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MISSING PERSON

Items 601-617:

Found in the Fullerton Boathouse washroom 10/12/2011: One dk gr duffel bag, no ID. Contents: 16 yellow-lined letter-size sheets/water-damaged/handwritten pen and ink. Ref. voluntary M/P report 62443 filed 9/3/2011 out of the 1-8: Subject—Neil Preston. Request/Contact—Ann Preston, 1224 N. State. Action: None. Priority: Low

May 1.

Ann signed up for a pottery class last week and today is her first class. I'm sitting on a bench in Lincoln Park north of Fullerton. Looking east, boats are beginning to fill the marina. I've been here almost an hour, just watching the park fill up after the workday is over. Joggers are out in droves, dogs are being walked and baby strollers are being pushed. More green than brown now, everywhere. I can sit here, comfortably, in a light jacket, as the sun sets. I'm only seven short blocks from our condo on Diversey, but why go home if Ann isn't there? When I was in my twenties and an active runner, I looked at the people who sat on park benches for hours and wondered why some of them stayed as long as they did. I'd see the same old lady near the zoo on my run south and 45 minutes later she'd still be there on my way north. Day after day, week after week. I felt a little pang of regret when she wasn't there one day, and after that I never saw her again; I should've said hello, or smiled, or something. The sun is just setting now. 6:14. Two minutes later than yesterday. In a half-hour Ann will be home.

May 4.

Cloudy. Cool. Windy. Sweater and a down jacket. Gloves. In just a few days, the marina has filled in almost completely. Today is Ann's second class. There's a fog on the lake so I cannot see where the horizon is. It's a little unnerving, so I stop looking. Despite the temperature, the joggers are out again. The same mix of dogs and children, old men and strollers. Grey overwhelming the greenery. The only real color—kites, half a dozen. Bright-colored box kites and flat kites with rainbow tails. A little boy, couldn't be more than six or seven years old, is being pulled by a large box kite several hundred feet above him. His father—I guess it's his father—running alongside. Ann brought home her first pot after her first class a few days ago. She asked me what I thought of it, and although I thought it was juvenile, I realized that this was her first try and she was not a natural artist—that is, not a painter or drawer—so I told her I liked it. What does it look like to you? She asked me. I said it looked like an upright football cut off at both ends. Which it did! She made a face. Well, it's my first try, she said. Yeah, I said, first try. You're gonna be great at this. I kissed her. She froze. What did you do after work? she asked me right away, before I could ask her about the class itself. I told her that I sat in the park, just enjoyed the outdoors, I said. Looking at people. For an hour and a half? she said, You did nothing? I thought maybe you might make dinner or something. So I asked her if she wanted to go out. Jesus, no, she said. I'm tired. We didn't make love that night. Marty Gustavson is trying to screw me at work, speaking of screwing. That's funny! But it's not. 6:22. Can't see the sun but it's setting now. I'll be late getting home. Nothing to eat in the fridge. Ah well.

May 19.

Here on the bench again. Been trying to save my job so have been working late. Beginning to wonder if I'm cut out for this writing therapy. Can't seem to do it at all unless I have some kind of gap in my schedule, like the nights that Ann is at her class. Here on the bench. I'm supposed to show Ann my writing, just like she's supposed to share her art experience, but she hasn't asked to see anything I've written, so there you go. She brought home another pot, her second, a week ago, and now it appears that she will make one pot a week, but she hasn't felt like bringing her work home since the second pot, which I told her was just a wee bit, a tiny bit, very tiny bit lopsided but otherwise beautiful. Marty was supposed to open the store every day week before last, meaning I could arrive ½ hour before opening instead of 1 hour. So, 8 AM instead of 7:30 AM. The Horders at the corner of LaSalle and Division gets a ton of business the first hour of every day, so it's not something you can be lax about. Friday I came in and Tiny Holgraf—who is the group store manager, and not tiny at all—was waiting when I walked in early. 7:45 AM. He grilled me. What time are you supposed to be here? 8 AM, I said. Really? He said. You think that's enough time to get the store ready? Marty is here for that! I said, but I was nervous. Good thing he is! said Tiny. Tiny's a huge guy, built like a pro wrestler, and I don't think he gets much back talk ever. Where is he now? I asked. I was angry but didn't see the value in getting angry at Tiny when it was Marty who had screwed me. He's getting coffee, said Tiny and wouldn't you know that's just when Marty came in all smiles and handed Tiny a cup. Black eh, Tiny? he said. And he handed me a cup. And you get a two sweet-n-low latte, eh Neil? But what could I say right there? You asshole! You're on the sheet for opening this week, not me! Why are you fucking with me? But I didn't. And Tiny made it tough by softening: Hey, Neil, no biggie. We cover for each other. That's what we do. You'd do the same for Marty, eh?

The store's off 15% from last year, he added, which we already knew for months. So let's do everything we can to get those sales up. Thanks for the coffee, Marty! He said on his way out. I'm thinking now: This is how it starts. You read about the end results. Some guy beats the shit outta some other guy, or knifes him, or shoots him. That's what I felt like doing to Marty, down the line.

May 20.

Second day in a row. Couldn't pass it up. 70 degrees. Blue sky. Not a hint of pollution. You can see the Water Filtration Plant miles out into the lake clear as can be. Shirtsleeves rolled up. Park thick with people now. A temporary trailer went up last night renting Rollerblades. The rowers south of Fullerton are either raising or lowering some longboat or waxing oars and keels of various sized sculls. Fishermen are speaking a myriad of Slavic tongues talking of God-knows-what. Young singles jog, skin glistening, smiling and greeting one another as they pass each other and by me. They are enjoying the unofficial bond that having money creates. This is odd, though. Across the jogging path from me is a guy. He was there when I arrived. Now that I think about it, he has been here every day, too. He doesn't seem to move at all, which is why I didn't notice, I guess. I am drawn to activity, unless it is nature I'm watching, like sunsets or the ripples on the water, which come to think of it are activities of nature. He is writing on a pad of standard-sized paper, and just a second ago—which is why I noticed—he tore a sheet of that paper off and placed it in a dark leather bag to his left on the bench. So we have a kind of bond. I wonder what he is writing. And why. Now that I have noticed him I can't take my eyes off him. I am waiting for him to look up. He doesn't. For long periods he

just rests the pencil on the paper. He is dressed all in black; too warm for today, I think. He is so obvious now. How come I never noticed him before? Strange.

May 21

Three days in a row. Sunny again. Walked briskly from the store. Got here early. 5:35. Ann's now spending two days at the wheel and one day at the kiln every week. We argued about money last night before bedtime and didn't make up. Today, Thursday, she's at the kiln until 7 PM. Yesterday I showed her my journal. The day where I wrote about getting screwed by Marty. Her reaction? We need that job, Neil. If you're not going to look for a new one, don't fuck it up like before. She was referring to the fact that my career isn't really a career, but a succession of retail jobs where I have managed to get fired or let go somehow just before making it to management level. But I always get hired someplace else, so I am always earning money. I just never think about doing what you have to do to get ahead. And now I can sense trouble because of what Marty did two weeks ago.

So, day three and the guy is sitting there again. Was here when I arrived. I stare right at him, thinking he'll sense me. He doesn't. The pencil is in his right hand. The paper is on his lap. His hand isn't moving. He is thinking. I am concentrating so hard on the hand holding the pencil, that when it finally moves, I am startled. I am curious about what he is writing. He doesn't look like a homeless man. He is clean shaven, hair a bit unkempt but not dirty. Black slacks, black sweatshirt, black socks and shoes. The leather bag is like an oversized briefcase, almost a duffel bag. What's in there? Paper I guess. He did put a sheet in there the other day. Well, I'm in no rush.

7 PM. It's almost dark. I must have fallen asleep! Sitting up. Ohmygod! What am I doing? I'm wasting my time here.

May 24.

The guy just looked at me! He picked his head up, stared at me—nowhere else—and went back to his writing. He must have seen me looking at him. It was so sudden I didn't have time to turn away or look down. I should go over to him and say something. Ask a question: Are you a writer? I just couldn't help notice we are here all the time. I'm not a writer. This is my therapy. My wife and I are struggling to stay together. At least I am. Trying, that is. Our therapist suggested our activities. She's taken up pottery, and I'm keeping a journal. Yech! I am no good talking to people. Strangers, that is. Thank God I only thought all this and didn't actually bother the man.

The question is: will I stay here now that the rain has started. The guy is taking a poncho out of his bag. More like a tent cover. And he is staying. He shoves one side of the tarp under his bag and pulls the rest over him and there is a little room left for him to tuck it under his butt on the other side and now he is wrapped tight like a package, covered on three sides. The rain so far is like a mist. My little rainslick is OK for that. But—here it comes! Heavy drops that burst on impact.

Later. I have taken shelter under a canopy at the Zoo entrance. In the distance I can see him. From here he appears as just a triangle of black resting on top of a park bench. It's a downpour. Occasionally the air is so thick with raindrops I cannot see him. He must be nuts. I'm going home. Ann won't be there. Maybe I'll take the time to read what I've been writing. I'm not supposed to do that. Only when I'm sharing with Ann.

Otherwise it makes you self-conscious, the therapist said. You'll begin writing what you think you should feel, instead of what you do feel. I'm trying to remember. I don't think I've really written about my feelings. But that's OK. No rush. Dr. Aronsen says that you start by being honest and truthful about what you observe outside of yourself. You get used to being honest with that, he said, and you can then move on to your feelings.

I gotta say: I don't get the connection. But I am doing it anyway.

May 31.

Tiny promoted Marty to Store Manager today. Just like that. I was there early, ready to open, because it was my week. At 7:32 AM Tiny called my cell and said he was just outside and could I let him in. Good to see ya clockin' in on time! he said, slapping me on the back. I knew something was up. Sales are still off, but it ain't your fault, he added. Just keep doin' the right thing, that's all we can ask! His enthusiasm seemed so fake to me, but I have never gotten that in people. At football games in high school and college, I never managed to get myself all worked up. Guys around me would be yelling Kill the bastards! Run 'em into the ground! Fans and coaches and players would be screaming at the top of their lungs non-stop and I never got it. After the game, at the bars we frequented, the adrenaline rush would continue for hours. Like: Dja see the tackle Merkley put on that guy? Yaaahhh! When Preston knocked that guy's helmet off, dja see how far that thing flew? I thought it was the guy's head! Yaaahhh!

I never got it.

So when Marty arrived, after Tiny and I had talked about restocks and shelf life and weeklies and other dumb shit, he goes right up to him and shakes his hand. I was in the back of the store, but I knew what had happened.

After Tiny had left, Marty came up to me as I was unlocking the entrance door. He said: Nothing's changed Neil. It's just a title, man.

I am deciding whether or not to tell Ann. Probably not. She'll just go on and on about what I should have done, where I went wrong. Again.

June 1.

He's here. It's noon, Friday. I told Marty I was feeling ill, and that I shouldn't have even come in. He made some calls and they sent a guy from another store. I left and walked here. I feel fine. I mean I'm not fine, I'm angry. I'm seething inside. I'm really—I thought I would go to work and kill him. Take a shovel from the display and whack him a good one. Put a shovel in his hand and tell the police he came at me and I had to defend myself. But instead I am here on the bench. Last night Ann didn't get home until 10 PM and that made me angry as well. She walked through the door jabbering so I couldn't say anything. Want to see what I made tonight? Or more accurately, what I finished? she said as she walked through the apartment holding a large cardboard box, which she set on out coffee table. Ta da! she said as she removed an object from the box and placed it in the center, sweeping the box onto the floor. She stood back to admire her work. Isn't it gorgeous? Isn't it exquisite? I fucking made that! That's all mine! She looked at me. A month ago I couldn't do shit. You were right. But now! Whoo wee! You wanna beer?

She did all the talking, but I was out of breath. Big disconnect for me, but what could I do? I couldn't tell her about Marty at that point. Spoil her moment? Nah. It's beautiful, Ann, I said, reaching out for her, but she left for the kitchen. I forget, she yelled out, Dja wanna beer or no?

The mistake, I see now, was not letting the moment resonate. It should have been like after a football game, when you keep talking for hours about the game, until you have squeezed that sponge dry. Everybody goes home happy and drunk, and you fuck somebody's brains out. But when she came back with the beer, I asked her: Would you like to see what I've been writing? Because that is how Dr. Aronsen had pitched the idea. Sharing in kind, tit for tat. But he had not put a time stamp on it. And we know nothing if we don't know: timing is everything. Screwing up your life you feel the momentum build, and it's like I couldn't stop myself. She could have said, calmly, No sweetie, I'd kind of like to savor this for a bit. This is really special to me. But she didn't. People in love generally guide each other's hand to the right place, but we had shifted from that gentleness, and instead she said: You couldn't fucking let me enjoy this for just a little while? I must've said I'm sorry a hundred times.

June 2.

This is the first time I've been here on a Saturday. 10 AM. Gorgeous day. Warmest yet. Maybe 75 already. And guess what? He's here. Or rather, over there. As unchanged as a statue. Pencil and pad. I wonder how old he is. Thirties? Forties? Dark hair. So probably not older. Look at me, though. I'm forty. Not a hint of white or grey hair. I'm told I look like I'm in my twenties.

The park is thick with people. Boaters in their boats and crawling up and down the docks. Scullers to the south. Kite flyers. Dogs racing after balls and Frisbees. Teenagers playing catch. Hispanics and Poles kicking and juggling soccer balls. Hordes of families behind me lined up to enter the Zoo. Two young women who were jogging by at 9 AM or so, stopped and one of them asked me: Are you a writer? I see you here some

afternoons and you're always writing. Both women were young, good looking, with that athletic sexiness accentuated by the sweat on their bellies and the sleek sports bras. No! I'm not a writer! I was quick to say. Too quick? Why so defensive? But I denied it. No! They did not seem to notice the man across from me. Well what are you writing? asked the one with the full lips, and I could imagine kissing them. Ann, forgive me! Her face glistened from the sweat. I am writing, I said, as a kind of therapy. Oh, no—do I tell them my marriage is on the rocks, as they say? What kind of therapy? She asked. Stress, I said. Oh! she said. Like Post Traumatic Stress or whatever? Well, that's great then! she said, her curiosity satisfied. I think that's great! And that was that. They ran off. Why hadn't I noticed them before? They gave the impression they ran by here all the time. I'm supposed to be noticing things, but I'm not. What else might I be missing?

June 8.

Friday again. It's been raining for a week. I'm writing this in the lobby of the Cinemark movie theatre on Michigan. I haven't been to my bench all week. It's odd, but I've been seeing a different movie after work every day, and I am not eager to return to my condo, where we are always eating take-out now, and very seldom at the same time, and I watch Ann fall asleep a few feet from me, and when I wake up I wake up so early and she does not want to get up with me. I got up the courage to kiss her goodbye this morning, but as I leaned in, she covered her mouth. Ugh, I got cheese breath, she said.

Every day a new movie. Lots of lobby time. Sometimes I arrive an hour beforehand. But only today am I writing in my journal. The thoughts have been simmering in my head all week, and I have not been to the bench. The rain is incessant and the park is muddy. Last night taking the 147 bus home I looked out the window as

we approached the Zoo and saw the park bench where I have been writing, illuminated by a street lamp. I thought I saw, on the edge of the halo of light, the guy on his bench. A triangle of black. Maybe not.

So Ann and I have not made love in months. That's not true. A year or more. I have begun, finally, to see inside my head, just like Dr. Aronsen said I would. And I began writing here in the lobby thinking I would get to that event, but although I see it play against some velvety black backdrop in my brain, I cannot get it out. I am thinking: when I get to the bench again. There is some comfort there. I don't know why.

June 9.

Ann did not come home last night. She called to say she was at a friend's house, Susan Dibble, who I remember from when Ann worked at the Sears bank years ago. She was assistant comptroller or something. Girls' night out! Wa-hoo! Movies and staying up late like in college, and she'd be home in the morning. An all-girl night, said Susan, who got on the phone and sounded drunk already. So—no guys! she added for emphasis.

There's my writer. Only something's different. What is it? He is not hunched over his writing pad! He is sitting straight up and I can see his face! He is looking right at me. Or behind me. I can't be sure. As I am writing this, I look down and up again at intervals. Sometimes he is looking left or right of me, then I will write, and—now! Again he was looking right at me!

He has deep set, dark eyes, dark brown or black, like mine. His skin is tan, maybe naturally dark, but leathery and creased with lines but not wrinkly. His legs are crossed now, and both arms are extended along the top of the back of the bench. He seems almost elegant, like a man with some breeding, as the Europeans are fond of saying. A man of

culture. A man possessing some knowledge of the world. There is a hint of a smile—or a sneer?—as he watches. Does he see what I see? The people, animals, objects? Or does he see people's dreams, hear their heartbeats, smell what they've been eating?

As I imagine what he might be capable of knowing—it comes over me. I have to write it down now! I simply have to. I look up one last time before I begin what I know will be like a long underwater swim, but I vow not to take another breath until I have put it on paper. He is looking at me! Here it goes! Put it all down, says the doc. Here is what I remember:

Back in April, I had to close the store up early one afternoon. There was a fire on the roof of the building next door, and they poured water on the roof, and a lot of water got onto our roof and by noon water was dripping all over the store. I volunteered to stay but Tiny said they had a firm they hired for stuff like that, and to go home. By the time I left, it was cloudy and a misty rain, barely a drizzle, had moistened the surfaces of everything. I decided to walk home through the park, and I remember all the smells, the pungency of everything was overwhelming. The horse manure, the algae from the fish pond, the animal smells from the Zoo, the hint of gasoline coming off the surface of the marina waters, the dark earth of the walking path, the leaves of the oak and spruce trees—all seemed to force their way into my nostrils.

I thought maybe Ann and I could go to an early movie. We were both usually so tired at the end of a normal day, being on our feet; she at the bank, me on the floor of the Horders. I remember that by the time I reached our apartment, the sky was clearing, the clouds in the west were bright purple and orange. A cool breeze blew the fragrance of moist leaves off the trees, and I took huge gulps of the pristine air before entering our apartment. I took off my shoes and walked noiselessly straight down the hallway, past the

partially closed doors of the bathroom and bedroom, to the kitchen and enclosed back porch. For a few moments, as I took a Corona from the fridge, I thought she might have made it home ahead of me. She got off at 3 on Fridays. My walk had taken over an hour. I needed to take a shower, but I went to the bedroom because my shirt was still wet and I thought I could change shirts and take a shower later after Ann got home.

The bed was unmade. It looked like when I had left it in the morning, only Ann was not in it now. I set the Corona on the bureau and threw my shirt on the bed and pulled open a drawer for a new shirt. In the mirror I could see the bed in reverse, the nightstand on Ann's side of the bed, the closet behind that, and—something moved across the mouth of the open closet. Something light against the shadow. I turned around, I honestly thought an animal had somehow gotten into the apartment. That is what I first thought. I expected the animal to hop past the end of the bed into view. My heart was already quickly beating. You know how your heart goes up into your head and you don't really hear anything except the beating of your heart? That's what it was like. That is why I didn't hear them, I guess. I really heard nothing, even after I saw the pair of legs—Ann's legs—rise up into view behind the bed. Her legs were slightly bent, her calves twitched and bounced. My hearing may have been momentarily cut off, but my sense of smell, which had been so heightened outdoors, now imagined the full force of my wife's scent, the sweet smell of her sweat. I felt the rage build in me, but also a sickness, like I might vomit, and I couldn't move. I was rooted where I was, like when you have a dream where you are trying to run away from a terrible danger, but cannot. Only I didn't want to run away. I wanted to see! I wanted to say something, but I couldn't!

And then suddenly, it was as if plugs had been removed from my ears, and—the volume! That sound peculiar to lovemaking, made me cringe as if it were some horrible,

loud dissonant violin. Still, I couldn't seem to do or say anything. How I wanted to run away! And how I wanted to—what? Kill the guy I couldn't see? I knew that if I did see what I knew in my mind was happening, I would be in a rage I would be as helpless to stop as the immobility I was now helpless to overcome.

It was because of those noises I had my breakdown. Because I couldn't forget those noises, and then suddenly, until now, couldn't remember them. Is it gonna stay on? I heard Ann say. And the guy said: Baby you couldn't pry it off with a claw hammer! And then the noises began again in earnest, as if someone had switched off a washer in mid-cycle and switched it on again. There was no buildup. It was ugh and ugh and oh and oh and yes and yes --everything coming in twos, from Ann and the guy. Everything sped up and the slapping of flesh was a kind of counter-rhythm, with Ann crying out now fuck me fuck me fuck me—a triplet—just as I lost sight of her legs and finally I heard the guy. It was a youthful voice:

Yeah baby!

I turned away, and in my rush out of the bedroom, grabbing the new shirt, I knocked over the Corona. I know the bottle broke. I could hear the crash, even though I was out the door already. I ran down the hallway. I realized I was crying. My eyes so filled with water that I could hardly see the front door. I heard the guy's voice: Shit! Was that him?

Now that I have put this all down on paper, I'm not sure what I'm supposed to feel. The next few weeks were a blur. I guess I'm going to have to wait until those weeks become clear again and I can write them down as well. For now, I feel a bit lighter, but not happier. No miracle cures, said Dr. Aronsen. No magic moment. Just keep working at it. Remembering is a victory. Lots of little victories makes a winner. And winners are

happy people, says the good doc. Everybody loves a winner. I don't feel like a winner, though. What I do feel is a bit of freedom, like I could kill the guy. I feel...capable. Or I could kill Marty. Or Ann. I have to remind myself: This is good. Feeling is good. It's anger and that's a good thing. It's freedom.

June 18.

Back at the bench. Noon. No guy. Very disturbing, though why should it be? I don't know him. Never talked to the guy. Last night I moved out. Dr. Aronsen never promised that this process would get Ann and I back together, just that we would see clearly the path for us, and that we would both be able to give our lives to the future and not get mired in the past. That just sounds like such horseshit. I've managed to get in touch with my anger, but I cannot act on it! I would have to kill someone in order for me to feel better. And that can't, that won't, happen. I just got an idea. Here's what I feel like: I remember when I was a child I saw a movie about men in outer space and there was a scene that just chilled me, frightened me to near apoplexy. I identified so much with the astronauts, that when one of them was outside his space ship and his cord got ripped loose, I could imagine myself in his spacesuit. I had a real imagination then. When the men on the spaceship asked him how he felt, he said he felt cold! And boy I remember feeling cold too! So the guy was no longer attached to the ship and he began floating off into space and there was nothing the other astronauts could do about it. God, the look on his face as he drifted away into what the voice said was the Vast Loneliness Of Space. That's what it feels like now.

I am on the park bench watching the world, once so close to me, drift away. And where is my guy?

Still waiting. Ahh, here he comes!

Sunset now. Let me tell you what happened.

The guy came up to me a little after noon and said: You done? And I said—maybe I said Yikes! Or Jesus! Or something first, because he surprised me—Done with what? Whatever you've been writing. You had that look the last time I saw you. And I said: You've been watching me? And he said Well, you've been watching me! And he smiled and that made me laugh! I laughed! I swear I hadn't laughed in a year. So I said what about you? And he sat next to me, and said. Yes. I'm done. Well that's great! I said. How long you been there? A long time. Years? Yes, years. Just writing? No, sometimes just looking. I know how you feel, I said. Yes, I think you do, he said. I kind of had a breakdown, I said. I know, he said. You look sad. I do? I said. He looked me in the eye, real close, as he put an arm around me, and I saw his black eyes, and he said, sympathetically, softly, gently, like a bird settling on a flimsy branch: Yes you do. He set his bag next to me on the bench and got up. It's all yours, he said. He took a wad of yellow papers out of it, and walked away.

Sept. 3.

Day 72. Page 72. Labor Day. Quit Horders a while back. Don't see the point, when I'd rather be here. The park is a dizzying whirl of activity. Today I noticed the birds for the first time. Why have I not noticed them before? All manner of color and shape, all kinds of whistles and chirps. They dart and swoop like a disorganized band of children playing some secret game.

I discovered the Rowing Center has showers and you can walk right in and use them. Anytime. There is always some soap and a disposable shaver or two lying around. I have a towel in the big bag and a couple days worth of clothes, underwear and all. A small bottle of detergent. I wash and rinse in the sink to save money, and use the Laundromat dryers. I have money, though. I still have a bank account, although I do not have a home address. When I have to, I stay in a motel for a night, but those rooms make me feel uncomfortable. I can't sleep on a bed anymore. All those rooms remind me of the bedroom I would rather forget. I hear noises. I smell smells. So I do it when I really have to, and then I am free again. You wouldn't believe how many places there are to sleep in this park. I am worried about the winter. I didn't kill anyone, thank God. Little by little, day by day, it gets a little easier to fight that urge. Most of the faces in my past are a blur, out of focus. Only the faces that pass me each day are sharp, and real. The joggers, the women pushing strollers, the little boys with kites, the young men in skin tight suits on sleek bicycles pretending to be Lance Armstrong, the soccer players and hacky-sack dancers, the businessmen and zookeepers, the sailors and marina workers. Across from me is another park bench. Occasionally someone sits and stays for a while. I look them over when I am not writing. Most of them do not seem to see me. Those that do get up and leave. I look good, though, I think. I am clean-shaven, and I wash my hair nearly every day.

Earlier today, about 6 PM or so, before sunset, a middle-aged man sat on that bench across from me and there was something about him. He was upset about something, you could tell that. After he sat down, he took out a little pad and a pen and began writing. For a moment I was hopeful. I had my pad of paper and pencil out. I looked at him. He looked down, and I thought at first he might be shy.

When he looked up at me again he said: What the fuck you lookin' at?

That sort of thing doesn't bother me anymore. I have to believe somebody will come along, somebody who is lost in space, somewhere in his past, someone who has just begun to realize it and is frightened to death of what he is becoming. Someone like me.