



February 13, 1982

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Time passes. That's for sure. It's the nightmare of having what you want that I'm interested in today. I had a book party five years ago. It took place in New York where I live and it was the beginning of the end for me.

I'm a very different person today. Bill's coming over to build shelves in the kitchen. Things have a slow progression, kind of a pleasant listiness. A big part of my list is the past. I went over to Rose's to plan the book party. Power Mad Press, which was Barbara, was publishing my book. Barbara lived with Rose in a loft and that's where we were going to have the party. Rose is an astrologer. She pointed to February 13th on her calendar. It's got to be this date, she said. Absolutely. But why, I asked. A lot of things will converge for you on this date. Your Mars, a lot of your aspects . . . I don't know how to explain it, but this is YOU. Maybe you don't want your party to be such an intense experience. It could be a lot quieter. It depends on what you want. Rose was like a lawyer, or a salesman. You never knew if she was making this stuff up — if she really had her finger on the pulsation of the orbs and if she did, I mean, if she really had the power, was she on my side.

I watched the way she played with her cats. What if she was just very powerful and intuitive, but to her we were all just cats. It was an interesting place to be and I decided to go with her suggestion.

I made a very nice white on black invitation. Mostly the party was publicized by word of mouth. I bought some cocaine. I was a very down and out person. Sort of a beer drinker, really. The kind of person who always had diet pills in her faded jean pockets. My main concern really was that I didn't get so drunk that I fell down or turned it into an embarrassing night in some way. It was an early evening event. I had slept with this girl who was a musician and who I was currently in love with. She left around noon, left me to my cigarettes, and a nice foggy musing upon my pink floral sheets and the birds outside my window and the slender branches of the trees. I have an old cemetery outside my window and I felt like Keats in the 1800s or something. I could feel the nervousness rising in me like some kind of strange spring, inside and out. The winter had a way to go, but there's always days in February when you forget that. For me to put down one hundred dollars for cocaine was something, but all in service of this wonderful amazing day — the long-awaited book and of course my new life.

I suppose I had the typical horror of what if nobody shows up. I went over to the loft relatively early and I know I was full of the deep calm of one who is in a total panic. I smoked significant cigarettes. The whole thing wasn't very professional. We didn't even know we could sell books. We had maybe twenty available copies. The rest of the books were there in the loft but a couple of things were missing from them. One was the name of the photographer who did the photos front and back. Irene Young would be pissed if she didn't get credit so we had a stamp made and dutifully stamped her name in red ink on the credit page.

The other thing missing from the book was a whole stanza, the last stanza of a poem called “New York.” Here’s the stanza:

Then entering the subway, pushing through
the crowds at 34th, I saw a
baby sucking desperately on its bottle
tears streaming down its fat dark face.
As it sat in its carriage. It stopped me,
I turned, examined some flowers
for sale, cloth on silky green leaves
mounted on a comb. I plucked
up a black one, a black rose, paid the
guy a dollar. I love it.

I’m softly fingering the petals on the
subway home, it is so artificial
so dark and so beautiful.

I thought “it is so artificial / so dark and so beautiful” referred to New York. Now it strikes me that I was talking about my life. Line four should read “fat dark face,” not “tat.”

So what happened once the party got going was that as people wanted copies of the book I had to go into the back room and stamp “Irene Young” and the final stanza of “New York” into each copy. My book was called *A Fresh Young Voice From the Plains*. I had always figured if I had a book I would want my face all over it. The experience was like television. Every book hanging off the end of someone else’s hand was like another tiny monitor. As more and more people began to flow in it meant that that many more pictures were bobbing around the room. What a horror. Particularly in relation to the people I didn’t know. They would look down at their

book and then up at me. Oh, it's you. Here it was a big moment in my life and to them it was just another party. I began to join that group. Some beer, some coke. Some people you know. I would go in the back and people would offer me some coke and then I would offer mine to other people. People seemed surprised that I had my own coke. Of course. It's my party. It's a self-serving event.

Allen Ginsberg asked me to sign his book. I must've stood there for five minutes drawing a complete blank. Hi Allen, from one howl to another. Dear Allen I'm glad you think I'm a poet. Love, Eileen. I'm the only woman you like, right Allen? Only the craziest thoughts passed through my mind. Finally he started getting embarrassed. Just sign it. Come by and write something better when you think of it. I scrawled something. I forget what it was.

I was "The Fresh Young Voice from the Plains." I felt so foolish signing books. "Mark, you're going to kill yourself if you keep drinking the way you do. Me too. Eileen." The wrong lines kept flashing through my mind. In David's I wrote: David, I just wrote something really horrible in someone's book. People I didn't know wanted copies and I would put them off and they'd offer money, go "C'mon, I'll pay for it." At the end my pants were full of these wrinkled dollar bills. It made me feel kind of sleazy, through Barbara was the most laissez-faire publisher ever and I'm sure she didn't give a shit.

Rene was skipping around. That made it a real party. He was talking to Ted who was there in his dark blue short sleeve shirt. Ted found my discomfort so amusing. How're you doing, *Eileen*? He put this faggy little turn on "Eileen," like it was a made-up name, something I'm pretending to be. It sounded right. It sure amused Rene who kept telling me how fabulous my book party was in a way which made me wonder if this wasn't the worst party of all time.

The girl musician was blowing her saxophone in the middle room with all her musician friends who were taking this party as

an opportunity to play or impress each other or whatever musicians do. She seemed to think they wouldn't let her in on all their men things if they knew she was a "lezzy" so I could barely get a hello out of her.

My couple didn't come. I sort of moved in on this couple of poets that winter. I liked him, but I adored her and that was falling apart around this time, but at least they could come to my book party. I used to wear a Timex watch and she was always asking me what time it was. I planned to give her a watch of her own at the party but she didn't come. Suddenly I had this extra watch. I had also guiltily bought him a purple striped tie. What was I going to do with that tie. I asked my sister to hold the stuff in her bag. She wound up going back to Boston with the watch and the tie and eventually they came back in the mail. Then I gave Mark Breeding the watch. The tie just hung out with my other ties for a few years until I realized I didn't wear ties.

Yeah, my sister from Boston came to the party. A representative of the Myleses from Boston. Unfortunately, she had just broken up with her boyfriend the night before. She thought the trip would be good for her, a distraction. People always think that until they get a few drinks in them.

I wore a striped boat-neck shirt. There was a poem in my book about a dog named Skuppy who sailed the seven seas and lived in his own private boat. I secretly knew that I was a dog who lived in a boat. The floors in my apartment had a definite slant and the trees outside would get going in the wind and I was always kind of staggering around so it was a pretty natural image to grab onto. Vickie picked up on it and greeted me: Hey Skuppy! I barked. She had the same shirt on. Mark told me he had also considered buying the shirt and would have worn it as well. I guess it was 1982 and it was an obvious shirt to have that year.

Chassler, who also lived in the loft, had two kids from his last marriage. They were great, they were sort of the pets of the loft. These kids always had some toy that we were all playing with. Nora had a parrot on a stick. You could make the parrot bite by moving the stick. Once my sister got a little loaded she started nipping at me with the parrot. She started aiming for the crotch a lot, and I started to get the picture that my sister was going out of control. She wasn't mixing very good and she kept turning to me for love and affection . . . and then these kind of odd sexual gestures.

It wasn't my day. Or was it? Chris showed up. She was living in Maine with Judy. She didn't look so happy and she looked like she had put on some weight. Somehow I think the experience of being in New York all of a sudden with its great frank energy was completely terrifying to her. People walk up and say things like: I don't mean to offend you . . . but you look really big. I mean, it's good. Do you do anything there? What do you do? Christine looked immediately like she was going to cry and eventually she did. Judy seemed like one of those nurse-type girlfriends. She had her arm around Chris who wouldn't look up. We gotta go, Judy smiled. But thanks a lot! Don't forget brunch tomorrow! People started asking me if I was having a good time. Are you okay?

The thing I couldn't look at was that book. On the front I stand with these crooked bangs and big bags under my eyes against the white wall of my apartment. You can see the buzzer maybe a foot and a half from my right shoulder. My face looks puffy and shapeless, fortunately I have kind of a big mouth so it sort of works. My arms look weird, though. I had been doing a lot of speed in that period of time, so I'm thin but it looks like bones with all this loose flesh tied on. The arms always look scary to me. Old. Folded across my ribs. There's other things that bother me about the front of the book, but look at the back.

Here I am lighting a cigarette, here is my can of beer on my desk. There's the typewriter. Poems all over the desk. I used to know what that big one was, but I can't remember now. And here the skin that my arms were made up of now makes up my face. I look like an old lady. It is really scary.

I had been to a million book parties since I lived in New York but mine seemed made up. I wanted to go home. There were three places to be in that loft: in the back room doing coke — it was actually most comfortable back there. It was smaller, and it had that kind of enforced closeness that feels safe in a screwed up way. But the coke made me feel more and more like one of those cubes of glass they use to create partitions with. Can I put on sunglasses? I wasn't sure.

I'd go out into the fray passing the musicians' area each time. They weren't playing music like you could dance to, it was an inner experience they seemed to be involved in. I think they were all junkies. I still could hardly get a wave out of you know who. I leaned over and said, We're all going someplace in a while, you wanna come? She nodded.

The front room was still loosely packed with drinking smoking people, oh yeah, and there were all kinds of joints circulating and for one lucky day in my life I managed to say no to them. Since I was already completely paranoid I couldn't imagine where I'd go if I smoked pot. People were beginning to leave, they were saying you want to eat with us, or we've got another party, or I've got a rehearsal, or you know me, when you get to be my age (turns up his collar) we go home when the getting's good. He raised his eyebrows. Hey Allen, wanna share a cab? The Dads are leaving I thought. This means something.

Rose's girlfriend from Chicago was in town and I was part of a troop going to Café Society, one of those part-time lesbian bars. I

was bringing my sister, I was bringing the musician and I was completely depressed, but my face was frozen into a grim smile. Eileen, Rose screamed as we piled into a cab, did you have fun?

She was using the same tone she used on her cats. Yeah, it was great, Rose. Thanks a lot. Where are you going, squinted the musician. I felt like tying a rope to her leg. I was so convinced she wasn't going to stick around at all. I was right. As soon as we got inside the kind of glitter ball, tall hyacinths-in-a-vase Italian lesbian disco environment I could see her squirming free. I sighed. I hate disco, she said. You can't tell me you like this. Like? I didn't even know what that meant. Well, no, but . . . Listen, I gotta go, she said. It was that fast.

My sister seemed ready to go off. She kept putting her arm around me like . . . you know. I guess she was really upset about her boyfriend. I couldn't handle it. She kept saying sentimental things to me. She was really bombed, and I wanted to be nice and I knew she was a mess, but I really didn't want her touching me. Especially now that the musician had left. By the time we were all at the front of the bar the situation had reached its crisis. My sister had her arms around me and her head on my shoulder and I absolutely couldn't handle it. We had shared a room for seventeen years. If she wanted love and affection why couldn't she have asked then.

Everything was all confused. At the party people kept saying the musician looked like a younger version of me. I thought she looked like my sister. Lookit, I said, why don't you sit over there. Unhinging her arm from me. She held her head down and shook it grievously. The attack. You don't care about anyone but yourself. She was bombed. I could tell by the way she was shaping her words. That's it. That's the whole story. She waved her arms with a referee's gesture of closure. You don't care about anyone but yourself. All you think about is yourself, you don't even know other people

are alive, you're so selfish. It's true. She doesn't care about any of you. Think she does? She doesn't. I know her, she's a phony. A fucking phony. Well, I hate you and I'm leaving. I'm going back tonight. She still held the parrot on the stick. She grabbed her suede jacket off the stool and her bag was on her shoulder. I hate you and I never want to see you again. You are so, and she broke into sobs, selfish! She ran out the door. I looked up at the faces that surrounded me. She's your sister, Eileen. Eileen, this is a very important night for you, said Rose. It counts. Should I go? I don't want to go. I was thinking: It's my night. It's my party. This isn't fair.

I caught up with Bridget on 5th Ave. and we jumped in a cab. I tried to sort of pet her. Don't touch me, she shrieked. You can't make it better now. I never want to see you again. In my apartment I watched her call the trains and discover she had just missed the last to Boston. I'll get a hotel. I will not stay here tonight. She didn't have far to go. She threw herself down on my bed and I took her boots off. In a few minutes she was out like a light.

I wanted to be anyplace but home. It was 12:30. I was sitting on my couch. On the coffee table I had my cigarettes, my little vial of coke and the red phone. And a mirror, of course. A big piece of thick broken mirror I had found in the trash. This is the picture that should have been on the book. I could see my sister's legs and skirt. It just seemed so odd to have a passed out woman on my bed. Who I know the way I know my sister. Family, great. Look at me. No one to call. My book sat on the coffee table. I felt great. I felt frozen, completely frozen in my life. It would never stop being exactly like this. I was a great poet and I would always be alone. This was my curse. I took a couple of valiums and fell asleep on the big brown velvet couch that always felt like a casket. I always heard a little voice yell my name just before I lost consciousness. I thought my death would be this way. I loved it.