The Eighth Sacrament

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I. the collegiate—Friday night

Bring a broad, we’re having a real orgy. Everything else provided. Just bring a broad and come. You know the place; it’s his own apartment and it’s big and so is his allowance.

So the collegiate went. He went as he always did, because he liked parties. Especially big parties, with lots of liquor and good talk and if the crowd loosened up, a lot more and a long night.

So he went. These were lots of people there, friends and people he knew too well to have them for friends and a few new people he would meet and forget in three minutes. There was a good hi-fi with plenty of progressive jazz that some liked and more pretended to like and a long, long table with a hundred different cheeses and meat spreads and chips and fish spreads and crackers and bottles in ice and glasses waiting for the ice and the bottles.

Vodka and sevenup and a squirt of lime, he said.

Right, coming up, just help yourself and don’t let ‘er get empty.

No sir, I won’t, he thought. A good party indeed indeed.

The platinum type blond he had brought said she would have anything, just any old thing, just so it was strong because she felt that she might like to get smashed and it was going to be a long, long night.

He ignored her and she kept quiet while they stood with several groups and talked good talk and trite talk and heard a lot of jokes and watched each other watching each other. The conversations interested him for a while, but only for a while. As the evening developed, the party spread out from the living room into the bedrooms and out into the cars out front and anywhere at all as long as it was comfortable.

To him, the party was a blur, hazy from smoke or what he did not know. He was getting thirsty. He refilled for the third time and tried to talk to the broad.

She was on her fourth and was feeling sorry for herself telling him how she had lost a very rich boyfriend and after all those weekends, too. Anyway, she was just a lost soul seeking solace.

Good liquor is good solace, thought he. And this is not very good vodka; you should not be able to taste the vodka. This does not taste like sevenup or anything; it tastes a little like varnish. Try something else, maybe. Anyway, old man, you have had three so why stop now?

The party had loosened up quickly. There were no more groups, only couples; and the one hundred different kinds of food had disappeared and the bottles were scattered and the ice melted, but indeed, it had settled down to a very good party.

The blond was on his lap and she was in no worse condition than
anyone else, in fact, she looked better than the rest, he thought.

You look good to me tonight honey. She giggled and stole some of his drink and giggled and slopped it and made him playfully angry.

Cudditout.

You look good too, she said.

He thought, now we are all set ... what a good party ... come Monday and back to classes ... ah, but what could be more true than a good party and this excellent vodka .... I wonder ... you are hurting my leg, please sit on both of them at once please ... I wonder if this party ever has to break up anyway I wonder if there is more ice ... did I ever notice before blond hair ... I wonder if it would break if I touched it it is so brittle looking ... I had coffee with a real blond the other day and it was not brittle like this ... man, the room is foggy ... how many will know tomorrow, half will know in three or four weeks and maybe one or two will be scared but what the hell o boy o god o boy what a wild party this has become ... somebody must have messed up the fi hi ... hah ... hi lover ... hey you know something you beautiful hunk of platinum blond, god o god you are beautiful even if brittle ... stop squirming ... he had forgotten her name.

He laughed ... hey you know something honey? you really ought to put some clothes on.

She just said, why?

II the virgin—Sunday morning

She wore a tiny silver bead chain around her neck; a tiny silver cross hung from the chain. She was not Catholic, but she had often thought about becoming one. She was Pure.

"Hello, Mrs. Brian, did you enjoy the sermon?"

"Oh, my, yes, he didn't keep me awake at all."

Gentle laugh gentle smile.

"My, there you are," a chubby woman greeted her. "You are so pretty again today! And I see you here every Sunday! How wonderful that at least some of our young people are devoted!"

"Thank you m'am, how are you today?"

etetcetcetc

The sun always shone on Sunday.

And she enjoyed church, but wasn't always satisfied. She thought many times that she could find something solid in the Catholic religion, or in becoming an Atheist; both Catholics and the Atheists seemed so sure. She was at that peculiar point in her thinking that every youth passes, and she knew it. She laughed at her confusion,

"Come along, dear, I want to get dinner started ... George!"

"Coming, coming ... wait in the car," said her father, interrupting his conversation with another elder.

Mother took her arm and they went together to the car. They were close, as mothers and daughters should be, but Mother always worried about her.

As they sat in the car, Mother asked, "Dear, you mentioned a
young man that you met at the University. I hope you are using your usual good judgment?"

"Oh, Mom, I just mentioned him ... we just had coffee once ... but I suppose he will ask me again."

"Just the same, you know you can't be too careful. I just don't want to see you get involved in anything, sometimes I worry so . . ."

"I know, Mom. I wear a little cross around my neck to remind me."

"George! Hurry up George!"

At home they ate. She read the Sunday funnies, helped Mother in the garden . . . it was Spring and the seeds were bought and needed only to be planted. She studied. She wondered at some of the things she read in her books.

"How much I need to know," she thought. "What hell it is to know that I'm in a stage and feel it at the same time. Enjoyable hell."

"Is there a hell?"

"What a sophomoric Sophomore I am. I like it."

She heard her father put a record on the player.

"Oh, no."

It was one of her father's noise records and it was trains or something like that.

"Dad, please turn it down so I can study?"

"Waat?"

"Turn it down!"

"I can't here you." He turned down the volume.

"Turn down the fi-hi!"

"Oh, okay, I did . . . the waat?"

"Fi-hi, hi-fi . . . that's all right . . . I'm a little backwards today anyhow."

III. a love story

Strange that they should even like each other. He did not take her to parties, because he knew her. She did not ask him more than once to go with her to church.

Black and white, but complementary . . . they talked good talk and drank lousy coffee and saw good movies and bad movies and always enjoyed each other.

They talked long of what they believed, and they learned much from each other, as only two who are so different can learn. He was corrupt, at least he always said he was, but at least he was a gentleman. He impressed her mother and father, and when he was sober he was very fine. He was always sober except at parties. He went to fewer parties. He was reforming for her without knowing it. He was enjoying it. His friends kidded him but he still reformed for her.

She changed, too. Between them they worked out some of their problems and each gained new insights to many ideas. She liked to think that she was becoming less sophomoric.

They both were.

They loved in an ordinary way; she keeping perfect control and
not having to; he finding a certain respect for her that surprised him.

Yet she still felt empty; she could not crack her imaginary shell; she imagined she did not want to crack it. He had threatened the shell. She always wore the Cross.

He liked her, but he did not want to hurt her. He was very careful at first of what he said. He soon found that she could defend her beliefs, and he did not have to worry after that.

One Friday night, in fact, they had a long discussion on sex and morals etcetcetc. Before they finished, they had talked long and well, and he had learned much of her that he had not suspected, and she of him.

He did not kiss her goodnight. Instead, he stood and looked in her eyes, and she felt as if he were looking through her.

“Don’t,” she said. She quivered and turned and went quickly through the door.

The following Sunday they went to the beach.

IV. the sacrament . . . a fantasy

Sun burned the sand; sun burned the people; sun spattered diamonds on the Big Lake; sun tanned the hundreds of people who were trying to keep cool on the beach.

Two lay apart, alone, surrounded by the hundreds and yet alone.

He lay face down on the blanket on the sand; his back and legs were brown from the sun. His trunks were black and his shoes were off and one was full of sand. She was lithe and true blond and tight white stretched next to him, her face close to his. She wore a tiny silver bead chain around her neck; a tiny silver cross hung from the chain.

He said, I have wondered many times about that chain because you're not Catholic but you wear that little cross around your neck.

She smiled. “It keeps me pure.”

You’ll always be pure anyway. You are blond and white and probably perfect.

“But someday I will get married and then . . .”

And then you will still be pure because Love is always Innocent. He moved a little and kissed her.

“You are funny,” she said. “you've been telling me that Purity is Impurity. I think you are backwards.”

He laughed and turned over.

Am I right side up now?

“No.”

He looked at her seriously. I told you what I thought Friday night. I told you that Virginity is a state of mind. I told you the difference is not physical.

“Yes, I know.”

Do you see what I believe?

“Yes,” she said. “But I still have the Cross around my neck.”

He kissed her again.

“You're strange today,” she said. “You talk to me like it doesn’t
matter what you say. How do you know I am not offended by all these things you talk about?"

If I were to talk about something crude or filthy, you would hate me. Have I talked about anything crude or filthy?

"No your mind is beautiful." She laughed at her joke and sat up. She scooped a handful of sand and rubbed it on his stomach.

damndamndamn. You had better run like hell because when I get mad I swear and I swear I will fan your tail if I catch you.

She ran for the edge of the water but stopped when the cold sliding wave touched her feet.

She should not have stopped because when she did, he caught her. He picked her up, waded out into the water and dropped her.

You're lucky, he said. I didn't fan your tail, I just dropped you on it.

She spit and screamed at him and tried to dunk him but he stayed up and laughed at her.

damndamndamn she said. Then she kissed him hard. Some people on the beach watched and a few smiled but some frowned and some looked offended.

She didn't let him go and he hold her and they kissed hard then Iwant he said Iwant Iwantto

"No."

Somehow Iwant

"No."

Has no one ever touched you has no one ever touched you anywhere?

"no no they always ask that no no and no one ever until"

She let him go and stood apart from him and looked at him frightened and sobbing just a little and he did not like it. She stood apart holding her hand to her breast and in her hand the Cross.

It was fear of him and it was Right but he could not stand it.

A fat, more than middleaged woman stood at the edge of the water. She had on a fat green bathing suit that reached from her knees to her chins. The suit was like a tent and her breasts hung in it heavy on her stomach. She stood on the wet beach holding her large inner tube looking at them with great round eyes that looked as green to him as the rest of her.

He felt gutted and he hated

What the goddammhell are you staringatYOUBITCH?

What the woman said she said because she was very angry. She went away up the beach muttering about delinquency and degenerate morals and filthy mouths and Godlessness and etcetcetc.

He turned around to where she stood laughing a little hysterical laugh. Her laugh was funny and beautiful to him; her hair was wet and stringy; but something new was there; he thought she looked perfect. He did not know what he had broken.

Then they both laughed. He chased her again and she dove out
into the cold green water and they swam out until it was over their heads. It was cold out in the green water but they liked it and they stayed to swim alone together and to feel the hard greenness of the Lake.

They came in not wanting to come in, and found their blanket on the sand.

As they dried he said, I think that she can never be saved, that fat green lady, because she has never sinned.

She smiled a faint smile.

“Do you know,” she said, “that it is almost time to go home?”

No, I don’t. I see by the watch in my empty shoe that we have a lot of time a lot of time.

She lay on the blanket and looked at him. He lay on his stomach and he looked through her eyes into the sand.

What do you see?

Only the beautiful, he said, and smiled.

You can’t see! you can’t . . . oh you’re not so smart.

He looked through her.

“Your eyes are very blue,” she said.

But your’s are far more blue than mine, he said. Your’s are not cloudy like mine and mine are probably bloodshot and I can see through your’s.

You must think that you are Sin’s only Bastard, she said. You must think that I don’t understand you, that you are talking me around in circles. “Is it just a line you are giving me?” but you are wrong you know. I think that oh don’t.

But he had already unfastened the little silver chain. He dropped it. The Cross lay on her throat, but the chain was unfastened.

I’m sorry, he said, I’m sorry.

She took the chain and tried to fasten it, but her hand shook and she dropped it and picked it up again and this time she took it off and placed it carefully in his shoe.

She looked through him.

You are perfect, he said softly. You are perfect but you do not want to be and this makes you more perfect and this is your hell.

No, she said. no nono damndamndamn

When he kissed her hard she held his neck tight. It seemed that she could breathe nothing but the sand and the heat and him. She was full and free

She twisted she breathed hard the Cross was in the shoe.

She twisted and said

I want

I want to be naked.

But the sun was burning on the sand and the people numbered in the hundreds and the fat green lady stood down the wet beach shaking her head and looking at them.