

RATTLE

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I've come to the edge of the woods.

I have a treasure.

Behind me are the trees, before me the roads.

For years I've been searching in the woods. I'm holding it in my hand, my treasure, in my right hand.

I've found it.

The treasure that will make everything transparent. Will see what is. Not select, just see.

Order?

Chaos!

Life?

Theater!

Me and my treasure. Bright light, no shadows. Everything visible. The treasure that looks through everything.

Ugly?

Beautiful!

Beautiful?

Ugly!

At the edge of the woods, where the roads begin. At the edge of the woods where a crowd should be waiting to behold my treasure. Where is everyone? Not a soul in sight. What treasure? Didn't I have something in my hands when I came out of the woods?

Who says what we think actually exists? Maybe what we think exists doesn't exist at all. It's like roads. First there were no roads, until more and more people kept walking in the same direction.

Actually they never took shape, those roads. Routes did, though. A route isn't a road - a route is a collection of signposts.

I like cars. Did I tell you about my wife? I have a wife. Everyone's got one. Me too. And I've got a kid. I like doing things, not thinking, doing. Can't think. And I've got another kid, who's with another wife. A kid from another marriage. And another wife, who doesn't have a kid. An ex-wife. Not so great, all that. I like doing. Doing a woman. Not like having. I like machines, too, anything that has knobs and handles.

Cars, cameras. A machine between me and the world. Camera, film, five, six, seven rolls, then yesterday six. What sort of weather is it, bright light, a two-hundred-fiftieth/sixteen kind of day, you've got those. A couple of dollars for coffee, tape, a pen: I've got it all squared away in front of me, everything ready to go. Not often do you see it that way. Things are there, but you don't see them. The city buzzes in the background. I push the door open, take a step, the buzzing stops: you're right in the middle of it. Buzzing yourself. The strap wound loosely around my wrist, twice, feels good, extension of a machine. Eyes, brain, neck, shoulders, arm, elbow, wrist, hand, fingers and at the end of that chain, knobs and handles. Me and the world. Hands off! Don't choose! Collect, collect everything that's clear.

I like cars. Like to sit in front, next to the driver, open and shut the window, with the camera on my knee. So there I am. Cars are beautiful and women are beautiful, hard and soft. Women in cars: even more beautiful.

- Honey, someone's passing us on the right.

- So what!
- Causes accidents, passing on the right.
- Well, tell 'em to cut it out then!
- They're doing it 'cause you're hanging in the left lane.
- I've got as much right to be driving here as they do!
- Sure, you're allowed to, as long as you move along.
- Oh, so we're not going fast enough?! That again...
- Everyone's got to maintain a certain speed in the left lane.
- Speed, yeah right, speed! So where's it say I've gotta go fast?!

And then bending towards her, ever so slowly.

- What're you up to?!

- I love you.

Then, pressing your lips against her cheek...

- I saw that. You were looking at the speedometer.

- Why would I?

Then, saying nothing and staring straight ahead for awhile...

- You're doing forty. Is that what you'd call a left-lane speed?

- I'll be damned if I get stuck between any trucks.

- Where, what trucks?

Here we are, living in a dizzying here and now, a present that has no past or future. No memory, no wish. A man bluffs his way through this life until it gets the better of him. And that's it: pack it in, get the hell out. Didn't make much of it. Our wants and successes were cheap and pathetic. So keep your mouths shut about the past. And quit yawning. They're just sitting there yawning. And when they get home, they'll say it was all a bunch of crap. If I think someone's a pain in the neck, I say so. Or it gets printed in the paper. Since they went to school for learning to think something. This is good, this is bad. I say what I've got to say. Even if it fills up the whole place. We're lost. Do you hear what I'm saying? We weren't anything. We didn't embrace life. We thought pain was something else. Cry if you want to. We botched it. Go ahead 'n cry. A whole audience in tears...ever seen such a thing? Nobody has to know. Doesn't matter. Even these'll be the good old days some day. Wipe away that teardrop. If the whole house breaks out in tears, we'll make the papers. How old would I be by now, fifty? At least. Hey, I go way back. We know too much and do too little.

There'll come a day when it's the lunatic's turn, I mean the lunatic in here. That day will come, believe me. It might be the last day, when the Grim Reaper puts his hands on the doorknob as you lie in bed - coughing up blood. The lunatic will take control of things - do away with reason, empathy, respect. Or before that, on the day you hear: you're a goner. Or even earlier. With me it was even earlier. I couldn't breathe...it was too much for me, had to go outside. I loved her and she loved me. And it stayed that way. Fresh air. Eventually, you get fed up with certainty - you get sick and tired of it. So the lunatic cut in.(butted in?) Some strings had to be cut.

Listen. If you have to leave, you can make a choice: take a walk and never come back - the coward's choice...

Or just be honest, say you're leaving. Otherwise they'll think you're rotting away somewhere. Bite the bullet. I'm out, you say - it's over. Look them straight in the eye and say it. You're all really swell, you say, but I've gotta go. You slam the door behind you and never look back. Think about

it. No calling to say I miss you so much. Say what you want about it, but it sure ain't spineless. Real backbone means staying, I know. The real men stick around. They nod yes or no, move their heads back and forth according to the intonation.

Somewhere between yes and no. An answer isn't what she wants; what she wants is something to talk at.

- Twiddleedee

- Hm, hm.

- Taatatata

- Nwoagh, nwoagh

- Ratatateee.

- Oh, oh, oh.

- Piddladiddlapwee.

- Pwaob, pwaob.

And you can go on like that for years.

Or you can let things get so out of hand that she – not you – puts an end to it. Takes some patience though. Some just stay anyway, doesn't matter what you do: they stay. They try to understand you, become self-effacing. She was kind, very kind. She was beautiful; we could laugh together, we made love, she was smart, fertile. That wasn't it. None of that had anything to do with it.

Coming home. Nothing the matter. Yet some odd feeling. The old and familiar says hello again. Something's changed, but what? Like a friend who's shaved off his mustache. I open the door to the kid's room. Nothing there but a stray little crane. Gave it to him for his birthday – never saw him play with it. I know he didn't. But still, he must have put it together once. So there it is, fully assembled. Anything else? She's left what's mine: the toothbrush, the back scratcher. Basics. The pile of packing material that surrounded me every day is gone. Taken.

I never cry. Slammed the door shut, and I'm outside. Everything behind me is just the way it was. Except for a few details. But that air, that fresh air. Starting over. Even if you're at home, surrounded by your own stuff and the people you love; and they love you. You'll always be a stranger. That can be stimulating, being an oddball in your own house. But not anymore: what do I care, where I am doesn't matter, I just do what I'm gonna do. I'm the nurse who rushes through the corridors of the hospital, from one room to the next.

Ever seen a movie that doesn't have a woman in it? That woman has to be conquered. Ever read a book that doesn't have a woman in it? Unreadable; a book doesn't sell without a woman in it. Life without a woman is tough. When summer comes, the winter coats go off: boobs start swaying. Atlantic waves in the streets. They know what they're doing. Why do high heels, tits, black nylons and lipstick get me so excited? Couldn't be in our genes, could it? Gets talked into us, from childhood on: how I don't know. That's the sneaky thing about free advertising. The brainwashing started the minute we got our heads above the edge of the cradle. The ads on TV aren't for laundry detergent, or lipstick, or bras, or cereal, shampoo, bath suds. All that stuff is a cover for illicit advertising: advertising for the phenomenon 'woman'. Just try giving them the cold shoulder, those women – heh, forget it. You're looking and looking – longing – and you think you've found one you can get all wrapped up in. Here she comes with her little problems, the little hurts, her past.

Budding love. Tell me what's the matter, honey, we men say. We're all ears, all nods that say yes. And the women pour it out, tickled pink to unload their burden. There are moments when they wonder: don't men have anything from the past to set straight? Isn't there something they haven't dealt with yet? Who us? Anything? No of course not, wasn't all that bad. A real man doesn't like to complain. Women can barely imagine that, but yeah, we listen to them so gladly and with such understanding, they'll just have to take our word for it. They put every last bit of baggage out on the table: who they used to be with, how dreadful the last relationship and the one before that was. Ah how wonderful, finally, a man who understands me, a woman like this says to herself. She's talking about the two of you and what she had going with someone else, the dirty stuff that was going on. And so you tell a little about what you had going with someone else...not too much, let sleeping dogs lie. And the dream goes on for three months: then comes the now, the here. Cracks of thunder: the whole jittery house of cards comes tumbling down. And when the clouds of dust clear off, what's left standing in the midst of the ruins? Man's mission: Don't be a wet blanket. You Can Do It, You'll Get Even. I'm dead tired. Tired of holding my ground all my life, tired of all those times when it's slipped away. I can't do it anymore.

There's a switch somewhere. Actually there isn't, but just say there is. A switch on your body. Maybe that's too risky - bump against the edge of a table and the switch gets flipped. Somewhere else would be better, a secret place only you know about. It's in a case, and the case has a lock, yeah, a lock. A combination lock. No, forget that: combinations can be forgotten, and keys can get lost. Fingerprint identification, that's it. When you touch the switch, and it recognizes who you are, you can flip it. When you flip it, you're dead. Very simple, nothing complicated like putting a barrel to your head. The mere idea of a bullet penetrating your skull, ugh! Then coming out the other side of it... And still surviving. Wait and see. You'll end up paralyzed and spend the rest of your life in a wheelchair. Wobbly knees up there on the roof of an apartment building won't get you anywhere either. Those three seconds when the pavement rushes up at you, or when you smack down on top of a truck: you'll see - wheelchair. Pockets full of stones, water in your lungs. Oh yeah, head in the oven. Or a chair teetering under your feet. Is there one I'm forgetting? Stepping on the gas and shutting your eyes until the blow comes. Always the risk that you'll still be breathing when they drag your body from the wreckage. Cyanide, gulp, and a boa constrictor squeezes your throat shut. No fun either. Go for the switch. You flip it, and your last hour has come. No, your last second - as though you're turning the lights off. No corpse, no spatters, no stench, all taken care of, the drill's over, off to heaven without an audience.

So you've got this switch...

Think you'd 've already flipped it once? Give me a hand, guys. While you're sitting there... Would there have been a point in your life when you just might have flipped it. You know, done away with all the bullshit. Go ahead, give it some thought. I'm not expecting an instant answer. And even if you don't have an answer, just think about it.

About how difficult life is for some people: that's the issue. Whether it isn't because of sheer inconvenience that they're still there. The inconvenience of suicide. Must be a good many out there, I'm sure, just too bonkers to put an end to it all: they figure it's too much hassle. First head to the Wal-Mart to get a gun. Say, eh...would this be the right calibre for penetrating a skull? Take it home, where to stash it - or do we get it over with right away, tonight...naa, better not, where's that bullet gonna go, who's gonna hear the bang.

If a flip of the switch, or just pressing a button, were enough to do the trick, they'd be long gone. Pulling a trigger, yech; let me have that switch. Let me press that button. Two hundred times a day, how should I put it? I'm getting completely beyond myself. Can't get any closer to not existing. To not being there: nothing quite like not being there. Open and shut the window. Wouldn't even need to load the film. Yet it goes in again every time. Five rolls a day, including weekends. Rewinding it, the roll of shot film; snapped that little trigger thirty-six times, and it's all stored away on a little roll. Put in a new one, destined to cast thirty-six glances at the world outside, each glance a two-hundred-fiftieth of a second: window open, window shut...

About a month ago, the phone started acting up. Sometimes when I'd answer it, there seemed to be a connection, but no matter what I'd say, nobody talked back. Maybe once a day, twice at most. A week later I came home: eight messages on the answering machine. Six of them sounded kind of like rustling that would last a few seconds each time. Not like rustling leaves, or like a bad connection, not like that static when the TV goes on the blink. Still, it sounded familiar. For two days it went okay, then again: that noise. So I didn't hang up, just kept on listening, really well... Could have sworn I heard breathing in the background. Heavy breathing, kind of like wheezing. I hung up. And right away: the phone rang again. Same thing. This time I didn't hang up but switched on the answering machine, recorded it. Next day, while I was busy winding some film, phone again. First get those films in, then hit the light...phone's still ringing. I answer: the noise. And two hours later, again.

So far I'd been managing a neutral 'Hello' on my part – like I always answer the phone: 'Hello.' And when nobody talked back, I'd hang up. But now I wasn't hanging up. 'Hello,' I said for the second time...slightly louder than the first time. Then, when there was still no answer, 'Hello' again, but now I was shouting it – and again, till I finally went up the wall, blurted out 'Asshole!' and threw down the receiver in a rage.

Stupid. Especially at times like this, you should keep cool. You say your name. And if you don't hear anything, just hang up. Now they knew I was going for the bait. From that point on, things got worse and worse. Some days, twenty calls. Especially in the weekend, nice and cheap, he must think. Or she.

Once I answered it and didn't say anything: no 'Hello', no 'Asshole'. After a few seconds, the connection was cut off from the other end. Next time I kept my mouth shut again. They weren't hanging up. Nor was I. Had put the receiver on the table, letting the line stay open. An hour went by: still rustling, but now it was different. Another hour went by: still on the line. You become aware of all the surrounding sounds when someone else seems to be listening in on things. Cars starting up, people calling out, doors being slammed.

Little roads in front of me... Beyond them, in the distance, a big one. Camera zooms in. A parking lot off the highway, a hamburger joint. Four people hanging around their car. They're wolfing down burgers. Forgot to put on the parking brake. You can't put 'em in gear, those automatics, damn things just go forward or backward, not much else. Pretty handy, though, having one hand free behind the wheel. So you can put it on some girl's knee. Or hand out a slap if the kids start horsing around in back. Or wolf down another burger. Anyway, oh so slowly, the car starts rolling, eventually bouncing its way off the parking lot, while they haven't the foggiest, just stand there lickin' their fingers. Tidy people, they are. Don't throw trash on the street. One of them looks

around for a garbage bin and, out of the corner of his eye, sees the car disappearing over the edge of a bottomless pit: Oh my God. The others do an about-face, manage to get one last glimpse of the bumper. In unison: Oh my God.

That's how they are. No, that's not how they are. That's how we are. Some unexpected thing just has to happen, and it's Oh my God. Or Shit. Or Scheisse! In another country. Or Merde. In some other country. Depends on where you are. All of it poop: Shit, Scheisse, Merde – nothing but poop. Except you never hear the word 'poop' when someone's giving himself a rap on the knuckles. But you do hear Shit, Scheisse and Merde. Even in countries where poop comes from, people never say Poop when they go out and shut the front door, leaving the keys on the kitchen table. They'd rather say Shit, which is of course poop, but not in their language. Or they say Fuck. So you can see just how much influence our asses have had. That they're saying Shit and Fuck on the other side of the world. But not Oh my God – Oh my God is staying right here for the time being, in case things get out of hand. Here we are, at home on the couch – a Bud in one hand, burger in the other – and someone comes knocking at the door: who could that be? A flood of light on the doormat and a man in a three-piece suit, a camera crew behind him. Seventeen million, the jackpot! Won the jackpot! Oh my God. See, it doesn't necessarily have to be something terrible: just something we didn't count on. Like an orgasm. There we are, doing it...and sure enough, the earth moves: Oh my God. Now who would've thought... Did I come too fast? You crazy? Of course not, we were at it for at least a half hour. You were fantastic tonight. You really mean that? Gosh, what a relief: was I any good? To come or not to come. I was too nervous to come. Didn't you like it. She liked it, she says. Actually wasn't anything special. Me on top. But she liked it. Never know what she's gonna tell her girlfriends, though. He did fuck like Donald Duck. Anything's possible, you know. Or maybe the condom doesn't hold up. Yep... And what do we say then? That's when it's Shit all of a sudden. Lousy, but we do get it – things haven't gotten beyond us. The cheated-on spouse comes home: Oh my God. That goes beyond our comprehension. That's when you need to stretch it out to Oh my Gohohod. That's them. No, us, let's be honest, I'm part of it – heaven help me – I'm one of them. God have mercy on this humble creature; after all, he's one of us, this bunch of know-it-alls, the guy in the street. Women with the biggest asses. No, no putting down the mindless masses; no smugness. Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. But Christ, what enormous butts: they get sealed air-tight to everything they sit on. The fattest women and the most disgusting fried-meat sandwiches in the world. Onions on top? Mayo, ketchup? In that order. First you had butts, then came the burgers. First the chicken and then the egg. Mighty good export product. A mouthful of grease for the whole world. And I admit: I'm part of it. So I guess I can say: Christ, what enormous butts. I hate us. Oh my God. He hates us. Yeah, I hate you all, your god-awful burgers and your fat asses, your 'fighting for peace', whatever the fuck that is. If I see what I've seen up to now, if I look at that, then I can't help thinking it makes no damned difference who we are or how we're supposed to end up. I could care less. Marketeers in fantasy and illusion: that's us. Exporters of Shit and Fuck. As far as I'm concerned: let the bomb do the job. Hey, it's what we're good at. Go on, blow up the whole fuckin' mess, put a match to it, drop a bomb on it. Like dumping a bucket of water in the deep-fryer...a mushroom cloud of grease.

Listen, I'm just passing by. Don't really belong. One second and there it goes. Keep a distance, come in close and then beat it. Been so close they could touch me, a hundred thousand times. Maybe more if you add it all up, maybe a million. I can be damned fast. The fraction of a second you're within their reach. There we go, hot chickadee, another one and then: beat it. 'You're

immortalized!,’ I call out just as they wonder: should I get mad or do I shrug my shoulders? You’re not there, I tell myself, just remember, you’re not there. So why pretend they are? One thing: don’t look at them. Wherever you look, don’t look at them, because they’ll look back. You’re not there, what’d I say now, you’re not there, they’re not there, they were only there for a moment at most. What they see of the world comes in through two holes in the skull. That gets shown upside down inside the brain, and then the brain turns it right-side up again. That’s all there is to it. Everything we see is a projection. I’m one too. I’m no different, I know. But still, I don’t belong. They do. I’ve got something that lets me see more. My treasure. I have two holes, too, but an extra one as well. Don’t need to measure. Here it’s one-thirtieth/one-point-eight. Under the lamp. There, to the right, one-eighth/one-point-four. Needs a flash. The stars keep orbiting around each other without touching. Only once in a great while does one bump into another. And that one time: broken leg, rib. They hurtled over me, didn’t even see me standing there. Nor did I see them. My eyes were somewhere else. Three passersby hurtled over a fourth. I don’t like us – we made a mess of it. All of us. All of you too. A whole audience passing by. Me here, you there, at a proper distance. One second and there it goes. Gone just like that, as though we were never there. I’m pretty fast with the camera when I have to be. Can you hear me okay? If I stand here? Say something. Am I part of it all? Part of the crowd? Am I part of it?! Say something for god’s sake, don’t just sit there. Do we go together or not? Cat got your tongue? Put up a finger then. Have we got anything to do with each other? Or not. We’re just passing by. So what’s the deal with that switch – given it any thought? How’d it work out? Is it that difficult to come up with a decent conclusion? Doesn’t really mean a damn thing. Don’t take it so seriously. Are we together here? Put those fingers up! Fingers! No? Okay, fine. We’re not together. And what about right here, right now: are we together? Fingers! Aaah, Christ. Fingers! No, this isn’t bullying the audience. It’s trying to get closer. And you sandbags just sit there. Nobody’s even coughing. Just look – with your eyes! Started too early, I guess, got to the point too quickly – timing’s off. They want to be tickled, not talked to. Hmm, what a shame. Are we together or not? And what about here? No, we’re not together – I’m not with you. You can be a stranger anywhere, everywhere, even at home. Hear what I’m saying? And here? Like this?

Don’t know where it went wrong. With me. I was down, having a hard time. And getting back up again wasn’t in the picture. So did it actually go wrong? Can an experiment be said to go wrong? Every result is one – even a negative result. An experiment that took fifty-seven years. More or less. Won’t take me that long. A couple more months, six at most. Every once in awhile I catch myself saying goodbye. It’s just one extra step. I’ve been practicing absence for years. Now my time’s come...it’s on the way. Grass, asphalt, trees, lampposts: how much longer do I get to look at them? Chats with the kids, maybe. Success with women, no. The display windows, my friends, my wife. Gotta hang on to the light. You guy’s ‘ll never guess who’s got cancer this time, I said when I got home. Three guesses and they still didn’t get it. I was down, got behind it, got on top of it. But I’m still on the outside. Sometimes I do look, sometimes I don’t, shove my nose right into it, a few steps back, pushed that button a million times. Piles of it at home, go and take a look if you don’t believe me. It slipped by me. Just wouldn’t show its face. What? Life, for god’s sake. What? Life, goddammit. Life and the flesh of women: one and the same. Slipping some moist undies off a woman’s ass, the first time you’re allowed to undo her bra, take out what’s in it. Yeah, it can be disappointing at times, but what the hell, let it be disappointing, you’ve got a woman on top of you, under you, over you, beside you. Let your hand go through her hair, put your nose in her armpits;

she smells like soap and a little sweat. You'll never have her: dream away. The closer you get, even when you dive in all the way, get completely taken in – a woman's flesh will always remain untouchable. You put your hand on it, and that's how far you get. The ultimate abstraction: a woman's flesh. Close and far away. Even if you sink your teeth into it. It's pulling at me. I feel it pulling. But it isn't. I'm pushing. It isn't doing anything, just heaving slightly. Fucking and shoulder slapping: those are the points of contact within the realm of a man's physical capacity.

Was I actually paying attention? Those billions of thoughts I've had... Those billions of glances I've cast. All those times I've had a spoon in my hand, lifted it to my mouth. And put my hand on a thigh... Those hundred thousand cups of coffee: did I really taste them? Occasionally, in a photograph, something might just happen to float to the surface. No, really, I'm serious. The realization that things aren't quite the way you'd been thinking for so many years. As if the world you thought you were looking at is just one of the many pairs of glasses you could've been wearing. My treasure from the woods. The treasure that'll let me see through everything. See what is. Not select, just see. Pompous people? Laugh your head off. Resentful ones? A cryin' shame. Are they there? Not just dozing? Are those eyes open when the front door shuts behind us, when the first steps of the day hit the sidewalk? Rows of parked cars, lampposts, too familiar to be seen. You've got to put them at an angle before they strike the eye. Something's got to go wrong. Only when it comes charging at me do I see a car. Or there has to be an urge. Only when I want to lock up my bike do I see the lamppost. Only when I step in it do I see the dog turd. A cry for change can be heard all over in all kinds of ways. The world just ain't good enough. It's gotta get better. But what if we haven't even seen that world and are all living in a big daydream?

Sunday morning, phone rings at seven-fifteen. Before I pick up, I grab a metal ruler off my desk and go over to the kitchen table with the plastic tablecloth. 'Hello', I say like I always do. No answer. Whack the ruler on the table twice, full blast: phone right next to it. Then I hang up. Radio silence the rest of the day – till ten o'clock at night, when the party starts all over again. The nut'll be sure keep his or her ears away from the phone this time: I mean, that ruler trick'll only work once. So I stay on the line, like last week. Pushed the 'mute' button to block out any sounds in the house. Why didn't I think of that before? Next morning, nine o'clock: turns out the line's still at it. Local calls cost about five cents a minute in the evening and weekend. So it cost him or her, say, twenty-four fifty in all. That sound does remind me of something – seems as though it's slowing down. Or the wind is dying down... Maybe a heavy downpour – with hail. Yeah, could be hail.

Out and about, getting a move on, looking serious, carrying a briefcase and feeling like part of the bustling office world that takes over the city from nine to five. Streets are flooded with people. I'm nothing, I'm not anything at all. Might take awhile before that sinks in. Could just as well have not been there. No loss – wouldn't have been there. You have to have gone through the mill before really believing this. What's a turning point? When you suddenly become someone else, become the way you want to be. All those years, being that decent guy, even with that big mouth of yours. There's never any turning at all. Yeah, pages maybe. You think something's changed; a few doors open, then they shut. And there you are again, out on the street, like old times. Force of habit keeps on pushing you back into the straitjacket that you want to tear off. You don't learn from experience: every occurrence is unique – no such thing as repetition. To be struck dumb, as though someone came up to you and put a gun to your head. Trembling until your nerves are shot and can only say:

go ahead and shoot, pull that trigger, I'm nothing, not even a speck you can flick off your shoulder. Haven't got a thing to say about what happens in my life. I'm powerless, meaningless, helpless. That means you're free, you can go wherever you want, the gun to your head is your liberation. In other words: live your life, don't be afraid, don't be jealous, there isn't anything to want, don't count on a single thing, the trigger can be pulled any second, we just don't get to say when. Step on the gas and get the hell going.

Same as with everyone else: there's a heart beating inside. And you get hungry. You've got eyes like anyone else. What you see can't be all that far off track. Even if you don't let anything get to you (since you aren't anything anyway) that's still no guarantee for even a modicum of success. It won't ever really be easy to see what you didn't see. You've gotta work at it. Not with ideas in your head, but with what happens right in front of you. Stop complaining, stop worrying, just push that button, flip that switch, don't ask questions. That old fart, who's interested in an old fart? By the time you get the photographs back, you weigh less than a feather from asking yourself questions, calling yourself all kinds of names. But not when you're out with the camera. Go on, take that shot. You've got all the time in the world to print it - or not - but if you don't take it now: you've got nothing. Shit, Oh my God, Fuck.

Several times today I had to think, for no reason at all, of the stoplight at that intersection across from the diner, where an Esso station used to be. That light where you end up when you come out of the tunnel and either head uptown or downtown or out to Brooklyn or Queens.

I don't choose. I'm against everything. Until I make a choice. Then I'm for it. That's why I don't choose. Why don't you choose? Hey, you're an old hands at that. Twenty kinds of cigarettes to smoke. Forty channels on TV, forty channels, all with the same gooey sauce. You choose. I don't choose. I seek. That one moment when everything becomes clear and acquires meaning. It's best not to look. Sometimes I can manage that, actually most of the time. Let the camera do the job, in time with the click of the shutter. Meaning is everywhere. It's just difficult to capture...slips away the minute it feels like it's being watched. Always go after the extremes. There isn't much in the middle. That noise... No, not a downpour. There's a certain rhythm to it, a resonance. Wait a second, switches being flipped really fast. Possible. Or a shed full of cars with ignition problems. Naa, not enough rhythm.

What if there isn't some nut behind this? What if there's some technical defect in the phone, something wrong with the line? Say my number is being used to call outside the country, you do hear about that... Or the phone is picking up signals not meant for it. Everyone's saying: maybe you should consider the possibility of a woman who's been rejected.

A letter from the phone company. They can't do anything. Evidently the calls are always made from different numbers. That's what I suspected. Four calls in a row that week. Then nothing for awhile...till an envelope with no return address shows up in my mailbox. The handwriting is shaky. In it is a postcard: two waterlilies on an idyllic pond. Written on the back is:

"I don't choose."

Didn't hear anything for a week. Then got the noise, whatever it might be, on the answering machine again, but now it was slower than before. Didn't hear anything for another week. Then one time, complete silence. Next day, the noise: three times. Early one morning, the phone rings. I was in bed, had the phone next to me. Here we go again...like clockwork. Forget the answering machine: I pick up.

- Is this Winogrand?

A man's voice.

- Yeah, it's me.

- Garry Winogrand?

- Yeah, right.

- Well, finally...I've been trying to get in touch with you. Why don't you say anything when you pick up the phone?

That must be him, the phone nut: deadbeat old geezer.

- 'Cause I only hear stupid noises. Are you the guy leaving stupid noises on my answering machine?

- Well, what sort of noises are you actually talking about?

- Rustling trees, traffic, cars starting up, switches being flipped.

- And you think those are stupid noises.

- Yeah, I do.

- Is that Garry with one or two r's ?

- Take your pick.

- But if you had to choose...

- I don't choose.

- Okay. So let's have truth. It's truth or dare. You want truth?

- Let's have truth.

- Three million, six-hundred-and-seventy-nine thousand, two hundred divided by five rolls of film a day, and by the number of days in a year, and by the number of exposures on each roll: how many years is that? I hope you're good at math.

- Fifty six, I said.

That's how old I am.

- Your choice has been recorded, said the voice.

Exit voice. Enter noise, oh so slowly. You can hear every leaf in the wind. Might be too rhythmic for leaves in the wind though. Not leaves. Switches maybe? Not switches...a hundred-twenty-fifth, a two-hundred-fiftieth, a sixtieth, an eighth, a five-hundreth...shutters, they're shutters...a hundred-twenty-fifth, a two-hundred-fiftieth, a sixtieth. Well, I'll be...shutters clicking. Funny I didn't hear that before. Film being wound on through...Zzrrak-Chick-Zzrrak-Chick-Zzrrak-Chick-Zzrrak-Chick. Slower and slower. And slower. Slow....The last Chick-Zzrrak...was quite awhile ago, the last Chick-Zzrrak