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18 May 75

Dearest Jo -

Will you accept a somewhat goofy letter? I sprained my back and they've given me some sort of Fort Detrick surplus that is supposed to relax the tendons---but it seems to be even more effective in producing strange relaxed lacunae in the brain. And yet your letter just came and I have an insuperable desire to say hello and wamble on at you, and also to clear up a couple loose ends left dangling somewhere back.

Re Chiang Kai Shek---Oh baby, how young you are, how old I am. I guess you really don't recall those years---decades---in which the American political right was clamoring about the "loss" of China and how if only we had thrown our weight behind the Nationalists and "unleashed" Chiang and his mythical forces poised to charge back and annihilate the wicked Commies...And then when the Quemoy-Matsu islands thing came up we did send up the go signal to unleash...And he emitted a faint plop followed by a resounding and permanent silence. One of my generation's great jokes.

Or maybe you were kidding me? If not, it's one of the great tragi-comic episodes you should tuck away, another in that fifty-year history of occupational therapy known as American foreign policy.

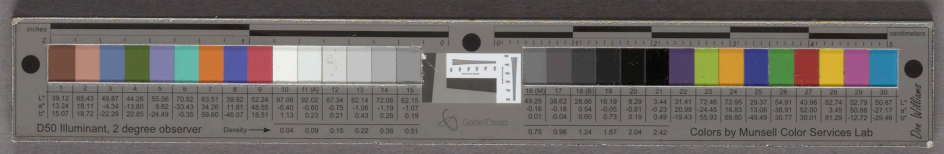
(I call it fifty years because for me it dates from the League of Nations diaster and our absurd and psychotic refusal to "recognise" the new regime in Russia, as though we could somehow make 200 million people go away.)

You must have had a truly miserable time reading that sex-war junk. A powerful depressant, brave of you to undertake it and let all that mess in your head. One of the things you need is some relief, some refuge-time from the crap of life. You're right to flee to good writing, it seems to have a healing quality for you. I was looking about my shelves for something that might have resorative value for you, things, that is, which are both pertinent to life and yet would not grate on flaming sore spots. And well-written.

Here's three I came up with ~~tkxxx~~ which I strongly urge you to get and save as protective talismans. First, the current LIVES OF A CELL by Lewis Thomas---if you haven't already. Guaranteed to switch the wounded mind to new and suggestive tracks. Second, the Penguin ATLAS OF ANCIENT HISTORY. Compact, divinely illustrated.(To me, was a revelation---I always thought the Seleucid Kingdom was a myth, like Atlantis.) There is also a Medieval Atlas companion, but both are hard to get---one of those Penguin things mysteriously not for U.S.A. The last may surprise you---William James. If you have not read his VARIETIES OF RELIGOUS EXPERIENCE you are---he says diffidently---basically uneducated. Also you have missed a most marvellous exciting shock. Indescribable, no preconceptions apply. And of course the prose is, well, up to your standards. I've been lately reading his ON PSYCHICAL RESEARCH---a marvellous account of the whole damn thing with the medium Mrs. Piper and the British Society for Psychical Research---Diogenes with a calm white light exploring the greatest can of worms known to man.

A last appetiser-tidbit worth your time is the paperback SUPER-NATURE now on the stands. By Lyall Watson. Not well written and not to be uncritically believed but so chock full of half-credible trails to cosmic whoopee that it refreshes the mind.

You are, you know, very deeply immured in the humanist half of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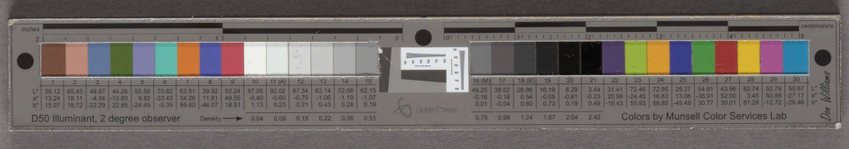
Snow's two cultures, and I offer you the suggestion that it might be protective and life-enhancing for you to build yourself some bridges, claim a little enclave over on the impersonal-science side. Maybe you do this more than I realise. But I suspect you come to it more through the hot human stuff, conventional psych or anthropology, maybe stuff like Desmond Morris, Ardrey, Tiger, etc. What I'm suggesting is cool, longer-range material having no instant applicability to your human predicament. Insights at a level below and beyond. I really mean, a refuge.

(If this is quite inapplicable, forgive it. It's been a strong theme in my life, I've been in such churned-up depressions that all I could read was math. The fact that nothing human is alien to one can be a threat, and the better part of valor under certain circumstances can be to run like hell.)

Hey, descending abruptly to the all-too-human level of one author, inexperienced variety, talking to another, superior variety. A couple of points about that stupid MAMA COME HOME, if you really are taking it seriously. Of course you're right about the having-to-pair-off business, at that point I was simply too green and conventional to question it. (And, as I said, my basic wonder was whether such a woman could accept any man.) And maybe I have a weakness for pairings. But one thing you are wrong about, probably from simple life inexperience---the conduct of that alien crew, who were specifically described as like a tramp freighter, does not represent the home matriarchy. Any more than the conduct of the tramp crews I've seen in Port Said represented the official policies of their home governments. To be sure, the home culture was a slave-owning one, but there is no indication that the lot of the men---who were, after all, quite physically inferior---was any worse than the plight of women in thousands of earth cultures who regard themselves as enlightened and humane. (Ancient Greece, anybody?) And, by the way, male supremacy has often been enforced by bone-breaking or worse. (Check Chip's remark on Kikuyu mutilation.) And the Bosphorus, as Rebecca West says, is lined with female corpses. But that's beside the point; this particular freighter crew were just the usual gang of toughs, who happened to look like what we think of as "wholesome" types. Finding themselves lionised, they stayed on their best behavior for awhile in public. They didn't mess around with the little local dignitaries, they looked around for "nobody's property," un-owned people---which are very typically found in parks. Human freighter crews don't rape the chief's wives---until they have the situation sized up a lot better; they finish the formalities and then go for some action down in the slums or no-man's-lands. Women nobody owns. I pictured those aliens as having trouble believing, at first, that the set-up was as it seemed.

You see, it really was a very simple story. Your suggestions would have made a much better one, which was far beyond me at the time. Oh---but one more thing. Tillie didn't defect from the giantesses for love of Max, really, you know. Maybe a little; but mostly because, if you think of it, it would have been a fairly lonely, chilly, forever kind of business. Alien is alien. And she wasn't, you know, anywhere near as profoundly alienated as my women who did go away. (I mean, Tillie had even taken sides in a human war, etc.) Ruth and her kind had had it with the whole, entire scene. Tillie had only a "mad dream" ---by the way, I hated that line too. Ruth had a bone-deep, totally sane intention. And yeah, it wasn't "masters", a la Silverberg.

Oh god, if you can stand some more----about Ruth's "concerts," apparently normal life, etc. Firstly, that was conversation she was making with the male narrator. And second---I really drew her partly from life, you know; my "Ruth" does divert herself with concerts, etc. What else was there for her to do, in those days? You read Brecht, baby, after all. In prison ~~you~~ one tame toads.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So you can't really be sure she doesn't enjoy ordinary music, or even go to Chinese firepot dinners with her decorous pals. She is not, you know, in overt despair. She is simply enduring a life-sentence, Thoreau's "quiet desperation," so deep she probably has never faced it until the incredible, crazy chink opened in the sky.

And of course here my age does show, because that lot of women are a vanishing breed. Ten years ago they were everywhere in this town; today it's changing. But the government still has herds of them, and particularly the security-classified parts of government. Lives so conventional they are almost caricatures. Have you ever considered what it must be like to live in the awareness that one must never, never jiggle the lines on a polygraph?

I've seen them.

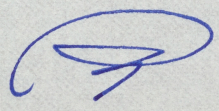
Odd thought: You know how often certain white middle-class culture traits are preserved among "assimilated" blacks long after the whites have started losing them? Funny if the Ruth I should have drawn was black.

....Let's see. (Pause for discovering that the back-curative seems to be also a vigorous emetic.). ...A lot of yesses due here, yes about the great Golden Schlong syndrome---god that was funny---yes I can see the incredible bind of being in a body that is damn near state property, not to mention any hoodlum's; yes I think you are right about the sex-war covert plot, women are so dangerous. I personally don't really know what everyone is so scared of. (I know what I'm scared of---everything, starting with the second law of thermodynamics. But I guess I don't count.) The "dangerous" part of women only appeared to me as Mother, who could and did scare man-eating lions anyway. Outside of that I first kept falling in hopeless love with heart-breakingly beautiful, doomed, delicate, and usually appallingly rich girls, who kept being whisked away to dreadful fates, typically without my even having been able to get a message through. That went on quite a while. After that I guess I'll draw a tenuous veil, during which our hero took refuge in unending mountains of hard work and had many pleasant friendships with co-workers but kept the heart in a bullet-proof bottle. From which he emerged as, well, everybody's kindly uncle. An old-fashioned sort of thing, I guess. And yes, I imagine you are right, that I should do more from within. By the way, you'll see a "within-er" male story from me in Vonda's AURORA. Probably get thrown out of the club for that one. It features three men given drugs to see what they are really like. But not the modern sort of thing I believe you mean, which probably has been done better than I can in Feigen-Fasteau's THE MALE MACHINE. But there is, to my mind, some "within" missing there too.

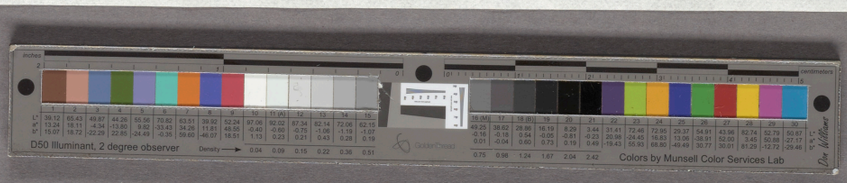
And yes I can see about the chopping act to get men's attention. Like the story about the mule.

The stomach is forcing me to say goodbye, doubtless to no ones regret. And here I wanted to chat with you about Carol Emshwiller whose JOY I was just reading. Ulp. Ah well.

Thanks for that good letter, my ESP hard wishes for your health & all go with this---



Just reread NOBODY'S HOME. HOW DAMN GOOD. ALL THE SUPERB LITTLE TOUCHES — THROWN AWAY.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