

SAN FELIPE, GECKOS, AND MESCAL

“Finally, there is the most basic
desire: To make some sort of contact
with the rest of humanity.”

Dr. Roland Furst

It happened this way:

Edited Journal Entries for the week of
7/15-7/20

Sunday 9:00 pm

Nothing is happening. No prospects, I
mean. Whenever my prospects are this
non-existent I find myself on the fold-out

Chip Erikson

bed, drunk, watching *Jai-Lai* on the Brazilian station.

(Last week I had a dream that if you chewed Cheetos fast enough, then inhaled the dust, you could *exhale* it through your nostrils; thereby sending smoke signals through the atmosphere to those you need to contact, but don't want to call on the telephone)

I'm on the fold-out, drinking Pabst, and inhaling Cheeto dust. Earlier, I wrote these lines:

etched
over the terrain
of your
boundless angst;
an extinguished spark
you named "love"
but couldn't
speak

I wrote it for Gab. I write everything for her, which, I guess, gives me an unlimited range of possibilities for material.

10:00 pm

No prospects. It feels like an over-confident, carnivorous rat is sneaking up on me, knowing that I'm mentally, physically, and spiritually incapable of fighting back. I haven't written

anything for two weeks now (except the above) and rent is due in a week. I *know* I could've gotten a job at the petting zoo next door if I didn't have these goddamn tattoos.

I didn't start writing tonight because I couldn't find a fucking pen. I think there's one under my fold-out couch, but I'm not moving the couch tonight. By the time I found this pencil I forgot most of the story I was planning to write. I remember there was an obese baby and a woman that looked like Jacqueline Onassis, but I can't remember how I was going to tie them together. *Fuck!* I'll start it tomorrow...

10:15 pm

I have to get out of here. Inactivity, stagnation... my essential motivating processes have come to a screeching halt.

Kerouac's characters never really found anything on the road, but that wasn't the point: It's the moving that counts. Motion, somehow, restores one's balance. I tried doing the log-roll around my apartment once (*stomach to back, stomach to back, reverse before you hit the coffee table! back to stomach, back to stomach...*) but I had to stop when my downstairs neighbors started banging on their ceiling with something metallic.

The theme of tonight's journal: *Motion restores harmony...*

Special note: I've lived in Reseda for twenty-seven years, which also happens to be the amount of time I've been alive.

It just occurred to me that *Reseda* is a Spanish word. Loosely translated, I think it means "no escape."

11:35 pm

I think I blew some Cheeto dust out of my nose just now, though I might've been imagining it through this interminable, but pleasant, "Blue Ribbon" stupor. Whatever the case, it wasn't enough for a smoke signal. There's a certain amount of Cheeto mush collecting in my lungs, and I'm vaguely aware that I might be committing a slow, strange suicide.

The phone just started ringing.

Fate, coincidence, and irony all scare the shit out of me, so there's no way I'll answer it.

Besides, it sounds like an evil ring. In the space of six of these evil rings, I imagine what an evil phonecall would be like, so I mentally organize a partial list while staring at my black princess phone:

- 1) Someone has made a *videotape* of me engaged in some nefarious act, and now they want blackmail money.
- 2) My former second-grade homeroom teacher is now a vicious serial killer, and she's killing her way through the '74 yearbook.
- 3) My lithium prescription has run out,

and they want the remaining pills back.

4) A relative is calling, and I can't, for the life of me, remember who the person is.

Only the last two seem plausible, though many of my neighbors *do* own video cameras.

The suspense is killing me. Plus, if it *is* something negative, at least it's something...

I pounce on the phone like a mad-dog, ready to confront whatever dark force is there:

"Hello."

"It's Gab. Why didn't you answer the phone?"

"I wasn't sure if I should."

"Making one of your *lists* again?"

"A short one."

Gabriella's voice is rough. When it's bad, like when she's hungover or drunk, it can actually make you wince.

“Did you get that job?”

Her larynx must be forged out of rusted tin. I ponder this for a split second, then answer:

“No.”

“Then you can come with me. Pack something, I’ll be right there.”

This is the essence of Gab: Always on the move. I was lucky she called this time. She usually just drives over and throws clumps of dirt at my window to get my attention.

Monday 1:23 am (in the Cadillac)

*Curious, and curiouiser...*we’re in Gab’s ’71 black Caddy, hurtling down the 405. Our destination: San Felipe, Mexico. I’m curled up on the Cad’s shredded, black vinyl seat while writing this. Gab has a nude Ken-doll suspended from her rearview mirror...swaying, swaying, like a miniature scaffold above the car’s dashboard...

She got to my house an hour ago (actually, closer to 12:00). Walked in with two forty ounce bottles of Mickey’s Malt Liquor. One, hers, was three-quarters empty. She noticed the heavy layer of Cheeto dust blanketing the fold-out.

“What’s been going on in here?”

“Just — I don’t know — experimenting with different carbohydrates.”

I wanted to explain the process to her, how (with the help of a popular snack food) I could communicate with her on another level...but she didn’t seem interested.

“Hmm.”

Then, without pause, she was on to the next idea:

“We need money.”

We’ve always assumed a sort of tacit partnership. I could not tell you when we started this habit, though.

“What’s the plan?”

I knew she had something vaguely worked out. She chugged from the bottle before speaking.

“Lizards. We catch these *gecko* lizards in Mexico and bring them back here. This guy over on Sherman Way owns a pet store and will buy them from us.”

“Do we know how and where to catch lizards?”

“They’re fucking *lizards* — I should hope we could just out-smart them. We get *twenty dollars a-piece for them*. We’ll find a way.”

I didn’t then, and I don’t *now* believe that the lizards were actually *Geckos*. They were some other type. But still, this sounded like one of Gab’s more plausible plans. And I had no more money or prospects. I did, however, like the idea of being on the move. Being with her didn’t hurt matters, either. I packed a bag.

4:20 am (Cadillac time)

We’ve made it through most of San Diego. It seems hotter down here, even at this time.

Here’s a partial list on Gabriella, in case I haven’t written one in here before: 1) She’s tall and angular, with lean, tight muscles — she reminds me of a lightweight boxer, without the scar tissue, 2) There’s a tattoo on her back (a demonic-looking parakeet with a dagger clenched in its beak) and a *tribal* tat around her left arm, 3) She possesses an obscure, dark sense of humor that occasionally borders on the exotic and dangerous, and 4) She’s running with wreckless, inexhaustible abandon towards *something*, though I’d be hard-pressed to identify what that something is.

7:45am

Gab blazed past the border patrol and I was worried they were going to pull us over. Then again, they're not worried about what goes *in* to Mexico.

It's already hot. Gab took off her t-shirt and is driving in her black bra. I haven't met many girls who do this, but, oddly, it seems okay when she does it. Also, she drives with her left boot resting on the dash, like she's constantly trying to push the seat back. *She hates to be cooped up in the car.*

8:30am

Fucking hot. Waves of heat, like evaporating liquid glass, are rising out of the pitted asphalt, rising towards the pale, sun-bleached sky. The sun sucks the color out of everything down here. It also makes things move slower: the people, the cars, the shimmering heat waves from the asphalt...

8:30am (cont.)

Gab is sober now, and it's making her antsy. We had breakfast in Rosarito and the tortillas and carne asada sucked all the booze out of her stomach (usually she doesn't eat to prevent this sort of thing from happening). She told the waitress that she "puked all over the bathroom" and the

waitress let us leave without paying. We had some kind of strange conversation during the meal, only part of which I remember. She started with:

“What would it be like if you and I
were boyfriend/girlfriend?”

I felt a bubble form in my stomach. Maybe it was an alien, and I'd soon be on my back, on the table, thrashing wildly as it ate its way through my gut.

“It might...alter our friendship.”

Couldn't believe I said that. There's something in our relationship, a symbiosis, an organic process that seems to be in continuous evolution; whatever it is, it defies a simple break-fast-time explanation. She, too, couldn't fit any words with the concept:

“Sometimes I think about you and
I just want to reach out and...grab
you by the face or something.”

She reached across the table and squeezed my cheek, hard. Salsa squirted out of the corner of my mouth, and speckled her sunglasses which were lying on the table.

Her eyebrows arch when she's frustrated, and her voice, I don't know...*huskifies*.

“I just...ahhhh! This is so fucking hard to explain. Let’s go.”

Odd conversation, but it somehow addressed something we constantly hint at...

9:40 am

We’ll be in San Felipe within the hour. The Cad rumbles over the scalding asphalt, a dusty black bullet train with its two half-naked occupants (I’ve taken off my shirt, and Gab is down to her boxer shorts and black bra). I wonder what the people on the side of road think of us — is this the image that entices them to go to America?

We stopped at a liquor store and bought some Mescal. The guy in the store was surprised to hear her speak perfect Spanish. I guess they’re not used to twenty-five year old Mexican-American girls with bleach-blonde hair and tattoos.

9:55 (outside San Felipe)

We're working on the Mescal. It tastes like bad gin that was processed in grainy dirt. The worm at the bottom is fat, completely saturated with alcohol.

The first time we tried Mescal — one night we were walking the streets of Reseda and decided to drink an entire bottle before going home — Gabriella told me about it:

"The Mexicans say that if you drink enough of it, and you have a good heart, you can actually see people's souls."

I had no idea what to say to this, but I wanted to be a part of the conversation.

"Souls of living or dead people?"

She thought for a minute, then fished the worm out of the bottle, bit off half, and handed the other half to me.

"Is there a difference?"

She chewed her worm carefully, I swallowed mine like an oyster.

"I guess not."

San Felipe (notes for entire day, written on Tues. night)

What a day! This is *it*, where everything comes together. Gab and I saw our future today and for once it wasn't bleak. Realizing financial stability is a visionary experience of sorts: Visionary in the sense that you can finally look at yourself without cringing.

The lizards wanted to be captured. That's the only way I can explain it. The events of the day are best organized in a list:

Our San Felipe Gecko Adventure List:

1) We arrived at the outskirts of town. Gab parked near a small hill, reasoning that the lizards would be sunning themselves there.

2) She was right. I think she's some sort of reptile divining rod.

3) Gab got behind the bushes/rocks with a stick, and literally beat the lizards out of their hiding places. When they scurried out, I was waiting on the other side with a shoe box and towel. I transferred the lizards from the box to an ice-chest we had prepared with dirt and small bowls of water.

4) We started drinking Mescal at 3:00. By 4:00 we decided that we should use *fire* to maximize our reign of terror, so I siphoned gas from the Cadillac; eventually, I managed to

create a raging, though short-lived inferno over the dirt and rocks. (captured ten lizards via this method)

5) I watched Gab march over the blazing earth in her black jeans and tank-top, with her multitude of earrings and bracelets reflecting sharp light from the Mexican sun; marching like some kind of eternal, punk-influenced Nazi stormtrooper, dripping sweat, lighting fires, pillaging the vast Gecko village with her fierce intensity.

6) What kind of relationship can we have? There's no way I can even partially absorb her spirit. There's too much, it would overlap my own.

7) We caught 37 lizards. If Gab is right about the price we'll get, everything is set for me. Food, rent, bills: My valley existence will again be sustained.

8) These are not Geckos.

9) We don't know how to care for these lizards, so we've decided to return to the states in the morning.

Late night, Tuesday (written on Wed.)

When we eventually slept we did so on the ground, outside the Cadillac. We had a campfire, a huge one, it was like being in an episode of Bonanza.

The lizards were in the trunk, in the lizard-chest. They're very strange looking — enormous, lidless eyes, clawed feet, iridescent green...they have all the qualities necessary to be little superheros...*look ma! It's Geckoman!*

The first Mescal bottle was empty and we were working on the second. I had an incredibly strange experience. It happened during our campfire conversation, which went as follows:

"This is our new business, Nick. We're the next great entrepreneurs. If this were legal, we'd eventually be in magazines and entertainment/news shows like *Hardcopy*."

"Yeah."

Something, I'm still not sure what, fell out of my mouth and landed in my lap. I was too dizzy to look down.

"You're drunk."

She put her boot next to the fire. The flames reflected off the black leather, making little orange light coronas dance and wiggle over the legs of her jeans. They looked like little ghosts, or parts of a larger one. I needed, somehow, to convey this image:

"I think I see your soul."

"My *soul*?"

And the orange wasn't just reflecting off her boot anymore, it was seeping out from beneath her clothing, glowing through the porous fabric of her jeans and tank-top like light from some kind of super-charged jack o'lantern.

"Nick, are you okay? Why don't you lie down...?"

As she spoke, orange light seeped out of her mouth and began swirling slowly around her body and head.

I kept my eyes on her as I lay back, trying not to hit the ground too hard. Something was coming out of my mouth, seeping out of the corners. I opened my mouth wide and *blue* light began rising from it, swirling over my head and body like an illuminated gaseous cloud.

"Nick..."

Concern in her voice. Never heard that before. She lay down next to me, rubbing my arm.

"Are you alright?"

And our lights began rising in the air together, intertwining, twisting, stretching like an orange and blue rope into the sky.

I watched it stretch, getting thinner and longer, and finally I couldn't see the end of it, but I had an idea of where it ended, and it wasn't heaven or hell or purgatory or nirvana or reincarnation, but *right here*, in this moment, in San Felipe.

Then the rumbling started, like the biggest quake I've ever been in, like the one that will eventually give Nevada a shoreline. Peeking over the hill — I couldn't see its body — was a gigantic Gecko, hundreds of feet tall, judging by the size of its head. It's green skin glowed with a green light, so bright I had to squint.

It stared at Gab and me, and I could see us stretched out by the fire in the reflection of its lidless eyes. One huge, clawed foot was gripping the edge of the hill. The lizard opened his mouth slowly and I discovered that I really didn't care about what I thought he was going to do.

Instead, he spoke.

"You."

"What?"

He mocked me, imitating my voice. The Rich Little of Lizards.

"What? What? Did you really think you'd find something here? Did you really think you were different from anyone else? You're absolutely pathetic. Then again, I should've known what to expect from somebody from Reseda."

He looked at the entwined lights, roping their way past the stars.

"Here's your dream."

He passed his claw through the light, and it immediately diffused, broken into billions of particles. In seconds the particles disappeared, and there was nothing but clear, black night above San Felipe.

I wanted to scream at him, kick him, put him on a spit and roast him slowly...Then I think I understood him and that was somehow worse.

He looked at me a second longer then withdrew his head. I heard him rumble back to wherever he came from.

Wednesday, am

I woke laying in the dirt, next to the Cadillac, with my hands tied behind my back. My face was covered with dirt and I had the rusty taste of dried blood in my mouth. I struggled to a sitting position and noticed that my feet were tied too.

Gab was sitting on the windshield of the Cad, sunning herself and drinking from the bottle of Mescal. The lizard chest was on its side, next to the front of the car. Empty.

Someone touched my shoulder. I attempted a scream, but what issued forth was more of a parched, soundless, *Haaaaaa!*

A man was bending down, staring into my face. He was at least sixty, but the deep cracks in his dark brown complexion

made him look somehow...ancient. *Here he is, a typical farmer from San Felipe. At least I'm being exposed to some of the culture down here. Ten bucks says this guy doesn't have any teeth.*

He smiled, revealing two flawless rows of pearly whites. In that nano-second I realized that I really didn't know anything about these people and their land. *Why the fuck did I think I had the right to come down here and steal their wildlife?*

"Senorita."

His voice was actually soft and rather pleasant (yet another inconsistency with his appearance — this was starting to annoy me).

Gab jumped off the hood and stood over me. She looked down at me and shook her head.

"What got into *you*?"

"Muy loco. El mescal es muy peligroso."

I don't speak Spanish so I didn't even look at him.

Gab was dripping sweat on me. I didn't want any in my eyes, so I stared at my jeans. I remember, for some reason, watching the sweat drops make dark spots on my 501's, then dry quickly in the already scorching Mexican sun. Eventually, her sweat would evaporate, become rain, and land on some-

one else. I thought, *Gabriella is eternal*. I felt better knowing this.

"You *completely, completely* freaked out last night, Nick. If I had my gun I probably would've gut-shot you. You drank way too much Mescal."

"Mescal. Muy loco."

I could take only so much from this guy.

"Who the fuck is he?"

"This is his land. Someone told him there was a fire and he came out. *He* actually tied you up. Good job, I might add...you should've seen yourself last night, Nick...screaming and shouting about souls and Geckos...

I was staring at the empty lizard chest.

"What happened with that?"

"This is the craziest part. You pulled it out of the trunk, dumped it out and began screaming at the lizards. At one point you grabbed two of them, held them close together and screamed something like, "You will *never, never* understand each other...*you can't, we can't...*" Then you turned on *me*, screaming, "Who the fuck are you Gabriella, who the *fuck* are you?" You really

scared me Nick, and then *this* guy showed up, and he thought you were attacking me, so he knocked you out."

"How?"

"With his fist."

I'd been punched out by the Latin American counter-part of my grandfather. Great.

"You crazy, with Mescal. No Mescal, good peoples."

He smiled and walked to his truck. Before getting in he said something to Gabriel in Spanish.

"What?"

"He's sorry we lost the lizards, but he says they don't like it in America anyway. It's too noisy."

The old man got in his truck and left.

Gab untied me and we got in the Cadillac.

(Friday 10:00 pm)

Back in the apartment.

I'm on the same spot on the fold-out, nursing a Pabst and munching on the Cheetos. The trip actually sparked something inside me, and I've been writing like mad. It'll be a short story, I'm guessing. Something about Geckos, Mescal, San Felipe...

Gab is moving to Vegas. She has a friend there who's going to teach her how to deal Blackjack. The way she described it, it sounded like a lot of money.

She wasn't that upset about the lizards, anyway. Turned out, the guy wasn't going to pay us more than five dollars a piece, and *that* wasn't even for sure.

Oh yeah, I got the job at the petting zoo next door. I wear a blue, long sleeve shirt that covers up my tats...today, before closing, I stared at the goats. They can look at each other (and other animals), for hours, and never register any kind of discernible emotion. They seem to realize that their presence among other goats really doesn't mean anything, that they'll never achieve unity with *anything* outside of themselves. Or maybe they don't realize this, and live lives of uncomplicated, unaffected bliss. Who knows what goats think? I don't, and I work with them all day.

One more thing — I finally figured out how to do it! I wasn't inhaling right, but now I have it, and with practice I know I'll perfect it.

As soon as I could do it, I leaned out the window of my apartment, and sent a plume of Cheeto dust into the Reseda-night sky, hoping it would reach Gab before she left for Vegas.