

New York, New York

by Eustace F. Pendleby

I finally get off of the plane at twelve thirty, and there're a billion people moving around. JFK seems dirty. Man, traveling sucks. Something always goes wrong. You just can't plan enough.

Because the flight leaving Columbia was late, I got into Cincinnati just late enough to miss the nine o'clock connecting flight here, and so they set us all up at a Holiday Inn. I ran to that damn terminal all the way across the airport carrying my huge overstuffed duffel bag and my backpack. I did overpack, but I would have missed the plane anyway, even if my luggage hadn't weighed me down. There must have been twenty people who missed that flight — because of the airline's mismanagement. They gave all of us new flight tickets, tickets for our hotel rooms, and meal vouchers, and they handed out to each of us a small black toiletry bag containing a toothbrush and toothpaste and a few other items. On the top of the kit was a small Made in China

sticker. I saw behind the ticket counter a large clear plastic bag full of the kits.

On the shuttle-bus ride to the Holiday Inn, which we had to wait over an hour for because of all the other people who needed shuttling to hotels, too, because the airlines had screwed up their flights, too, I sat next to a man maybe in his late fifties. We talked during the bus ride and then parted once at the hotel. After putting my bags in my room, an extra-large corner room, I went down to the lobby's restaurant to see if my meal voucher could be used toward alcohol, which it couldn't. I ordered a bowl of soup. The man I had sat next to on the bus came into the restaurant and sat down at my table.

He ate a little, as well, and was friendly and bought me a couple of drinks. He is a sculptor and has become fairly wealthy from this profession, sculpting commissioned works for business buildings and churches and parks and whatever else. I told him about myself, what school I'm at and so forth. And for some reason, most likely the whiskey, I ended up telling him I sell a good deal of pot back where I live. He didn't seem to care much one way or the other. Then he told me that when he was in college he had a friend who was studying computer science at Harvard. This friend had created a program that could calculate winning betting strategies. The first time they tried it, him, his friend, and one other, they won a thousand dollars betting on dogs at a racetrack. And that's a thousand dollars in what's probably the 1970s. He said that they were careful about it and that they started doing it frequently. They did it for about a year, he had said, and made great money, but they stopped because they got badly burned a few times.

It wasn't the computer program's fault, though, he had said. The software never failed. It was the races, is what it was. They were rigged, he had said.

I always take all of my luggage as carry-on, no matter how giant my bags are, and

I always overpack. I find my way out to the taxis and toss my bags in a cab's trunk and get in. The driver, Masoud, is from Iran, and he seems genuinely surprised when I start talking with him. He says he's been in the United States for two years. His English is pretty good. I ask him what he thinks of America so far, and I say that I want him to be honest, that I want to know how he really feels. He tells me that everyone in America wants to be Hitler. I laugh and tell him he's right.

It takes about twenty minutes to get to my older brother's high-rise apartment complex, Normandie Court, which is on Manhattan's Upper East Side, and Masoud drops me off on a corner. I have trouble finding the complex's main entrance, even though I've been looking right at it. Being alone in New York is pretty disorienting. I did come here that one time on that high-school trip. But we were always in groups with adults, and we were only in the city for a day.

I get the spare key Sam left me from a woman at the front desk and take an elevator up to the 27th floor. He said that he'd be working until late tonight and that he wouldn't be home until after eight. I let myself in and put my bags in Sam's room, and I grab a can of Sprite from the fridge and sit down at the table in their small dining room. The kitchen is tiny, and there is no living room. The two bedrooms are spacious and share a spectacular view to the south.

I drink some of the Sprite and go to the restroom and wash up. I take *Ulysses* out of my backpack and sit at a desk in my brother's room and read until it's a quarter past three. Although it's for school, I want to read the entire book and not just the first and last chapters like I normally do for my classes, but a hundred pages into it, I'm not convinced that's going to happen.

I am feeling hungry, so I throw on my coat and go down to the lobby and then out

to the street. I walk to a pizzeria across the street. I get two hefty slices, one with broccoli and mushroom and the other with tomato slices and chunks of mozzarella, and eat them at a table next to a window. There's so much going on in this city. There's so much life.

But I guess it's the same anywhere else. Something's always going on everywhere. Some places you just have to look closer than others. I finish my food and smoke a cigarette outside.

I start walking and smoke another cigarette, and I decide to go to the location the World Trade Center complex used to occupy. I buy a foldout pocket map from a newsstand and find a subway and purchase a ten-trip pass and take a train to Lower Manhattan. I walk around the site, "Ground Zero," which is just a hole in the earth, and then I take the subway back and get to my brother's apartment around six o'clock. It's very cold outside, but not as cold as I thought it would be — not for January. When I get inside the apartment, I take off my hooded jacket, navy blue beanie, sweatshirt, and sneakers, leaving on my jeans and holey socks and T-shirt with a chili pepper and the words Bite Me on it.

My brother has cable TV is hooked up through a laptop on his dresser in his bedroom, and I find *The Simpsons* on. I watch the rest of the episode and then fall asleep.

"Jason. Jason," I hear, waking up on my brother's bed.

"Huh? What's up?"

"Hi. I'm Jah, Sam's roommate," Jah says. "I don't think we've met before."

"No, you're right. We haven't," I say, sitting up and swinging my legs over the side of the bed. "Good to meet you." I think Sam said Jah is Chinese, but I can't remember. He's thin with short, gelled hair and is wearing eyeglasses and a nice-looking business

suit.

“Yeah. Listen,” Jah says, inhaling strongly through his nose, “you left this in the door.” He holds up the apartment key.

“Oh, did I?” I ask. “I apologize, man. Guess I—”

“Well, don’t do that, okay? It’s not safe.” He hands me the key and walks out of the room, and in a minute I hear him start the shower. It’s already eight thirty. I must’ve needed rest.

Sam gets back in ten minutes, and we exchange a hug and hellos and smiles. He went to the gym before coming home. He says that we’re going to go get food soon and that I should get ready. He gives me fifty bucks for the cab ride I took to get here. I put back on my sweatshirt and jacket and beanie, and Sam changes into a sweater and jeans and tennis shoes. Jah dresses down to the same, except he’s wearing a UPenn sweatshirt instead of a sweater. And they both wear long coats.

My brother is of medium height and build, and he is physically quite fit. He has penetrating gray-blue eyes and short dark-brown hair that in a manner that strongly suggest finance. I’m the same height, but a slightly bigger build and heavier, softer. My face is round. His is narrower. My brown hair is long and freely hanging. My eyes are darker blue and larger. He always dresses well, and I couldn’t care less about my clothes.

The three of us take a cab to a restaurant called Mick’s, an upscale burger-and-fries place. I tell them I won’t eat because I had pizza earlier, but when the waiter comes, I order a catfish sandwich. We all order beers, too.

“Now that you finally can, Jason,” Sam says.

“I know. I know,” I say.

“Welcome to the club, big man,” he tells me.

“Thank you. Thank you,” I say.

After we start drinking our beers, the conversation loosens up, and by the end of the meal, we’re all sharing good laughs. We talk about going to a movie, but we decide against it because it’s getting too late. Sam says we’ll go to a Blockbuster and rent something decent. Sam pays for the meal.

We take another cab back to the apartment. Sam and I walk from there to a Blockbuster around the corner, and Jah goes up to the apartment. We look for a flick and discuss his church, which he has found himself liking.

“It’s really great,” Sam tells me. “I’m glad that I found a group of cool Christians in a city like New York. But what about you, Jace? How’s your spiritual quest coming along?”

“Oh, I’m still questing, I guess,” I say.

We choose *Fahrenheit 9/11* and *X2: X-Men United*. I’ve seen both and he hasn’t seen either.

“I’m not a huge Michael Moore fan,” I tell Sam at the register. “But it’s worth seeing anyway — if only because everyone else has seen it.”

“Yeah. Sure,” Sam says. He is politically conservative. “Maybe we’ll put it in first.”

When we get back, we put *Fahrenheit 9/11* in his laptop and watch it while sitting on his bed, but he’s falling asleep fifteen minutes into it.

“Sorry, Jace,” Sam says. “I just can’t stay awake.”

“It’s no problem,” I say.

“You have plans tomorrow? I won’t get home till maybe five.”

“Not really. I thought I’d explore the city.”

Sam has to go into the office tomorrow and crunch numbers for a while, even

though it's Saturday. We turn off the movie and get ready for bed, and Sam helps me set up his air mattress in the dining room, pushing the table and chairs against a wall.

I'm lying on the air mattress and have the sheets pulled up to my chest and am reading *Ulysses*, when Sam finishes brushing his teeth, and he stands in his bedroom doorway with his shirt off, in boxer briefs.

"So, you're still *questing*, huh?" he asks.

I sit up and put the book in my lap. "Yeah. Still *questing*," I say.

"Well, what are you questing for? What are you looking for?"

"The truth, Sam. Just the truth."

"Have you read the Bible any?" he asks, his voice becoming more serious.

"Sure. I've read the Bible plenty."

"All the way through?" he asks.

"I've read it enough," I tell him. "We went to the same churches growing up. You know I'm familiar with the text."

"But do you believe it?"

"The Bible? Yeah, I believe it. I believe that Jesus died and was resurrected and walked on water and all that stuff. Yeah, I believe it. But I still have questions, questions the Bible doesn't answer."

"So are you not Christian anymore?"

"I don't find labels all that necessary, Sam. I think they confuse the issue."

"But it says in the Bible, Jace: 'Thou shall put no other gods before me.'"

"Okay. And who says I'm doing that?"

"Well, you're looking outside of Christianity, outside of the Bible, which means you're considering other ideas to be possibly credible."

“So I think Allah might be interesting. I think Buddha might be interesting. Who’s to say that they aren’t God, too, just with a different name?”

“But it says, ‘No other gods before me.’”

“But what if they’re the same God, just with a different name?” I ask again, raising my voice slightly.

“Well, they’re not.”

“Who the hell are you to say?” I ask, raising my voice louder. I quiet myself. “I mean, it sounds to me like you’re jumping to conclusions about something you don’t know, which is dangerous, Sam. It’s not a logical way to go about things.”

“I’ve looked into it, Jace,” he says. “It’s not like I’m saying this stuff without having researched it.”

“Me too. I’ve looked into all of this myself. And I still have questions — questions you can’t answer and questions the Bible can’t answer. If it’s working for you, great. Keep at it. But I need something else.”

He tries awhile longer to convince me that I’m barking up the wrong tree. I get the impression he isn’t really listening to me.

“Well, Jace,” Sam says, “I’m always glad to talk with you about this stuff. Listen, tomorrow night, Memet and I are going to a club. I think you should come along. It’ll be fun.”

“Yeah, I’ll go.”

He turns off the lights and we go to sleep.

In the morning, I wake at seven when Sam leaves for the office. I try to get back to sleep, but I can’t. I get up and shower and put on clothes and eat a bowl of Cheerios. I was happy to find organic milk in the fridge, and Sam left some cash for me on the

kitchen counter with a sticky note with my name on it. I leave the apartment not long after nine. Outside, the city's morning air smells of garbage and engine exhaust and urine. I find my way back to the subway, and on my way there, I people-watch families and groups of teenagers and business professionals and many others. And I look up at the tall buildings. The sky is overcast.

At the subway station, I go through a turnstile and find my platform, which is crowded. As I wait for the train, there is a tall, thin black man with expansive dreadlocks standing next to me, and he's wearing a bulky brown fur coat. It soon becomes apparent to me that this man is smoking a joint, which he cups in his hand and puts in his coat pocket when he's not taking puffs. I think about asking him if he knows where I can buy some, as it smells like good weed, but I don't.

I cram into the crowded subway car, having to stand and hold a pole. At the next stop, the car becomes fuller, and people around me complain about the crowd. I get off the subway at Union Square. I go up to the street and walk about ten blocks south to Washington Square Park, and I wander around the park for a while. I stand and watch a painter paint an abstract scene of the park and surrounding buildings. He's painting on a canvas that's on an easel. I tell him I like the painting, and he gives me a curt "Thanks".

I smoke a cigarette and then walk into an NYU bookstore. I pick up and flip through a giftbook about penises, which is on one of the bookstore's main displays, and the book informs me of how my penis-size compares with the world average. I leave the bookstore and walk down a street that runs along the park's edge. Not far from the park, I find what I'm looking for: a head shop.

I enter the cramped shop and talk with the man at the counter, who is from the

Dominican Republic, he tells me. He asks me where I'm from. I tell him South Carolina, and he tells me he loves the South because that's where Elvis came from. The shop's selection isn't any better than what I can find back home. I leave and go next door to a gyro place, and I order a gyro at the counter.

"How about this weather, huh?" someone asks from behind me in a thick New York accent.

I turn around and see a big, round, young black man in a long brown leather coat and baggy blue jeans and a Pittsburgh Steelers beanie. This guy is talking to me. I'm the only other person in here besides the cook who took my order.

"Well, I'm from South Carolina," I tell him. "So it's colder than what I'm used to."

"South Carolina, huh?" he asks. He steps behind the counter and takes a piece of flatbread and puts it in a toaster oven. "So, what's up? You lookin' for that good New York City herb?"

"Um, yeah, actually," I say. "Just a small amount."

"Aight. But I ain't got it. My friend does and he's working close by. Why don't you get your gyro and come with me, okay?"

I agree, and my gyro is brought out to me, which I then pay for. The guy takes his flatbread from the toaster oven and tells me to come on. He says his name is Cosmos. He eats his flatbread quickly, and I take a few bites of my gyro, which is all right. We walk to a produce store half a block away, on the corner. We go to the back of the very busy store, past all sorts of fruits and vegetables, and Cosmos talks with a Hispanic-looking worker who is wearing a stained white apron over his work clothes and carrying a box of bananas on his shoulder.

"No luck, my friend," Cosmos tells me. "But don't worry. I'll find you some

Buddha.”

Outside of the produce store, Cosmos says that another one of his friends has some but that he won't be available for an hour and a half. He tells me to come back then and meet him at the leather store next to the gyro place. He tells me that the weed is Purple Haze and that it costs thirty-five dollars a gram. I ask him where the best place is to buy glass for smoking, and he gives me directions to “the best head shop in the city.”

The head shop is close by and I find it easily. There are large, intricate glass pieces on display in the shop's front windows. And inside, every wall is lined with shelves of smoking devices, many like nothing I had ever seen except online. There are bongos and pipes and steamrollers and bubblers and chillums, and there's even a chubbler. An Indian-looking man waits behind the counter with who appears to be his teenage daughter. I find a cool glass bowl that is small and purple and blue and decorated with swirling orange latticino and priced reasonably at twenty-five bucks, and I buy some rolling papers and a pack of Parliament Lights. The cigarettes cost nine dollars. Before the Indian-looking man wraps up my bowl, he tells me that it is very strong, that it is triple blown, and then he takes the bowl and throws it on his store's hardwood floor. It bounces around, but it does not break. I pick it up and give it back to him, and he wraps it and puts it in a bag with my other articles and hands me the bag.

I leave the head shop and walk back toward the leather shop and on the way stop into a record store, an electronics store, and a café. I drink a coffee at the café and wait there until I'm supposed to meet up with Cosmos.

Inside the leather store, a narrow store with the unsubtle aroma of a cramped space overflowing with leather jackets and leather pants and leather belts and leather

suitcases and a bunch of other leather shit, I find Cosmos near the back.

“Hey, Jason,” Cosmos says. “I’m with a customer. Meet me out front in a few.” He resumes attending to the customer, and I go out front and smoke a cigarette. He comes out after about five minutes.

“Aight, my man,” he says and raises his hand to slap mine, which I extend. In my extended hand is the thirty-five dollars. Our hands clasp, and his takes the money while mine takes the two miniature Baggies that were in his hand. I put the Baggies in my coat pocket. “Enjoy the city, my friend. Until next time.”

“Thanks, Cosmos,” I say.

He turns around and walks back into the leather store.

I walk to a Starbucks at the next street corner and wait in a long line for the restroom. When I get in, I put down the commode’s lid and have a seat and break up the weed on my pant leg. The weed is very good, but I’m pretty sure it’s not Purple Haze. It seems to be more than a gram, though. I try to roll a joint, but I’m nervous, my palms and fingers are sweaty, and I’m taking too long. Someone knocks on the door.

“One second!” I yell.

I put the weed back in the Baggie and stuff everything in my pockets and flush the toilet and leave the restroom and the Starbucks. I walk across the street to another Starbucks and wait in another lengthy line for the restroom, and when I get into the restroom, I hurriedly roll the joint. I leave the Starbucks and check my map of the city. I get back on the subway, and then I get off the subway again and get back on the street and look around for a discreet place to smoke while walking to my next destination: Alex Grey’s Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, a New Age art gallery. I don’t find a suitable spot for smoking before I arrive at the five-story redbrick building that contains the Chapel on

its fourth floor.

I walk into a parking lot next to the building, and the parking lot is surrounded by buildings on three sides and a fence with a gate on the fourth and filled with cars. I unfold my map on a minivan's hood and act like I'm trying to figure out how to get somewhere. The minivan is backed into its space, and I'm facing the street so that I can see if anyone is walking by. I light the joint and a cigarette and smoke the joint to a nub and throw it under the minivan.

I walk into the building and up some dingy flights of stairs until I get to the gallery's front door and walk into an open reception area with a wall of windows looking out toward the street. I don't see anyone around, and I find a small room with some paintings hanging on the walls. Only one of the paintings is by Alex Grey, and it's good but not that big. Some of the art is marked for sale. I leave the small room and am frustrated that I came all this way to see this art that's not by Alex Grey, and I'm about to leave when I notice a large black double door. And I had already passed by the double door, but I had somehow missed it.

Anyway, through the double door is the actual Chapel of Sacred Mirrors, and there is not an attendant present to take the five-dollar admission mentioned on the website. But I show myself around the gallery, which is essentially split in two. One side has a few rooms displaying many of Alex Grey's more notable paintings, as well as a sizable sculpture of a four-headed deity, and the other half is a warmly lit, long rectangular room with wooden floors and, on the walls, the Sacred Mirrors — a series of life-size paintings that are the artist's highly detailed renderings of the human form's anatomical, bioenergetic, and spiritual constitutions. Each painting is set in its own elaborate, ten-foot-tall frame, and I have seen all of these paintings many times in books

and on the internet. In person, however, my reaction to them is one of deep catharsis that verges on nausea. There is a guy sitting on the floor in the rectangular room, and he is wearing a flowing maroon robe and hitting a big metal gong with a mallet every so often. On my way out, I buy a poster from the now-present attendant.

I leave the Chapel still stoned, and I walk to a subway, which I take back to Washington Square. And I walk from there to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The walk takes me over an hour. It is very cold, but the temperature doesn't bother me.

I walk through the Met for a few hours. It's rather amazing, I guess. I'm looking at all of these ancient artifacts and renowned pieces of art, and I can't help but feel underwhelmed. I know that there is a ton of history behind it all, but I find myself having to force my appreciation. Maybe that's the process. Maybe it's supposed to develop. Or maybe this is all bullshit. Nobody working here could answer that question for me most likely, so I don't ask around here.

The last place in the Met I visit is the gallery of modern art. I keep trying to enjoy the couple of Picasso paintings they have, but all I get is the same nausea I encountered at the Chapel of Sacred Mirrors. I consider that it could be the gyro I ate earlier.

I leave the Met at five and Sam calls my cell phone. He says that he won't be back until close to eight and that Jah's out for the evening with some family that came in town. I'll have the apartment to myself for a few hours.

I walk back to Normandie Court, which is about a mile away. When I get up to Sam's apartment, I go into his bedroom and close the door and open his window and pack some weed into my new pipe and sit in a chair and prop my feet up on the windowsill and smoke while looking out at the city at almost totally nighttime, there on the 27th floor, feeling the cold wind blow over me and fill the bedroom with the cold. I

finish the bowl and pack another with the remainder of my weed. After a bit, I spray some Febreeze that I find under the kitchen sink and sit back in the same spot and read *Ulysses* for a while while I let the bedroom air out, very high. Eventually, I close the window and I get a Sprite and continue reading.

Sam surprises me shortly after seven. I'm still very high, but I hide it well.

"They let me go a little early," he says, stripping to his boxers, us in his room. "I had to bust my ass, though. We're meeting Memet for sushi at eight thirty."

"Cool, man. Sounds great," I say.

"You can borrow some of my clothes. A nice coat and a sweater. Get you lookin' presentable, ya slob." He laughs. I laugh, too. "Hey, and a friend of mine from high school is in town. He's gonna meet us at dinner and come out to the club. His name's Josh. You'll probably remember him."

"Probably. I'm not into going to clubs much, you know."

"Oh, I know. I know. We'll have fun. Memet's a blast. I can't wait for you to meet him." Sam is trying on shirts, checking himself out in the mirror.

"I'm sure we'll have fun. Just don't expect me to go crazy," I tell him.

"You? No way. That's the last thing I'd expect out of you!"

He laughs again, and I do, too.

I go to the bathroom and splash some water on my face and brush my teeth, and I borrow some of Sam's clothes, including some dress shoes. Sam says the club is kind of chic. It's called Lotus.

We take a cab to the sushi place and meet with Memet and Josh. Josh is the first there and Memet arrives after Sam and me. Josh is a typical Southern white recent college graduate. He went to Auburn and is about to move to Nashville and work as a

landscape architect.

And Memet is Turkish and my brother's age. He's sharply dressed, as is my brother, and Josh and I are only averagely dressed-up, although Josh has a clean-cut look. Memet and Sam interned at Merrill Lynch together.

I get a tofu plate and they all get sushi rolls. And I get a Sapporo and they get some drinks. They all talk about work and basic stuff. I tell them a little about school.

We all get more drinks with the meal and are having good conversation by the time we finish and get the check, which my brother pays for. Sam and Josh and I catch a cab to the club, and Memet takes a separate cab to go pick up some girls he knows, nearby. We all enter the club forty-five minutes later, and I've put my hair in a ponytail, at Sam's suggestion. When we get in, we walk downstairs to where a DJ is playing and a few groups of people are talking and dancing and drinking. Sam and Josh go somewhere, and Memet runs off with the girl he's dating, leaving behind her two girlfriends with me. So I'm left with these two girls I've just met. I've already let down my hair, and I can tell that the girls aren't interested in talking with me. I see that the bathrooms are next to the stairway leading up to the exit and the main dance floor and bar.

I walk up the stairs to the main floor and find Sam, and he asks what I'm drinking. I say tequila. A lot more people are coming into the club. Sam and I shoot the tequila and bite lime wedges, and then he walks to the dance floor. I wander off, walking around aimlessly, not about to dance.

I walk paths through the milling crowds, by the bar, through the dance floor, back downstairs, and through an upstairs balcony with couches. I keep walking around until I run into Sam again, and he buys us two Heinekens. And then he goes back to the dance

floor and continues dancing with this girl. Memet is talking with his girlfriend at the bar. I don't see her two friends anywhere.

Memet waves me over. "Crowded, huh?" he yells over the blaring dance music. The club is getting packed.

"I can barely move around!" I yell back.

The bartender brings Memet a shot.

"Welcome to New York City," he says and gives me a big smile. He clinks my Heineken bottle and gulps the shot, and I take a swig. I walk around some more and quietly observe everyone as I finish my beer. I walk outside and smoke. I can really feel the cold now. I call my girlfriend while I'm smoking.

"Hey!" she says. "What's up? Are you having fun?"

"Yeah. I'm at this club right now."

"That's cool. Um, I'm out with some friends. You wanna just call me tomorrow when you get back?"

"Alright. I will."

"Alright. Talk to you then. Love ya."

"Love you, too."

And I go back inside and find myself only kind-of buzzed, walking aimlessly again. I've been at the club almost two hours somehow. I walk through the loaded dance floor and past the crowded bar, and I walk back upstairs and see Josh talking with a guy who looks like him. I go back downstairs to the bottom level to use the restroom.

There is a line to the men's restroom, and I wait my turn. When I finally get inside the small bathroom, which has two urinals and a toilet, someone is peeing in the sink, and someone is peeing in the trashcan. I wait for a urinal, and I go back upstairs

when I'm finished.

I look for Sam. I search the bar, but there I only find strangers downing drinks and talking without listening. On the dance floor, I see a vibrating mass of impassioned faces and desperate bodies. I see two young white girls wearing skintight jeans and tight low-cut shirts. One has blond hair and the other has dark-red hair. They are dancing sexually with one another, their hands on one another's bodies. They are bringing their faces into each other's necks. A small group of people is around the two girls, watching, and one of the men in the group leans into the man next to him and says something. And then the man that said something reaches his hand down the back of the blond-haired girl's tight jeans, halfway to his elbow. He swipes upward, bringing his hand out of the girl's pants, and he puts the same hand under his nose and deeply sniffs. The friend next to him pulls his friend's hand to his own face and has a sniff, too. The girls keep dancing, as if nothing happened.

I pull my eyes away from the spectacle. Many people are smoking in the club now. I see one guy light a cigarette and exclaim to his friend: "See! Nobody fucking cares!" I light one, as well.

I look around the dance floor again and find my brother with the same girl he was dancing with. He sees me and says something to the girl, and then he walks over to me, all smiles, obviously pretty drunk.

"I'm out, man," I say. "Thanks for everything, dude."

"You're welcome, man," he says. "Glad to have a chance to go out with you. This girl I'm with's great, man — really cool. But hey, I'll see you in the morning. Here's some cash for a cab." He hands me a twenty from his wallet.

I leave the club and start walking, and I decide to find my way back using the

subway and save the money Sam gave me. On my way to the subway station, I pass by a handful of homeless people asleep on the sidewalk. I get to the platform, and only two other people are waiting for the train. It's about two fifteen.

When I get back to the apartment, Jah's door is shut and all of the lights are off. I drink a glass of water and brush my teeth and lie down on the air mattress and quickly fall asleep after setting the alarm on my cell phone for 6:30 a.m.

The alarm wakes me and I get up. I take a fast shower and pack my things. Sam comes out of his room, in his boxers.

"I don't think I'm making it to church today," he says. "She was a fun girl. I think I'll take her out this week."

"Awesome," I say.

"Man, it was great to see you."

"It's always great to see you, Sam."

We hug tightly.

And he gives me money for the cab. I catch a cab, and the cabbie is a nice old black man, whom I chat with. He tells me that not many passengers talk so openly with him. He says I'm a good man for doing it. Inside the airport, I go to a restroom and take the brown paper bag containing my glass pipe out of my bookbag and roll it up and fixedly situate it inside of my boxer briefs. I carefully walk through security, my baggy cargo pants providing enough spare fabric to lessen the bulge, and then I go into another restroom and take the paper bag with my pipe in it out of my pants and put it back in my bookbag.

When the plane takes off, the skies are relatively clear. I thankfully have a window seat, and I look out the window at the city. During the trip back, I sleep some

and read *Ulysses*.