Crazy

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BUDDY WEATHER, VIRGIN, draft bait, would-be hippie, drunk and getting drunker by the minute, leaned his weary head against the stairway bannister, eyes closed, listening to rock and roll. In 1969, it was still rock and roll. In 1969, it was dangerous to be eighteen and male without college possibilities.

He lived in a falling down farmhouse outside Moberly, Missouri, a town of only about thirteen thousand people, known, and not altogether far and wide at that, for being the home of General Omar Bradley, even less far or wide as the home of the man who wrote a better book about the Depression than John Steinbeck, who folks in town swore would have been more famous than Steinbeck if Steinbeck hadn’t beaten him to the punch with Tobacco Road, a publisher of small leftist poetry magazines named Jack Conroy. Buddy lived with his father, Woody (Woodrow Senior), and his brother, Ray. Buddy’s father had once gotten in a fight with Jack Conroy in a bar, but that hardly made him famous, since Woody Weaver had gotten in a fight, at one time or other, with most of the men in town, in most of the bars in Moberly.

He called Buddy, “Dummy.” In second grade, Buddy took a test which indicated his aptitudes were manual, not mental, but all the same, he didn’t feel dumb. His mother had been smart enough to leave his father. Buddy’d always hoped he took after her, not him. He never wondered why she’d left. Consigned and consenting, then, to a life of physical labor, and thus without college possibilities, Buddy had gotten his draft notice in the mail, taken his physical, and was to report for induction the morning after the party, though the party was not being held for him. His father had laughed, saying he doubted even the army could make a man out of Buddy. Buddy’s only real friend, Jenks, had said it was “the shits.”

“Here’s to my last night of freedom,” Buddy announced at the party, raising his first can of beer in a toast. “Tomorrow I’m in the fucking army.”

“Kill a gook for me, Weaver,” someone said.

There was a sudden burst of laughter. Buddy opened his eyes. Waterbeds had recently come on the market, and one such novelty had just been discovered behind the closed door of a side bedroom. A drunken line-
backer from the football team had rolled back and forth on the waterbed with all his friends watching. When someone turned the lights on, they saw that the door had been closed to confine a Doberman puppy, and that the dog had defecated in six separate places on the waterbed. The laughter died down. No one would loan the linebacker clothes, or even a car to go home and change.

“Hey, let’s get Weaver to roll in it,” Buddy heard someone say.

He went upstairs and closed the bathroom door behind him. He splashed his face with cold water, turned off the vanity light and sat down on the toilet, his head spinning. In the quiet dark, he wondered if he was more likely to die in Viet Nam or in boot camp. He lost track of time. The light came on, and a voice said, “Oh!”

“Oh, excuse me,” he said. The girl’s name was Carol Ivy. Buddy felt immediately uncomfortable. He was shy with girls, and particularly intimidated by those in The Clique. Carol was one of the prettiest and arguably best-liked girls in his class. She was wearing blue jean shorts and a blue sweatshirt. Green ribbons held back her hair, blonde as cornsilk.

“Pardon me,” she said, looking at him. “I have to go. Are you okay?”

Buddy took the question to mean she thought he’d been sick. “Have you been crying?”

He looked at himself in the mirror. There was still water on his face.

“No,” he said. “I’m fine, really.”

“What’s wrong?” she insisted. “Did something happen?” She twirled the drawstring to her sweatshirt around her index finger.

“I have to go in the army tomorrow,” he said. “I had my physical and everything.” He dried his face with a towel and sniffed.

“Why?” she said.

“I don’t know,” he said. “You tell me why. To fight in the fucking army and get my ass blown off in some place I never heard of.”

“No one else is getting drafted,” she said.

He shrugged.

“Why do you have to go?”

“I got held back in the fourth grade,” he said. “I guess I’m a year older than everybody else, or something.” He felt self-conscious. “I should get out of your way.” He moved sideways to pass her.

“Buddy,” she said. He was surprised she even knew his name. And she was a little surprised to say it, but she’d never known anyone actually
doomed, anyone to whom death was more than an imponderably distant destination. Facing up to death didn’t really surprise Buddy, who was a pessimist, but the very concept shocked Carol, who up to that point had assumed she and all her friends would live forever. Carol felt oddly moved by the awkward boy she barely knew and expected never to see again. “Why don’t you go to Canada?” she said.

Buddy didn’t know what to say.

“My cousin over in Marshall knows a boy who did that — could you be a CO?”

“You have to write up a big deal for that,” Buddy said. “And besides, you have to have your pastor or your principal or somebody testify for you. I can’t — I don’t even know what my conscience is thinking.”

“Are you afraid?” she said. She tried to imagine herself in Viet Nam, but found herself imagining only that she was on the six o’clock news.

“No,” he said. But that was a lie. “Maybe some. I just can’t think of any reason why I should kill anybody. But look, uh, you gotta go to the bathroom and all, so I’ll, uh, see you.”

“Buddy,” she said, flushed with a sense of dramatic self-importance, as if she were sending him off to war, “if you don’t want to go, then you shouldn’t go, because that’s your conscience. You should go to Canada.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “Maybe so.”

She came to him, reached around him to turn off the light again, and then kissed him, a huge, full, going-away kiss. She was only the third girl Buddy had ever kissed, and he was so astonished that he could barely react to kiss back. She put a warm hand on the nape of his neck and ran her tongue over his front teeth, his first french kiss. Girls in The Clique were different. She broke it off. She looked into his eyes. Then she opened the door, stuck her head out to see if anyone was there, and told Buddy the coast was clear. She pushed him out and wished him good luck. He stood with his heart racing, staring at the closed bathroom door. He listened. He heard water running, and he suddenly knew that he had to leave.

He’d come with Jenks, but Jenks was nowhere to be found, so he walked out of town, past the bowling alley, three miles home through woods and fields, on a dirt road, with a three-quarter moon shining wetly in the humid sky to light his way. In a farmyard, he saw three raccoons raiding a garbage can, and felt strange. He couldn’t mentally picture killing so much as a raccoon, though he’d shot a number of them before. When he
got home, he found his father passed out in front of the television with a bottle of vodka wedged between his thighs. Buddy's brother was asleep, but soon awoke to a noise coming from the barn which had been converted into a garage/workshop. Ray looked out the window and saw a flashlight moving among the wheels and fenders and parted-out wrecks in the yard. He put on his robe, his St. Louis Cardinals baseball cap, and grabbed his twenty-two single shot rifle. When he came outside, he saw his brother on his hands and knees, peering under a Biscayne.

“What are you doing, Buddy?” he said. “You didn’t have to scare the shit out of me.”

“Sorry,” Buddy said. “I'm looking for that starter we were going to put on the Impala.”

“It’s in the shop, I just rebuilt it,” Ray said. Buddy thanked him, rising, dusting his pants off. “What the hell you working on cars at this hour for? You stoned?” He followed his brother to the work area. A red 1962 Impala sat with its front end up on jack stands, an emergency light under it.

“What are you doing?”

“I'm leaving,” Buddy said. The back of the car was full of clothes.

“Leaving?” Ray said. “Leaving for where?”

Buddy took the starter and slid under the car on a dolly. Ray squatted at his feet.

“Canada,” Buddy said. “You got a nine-sixteenths there?” Ray knew what bolt his brother meant and handed him a ten.

“In this?” he said. “Pop'll kill you.”

“Pop'll never find me,” Buddy said.

“He'll call the FBI.”

“No he won’t,” Buddy said. “Not to chase this car—he bought it off Clark Perry, who everybody knows for a fact probably stole it.”

“It don't matter if you can't prove nothing,” Ray said. “He's going to kill you, Buddy.”

“How's he gonna do that, Ray?” Buddy said.

“You got any money?”

For several minutes, Buddy didn’t answer.

“Some,” Buddy said. “Get in and try it.” Ray complied. The car started perfectly. Ray took one of Buddy's Camels from the pack on the dashboard and lit it.

“How much?” he said. Buddy came out from under the car.
“Well, I already had eighty-five,” Buddy said, “and Woody had three hundred in his dresser.”

“Buddy,” Ray said, “Jesus fucking Christ—now he’s going to kill me too, just for drill.”

“Lighten up,” Buddy said. “I only took two. And here.” He reached into the pocket of his jeans and peeled off five ten dollar bills. “Maybe you’ll want to lam out for a couple of days or something.”

“Buddy,” Ray said, “that ain’t the point.” Ray wasn’t sure just what the point was. “When are you coming back?”

“Don’t know, Ray-moon. Maybe not ever. Maybe I’ll learn to skate and be a hockey star.” He jacked the car up, removed the stands and let the car down. He took off his dirty t-shirt and put on a clean one from the back seat. He filled the gas tank from his father’s pump while Ray stood watching.

“Can I have your rifle?” Ray said.

“Absolutely,” Buddy said.

Ray held out his baseball cap to Buddy.

“I’ll swap ya.”

Buddy took the cap and put it on.

“Maybe if I find a good place,” he said, “you can come join me in two years when it’s your turn.”

“No way,” Ray said. “With my allergies, they can’t touch me.”

“If you keep smoking like you do, you’ll get out for lung cancer.”

“You should talk,” Ray said. “The old man’s check-up today was negative, by the way.”

“Too bad,” Buddy said. The two boys looked at each other and shook hands. Buddy told his brother he would miss him.

“Don’t do anything I wouldn’t do,” Ray said.

“What good’s that?” Buddy said. “You’re so crazy, you’ll do anything.”

“Takes one to know one.”

“That it does, Ray-moon.”

“You want me to tell anybody anything?”

“Well,” Buddy said. He wondered if the light he noticed in the sky was a star or a planet. “I guess not.”

“I’ll tell ’em all you went to Mexico,” Ray said. “I mean it—you are crazy.”
“We’re both fucking nuts,” Buddy said. “Adios, amigo.”

“See ya Buddy,” Ray said.

Buddy rolled the Impala out easy, backed around right, put the car in drive, turned the wheel left, tromped on the accelerator and fishtailed away, spraying gravel behind him. Ray felt a lump in his throat. In the house, the old man snored.

Buddy was eighteen, in a car at night, headed north without a map, through country he’d never seen before, refugee, fugitive, exile, a life-saver in his own eyes for choosing not to take life, a coward in the eyes of a society only beginning to reconsider the morality of blind patriotism, a romantic hero, a lone cowboy, a Huck Finn following a white line instead of a river, through Sublette and Ottumwa and Oskaloosa. He was not old enough to be afraid of failure, hunger, loneliness, and he had no idea, the growing up he would soon be doing.

Buddy ate a late supper the next night in Duluth, briefly flirting with the idea of joining up with a couple of Philippino sailors from an iron ore ship who were dining next to him at a place called Ruthie’s. One sailor had a tattoo of a girl on his arm. Buddy wondered what kind of tattoo he’d get, if he ever got one. He drove up route 61, past the Reserve Mining facility, with its mountainous black piles of taconite all around it, making it look like a glittering fortress in a vast desert. He glided through Lutsen and Grand Marais, with the moon over Lake Superior reflecting on the water like the soul of Hiawatha, a poem from one of the books his mother had left behind. He crossed the border out of Grand Portage at three o’clock in the morning. A sleepy officer asked him only where he was going.

“Fishing,” Buddy said.

He drove as far as Thunder Bay, where he parked next to a dumpster in a supermarket parking lot and went to sleep. When he closed his eyes, he was thinking of the same thing he’d thought of since leaving Missouri.

Dear Carol,

I never asked you if you spell your name with an ‘E’. I am sorry this is just a postcard. I took your advice. As you can see from the walleye in the postcard, I have made it to Mexico. (That’s to throw off the FBI.) I will write again. I hope you are fine.

Buddy
Dear Carol,
Greetings from Sturgeon Bay. By the time you get this, I will not be here. I do not know yet where I am going but I figure a bigger type city is best. I hope you are fine.

Best wishes,
Buddy.

Dear Carol,
Greetings from Ottawa. This looks like where I will stay. I am running low on money, and if I go farther east everybody speaks French. I will let you know when I get an address for you to write me if you want. I think about you alot. I hope you are fine.

Best wishes,
Buddy

Aug. 2nd, 1969

Dear Carol,
At last I can write to you longer than on a postcard. How are you? I hope you are fine.

I have found a job (lucky) at a donut place where I met a guy when I was catching a few winks outside his place and smelled donuts. It is called Mister Donut and lucky for me the guy is a pretty cool dude that is happy to hire an American without a work permit that you have to have here, so he does not have to pay taxes but instead I get cash. That is best for me too because I am a little afraid of opening a bank account and getting traced through their computers.

You would not believe the weirdos and bums who come in, though most of them are not harmful people but just loudmouths or lunatics. Once an old guy told me he was taken for a ride on a UFO.

I think leaving Moberly was the right thing for me to do. It is somewhat nerve-racking to be on the lookout for cops all the time and all, but I would rather look out for cops than for Viet Congs. I still do not see why I should have to shoot them. They have not done anything to me. I met another resister at where I work named Tom who is showing me the ropes. He thinks driving down for short visits is safe enough, but I don't want to risk it until I know my way around more.

This place is pretty boring and flat, but it will do. I have a room in a
house for sixty dollars a month. It is pretty terrible with winos fighting and people getting ripped off but we pay by the week and when I found it I was down to forty-two bucks.

How are you? Did old Mitch ever get the dog poop off his clothes? That was pretty funny. If you see Jenks or my brother, please say hello, or anybody else, but please don’t tell anybody where I am. Okay? I have decided to write to only you because Tom says the FBI reads all the mail from Canada going to people’s friends and relatives, but since nobody knows you’re my friend it is okay. From now on, my alias is Ricardo Chekoff (I got the Chekoff part from Star Trek since a guy said I look like him) and if you want to write to me write to Mister Donut, 131 Kit
chener Street, Ottawa, Canada. Think up a good alias for yourself.

Your friend,
Ricardo Chekoff

Aug. 22

Dear Buddy Weaver,

I don’t know where you got the idea that I told you to leave the coun
try, but if you are in violation of the laws of the United States then you should take the responsibility for it and not try to pass it off onto other people. I hardly know you, so I wish you would stop writing me. If something happened at the party, it was only because I felt sorry for you, and because I guess I was alot drunker than I thought, but I thought you were going to be killed so I wanted you to have something to remember. App
parently now that is not as the case may be, so I think I made a mistake. I’m glad that you’re okay, but I want to stop this right now. Good luck, but please do not write me again.

Sincerely,
Carol Ivy

Sept. 9

Dear Carol,
I am sorry. This will be the last time I write you. I never had a lot of friends so I guess I was pretty blown away when you were nice to me. Thank you again, and I am sorry I was bothering you. I hope you are fine.

Buddy
Dear Ricardo Chekov

(Note proper spelling)

Now I'm the one who has to be sorry. When I thought about that last letter I wrote you right afterwards I felt terrible. I guess I was afraid I would be arrested or something, but I know I was quite mean, which is not like me, usually. What I also didn't tell you was that I was feeling extremely upset and depressed because I didn't get into Stephens College. My mother went there, and I was sure my grades were good enough, so I was so sure that I would get in that I didn't even apply to a safety school, even though the guidance counselor (remember Mr. Davis?) told me to. It was just such a shock. It was partly because I guess I applied late and partly because of distribution requirements geographically. Anyway, now all my friends are in college and I'm sitting home. I applied now to the University as well as "Magic" (I mean, Moberly Area Junior College), but no matter what happens I'll not be able to go anywhere until January. Actually, it's kind of nice to be able to tell you this, because I haven't got the courage to tell anybody here. I'll keep your secret if you keep mine.

As you could predict, life in Moberly is running true to course: boring. It's much worse now that I'm out of school. When I do the things I used to do it makes me feel almost like a baby. Pretty weird, huh? I went to the football game against Salisbury (we won) and felt like a complete idiot. Eighteen is too young to be over the hill. I broke up with Gary too, right before he went off to school at the University of Indiana, so I hang around with my girlfriend now, but it makes me feel like an old maid.

How are you doing for money? I don't think I know who the Jenks you mentioned is. As far as I can tell, nobody but me knows you're gone. I haven't seen your brother. If you want me to call him and tell him anything, please let me know. For my alias you can call me Josephine le Plummer (get it?). Once again though, I am truly sorry for my other letter. I'm not that bad. You can write me if you want.

Sincerely,

Carol

Josephine le Plummer
Dear Josephine,

Far out! I was very glad to get your letter. Needless to say. You write very good. They must be insane at Stephens not to let you in, if you want my opinion. If you went there, they would just teach you how to hold your pinky finger when you drink your tea anyway.

I am also very glad that you feel you can tell secrets to me. That is a pretty good feeling. If you want to know another secret, sometimes I get so lonely I want to cry or something. It almost makes me bananas. I can- not even get sick because if I go to the hospital they will want my social security number and then when I don’t have one I will be arrested. I know Tom, and through him I have met other resisters, mostly though when I am not working I just sit in my room or walk around wishing bad I had someone to talk to.

Jenks is Jeff Jenkins. He works at the Skelly station. Just tell Ray I am alright, and tell him I am sorry if our pop raises the roof on him because of me. Canada is just like America but all in all I wish I was in America. I never thought I would miss Moberly. Speaking of Miss Moberly, why don’t you enter a beauty pageant while you are waiting for school? I bet you would win. I hope you are fine. Thank you for writing me.

your friend,
Ricardo Chekov

Dear Ricardo,

Happy Halloween! Do they have Halloween in Canada? Is it cold there yet? I am sitting in my house watching television and answering the doorbell for trick-or-treaters. My parents are at a party. This is okay, considering, because the only party I heard of was at Melodie French’s house, who is still in highschool, so like I said I could hardly go to that now could I? I was never real good friends with her either, but bummer!

I started waitressing at the Country Kitchen. It’s quintessentially degrading so I’m glad it’s only temporary. I’ve been going out with the manager there named Steve, who is two years older than me. He’s nice but he’s a little red necked if you catch my drift. For instance, I wouldn’t dare tell him about you, not that there’s anything to tell, you know what I mean. My secret for this letter is that I finally tried marijuana. Nothing
happened. There’s the doorbell, hang on.

It was two ghosts and a cowboy. Did you know that in every letter you write, you say, “I hope you are fine?” Also, if you want, you don’t always have to say “I am” when you mean “I’m.” Contractions are okay in letter writing, though perhaps not in theses and whatnot. I thought maybe you’d like to know. Be careful. I mentioned you (not by name, of course) to my friend Becky and she said she thought you were brave. We are both sick of Moberly and wish we were somewhere else. She said she wished a white knight would take her away, and I said I would settle for a green chicken plucker as long as it was away from here. I don’t know how joking I am.

sincerely,
Josephine le Plummer
P.S. secret: I gained 2 lbs. at work. Ugh!

Nov. 21

Dear Josephine,

Happy Thanksgiving. This is just a short note. I shot a turkey once like the one on this card. Now I can’t (note I did not say “cannot”) want to kill even a rabbit. My only secret for this time is that when I think of what I’m thankful for, I think I’m thankful to have you to write to the most. I hope you are good.

your friend,
Ricardo

Dec. 20

Dear Ricardo,

Merry Christmas—ho ho ho! I feel so sorry for you, being up there in the wilderness alone for Christmas. I talked to your brother Ray though so I know you never had much of a big deal for the holidays, but all the same, I hope you and Tom go out and get loaded or whatnot.

Steve gave me the most beautiful sweater! He wanted me to wait to open it but I couldn’t. White angora turtleneck. It’s so soft. I think I am in love with him. That will be my secret for this letter, because I haven’t had the courage yet to tell him. I keep thinking, what if he doesn’t say, “I love you,” back? Wouldn’t that be awful, or am I just being silly? I think he probably would, but I don’t want to rush into it or do anything stupid like I usually do.
All my best wishes are with you on this Christmas Eve. Please don’t send me a present or anything. I know how hard it must be for you to get money. Got to go, I’m going sledding. Three inches of snow last night. Merry Christmas.

Josephine

Dec. 20

Dear Josephine,

I hope this reaches you before Christmas. It is supposed to be made by Eskimos, but I’ll bet it was made in Japan. Who knows? I hope you like stuffed animals. They had bigger penguins, but I couldn’t fit the big ones in a donut box.

I got fired from there. Not really fired, but my boss said the big owners of the Mr. Donut chain were coming from Toronto to look at the books or something so he had to let me go. Have you heard “Eight Miles High” by the Byrds? It’s great. It’s old, but I never heard it before. Tom is driving down to Detroit for the holidays but I don’t know if I should go with him. Actually I should stay and look for work. It’s real hard without a permit. Also you will never guess what I got. A bird. I ran into a lady who was going to get rid of it. It’s a canary, so I decided to call it Tweetie Pie.

Steve sounds like a nice guy I guess. I can’t think of a good secret to tell you except did you know I am still a virgin? I am. If you want to know the truth, you were only the third girl I ever kissed. I sort of went out with a girl I worked with at Mr. Donut but we didn’t do anything. I hope you have a good Christmas and a Happy New Year. It snowed 14 inches here last night. My room is freezing. I should have gotten a dog to sleep with and keep me warm instead of a stupid bird—I could name him Hammershold, like that guy we studied in civics. Say hello to my friends and Merry Christmas if you see them.

yours truly,

Ricardo Chekov

1970

Dear Ricardo,

It’s New Year’s day. I am so hung over. My dad is watching football. I went to a party at Steve’s with his friends who are mostly older than me. He has a pretty neat apartment. Guess what? Here is my secret: he asked
me to move in with him. He said he loves me! Hurray! I really love him too. I think this is the real thing. That sounds corny to say but it’s true. I got accepted at the University, but I figure Steve is more important. Do you think I’m making a mistake? Besides, I’ve already postponed college a half a year, so maybe we can both move to Columbia later. That plus the only reasons not to move in with him come from the older generation, who I don’t think have the right to say what’s right for us.

I also think you are too old to be a virgin. It’s kind of weird to talk about sex with a boy, but maybe that’s the problem with society. Anyway, you are too good looking (if I remember correctly) to not have a girlfriend. You are also a nice, gentle person, so get off your high haunches and go get a girlfriend, Ricardo Chekov! That’s an order. The penguin was very sweet. Thank you. I was sorry to hear you lost your job. I was saving money for college that I guess I’m not going to use at this point in time, so I’m sending you ten dollars for you to use to go get yourself a big hot meal. This is also an order! Take good care of yourself.

your good friend,
Josephine le Plummer

Jan. 27

Dear Josephine,

Hello from the frozen northland. You would not believe how cold it seems to be here. I’ll bet you are sitting on your porch in shorts.

I got a job at the rubber mill where Tom works. There are a lot of American resisters there. The owners pay us less than union scale but most of us are glad to have any work. Some of the guys talk about protesting for better conditions and pay, but we can’t really do anything since we’re illegals. I am a maintenance mechanic there. I don’t know if you know, but I have always been manually inclined.

Also here is my secret: I am not a virgin anymore. Her name was Renee and she was half Ojibway Indian, but very good looking and nice, although older than me. She worked at the mill too but got fired. It really is pretty weird to talk right out loud about sex, especially with you since you are so beautiful and popular. I was real nervous about doing it, but your letter made me not so much. If I’d never gotten to know you I probably would have thought you were just pretty and still be scared of you. I would like a girlfriend but there are not a very huge population of girls here.
About your question that you asked, I think you should go to college. I don’t really know anything about college except that I always thought it was the best thing that you could do. My mother went to Purdue for two years. If you went to college, maybe there would be other boys there besides Steve. If you love Steve you should be with the person you love though because then your heart wouldn’t ache for them all the time.

Who won the football championship? How’s the basketball team doing? I really miss that stuff. My last memory is the party. I hope you are not too hassled. Tweetie Pie says hello.

sincerely,
Ricardo

May 26, 1970

Dear Ricardo,

First of all, I’m very sorry that it’s been so long since my last letter. To make up for it, I will make this letter extra long. It’s going to have to be, because so much has happened, and I really need someone to talk to.

Prepare yourself for a shock. This is no secret, but it sure is a shock, even to me: I’m married. I moved in with Steve in January (talk about everything moving fast) and my parents almost disowned me. My mother had an absolute cow! She told me I was committing moral pollution. Now here is the real secret: the reason I got married is that I’m pregnant. We’ve been married one month but I’m two and a half months PG. I knew right away. You are the only one who knows, other than Steve. I can’t possibly tell my mother, after the scene she threw just for my moving out. She’ll find out soon enough, I guess. When I found out I even called Ottawa directory information but they said there was no phone for Buddy Weaver. Is your first name Buddy or is that short for something? I even tried under Ricardo Chekov. At first when I found out I thought it was great, in a way, but when I told Steve he really lost it. I couldn’t believe it. He got totally angry with me and freaked out, and said I should have an abortion, and when I said I wanted to have it he sort of bumped me and ran out. I know you won’t tell anyone (god it feels good to talk to someone about this) but please don’t because he’s not violent or anything really, it just freaked him out too bad. Now he thinks his salary isn’t enough to have a family on. We got married in St. Louis but somehow everything is real changed. I love him and I know he loves me, but I agree that this new
alteration in circumstances changes everything to a new and stressful perspective. Steve got out of the draft for being the only son, but now he thinks if he enlists in the army he'll have his choice of going to Germany, and then when he gets out we'll have GI benefits. I suppose there are worse things than being an army wife in Germany. Ja voll, or whatever. I could also then go to college afterwards on the GI bill, maybe, but I'm not sure.

Now though I think I am beginning to know what you feel like, being all alone in Canada. Being pregnant is really wonderful, to sit around and think that there's something inside you, but when you're pregnant your hormones begin to go haywire, or something, anyway, has been happening, because now I get knocked out with the most bizarro feelings sometimes, which also freaks Steve out because he doesn't want to talk to me or deal with it. It's especially hard because a lot of the time the emotion is sadness, and that's exactly when you want to talk to somebody.

Look at this. From now on, I will try to remember to write with a ballpoint pen instead of a felt tip, in case I start to leak. Like I said though, the moods just come on, suddenly. Right now Steve is out drinking with his buddies. I can't even call home to talk to my mom, that's really the hardest part of all. You are lucky you are not here because if you were I would probably talk your ears off.

You must write to me and tell me what's new with you. You don't always have to wait for me to write to you to write me you know. It's been mild and sunny lately. Yesterday I sat in the park by the cannon and read a magazine. Do you remember Janet Belmont? She died in a car accident. I didn't know her. She was in a car with a bunch of kids and I guess the guy driving was drunk. It's so stupid. Jenks changed my oil last week. He's nice. So write me back soon, okay?

yours,
Josephine

July 16

Dear Buddy,

What's wrong? Did I say something in my last letter that made you angry with me? Please please write me back. Steve enlisted but they talked him into joining the Special Forces. We had a big terrible fight, but now instead of both of us going to Germany, he's supposed to go to Panama to
train and then to Thailand. Thailand is not as bad as Viet Nam, I guess, but I have to stay behind. They said when the time comes they’ll fly me to Hawaii to see him off, but Steve said he didn’t want me there. Are you mad at me? Please tell me you’re not. Has something happened to you? Please write.

Carol

July 29

Dear Carol,

I am sorry I have not been as good a pen pal as I was. First I was away in Montreal for two weeks, and now I’m back in Ottawa. Maybe I was also upset about Kent State or something—from here, it just looks absolutely unbelievable. If I ever had any doubts about coming here, I don’t anymore, but it’s just so depressing because there’s nothing we can do, and we have to try not to draw attention to ourselves anyway. Those National Guard guys were just like regular people too, so I’m not even sure I agree with everybody who has been blaming them. I just blame the fact that everybody has been taught to be afraid and hate each other and not anyone in particular. So anyway, I have been busy at work, trying to learn more than anybody in their right minds would want to know about rubber. It’s pretty interesting really. There is a lot of pressure too because anybody who is a goof at all gets fired. Some of the bosses are okay but some don’t like American hippies and hire us because they don’t have to pay us as much and they know nobody will ever complain to the authorities because it would ruin it for the others.

The next time you say you are going to shock me I will know better enough to sit down. I don’t know what part is harder to believe, probably the baby part. If the baby is half yours then even if Steve is the ugliest man in the universe it’s going to be a beautiful baby so congratulations. I hope it is a boy or a girl (joke). You can name it Josephine if it is a girl but if it’s a boy you have to name him Ricardo, deal? Now that you are a married woman it makes me feel like I have to be different with you, or respectful or something. I guess because I don’t know anybody married here. I hope nothing is different, but please tell me if it is because I don’t want to do anything wrong. I might as well tell you part of why I didn’t write you back right away was because it made me sad to think you wouldn’t want to be as much of my friend anymore. I don’t know if I’m saying what I mean, but anyway I am glad for you and hope everything is fine with you.

Buddy
Aug. 16

Dear Buddy,

First of all, happy anniversary! It was a year and a month ago that I last saw you. I think you're doing great. Second, please please I'm sorry if I made you think that being with Steve makes me care any less about you because it just isn't so. You are my secret special friend. Also don't worry about Steve being jealous about you or anything like that because he doesn't know, and it's none of his business, whatever goes between you and me, and even if he did know I wouldn't care what he thought because my friends are my friends, period. Becky (do you recall her?) was about one of the few friends I had left from school who told me I was wrong to marry Steve (she didn't even know him and nothing about the you-know-what either) and anyway, we had a falling out, or whatever, so believe me, I would never want to lose another friend.

Speaking of the you-know-what, Steve wrote me to say he still thought I should get an abortion. I hoped that whole hassle would be over with. Now he says I should do it because he's not going to be here and it will be too hard for me to go through with it alone, that makes sense, I suppose, but I don't care. I just wrote him a letter saying if Russian peasant ladies can have their babies in the middle of a potato field and go right on working, then what did I have to worry about? It isn't like nobody has never done it before. He doesn't like the idea of coming home after two years and seeing a baby he didn't even know, almost as if it wasn't his baby. This we will just have to take one day at a time. He sent me a beautiful shell necklace from Bangkok, where he was on leave. He is a Green Beret, by the way, and he says he is working training Vietnamese troops things like First Aid. I can't believe I'm married to a Green Beret and my best friend is a draft resister. Write back soon.

yours,
Carol

Sept. 10

Dear Josephine,

Enclosed you will find one size extra-teeny "Make Love Not War" tie-dyed t-shirt for babies. When I saw it it cracked me up completely. It will fit both boys and girls too. When Steve comes home, you can just hide it, right? Anyway consider this my anti-war shower to you. I started putting
in four hours of volunteer work a week at a daycare center on Saturdays, so I get to play with the kiddies. Take my words for it, you are going to have a gas. I should have bought a baby instead of Tweetie Pie, fine by the way.

yours truly,
Ricardo Chekov,
hippie

Sept. 23

Dear Buddy,

Hi friend. I don’t know if you can tell by the way the handwriting is jumping around, but as I write this I am on a Greyhound bus. It must be three in the morning and I haven’t slept in twenty-four hours at least, but somehow I’m not tired. There’s a man in the seat beside me who is snoring like an airplane. Oh Buddy, I’m so unhappy I want to die. I’m not going to have the baby. I was in Oklahoma City visiting Steve’s parents, who I barely know, I only met them once before, and I had a miscarriage. I don’t even know how to begin to tell you how it makes me feel. The doctor said it happens a lot and the reason is it’s nature’s way of protecting the mother. I cried and cried, and Steve’s parents were pretty nice and all, but I felt so alone and I couldn’t stop, and I just wanted to get away and go home. We just now stopped in Conway, Arkansas, (I couldn’t get a direct bus) where the driver had to make a phone call, and the station was just an ugly old empty building with a fluorescent light inside and nothing else, all locked up with no one there. All I could think of while he was calling was that that was what I feel like, like my heart used to be full of life but now there’s nobody there, and I keep dialing that room on the telephone and it rings and rings but no one answers. God Buddy, I just wish I could sleep. I look out the window and see the lights of the farmyards and think of how many families there are, and I just wish I lived in one of those places, I’m so envious. I keep telling myself it’s all over with, and done and gone, but I can’t. I know Steve didn’t want the baby but I feel bad for him too, like I let him down, even though he’ll be glad.

He is doing fine. He says he thinks about me often, and he just sent me a beautiful necklace from Bangkok. I got a job too, at the florists downtown, so now I’m really a flower child. It will probably be good to keep busy. The t-shirt was nice. I will save it for another time. It won’t get out
of date or anything, I don’t think. Know what? Writing you has made me tired now, finally. I’ll talk to you later.

The man next to me has finally stopped snoring, which is going to help too. You bring me luck.

Carol

Oct. 3

Dear Carol,

I was sorry to hear about your misfortune, and you have all the sympathy I can think of from me. I am also glad you yourself are okay. I was reading in one of the medical books on pediatrics that Marjorie has at the daycare center that when a woman is pregnant, at seven months or so her breast milk is even more nutritious than it is later, so if the baby comes out early, it will need more nutriments to live, and the milk will already have it in it if it needs it. All I mean is that sounds like what the doctor was telling you, that a baby being born is the end of a whole big system, and maybe your miscarriage only means that the system was working by shutting down for safety. Marjorie also says that miscarriages happen all the time, more than anybody likes to talk about, and without them the world would have more people in it who are sick and crippled and suffering maybe, we just never know. But you are still a good and very special person. Here is a bonus letter for you.

DEAR JOSEPHINE THE PLUMMER

WE ARE THE CHILDREN OF THE SUNFLOWER DAYCARE CENTER AND WE LOVE YOU.

AMY            MICHAEL
ANN            MICHELE
BOBBY          NORA
FRAN            RANDY
GEORGE         SARAH
LOIS           EPSTEIN
LUKE

Epstein doesn’t know alphabetizing yet. He also calls everybody by their last name. Anyway, I hope maybe this will cheer you up some.

yours,

Buddy
Jan. 12, 1971

Dear Epstein,

A is for America, where I am to the south,
B is for Buddy, who has a big mouth.

C's for the children at Sunflower Day,
D's for what darling young people are they.

E is for Epstein, who in schoolwork must push on,
F is for Fran who Epstein has a crush on.

G is for Germany, don't ask me why, and
H is for Don Ho, a famous Hawaiian.

I's for intelligent, which I know you are,
J is for LBJ, who got us into the war.

K is for kisses, which I'd like to give you,
L is for love, which is what I'd feel if you

M—make a story or poem for me.
N is for nice, like you and Buddy.

O is for Ottawa, far away as the moon,
P is for peace, may we all have it soon.

Q is for the Queen, Canada's one time ruler,
R is for rock and roll, which is much cooler.

S is for sweetheart, the person you love,
T is for time, which there's not enough of.

U is for underwear—please change yours nightly,
V is for Vietnam, where there's just too much fighting.

W stands for Wednesday, the day that's today,
X is just X—I don't know what to say.
Y is for yellow, the color of my hair.
Z is for zoo—have Buddy take you there.

Josephine the Poet

May 14,

Dear Josephine,

Once upon a time there was a boy and there was a girl and they were living in a cabin in the forest and one day there was a man. The man was a big man they did not know who he was but they were afraid. He was a man in a ski mask and there were not there parent anywhere and one day he came up to the cabin and he went around and around the cabin while the children hid under the bed because he was want to get in and hurt the children.

“Oh no” said the boy.

“Do something don’t just stand there” said the girl.

The man kept going around and around the cabin and then he came inside and the boy hit him on the head with the frying pan. Then they hit him with the frying pan until he was unconsess and then they sat on his stomach and made him stay there he couldn’t get up and the police came and the police took that mans ski mask off his face and they saw his face and do you know who that man was?

BOB HOPE—A GIRL HATER FROM SAN FRANCISCO

Epstein

(Don’t ask me—the assignment was that they were all supposed to write about the vacation they want to go on next summer.)

July 3,

Dear Buddy,

All I want to say to you is IT IS TOO DAMN HOT! I am sweating like a, well let’s just say probably less than a pig and more than Queen Elizabeth. I’ve got the fan pointing right at me, and it helps somewhat, but not enough.

Tomorrow I get to go to watch the fireworks in Columbia with my parents and my grandparents. I think they’re trying to patch things up
with me now that Steve is finally coming home, though he still can’t say exactly when. At one point he said he sometimes wants to join up again, just because he’s good at teaching people how to save lives or whatever, but I’m pretty sure he’s not going to. It’s really weird with my folks though, like they’re doing it to make it all look good for him or something, I don’t know. I can’t even think about it. Your last letter said you were writing things. Writing what? I’d like to see, if you’d care to show me.

I’m sorry, I can’t write anymore tonight, I hope you understand, IT’S TOO DAMN HOT!!! hotly,
Carol

August 12,

Dear Carol,

You asked for it. I don’t really know anything about it, except we’ve been having readings against the war and whatnot in an old firehouse, so I thought I would try to write down what I feel. I don’t even know where the punctuation is supposed to go, so I left it out. Here’s one about you, anyway.

I believe if you could catch any fish and teach it English it would never tell you nomatter how much it wished to please you you can have your life back again

and all the things you wished had stayed the same were riding trains with one way tickets out and all the words the midnight radio evangelists of mid-Missouri use on you are lies

I believe if you had played your cards right but you never had much card sense all you ever had was faith in people the sort some people take advantage of
sometimes it makes me sad to think
how sweet and delicate you were
and wonder why we had to both grow up
and why we let them write dirty words all over us

if I were there and found you
crying about something or other
I would take you in my arms and whisper
“let me help you” and I’d cry too

Pretty dumb, eh? The part about the talking fish was from a dream I had. The part about card sense was from a poker game we had and the part about them writing words on us was when Tom said we were all branded, and it seemed like maybe you were too. I had some anti-war poems, but I really don’t like them, because everybody is writing these anti-war poems and the poems are more violent than the war, sometimes. Anyway, this will be my secret because I have not shown my poems to anybody yet and maybe never will. I hope you find some relief from the heat. It’s hot here too, but it still feels good, after last winter.

yours
Buddy, poet
(ha ha)

Dear Buddy,

Hi. I’m sitting here watching an old Gary Cooper movie on television, “Mr. Deeds Goes to Town,” where he’s a poet that everybody makes fun of, so I wanted to tell you I thought your poem was beautiful. Really though, he just bought a girl a huge meal and looking at it is making me famished. He’s sweet and gentle and he reminds me of you. I don’t really understand poetry either, but I’ve written some too, my secret for this letter, and maybe I’ll send you some. Tell my pen pal Epstein I want another story. I also want to know why he hates Bob Hope. He certainly is a strange little boy.

It’s been almost a year since I saw Steve’s parents the last time, and now they’re coming to visit in only two weeks. I still don’t know where they think they’re going to stay, but I know one thing—not in this tiny place.

Sept. 12
Steve and I are going to have to move into something bigger. I've kind of started looking. It's also like I don't have enough to be nervous about, seeing Steve again. It's been so long. Actually, I know what will actually happen will be much less than what I fantasize, probably just regular ordinary business as usual, and also not to expect too much. My worries are that he or me or both of us have changed so much that we won't like each other anymore. What do you think? I got a letter from the army about some program they have, teaching wives how to help their husbands when they come back from Viet Nam (for the Special Forces only) but I sure don't feel like spending a weekend in Kansas City with a bunch of women I don't know, being told I can't just be myself with him. We'll see, I guess.

I started bowling with the girls I work with, Thursday nights. My all time best score is 117 so far, but it's something to do. Enclosed is an article from the paper about Ray. Isn't it funny to think that if there had only been such a thing as hay fever in Asia, Ray wouldn't have had to go there? Whatever he's doing, he sounds okay, so I thought maybe you would want his address.

yours,
Carol

Oct. 10

Dear Carol,

Howdy. I have much news to tell you, beginning with Epstein knocked out his two front teeth. I think it is proof that bad kharma is in the air around here, because I also had an accident at work when I was fixing an extrusion machine that was jammed and screwed up and chopped off the tip of my little finger on my left hand. It's really nothing, except here's how big assholes the bosses at the mill are, they said it was my fault, which it was, but it was still an accident, but they refused to pay the doctor's bills, so I quit. I can live pretty cheaply, and I have savings. Now I am working full time at Sunflower, and it is much better anyway though not as much money.

Thanks for the clipping of Ray. I got a letter from him. This is a long story, I will try to make it short. First he said why he went in was to be taught a skill, either in the army or afterwards with the GI bill. I figured they would put him in the motor pool, instead he's a sniper. It figures,
doesn’t it? Do you remember that Mark Twain story we read before the
field trip to Hannibal, about Fenimore Cooper where he said some guy
could hunt flies with a deer rifle from a hundred yards, well that was Ray,
we both hunted since we were little, and he loves guns so much, so they
gave him this terrific super-duper rifle with mercury tipped bullets with
cyanide on them or whatever, and his job is to try and kill Viet Cong
colonels from five miles away. If anybody could do it he could. He says the
way he sees it, if he can wound their leaders and take them out of the war
so they can’t help plan attacks then he’s actually helping keep the casualties
down, and not killing any innocent bystanders or friendlies at random like
bombers. I can see his point, but I wrote him back and told him what
about the colonel’s wife and kids, what good was he doing them, and
what had they ever done to him? It’s like a game to him like the shooting
gallery at the State Fair or something. At first it made me furious, but the
more I thought about it, the more I understood how he thought he was
doing so I said I would admit he’s part right if he’d admit I’m part right
too.

Good luck with Steve. I would say don’t do anything until you find out
what he is like because I know how much he could change, plus once he
sees you and gets used to you that will have an effect also. Be careful and
take care. I will write again on your birthday.

Buddy

1972!
Dear Buddy,

HAPPY NEW YEAR! Steve was working last night (I told you he
finally got a job with the sheriff’s department due to his Green Beret train-
ing, didn’t I?) so this is New Years Day night and I’m still by myself.
Right off I have to apologize for my last letter, which probably sounded
cheerful to you (did the gloves fit?) but it wasn’t the truth, so now I will
tell you everything. I didn’t so much lie to you but in a way I was lying to
myself. Now it’s gotten to the point where I’ve decided I’m going to take
care of myself and let the chips fall where they may. Anyway, when I said
everything was fine with Steve, it wasn’t at all. It was fine for the first
week or so, and then by the time I finally got it out of him what was
wrong and making him gradually act like such a prick he said he was
pissed off at me for losing the baby almost a year and a half ago, and he was
trying to deal with it. That freaked me out, but I said if that was bothering him then we should talk about things because I had no idea, but he just keeps everything to himself. We never talk. We tried one night, but that was it, until a few weeks later when all I said was that I was still thinking about going to college and he just blew up completely, saying I thought I was better than him, as if the only reason I want to go to school is to make him feel inadequate, so I lost my temper and said maybe he wasn’t quite as goddamn adequate as he thought, meaning nobody is and it’s okay to be just human, you know, and at that point he grabbed me by the hair and looked at me like I was a cheap slut or something. I almost wrote you that night, because I was so scared, but then I got scared he’d even catch me writing to you, so I burned it. That probably sounds like extremes but I was terrified. Then absolutely nothing after that went right. Suddenly the trailer is too small, and he feels trapped so he goes out all the time as if it was my idea to buy this thing and it wasn’t, it was his. I don’t even mind living here.

Now tonight is a major crisis. At this moment he is having an emergency meeting with somebody, maybe the mayor, about some trouble. He came home and told me the crap was going to hit the fan soon and I was supposed to just ignore it, but that I would find out sooner or later that he and his partner were supposed to have beaten up a couple of drunk Mexican farm workers they were arresting. He said it was all a bunch of lies, but it’s not Buddy, and he knows it, because he wanted me to wash his shirt, and it had a stain on it that has to be blood, I’d bet anything. I washed it, but that’s not the problem. You can’t really tell exactly how but he is really not the same person, and I don’t think I can help him any more but I know he needs it, so I am sitting in the laundry room at the trailer court, trying to figure out a way to get him to see a psychiatrist, because I know what’s going to happen when I tell him what I’m thinking, but if I don’t tell him, nobody else is going to. I thought about writing the Army, or asking his parents for advice, but they hate me, and my parents hate him, and everyone else thinks he’s a big war hero, except the people in our generation in town. I’m so miserable though that I can hardly eat, so I thought I’d pretend that maybe I’m the one that needs a shrink, and get him to come along with me. I really think I owe him my best effort. I just wish there was some way to know what to do or who to talk to. Please tell me what you think.

Carol
P.S. I’m glad I didn’t mail this right away. Last night (this is the next day) he came home drunk and laughing about how there was nothing they could do to him for beating up the Mexicans, so I lost my cool and said flat out he was sick, so naturally he could only deal with it in his macho way by slapping the little woman around and telling her to shut up. I suppose I was asking for it. I called in sick this morning and Steve felt so bad and apologetic he went to my own place and bought me a dozen long stemmed roses. It was just one of those things, I know, and this morning we had probably the best talk we ever had. Why are men so easily threatened? Why does he think I’m going to do something to him, if I love him? Write soon.

Jan. 15

Dear Carol,

Okay kiddo, now I’m going to say things maybe you wouldn’t want me to say, and I probably would not have the courage to, face to face, but I think Steve is a total complete asshole and I always have, even before he went to Viet Nam. I never said anything before because I didn’t know him, and I have to trust in what you think, but enough is enough. Love must be blind for you not to see him the way I do, and I’m sorry if I hurt your feelings but I couldn’t possibly hurt them more than Steve has. I’m not saying you were wrong to marry him or anything, and I know you know him better than me, but from where I’m sitting, he sounds rude and violent and messed up in his head, and it’s obvious he doesn’t appreciate all the good things about you, and I’m sorry Carol, when you say you figured you were asking for it, I get super pissed off because you don’t deserve it, and if you had half your brain left you would know that. All you do is try to help him and all he does is rag on you and be a jerk and you think that is fair, think again. Nobody deserves to be hurt for no reason.

That’s all I’m going to say, I guess, except I never thought he sounded right for you. I don’t know. I’m sorry if you think I’m interfering. But I thought I should at least tell you how I feel, because you don’t sound happy. Like I said, there is no doubt a lot I don’t know.

Buddy
Feb. 28

Dear Buddy,

Sorry I haven't written for a while. I have thought a lot about what you said in your last letter. It wasn't just because of your letter, but I was thinking even before you wrote that until we straighten things out, it would be a good idea for me to move to another apartment, since when we're together Steve and I do nothing but put pressure on one another. He has enough pressure as is, trying to re-adjust, but when I mentioned it he took it all wrong (who me? Not adjusted, not okay, you bitch . . . and so on) so we had probably the worst night ever. All I meant was for a little while, but now I'm not even thinking of how long, just that I have to get away. I can't afford to move out right now, but there are two things that I know for certain, first that moving out is the best step to take, either for making it work or for getting divorced if it doesn't work, and two that you are right, I don't deserve it. I'm a good person, and if he can't accept that, that's his problem, and good luck solving it. I hate feeling like I'm being egotistical, but even though I don't know how Steve made me feel so bad about myself, I just have to stop it somehow. Everything changes day to day, but right now I am madder than I can remember being in a long time, and I don't care any more, I'm going to tell him when he gets home. I will probably write you another letter tomorrow telling you I did the wrong thing, but like I said, I don't care any more.

yours, pissed off,
Carol

Leap Day?

Dear Ricardo,

I did the wrong thing. The beautiful scene on the other side of this postcard is not appropriate but it was all I had.

very sorrily yours,
Carol

P.S. Don't worry.

March 8th

Dear Carol,

Use this money if you need it to move out, and you can pay me back whenever you can, or not at all. I remember you sent me ten dollars once
when I was starving. I didn’t tell you but I really was starving, I was so hungry. I went to one of those Soul’s Harbor dinners with the bums I knew from the Mister Donut. I hope you do whatever you have to to be happy. If it is money that is keeping you from anything, that is a bad reason. I have plenty of savings, so don’t worry about me, and I have more if you need it.

Buddy

Dear Buddy,

D*I*V*O*R*C*E—oops, I meant those asterisks to be hyphens. Anyway, I am typing this on my lunch hour. I can hardly believe I’m divorced, except that at the same time I can tell myself I knew this was coming all along, and I think of what a colossal waste of time it was. Just a waste. I am so tired, Buddy. You have no idea how much I appreciate you as a friend. I just wish I had the energy to write you a good letter. Here it is, spring, or summer or whatever, and I’m just a slug. I started three letters to you and threw them all away. I hope I finish this one. Do you know the only other divorced woman our age in this town is Gail Rooney, the school whore? I should move to California so I could be with all the other divorced people. One of my mother’s friends I’ve known all my life bought some carnations and barely said two words to me. Of course I’m the bad guy here for walking out on Steve. I still told him if he wants my help seeing a counselor I’ll do it, but he won’t hear of it. Maybe next time I’ll be smarter. Anyway, I’m too exhausted to write more. Sorry. I really do appreciate you. I’ll write again soon.

Carol

Dear Carol

Hi. I thought a lot about what you said in your last letter, and I feel that if you learn from your mistakes then nothing is a waste of time, so don’t think that way. About Steve, I don’t see how they can justify training someone for nine months or whatever to be a killer, and then not train you at all not to be. There was even one American here that played in our Wednesday night poker games, that decided to go back to Green Bay and let himself be drafted after all because he thought that if somebody had to
go to Viet Nam and fight it should be guys like him instead of guys like Steve, and this person was one of the guys who was writing the anti-draft newsletters and such whatnot for the Peace Press. So I mean, talk about people changing.

I had another bad dream about my brother last night, and so I was wondering if maybe you had heard anything? Thank you for sending me the newspaper. It is a dumb little small town newspaper but I love to see it again. If I ever come back what a shock it will be. What are you doing with yourself? Have you raised your bowling score any? Are you meeting boys? I have kind of a girlfriend named Andrea but I doubt anything like a big deal will come of it. If I was home, do you think we would be dating? We would probably hate each other right off. Anyway, let me know if there is any news about Ray or anyone else.

Buddy

P.S. If you vote for Nixon I will never speak to you again. Not really, but don’t.

July 18

Dear Buddy,

What a horrible thing to say! I thought we were friends. I would never vote for Nixon. I just wanted to jot you off a quick note to say hurray for you and Andrea. I hope you both fall deeply in love. I had a scary idea that maybe my bad example would discourage you—do not let it. I don’t know what I feel about love, personally, but I know I feel out of it. This is short because I only have five minutes. I’m working extra hours because it helps to stay busy.

yours busily,
Carol

P.S. I forgot—hi Tweetie.

July 25

Dear Carol,

Hello hello hello. On the back of this piece of paper is Epstein’s latest masterpiece. You will probably want to frame this.

I should tell you I’m not seeing Andrea any more. We just decided. I wish I could talk to other women the way I feel I can talk to you but I just can not. You make me feel comfortable, that’s all. I wish I could see you.
My next letter will be longer, but Epstein is in his miniaturist period, Marjorie says, so there's not much room for me to write on. He drew this especially for you.

Buddy

Aug. 3

Dear Buddy,

I think it would be fun to see you too. I can't remember the last time I had a vacation. The last time I was even out of Moberly was when I visited old what's-his-name's parents, and I'd hardly call that a vacation. Ugh. What an awful time. When we were little our family used to go every year to a cabin at a resort near Indian River Michigan, where my brother Mike and I would catch sunfish. I bet it's burned down or closed by now. Just smelling the air through the pine trees made you feel better.

What's new with you? I was sorry to hear about your girlfriend, if that's how it was. I'm sorry—I should have said woman friend. I'm trying not to call women girls any more. There's a big difference. You have no reason not to be confident of yourself. I think any woman would have to be crazy not to think you're swell. It could be worse, right? You could be worn out, washed up and stuck in Moberly Missouri, like me, right? Write!

Carol

Aug. 7

Dear Carol,

I'm writing you the same day I got your letter, because I had an idea recently. Let me change that, actually I have had this idea for some time. I never had a specific time or place in mind, but now that you mention Indian River, I will just tell you my idea. Why don't we meet at noon, on the 23rd of August, on the steps of the Post Office in Indian River? Every town has a Post Office, and like you said, you need a vacation. I would feel safe, as long as I could stay reasonably close to Canada. You could even call up the same resort and make a reservation. Do you want to? Just yes or no.

Buddy
Dear Buddy,

Yes. Okay. Something has happened, but I will tell you more about it when I see you.

The Post Office in Indian River was a modern building at the end of Division Street, with an American flag and a state flag flying atop a tall pole that Buddy sat leaning against. Across the street, a bank clock flashed the time and temperature, 11:31, 91 degrees, a scorcher. He wore sandals, overalls, a t-shirt and Ray’s red baseball cap. His hair was down to his shoulders, and he sported a weak beard and mustache. He received a few odd looks, but not so odd—it was tourist season. Lots of young men looked like him.

Three buses were scheduled to stop up the street at the LeBarron Cafe, one at 11:45, one at 6:20 p.m. and one at midnight. At 11:53, Buddy saw a blonde girl in a blue jean skirt and pale blue work shirt tied at the waist walking his way with a large bag slung over her shoulder. He’d imagined the scene a thousand times before, borrowing heavily from cinematic clichés, Carol running towards him in slow motion. Instead, she walked, waved, smiling broadly, pausing once to pick a pebble from the sole of her thong. Buddy’s heart raced. He felt his shyness return, a small voice urging him to flee, but he ignored it.

“Buddy!” Carol shouted. “Or should I say Ricardo?”

“Josephine!” Buddy said. “You look great. I don’t believe I’m actually seeing you.”

“I’m starving,” she said. “God, you’re a hippie—I didn’t know I was meeting a freak. It’s so hot.” They hugged, Buddy nearly lifting her off the ground. She kissed him square on the forehead.

They ate lunch at the LeBarron Cafe, feeling awkward and odd for the first five minutes, after which they talked rapidly, fluidly, eagerly. Carol couldn’t get over how the boy she remembered as being barely able to look her in the eye now leaned towards her, following everything she said with great intensity. Buddy couldn’t take his eyes off Carol, pouring over every part of her face, counting her eyelashes, hearing the shush in the sweep of her hair when she tilted her head—it had been his recollection, and fear, that when girls in his town got married they got uglier, or stopped trying to look good, but such here was not the case.
"You look great," he said again.
"You look great," she said. "You're doing so well."
"I don't know," he said. "I guess. It gives you a boost to learn you can be okay all by yourself." He gave her a present he'd bought her, a lace tablecloth. She gave him his present, a t-shirt from their former high school, saying, "Sic' 'Em, Spartans!" They walked around town, and bought groceries and wine at the A&P, with Buddy explaining the differences between American and Canadian supermarkets to Carol, "... big huge shelves of nothing but pancake syrups, and miles and miles of Canadian bacon." After stocking up, they drove in Buddy's red Impala, which he'd maintained in near perfect condition, out Highway 27 up the west shore of Mullet Lake, where Carol gave him directions to Pekola's Cove. As they drove, she told him what childhood memories occurred to her. She'd even managed to reserve the cabin her parents always asked for, Beechwood, farthest up the shore from the office. They would have to carry their luggage two hundred yards from the office since they couldn't drive, Carol explained, but it was worth it because it was the only cabin on the other side of the beach, the most isolated.

They registered as Mr. and Mrs. Ricardo Chekov. Mr. Pekola looked at them more than a little cross-eyed—he did not like hippies—but was somewhat mollified when Carol mentioned her parents. He remembered them, and he took a long hard look at her left hand and the wedding band there, which Carol had brought along for just this reason. She carried her own bag. Buddy grabbed the food, saying he'd go back later for his clothes and his fishing gear—his plan, he said, was to get up early the following morning and catch them both breakfast.

"It's exactly like it was," Carol said, standing in the cabin door. "I guess there's no reason to ever change these places." The walls were knotty pine, the floor a darker wood, with a fireplace opposite the entrance. There were ducks taking to flight on the parchment lampshades, and Audubon posters on the walls, and wildlife guidebooks on a shelf mixed in with Louis L'Amour westerns. Buddy put the food in the kitchenette. Carol set her bag on the double bed, which was high and hard, iron tubing for the head and footboards. It was cooler in the shaded cabin than outside it.

"Buddy," Carol said, "there's something I have to say first..."
"Wait," he said. "I had this idea last week, okay? There's a thing we do at the daycare center, actually it's just a trick Marjorie thought up to keep
the kids quiet, but it's really a groove. What we do is, we make them play with each other and communicate in silence, not—I mean, you can grunt and groan or whatever, but you can't use words. It's like charades, and they really get into it not to mention that after they've been screaming all morning we like it more than even they do, but it really makes you think of ways to communicate, sort of like sensitivity training, or whatever, but I just . . . I don't know. I thought we could try it.”

“Buddy . . .”

“That was my big speech. Besides, we've been talking solid since noon, plus, god, Carol, we've known each other for three years through nothing but letters and words words words. You know? With nothing real.”

“Buddy,” she said.

“I'm too nervous to say anything, Carol. I don't know what to say.” She reached over and flipped the bill of his cap up. “Just until midnight?” he said. She nodded. He put his finger to her lips to seal them.

She followed his lead. He poured them both large plastic tumblers of white wine, and toasted her by making a sweeping gesture with his arm. She laughed and curtsied. He pulled a chair out for her and she sat in it. He took his comb out and combed her hair. She gave him a brush from her bag to use instead, and laughed. He'd wanted to brush her hair for as long as he'd known her. They traded places. His hair was longer than hers. She braided it, and he laughed. She put her arms around him and hugged him, thought he was too thin, and how odd to only now know by touch this three year friend. He undid her watch, pointed to the twelve, and held up five fingers. He set the hands back an hour. She took it from him and advanced it to the proper time. They laughed. In order to communicate this way, they had to watch each other closely. She got two cups of yogurt from the groceries, and two plastic spoons. They ate, feeding each other. He loaded his spoon with yogurt and pulled back on it, threatening to fling it at her. She shook her head, opening her mouth to say, “oh no you don't,” at which point he aimed for her mouth and let go, laying a splattered pattern diagonally across her face. She got him back twice as bad. He wanted to lick the yogurt off her face, but fetched her a towel instead, wiping his own face first. He got down on the floor and crawled under the bed. Not knowing how to respond, Carol got under the bed with him. It was so silly, they both had to laugh. He slithered out the other side and got on top of the bed. She joined him, and they lay head to toe. He tickled
her feet, and she tickled his. They Indian leg-wrestled, until his more powerful leg pulled her on top of him. She turned around so that they lay side by side, and then they kissed.

No kiss more soulful transpired in Michigan that year. After fifteen minutes of kissing, she rose, drew the curtains, threw the latch and refilled the wine, while he sat on the edge of the bed. There wasn’t a doubt in Carol’s mind that what they were about to do was right. She set her wine down on the nightstand and stood in front of him. He undressed her, and then she undressed him. He pulled back the covers. For twenty minutes, he did nothing but touch her in wonder, amazed at her body, listening to her sighing pleasure sounds, playing them like they were music. They were music. She touched him. They lay in the darkening twilight and looked into each other’s eyes, confirming the intimacy they’d been three years building. By the time they finished making love, the woods were raucous with crickets.

It was still warm out. Buddy looked through Carol’s bag, found a pair of shorts and put them on her. She opened her mouth to speak but he shushed her. He put the “Sic’ Em Spartans” t-shirt on over her head, and she put it on the rest of the way. He donned his overalls and cap and led her outside. A granny’s moon hung like an earring from the bough of a spruce tree. At the beach, he gestured that they should swim. She put her hands on her hips and shook her head. He let his overalls fall to his ankles, holding his arms out to his sides and turning a full 360 degrees to show all the world. She laughed, covering her mouth with her hand. Not-so distant lights in the windows of the other cabins were visible through the trees. She embraced him and kissed him. He stepped out of his overalls and unbuttoned her pants. She lifted the shirt over her head and threw it in a bush. She stepped out of her shorts. He hid the clothing, keeping his cap on, and together, they waded into the water. It was a shallow lake, and they had to go quite a ways out before the water was up to their chins. The floating white diving platform was a good thirty yards beyond that. They swam to it without making a sound, and climbed up onto it, sitting in the warm summer air until they were dry. They might have made love again, had Carol not suddenly whispered, “Buddy!”

“Shh. It’s not midnight yet.”

“No, Buddy, look,” she said, pointing to the resort office, yellow bug light shining above the front door. A police car was parked before it. “Oh god, Buddy.”
“Shit,” he said. “Maybe it’s nothing.” As they watched, a police officer came out of the office with Mr. Pekola. The two men walked to Buddy’s car. A flashlight was shone on his license plate.

“Buddy . . .” Carol said. They could hear the two men talking, a low murmur carrying over the water in the clear night air. “Mr. Pekola must have called the police.”

“I’m dead,” Buddy said. “What can they do?”

“I don’t know. My car might be listed as stolen. It’s a long story. Do you think they have computers in Indian River?”

“I doubt it,” she said.

Then they saw the flashlight moving along the shore, bobbing down the path towards the cabin called Beechwood, occasionally shining off into the woods. The beam appeared to be too weak to reach the diving platform.

“Okay,” Buddy said. “Wait until they get to the cabin, and then swim in and get dressed. If they stay there and don’t leave, wait as long as you can.”

“Buddy, why . . .”

“Just say you were coming here on your own, and you just met me hitchhiking. Have you got enough money to pay the bill?”

They hid behind the diving platform as the flashlight crossed the beach, pausing not ten feet from where their clothes were hidden. The beam swept the surface of the water and moved off. Carol was terrified. Buddy pushed away, towards the office.

“Where are you going?” she whispered.

“Home,” he said. “Everything’s going to be okay.”

“What about your clothes?” she said. “Your keys?”

“I’ll hotwire it,” he said. “I got stuff in the car.” He backstroked quietly away from her, with more words to say but no time. He stopped to tread water and take her in one last time with his eyes. “It was really great to see you,” he said. Then he turned and continued swimming. Carol clung to the platform until she could no longer see Buddy’s head. For a horrible moment she was afraid he’d drowned. She saw his red cap, then his naked form dashing across the parking lot in a crouch. A flashlight—was it the same flashlight?—moving again on the shore, back towards the office. An eternity passed before she saw the taillights on the Impala glow red. She watched Buddy drive away.
Dear Ricardo,

Whew! That's all I can say. If that had happened in Moberly, we'd probably both be in jail. When the sheriff realized you were already gone, I'll bet a lot of wind went out of his sails, so to speak. But I was sure they'd get you crossing the bridge. Crazy they didn't. I'm so glad you made it back, though I think mailing me a postcard from Sault Ste. Marie was a stupid risk to take, so soon after your big escape. I am also glad we made love— it was wonderful, but the hard part was that so much was left unsaid.

When we went without words, you were right, it was neat, except that I had something terribly important to tell you, and then I couldn't. Now I can't wait any longer. I really really wanted to tell you in person, but here is why I have not been sending you any newspaper clippings lately. I had these with me in Michigan, and I was even afraid you were going to find them when you were looking through my bag. They pretty much speak for themselves. I'm including the editorial too, even though it's rotten and unfair, so you'll have an idea of how they're comparing what you did with what Ray did, though something is sick in a society that calls a person who kills other people a hero and someone who chooses not to isn't. I'm not saying that Ray wasn't brave, only that I think it's just as brave to stand up for your beliefs, or even more brave than just going along with it and doing what you are told. Ray was just as much a victim of circumstances as I think you were. Anyway, I'm so sorry, Buddy. At first, I thought I should spare you this bad news. I know how hard it must be. I also thought that, after all, Ray is not proven for a fact to be dead, just presumed to be. I guess I was hoping maybe something would change or some further news would come out and whatnot. I guess now it doesn't look like it. You have my phone number, so please use it if you want to talk or need to, and be sure to call collect if you can't afford it. You know that I will be here if you need me. I don't know what else to say.

Jo

Sept. 10

Dear Josephine,

Talk about your close calls. What happened to you after I left? Are you okay? I'm sorry I haven't written until now, but as you might have
guessed, things were pretty hectic when I got back. When Tom heard what happened he laughed his ass off. I had something I wanted to tell you though that I didn’t get a chance to say. Now I want to stand on top of a mountain and shout it, so instead I will write this secret in as big letters as possible:

I LOVE YOU

So what do you think of that?

love,
Ricardo

Sept. 27

Dear Buddy,

Here are your overalls and your t-shirt. I sent you a letter as soon as I got home, but from the sound of your last letter, you didn’t get it. Did you? If you didn’t, please call me as soon as you can, collect if you want.

Carol

Oct. 18

Dear Carol,

I don’t care what your last letter said, because I love you, so if it was bad news then I’m glad I didn’t see it. Do you know what I think? I would bet anything the sheriff in the Indian River sheriff’s office ran my license plate through the computer, and then somebody called Moberly or the Selective Service, and they telephoned the FBI, so now the FBI knows and will intercept or read all my mail from now on. Tom says it happens all the time, and to get used to it. From here on then we will have to be very careful and write only in unbreakable codes. I will agree not to send you any top secret documents if you agree you won’t send any of them to me, unless of course our commanders in the Kremlin order us to. Okay?

I still want to know what you think about I love you. I think it’s pretty neat. I think you should come to Canada. Epstein thinks so too. Write soon.

love,
Buddy
Dear Buddy,

There is so much I could say if I had all the time in the world. I really wish you would get a phone or call me. Some things you just can't write. I keep starting letters to you and tearing them up. For now, all I want to tell you is that I thought the time we had together in Michigan was wonderful, and nothing is ever going to take that away from us. Even so, I think it would be wrong for you to go on thinking of me in the terms you do, and I have a lot of reasons why.

First, I did not expect what happened in Michigan, and even now I get afraid at times that I might have ruined our friendship, but in a way I did want it to happen. I'm not sorry it did, but I would not want for it to happen again. What I'm trying to say is that even if you were here, I'm just not ready for anybody to be in love with me. In some way, of course, I love you too, but not in the way you want me to be. My heart still hurts a lot, Buddy, because of Steve, and all I can think of now is that the last thing I want is to make another mistake. You are nothing like Steve, but that's not the point. I just need a lot of time to think about how I feel, just about men in general and myself too. I was way too young to get so heavily involved before I knew anything (with Steve) so I want to form some opinions and so on.

Secondly, I'm not sure I want to leave this town, so there are reasons that I don't want to go to Canada that have nothing to do with you. Half it's safe here and I know everything, and half I think if I ran off it would only prove to certain people how immature and irresponsible I supposedly am. It would just be wrong in terms of my parents and even Steve. I should at least be available to him if he wants to talk about his problems, because I would want the same thing from him, for a while anyway. Lastly and most important, I know I don't want to have any sort of relationship but I know you do, so you would just be wasting your time waiting around for me for any reason, when there must be plenty of women who would be perfectly happy to be in love with you. Both of us should live as much as we can now while we're still young, and as long as I can't come there and you can't come here, I would feel bad if I felt you were holding off falling in love with someone else because of me. You should be in love, but it is just not possible for me again. Maybe ten years from now I'll want to. I hope I'm making sense. It has nothing to do with
you, but please try to understand what I’m saying. I’m only trying to use practical common sense. Also I don’t care if the phone is tapped—call me, okay? It’s important.

love,
Carol

Nov. 11

Dear Carol,
I don’t want to call you. I want to get things in the mail, that I can read over and over again when I’m bummed out, and I don’t want to be in love with someone else. I want to love you—why shouldn’t I? I went to Michigan because I wanted to be in the USA again, but there’s no reason you can’t come here, even for only a little while. If two people love each other, they should be together. What is more practical common sense than that? I am sending you a bus ticket in this letter so you will have no excuse.

love,
Buddy

Dec. 5

Dear Buddy,
I am sorry Buddy, but no, okay? No. The man said on the phone you can get your money back for this. I am also paying you back the money you loaned me to help me move out. I greatly appreciated it, as I’ve already said, but I don’t mind saying it again. When you said two people who love each other should be together, you are right, Buddy, but Buddy, that’s not the way I feel about you. I am sorry. I don’t exactly know what my feelings are, or how to explain them. Even if it’s only a little bit of me, I still have love for Steve, I feel something there anyway, but I should not be living with Steve and I’m glad I’m not. Please though, just accept it when I say I don’t love you, not that way. I’m so sorry if it hurts you to hear that, but you have to. It’s hard enough for me to get my head together just on little things like doing the laundry or whatnot, so please, okay?

love,
Carol
Dec. 25

Dear Carol,

Merry Christmas. You keep telling me you love me but not in some way I do not get. If you love me then in what way? I think that is a fair question for a person to ask. I asked Epstein what he thought and he said you should fly here in a balloon, so I am enclosing an official Olympics balloon. If you need a bigger balloon, please let me know.

I love you,
Buddy

Jan. 20

Dear Buddy,

Stop it! No more! Here is your balloon back, I don’t care what little Epstein says, and I don’t want to feel bad when I don’t want to answer your questions or when I can’t answer them. I don’t mean to threaten you but if you want to keep writing to me you have to stop making me feel bad. I have tons of reasons to feel bad already.

Carol

April 1

Dear Josephine le Plummer,

April Fools! It’s not really Paul McCartney writing to you like it said on the return address, but only your old friend Ricardo Chekov. Enclosed is the only Blondie and Dagwood cartoon that has ever made me laugh. I wasn’t even stoned or anything when I read it.

And now for a progress report from mighty Canada, your neighbor to the north. The Peace Press located in the basement of a bookstore on Wales Street in the lovely capitol of Ottawa has just published a book of anti-war poetry that you will receive in the mail if they ever get enough money together (not to mention their fried skulls) to send things in the mail. Also in Ottawa is a rubber mill where an amazing epidemic case of the Hanoi Flu struck and everybody who showed up for work one day could only work half as fast until a doctor was called in that said the only cure was if everybody got another dollar an hour, and guess what? They did and it cured them all.

In sports, Phil Esposito seems well on his way to setting all kinds of new records. I have become quite the hockey fan. I am also your big fan and I
think the worst thing in the world would be for you to stop being my friend. I don't care how you feel about me as long as we can stay friends. I'm sorry for causing you grief, and if you want to know the truth, I went back over your last three letters and I think you are probably right about just about everything. Please forgive me, and to prove you forgive me please send lots of newspaper clippings and photographs of our favorite men here in Canada, Richard M. Nixon and his merry gang of thugs. Something went wrong with our writing because we stopped discussing current events like Watergate. In my humble opinion it cracks me up completely, but it is still going to be up to you and me to make sure we voice our opinions so the world will be saved and all those bastards go to jail. And that's no April Fools joke either.

somewhere in Canada
Ricardo Chekov

July 4th

Dear Mr. Chekov,

Happy Fourth of July!

We at the FBI are writing to you on behalf of Miss Josephine le Plum-mer, who has been called to Washington to testify before the Sam Ervin committee. We suspect her to be related to the White House Plumbers. It seems she and her communist activities (and yours too) have managed to upset the President of the United States so bad that he became completely paranoid and mentally non compos mentis. Because of this, we at the FBI would like to fly you to Washington where I would very much like to buy you dinner in the restaurant of your choice. This is not a trick.

signed,
your friend,
J. Edgar Hoover

Aug. 2

Dear Josephine,

I hope you don’t think I’m being paranoid, but now I’m sure the FBI is reading our mail. I’ve just got a letter from J. Edgar Hoover. It looks like the jig is up. Actually, I have been painting the house of a friend of Mar- jorie’s and listening to the hearings on the radio. I will bet you a buck Nixon is impeached by the end of the year.
It must be a hundred degrees today. I am going swimming. I have also taken up jogging, that is a real establishment thing to do, but I am so out of shape, and I really liked being on the track team in high school. Can you believe how long ago that was?

el Ricardo

1974

Dear Josie,

Here's the buck I owe you. Tom says maybe if they can get enough proof on Nixon to impeach him maybe they can get enough to deport him. If we are lucky they will send him up here. We're waiting for him. Thank you for the beautiful scarf—it's cosy. Next time let's get coordinated so we won't send each other the same things.

I have been feeling much better. I think it's great that I get mono, the "kissing disease," by smoking dope. Eight people who were at the party also have it. Actually, I think I will stop writing now and take a nap.

love,
Buddy

P.S. Did you know that in Canada they have cough drops flavored with maple syrup? True.

Feb. 15

Dear Ricardo,

Be my valentine? Do you remember when we used to make mailboxes in kindergarten and go around delivering valentines? I used to love that. Here is your valentine, so it's up to you to make a mailbox.

Carol

Feb. 28

Dear Carol,

Sure I remember that. I never got any—how could I forget. Here is my valentine I made for you, but probably by the time you get it all the macaroni will fall off. In addition to my wages Marjorie gives me all the glitter and library paste I can use from supplies.

Buddy
May 16

Dear Buddy,

SPRING AGAIN! It’s so beautiful and warm here. You’re probably still knee deep in snow, I know, but if you were here you would be drinking beer on the tailgate of somebody’s pick-up. In two weeks the opening of the racing season out at Jefferson Speedway. I ran into Jenks and he says he’s going to be an alternate for the same team he was on last year, driving, I mean, and he says you could mechanic for them some day if you ever want. Let’s see, what else? My brother Mike came home for a visit. I can’t believe how different he is, just from living in California. I don’t ever want to live there. I have been starting to think about just what I really ought to do with my life. No answers yet. It was good to eat dinner at home and feel the way I used to when me and Mike lived there. Write soon.

Carol

P.S. The Spartans have one of the top rated baseball teams in the state this year. Thought you’d want to know.

June 26

Dear Carol,

HOW LONG IS IT GOING TO TAKE? Unbelievable. We know he did it, so why don’t they just take him out and shoot him? (Full of tranquilizers, like his wife.) I think it’s all a bunch of (expletive deleted) er . . . uh, the thing with the (unintelligible) twisting slowly in the wind, er . . . (expletive deleted) stonewall. Don’t you agree?

I don’t have a whole lot of news. Marjorie started dating a man from Montreal, so sometimes I babysit for the weekend so she can get away, and when he comes here and they go out, he brings his daughter Marie. If Marie thinks she’s getting away with something and I catch her, she immediately starts talking in French. You should meet Marjorie some day—you’d like her.

Meanwhile, we are planning our Nixon resignation party. You wouldn’t believe how easy it is to get people to pitch in a few bucks. Tom wants to rent one of those big spotlights, like they have at circuses or used car lots, but I don’t think it would be such a good idea, since we’re still technically illegal.

Write back soon.

Buddy
Aug. 9th

Dear Buddy,
HIP HIP HURRAY STOP THIS IS MY FIRST TELEGRAM EVER
STOP LETTER FOLLOWS STOP CAROL

Aug. 9
Dear Buddy,
I just sent you a telegram today but I wanted to send you a letter as well. Here is the front page of the paper for you to frame. This isn’t even important though, compared to what I heard on the radio. Someone said that the only way Gerald Ford could get away with pardoning Nixon would be if he also pardons all the draft resisters at the same time, and they thought it was a pretty likely possibility he really will pardon Nixon. Isn’t that wonderful?
I don’t have much other news. Bowling league starts again next week, Thursday nights. I’ve been keeping pretty busy. It’s hot here too. I’m going over to a friend’s house to drink gin and tonics and play Chinese Checkers—pretty racy, eh?

Carol

Sept. 1
Dear Carol?
Chinese checkers? That sounds pretty darn communist to me. I just now found this postcard in a drawer I was going through. It was from the packet of four postcards I bought way back in Thunder Bay, and the three I used were the first three things I ever wrote to you. Remember? Happy Anniversary.

love,
Buddy

Sept. 17, 1974
Dear Mr. Buddy Ricardo Chekov Weaver,

I AM SO HAPPY FOR YOU!
I AM SO HAPPY FOR YOU!!!

I repeat, I am so happy for you! Write me and tell me if you want a welcome home party. It might be pretty small, I'm afraid, but I think Jenks is still around.

Now, Buddy old boy, I have something to say that I wish I didn't. This is going to be hard. I am assuming that you will want to come back to Moberly, though for all I know maybe you would just as soon stay in Canada. If you come back here, there are two things that you must know before you do, and neither of them will probably be very pleasant for you to hear. You might want to read the rest of this with someone there with you. Even though you once said you thought you'd perfected the fine art of being alone, I know sometimes it helps to have someone there with you when you hear bad news.

The first part isn't that big a deal, really, except that I know you, Buddy Weaver, well enough to get the strong feeling that you probably hope that when you get back, you and I can go out, or pick up where we left off in Michigan, or finish what we started two years ago. It doesn't seem that long ago, I know, and I'm not saying that it would be so terrible or anything like that. For a long time I hoped a little it would come true, and I know I love you, or that I've come to love you in some weird way I can't explain, but maybe not in the same way you think. We've already been through this, I know. Anyway, being here, after that, after a while I was lonely in ways that cards and letters couldn't take care of. I just hate telling you this, because our letters have been so friendly and chatty lately, but mine were that way because I met someone here, that I couldn't tell you about. I kept hoping you'd met someone you weren't telling me about too. His name is Dwight, and I've been seeing him for several months. It's not like with you, with him. I haven't shared with him everything important that has happened to me since I was eighteen. All the same, I am in a relationship with him, I guess you could say, and so you should know that you and I would have to be just friends, best friends! I just don't believe it would be very fair of me to let you go on thinking anything could happen between us, because it couldn't. That doesn't mean I don't want to see you, of course I do, more than anything, just that you don't go getting all haywired and fly off the handle like I know you do, Ricardo old boy.

I hope you don't feel too bad about that. This next thing though is even worse, far worse, but since I don't know when you'll be here, I have to say
it now. Do you remember when I sent you that letter you thought the FBI must have stolen? Well, there was horrible news in it, but you have to know before you get here. On August 11th, 1971, Ray was reported missing in action in a heavy firefight near Quang Tri. This is just north of Da Nang on the map. What I sent you in the letter you never got were all the newspaper clippings. They explained everything much better than I can. I even wrote the army for you, but their official view is that they will never say somebody missing is actually dead, even when that's the common knowledge. I'm so sorry Buddy. You should also know that back then there were editorials about how brave Ray was and what a coward you were in comparison. I haven't heard another word for a long time, but you should know in case you walk into some place like the Peppermill expecting everybody to pat you on the back and welcome you home, because it probably won't happen that way. Call me if you want to talk about it before you get here. You won't believe how many times I tried to tell you (I tried in Michigan) but it kept getting fouled up. Then I thought I would just wait until you asked about Ray, and I tried to get you to ask me about him but you never did. I was also afraid you'd rush back for some reason and get arrested. I'm really sorry, but I felt so helpless, and I guess I'm ashamed too, so I hope you don't hate me for not telling you. I tried, but I just couldn't.

I am waiting quite anxiously to see you, old friend. I finally told Dwight all about you last night, and he took it pretty good, saying I was free to feel whatever way I wanted. I was free to feel whatever way I wanted about whoever I wanted to (he's older than me, divorced with a four year old child) and actually, I think you would enjoy meeting him. Well anyway, it will be great to see you.

love,
Carol

Sept. 17 1974

Dear Carol,

DON'T TOUCH THAT DIAL! And also hang on to your hat, because I am coming home— I've been packed for a week already. I can't wait to see you. I have been waiting six years for this. The first thing I want to do is take you to the Peppermill and buy you the biggest cheeseburger and shake in the history of the known universe. Do you know of any jobs? Do you think it would be okay if I stayed with you for a little

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while at least, I don't think I could stay with my old man. I have too many questions. I know I stopped talking about it, but I still love you as a friend and as whatever else, so it will be too freaking great to see you again. I think if you spend some time with me you would see that I have changed maturity-wise, even from when you saw me last, so you would like me even more. I am really too excited to write, so I will just pack. The plan is, I will give Tom a ride as far as Detroit and stay a night with them, then I will drive to Moberly. I wish I could be more definite about the times but I can't. I hope you are fine. I am dying to see you.

love,

Buddy

P.S. I gave Tweetie Pie to the kids at the daycare center. Epstein is moving on to public school, and I was going to give T.P. to him, but I think Sunflower should have bird.

When Buddy thought about Carol, the speedometer would creep up to seventy. When he thought about his father, it dropped to fifty-five. He averaged sixty-eight miles an hour. For six years, he'd read how he and his fellow draft dodgers were supposed to be traitors and cowards who did not love their country. If he did not love his country, then what was it he felt as he drove? Why was it a thrill to buy a grape soda at a Texaco station outside of Toledo? Why did he chew, so slowly, the fish sandwich he bought at a drive-in outside of Ft. Wayne, savoring every morsel of it? All this, after all, was not so different from Canada. Why did the sight of a roadside fruitstand, vending apples and cider and gourds and Indian corn, make him almost giddy? He honked his horn and waved at two kids on an overpass near Muncie, silhouetted against the sunset, and he swooned at the nightlights of Indianapolis. How could anyone who does not love this country swoon at the nightlights of Indianapolis?

Carol was bowling. Dwight was there, keeping score for her and her teammates. She was in the ninth frame of her first game when she turned and saw him at the soda fountain. She wasn't sure it was Buddy at first, with his hair cut and his face shaven clean. She would have shouted out his name, but Dwight was there. She touched Dwight on the shoulder, whispered something in his ear, and went to Buddy, hugging him so hard it made him gasp.
“Geez Carol, what are you trying to do? Kill me?” he said.
“How long have you been back?” she said. “Oh god it’s good to see you.”
“I have to talk to you,” Buddy said, inspecting the faces in the bowling alley.
“I have to talk to you too, Buddy,” Carol said. “I can’t believe you’re here. Come meet the girls. That’s Dwight, keeping score.” She pointed.
“I have one more frame. Oh god, I still can’t believe it’s really you.”
“Who’s Dwight?” Buddy said.
“I told you all about—don’t tell me you didn’t get my last letter.”
“I didn’t,” Buddy said. “I left the day I heard the news. Did you get mine?”
“I haven’t checked my mail yet,” Carol said. “I haven’t been home yet. Oh Buddy . . .”
“Go finish your game,” he said. Carol’s teammates were calling her. Her hands were trembling, and she rolled her first gutterball in months. She picked up seven pins on her second ball, for a final score of 144, six over her average. She told Dwight she had to talk to Buddy, and could possibly be a while. Buddy took her through a room full of pinball machines and out a side door. Carol knew something was wrong.
“I can’t stay here,” he told her, as soon as they were outside.
“Buddy, what? Why?”
“Carol, I have to go,” he said. “My father and I had a fight. I stopped out there first to say hello, and he called the police to have me arrested for stealing his car, and he said he’d get me for assault too. If I go to jail now after this I just couldn’t take it, but anyway, I want you to come with me, because I can’t go without you either, after everything between you and me.”
“Buddy,” she said, trying to understand. “I can’t. I told you in my last letter, I’m with Dwight now.”
“Well not like I love you, but . . .”
“I don’t care,” Buddy said. “I’m glad you love Dwight, I’m sure he’s a prince and everything, but you’ve got to love me too, Carol, it’s real important that you do. You have to.”
“Buddy, god, you’ve got to give me a chance . . .”
“Give me a chance,” Buddy said, taking her by the arms, gently. “Give me a chance. Please.”
“Don’t shout,” she said. “That’s all I’m saying,” he said. “I’m sorry. I never had a fair shake with you. Come with me, and if you don’t like me, you can come back. Just give me a chance.” Over Carol’s shoulder, he saw a squad car with its flashers on, parking in front of the bowling alley. “There’s no time.” “Buddy,” she said, “what am I supposed to do? Make up my mind in twenty seconds?”

Sept. 21

Dear Dwight,

You’re probably wondering where I went. This is going to be very hard to explain, and I’ve never been much of a letter writer, so why don’t I call you? I am very fine. Right now, we are in a highway rest stop outside of Tucumcari, New Mexico. Buddy is catching up on his sleep and I am sitting at a picnic table. It must be six in the morning, but I wanted you to know as soon as possible that I never meant to leave you there keeping score. I don’t know if I can explain it, but even though you and I got along pretty well, like you said more than once, there was some sort of rapport that was missing. Well it isn’t missing with Buddy. I knew it the instant I saw him again. He said I should just come along with him and that if I wanted to come back, I could, but I don’t think I want to. I will call you, so be at your phone on October first, at ten o’clock p.m.

Carol

Sept. 22

Dear Marjorie,

You were absolutely right. Are you sure you’re not my mother? Do you remember Stuart, Sarah’s father? He said anybody with half a brain could make it in San Miguel, so we’ve decided that is where we are going to go. Maybe some day I’ll be allowed to live in my own country again, but for now, this is great. Carol is my country. I certainly have at least half a brain, and it will be especially easy now that I have the other half. She is twice as beautiful as I remember. If she keeps getting twice as pretty all the time I think I’ll die. We will be driving along, with her sleeping with her head against the window with a balled up jacket for a pillow, and I can’t take my eyes off her. I almost drove off the road once. We had to split
Moberly like Bonnie and Clyde when my old man called the police on me for stealing the car, so you were right about him too. I should have taken your advice, but somehow I just had to see him. He called me a "spastic little queer," for leaving the country when my brother Ray went to Viet Nam and got killed. Can you believe that? He didn’t even think once about how I might have felt. I will tell you everything in my next letter, but for now, everything is absolutely super terrific.

love,
Woodrow

Oct. 4

Dear Epstein,
Hello from Mexico. Do you know where that is? How do you like the first grade? Tell your dad we made it. If you ever want to visit, you are invited. I hope you like school.

love,
Weaver

P.S. Hi David, this is Carol, but you can call me Ivy if you want. Weaver showed me your picture. You sure are a cute little boy. We really would like it if some day you could come down to visit us here. Or maybe we’ll visit you there. Bye bye until then.

Dear Deputy Steve,

FUCK YOU

a friend

Oct. 12

Dear Ray-moon (and Kim Li too)
Yahoo, you lunatic pinhead! Have I got a funny story to tell you, the next time I see you. First of all, everybody in Moberly thinks you’re dead. It was in the papers and everything. Your photograph was ugly but that is no surprise because you’re ugly too. Actually, I didn’t see it. Carol tried and tried to tell me for two years that you were dead, and for the same two years I had no idea she thought that, but I couldn’t tell her you weren’t dead because you made me promise not to tell anyone, you jerk. Don’t say I don’t keep my promises. She thinks we are both crazy. See, I told you she understands.
Anyway, you should turn your ass in to the MPs pronto. What President Ford said is no scam, trust me. I would turn myself in except guess who, the Moron, tried to have me arrested for stealing the car. I'm going to file a claim anyway and find out what the statute of limitations is in Missouri for auto theft. The clemency deal is for military deserters too, you know, not just draft resisters, and I talked to a guy who said that even though you deserted in country, as they call it, that they consider a little worse, still you had a real good service record before you freaked out, the first time you had to fire at somebody up close, so if you play up that angle that should be easy since it's the truth, it will look like combat fatigue to the clemency board and they are mostly democrats. The worst that could happen is you'll maybe have to see a shrink.

We are living in San Miguel, Mexico. There are almost more Americans in this town than Mexicans, so language isn't a big problem. Carol is taking over a flower shop from somebody who wants to move back north, and there is also a chance she will be taking some college courses. I am trying to set up a daycare center. Here is a picture of us. Nice couple, eh? If you like Kim as much as I like Carol, it will be pretty great for both of us. It's like, we have no idea what we're going to do here or how long we're going to stay, but it's not even anything we even feel like talking about, so long as we can be together, physically, because we were together for five years before we even knew each other. So anyway, I guess you and me turned out okay. But then what do we know—we are both crazy.

hasta luego,
Buddy

P.S. This is Carol. When I see you I'm going to punch you in the stomach for making me worry and then I'm going to kiss you. Anyway, I'm glad you're alive. Buddy is right though, you'd better turn yourself in before the VC take over Saigon, a possibility you'd better take into account. Kim sounds like a great girl. I hope to see you soon, there's plenty of room.

love,
Carol
From:
Information Office,
rm 1073
Federal Bureau of Investigation,
Washington, DC 20025

To:
Woodrow Weaver,
box 57
San Miguel, MEX

4/16/75
Enclosed find information requested under U.S. Code 552 (FOIA) as registered. All data in file is included.

Federal Bureau of Investigation,
Inter-Office

from:
Bill Harrison

to:
Gene Tarbell

You owe me five bucks. Our man in San Miguel says the dovebirds got married. You're no judge of human nature.