

“I’m stuck. Can you give me a lift?” Alexandra asked. I credit myself with saving her from being stranded in the onrush of traffic. A stranger had come into my life fully clothed and unscathed by any knowledge of me, the kind of friendship I had dreamt of. “You’re safe with me,” I assured her as we sped on. A few weeks later I invited her to spend the afternoon with me at a friend’s house in the New Jersey countryside. I knew I had forgotten the keys to the house and circled the house countless times to find an open window. It was a great day for riding horseback.

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We did not go horseback riding. We had a picnic. The food was spread out on a blanket on the warm hood of the car. We returned to New York City as dusk descended over Secaucus, striations of light piercing the saffron sky, through the Lincoln Tunnel into Manhattan, intoxicated by the blast of hot summer air, the scent of Alexandra’s lily of the valley perfume and fumes leaking from the manifold of my old Plymouth, the car radio blaring to the sound of WNEW-AM. We embarked upon a platonic histrionic cosmopolitan adventure, sitting beside each other in darkened cinemas, me feeling her elbow on the armrest, gazing at her profile and then her countenance in the glimmer of the movie screen and under the light of the marquee as we walked out into the street. Another summer night we sat on warm rocks at sunset watching Joseph Papp’s Shakespeare in Central Park, witnessed the agons of Julian Beck and Judith Malina’s Living Theater, Lillian Hellman’s Toys in the Attic with Irene Worth and Rochelle Oliver, Tony Richardson’s production of Faulkner’s Requiem for a Nun with Zachary Scott and Ruth Ford. Alexandra even introduced me to her best friend, Wendy, a pregnant runaway from Cleveland to Las Vegas at the age of thirteen because her stepfather was molesting her, and her mother would not believe her. “The bitch believes it now,” Wendy told me. After two years in Las Vegas, Wendy told me she arrived in Los Angeles and married some man fifteen years her senior who impressed her into a sect of meditators, got her addicted to cocaine, and forced her into prostitution to support their habits and meditation fees. She was a Temple Virgin in California reading Scripture to a State Assemblyman at 8:30 in the morning and spent her lunch hours with a big City Mayor under his City Hall desk. She ran away from that cult to join another. “They told me to split. They hid me. They cleaned me up. Took me out of prostitution. Gave me money. I haven’t smoked a joint or sniffed coke in two years. Now I’m living for my unborn baby. I was one of their best producers and that’s not counting the telemarketing I do in

my free time. I grossed \$30,000 for our community, marketing scented candles and counseling. I worked my way up through four plateaus in six months. I broke a record. So, they sent me to New York. Now I get to go to Switzerland to study the fifth plane.” PROOF

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“Everything is shared. I don’t even know who the kid’s old man is and I don’t care. I want the baby. I don’t need to peddle my ass on the street. When I was twelve I decided I wasn’t going to be the wife of a bum like my stepfather. My child is not going to end up a freak like me either,” she said with a steely glint in her eyes. Alexandra and I saw each other seldom that summer. During the many long intervals when we were not together, I suffered the anguish of a clairvoyant riveted on past disasters that might separate us forever. I always had the premonition disaster would strike and that my heart would be broken. An accident on a subway she never took, a plane crash, contamination with AIDS by a lover, assassination by a crazed admirer, riding an elevator that would plummet ten stories with her aboard. Whatever I imagined could happen and might happen according to Voltaire’s worst case scenario of bad providence in his rebuttal of Leibniz’ proof of the goodness of God in the best of all possible worlds. There were of course memorable moments. I once introduced Alexandra to my mother at a restaurant while other people looked on. “It must be nice to have your son living with you,” she said to my mother. “Oh, he isn’t interested in an old woman like me,” she said. “There must have been some girlfriend over the years,” Alexandra said. After I moved out of my mother’s apartment, I came home one spring night to my East Village flat to find it like a steam bath. The landlord had decided to repair the boiler on the warmest day of the year and the heat in the room was so intense that generations of newsprint and wallpaper were peeling from the walls. Alexandra was lying on my bed reading a script. How she got in is no mystery. I left the door unlocked hoping some girl I knew would visit me. “I had an impulse to see what your place looked like,” she said. “How did you get in?” “The door wasn’t locked.” I lay down beside her. She just wanted to be held and I was too shy thinking her a virgin, notwithstanding the crude observation Wendy made later. It took days for me to understand the heartbreak of reality in the PROOF

knowledge that Alexandra had been untrue to me and had already betrayed our inviolable relationship long before we knew each other. Alexandra got up from the bed and handed me the script, one of the final scenes from a French play she was preparing for an audition for a role in an off-Broadway play. She wanted me to play the part of a Prince. The scene ended in a kiss I tried to prolong in our rehearsals of the scene. I saw her the next day. She invited me up to her apartment. She had been crying too. She had been denied the part. "I was called back twice. I cried all night." I waited in the kitchen while she put oatmeal on her face to improve her complexion. "If it can work on your face, think what it does to your insides." Then she came into the kitchen and meticulously set the table for a cup of coffee and then put her hand on my shoulder and smiled, a gesture meant to tell me "I know. You're different. You're not like the others." No one had ever touched me like that. Once she invited me to a male friend's birthday party along with Wendy and her sister. Someone had hired a belly-dancer. At first the friend was staring at the television as if he were indifferent to the belly-dancer's performance. The belly-dancer kept staring back at him writhing provocatively. He just looked at her. When it was time to open the presents, someone had given him an assortment of condoms. "Try the blue one, the French tickler," someone cried out. I was half-drunk when Wendy introduced me to her sister, a scrawny looking child of sixteen who appeared to put on too much eye-shadow. It wasn't eye-shadow. "Did you see her eye?" Wendy asked. "She wanted to go to our grandmother's funeral and her boyfriend got jealous. He gave her a black eye," Wendy whispered to me in the kitchen. One day, I was with Alexandra when she stopped to chat with old friends on the corner of Bleecker and West 11th. In one of Brecht's notebooks, he refers to Kafka's rueful observation that "she would not have looked at the other man if she had not been with me." I envied myself for being with her and I was jealous of other men when she looked at them and even of her conversations with women friends. I looked away pretending I wasn't there