

Sunday – August 10, 1963

Saturday night, Billy and I had an engagement

to play at Snow Hill Country Club in Wilmington. I was laid off at Corning, so the extra money was welcome.

It was after the Wilmington show that I met a girl named Shannon, a very cute, blonde with black roots, as weird as a Halloween night. She was with Dick Bopp, but I soon found that she had been married, was separated, and had a two-month-old baby. She had tried to kill herself three times, twice with razor blade slashes across the wrists and once with sleeping pills. After the Wilmington show, we came back to the *Lemon Tree*, and Phil invited us over to his place for a party. After the Tree closed, we hopped over for a few beers and ended up drinking more than a few. We were having a ball. By this time, Shannon had ditched Dick completely and was making a play for me. Fred was sleepy and had too much to drink.

On the way, Dick had picked up his date, a girl who lives in Columbus, and was afraid that he could not make it home. It was late, so Shannon said that we could all come to her house to spend the night at her house. Dick had gratefully accepted. I looked at my watch, and it was 3:30 AM. I called home and told them that we were at a party. Mom said just to stay over and come home in the morning, but Dad woke up and said that Billy had to come home immediately. I couldn't miss out -- 42on all the fun and knew that something was hanging in the air, something that would possibly make a great story. I told Shannon that I had to get Billy home unless I could find a place to stay. She said that I could come on over to my place as I hoped, so I gave Billy the keys and chased him out. He stalled around and refused to leave for a long time, but I kept talking to him and finally got him to leave. I was sure that if he drove home at 5:00 AM without me the folks would never let him go with me again. Billy left before midnight and we went back to Phil's. Everyone was drunk, discussing palm reading and yogi. Shannon read everyone's palm. Phil and Dick were supposed to die young. I was supposed to live to a ripe old age, have three mistresses, quit my singing and writing, then pick them up again later and become a great success after the years have mellowed me. The hushed voice of doom had silenced everyone. The party broke up, and most headed for home. Shannon, Fred, and I went out to Shannon's house.

Shannon's home was a new, high-ceilinged beauty with grass-green thick carpeting. She had left her six-

month-old baby alone all the while we were gone. A neighbor was supposed to have come in and checked every now and then. I spoke with her to learn what I could. She is studying psychology and has had five or six different psychologists herself. She's very pretty, but it's a wonder her parents haven't committed her. She says she is schizophrenic — a split personality. She wasn't ready for marriage. Anyone could tell that. We talked about her marriage and her almost successful suicides while the blood stains on the carpet glowed yellow and orange in the newfound daylight. She's getting married again to a man named Tom out in Oregon. He's a writer and so is she. Her ex-husband, whose name is Doug, is trying to take her baby away from her. That should only be so. She seems to be a loving mother, but she isn't a fit mother. She gives the child phenobarbital much of the time to keep it asleep. That the poor kid must be a drug addict by now.

I was lusting after her, naturally. We slept together that night, but we did not make love. The only way to tell this story is to go into the conversation or write it out in graphic language to make a short story of it. I was on the couch, dizzy, weary, wanting to make love her, talking about everything from the Bible to incest. I kissed her lips and she came to me passionately.

"Of course, you know I want to make love to you," I said .

"Sure," she said .

"And you're not going to let me, right?"

"Right."

"You hate men, don't you."

"They're not very gentle."

"I'm fairly gentle, wouldn't you say?"

"Yes, I suppose," she said, "but I want a man that wants more than me for sex."

"I can understand that. You can't sleep with just anybody."

- - 44 "I offered it to Tom, but he wouldn't even take it. I love him for that."

"Some women have perverted ideas about sex."

"No, men do."

"Men do most of the raping."

"That's been done too, when I was fifteen."

"You aren't shocking me. You're drunk."

"No, not now. I was once but not now."

"Nobody has ever loved you?"

"That's true."

"You know another thing? I think I could I love you already, even though what I've seen of your motherly instinct and those damn scars on your wrist ought to repel me."

"You get to know a person psychologically and you can build your line on that."

"I'm not building a line. I apologize for wanting to

make love to you, but you have to overlook that, it's only human."

"Yes."

Around eight, Dick came in with a small bag of groceries. No one had slept. I was hungry, but Dick and Shannon said that if they ate, they would get sick. The sun was coming up. I was sick myself. Fred got up, and we went into Dayton for a bite to eat. When we came back, we talked about different theories—time, Einstein, and atomic energy. We must have still been drunk, or perhaps we were drunk on thought, for that can happen too.

45 We talked about other dimensions. We talked about the fact that we might be just an electron in an atom of some oxygen in a blade of grass in some other, more dense, more vast cosmic existence, and it seemed to make sense the way we thought of it. We played hearts all morning and all afternoon.

At four o'clock, I decided to take the five-fifteen bus to Greenville. Shannon and I talked about books and authors, and then Fred gave me a ride to the bus station. I had had no sleep, and I was barely able to talk.

Shannon left her glasses in my car earlier, so I will have to get them back to her. In the wee hours of the morning, I asked her if this was all there was to it, if I only had her for a night, and that was it. "Yes," she said. "This is all there will be. You see, I'm playing a game." "I know you are. I can tell. You don't like me at all, do you?" I asked.

"Yes," she said. "Yes, I really do like you."

I haven't seen the other side of her personality. On the normal side, she is an intelligent, pretty girl with a warped view of things that must be straightened out. On the other side? Suicide?

I found myself staring once at her fresh wound, the stitches still sticking out like tatters of thread on an otherwise perfect piece of clothing, something entirely out of place. The wound was swollen and infected. "Don't look at it," she said. "It's ugly."

"It fascinates me. I'm sorry, but I can't help it. A pause, and I said, "You really want to live. You only do this for attention, don't you?"

- - 46 "Yes," she said. "I never wanted to succeed."

And that is probably the last little escapade with her. I wouldn't be surprised if she succeeds the next time. Or perhaps the baby will die of an overdose of drugs, and she will be sent to prison or the zoo for treatment. Will anything good ever come into her life? I don't even know her last name.