted highway where Ohio starts to meld into Pennsylvania, picking up some Podunk station out of Nowhere, Ohioania, and the fucking

Beatles are singing for us. *Hey, Jude, don't let me down, you have found her now go out and get her.* How do they know?

I remembered Mike and me, in the early days at Mountfort Street, listening to *Abbey Road* for the first time, high on mescaline. The first side was full of great Beatles songs, but, shit, when we flipped it over, we flipped out, our eyes locked into each others, getting wider and wider, fucking speechless, as one riff flew into another, reaching deep down into our consciousness, plucking our strings, beating our skins, singing our souls: Soaring guitars: "Here Comes the Sun." A wall of harmony: "Because." A muffled, joyous voice: "You Never Give Me Your Money." Sad solo voice: "Golden Slumbers." Just rolling, couldn't tell where one song stopped and the next started. It was all one song, one jumbled, flying, floating, roaring, funny, sad, glorious fucking song: *And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.* Man, Mike and me went insane. The Beatles singing, playing what philosophers had written big thick books about: existentialism or whatever the fuck you want to call it and the Golden Rule all wrapped up on one side of a rock and roll record. It was all there in some great fucking music—in a way that bypassed the cold analysis of the brain, the dry collection of words on paper—vibrations and sounds that made it all absolutely clear. And the thing that blew our minds was: Here were the Beatles, the group, who somehow fed off each other, fed off this great collective consciousness that was spreading over the world to create this incredible music. It wasn't like Dostoevsky or Hesse or Nietzsche or Van Gogh or even fucking Marx, in some lonely room, staring at the wall, a prisoner of their consciousness, alone because of their consciousness, creating their art to avoid the madness that the weight of their consciousness drove them towards. The Beatles were a group, creating, learning, fighting the madness together. Like us. Like we wanted to be. Mike and Stu and Brian and Sarah and me and all the other kids in Boston and even the kids in Champaign, Barry and Scotty and all of them. Shit, kids everywhere were doing it. Berkeley, Prague, Paris—probably even in Conneaut, Ohio, which just went flying by—everywhere, man. And the Beatles were just riding that energy, fo-

cusing it, putting it into a form we could sing along with. *And in the end, the love you take is equal to the love you make.* Man, I hope that's true.

*Hey Jude, don't make it bad. Take a sad song and make it better.
Remember to let her under your skin. Then you begin to
make it better—better better better better.*

Better. Better. Better. Better. Sarah. Sarah. Sarah. Sarah. Man, in three days, we'd be together and.... And what? I was supposed to know what by now. Supposed to know what the next step was. But I didn't, only that I couldn't wait to take it.

"Great song," I say into this new softer spell we have drifted into as the darkness that has enfolded us begins to break with the first hints of daylight.

"Yeah, great song," I hear from Barry's tired voice and a mumbled agreement from Stu in the back. It's time for a shift. We pull into a Sunoco station. Refuel. Grab Pepsis and Paydays. I get behind the wheel. Stu moves to shotgun. Barry curls up across the back seat. We get back onto I-90.

Gentle hills roll into the red dawn. A hazy and chilled whiteness wakes slowly as we whisper past exits counting down the miles to Erie, the next waypoint, and then Buffalo and Syracuse and Albany. It's a new day. Boston waits at the end of it. *Nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, nah.*

December 28

THE DOOR WAS UNLOCKED. OF COURSE. The door was always unlocked. Somebody must have the key. Probably Stu had it stashed somewhere in his room, but it'd been so long since anybody used it, the four of us who (usually) paid the rent and all the others who lived there from time to time never even thought about carrying a key. The glowing blue paint on the white chipped door said "Welcome ALL." And we meant it. Stoned, wired, rejoicing in no longer being crammed in that tiny car, I felt good pushing open the door and smelling home: old dope smoke, forgotten cat litter, leaking upholstered furniture: the distinct and familiar stink that reminded me that this is where it was all happening. And the wall...

As we filed into the apartment, we were met by a swirl of colors and words, a blur of blobs and lines, explosions and expressions, a collapsed rainbow of politics and art and stoned kids having fun. In playful pinks, letters almost smiling: "Distrust sad people, the revolution is joy." In a shiny bold blue counterclockwise circle: "In a time of revolution, no bystanders are innocent." Wild thick red strokes: "Be realistic, demand the impossible!" Sinister black in stenciled seriousness: "KILL YOUR

PARENTS.” An intricate Escher-like drawing, hair thin lines intersecting and closing in on themselves to form a tower that spiraled and cork-screwed into the wall, disappearing in a vast imagined distance. Rolling script, green and neat, following an unseen line: “You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough.—William Blake.” A multihued day-glo peace sign. A recipe for Mary Jane Superweed Candy, lined up just like it came from a cookbook, with flour and caramels and walnuts and “clean and sifted marijuana” and an option (to be used with “discretion”) to psychedelice with DMT or LSD. “LOVE” spelled with flower letters with petals and blossoms of yellow and orange and purple. Small red letters in a tight little square: “Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun: Chairman Mao.” A damn good Mr. Natural on a scooter, saying, “Don’t mean sheet.” A skillfully drawn female nude beneath a hastily scribbled quote from Dylan: “He not busy being born is busy dying.” And more and more, notes inside of letters, colors on top of colors, *Mad Magazine*-like doodles sneaking into every margin and blank spot. And down in the lower corner, closest to our front door, where the plastered painted wall met the wooden wainscoting, a small awkward-looking heart with the barely legible legend inside of it: “BT X SS.” Guess who did that?

The wall had been decorated during a party we’d thrown on Thanksgiving, the Beggar’s Banquet we’d called it after the Stones’ great album. We had a turkey and everything. But the boys from New York showed up with some fine LSD and killer opium. And I found myself looking at the cooked turkey, admiring its golden, crisp skin and its full rich aroma and wondering how anybody could possibly eat it. I don’t know if anybody did. The only other clear memory I have of that party was suddenly missing Sarah so much that everything, the music and the talking and the collage of people’s faces, rolled together to form a blurry wall of noise that was keeping me away from her and I had to call her. I tried. I somehow got her on the phone, but I couldn’t get my thoughts from my brain to my mouth. I don’t know what she thought, but just hearing her voice, hearing her laugh as I struggled to make sense, made me feel

better. I must have drawn that heart sometime after that, though I don't exactly remember doing it.

Stu and I shared Apartment 9 at 64 Mountfort Street with Mike and Brian and whoever else felt like staying there. We were all more or less students at Boston University. Mostly less. Stu had just dropped out. Mike and I were barely hanging on in school, but not quite ready to let go. Brian...? It was hard to tell about Brian. The four of us had met the year before when we all lived in a three-building dorm complex and ended up at the same parties or concerts or demonstrations often enough that we became friends and then more than friends, part of a tribe of radical, stoned-out, rock-and-roll-loving freaks. We'd been in this apartment since September, when Stu and Mike and I started our sophomore years and Brian, who came in at the last minute because the guy we expected backed out, was a junior.

The colors and wisdom of the wall rolled and flowed on both sides of the hall from the door until just around the bend, where Lenny was sleeping on the couch.

"Hey Lenny," I shouted, giddy with the homecoming high, feeling good about bringing Barry, a piece of my Illinois life, into our little den of insanity.

Lenny rolled over and squinted and softly replied, "Hey Tucker, what's happening?" Lenny was in the Coast Guard. He'd gone a semester or two to BU with us before he dropped or flunked out. And the Coast Guard, which was not fighting in Vietnam, was a better option than the always looming draft—if you could get in. But Lenny had figured out a way and whenever he got leave, he showed up at Mountfort Street and he always ended up stretched out on the first couch in the hall, his long legs hanging comfortably over the fraying edges. The hall had two couches on either side of the door into Brian's room. They were prime crashing spots and Lenny always made sure to claim his.

"Not much, man, we just cruised in from Illinois. So we're kinda flying now."

We filed past him: me, Stu, and Barry, each of us nodding, and Lenny nodding back.

The apartment was quiet. Strangely quiet. But shit, Stu and I had been gone. Who knew where Brian was? A lot of our other friends were probably still home for Christmas vacation. Some restrained bluesy music was coming from Mike's room.

I tossed my bag into my room—the first door on the left, across from Brian's door and Lenny's couch—which was as big a fucking mess as I had left it: papers and books and magazines and album covers spread all over the floor and creeping up onto the two mattresses which formed an L along the walls. Brown burlap curtains hung unevenly over the two tall windows that looked out onto Boston's back alleys. And a crooked Che Guevera looked down from the wall, smiling righteously above his bold red quote: "Let me say at the risk of seeming ridiculous that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love." Next to him hung a Boston Tea Party poster advertising a bill of the Kinks, Traffic, and Boz Scaggs—what a show that had been. In the far corner of the room, under the window in the space between the end of the mattress and the wall, Tavola was curled in a ball, partially hidden by the heap of an old blue sweater. She looked up at me like she didn't give a shit that I was back. I walked over and stroked her soft black fur. She stretched her neck and rolled her head to meet my touch. It was good to be home.

"This your room, Tucker?" Barry laughed, hanging in the doorway.

"Yeah, man, the suite." My whole room had been furnished by one night's expedition down the alleys and back streets of our Back Bay neighborhood. Boards and concrete blocks for bookshelves, a funky small wooden desk with two drawers, and two fine mattresses. You wouldn't believe the shit people throw away. "Don't laugh at it, you'll be fighting for a spot in it before long."

"Hey, I ain't laughing. I just could tell it was yours." He really was laughing. Barry was my oldest friend from Illinois—the kind of friend that his parents thought I was a bad influence on him and my parents were convinced he was a bad influence on me. They were both right.

"And I'm proud of it." I was laughing, too, but I *was* proud of my room.

Stu had disappeared into his room, which was to the right at the end of the hall and the least public of the four bedrooms. He had a nice stereo

and just seemed to need to be alone more than the rest of us. My room was the most public—the all-night lounge, the never-full motel. Mike's room, on the other side of the bathroom and kitchen from Stu's, fell somewhere in between—that's where Barry and I headed, following the sweet pleas of B.B. King's guitar.

The only light came from a small reading lamp that shined directly over Mike's shoulder to the thick book he held close to his eyes. He sat in a straight-back armchair (no alley find, he'd brought that from home). Mike's room had a single bed on a simple frame. A table-high bookcase along the opposite wall with his stereo across the top. Neatly arranged books on the middle shelf. His albums on the bottom shelf. Speakers on either side of the bookshelf. His reading chair and lamp were set in the far corner next to the bed and that's usually where you found him.

Mike slowly pulled his eyes from his book and looked me over. Only a hint of a smile came over his face, "Hey, Tucker," then seeing Barry behind me, he was a little more expressive: "Barry. What's happening?" Barry and Mike had gotten to know each other in three outrageous days at the Newport Jazz Festival the summer before.

I answered: "Man, we just cruised from Illinois in his goddamn little VW bug. Shit, it was cramped, but we had a hell of a time. We partied last night and when we were done partying we jumped in his car and just flew here. Man, it's good to be here. You're looking awful damn mellow."

"Well it was nice and peaceful until you fuckers showed up," Now his smile was big. "Where's Stu?"

"Stu's dropping his shit in his room. What's happening here? Where's Brian?"

"Still in New Jersey. Don't know when he'll be back. I've only been here a couple of days. Nothing's going on here that I know of. Doing lots of reading." Mike looked at me, then at Barry, then back at me with an expectant smile. "You guys got any dope or what? What the hell you waiting for?"

"Good to see you, too, Mike." Barry laughed, sat against the head of Mike's bed, and pulled out his pipe and tin of hash.

“Shit, I’m always happy to see a brother from Champaign, ’specially when he’s packing hash,” his laugh was a throaty, rolling jive, and his exaggerated grin showed the big gap in his front teeth. Mike was a bear of a kid, big and bulky, wild, curly bark brown hair thrown out from his head in all directions, a full man’s beard framing his face along with thick black-framed glasses which magnified his deep-set eyes. He always wore his glasses, except, I guess, when he slept, or sometimes when he took them off just to freak us out. Mike was an intimidating-looking guy with his glasses on—he was like some kind of alien without them, especially when you were really stoned and he’d suddenly jam his distorted face right into yours. Mike was also the smartest person I knew.

His laughter and the fresh smell of hash smoke brought Stu and Lenny into the room.

“I recognize that smell,” Stu said as he sat next to me at the foot of the bed and took the pipe. “We smoked a bit of this in the last week. Too bad you couldn’t have been with us, Mike. Good times. Lots of partying.”

Stu had gone home to Illinois with me for part of Christmas vacation. A slouchy five ten or so, Stu had a mass of thick black hair that rolled from a part on the right side of his head and mounded across the top. That and his shaggy, full black mustache set against the soft features of his face gave him kind of a stoned-out walrus look. Stu was always back-slapping friendly and had a ringing wit that rode on the hard edges and soft r’s of his Worcester accent, sometimes sounding a lot like his older neighbor, Abbie Hoffman, a hero to us all.

Stu gave his rundown of our week in Champaign-Urbana. Heavy drinking. My crazy family, though Stu was too nice to put it that way. Lots of hash, thanks to Barry, and rock and roll. He told Mike how I almost blew a free meal when I told Norman, one of my old band managers who was buying a bunch of us a Chinese dinner, that rock and roll stars don’t deserve to be rich and we got into a hell of a shouting match.

Stu spread his arms out wide, stretched his eyes open, tilted his head toward Mike, like a wise parent moaning about a silly kid: “I told him he should’ve waited until after the guy picked up the tab to call him a capitalist pig.”

I looked to Mike, not sorry, “And I told him what Marx said, “The last capitalist will sell us the rope we hang him with.””

Barry had the same reaction he’d had when Stu and I went through this routine in Illinois. “Shit, Ben, Norman’s just a little punk from Danville. Marx? Shit!”

Mike laughed, letting this one go without taking sides. He got up to change the record. More B.B. “Every Day I Have the Blues.”

Mike filled us in on his time at home in Springfield, his old man giving him a hard time, his mother freaking out. Sounded familiar. What saved him was getting together with his old buddy JT and getting high every night.

The pipe came round to Mike. He took a deep pull on it, then passed it to Lenny, who was sitting on the floor next to Mike’s chair. Lenny smiled big as he took the pipe and sucked in the sweet smoke, and then started giggling as he tried to hold it in and it trickled out in spurts and coughs. He handed the pipe to Stu. Lenny was a tall lean black guy, whose Afro had been lost to the Coast Guard. He always showed up in a navy blue stocking cap and a navy blue pea coat with a six pack under his arm and never said much. Stu took his turn on the pipe and passed it to me.

I took a long hit on the pipe and clamped my mouth and eyes shut and held the smoke as long as I could. When I finally released the smoke and opened my eyes, the room was brighter and sharper. Stoned again.

Things were quiet around town, Mike said. He hadn’t seen any of our other friends since he got back. He had run into a few Weathermen in Kenmore Square. Luke wasn’t with them, but they all knew Mike and said they wanted to come over and talk to us about running with them in some of the upcoming actions.

“Let me know when they’re coming,” said Stu, from his perch beside me on the bed, as he took the pipe again, “and I’ll be someplace else.” He put the pipe to his mouth.

“They ain’t gonna shoot you, Stuey,” Mike said. Smoke filtered the room’s dim light to ripples of gray. Mike looked at me with a knowing grin as he talked to Stu. “They’re just assholes like you and me.”

“No, I think they’re a different kind of asshole,” Stu said, his voice squeaky as exhaled.

“Crazy motherfuckers,” Lenny piped in as he offered his lighter to Barry who packed a fresh bowl of hash.

“I think they are, too,” I said. “They got that look in their eyes like the Meher Baba freaks or the Hare Krishnas. Shit, you know, like they *believe*. But they got guts and I think a lot of their analysis is right on.”

The Boston area leader of the Weathermen—one of the factions that had come out of the crazy SDS convention last summer—was Luke, kind of a friend of ours, who’d been the leader of the anti-military campaign at BU the year before, a campaign that Mike and Lenny and Sarah and I had all been active in. Luke was older, a full-time organizer for SDS, a kind of charismatic guy who was tall with wavy ink-black hair and a granite face, a great speaker—and he usually made a lot of sense.

“But I don’t know if I want to hang out with them. They’re so fucking serious,” I said looking at Mike, who shrugged again. “I mean, I like Luke. I guess we can talk to them, figure out some way to work together. I guess we’re on the same side.”

“Sure,” Mike said, and took the pipe from Barry. None of us were really part of SDS. I signed up for membership once to help the BU delegation get more votes at the national convention—which turned out to be the one where it split into all the factions. I’m not sure which faction my vote went to. And my SDS “membership” didn’t help much when BU decided to include me in an injunction against real SDS members—and members of the straightest faction, the worker-student alliance folks, at that. We—mostly Mike and me—worked with all the various factions on a lot of stuff and we’d always end up at demonstrations together. But we had our own little faction that didn’t have an official organization or name. Some reporter once called us “hippie militants,” which described us as well as any label, I guess. It was fittingly contradictory. Our faction

stretched all the way from Stu to Mike, from rock and roll to revolution. The Weathermen were among the first politicians outside of Abbie and the Yippies and the White Panthers in Michigan to recognize the power of the cultural revolutions—the youth movement, the women’s movement, and sex, drugs, and rock and roll, and all that.

“Anyway,” Mike said to me. “I told them you were out of town and that we should get together sometime after you got back. You don’t have to be here, Stu. You can go bury your head in the sand somewhere,” Mike said, grinning at me, as he got up to flip the record over.

“You bet your ass I don’t,” Stu was smiling. He knew Mike’s game—most of the time. “And for another thing.” He paused and glared at Mike, then me. “Don’t call me to bail your asses out.”

“Ah, Stu, we know we can always count on you,” I said.

“Count on this,” he said as he raised his middle finger to me, and got up off the bed. “I’m going to bed and dream of a world without room-mates who try to drive me crazy.”

“Hey, Stu,” I said as he headed out the door. “It was fun having you go home with me.”

“Yeah, sure, but I’m still not bailing your ass out of jail.”

Lenny followed Stu out of the room to reclaim his spot on the couch. Barry and Mike and I took another round on the pipe.

“Shit, Weathermen? What the fuck are you guys into?” Barry asked, looking at Mike.

“Didn’t Tucker tell you? We are the revolution, man, pig-offing, state-smashing, government-overthrowing motherfucking revolutionaries.” Mike’s grin was truly shit-eating now. And you could tell how stoned he was because his magnified eyeballs were now squinting little peas. “Shit, Tucker, I’m surprised you didn’t tell our brother he was coming into a major cell of the international people’s liberation movement.”

“Tucker talks so much shit I don’t know what to think about it,” Barry looked at me and laughed. “He’s been doing it for years. As long as I’ve known him. Except it used to be for Goldwater. Now it’s Lenin and Weathermen. Shit, why should I start taking him serious now?”

“You got that right at least,” Mike said. “Shit, man, I don’t know what we’re into,” his voice tailed off now, almost quiet. “What are we into, Tucker?” He wasn’t expecting an answer. “I’m into feeling pretty fucking stoned right now. That’s some good hashish you got there.” The pipe was out. B.B. pulled some heartache out of his guitar strings, his voice sharp through the smoky gray haze that had settled around us.

“So what happening with you, Barry?” Mike asked.

“Mainly I’m trying to figure out how to stay out of the goddamn army.” Barry got the worst number of anybody I knew—five—in the draft lottery that had happened a few weeks before. Shit, what a crazy day that was, like some kind of government-sponsored Russian roulette, except the government was the one who loaded the gun and had their finger on the trigger—and pointed it at our fucking heads. Even if you got a good number—which I did (225)—you couldn’t feel too fucking good because there was someone in the same room or someone back home—like Barry—who got a low number. Barry had just flunked out of school, which meant his student deferment was gone. He could basically get an induction notice any day. The fucking draft, man. Screwing up everybody’s life. That was just one of the reasons we had to stop the fucking war.

“What are you going to do?” Mike asked. The jive was all gone now.

“I’m not going in the fucking army,” Barry pulled a Marlboro out of his pack and lit it. I reached out my hand and he handed me one, too.

“Of course not, but what are you going to do?” Mike asked. Barry and I had had this conversation many times.

Barry told him about his bad knee from his days as a halfback for the Urbana Junior High School football team, and his redneck doctor who wouldn’t sign the 4-F forms because he thought anyone with two legs should go in the fucking army. Barry held his cigarette in his mouth, little puffs of smoke shooting out as he talked. “So I’m going to a different doctor. If that doesn’t work, I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“You know we know people who can help you.”

“Yeah, Tucker’s told me all that shit.” Many times. “I just don’t want to do that unless I have to. I mean if it comes down to the army or Canada, shit I’m gone, but I am going to try everything else first.”

“That’s cool, man.” Mike said. “Just so you know where to come if you need help.”

“I do.” Now it got real quiet. What else was there to say? Barry took a long drag from his cigarette and pulled it from his mouth as he exhaled. “Shit, man, I’m tired. I’m going to get my shit out of the car and hit the sack. In your room, Tucker?”

“Yeah, the suite—take the mattress under the window I’ll be in there in a little bit.”

Mike and I watched him go. B.B was still wailing to “Help the Poor.”

We talked about Barry. I just knew Barry would find a way out of the draft. All the time, we were growing up, Barry got away with incredible stuff. One time, we burned this car—a big old boat of an Oldsmobile—his dad had bought for him. Somebody dropped a cigarette into the back seat upholstery and it turned into a fucking smoldering smoking mess. But he came up with this story about somebody stealing it and us finding it—this incredible line of bullshit that his father actually bought—and we came out looking like heroes. I knew he was going to find a way out of the draft. He was going back the next day and seeing some new doctor later in the week. Still, it was a pain in the ass.

Mike and I talked about our trips home—how hard it was with family and old friends. He’d gone through a lot of the same stuff I had. Neither of us exactly said how good it felt just to be back, hanging out in *our* apartment—like home, but a kind of home we’d never known before, our home—but, man, that’s what I was thinking sitting there with Mike as the hours and the miles and all the smoke and drink I’d taken in over the last day and a half piled down on me to make me achingly tired, a good ache, a full ache.

I told Mike about Sarah coming, how cool that was going to be. He was heading to Amherst for a big New Year’s Eve party at JT’s, and he was planning to see his old girl friend Pauline.

“I think she’s going to come live with me after the break,” he said.

That roused me. “No shit! That’s great.” Man, Mike had a way of dumping heavy shit like he was talking about a bus schedule. We’d had plenty of girls crash at Mountfort Street or spend the night. Brian had frequent and changing and often strange female guests. Sarah had been up for a few weekends. But we never had a girl live there before. And who would have thought it would be Mike to be the first. In the year and a half I’d known him, he’d never had a girl friend that I knew of. I’d never met Pauline—Paulie is what people usually called her. She’d been Mike’s high school sweetheart and I guess they’d been on and off since, but he didn’t talk about her much. It was like this whole other side of him that he kept hidden in some secret place. I liked when he let me in there—even for just a glimpse.

“I guess. We’ll see.” It was a trip just to see Mike show even a little bit of uncertainty. “It should be cool.”

“Shit yeah, should be fine,” I said. Of course, what popped into my mind was Sarah: maybe Paulie being here would help convince her that she should be here, too. “Man, wouldn’t it be cool if Sarah would decide to stay here, too.”

“Sure, man, that’d be great,” he said without much emotion. He was as flat about my love life as he was about his own.

But, man, that would be cool.