

TERRY ALLEN + THE PANHANDLE MYSTERY BAND
PEDAL STEAL + FOUR CORNERS: RADIO PLAYS, 1986–1993

In Memory of Roxy Gordon and Douglas Kent Hall

LP + CD1: **Pedal Steal** [1985, 35:32]
CD2: **Torso Hell** [1986, 25:46] + **Bleeder** [1990, 27:09]
CD3: **Reunion (a return to Juarez)** [1992, 28:57] + **Dugout** [1993, 27:57]

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Pedal Steal premiered in 1985 as the soundtrack to the eponymous dance performance by Margaret Jenkins Dance Co. Fate Records released it on CD in 1988 as *Pedal Steal/Rollback* (Fate 7655266), and Sugar Hill Records reissued it on CD (without *Rollback*) in 2006 (SUG-CD-1078). Following its live radio premiere in 1986 on KPFK, *Torso Hell* was released on cassette by High Performance Audio in 1987 (HP013). All other recordings are previously unreleased aside from radio broadcasts. *Torso Hell* was commissioned by *Soundings* and *High Performance*. *Bleeder*, *Reunion (a return to Juarez)*, and *Dugout* were commissioned by New American Radio.

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**The Radio ... and Real Life:
*Pedal Steal, Four Corners, and Other Panhandle Mysteries of the Wind***

Brendan Greaves, 2018

*You, little box, held tightly to me, escaping,
so that your delicate tubes do not break;
carried from house to house, from ship to train,
so that my enemies may continue communicating with me
on land and at sea
and even in my bed, to my pain;
the last thing I hear at night, the first when I awake,
recounting their many conquests and my litany of cares,
promise me not to go silent all of a sudden, unawares.*
– Bertolt Brecht, “Radio Poem,” 1940

It's not true that I had nothing on. I had the radio on.
– Marilyn Monroe, in *Time* magazine, 1952

*I think there are three great American inventions: one is duct tape, one is hot glue, and the other one is putting
radios in cars.*
– Terry Allen, “A Self-Interview,” 1994

Wind and Distant Engines

Six minutes into Terry Allen’s *Pedal Steal* (1985), emerging from the crass clatter of a McDonald’s radio ad—“I’m hungry! I’m broke! There are hungry children and old people back here wanting Egg McMuffins!”—the flinty voices of Robert Nakaidinae and Clarence Clearwater rise to stop time and intone a song, written by Allen and elliptically translated into Navajo, about a “People of Air” and a “People of Dust,” both descended from the holy wind. Nakaidinae taps percussively on a kitchen table, a formica drum in lieu of the traditional frame, log, or water instrument. Lloyd Maines abruptly launches into a stratospheric pedal steel salute—distorted, detuned, heavily delayed, and utterly fried—while his brother Donnie bashes out a seismic drum solo, heavy on the toms, that flirts with free jazz, like Richie Albright reaching for Rashied Ali. The storm settles, and Butch Hancock speaks gruffly of ghosts, of Billy the Boy: “That night at the Wigwam Motel, blasted on acid and drinking mezcal, in bed with the Dog Girl from Animas, broken glass twinklin’ like rhinestones on the sheets, looking at PTL, fighting over who gets the worm . . .” Thunder rolls like a shotgun crack funneled through a slot canyon. Welcome to the chthonic Southwest of *Pedal Steal + Four Corners*.

Ghosts have always traveled on the wind and spoken through it; wind is their road and their tongue alike. Ask any kid, spooked at night and buried under blankets in bed while a storm howls outside. Ask the Navajo, whose word for wind, *nitch’i*—the title of that chant on *Pedal Steal*—comprises sacred valences of spirit as well as elemental air. It’s only natural that latter-day ghosts colonized radio waves, and now inhabit WiFi signals, if only metaphorically and linguistically. *Nitch’i* is also the root of the Navajo word for radio, *nitch’i bee hane’é*; in English, “airwaves” is a synonym for radio broadcast frequencies that contains a formula for wind, waves of air. Ask Thomas Edison, one of the inventors of radio, who experimented with the idea of “an apparatus to see if it is possible for personalities which have left this earth to communicate with us” via subatomic “life units.” Ask Harry Houdini, who in 1922 railed against spiritualists and their fraudulent and hokey radio hoaxes, while allowing for the future possibility of communication beyond the grave: “I hope that spirits will talk to us through radio instruments some day, but I will prefer to hear such messages in a scientist’s laboratory rather than through the presentations of unscrupulous mediums.” Even today, paranormal investigators lean into radios in search of “electronic voice phenomena” in the gusts of static. They might as well listen to the wind.

Ask the artists Terry and Jo Harvey Allen about their childhoods in midcentury Lubbock, Texas—a notoriously windy and tornado-prone place—and their memories return inexorably to the powerful, sometimes oppositional presences of wind and radio. The airwaves beckoned with a lifeline to distant lands of possibility beyond the interminably flat Llano Estacado of Panhandle Texas, while the waves of wind eroded the landscape of present possibility, threatening to drown out those newfound voices. Terry tells about one of his earliest memories of the radio’s constant murmur in his house in the terms of a wind-haunting that continues to blow through all of his works for radio:

A tornado had devastated Waco. No telling how many were dead, and a statewide plea was out for blankets and canned goods. . . I remember . . . hearing this broadcast crackle in from the living room, and outside the wind moaned through the weather stripping, and it sounded like ghosts trying to get inside the house. But that same wind seems to be in every radio show I’ve made, and in a way, being raised where I was raised, you can’t hear a radio without it.¹

In her 2014 book *Homerun*, based on her play of the same name, Jo Harvey describes how as a kid she used to lean into the speaker as if to absorb the displaced air of her favorite program, *The Shadow*: “I’d press my ear right up to the radio and pretend I couldn’t hear my favorite shows. [Our boarder] told my family that I was a sadist. I didn’t care. I didn’t know what that was.”²

As teenagers, both Terry and Jo Harvey deployed car radios for entertainment, as a sort of ad hoc cotton-field dance club, a séance of teenaged discovery and togetherness. Radio allowed them to create a place-based community ritual by circling inward while connecting to the outside world, to popular North American culture.

A lot of us, maybe ten to fifteen people, would go out into a cotton patch in our cars and park them in a circle with the headlights facing in. Everybody would tune to the same radio station. We would turn on our headlights and turn up the radios and dance in this circle of cars with the headlights on.³

Four Corners, the collection of Terry Allen’s radio plays presented herein, shares its title with a song from his first album, the conceptual masterpiece *Juarez* (1975). The name is a reference to the site where the state lines of Colorado, New Mexico, Arizona, and Utah crash in a cartographic crucifix. Indeed, the road and its cars, trucks, trailers, and vehicles of all varieties figure prominently in many of Allen’s songs, as both settings, and metaphors. Nowhere is this preoccupation more evident than on *Juarez*—one chapter of the ongoing interdisciplinary work *JUAREZ* that Allen calls a “haunting”—most of which takes place on the road; nearly every song references driving or vehicles in some way, often in conjunction with radio. In his song “Honeymoon in Cortez,” Allen sings of “wind and distant engines.” In “Cortez Sail,” a reverie about the conquistador Cortés is catalyzed by driving and nitch’i: “You turn on your radio . . . an’ let the wind blow / With your rock & roll . . . down the highway / All the way.” And it’s “the radio man” who announces the crimes of the characters Jabo and Chic and the ensuing police pursuit, the reason for the ride through the lightning and back in time to colonial Mexico. We later hear the newsman’s voice in “Dialogue: The Run South.” “The Radio . . . and Real Life” switches stations between “radio” and “real life” choruses and verses that articulate erotic appeal in the romantic, “radio” language of the love song and the “real life” language of overheated lust; compression, reverb, and EQ heighten the sense of difference between the audio spaces.

The road rage continues with the album *Lubbock (on everything)* (1979), from “Amarillo Highway” to “Truckload of Art,” and later with songs like “Whatever Happened to Jesus (and Maybelline)?” (which interpolates the Chuck Berry song), “Roll Truck Roll,” and “Gimme a Ride to Heaven Boy,” in which Jesus Christ bums a ride and proceeds to steal the narrator’s car. Perhaps most poignant is “The Wolfman of Del Rio” a diptych car tune inspired by the classic-country border radio stations and DJs of Allen’s youth, which may or may not cause, exacerbate, or simply soundtrack “some disease of the dreams.” Terry often introduces it in concert by recounting that “the first memory that anybody has growing up in that part of the country is when you get your first car, because there’s absolutely no reason to have a memory up until that point. A car really became the ultimate vehicle of

every first-thing that ever happened to you in your life,” a link to “the outside world and the world of music.” Of course, the road also threatens with the prospect of danger. The road opens like a fanged maw. “I leave a few people dead,” Terry as Jabo sings in “There Oughta Be a Law Against Sunny Southern California (Jabo I, II, III),” from *Juarez*, “but I got open road ... ahead.” In his 2016 video installation and performance *MemWars*, which also features Jo Harvey, he recalls that:

The sense of hurtling through great black empty space ... late at night on a dead straight line of asphalt with headlights shining ... driving a car as fast as it would go ... and listening to The Wolfman on the radio turned up as loud as it would go ... is probably where every freedom I most value first began.⁴

From its earliest iterations, Allen’s work has always referenced and incorporated radio, and his visual art is no exception. Many of the early works in the *JUAREZ* cycle incorporated recorded audio. A sculpture from the late ’60s entitled “Lucky’s Last Song” included a transistor radio tuned to a “staticky country music moan” placed inside a guitar case filled with sand, a bronze horseshoe, rabbits’ feet, and other talismans: “The idea was for the radio to play until the batteries went dead, and whatever the last song was, that was Lucky’s Last Song.” *Road Angel* is a 2016 bronze cast of a 1953 Chevy hardtop coupe, the make and model of Allen’s own first car, installed on the grounds of the Contemporary Austin’s Laguna Gloria Museum as if parked for a lovers’ tryst or run off the road and abandoned in a swamp, “an old ghost car.” *Road Angel*’s “radio” plays songs and stories expressly recorded and contributed by a variety of friends and family, including his sons Bukka and Bale, Lloyd Maines, Joe and Sharon Ely, Steve Earle, Shawn Colvin, Delbert McClinton, Rodney Crowell, Joe Nick Patoski, Ed Ruscha, and me. The headlights, of course, shine at night.

In 1961, when Jo Harvey was nineteen and Terry eighteen, they flipped a coin to decide their escape from Texas: heads for LA, tails for New York. It came up heads, and they followed the radio west. The couple’s first serious forays into their own radio transmissions happened while living in California, where they stayed for the next twenty-six years.

Rawhide and Roses

While the jaw harp and fiddle of Buffy Saint-Marie’s “They Gotta Quit Kickin’ My Dawg Around” rings out, Jo Harvey speaks, and as always when she talks, you can hear the smile in her voice.

Hi, this is Jo Harvey Allen, bringin’ you a little *Rawhide and Roses*, right on your corner, left at your heart, and straight on your way home. *Rawhide and Roses*: sashayin’ and dashayin’, rip-roarin’, wild and woolly, ripe and unpredictable, one hour of the best past, present, and future of pure downhome, honest-to-goodness country music. We’re gonna feature a loosely documented look into the backwater origins of honky-tonk glitter and the Cadillac glamor of the music that makes America home.

Rawhide and Roses aired on Sunday mornings from 1967 to 1970 on KPPC-FM 106.7, broadcast from the basement of the Pasadena Presbyterian Church—literally an underground station. It was a country music show produced and largely programmed by Terry, and hosted and helmed by Jo Harvey, making her the first female on-air country music radio DJ in history. “It was kind of a novelty then,” she laughs.

The shows are themed—tractors, trains, trucks, weather, Texas, birds, beautiful women—and Jo Harvey not only announces the artists and songs, but tells discursive, infectiously charming stories about her family, Lubbock, and her life. Her seemingly improvised non sequiturs often have the power of poetry—“I love it when I feel like an animal,” she giggles during the episode about animals. But the surviving tapes of *Rawhide and Roses* transcend curatorial gimmickry to enter the annals of broadcasting (and feminist) history. It was the first radio show in LA to play Willie Nelson. In an early indication of their interest in radio plays, Jo Harvey and Terry invited Orson Welles to join them as an on-air guest to discuss *War of the Worlds* (he couldn’t make it.) Once they broadcast a tape of William Burroughs

reading from *Naked Lunch*, which got the station temporarily kicked off the air by the FCC. They recorded radio promo spots for other artists, notably for Captain Beefheart's album *Safe as Milk*.⁵ In 1970, Terry even recorded a radio jingle for hometown electrical company Lubbock Power and Light, which aired but was overwhelmingly rejected by conservative listeners for its "suggestive" lyrics about, what else, "turning on."

Rawhide and Roses became an underground phenomenon in LA, leading to an invitation for Jo Harvey to travel to Peru to appear in Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* (1971); an offer to host another radio program for KSAN in San Francisco; and a proposed gig interviewing Waylon and Willie at the Dripping Springs Reunion festival in 1970, which became Willie Nelson's annual Fourth of July Picnic.⁶ Jo Harvey walked away from them all. Instead, she chose to concentrate on her family and embark on her own projects, including *The Beautiful Waitress* (after Terry's song of the same name), documenting the lives of working waitresses, which launched her impressive career as a poet, playwright, photographer, actor, and performance artist. Over a decade later she returned to radio to grace Terry's radio plays with a series of extraordinary, unforgettable vocal performances.

Lies and Ignorance

Until now, *Four Corners* has never existed as a title for the four audio works collected here under that rubric: *Torso Hell* (1986), *Bleeder* (1990), *Reunion (a return to Juarez)* (1992), and *Dugout* (1993). While the title *Pedal Steal + Four Corners* accurately suggests a difference between *Pedal Steal* (1985) and the other four pieces represented, it doesn't make clear that, within the context of its conceptualization, creation, and distribution *Pedal Steal* had absolutely nothing to do with radio. It did not premiere on the radio and was not available for broadcast until its commercial release as an album three years later. In actuality, *Pedal Steal*—which interweaves spoken (and occasionally sung) narration and dialogue, full songs and song fragments, instrumental interludes, sound effects, and even samples into a single thirty-six minute track—was commissioned as soundtrack to the eponymous 1985 dance performance by the choreographer Margaret Jenkins and her company. In retrospect, however, within the subsequent context of the radio works that it spawned, it is indeed an honorary radio play in everything but the circumstances of its composition. (Like those Lubbock cotton-field parties, dance was the occasion, but the language was radio.) Its *Four Corners* companion pieces would not have been possible without the earlier, and more structurally complex, blueprint of *Pedal Steal*, which was the first long-form narrative recording Allen undertook with the support of the Panhandle Mystery Band, Jo Harvey, and other collaborators.

The five works on *Pedal Steal + Four Corners* were all created during a period of intense, condensed creativity spanning eight years, are all related to earlier interdisciplinary bodies of visual art and performance, and are all set primarily in the American Southwest and West, very much concerning American characters, archetypes, and cultural and historical contexts. This collection intentionally excludes *Ghost Ship Rodez (a radio play)* (2010), a component of the interdisciplinary project *Ghost Ship Rodez (The Momo Chronicles)* (2005–2010), a fictionalized investigation of the true story of influential French modernist playwright, artist, and Theater of Cruelty exponent Antonin Artaud's descent into insanity after attempting to return an artifact he believed to be St. George's staff to Ireland. While similar in format and approach, and also starring a polyphonic Jo Harvey in various roles, its European subject and setting, as well as its later date, distinguish it from the other interrelated pieces. *Ghost Ship Rodez (a radio play)* is something different, though equally fascinating.⁷

Pedal Steal was originally released on Allen's own Fate Records in 1988 (three years after its premiere performance at the Brooklyn Academy of Music) and again on Sugar Hill in 2006, both times on CD—this is the first vinyl edition. *Torso Hell* is the only other piece in this collection that has ever been released in physical form, albeit in a very limited cassette edition. Originally broadcast on artist Jacki Apple's KPFK-FM radio program *Soundings*, *Torso Hell* is also the only one of the *Four Corners* works that was not commissioned by New American Radio (though NAR did later archive the work and make it available for broadcast), and the only one that does not feature Jo Harvey. From 1987 to 1998, New

American Radio, founded and helmed by director Helen Thorington with the assistance of associate director Regine Beyer, commissioned more than 300 experimental works for radio by artists such as Pura Fé, Pauline Oliveros, and Christian Marclay, among many others. As Terry explains:

What they were doing is sending it up on satellite, and NPR stations could pull it down and if they wanted to, they would play it, and if they didn't, they wouldn't. Usually if it was on it was on from twelve to six o'clock in the morning—your great royalty hours, you know?

Allen designed the pieces specifically for listening in a car, which has always been a favorite space to audition his audio work, including album mixes and masters. “With radio, I always think of motion, in a car at night. I always considered that when making these pieces.” He even imagined an audience:

I like to think of some salesman, or a trucker, out in the middle of the highway, just tuning into the middle of *Bleeder* and wondering what kind of thing is going through this person's mind when they hear something like that. I figure to hear anything different is productive as long as it doesn't cause a car wreck or something.⁸

According to Terry, although Thorington celebrated and supported his work, he was by his own estimation “kind of the bastard of her bunch,” since his radio plays were generally less abstract and focused on more traditional, albeit often disjointed and nonlinear, narrative exercises than most of the New American Radio library. Like his songwriting, which only nominally fits within the realm of country music (“Which country?” Terry quips), his work for radio, and his long-form narrative audio recordings more broadly, appropriate the general form and format of the genre, or medium, of popular radio dramas—monologue, dialogue, songs, interstitial instrumentals, and diegetic sound cues within a roughly thirty minute running time—but transforms it into something much denser with meaning within a postmodern art context.

Over the course of the past thirty-five years, Allen has alternately referred to the body of work represented in this collection as radio plays, radio shows, or radio movies. In 1994, Allen recorded a “Self-Interview” for New American Radio, in which he frankly discusses the medium of radio and its significance to his practice.

Radio is really about images for me. It's really about making an image happen that gets into your brain ... I think it is about cinema. I think you see it. If you listen to it you don't have any choice but to see it ... Radio is a living visceral thing of the heart, blood, and bone and should be confronted with courage and respect. It is a true voice, and like all such voices, it is riddled with lies and ignorance. A medium of humans.⁹

These works, each of which is couched in one of Allen's bodies (or cycles, as he often calls them) of interdisciplinary art, serve as a ligament between Terry's music, writing, visual art, and theatrical work, and as a bridge to Jo Harvey's writing, theatrical work, film work, and acting. In many ways, they bear a stronger affinity to Allen's visual art and theatrical practices than to his discography of album-oriented songs. And yet they function as standalone documents, stripped of the accretion of visual cues, the shell of objecthood, while retaining the density and transport of dreaming. Terry elaborates in his “Self-Interview”:

Radio pulls you inside ... like listening to bedtime stories with your eyes closed ... I always think of it as the voice of emptiness. Maybe it's growing up on this immense flat ground, where everything is so much bigger than you are—the weather, the distances between where you are and where you'd like to be ... And the only legs you had to get across this emptiness really were car tires, automobiles ... against that stark flat ominous blankness of the plains ... I always think of radio as this one light, this one sound that would cross all that territory and spoke to you, helped you speak to yourself.¹⁰

In the absence of the visual, what is left resembles spells, rituals, enactments of story and spirits, air and angels. The voice of emptiness that speaks to you and helps you speak to yourself. Memory. *Nilch'i*.

Pedal Steal

The title of *Pedal Steal* is of course a pickpocket pun—Terry loves puns—on the most lachrymose instrument of the postwar country music canon, whose slippery melisma mimics the human voice at its most despondent and wretchedly fluid. So it's apt that the project originated when master steel-guitarist Lloyd Maines—whom Allen had only just met and who soon became his enduring bandleader and brother—invoked the name of Wayne Gailey. It was the very first day of recording *Lubbock (on everything)* in the summer of 1978 at Caldwell Studios in Lubbock.

Lloyd got a call that Wayne Gailey—who I'd never heard of—had died. It was in Vegas or Reno, somewhere in Nevada. Lloyd told me that this guy had been an incredible pedal steel player in New Mexico. He was one of the first people Lloyd had ever heard, and seen, play that instrument in a psychedelic rock and roll context. Gailey would be playing at a little country bar somewhere up in the New Mexico mountains, and they'd be playing just flat-out country stuff, but as soon as some pretty girls would walk in, he would take off into a wild Hendrix flight. I think that jarred Lloyd into how he was playing with [Joe] Ely, and taking off with Jesse [Taylor] on those incredible rides that they took. I didn't think about it again, except that Gailey's death had a real impact on Lloyd, who was someone I respected.

Although Allen didn't think of Gailey again for years, in a sense *Pedal Steal* emerged from *Lubbock* as a parallel, more experimental path to the nominally more conventional (or at least contained) songcraft Allen went on to explore on his albums released in the meantime, *Smokin' the Dummy* (1980) and *Bloodlines* (1983). Both of those records, like *Pedal Steal* and the *Four Corners* pieces, were credited to Terry Allen and The Panhandle Mystery Band, an amorphous entity that also emerged from the *Lubbock (on everything)* sessions, when Allen first met Lloyd Maines and many of the other regular players.¹¹

Six years after the recording of *Lubbock*, while Allen was living in Fresno, Gailey's ghost unexpectedly rematerialized in his life. Terry had invited his friend, the Texan writer, musician, and artist Roxy Gordon, to help make some spoken-word recordings to accompany the soundtrack to an installation called *China Night* at the Fresno Art Center. *China Night* was one articulation of *YOUTH IN ASIA* (another pun), a project that endured from 1982 through 1992 and encompassed nearly 300 works in a variety of media. *YOUTH IN ASIA* addressed the posttraumatic legacy of the Vietnam War and its toll of violence through various lenses, including American Indian, Latino, Mestizo, and Chicano cultures in the American Southwest; Vietnamese, Chinese, and French cultures in Southeast Asia; the iconography of Buddhism;¹² and the global imperialism of the United States and—its comic symbolic corollary—melting and molting Disney cartoon characters, an indictment of the “bogus innocence of those fairy tales”¹³ foisted upon the generation who fought the Vietnam War.¹⁴

The soundtrack, anticipating the collage structure of *Pedal Steal*, juxtaposed late '60s American rock, pop, and folk songs popularly associated with the era (Hendrix, Creedence, Doors, Townes) with Tejano music, Navajo and Hopi songs, and Montagnard (indigenous highland Vietnamese) chants that sonically resembled the American Indian recordings. Roxy, Terry, and Vietnam vet and Tyler Museum of Art director Ron Gleason voiced Allen's texts (collected in a related *China Night* chapbook. Gordon, who was Choctaw and Assiniboine, and much of whose work addresses his ancestry and the ongoing colonial violence wrought on American Indians, was a natural choice for *China Night*.

The whole piece was about the Southwest, the aftermath of the American Indians and Hispanics that had gone off to war, courtesy of the USA, to visit their ancient relatives in Vietnam, who had thousands of years before crossed the Bering Strait and come down through the Americas and become what we call

Native Americans. So it was like a return home in a perverse way. It was all told through this installation of this quarter-scale adobe rathole bar that I called *China Night*. There's a neon sign in the window of the bar that the "K" and the "A" are burned out, so it's "China Night," but originally it was Kachina Night—kachinas are ghosts, presences of the dead, in Pueblo culture. Then the soundtrack played in the back of it, where it was Snow White and the Seven Dwarves, with the Seven Dwarves as the Vietcong.

Or, as Allen succinctly put it in conversation with art critic and longstanding sparring partner Hickey in 1991:

In my old pickup between LA and Lubbock, driving through the desert, listening to rock 'n' roll and monitoring the jungle war on the radio ... That, basically, was my Vietnam War experience—the American Southwest overlaid with rock 'n' roll and news from Southeast Asia ... Buddhists and Hopis; Laos and Taos, you know. All these weird parallels and incredible collisions made a sad sort of sense to me.¹⁵

Gordon wrote a powerful essay called "Terry Allen—The Magic: The Art: The Artist"¹⁶ about his time with Terry in Fresno. While he was in Fresno, Roxy told Terry more about Wayne Gailey, whom he calls, in an essay he later wrote on Terry, "a steel player I used to know in New Mexico ... who OD'd in the late seventies." In his 1979 essay "Whatever Happened to Wayne Gailey?" Gordon ventures deeper into Gailey's own black magic of desert blues:

Wayne Gailey was an artist coming close to my definition of artist as magician. I saw Gailey's magic work, and I saw it fall. Things so undefined as art and magic are almost non-understandable. Gailey, I'm sure, died not understanding. But Gailey and others like him—people I met in my music mid '70s—have given me a clearing definition of my future as an artist. In art school and galleries, I found weak and forgotten magic; in honky-tonks, I found jukeboxes. In artists I found academic magic. In Gailey I found magic so great and so unbounded that it killed him.¹⁷

Roxy Gordon died in 2000. Though the only direct link between *China Night*, Roxy Gordon, and *Pedal Steal* is the context of Allen's reintroduction to Gailey, the Navajo song "Níłch'i," and the general context of honky-tonks, roadhouses, and "adobe rathole bars" of the type populated by Gailey and Gordon alike, the connection was sufficiently powerful for Allen to dedicate the 2006 Sugar Hill reissue of *Pedal Steal* to Roxy's memory.

After *China Night*, Terry began writing the songs that became the "Billy the Boy" cycle that features prominently, though piecemeal, in *Pedal Steal*, and which he rerecorded for *Salivation* (1999) and still performs live. Billy the Boy—with "dimes / in [his] blue eyes ... lead / in [his] soul ... bleedin' to death / beneath the dancehall lights"—was the wild result of the conflation of two antiheroes of New Mexican infamy: Wayne Gailey and the legendary outlaw Billy the Kid (a.k.a. William H. Bonney a.k.a. Henry McCarty). Billy's territory is that Laos/Taos nexus in the Land of Enchantment.

I was using that old classic Billy the Kid legend and slanting it against the climate and culture of early '70s New Mexico. I used Gailey as a pivot point, thinking about a band in that period of time roaming around the Southwest playing these shit gigs.

Around the same time in 1984, on the recommendation of Laird Rodet, the executive director of her dance company, San Francisco choreographer and dancer Margaret Jenkins reached out to Allen about a potential collaboration. Neither was previously familiar with the other's work—Jenkins wasn't a country music fan, and Allen had never partnered with a choreographer in this capacity—so it wasn't necessarily an obvious match or a natural fit, as far as aesthetics or personalities.

My history as a modern choreographer, so to speak, was to make work in collaboration with contemporary avant-garde artists. Not only had I not worked with someone whose musical form was what Terry's was, but I had not worked in that kind of narrative form before—dance as a way of physicalizing a very

particular story. . . It also was the first time that I had ever choreographed specifically in response to music that I was given outright, without any back and forth development of the score.

The Brooklyn Academy of Music liked the idea of pairing these two “Western” artists who both lived and worked in California but represented radically different creative milieus and practices. They invited Allen and Jenkins to premiere a collaborative piece for their 1985 season. The timing was perfect for Terry to present his new Billy the Boy songs as a component of a sustained narrative.

After a meeting with Margaret and the dancers, I sat down and I just flat-out wrote the script; it was a script as a sound piece . . . It really kind of took on its own life as soon as I kind of locked into the fact that it was the odyssey of this character, as told by peripheral characters, like they were talking about a movie.

He recorded with the Panhandle Mystery Band at Caldwell Studios in Lubbock as usual, but he brought along a variety of guests, by far the largest cast of any of his radio works. Rolling Stones saxophonist Bobby Keys (also from Lubbock) and studio owner Don Caldwell (who also co-engineered and coproduced) played a sax-duet arrangement of the hoary standard “Sentimental Journey.” During Billy’s funeral scene, Sharon Ely (Flatlander Joe Ely’s wife), as Billy’s widow, read from an actual found postcard from Granite Gorge, in the Grand Canyon. Erstwhile Flatlander and Lubbockite Butch Hancock dryly voiced a character, as well as led the band on the morbid country classic “Give Me Flowers (While I’m Living),” a favorite Panhandle Mystery Band encore that also concludes Terry’s 1999 album *Salivation*:

Won’t you give me my flowers while I’m living
And let me enjoy them while I can
Please don’t wait till I’m ready to be buried
And then slip some lilies in my hand

That’s Terry’s sense of humor encapsulated in a perfect quatrain, the macabre freaked with tenderness, as well as his ultimate subject: how we remember, and how we are remembered. The past recedes in the rearview, until one day it looms ahead again on the highway, transfigured through the grimy film of the windshield. What corpse needs flowers? Not Billy.

Pedal Steal begins with the disorienting metatheatrical overture of Lloyd tuning his guitar strings while Terry walks around the studio. All the dialogue other than Jo Harvey’s is voiced by a Greek chorus of musicians and nonactors, who remember and misremember anecdotes and evidence of Billy’s life and death, conjuring the dead, as we all do, to keep them alive. That suits the multivalent, folkloric nature of the text, wherein no single voice (or dancer) is stable, but each embodies multiple characters. The metatheatrical casting and performance strategy peaks in a scene of strange Brechtian distancing.

There was a melodrama that we asked this Mexican couple [Emma and Javier Tuset] to read. It was overtly, innocently idiotic, a conversation they have about this boy. At the time when we did it, a lot of people were saying, “God, that’s awful, they’re awful actors, you need to get somebody who knows what they’re doing.” But there was something about the innocence of it, their struggling to read the lines, that seemed so appropriate and moving to me, so I kept it, and I still really love listening to it.

The piece was assembled as a collage, using the techniques of film sound editing and analog electronic music. *Pedal Steal* took form as country-concrete composition, the master tape of which served as the soundtrack of each performance of the dance piece.

Each of the people I brought in to read became a strip of tape, until we had the floor and every horizontal surface in that studio covered with numbered strips of tape. When we’d finally finished recording everything, it was like putting a dismantled sculpture together. It was all cut and spliced by hand. It was tactile.

Terry also took on responsibility for art direction for the performance—designing the set, costumes, and projections—for which he won the New York Dance Critics’ 1985 Bessie Award. The dancers performed around a structure designed to look like the graffiti-covered shell of the screen of an abandoned drive-in movie theater called *The Beauty*. Jenkins remembers that the set was “pretty controversial, because it had the words ‘fuck you’ on it in big pink letters, and it wasn’t something that I was going to be able to tour to a lot of different cities because of the language. There needed to be warning signs in the lobby that some of the language might be offensive.”

The audience faced the rear of the screen, so the blue-neon sign that read “*The Beauty*” was backwards. Frontal and rear slide projections allowed for the layering of photographs made by Douglas Kent Hall in collaboration with Allen (some of which appear in the album design of this reissue): stark Southwestern landscapes and photos of postcards depicting said landscapes, one degree removed; banal exterior shots of honky-tonks, bars, motels, and roadside cafes; equally banal shots of their interiors and contents; Mexican image candles of nude figures, a devil, a skull; drawers full of what looked like personal effects emptied from pockets or forensic documentation of criminal evidence (spilled pills, guitar picks, a switchblade, etc.). Frontal and rear lighting stimulated spectral double shadowplay when dancers moved in front of the screen and onto platforms behind the backlit screen. “One of the things that I was thinking about,” Terry remembers, “was the idea of images coming out of a movie and becoming real and walking around and then going back into the movie, characters who could break continuity but keep moving through another space.”

Terry issued very specific instructions for costuming the six dancers (one of whom was Jenkins herself): “Imagine yourself in Clovis, New Mexico in 1972, Saturday night, about three in the morning at Denny’s. Go in there and take everybody’s clothes off of them—that’s what the costumes should be.” They spent a lot of time in Goodwill. Jenkins recalls that the only point of real conflict and tension during their collaboration involved an argument about a prop. One sequence involved miming a shooting with a pistol, and Allen insisted they use a real gun and actual blanks. She outright refused—“we’re dealing with real bodies here!” she protested—and remembers that “Terry was *not* happy; it was not a nice moment.”

While *Pedal Steal* toured nationally to critical acclaim, according to Jenkins it was particularly popular regionally: “It was very successful work here in the Bay Area. People still remember it and talk about it as one of their favorite works of mine.” The collaboration was sufficiently fruitful for Allen and Jenkins to work together again in 1989 on another production called *Rollback*, the set and video elements of which were designed by Terry’s friend (and by then, fellow Santa Fe County resident), the pioneering artist Bruce Nauman. Terry and the Panhandle Mystery Band once again composed the soundtrack. In 1988, Allen released both *Pedal Steal* and *Rollback* together on a Fate Records CD, which was packaged with two album covers, obverse and inverted reverse: “It’s hard to figure out what’s what on it, where *Rollback* starts and *Pedal Steal* begins. A lot of people think it’s all *Pedal Steal*, or it’s all *Rollback*, depending on which side of the CD they read first.” The reception was varied: “Most people who liked my music were mystified, especially radio stations, who don’t want to play a thirty-six minute track. But punks loved it! I got letters saying that *Pedal Steal* was the punkest thing they’d ever heard.”

Today the dance components of *Pedal Steal* survive only in dim, faded shadows—like the dancers’ silhouettes on *The Beauty*’s screen, or the patterns on their Goodwill costumes—in memories, still photographs, and hazy video documentation that suffers from the technological limitations of the day and the eternal difficulty of capturing dance in two dimensions. But remarkably, even as a discrete album, shorn of its elaborate and affecting performative and sculptural contexts, *Pedal Steal* stands as another masterpiece in the Allen discography and a prescient predecessor of his subsequent radio plays. Allen assesses it in retrospect as an important transitional work in his career: “To me, it all kind of became about what installations could do dramatically, and what a soundtrack could do dramatically without actors. I think it was all struggling toward a theatrical idea, more than it was about a soundtrack or even an installation.”

Torso Hell

In the original liner notes for *Lubbock (on everything)*, three capitalized curses comprise Allen's dedication to fallen friends. "FUCK VIET NAM" is for his childhood Lubbock friend, track star Stanley McPherson (a.k.a. Roadrunner), killed in action in 1967.

Stanley never got to be a forest ranger like he wanted to—to take care of Bambi and Thumper. And when he died, that made me angry, but not at Lyndon Johnson. I was angry at Walt Disney for giving Stanley that stupid dream!¹⁸

That curse, combined with "FUCK HOLLYWOOD"—in memory of Allen's LA friend Peter Duel, a television actor who committed suicide in 1973—encapsulates the virulent recipe of rage that resulted in *Torso Hell*: equal parts rage against the trauma of war and against the vile delusions of American pop culture that Allen satirized in *YOUTH IN ASIA*.

Allen's first work expressly for radio, *Torso Hell* is the outlier of this collection in terms of how it was commissioned, recorded, broadcast, and released. In 1986 Terry was again called out of the blue by a female Californian artist he had never met. This time it was Jacki Apple, who admired his work and invited him to make a radio piece for *Soundings*, the weekly one-hour radio program she hosted and produced from 1982 to 1995 and which aired on Pacifica Radio KPFK, a listener-sponsored FM station broadcasting from North Hollywood. Fresh from the success of *Pedal Steal*, Terry took her up on the offer immediately: "I'd always had a love for radio, especially the old serials and dramas, so I was excited about doing it ... So I wrote this piece, and I was in Texas, and I wanted to have a soundtrack for it, and they had this machine at Caldwell Studios called an Emulator."

The E-mu Emulator II was an early 8-bit digital sampler and synthesizer that used floppy disk storage—a very different instrument than Terry had ever used on a recording, but one which dominates *Torso Hell*. Terry recorded the soundtrack at Caldwell Studios, with some additional tracking at STRS Studios in Fresno, where he was still living and teaching at California State. He and Jacki would perform his script live on-air, so he had to estimate the approximate durations for each of the twenty instrumental tracks he recorded and hope they fit more or less with the rate he and Jacki read the script live while the tape played back on air.

Dave Hickey best summarizes the story itself, which Allen conceived as a "radio movie," or a horror film treatment for radio, about a Vietnam vet:

He has been the victim of a direct artillery strike in Vietnam that has resulted in his becoming a quadruple amputee. Further, his blown-off arms and legs have been inadvertently reattached to his buddies, who were victims of the same explosion. They have all returned to the States: the buddies to their previous lives, the hero to a "torso hell," in the custody of his heartless aunt and her punk son in a boarding house in New Mexico. The aunt and her son keep the hero alive to collect his government disability. They torture and abuse him to amuse themselves. The hero ... having no place else to go, goes deep "into himself" and through "mind control" summons up his buddies and his absent limbs, calls them to him. Finally, in a violent scene of reunion and revenge, the torso reassembles itself into a "whole man"—enacting a powerful and perverse ritual of resocialization.¹⁹

This narrative unfolds with a weirdly subjunctive logic and momentum, as if a screenwriter is breathlessly pitching to a movie producer, while the Emulator buzzes and drones and arpeggiates in the background. Nothing is fixed; everything is potential; the film does not yet exist except in the writer's febrile mind and fragmentary notes. The script is notable for its lacunae, its conversational contingencies, as curious for what it specifies as for what it excludes, qualifies, or speculates upon. It leaves nearly every detail of direction and dialogue open to the listener's imagination, preferences, or kinks—or perhaps to the eventual film producer's budget. Terry and Jacki's live on-air vocal performances, which maintain the odd flubbed line and imperfect transition, reinforce this impression of gaseous mutability, of someone speaking this terrifying and hilarious story into existence on-air—*nîlch 'i bee hane'é*.

Torso Hell is, then, a ghost story in both content (actualizing phantom-limb syndrome into the realm of cinematic horror) and form (the ghost of a narrative, flesh riven from the skeletal, sun-bleached myth). It shares the extreme violence and sexuality of its pulp inspirations, but presses into the realm of absurdity and metafiction, serving simultaneously as a parody of trashy B horror flicks and ponderous Hollywood Vietnam movies and as a vicious commentary on war and its endless rhetorical wake, the ways we abuse, exploit, and ignore our veterans while spouting inane pieties about honor, service, and patriotism. “The number of suicides by Vietnam veterans is now double the number of names on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall,” Allen writes in the 1992 catalog to the *YOUTH IN ASIA* exhibition. “Where’s the memorial to that?”²⁰

Even moreso than *Pedal Steal*, *Torso Hell* is a direct and visceral articulation of Allen’s *YOUTH IN ASIA* body of work and its examinations of the psychological residue and betrayals of the Vietnam War. In 1987, a year after its broadcast, the performance-art journal *High Performance* released a limited-edition cassette of *Torso Hell* (HP013), with the play on its A-side (“The Radio Movie”) and the instrumental tracks only on the B-side (“The Soundtrack”). The cover features a black-and-white reproduction detail of Allen’s 1986 monoprint “Mickey Bob Death” (a.k.a. “The Red Letter”), which depicts a sinister, molten Mickey Mouse among Chinese characters from the I Ching (*grace, peace, the abysmal*) and a scrawled “1968.” Perverted Disney characters—Goofy, Donald, et al.—infest the *YOUTH IN ASIA* works in all their frothy animistic pagan glory. In the radio play, Apple’s character suggests that the film should begin “like an old Disney movie, that paintbrush going over the screen in big sweeps, making a full-size cartoon of the jungle, then transforming it into the real thing. There it is.” Disney’s goons appear on a large triptych also entitled *Torso Hell* and incorporating much of its script text (as well as “Mickey Bob Death”), some of it stamped into lead, its own toxic Vietnam Memorial. *Torso Hell* the radio play likewise serves as the audio soundtrack to the sculptural installations *Treatment (Angel with dirty tracks)* and *Big Witness (living in wishes)* (1988), further facets of the *YOUTH IN ASIA* firmament of damaged ghosts, fallen seraphim, and violated corpses. As Hickey writes, “Taken together, *Torso Hell* and *Big Witness* present us with two rather bleak options for the reassertion of the human bond: hopelessness and transcendental violence, which are, in effect, the same option.”²¹

After *Torso Hell* aired, producer and director Roger Corman called to inquire about acquiring the rights for a film. Allen declined. “I said no, you’re supposed to listen to it, not look at it. It’d be bad enough to listen to, much less see it.” More notoriety followed when “Jesse Helms put it on his Top Ten hit list of things to be avoided at all costs on radio. I was very proud of that.” In Germany, through New American Radio’s Regine Beyer, who is German, *Torso Hell* gained a longstanding audience. “They probably played it every Halloween or V-Day or something like that,” Allen gibes, whenever some nice horror period for Germany was.”

Bleeder

The third and final curse in the *Lubbock (on everything)* liner notes is “FUCK BAD BLOOD,” a reference to another of Terry and Jo Harvey’s childhood friends from Lubbock, Danny Parrish, a hemophiliac who died in his thirties. Allen’s *Anterabbit/Bleeder (a biography)* cycle (1982–90), roughly contemporaneous with *YOUTH IN ASIA*, deploys fact and fiction, from Parrish’s life and far afield, to explore the very nature of biography and history, the ways our language and memories fail and fool us with their feeble reenactments and fractured transmissions of the past filtered through our myopic present. Memories are hemorrhages, *Bleeder* suggests, that stain our speech, our stories, and our mark-making with Rorschach bruises of untruths, exaggerations, and fantasies. At the beginning of *Bleeder*, Allen’s voice introduces this premise, a key to unlock much of his work:

History exists temporarily, and people take place. Events are carried away to different directions through the mind, as images. Images dissolve across the passage of years, into memory. Stories are told; songs are sung. Hearts become rooms set aside. And hallucination begins.

The artist describes the *Anterabbit/Bleeder* cycle as “a fictional ‘autobiography’ of an enigmatic Texas gambler, religious fanatic, possible gangster, magician, and hemophiliac.”

History, events, images, memory, and hallucination dissolve into one another and invent Bleeder’s life and mythology. The piece has three parts: an exhibition/installation; a theater piece for proscenium theater; and *Bleeder*, a radio show produced by NPR. All three elements are generated by and developed from the text of the same story. The exhibition/installation includes text, drawings, sculptures, neon, music, and live parakeets. The text in the installation becomes the monologue for the different female personas of the character “Woman” (performed by Jo Harvey Allen) in the theater piece. The theater piece also includes musicians, a hula dancer, a magician, live doves, and an actor as “Bleeder.”²²

Maniacal cartoon imagery returns, this time based on Bleeder’s own juvenile sketches.

I did a lot of drawings, because one of the things I remember when he was a kid is going to the hospital, and he would be on his deathbed and giving all of his stuff away, all his toys. He would write these wills, and he did these drawings—elaborate, goofy drawings. In a way the drawings that I did were child’s drawings too, even though they were much more horrific.

Allen considers *Anterabbit/Bleeder* his first sustained foray into biographical strategies, at least insofar as they are applied (or misapplied) to a “real” person, an important preliminary project to the even more personal *DUGOUT*.

I used stories that were true, stories that were fabricated, built characters that were not true based on some characters that were true. It was the first time I dealt with real biographical information and tested the idea of what a biography was. That also played into parallel to that disease itself, because it was so elusive and strange that it kind of became a biography of hemophilia.

The exhibition and the theater piece—Terry’s second theatrical event ever, after the wrestling-ring ritual *The Embrace ... Advanced to Fury* (1978), which also starred Jo Harvey—both premiered in 1983 at the La Jolla Museum of Contemporary Art, preceding the *Bleeder* radio play by seven years. The performance, two nights only, was elaborate, necessitating lugging heavy, literally leaden sculptures from the upstairs museum galleries downstairs to the museum’s stage each night to serve as the set. The show featured Panhandle Mystery Band stalwarts Lloyd Maines and Richard Bowden playing with Terry and Sean Sullivan as Bleeder, but Jo Harvey stole the show, playing four aspects of the Woman character, who cocoons Bleeder with involute narration.

Helen Thorington inaugurated her relationship with Terry and Jo Harvey when she approached Terry in 1990 about writing and recording a new piece specifically for New American Radio and NPR. Since the script for the theater piece already existed, *Bleeder* seemed a relatively manageable story to adapt. Once again, they recorded at Caldwell Studios in Lubbock, with Don Caldwell, Lloyd Maines, and Terry coproducing, a return to the splice-and-dice tape-collage tactics of *Pedal Steal*. According to Terry, when she first heard *Bleeder*, Thorington “became infatuated with Jo Harvey’s voice,” and indeed, Jo Harvey’s performance is indelible, virtuosic. Terry remembers:

It was the first time working with Jo Harvey that I realized—and I think one of the first times *she* realized—that she could jump personas, almost in the middle of a sentence. She played four characters: a mother, a girlfriend, a friend, and an ex-wife. There was this text that divided the piece all the way through it, kind of bled through itself. It introduced each section but shifted each time—the first sentence in the first part became the second sentence in the second part; everything dripped down.

Memories drip down and dry like blood, corrupting our stories with the encrusted residues of lies. That anxiety, that uncomfortable eroticization of memory and memorials as universal taboo, haunts *Bleeder*, the complexity of which, and of whom, we never fully apprehend. The inscrutable character Bleeder himself assesses “the whole idea of biography” as “pure bullshit, some powdered-up, sick,

perversed form of necrophilia.”

Reunion (a return to Juarez)

If *Bleeder* drips like blood, *Reunion (a return to Juarez)* is tidal, oceanic. Despite the action taking place largely in the deserts (ancient oceans) of Southern California and the Four Corners states, the piece begins and ends with the sound of waves and gulls, returning its character Sailor/Jabo to the sea and “the perfect ship,” suggesting that even the militarized Pacific of the WWII-era US Navy is more truly pacific than his bloody future.

The *JUAREZ* cycle (1968–present), as most famously articulated on Allen’s 1975 debut album, a conceptual corrido of colonialist critique and a cosmic cartography of the US–Mexico borderlands, represents the most fruitfully iterative and persistent narrative structure in Allen’s oeuvre. Ostensibly the “simple story” of the fateful but arbitrary murder, in a “small, rundown mountain trailer” in Cortez, Colorado, of Navy boy Sailor and his new bride, the Tijuana prostitute Spanish Alice (a.k.a. Alicia) at the hands of Juarez-born pachuco Jabo and his LA girlfriend, the “rock writer” and bruja Chic Blundie, the story spirals outward, and inward, recursively through a palimpsest of possibilities, a constellation of connections. *Reunion (a return to Juarez)* offers a retelling of the cyclical tale, denuded of much of its original musical context but with a new score and fresh narrative details.²³

What Terry Allen calls the “haunting” of *JUAREZ* first visited him in the late 1960s, and he first released the album *Juarez* in 1975. In 1978, Allen had written, and then abandoned, a film treatment with no dialogue:

It was all images and motion, literally like a movie of the album. The characters were so enigmatic, you never got to really see them. You might see a closeup of an eye, a mouth, a hand, or something like that.

In 1990, Allen and his friend David Byrne completed a more conventionally theatrical script for a *JUAREZ* musical-theater piece.²⁴ It was never produced, but fragments and ideas survived and filtered down to other works, including *Juarez: A Work in Progress* (1992), a one-woman theater piece starring Jo Harvey that premiered at the Brattle Theater in Cambridge, and which Allen felt was not completely successful.

Jo Harvey basically was a storyteller who acted out the four characters again, and we played the music live. It never was right, it never seemed to make sense at the time. I mean it’s typical of *JUAREZ*—it’s never been right. It’s never even been about that. It’s just this presence that just keeps kicking my ass.

It’s a recurring problem with any potential cinematic or dramatic interpretation of *JUAREZ*, in which the characters distill their atmospheric essences as “climates” into the form of corporeal people. The elision and collapsing of maps—“crashing the state lines”—that characterizes the uncanny geography of *JUAREZ* is a contagion that infects the characters as well. No identity or story is discrete but rather porous and dynamically interpenetrative, like weather systems—or borders, or cultures, or generations, or memories—colliding. In *Reunion* those transformations are made explicit in a way Allen only hinted at in previous versions of *JUAREZ*: “The two stories”—that is, the two couples—“collide and pass through one another.” (Whereas *Pedal Steal*, *Torso Hell*, and *Bleeder* orbit solitary, isolated antiheroes, *Reunion* and *Dugout* both concern the romantic and sexual relationships of couples.)

Reunion furnishes much more detail about the various locations, the courtship of Sailor and Alice, the crimes of Jabo and Chic, and the dissolution of distinct identities between the two couples. There is a lot of tattoo talk, a complex extrapolation of a single, isolated lyric from the 1975 album’s crucifixion ballad “Dogwood.”²⁵ (The song does not appear as part of *Reunion*, except for the allusive name of Jabo’s motorcycle, La Crucita.) As Dave Hickey observes, in Allen’s 1990s *JUAREZ* works, tattoos function as a metaphorical inscription and reinscription of the story’s map-obsessed illogic.²⁶ The Fates as tattoo artists stitch character to character, state to state, nation to nation, sewing them into a tangled skein of

scars. “Perfect skin gives people ideas,” the narrator warns. Sailor dreams his tattoos sink beneath his skin to infect his blood, and he reflects on the similarity of a map to “the best tattoo he ever saw,” a net completely covering a man’s body, with birds trapped beneath frantically struggling to escape, “like every WISH he ever had was busting loose inside of him.” After the murder, Jabo and Chic escape wearing Sailor and Alice’s clothes, and Sailor’s tattoos (the “ships on his arm”) appear on Jabo, possibly poisoning his cruelty with compassion. Chic transforms into Carlotta—the name tattooed “above her left nipple,” now revealed as Alicia’s mother’s name too²⁷—and Jabo eventually assumes the identity of Sailor, or a sailor, staring into the water at “the perfect ship.” *Reunion* takes the additional, explicit step, only hinted at in the original album, into the cinematic territory of shape-shifting Lynchian doppelgangers.²⁸

With *Reunion*, Allen revisits the concept of the “radio movie.” One scene is described as “just like a movie.” In another, Sailor and Alice pass an abandoned drive-in movie theater, and Alice fantasizes about characters walking in and out of the screen, just like *The Beauty in Pedal Steal*. For Jabo and Chic, “that morning in the desert, Arizona is just like a hole with a movie in it.”

The Allens recorded again at Caldwell Studios with Don engineering and Lloyd on guitars. Jo Harvey is the sole narrator, though unlike *Bleeder*, she maintains a third-person perspective on the deadly proceedings. Although it features a new instrumental arrangement of “What of Alicia,” a fragment of “Parts: Jabo / Street Walkin Woman,” and a recurring pedal-steel theme that sounds like a reduction of “There Oughta Be a Law Against Southern California,” much of the incidental music is new, based around a new song entitled “El Camino.”

In America, it’s MOTION that is holy . . .
not the destination.
Speed . . . blood . . . dreams . . . love and hell.
The highway is the heartbeat through everything.
So Jabo sings:

“El Camino, Mi Corazon, El Camino, that’s my problem . . .”

Chic laughs. She says . . . that song is as close as you’ll ever get to knowing anything about anything.
Especially about love. Chic laughs again. Then writes on the wall: THIS IS HELL.

Terry wrote and recorded the script considering how he might use the audio not only for the New American Radio piece itself, but also as the soundtrack for an upcoming exhibition. In 1992, he mounted *a simple story (Juarez)* at the Wexner Center for the Visual Arts in Columbus, Ohio. The piece showcased three new large-scale sculptural installations, each representing a location in the story: *Melodyland*, an architectural conflation of the club in Juarez where Jabo goes to “sit and talk and drink and dance and long for LA” after Chic disappears and La Estrella Negra, the whorehouse in Tijuana where Alice works; *Stations*, the filling-station site of one of Jabo and Chic’s apocalyptic crimes and consequential conflagrations; and *The Perfect Ship*, the trailer in Cortez where the murder occurs, here cradled within the wooden frame of an ark and containing a floating, white, mummy-like figure.

The soundtrack to *a simple story (Juarez)* incorporated a remixed version of *Reunion*, sometimes separating Jo Harvey’s voice and the musical passages, or isolating the sound effects or other tracks.²⁹ Allen initially had developed the three structures as set concepts for the forsaken musical with Byrne, so *Reunion* was in a sense a musical without actors, the ghost of an aborted theater piece—appropriate for *JUAREZ*’s elliptical nature and for radio as a medium.

I remember contacting Helen [Thorington] and saying, “I need to get some copies of stuff, because I’m using it as a soundtrack for these installations.” It’s funny, nothing was ever just a radio show, even though at the time I was doing it, I thought of it as a radio show. *Dugout* might be the one that I considered the most when I did it as being something specifically for radio that people were going to be listening to with no context or background.

Dugout

Dugout, Allen's third and final radio play commissioned by New American Radio, was broadcast in 1993, seven years before the first physical artworks related to the *DUGOUT* cycle were completed and exhibited. In that sense, *Dugout* is unique among Allen's radio works, because rather than a radio reconfiguration, revival, or reiteration of an existing narrative in which the artist was already embroiled, in this case the radio play instigated a resulting body of work. He was able to write and compose specifically for the radio format without other looming considerations of totality.

His most personal and autobiographical work, *DUGOUT* is based loosely on the lives on Allen's father, a retired professional baseball player turned promoter of concerts and wrestling, and his mother, a barrelhouse-style piano player and "the first woman ever to be thrown out of SMU [Southern Methodist University], for playing jazz with black musicians in Deep Ellum in Dallas." Allen himself describes the *DUGOUT* cycle as "a love story, an investigation into how memory is invented, a kind of supernatural-jazz-sport-history-ghost-blood-fiction that rolls across the late nineteenth century into the mid-twentieth century."³⁰ The title refers to at least five family "dugouts" mentioned in the cycle: the frontier dugout home, "stuck half-in and half-out of a small Oklahoma hill" in which Allen's mother was born in 1905; a Civil War-veteran ancestor's story about spending three days in a "dugout dirt trench full of blood up to his chin"; the baseball dugouts Allen's father inhabited for years; the Satin Dugout, a Denver speakeasy; and implicitly, everyone's graves.

In its entirety, *DUGOUT* comprises five multimedia components, three of which premiered simultaneously in 2004 at LA Louver Gallery, the Santa Monica Museum of Art, and LA Theater Works, respectively: *DUGOUT I*, a series of six sculptural "stages" or tableaux and forty accompanying drawings, many of which include text; *DUGOUT II: Hold On to the House*, a video installation involving projections onto various archetypal and deconstructed domestic architectural structures; and *DUGOUT III: Warboy (and the backboard blues)*, a musical-theater piece with Jo Harvey and the Panhandle Mystery Band. The 2005 book *Dugout* documents these three incarnations with expanded text annotation, a CD of *DUGOUT III*, and essays by Dave Hickey, David Byrne, Terrie Sultan, and Dana Friis-Hansen. All of these iterations developed out of the original 1993 radio play—featuring performances by Terry, Jo Harvey, and her mother Katie Koontz—which later doubled as looping soundtrack to *DUGOUT I*.

Dugout the radio play shares the wild ambition of *Pedal Steal* and the other *Four Corners* works but surveys a scope more intimately rooted in Allen's own life and family history. As a result of its personal nature and, perhaps, because it is unburdened by years of related extant works, the chronology feels, if not exactly more linear, then more easily decipherable. The emotional syntax and psychological register are perhaps more approachable and empathetic to the casual listener, less dizzyingly antic, omnivorous, and encyclopedic. The radio play concentrates on the fictionalized avatars of Allen's parents and grandparents, stopping before the extensions into Allen's own childhood, and the midcentury Cold War and science-fiction contexts, that *DUGOUT II* and *III* present. Terry composed the music with Lloyd Maines, though many of the recurring motifs are deconstructions of traditional songs, like the spiritual "In the Sweet By-and-By" and W. C. Handy's "St. Louis Blues," a favorite of Allen's mother. The gestures of subjunctive direction in *Dugout* refer not to forking-paths filmic potential, as in *Torso Hell*, but to the inherent subjectivity and entrenched flaws of memory. ("If there's sound, it's a piano.") Though it contains its share of jarring sex and violence, *Dugout* maintains some of a child's innocent awe at his parents' bedtime stories, even if the child himself invented them: "Truths, half-truths, half-lies, lies ... now I don't even remember which is which," Terry shrugs.³¹

The passing of Sled Allen, ball player, concert and wrestling promoter, and Lubbock legend, is a hinge in Terry's life to which he returns repeatedly as a reference point in the narrative of his life and art. Terry has told me that when his sons turned fifteen, he suddenly started spouting stories about his family because his own father died when he was fifteen. Something about that potential symmetry of mortality with his father kindled a fear of forgetting. The stories began to flow and have not stopped.

"Did I ever tell you about my parents' house?" Terry asks.

I was born in Kansas and moved almost immediately to Amarillo, where I lived the first two years of my life. And we lived in this house that my parents really liked. So when they sold the house and moved to Lubbock, they took the plans, and when they got enough money, they built an identical house in Lubbock. That's where I grew up. After my dad died, my mother sold that house, and she kind of moved around for a while. By this time Jo Harvey and I had moved to California. Then she ended up moving back to Amarillo, and she moved two blocks away from that original house, waiting for the woman in there to die so she could buy it back. She bought it finally when the woman died. And we would go back to visit, and it was the identical house where I grew up in Lubbock, except it was 113 miles away in Amarillo. That was very bizarre. It was also totally typical stuff, that kind of displacement.

We are always, all of us, returning home—or mourning our displacement, the reasons why we cannot or will not return. (Hold on to the house.) As the *Dugout* characters reflect about aging: “Your life just turns into a bucket full of stories, with a little bitty hole in the bottom. Or a bucket full of holes, with a little bitty story in the bottom.”

The Voice of Emptiness

A body with very few clothes
An old radio
Some apples
You get to eat
as many slices of bacon as you want
the morning of a home game
The way his sweater smells
It gets so hot it smokes
After awhile
just when Sam Cooke's new song
comes on
Worms and a homely girl from Texas
who can read quicker than you
Good marks
and a lost crop
like a whole season
that passed without a letter
from my brother.
— Frank Stanford, “This Conflict,” 1973

the air
and the dream;

the dream
and the air:

the flow
of the dream;

the flow
of the air.
— Robert Lax, from *new poems*, 1962

Radio on!
— The Modern Lovers, 1972

This bucket full of stories flows with death, ghosts in the wind—*nilch'i*—with memory, poisoned nostalgia, and a spectrum of imprecise opposites: forgetting, trauma, amnesia, oblivion. Four Corners.

When Allen naturally strains to remember and recount the chronology and circumstances of songs and scripts he wrote, sounds he recorded, and sculptures he exhibited thirty or forty years ago, he is untroubled by the way accumulated folklore—disseminated both by himself and others—seeps into his narratives, staining and obscuring the shifting sands of fact and truth embedded in his own history. He finds the unstable contingency of memory, the constantly evolving nature of the stories we tell ourselves, the way they accrue baroque details or erode to skeletal nubs over time, a source of both morbid curiosity and perverse humor. The mirages and ravages of memory, its half-life and rate of decay—*MemWars*—is his essential subject matter.

Throughout all his work, Terry thrives in this mode of ambiguity; as moving and frightening and naked as his work can sometimes be, it's never entirely clear what is (auto)biography or fiction, memory or dream, deadly serious or cruel joke. The boundaries between story and symbol are effaced and blurred—those categories, like genres, interpenetrate and collapse. The distinctions are irrelevant to Allen; for him, meaning (if there exists such a solemn, tedious thing) resides in those very ambiguities and liminalities, those mysterious vectors that define the impossible totality of the work. “If it isn't a lie,” he once told me about songwriting, “it's probably satire.”

In Allen's radio plays, moreso than most examples of the genre, historical or contemporary, form and content mirror each other. These five stories assume the form of hypnagogic transmissions, moving on the air and on the highways of the Southwest, where stories live in their original, ancient contexts of oral tradition and folklore—amid the teeming multiplicity of voices (in our ears, in our heads) telling, crosstalking, arguing with each other, revoicing and reshaping tales through to justify their own mnemonic and psychic needs. This, then, is the foundation and wellspring of Allen's art: the (im)pure story, unloosed from visual anchors and superstructure, from the narrative-supportive scaffolding of what Dave Hickey calls Terry's “heraldry, or glyphs, or typologies.”³² These tales are likewise unfixed, their contingency and contested histories laid bare. You would be hard pressed to recite the nominal plot of any of the radio plays, because they are “about” flux, flow, and forking paths as much as they are “about” their characters' actions and choices. They exist outside of time, outside of any stable, single telling, as inherently, dissonantly choral and polyphonic, their narrative strands inextricably tangled and knotted. These stories are riddled with the “lies and ignorance” inherent to radio, that “medium of humans,” and of ghosts, our residual shadows and memories. At its best, radio can be internal *and* external, solipsistic *and* communal—conducive to listening under glowing blankets alone at night, as well as dancing with friends in a circle of headlights in a cotton field.

And so Terry tries again. He reinscribes the palimpsest. He ties another knot. He rebuilds the house. He returns to the road. He has recorded the songs from *Juarez* numerous times, on various albums, in an attempt to re-articulate those mysteries, to illuminate different facets of its enigmatic characters and climates. Similarly, *Pedal Steal + Four Corners* ultimately proposes five variations on a single theme: how we try, and fail, to tell our stories to ourselves and to others alike. How do we navigate the narrative vortex of our memories?

Instead of wedding rings, Terry and Jo Harvey have tattoos of tornados on their ring fingers, the ink blurred and blued. Jo Harvey identifies them as “twisters,” that symbol of recurring destruction and isolation in Lubbock and out on the interminably flat Llano Estacado. Lubbock people, acclimated to harsh weather, constantly spin lore about the scouring wind.³³ After recently experiencing a dust storm together in Marfa, Texas, Terry joked to me, “Now you know what it was like growing up in Lubbock, and why we're like this—*eroded!*” Terry tells how when they were children tornados were the default Halloween costumes for Lubbockites—“You just wrap yourself up with two hula hoops in a sheet and tape and sew all kinds of junk and shit to yourself, then spin like hell. Only problem is you get dizzy and sick with all that candy.” *Pedal Steal + Four Corners* is, in its way, another articulation of the same resignation and irreverence, a way of shouting into the void with the voice of emptiness. The wind within erodes certainty. We all spin like hell and sing *Nilch'i*:

People of air
People of air
People of air

Only the wind
Came motion-making
Before us

Howling people
People of the whispers
We are the tree shaking

The mother shaking
Who stays ... rocking
The father shaker
Who goes ... ha

Gone shake away

A wind within
And wind without
Breathing leaves
Grown falling

People of dust
People of dust
People of dust
People of dust

Fall rising

Unless otherwise attributed, all quotations are either from song lyrics, scripts, or from numerous personal conversations, interviews, and oral histories with Terry Allen, Jo Harvey Allen, and the other artists discussed.

¹ Terry Allen, “A Self-Interview on Tape – Radio Memories and Other Things,” 1994.

² Jo Harvey Allen, *Homerun* (self-published), 2014, 13.

³ Allen, “A Self-Interview.”

⁴ Terry Allen, *MemWars*, 2016.

⁵ Pictures of Terry’s piano in this era feature a prominent Beefheartian *Safe as Milk* sticker on the instrument, which he earned by tickling Jo Harvey and recording voiceover about the record over the sound of her hysterical laughing.

⁶ Terry also played in Dripping Springs that first legendary year, alongside Earl Scruggs, Charlie Rich, Hank Snow, and Billy Joe Shaver, among many others.

⁷ Seek out the self-released 2010 *Ghost Ship Rodez* CD. Allen’s 1986 installation and theater piece *Ohio*, nominally about the death of Hank Williams, represents another dramatic audio work related to his radio plays

⁸ Allen, “A Self-Interview.”

⁹ Allen, “A Self-Interview.”

¹⁰ Allen, “A Self-Interview.”

¹¹ As Terry often jokes, “I’ve always thought the mystery of the Panhandle Mystery Band is who *isn’t* in it. Because everybody who ever played with us, and there were a lot of people, became an instant member.”

¹² “I’m not a Buddhist, though maybe just saying that means I am,” Allen has quipped.

¹³ Dave Hickey, “Terry Allen’s *Youth in Asia*,” in *Terry Allen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 118.

¹⁴ Allen’s 1985 album *Amerasia*, a soundtrack to the Wolf-Eckart Bühler film about American expats in Indochina, focused on the *YOUTH IN ASIA* project from a different geographical and musical perspective, through the Panhandle Mystery Band’s collaborative recordings with Thai and Lao musicians Surachai Jantimaton and Caravan in Bangkok.

¹⁵ Hickey, “Terry Allen’s *Youth in Asia*,” 119.

¹⁶ Roxy Gordon, “Terry Allen—The Magic: The Art: The Artist,” *Omaha Rainbow* 38 (Summer 1986).

¹⁷ Roxy Gordon, “Whatever Happened to Wayne Gailey?” *Omaha Rainbow* 20 (Spring 1979).

¹⁸ Hickey, “Terry Allen’s *Youth in Asia*,” 118.

¹⁹ Dave Hickey, “Terry Allen’s *Big Witness: A Less Perfect Union*,” in *Terry Allen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 168.

²⁰ Allen quoted in *Terry Allen: Youth in Asia* (Winston-Salem: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1992).

²¹ Hickey, “Terry Allen’s *Big Witness: A Less Perfect Union*,” 168.

²² Terry Allen, *Terry Allen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 93.

²³ *Reunion (a return to Juarez)* was the first of Allen’s radio plays I heard; in 2006, Terry mailed it to me on a homemade cassette mixtape, the other side of which contained a mix of some of his favorite songs from, or about, the US–Mexico *frontera*.

²⁴ David Byrne and the Allens became close while Byrne was directing Jo Harvey in his 1986 film *True Stories*, and in 1992, they traveled and recorded together in Chennai, India. Since then, David and Terry have written, recorded, and performed together periodically.

²⁵ “Yeah I’m crashin the state lines / Headed for a high time ... this Sunday / An I need your tattoo / Next to mine when I do ... ahhh / Chic Blundie.”

²⁶ Dave Hickey, “Born in a Trailer: Borne Forth Upon the Perfect Ship,” in *Terry Allen, a simple story (Juarez)* (Columbus: Wexner Center for the Arts, 1992).

²⁷ Disappeared or otherwise unavailable mothers abound throughout *Pedal Steal + Four Corners*, a literal absence of succor: Billy’s damaged mother in *Pedal Steal*, Torso’s missing mother (supplanted by his evil aunt), Alicia’s mother Carlotta in *Juarez*, the ballplayer’s mother in *Dugout*.

²⁸ Some critics have speculated on the resemblance of Lynch’s *Wild at Heart* (1990), an adaptation of Barry Gifford’s 1989 novel, to the much earlier *Juarez*. Both star an ultraviolent, sex-crazed Sailor (played by Nicholas Cage in the film) rampaging across the Southwest with his lover.

²⁹ *Reunion* was similarly repurposed for the soundtrack to the *JUAREZ*-related 1992 exhibition *Voices in the Wilderness*, which involved speakers wired to paintings and sculptures. The note from the motel maid reappears later in Allen’s song “The Wilderness of This World,” on *Human Remains* (1996)—again, no story is distinct in Allen’s mythos.

³⁰ Terry Allen, *Terry Allen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010), 263

³¹ Dana Friis-Hansen, “Salvaging History: Terry Allen’s *Dugout*,” in Terry Allen, *Dugout* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 2005), xii.

³² Dave Hickey quoted in Terry Allen, *Terry Allen* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010).

³³ The lyrics to Allen’s song “The Lubbock Tornado (I Don’t Know)” from *Smokin’ the Dummy* (1980) describe a twister as “like a vampire over the Broadway / It showed no moral code.”

PEDAL STEAL

A Soundtrack for a Dance

In memory of Roxy Gordon

VOICES

Terry Allen
Jo Harvey Allen
Sharon Ely
Butch Hancock
Emma Tuset
Javier Tuset
Lloyd Maines

PLAYERS

Terry Allen: *vocals, clavivona*
Lloyd Maines: *pedal steel, guitars, dobro, harmony vocals*
Richard Bowden: *fiddle, mandolin, trumpet, cello, harmony vocals*
Donnie Maines: *drums, percussion, harmony vocals*
Kenny Maines: *standup & electric bass, harmony vocals*
Robert Nakaidinae: *Navajo vocals, percussion on “Níłch’i”*
Clarence Clearwater: *Navajo vocals*
Bobby Keys: *sax on “Sentimental Journey”*
Don Caldwell: *sax on “Sentimental Journey”*
Bonnie Wilkerson: *harmony vocals*
Donna Jo Barnes: *harmony vocals*
Butch Hancock: *vocals & guitar on “Give Me the Flowers”*

Pedal Steal was commissioned as a soundtrack to a dance performance by the Margaret Jenkins Dance Co. of San Francisco and premiered at the Brooklyn Academy of Music’s Next Wave Festival on October 22, 1985. *Pedal Steal* received the 1986 Bessie award for Allen’s music composition and visual design.

All text and music by Terry Allen, © 1985 Green Shoes Pub. Co., BMI, except “Sentimental Journey,” by Les Brown, Bud Green, and Ben Homer (Holliday Pub. and Morley Music Co., ASCAP); “Give Me the Flowers,” traditional; and “Níłch’i,” written by Terry Allen and musically adapted and translated into the Navajo language by Clarence Clearwater and Robert Nakaidinae. All sound effects recorded live at Caldwell Studio or taken from pre-recorded material. All materials used by permission.

Produced by Terry Allen, Lloyd Maines, and Don Caldwell. Engineered by Don Caldwell and Mark Murray. Recorded at Caldwell Studios, Lubbock, TX, August 1985.

Originally released on *Pedal Steal/Rollback* CD by Fate Records in 1988 as Fate 7655266; reissued on CD by Sugar Hill Records in 2006 as SUG-CD-1078.

Special thanks to Margaret Jenkins, Roxy Gordon, Paul Milosevich, Taco Village in Lubbock, and everyone who worked on this project.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Set is shell of abandoned drive-in movie theatre, "The Beauty."

SOUND: *Stereo tape containing music (lyrics & instrumentals), narrations, monologues & dialogues, sounds ... runs nonstop throughout the piece.*

Minimal notations except for silhouette sequences that take place in screen ("The Beauty" drive-in) area ... also a few directions for up-floor scrim, curtain "corridor," & hanging tires (all flexible). Majority of cues should be decided by the necessity of the dance ... but "climate" of piece should read consistently as if it is sunset, sunrise, & evening.

R. PRO.: *Rear projection ... two carousel slide projectors located behind screen/stage to project images & provide light source for silhouettes ... both projectors attached to a dissolve unit.*

F. PRO.: *Front projection ... one carousel slide projector to throw images to the front of the screen ... no dissolve.*

(With the exception of last slide & sequence of backs of people's heads, none of the slides will contain the physical images of human beings ... just landscapes, objects, rooms, gels, etc.)

SIL. #: *Silhouettes ... performed by live dancers/others on stage area located directly behind screen ... minimal activity & props ... silhouettes to be read on front screen like shadow box.*

NOTE: *The piece should be anticipated by taped music playing as audience enters or during intermission period between set changes, if another piece is performed first.*

The tape would be an assortment ... Navajo sway songs, early & later Spanish ballads by Lydia Mendoza, various mariachi, conjunto, i.e. Southwestern.

The tape should fade out or end several minutes before the beginning of the piece ... when house lights dim, it should be silent.

Room is black.

SOUND:

Acoustic guitar tuning gradually becomes audible, remains low. Crickets begin to be heard, low. Occasionally highway traffic passes deep in the distance. Boots walking on the gravel ... rise slowly in volume as if coming closer ... then stop.

LIGHT:

With crickets, very gradually the up-floor scrim begins to simulate dawn ... pinks, blues, etc. rise very slowly through following monologue ... revealing "The Beauty," a large drive-in movie theatre, abandoned.

SOUND:

Acoustic guitar fades out as monologue begins. Crickets, occasional traffic continue in background. Man's voice:

All that's left of her is the screen. The desert ate up the rest years ago. But she's stood out there, just south of the old

lonely road, for years. Like some big tombstone for everything that's beat-up ... whipped-down ... over with and done.

LIGHT:

Neon sign "The Beauty" hung to read backwards at top of drive-in screen lights up ... dim blue (controlled behind screen on transformer with dimmer).

SOUND:

Man's voice ... continues:

Every first thing ... first piece of ass, first fist fight, first bad drunk ... dope ... first big anything that happened to anybody around here, happened at "The Beauty." I mean ... if this place could talk ... the entire Women's Auxiliary and whole Chamber of Commerce of this fine little city ... would, collectively, shit a brick.

LIGHT:

Up-floor scrim lights stop rising, hold.

SOUND:

Man's voice:

A lot of history ... lot of memories, went down in front of those old picture shows. A lot of ghosts.

SOUND:

Dissolves from black to bright burnt orange on screen.

SIL. 1:

Woman in huge prom dress standing screen left, facing screen right. Simple plant silhouettes stick up from bottom of screen indicating she is outdoors ... in a field.

SOUND:

Deep eerie growl or pedal steel ... echo, moans (several steel sounds overlapped). Crickets, traffic sounds fade out.
Woman's voice:

The boy used to go there at night. Make up his songs. You would see him parked facing the screen in that old white Cadillac he had ... parked there with his headlights on and all the doors wide open ... playing his guitar.

Flurry of drums, low ... echo in distance. Single deep drum sets up slow "Indian" beat.

SIL. 1:

Woman in prom dress moves slowly screen right. She stops center screen & slowly raises face straight up. She holds this position ... perhaps hair & dress begin moving slightly as if a wind has risen.

SOUND:

Woman's voice continues:

He looked just like he was right out of some movie he was sitting there waiting to see.

SOUND:

Car rushing past, very loud & followed immediately by percussion ... jawbone, drums (tom tom, elephant skin, etc. ... hand-played drums) ... full trap also, erratic & overlaid behind hand drums. Shaker sets up rhythm, constant. Acoustic guitar, Mexican style ... faint, then advancing slowly in volume.

SIL. 1:

Woman in prom dress turns and walks into the ground (exits down back stage stairs).

R. PRO.:

Orange field dissolves into white Cadillac parked in country (woman in prom dress can be seen exiting out of Cadillac slide). Cadillac holds.

SOUND:

Guitar & percussion have established into melody ... volume lowers under song. Man's voice:

On the wings of a snow white angel
He played steel guitar
And the drugs
Broke his brain off into angles
But his fingers
Played true to his heart

F. PRO.:

"Trail" drive-in slide overlaps Cadillac slide during song ... on the word "DRUGS."

R. PRO.:

Cadillac dissolves into black.

SOUND:

Percussion (simple now) & guitar up to tune "Billy the Boy" (again, Mexican feel ... other instruments, i.e. marimba, mandolin, trumpet added if necessary). Man sings:

Ah
Billy
You got diamond
Sparkle blue eyes tonight
Billy
You got the pistol
In your soul
And the mariachi music will
Make you crazy ... all right
Down at Rose's
Santa Rosa, New Mexico

Instrumental ride ... fades slowly, holds. TV sound comes up, daytime programs ... low but audible all through following dialogue.

F. PRO.:

Motel room interior with TV.

LIGHT:

“The Beauty” neon off.

SOUND:

Instrumental fades out. TV up. Man and/or woman’s voice spoken/sung in Navajo-like chant (voices in unison or overlaid ... song translated similar to following or traditional Navajo song/chant about Níłch’i, the holy wind, can be used).

People of air

People of air

People of air

Only the wind

Came motion-making

Before us

Howling people

People of the whispers

We are the tree shaking

TV volume lowers.

The mother shaking

Who stays ... rocking

The father shaker

Who goes ... ha

Gone shake away

A wind within

And wind without

Breathing leaves

Grown falling

People of dust

People of dust

People of dust

People of dust

Fall rising

Pedal steel screams, i.e. Jimi Hendrix ... no tune, a frenzy with random & furious drumming with no particular pattern.

F. PRO.:

Rapid slide sequence of spilled open suitcases, debris ... both women's & men's. Sequence ends with bed slide ... sustained.

SOUND:

Pedal steel & drums diminish in volume and slow down ... like a record with turntable getting slower & slower. Speed decays to nothing during the following monologue.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to common objects found in motel.

F. PRO.:

Bed slide out.

R. PRO.:

Sequence of common motel objects during following monologue.

SOUND:

Man's voice:

That night at the Wigwam Motel
blasted on acid and drinking mezcal
in bed with the dog girl from Animas
broke glass twinkling like rhinestones on the sheets
looking at P.T.L.
fighting over who gets the worm ...

Thunder is heard.

Later, he told her he thought motels in different parts of America were just like audiences in those same places.

Saxophones very far away play "Sentimental Journey."

Out west ... they're always raisin' holy hell, kickin' in walls, shootin' guns ... havin' fights and wild parties. Somebody's always screamin' bloody murder or fucking their brains out in the room next door.

Back east ... motels are different.

You never hear nothin'.

Not a peep.

Thunder is heard over sax.

Like everybody back there's asleep with their thumbs up their ass.

Car rushes by ... thunder in distance.

Course they can kill your ass in either place.

It's just a lot more fun out west.

F. PRO.:

Barren landscape.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to black.

SOUND:

Sax segues or makes transition into song "Fort Sumner." First part of song is more urban ... sax, piano, cello, etc. Second part is more rural ... marimba, acoustic, fiddle, mandolin, etc. Man's voice:

He was born in New York City
On a cold and a windy day
Yeah his momma didn't love him
'Cause she threwed him away
On the doorsteps of this woman
Who took in wash to make her way
And she raised him with a vengeance
So he left her the same damned way

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to bright blue (under barren landscape).

Then this hobo named him Billy
On a train to the level land
He said, "Boy, you can make it easy
With a shovel in your hand
If you can just get to Lincoln County
Dig for gold in the Indian land"
He said, "Hobo, I'm a loner
but I'll take my gold
with an outlaw band"

F. PRO.:

Barren landscape out.

SOUND:

Man continues song:
And they heard thunder
In Fort Sumner ... New Mexico

Heartbeat is heard.

And they heard thunder
in Fort Sumner ... New Mexico

Heartbeat gets louder ... increasing in tempo. Instrumental ride fades out. Women's voices ... deep echo & singing a capella:

Steal your heart away.

(BLACK CURTAINS close completely as heartbeat gets louder.)

R. PRO.:

Blue dissolves to image candle of man burning.

SOUND:

Heartbeat establishes like a bass (rhythm machine for heart). Violin begins to be heard ... very sentimental. Following dialogue delivered like a B movie. Both man & woman have strong Spanish accents ... may even lapse into Spanish words off and on. Music plays throughout the dialogue ... also heartbeat.

Man: You shouldn't have followed me.

Woman: What could I do?

Just wait?

I couldn't just wait?

Man: You should have waited.

You comin' after me screwed everything up.

(Maybe sounds from horror movies begin to happen off and on through this ... under music & heartbeat.)

Woman: It was like a horror movie.

It rained all the way.

The kids were sick.

I followed a Greyhound bus all night in a terrible storm.

I thought you were on it.

The lightning was awful.

I thought you were on every bus I saw.

F. PRO.:

Image candle of woman burning.

R. PRO.:

Man burning candle dissolves to black.

Man: You should have stayed.

Waited it out.

I needed time.

I needed to figure things out.

You made a dangerous situation for the kids.

Woman: Jesus!

It was fifteen years ago!

Man: It doesn't matter.

It's still there.

It'd be over if you stayed.

But you came after me ... so it never stopped.

R. PRO.:

Burning woman candle dissolves into burning couple candle.

Woman: Stop it then!

Just stop it!

Man: I can't stop it.

That's why I left ... to stop it!

You never gave me a chance ... us a chance.

You made it stopless ... not me.

Woman: It wouldn't be any different if I stayed.

We're still the same people.

Man: Oh no, we're not.

We haven't been since you came chasin' after me.

We'll never be the same again.

Pedal steel growls in background ... over violin & heartbeat.

R. PRO.:

Burning couple dissolves to black.

F. PRO.:

Burning devil image candle.

Woman: Shhh ... he's coming. *(voice lower)*

Man: Yeah ... and when he leaves you can go chase after him too.

He can write one of his stupid songs about it.

Woman: Be quiet ... he's just a boy. *(Whispers last part to herself.)*

Violin out. Heartbeat up. Thunder is heard.

(BLACK CURTAINS open slowly, stopping to leave opening approximately 10', creating corridor between curtains & scrim. Something "startling" should be going on in corridor with lights, dancers, etc. ... maybe 8mm film of highway going very fast could be projected on dancers and/or scrim?)

F. PRO.:

Skull slide (b & w, reversed negative).

SOUND:

Heartbeat fades out. Women's voices ... deep echo & singing a capella:

Steal your heart away.

*Pedal steel (or slide) plays "Mexican song" ... marimba comes in, maracas ... maybe cello. Tune allowed to establish.
Man's voice:*

He had pictures living behind his face.
They ran out of his head like movies.
He'd sneak into them and watch ... then,
Go back outside and make up his life.

F. PRO.:

Black.

R. PRO.:

Black dissolves into silhouette of quarter moon.

SOUND:

The following dialogues are by different people and delivered like they are talking about a film. (HANGING TIRES light up ... each a different color.) Woman's voice:

Like that scene at night when he ran off the road into a cotton patch and climbed his Cadillac right up the back of a John Deere tractor ... and hung up there ... headlights bobbing ... balanced. The only time in his life.

F. PRO.:

Double pickup truck.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to black.

SOUND:

Man's voice:

Or that part about him driving into town that day and every person there had their shirts off and were sittin' outside drawing on each other with ballpoint pens. Even the women.

Oh yeah ... the part where he walked out by the swimmin' pool at the big Holiday Inn and looked up and saw all those buzzards ... making a perfect circle over all that slick, glamorous, greased-down pussy ... like somethin' right out of LA.

F. PRO.:

Black.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to Jesus & Mary statuette.

SOUND:

Woman's voice:

And remember the night he played downtown LA ... played nine solid hours and kicked in all the monitors ... then later, just as the sun was coming up ... in that parking lot by the Atomic Café ... watching a hawk dive right out of the blue and hit a rat?

Break its back ... then carry it way up in the air and drop it.

And him and that girl walked over and looked. And she kicked it with the toe of those beautiful shoes. Dead as a mackerel.

“Imagine that,” he said.

And she said, “Happens every day.”

Voices very deep in distance sing:

Steal your heart away.

F. PRO.:

Club Café.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to black.

SOUND:

Woman's voice:

... and him being the only person his age in America who had no idea where he was the day Kennedy got shot ... and all that stuff about his real mother being crazy after all those years of him looking for her ... Jesus.

And oh ... that part about him trying to hide being a Yankee ... God, that was hilarious.

Man's voice:

That was great.

F. PRO.:

Black.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves into TV drain-faced-woman.

SOUND:

Same man:

Also ... remember the thing of him seeing that cemetery in the middle of nowhere with nothing in it but a bunch of tombstones and two porta-toilets ...

And the thing about him never believing men had walked up on the moon ... him not believing the moon was anything but a snake-eye trying to give him away? I liked that whole part a lot.

Woman's voice:

Or yeah, what about that scene in the little bar in Moriarty ... you know, when he was going home, and he stopped off and he sat next to that real spooky guy with his ears all burned off? The guy suddenly leaned over, and he looked right at him in the eyes, and he said, "The creature ..." woo ... and then he paused a long time and he just stared ... and finally he leaned over, and he just whispered, "The fucking creature will kill you." That was pretty scary!

F. PRO.:

U.S. Rte. 666 in New Mexico.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to black ... after slight pause. (sil. 2 props & tableau set-up for scene here.)

SOUND:

Man's voice:

I hated all of it ... everything except that one part when he was at the Blue Hole in Santa Rosa. Sitting out there by himself with a guitar and some pills ... killing that last idea of his idiot wife and that motherfucker she was with. Then making up a song and singing it to that bottomless water.

F. PRO.:

Black ... actual slide of "black."

That was real.

The rest of it was pure bullshit ...

especially the stuff about it becoming a hit.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to bright acid yellow.

F. PRO.:

Black slide off.

SIL. 2:

Old woman sits in rocking chair ... screen left with profile of face screen right. She wears a long dress, hair back in bun ... posture like "Whistler's Mother." A bare light bulb (or small light fixture) hangs from wire screen right at

approximate height of her forehead. Old woman does not move.

SOUND:

Music fades. Wind ... low, but distinctly audible (something banging maybe). Man's voice:

I also didn't mind the critic. He played that part real good. What a classic prick.

SIL. 2:

Old woman begins to rock ... steady rhythm, hitting the light with her forehead ... barely moving fixture and never varying the speed of rocking.

SOUND:

Song: "Loneliness" ... Man's voice:

Loneliness

You say it's doing you in
Ah but you still got some playing to do
And that won't end ... Billy
But you been missing
What you've been kissing for years
Yeah, you just can't recognize a sacred heart
When she bleeds for you ... Billy
So you just keep on playing
Like New Mexico
Is the whole goddamned world
And you got the floor ... Billy
Ah but loneliness
You say it's doing you in
Yeah, but you still got some playing to do
And that won't end ... Billy

Hyn ha ya ya (*under following*):

Woman's voice ... like she's speaking confidentially to another woman with above sounds going on behind them (conversation could also be inside women's toilet at a club):

Well, Rose told me that his real mother went crazy out in California. She'd been living with a big fat woman that was rippin' her off. Conned her into signing a bunch of blank checks, then stole all of her clothes and took off. The boy heard about it while they were playing in Vegas ... Some relative of his called or something ... but he left and caught up with this fat gal at a trailer park in Blythe. He told her he'd burn up her new Chevy Nova with gasoline if she didn't give that stuff back.

I guess he got the clothes, but the checks were long gone. His real mother could care less about any of it. She was too busy bein' nuttier than a fruit cake back in San Bernardino ... making dream people out of parts of the living room. Sounds like one of those goofy voodoo movies. She'd take chairs and tables and put little useless items on them ...

R. PRO.:

Sequence of slides of backs of people's heads, men & women. sil. 2 scene continues the same ... with head slides as light source.

Crap like forks and ashtrays or string and sticks and little pieces of hair and cloth. Then she'd give each one a name ... after some person she knew or some relative of hers. She'd have long conversations with them ... her doing all the voices like she was playing dolls ... or making her own Tupperware party or something ... just nuts.

Rose said the boy told her he sat down and watched her make all these psychological people for a long time. He laughed and said he sat down right on top of this one uncle he hated. He tried to understand why she picked certain useless items to be certain people, but he never could. Mainly though, he kept waiting to see if she'd make him, but ... of course ... she never did.

He put her in the booby hatch in LA and went back to Vegas ... that trip when the drummer left to be a Jesus freak? But, far as I know, he never saw her again ... and never told another living soul.

F. PRO.:

Bright acid yellow.

R. PRO.:

Dissolve to black.

SOUND:

Woman's voice ... continued:

Just Rose.

Song: "Lonely Road" ... Man's voice:

He played steel guitar
In a rock 'n' roll bar
Then he'd run to his car
Beneath the stars

And it's New Mexico
Wherever you are
When you're thirty-one
On the runnin'

F. PRO.:

Bright green.

SOUND:

Yeah you might wonder
But you'll never know

That mystery boy
With his sleazy clothes
His flashin' smile
His lightnin' hands
Gonna take what he wants
From the Pecos Grande
In the promised land

F. PRO.:

Bright red.

SOUND:

Ahh Billy the boy
Felt the pistol joy
Shakin' his hands
On the mountain
Yeah he did what he did
Then he run and he hid
His blood bubbled up
In the fountains

R. PRO.:

Bright red.

F. PRO.:

Black.

SIL. 3:

Set-up in view of audience ... people put nightstand on stage, lamp on top of stand. Man enters and lies down on the floor face up, head stage right, and doesn't move ... like he's dead. Other people duck down beneath the stage leaving only man, nightstand, & lamp. This happens during last verse of song.

SOUND:

Yeah the whiskey flows
And the peyote grows
Through a thousand night times
A thousand shows
And the desert burns
But a cold wind blows
On a lonely road
In New Mexico

Instrumental ride. Telephone rings. Music fades out.

F. PRO.:

Slide sequence of personal objects (while phone rings & periodically through "autopsy" monologue, sil. 3.)

SOUND:

Telephone rings several seconds ... stops. "Give Me the Flowers" begins ... volume lowers after first verse. Woman's voice:

Oh yes ... the police found flecks of blood on the wall.
He'd been shooting in there for almost two weeks.
So it accumulated.

SIL. 3:

Two figures enter silhouette with cameras and begin popping flash bulbs at man on the floor ... exaggerated & slow gestures ... flashbulbs aimed at screen when possible to make a 'pop' of light ... as woman continues:

They found some peyote buttons and a brochure on Disney
World in his guitar case ... but no hard stuff. Just needles. A Mexican bellhop was the last person to see him ... told the detectives he brought him up a bag of Fritos, a half-pint of whiskey, and a pocket comb. He said the TV was on with the sound off ... a cassette recorder and some tapes were on the bed next to his guitar ... and maybe the sheets had a little blood on them, but that could have been lipstick. He wasn't sure.

The bellhop said he seemed like a nice guy ... especially compared to some of the musicians that stayed there.

R. PRO.:

Red dissolves to closeup of white sheets wrinkled on bed.

SIL. 3:

Scene dismantles ... man on floor gets up and takes lamp, camera figures get nightstand. They all exit down back stage stairs, mill around through remainder of silhouette ... always visible.

SOUND:

"Give me the flowers" up, then lowers. Man's voice (Spanish accent):

Yeah ... the autopsy said it was a cardiac arrest ... caused by a heavy combination of barbituates and alcohol they found in the bloodstream. Did you know that the highest rate of suicides among all musicians is pedal steel players? I think it's because they always have to sit so still while everybody else gets to jump around.

The official report was a death by misadventures. (*Pronounced "missed adventures."*)

Woman's voice:

It wasn't suicide.

F. PRO.:

Personal object sequence ends ... black.

SOUND:

Man's voice:

The band brought him back to New Mexico in an E-Z Haul trailer we rented to carry the equipment. Somebody should make a movie out of that.

We didn't any of us have enough money to fly him home.

R. PRO.:

White sheets dissolves to "Sunset at Granite Gorge" ... looks like postcard. (All figures from sil. 3 are gone, just image.)

LIGHT:

Strong feeling of artificial "cartoon" sunset.

SOUND:

"Give Me the Flowers" allowed to play a while, then volume goes down ... under monologue. Cars in the distance begin to be heard. Wind rises. Man's voice:

We buried him at sunset.

Quite a few people showed up ... even a few club owners.

Later, there was this picnic out at "The Beauty."

It was a little bit windy to be outside ... but okay.

We tried to sing some hymns ... but it sounded pretty stupid.

His wife ended the thing by reading from the back of an

old postcard of Granite Gorge ... one of his favorite places.

F. PRO.:

Shiprock sunset.

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to black.

LIGHT:

Room lights all begin to dim to black ... very gradual.

SOUND:

Wind sound up. "Give Me the Flowers" out. Cars in distance up slightly. Wind slowly fades. Cars in distance louder ... establishing as only sound during next monologue. Woman's voice:

Long may the visitor loiter upon the verge,

Powerless to shake loose from the charm,

Tirelessly intent upon the silent transformations

Until the sun is low in the west.

Then the canyon sinks into mysterious purple shadow;

Darkness falls,

And should there be a moon,

The scene in part revives in silver light,

A thousand spectral forms projected from inscrutable gloom.

More cars passing.

F. PRO.:

Black.

LIGHT:

All room lights fade to black.

Blue neon "The Beauty" lights up slowly ... sustains, dim.

SOUND:

Cars passing stops. "Billy the Boy" plays ... very simple. Man singing:

Billy
You got dimes
In your blue eyes tonight
Billy
You got lead
In your soul
And you're bleedin' to death
Beneath the dance hall lights
Ahhh Billy
Where did your blue eyes go

R. PRO.:

Dissolves to newspaper photo of man's face.

SOUND:

Song plays out.

R. PRO.:

Face remains several seconds ... dissolves to black.

LIGHT:

Remains dark ... only neon is lit.

SOUND:

"Mi Problema" by Lydia Mendoza plays as house lights come up.

END

TORSO HELL

A Radio Movie

VOICES

Terry Allen: *man*

Jacki Apple: *woman*

PLAYERS

Terry Allen: *E-mu Emulator II, keyboards*

All text and music by Terry Allen, © 1986 Green Shoes Pub. Co., BMI. Music performed by Terry Allen (special thanks to Skip Gaynard and Mark Murray).

Recorded at Caldwell Studios, Lubbock, TX and STRS Studios, Fresno, CA. Technical Director for live performance: Steve Barker, B.B.A.T. Productions.

Torso Hell was co-produced by *High Performance* and Jacki Apple for *Soundings* on KPFK Pacifica Radio with assistance from KPFK and the National/State/County Partnership.

Originally released on cassette by High Performance Records in 1987 as HP013.

Executive Producer of *Soundings*: Jacki Apple

Associate Producer of High Performance Records: Nathan Birnbaum

NOTES BY TERRY ALLEN

The original text of *Torso Hell* was written for, and included in, a multimedia (static) three-panel “wall-piece” with the same title. This piece was made in 1986 and is part of an ongoing series called *Youth in Asia*. In November 1986, the text was adapted to be read as narrations for a radio presentation. Music was written and recorded in Lubbock and Fresno. Narrations were performed live on-air, over the recorded soundtrack, on KPFK in Los Angeles as part of a monthly program called *Soundings*, produced and presented by *High Performance* magazine. The performance was recorded and made available on cassettes by the magazine. The included “script” is a direct transcript of the narrations as they were presented on-air. Jacki Apple read the part of **woman**, and I read **man**.

The cover is a portion of a color monoprint which was included in the third panel of the visual piece *Torso Hell*. This print was originally called *Mickey Bob Death ... little twist on Bob Hope and the USO shows*. The Chinese characters are from the I Ching and, from top to bottom, read *grace, peace, the abysmal*. Mickey was adapted from an ad in an airline magazine.

Music: “Theme from TORSO HELL.”

MAN:

Torso Hell.

Torso Hell is an idea for a horror movie ... a treatment.

Music: “Chopper Breath.”

The story starts off in Vietnam. This guy and his four buddies are dug-in and under attack. A rocket, or mortar or something, makes a direct hit. They are blown to pieces. Literally. Their people get out to them, but all they find are just piles of arms and legs and blood and gore. The whole bit. Anyway, it's such a mess, they can't tell one guy's limb from another ... so they just stick everything all together in one big bag and send them off in the helicopter. The main guy, the star of the movie, is a complete quad ... no arms or legs, barely even stumps, a torso ... but he's alive ... all of them are alive by some weird miracle.

WOMAN:

Perhaps it should begin like an old Disney movie ... that paint brush going over the screen in big sweeps and making a full-size cartoon of the jungle, then transforming it into the real thing.

There it is.

Music: "Morphine."

MAN:

At the hospital, it's so crazy and confused that when these guys come in, the doctors and nurses don't know what from what ... they just start sewing. The main guy stays a torso, but they put his arms and legs back on the other guys. Two guys each get one of his arms ... two guys each get one of his legs. I know this isn't realistic ... they can't sew that stuff back on ... but this is a movie. So the star is a torso ... and each of his buddies have one of his limbs. None of them, of course, know anything about it ... as they are all knocked out on morphine. They get sent off in different directions to different hospitals, so years later ... back in the World, they all figure everybody but them is dead.

Music: "Japanese Nurse."

The TORSO recuperates in Japan. There could be some shocking scenes here when he comes out of his morphine daze and realizes he is a torso ... perfect for a beautiful Japanese nurse to enter in and take care of him, fall for him, and tell him some Oriental philosophy. She could give him hope, make love to him the night before he leaves. He'd be feeling pretty down about his manhood. This would be natural ... also, it could hit on that Asian thing, his bitterness at slant-eyed people. Now it's a Japanese nurse that gets him back on track ... but just as love blooms, he's shipped off to a hospital back in the States.

Music: "BAD from Familyville."

This TORSO would have no next of kin but an aunt ... lives in some little shit town out in New Mexico and runs a boarding house. She hears about his situation. The army keeps her updated on his progress, but she could care less since he's the youngest boy of this dead half-sister she hated ... care less until she gets a letter saying he gets full disability. So the idea takes hold that she could bring him to the boarding house and get the government money. This woman needs to be established as a total bitch deluxe. She writes the hospital a real kiss-ass note ... says how terrible it would be for him to get stuck in the V.A. the rest of his life ... how he's her favorite nephew. All the stuff ... anyway, ultimately, she gets permission to become his legal ward. TORSO is just a kid too ... not twenty yet, a minor ... so she gets a guardianship.

After over two years in hospitals, TORSO is released. He's got some letters from the Japanese nurse, but that's kind of on the back burner. She sends him stuff on "the mind," but he can make sarcastic remarks like, "Might as well be chopsticks, good as that shit'll do me ..." But I figure he probably shouldn't talk much. Just glare around and be inarticulate like a Rambo type.

So, this evil aunt comes to pick him up. Maybe he could be in San Francisco or back east ... it doesn't matter. She and her own kid come in a van. They really try to butter up the doctors and the nurses and the TORSO, but he's suspicious,

because he doesn't hardly know her. He smells a rat ... tries to tell the doctors and nurses he doesn't want to go, but they need the room and don't pay any attention to him.

Could be a good scene here of him telling his amputee buddies on the ward goodbye.

Music: "Amputee Ward Song"; "The Van."

Soon as they get in the van, the true side is revealed. The aunt drives and makes jokes about him while her kid rolls him around like a ball in back ... pinching him and laughing. This kid should be a real sadist, but dominated entirely by his mother ... who is an even bigger sadist. It could be insinuated they are doing incest. The drive to New Mexico shouldn't be a long scene, but enough to establish some landscape ... and what the TORSO is in for.

Music: "Mean/whiles."

Now and then, shots ought to show what is going on with his buddies ... the ones with his limbs ... what their lives are shaping into. This could be pretty varied. One really psychoed from the war ... dope and liquor and trouble with the law. Another could be back in school and doing real good. One could have taken over the family supermarket business ... another could still be in the Army ... or a hippie ... or a cop ... or a soldier of fortune. Little scenes about their lives should pop in now and then ... also somehow establish some attention, however subtle, to their limbs that have been sewn on.

One of them could throw himself out of bed at night ... spook his wife. "That's not my leg!" he would say ... say he woke up and this *thing* was there, so he threw it out ... course he went flying out right along with it. That's an actual malady some brain damaged people have. They lose associations with certain parts of their body ... like this alien they have no connection with is hooked to them. So, this part could get psychological ... this stuff with his buddies. Some of it anyway.

Music: "Body Parts."

WOMAN:

Maybe it could?

Maybe it should?

Maybe intimate close-ups of body parts could be placed in various sections of the movie ... physical flash-points and mysteries. Real quick flashes ... recognizable as body parts, but not what parts.

Maybe the body parts could be from cartoon body parts ... Donald's neck, Tinker Bell's breast, Mickey's nose. This might make the movie more psychedelic ... and of the era. There needs to be psychedelic stuff in it.

Maybe zapped-out hippies meet the TORSO when his plane comes in from Japan. "Peace, brother ... you get what you give." Baby-burner remarks, though probably the badly injured never got exposed to those types ... just went from the plane to the ambulance.

Maybe there's a ceremony scene. A big general pins the purple heart on TORSO. Gung ho remarks.

Maybe he sticks the pin in too deep and sets up what TORSO is up against with the sadistic cousin.

Maybe even a flashback the TORSO has would be the general having the aunt's face.

MAN:

Years need to go by.

The TORSO is in the boarding house, totally at the mercy of the aunt and her kid ... who is now New Mexico's version of a stone little punker. He runs a gang ... maybe has a mohawk. Lots of leather and chains and razors and knives and guns. He leads a band of real cretins. They hang out at the boarding house, terrifying the boarders. The TORSO is kept in

a room and hid from the other people rooming there. This place should be made into a real tense terror house ... and the TORSO vet is tortured all the time. Things like this could happen to him:

Music: "TORSO Torture."

They starve him ... never clean up his body waste ... no furniture in the room ... sleeps on old carpet remnants ... roaches and spiders and mice run over him.

They keep him gagged so he won't yell for help.

He can hear the mother and son in bed next door. She also comes in and plays with his penis now and then ... gets him horny with dirty pictures, then uses him like a living dildo.

Her son and his gang use him like a toy. Throw him around, glue stuff on him, piss on him, put cigarettes out on him, draw pictures and paint on him ... dress him like a baby. They throw him in a tub full of water ... pull him out just before he drowns.

A good screenwriter could have a ball with this ... a daily torture routine to amuse themselves.

And during this, scenes could be going on in the TORSO's mind that show he is going crazy ... but also, somehow that he has developed his senses to bizarre proportions. He begins to concentrate ... and calling out for his lost limbs. Scenes of what happens to various guys that have his limbs when he's concentrating on them could be shown. Example: He thinks about his lost arm ... about moving it ... and the guy that has the arm suddenly moves it for no apparent reason. This could set up for some pretty funny and shocking scenes to counter some of the terror and torture stuff. Also ... keep that tie going with the limb surrogates.

Music: "Mind Over Matters."

TORSO starts using some of the Asian philosophy, mind over matter schemes he remembers from the Japanese nurse. He starts really concentrating and trying to develop it. He goes way into himself ... and pretty soon, he is able to detach himself completely from the pain and humiliation he has been forced to endure from the hideous aunt and cousin and his gang. They sense it and increase their efforts, but the worse it gets, the more and more control he gains.

One night maybe a rat could come in his room and he could mind-manipulate it to go next door, crawl in bed with the aunt, and bite her on the face. Her screams would make him grin ... the first time.

Little scenes of TORSO getting mind power could start showing up.

Music: "Flashbacks."

He could have flashbacks from the war ... remembering pals that collected ears, buddies that were tortured and found with their genitals stuffed in their mouths. This transformation into mind control should be developed mostly in scenes at night ... could be like wild dreams, spooky stuff ... but no animation, none of the little rubber creatures. This can be kept low budget and still be scary.

Also maybe he could fixate on something in the room ... some picture or object to help teleport himself. Maybe some knick-knack or ornament on the wall ... something like a plastic bird ... or some pretty scene, a landscape he can fly away to in his brain.

When TORSO is really in deep self, the lights could change ... room start to glow ... maybe even become another kind of room ... Japanese, maybe ... with the nurse there naked with him and him having all his parts. Hollywood stuff.

A funny scene might be with the guy who has the family grocery store. He's waiting on some woman customer, and when TORSO is thinking about touching the Japanese nurse's breast, the grocery store guy ... who has TORSO's real arm ... just suddenly reaches out and grabs the customer's breast.

Maybe the nurse could come to his brain at night and instruct him on the best methods of mind over matter.

Music: "TORSO Knows."

All this while, the brutalizing is still going on. The aunt and the cousin are really getting into every terrible thing they can imagine to mess with him, so he's getting pretty banged up ... also weak from not being fed anything but rotten scraps and gruel. They just throw it on the floor, and he has to scoot over to it, however far or awkward ... throw his body around, twist and wiggle ... contort to get to it ... and, of course, it's laying right there with his body waste that has built up into piles of filth for months and months. Now and then, they have cleaned the place ... just to keep the smell from making the neighbors suspicious. One night he gets the full realization that *this is not going to end* until they kill him. He hears them in his mind talk about how the government never checks on him and would never know if he was dead. They'd just keep sending money ... and if they did ever ask about him later, he could always pick up another quad at the V.A. or "make one HA HA HA," the cousin says. Lots of drifters and dipshit hitch-hikers out there on American highways.

Music: "Location."

WOMAN:

This whole thing should be filmed on location in Las Cruces or Lordsburg, New Mexico ... or similar places like Nevada ... barren desolate towns, ugly deserts.

A real quad amputee should play the lead ... actual vet, if possible. He could be a known actor though ... use a real quad in the cutaways and distance shots.

Punkers would be very alien in this locale, but they could be Southwesternized ... lots of snakeskin and rawhide, conchos. Punkers with the Mexican influence ... right on the edge of slimy *Road Warrior* types ... like people you'd run into maybe at a B-52's concert in El Paso.

Pick up that element at the box office.

Music: "The Four Messages."

MAN:

When he realizes that they are going to kill him, he decides to send out his brainwaves as hard as he can for some arms and legs. He still doesn't know his war buddies are alive or that they carry his limbs, but he sends out this very heavy message calling for the lost parts of himself. Those special effects where they make veins bulge and throb could be used here ... like his whole torso is rippling with ultimate energy. He could probably glow too.

When the message reaches the men with his limbs, it's like they become zombies, possessed. They stop whatever they are doing and make arrangements to go to New Mexico. This creates big confusions for those around them, loved ones, but they are oblivious, don't say a word. They get their uniforms and put them on. Lot of good scenes here, little fast scenes showing how drastic they are being sucked into this weird place.

They all arrive at the same time, and, though none of them knew the others were alive, each acts like it is a perfectly natural thing. They group in full uniform like robots and head for whatever rendezvous is drawing them.

Meanwhile, the power in the TORSO's room is tremendous now. He has sealed it off. The aunt or cousin can't open the door ... and weird light is glowing from the bottom of it. Even the walls seem to be bulging out from all the power going on in there.

Music: "Firefight in New Mexico."

The four soldiers go to a gun shop and buy guns and knives and axes, arm totally ... and head for the boarding house. People see them coming four abreast and step aside. A cop tries to stop them, and they kill him flat-out. More cops come

and a big shootout takes place. The cops get blasted to bits ... also a bunch of innocent bystanders. Some of the punk gang see this and head for the boarding house. They tell the cousin. He ignores it. "Kill all the fuckers, for all I care ... save us the trouble." Another gang member runs in and says four crazy soldiers are headed their way. Gunfire can be heard.

Meanwhile, TORSO's room is gaining even more power. His brain is huge, throbbing bigger and bigger ... meaner and meaner. He knows the rest of himself is on the way. The soldiers know it too. They kill everything in their path now, just like in the war. They take house after house ... blow them up ... burn them down ... move on. They are being pulled, and by now the punkers realize something heavy is going down, so they arm themselves and get ready.

Music: "Prodigals Return."

The soldiers take the boarding house. Big splatter scenes here. They kill everybody except the aunt and the cousin ... then gradually move toward the TORSO's room. The door opens, and a furious wind with debris flies out and eerie glow and terrible noises. TORSO has turned into a giant throbbing brain, and suddenly the arms and legs that belonged to him just rip off the soldiers' bodies they are on ... fly off and swoosh onto the TORSO. The four soldiers fall screaming and spurting blood until they are dead. The aunt and the cousin are rigid ... held in a trance-like vice by the TORSO's mind. Now he is whole. He stands up. Things calm down. He is fascinated with himself ... surveys each part, moves them, tests and teases. He laughs maniacally. The aunt and cousin are horrified, frozen. Finally, he looks at them ... and grins.

Music: "Looney Time."

WOMAN:

Could it all be animated? Very refined and well-drawn like early Disney? Call the nephew and aunt Mickey and Minnie? Daisy and Donald?

Maybe radios with screamy punk music should play all the time in the boarding house ... also, TV news and quiz shows. This would help ... the TV stuff ... establish different time periods in the movie.

During the hospital scenes, you could hear a lot of news from the war ... body counts, peace talks, demonstrations, and so forth.

Maybe there could be a scene where the official ending of the war is announced. TORSO could hear it in his room. That could be a good scene ... just showing him ... the camera panning the room and moving slowly to his body and face ... with the news report in the background.

Dramatic.

Torso Hell, the title, should probably appear right after the explosion where everybody is blown up. Very realistic jungle fight scenes would happen until then.

The credits should take place at the end of the movie. That seems to be the vogue.

Music: "Revenge."

MAN:

The revenge section ... last scene.

TORSO grins at the aunt and nephew, and suddenly their arms and legs fly off ... thud right on the floor, blood spewing ... but then, using his mind power, TORSO seals the wounds ... smooths them out, just like they had been surgically removed years before. The two wiggle around and squeal on the floor.

TORSO goes over to his buddies, who have bled to death. He lays them in a row and covers their faces. He salutes their bodies, then he leaves the room ... and the movie should probably end here.

When TORSO is a whole man.

Music: "The Whole Man."

END

BLEEDER

VOICES

Terry Allen: *narrator*

Jo Harvey Allen: *woman*

PLAYERS

Terry Allen: *vocals, keyboards*

Lloyd Maines: *pedal steel, guitars, dobro, vocals*

Text and music by Terry Allen, © 1990 Green Shoes Pub. Co., BMI, except “Auld Lang Syne,” by Robert Burns (traditional); “Rock of Ages,” by Rev. Augustus Toplady; and “Dixie Fried,” by Carl Perkins and Howard “Curley” Griffin (Hi-Lo Music, Inc. and Wren Music Co. o/b/o Carl Perkins Music, Inc., BMI).

Produced by Terry Allen, Don Caldwell, and Lloyd Maines. Recorded by Don Caldwell at Caldwell Studios, Lubbock, TX. Edited and mixed by Alan Crossland.

Drones, sound effects, wind, and instrumental musical themes recur throughout. Significant, and sung, musical cues and interludes are indicated.

NARRATOR:

Bleeder.

Music: “Auld Lang Syne” (bagpipes).

Hemophilia: An abnormal condition of males inherited through the mother, characterized by a tendency to bleed excessively.

A bleeder.

WOMAN (*whispers*):

His story.

NARRATOR:

History exists temporarily, and people take place.

Events are carried away to different directions through the mind as images.

Images dissolve across the passage of years into memory.

Stories are told, songs are sung.

Hearts become rooms set aside, and hallucination begins.

WOMAN:

He’s really running through my heart tonight.

I guess he always had this strong religious bent, because every time we’d all get together and start drinking ... you know, get really drunk ... we’d tell stories.

Music: “Rock of Ages” (group vocals, then instrumentals).

And he was a great storyteller. Great hilarious stories and dirty jokes ... really filthy. We’d all be laughing our asses off ... just rolling around howling on the floor.

And then, all of a sudden, he'd just stop ... freeze ... not even blink, you know, just get up and go sit down at the piano and stare at the keys. And then he'd start playing and singing real soft ... some wonderful, beautiful, sad gospel song ... like the devil had suddenly just hopped right out of his mouth, and a sweet angel had stepped in ... spooky. His favorite song was "Rock of Ages" ... you know, "cleft for me / **Let me hide myself in thee** ..." God, before he'd be finished we'd all be crying. It was just amazing ... strange and weird. It wasn't that he was religious at all in like a churchgoing sense, though he did keep up that end of his appearances ... But he really, honest to God, just seemed to have a special feeling in his heart for Jesus.

I think it was all that blood.

His image was that of a gambler and a charlatan. They called him second rate and evil. Rumors had it he vampired with pills. Several stories actually exhausted themselves into legend. He quaffed himself in the rigid but fashionable gospel plow. He spooked the proper remark, wore stormy tweeds, and smoked gracefully. He was born to oil and married into cattle and lived in tact. Every item in his home was of a combative influence. Whatever mythologies that had been gathered were carefully placed behind glass in the den. Lyndon Johnson wrote him letters. He was born to face the music.

One of his main real dreams was to be a revival preacher ... God, he could have done it too. He wanted to travel all around, all over in a big gospel train like Ringling Brothers and pitch up this huge ornate giant gold lamé tent. The "Cloth Cathedral," he called it. And bring in lots of top singing stars from Hollywood, Nashville, and get into some real big-time heavyweight show-business healing ... "That's where the real snakes get handled," he'd say ... "The real money ... cash through Christ." And then he'd laugh ... yeah, he'd laugh and laugh and laugh ... but you knew he wanted to do it ... he really wanted to lay on hands.

Pills. He called them his little red children. "The little red child ... flies," he'd say. His first memory was a shadow ... it leaned on him. He was asleep in his crib when a brilliant, razor-thin, vertical shaft of light slit open the room. He watched it ... terrified ... move at him slowly. He screamed and screamed and screamed, but it touched him anyway ... on the stomach. And he poured out ... thirty-three times from this ... this thing into his life. The next morning, he suffered his first serious hemorrhage ... tiny wings flew out of his mouth, and over in the corner his mother swoons and beats at her breasts like an ape ... crooning:

"Oh baby, baby, baby

Oh baby, baby, baby, baby, baby ..."

His favorite show business personality was Oral Roberts ... especially back in the early days, when he did that thing of shaking all over, and he'd put both hands up to the TV camera and beckon all of primetime America to get down on its knees and come crawling to the set to touch hands with him, palm to palm, and receive the sweet blessings of Jesus through the electronic marvels of God's own handiwork ... the modern science.

"An excellent scam ... better than Billy Sol Estes," he said. And of course, this was before all that information started leaking out about TV emitting enough radiation to kill laboratory rats.

He told me once that the story of Abraham offering up Isaac for sacrifice was a total distortion ... probably even an outright lie. "A daddy wouldn't do that," he said. "God would have never tested his old crone wife Sarah, because he knew she'd've stuck the kid in a New York minute. It's the women who use all the knives in this life ... the mothers," he said. "The old man is just a device ... just a stupid device with a dick."

He could be real cynical. He didn't just bleed blood.

NARRATOR:

Hallucination exists temporarily, and history takes place.

People are carried away to different directions through the mind, as events.

Events dissolve across the passage of years into images.

Stories are told, songs are sung.

Hearts become rooms set aside, and memory begins.

WOMAN:

Looking back, he was as crooked as they come.

Crooked as a true story.

A bleeder.

No smile too smirky, no risk too blue.

He stood right out and was stone flush.

Tired friends from high school sighed, "What a guy ..."

Women leaped into stores with his money.

Several leading concerns were left solidly behind.

He moved like smoke through the arts.

Yeah, in retrospect, few even knew he bled at all.

His mother had pet birds. She named each one after a memorable good luck year, except one which was named after a famous hero. 1943, 1945, 1956, 1959, Kennedy, 1963, '66, '70, 1973, etc.

All good luck has death in it.

He had this suitcase full of money from some shady deal or another ... and when this new secretary of his saw it, she fell madly in love with him. She was a big German girl, blonde and full of zest ... had lots of pets ... little birds and dogs and stuff. Anyway, he was on the rebound from this kind of failed cattle queen ... who was also a kleptomaniac ... so it sure didn't take this German girl long ... because just a few weeks later they ran off to Mexico to get married.

After that they moved down to Austin, where he was working on some more of his suitcase deals ... set up house in this teeny, small little condo near the Capitol Building where some ex-Senator crony of his had kept his whore. And they settled in with a real honeymooner's vengeance ... making love and taking lots of pain pills.

After a couple weeks, though, her pets were driving him nuts ... I think the birds reminded him of his mother, and his resistance was worn pretty thin from all the drugs. You know, also she was way too big for him ... not fat, but really large, you know ... and in the night she would roll over on him and mutter and jab him with her elbows and knees. She just wasn't used to sleeping with anybody sick ... but it caused him a lot of distress, you know, and finally, a major hemorrhage.

She had to rush him to the hospital for transfusions and monitoring, but she hated hospitals because her mother had been a nurse in New York or something ... Anyway, while he was recuperating, she just packed up all the pets and left ... no note, no nothing.

I think she's over in Hawaii now ... or Aspen or somewhere, but the marriage hardly lasted six weeks ... just long enough for that suitcase to get emptied and for him to turn thirty in the emergency ward ... yeah ... And as soon as he got better, he moved all of his stuff back up here to the caprock ... knowing he'd really screwed up ... but really determined now, you know, to try and get back with his first wife ... one of the only women he said he ever really loved.

I was surprised to see him back in town too. And when I ran into him the night of the day he got back, I asked him what happened, but he really didn't have much to say ... just something about too much birdshit ... and that he'd been betrayed by desire.

I got all the details from his mother.

He's sure in my heart tonight.

He told me once that if you got a big fruit jar the night you got married and put one jelly bean in it each time you made love the first year, you'd need a whole lot more than just one jar. Then he said, "Try the same thing ten years later, and you wouldn't even need any jelly beans."

I remember the third grade.

It was the only time that he really had to be in a wheelchair ... but he was real cute, and all the girls would make over him every minute ... even fight each other at recess over who got to push him around the schoolground while he'd comb out his hair ... ducktails and a flattop with fenders.

It was right at the start of rock 'n' roll.

The other boys stayed away from him though ... they avoided him. He was smarter than most of them, plus that disease, you know ... it was so strange and weird for kids to deal with, but more than that ... more than anything ... he could really be mean ... mean as holy shit, and nobody could do anything about it. Not the principal, the teachers, his folks, his

mother, no one.

And if you touched him you could ... literally, quite ... kill him. His blood was that edgy.

Obviously, this played no small role toward him developing some very necessary ... very basic ... social skills for later on. He became a real wizard at manipulation.

I remember he despised Dracula movies ... hated anything that had to do with vampires. I guess this made sense, though ... considering that he lived most of his life on other people's blood. He told me at a party once when he was really drunk ... that the whole idea of oral sex repulsed him.

He had a lot of trouble with his teeth.

He missed school a lot ... he was absent all the time. His body just couldn't hold up to the weight of his blood. He was either in the hospital or having to stay home and just not move ... freeze ... for weeks at a time. Because if his blood ever did break loose, which it could do in a whisper ... it would fly out like a dam bursting and go running wild all through him in torrents. I guess the worst was when he banged his elbows or his knees ... the blood would rupture ... just suddenly go roaring in ... flooding and blocking up so bad and swell so bad that the pressure actually separated the bones in his joints.

Years later, when he was drinking, it ran right out of his liver and filled up his stomach. He was always in awful pain.

Music: "Dixie Fried" (man's voice):

Rave on, children

Rave on, cats, he cried

The cops are gone

It's almost dawn

Let's all get Dixie fried ...

I remember when we were in New Orleans that time for Mardi Gras ... when he knew all those gangsters, and he could get us any table in any club in the Quarter, no matter how crowded ... just dropped a few names to the manager ... And how back in the streets, we'd stop at every single corner and drink Southern Comfort and sing, "Rave on children ... rave on, cats, he cried ... it's almost dawn, and the cops are gone ... let's all get Dixie fried!" God ... oh.

Later, he had me up against the wall in the bathroom of that motel ... kept trying to kiss me. I could feel his stomach up against me ... swollen and sticking out like a hard little knot ... full of whiskey and blood and Jesus.

Music: "Dixie Fried" (chorus repeats).

That's what always stands out in my mind when I think of him sexually ... he was surrounded inside by his own swirling blood ... terrible blood ... thin as the wind.

He had a gun in his suitcase too ... I kept thinking he'd drop it or something, and it'd go off and kill somebody in the airport.

He was on his deathbed over thirty times just that third-grade year. He got his mother to call his friends to come visit him in intensive care ... and he'd read us all these wills he made out, leaving us all this stuff ... his toys, and clothes, and his drawings ... He did some beautiful drawings back then ... he could have gone into art. I still have one he did of a dog ... kind of a wolf with a quarter moon hanging off its lip ... howling ... and scrawled across the top it said, "SPOTTY BARKS." Years later I showed it to him, and he laughed ... then when I left the room for a minute, right under "SPOTTY BARKS," he wrote, "FUCK SPOTTY." He never liked pets.

The next summer his family moved to New Mexico, and I didn't see him again for nine years ... not until he moved back to Texas to finish his senior year ... and by then he was already gambling with the big boys from Dallas, LA, and Houston ... and he carried a gun.

Later he was a politician ... and the same age as Jesus.

The headlines said, "Political Strategist Dies at Thirty-Three." He had something to do with Bobby Kennedy's campaign, but nobody knew just what.

His mother said he was too young to die, but that he'd always stayed up late. That meant something.
She was tricked and rattled.
Fire slipped through her dreams.
She demanded cremation and took fingers with her ex-husband for the fifth time in nine years. Their circle had no circumference.

At the funeral she read a poem he had written on the back of a pamphlet from the Democratic Convention in 1968:

I want a new tattoo.
A snake.
A mouth.
A scarification moon.
A total melody.

I want a mark that just begins with the flesh. One that roars forever in bloodcrust. A heart with MOMMA in it. Her bottles and skulls. The lover's question mark and panthers.

And I want it done with sticks and knives in New Guinea and San Diego. A blue bird, red bird, green bird, and anchors and daggers and Jesus winking black crows off the cross. And nails and secrets and razors and perfect dots. The red devil boy and eagles and a whole new set of eyes.

I want love illustrated in mean black little waves hauling road angels and comets ... and rats chewing money. Buildings better explode and guns and initials and everyone who ever died I loved. Atomic bombs, Old Glory, a fly screaming ... and some messages in general.

And I want it now, with hula girls and swastikas and aces and diamonds, and spades and clubs, and a four and a mirror.

I want a poison frog, rabid dog, bats and a guitar, and Stars and Bars ... and all the self-assurances that my decisions are true.

I want subtones.
I want my body to deliver the perfect burden to the ash.
A bloodscrawl, at the wind.

She said it sounded just like him. But we figured he stole it from one of his biker friends, because not a soul understood the vernacular. The poem wasn't appropriate, but no less so than anything else in his life.

I remember once he was reading this big book on the life of John F. Kennedy ... and he was furious. He told me he thought the whole idea of biography was pure bullshit ... some powdered up, sick, perverted form of necrophilia. "Look," he said, "I met Jack Kennedy once, and he was an asshole. The guy couldn't keep a normal appointment if it killed him."

The first year he was married to his first wife he had all the vending machines, cigarette and rubber machines, you know, all the condoms in town. They used to invite us over for breakfast on Sundays, and we'd help them count the money. I never saw so many quarters in my life ... millions of them ... there wasn't a flat surface in the whole apartment that wasn't covered with stacks of quarters. Later the Dixie Mafia got mad, because he wouldn't give them a percentage, and they tore out all of his machines, but by then he was already in the dog business. He would get these dogs out of the pound and advertise them in the paper as being trained seeing-eye dogs ... pedigreed ... you know, just these stupid ugly mutts, but he sold them like hot cakes.

And it was around that time that he joined the Young Republicans, but then he got in some kind of trouble over there, and then he had to join the Young Democrats.

I think he's the only person that I ever knew who had absolutely no conscience. It must have been pathological or psychological or something ... because I mean literally, he didn't have a conscience ... it just wasn't there ... gone ... did not exist. I asked him once in all seriousness, if he had ever really felt guilt ... real guilt about anything in his whole life. And he looked at me real funny for a second ... like I was from Mars or something, and he said, "No, why should I? I haven't done anything."

The last time I saw him, he looked pretty bad. He had on a dirty t-shirt, and his stomach was all swollen, and he hadn't

shaved in several days.

His teeth looked awful.

All the drapes were closed, and it was real dark inside, but I could see big stacks of hundred dollar bills everywhere. Stacks and stacks and stacks ... you know, just thousands of dollars piled up on all the furniture. He had on one of those shoulder holsters ... and God, I hate those nasty things. You know how scary-looking they are. I told him to take it off and put it somewhere way up high, so I didn't have to look at it ... and he did, but he put the gun out on the supper table. "None of this money is mine," he said, "and they'll kill me if I lose a dime of it." I noticed a little plaster bust of Jesus on the piano.

I hadn't seen him in three years, so when I called and just suggested that we go somewhere for a drink, well, he told me his ex-wife would be over in a minute ... so why didn't I just come on over to his place. He said she came over there all the time, but he must have been lying, because it turned out that she didn't want to have anything to do with him.

She told me later that she'd asked him to get her a good job in Washington, which she knew he could do ... but he wouldn't do it, because he didn't want her to leave town. He was still trying hard to get back with her ... he had even moved just two block away from her apartment. Anyway, after he had hung up talking to me, he must have called her and said that I'd called and was coming over to see him ... like, you know, trying to use me to make her jealous or something ... but also just using me to get her over to his place, because we hadn't seen each other, you know, in a long time either. And she did, she came over, but it was pretty tense.

Main thing I remember was the dark room with all those piles of money ... and that holster ... and that little Jesus. It's all about as corny as a country song, I guess, but it made me cry.

Later I heard he was running this club ... some ex-associate of Jack Ruby, some little place called The Night Owl, and he was sharing rent on his house with some newsboy ... you know, this older guy who threw the paper and dealing dope on the side. But I never saw him again.

Music: "Rock of Ages" (vocals).

After he died, his mother told me, "He had this real affinity for divine statuary ... but I can't tell you much about him anymore. I never knew what he actually did. I only know that he suffered ... and that he probably blamed me at the end. He was in some kind of politics, and he was probably a gangster ... but he couldn't have been nearly as good at it as he must have wished. He was just too sick.

"I'll tell you one thing though, he will always be in my heart ... always ...

"Sure as I was in his blood."

NARRATOR:

Events exist temporarily, and images takes place.

Memory is carried away to different directions through the mind, as hallucination.

Hallucination dissolves across the passage of years into history.

Stories are told, songs are sung.

Hearts become rooms set aside, and people begin.

WOMAN:

About three months after the funeral I got this bizarre letter from his second wife, no return, no postmark or anything. Here's what she wrote:

"I've tried all the moisturizers, all the cream rinse. I've bought two hundred-dollar shoes and seemed gay. I've been through it all ... and with a Germanic heritage, there isn't a soul left I can confide in. Music has played a precise role in the hell of my timing. I've been married three times, twice in Mexican towns. My favorite relationships have been with small animals."

Music: "Auld Lang Syne" (bagpipes).

"I have dreamed of childhood and touched money at night. This cannot be taken from me. I have remained invisible and

believed in faith. Christ is my loverboy, and I have tasted the clots of honey in his blood. My soul is tuned to the midnight choir.”

NARRATOR:

He exits, straight up.

Music: “Auld Lang Syne.”

END

REUNION
(A Return to Juarez)

VOICES

Jo Harvey Allen: *narrator*

Maria Zuniga: *woman*

PLAYERS

Terry Allen: *vocals, keyboards*

Lloyd Maines: *pedal steel, guitars, dobro*

All text and songs © 1992 Green Shoes Pub. Co., BMI.

Produced by Terry Allen, Don Caldwell, and Lloyd Maines. Recorded by Don Caldwell at Caldwell Studios, Lubbock, TX. Edited and mixed by Alan Crossland.

Ocean breaking against rocks. Seagulls.

NARRATOR:

THE CHARACTERS:

Sailor:

A Texas boy just returned from duty
With the Navy in the Pacific
Is on leave in the Port of San Diego.

Spanish Alice:

A Mexican prostitute
Working the bars in Tijuana
And looking for ways into the USA.

Jabo:

A Juarez-born pachuco
Living in Los Angeles
Decides to go home
By way of a joyride
Up into southern Colorado.

Chic Blundie:

Jabo's LA girlfriend
An enigma
Rock-writer
And occasionally ... Jabo himself.

Music: "El Camino" intro (instrumental).

A SIMPLE STORY:

Sailor meets Alice in a Tijuana bar.

They get drunk.

Fuck.

Cry-to-believe together

And get married.

They cross the border and travel by car

(probably a Buick)

From San Diego to Cortez

Colorado.

They honeymoon in a small run-down mountain trailer.

AND EXACTLY AT THE SAME TIME

Jabo appeals to and persuades Chic

To leave LA

(probably by motorcycle)

For Juarez by-way-of-Cortez.

THEY GO NORTH TO GET SOUTH.

Thunder.

In Cortez ...

The two couples meet

Argue

Fight

Resulting in Sailor and Alice

Lying dead on the trailer floor.

Loud thunder.

Jabo and Chic

Objects of a massive statewide search

Escape by car

(probably the Buick)

And flee to Juarez

As planned.

In Juarez ...

They part.

Thunder. Music: "El Camino" (instrumental). Ocean breaking against rocks.

Just like a movie ... in the center of the bridge,
a sailor and a woman hold each other.
They speak, but we can't hear them.
The sailor reaches up and touches the woman's face.

Their shadow is on the top of the river.
Two children, a boy and girl, wade into the shadow ... looking straight up into the bridge.
They are each holding catch-wands ... a broom handle with a cardboard cone wired to the end.
They shake the wands ... trying to get the couple to throw them something.

The woman looks up at him ... then she turns and walks away.
The sailor watches her until she disappears.
Then everything dissolves.
And all we can see is the edge of the river ...
The banks.

Ocean segues into distant thunder, then loud crack.

The sun falls down behind the mountains ... toward night ... in Tijuana.

WOMAN:

Cervezería las Golondrinas.

Music out. Loud crack of thunder.

WOMAN (whispers):

Alicia.

Slow rumbling fade into fire.

NARRATOR:

In the Beer Bar of the Swallows,
Jabo is at the bar ... tapping the floor with his pointy-toed shoes.
Alicia is in a booth.
She is looking at a postcard of the Burning Woman.
She looks up ... and there is a moment in the mirror
when she and Jabo see the same thing.

The room short circuits. It completely stops.

Music: "What of Alicia" (instrumental).

Then Sailor walks in.
Suddenly,

Jabo is gone ... and Alice is burning up.

Later

inside, the ghost is jumping.

The band is playing something impossible.

They all have on fancy suits, but the song is crazy
and endless and nuts!

In the dark, he mentions his mother.

But then he tells her all about Japan ... his tattoos.

She kisses the ships on his arms.

She shows him the Burning Woman.

They laugh and drink tequila and rub each other with limes under the table.

Outside, in the streets, somebody screams.

The band is playing dirty now ... the filthy norteño

singing about puta and blood

and something else about a Circle Forever.

Onstage, a naked fifteen year-old girl contorts.

She sits on her own face.

Smoke is everywhere.

And over the bar

ELVIS AND JESUS WALK ARM-IN-ARM ON VELVET ACROSS THE CLOUDS.

Clap of thunder. Rain.

WOMAN (*whispers*):

Later.

Fire fades.

NARRATOR:

Outside, a storm comes up.

Fire. Rain only. Music: "What of Alicia" fades out.

Later they take a taxi in the rain to La Estrella Negra,
the whorehouse where Alicia works.

Music: "There Oughta Be a Law Against Sunny Southern California" (instrumental).

Headlights in the rain.

Meanwhile ... outside San Bernardino,

Jabo is on the freeway, flying through the rain.
He just stole a car, robbed a store, and killed somebody.
He's covered with jailhouse tattoos and runnin' blind behind the wheel
(the only way anybody can really get to LA).

He makes it to Boyle Heights and taps on Chic's window with his gun.
She lets him in
The radio is blaring ... and they're all over each other.

Breathing with music and rain.

In between the songs a special bulletin mentions a shootout at some gas station in Arizona ...
and also something about the end of the world.
But the details are sketchy ... it's really too early to tell.
Jabo is naked, and Chic has on green shoes.
They fuck like demons to the music all over the floor and up the walls.

Breathing to crescendo. Thunder. Song out. Fade to pleasant morning birds chirping.

The next morning ...
they eat eggs and count hold-up money in the kitchen.

Fly buzzes.

They talk about Cortez.
He says he will take her there if she will go to Juarez.

Later Jabo brings his bike out of hiding.
He calls it his little Crucita ... his little cross.
He ties a rag around his head and takes off his shirt.
A blue Jesus is dancing on his back ... with Magdalena
Our Lady of the Luck ... the virgin whore.

WOMAN:

His little Crucita.

NARRATOR:

In the house Chic is at the mirror getting ready.
She's putting razor blades in her hair.

Wind moans eerily. Birds fade.

WOMAN:

To La Estrella Negra.

NARRATOR:

Meanwhile ... back in Tijuana,

the inside of the warehouse is one large gutted space.
It has a single door and two windows on opposite walls.
The ceiling is low, and the floor is completely covered with mattresses.
Ropes have been strung across the ceiling, criss-crossing overhead in a grid ... a web of rectangles.
Blankets have been suspended over the ropes, hanging down to make little rooms ... CRIBS ... over each of the mattresses.
The windows are open, and the wind is blowing.
The whole room rolls like the sea.
Alicia's crib is in the center of this ocean.

She says it is always night.

Music: sparse "El Camino" (instrumental).

Oceans of cloth.
Her life is pinned to the blankets.

Everything fades out but wind with "El Camino" music.

Postcards ... milagros ... a dried hummingbird ... little scraps of paper and flowers ... posters and tear-outs from fashion magazines ... beauty tips and shoes ... snapshots ... teen angel ... the Pope ... TV celebrities and saints ...

a picture of her mother.
She says her name was Carlotta, and she disappeared years ago in Guadalajara.

They just chinga and talk ... chinga and talk ... chinga and talk ... chinga and talk ... and finally,
they talk and make love.

WOMAN:

Carlotta.

NARRATOR:

He tells her he knows a perfect little place.
A little trailer in Cortez, Colorado.
They can go there and stay forever.
Later, he shows her Polaroids of his own mother who is buried in Abilene.

ABILENE:

A mean little Christian town stuck just off I-20
right between the last gasp of North Texas and the Holy Rapture.
He says it's just like a bad wish.
Facing East, but looking due West.
With a little bitty black heart running dead South.
Skinny as a Mexican dog.

Abilene.

It ain't nothin' like Japan.

WOMAN:

Carlotta.

NARRATOR:

Alicia listens.

Then she pins up the Burning Woman.

WOMAN:

Carlotta.

NARRATOR:

They talk
but right from the start
they knew.

They didn't really have a single thing to say to one another.
They had no history that wasn't busted up ... unhinged at the seams.
He just likes the way she looks.
She likes the way he looks as-a-way-out.

Strange, isn't it?

Their skin feels perfect together.
That did it as much as anything.

PERFECT SKIN GIVES PEOPLE IDEAS.

They both knew exactly what they are NOT doing.
They've practiced it over and over and over inside themselves for years.

CORTEZ:

The perfect plan.
The perfect place.
A cold-blooded, premeditated ACT OF LOVE.
They're on fire ... and somewhere in all the smoke,

a car gets bought,
some lines get crossed
and Colorado burns like a black star.

WOMAN:

Carlotta.

Music begins to fade. Wind still up.

NARRATOR:

So the next morning
in San Diego
they get married.

He gives her a camera and a blue kimono.
She gives him the Burning Woman ... and off they go to America.

Music fades. Wind segues into cars passing.

On the same day
at the same time
Jabo and Chic leave LA
They are all on the same road.

Music: "El Camino" intro fades up again.

In America it's MOTION that is holy, not the destination.
Speed ... blood ... dreams ... love and hell.
The highway is the heartbeat through everything.

So Jabo sings:

Man's voice:

El camino, mi corazon
El camino, that's my problem
El camino, mi corazon
El camino, mi problema
Por vida mi corazon

Chick laughs.
She says that song is as close as you'll ever get to knowing anything about anything.
Especially about love.
Chick laughs again. Then writes it on the wall:
THIS IS HELL.

Thunder cuts the song off. Cars passing.

WOMAN:

Especialmente el amor.

Cars passing.

NARRATOR:

Just across the state line, Sailor and Alice pass an abandoned drive-in movie theater.
She shoots it with her camera.

That night ... Alice dreams a film is showing.

The characters in the film walk out big holes in the screen and go sit in cars and watch new characters take their place.
It doesn't make any sense to her.

He tells her he dreamed once that all his tattoos sank right under his skin ... and he could feel it ... all the ships and fish and anchors wiggling through his blood ... feel it like it was REAL.

He said EVERYTHING WAS MOVING TOWARDS HIS HEART ... but he woke up before it got there.

He said he was scared shitless.

Alice shoots the desert through the window.

She has no idea what he's talking about ... and doesn't say another word for a hundred miles.

She does her nails.

Eerie drone. Music: "Stations" (instrumental).

That morning in the desert, Arizona is just like a hole with a movie in it.

We see Jabo and Chic pull into an isolated filling station and ask for gas. The attendant, this goofy-looking kid, is shook-up just looking at them ... Jabo fiddles with the bike while Chic browses around inside the station. She picks up a can of spray paint and tests it out on the walls, on the Coke machine, the cash register ... then opens the register and takes the money. The attendant sees this and starts to back away, but Jabo pulls a knife and walks him back toward the garage.

"Stations" rhythm overlay begins.

He tells Chic to move the bike around to the side of station. The attendant is standing hands-up in the sunlight in front of the open garage door ... Jabo is in the shadows just inside. Chic moves the bike ... and now we see a tow truck suddenly pull in ... "AZTEC AUTO" is hand-scrawled on the door. The driver sees the attendant with his hands up, knows something is wrong, and grabs a big rifle from the gun rack above the seat. Jabo yanks the goofy attendant inside the garage and holds a knife against his throat. Chic has spotted the truck and pulls a pistol. The driver gets out ... peers over the hood ... then suddenly just starts firing shots into the garage ... then he runs like maniac across the driveway into the office area of the station. Jabo and the attendant duck as the bullets ricochet off tire tools and wheel rims and the grease rack. The driver hides behind the office desk and yells for whoever is in there to come out RIGHT NOW with their hands in the sky ... and then he fires two more shots through the door separating the office and the garage. Again, Jabo and the attendant duck as bullets fly ... the attendant is petrified now, and his neck is slightly cut. Jabo is swearing and hissing curses... then, all they hear is the low rumble of an engine. Then we see Chic scream out from the side of the building on the bike and skid to a stop behind the tow truck. She starts blasting away with the pistol into the office from over the hood. The plate glass window explodes, and the driver inside is ducking flying glass, then returns fire ... blowing big holes in his own truck.

Jabo makes a decision.

With a single gesture, he slits the attendant's throat and shoves him through the door into the office. The driver, startled, whirls and shoots the attendant full of holes as he comes through the door already dead ... the driver is stunned when he

realizes who he's shot. Meanwhile, Jabo takes advantage of the diversion to run out of the garage and get across the driveway to safety behind the truck with Chic. They jump on the bike and screech off ... Chic still pouring pistol fire into the office. The bike hits the shoulder of the road and spins out in a huge cloud of dust ... then roars down the highway. The driver runs out firing at them, but the bullets hit a passing motorist in a camper. The camper careens off the road, barely missing Jabo and Chic, and crashes into the gas pumps in front of the station. Everything blows sky high. You can hear screaming inside the camper. Jabo and Chic are in a high speed wobble ... but Jabo gets it in control as more explosions and black smoke erupt behind them ... and back there ... we see HELL itself. Other cars are crashing ... somebody is trying to pull burning kids from the camper. A WOMAN IS ON FIRE, RUNNING IN CIRCLES. Everybody is screaming ... and blending in now with police sirens in the distance.

Eerie drone out. Breathing rhythm starts. "Stations" rhythm overlay continues.

The scene cuts here ... and we see a green Buick parked on the side of the road.
A highway patrol car rushes in the opposite direction ... sirens howling.
Sailor and Alice are asleep naked in the back seat.
The siren startles them awake ... they raise up and look out the windshield just as a chopper flies by.

Jabo and Chic zoom past the parked car.
Chic's hair is flying, and her legs stick out like the bike has WINGS.
She's spraying black paint in the air.
Chic looks back and sees Alice.

"Stations" rhythm and breathing out.

The whole screen fills with her eye.
It looks like a BLACK WHEEL.

Crickets, night sounds.

Under the highway
in a culvert
Jabo and Chic hide out from the day.
A cop car passes overhead.

They're naked and deep into Arizona.
They've made a fire, and Chic is glowing.
She's drawing on the concrete walls.
Jabo watches her breasts swing as she scrawls.
The word CARLOTTA is tattooed over her left nipple.
His own body is alive with words and pictures.
But they're more than just marks.
He looks at the dots on his fingers.
Then says he's been pissed off his whole life.

Chic stops.
She looks at him.

JUAREZ is stitched homemade blue across the bottom of his throat.

She laughs.

She tells him he's stupid as TV.

A truck passes overhead ... then another cop.

Ocean breaking on rocks. Seagulls.

You know

you are like that story of the fish that has no body

No flesh

a skeletonfish

all bones and empty and lost, swimming around under water forever

looking for your own skin

And one day, in complete frustration

that fish jumps right out of the water and grabs a seagull

He's fed up with seeing that thing up there just flying around

all free and easy

So

he decides to kill it

And eat it

But the first bite he takes

something happens

As soon as he swallows

he grows a brand new little piece of himself

ON himself

a little string of meat dangling on the bone

And it occurs to him

the more seagull he eats

the more REAL FISH he's going to become

So

he starts eating that bird like there's no tomorrow

Well, when the seagull is completely gone

gobbled up

sure enough, the fish has turned into and become a true whole fish

He's thrilled to death

But here's the catch

While that poor bird is being eaten

he's also been flying

straight up

And a fish, I don't care how real they are

can't live in the sky

He's just way out of his element

So

he falls.

Jabo glares at her.
He says he hates fucking fish stories.

Ocean out.

That night
in a motel
Sailor is looking at the map.
It reminds him of the best tattoo he ever saw.

Seagulls. Birds.

A man who is completely covered with a net
His entire body cross-hatched with lines
Stopping only at the wrist, ankles, and neck.

But the amazing thing is what was underneath.

Behind the net, and drawn with great skill, were thousands of birds
Birds of every kind ... frantically trying to get out.
The net was drawn like it was bulging.
And wings, feathers, and beaks looked like they were sticking out in places

And in other areas
like over his heart
it was unraveling.
It was like every WISH he ever had was busting loose inside of him.

WOMAN:

Alicia le dice que tenía un sueño de un cuarto lleno de pájaros ...

NARRATOR:

Alice tells him she has dreamed about a room full of birds...

WOMAN:

... pájaros y un torbellino de pelo negro.

NARRATOR:

... birds and whirls of black hair ... and razor blades are falling inside the room like rain.

Motorcycle passes.

It is inside a house
on a street
at night
and the front door is on fire.
In the distance, a pillow is stuck between two mountains.

No people are anywhere ... and a motorcycle passes by with no rider.

Then I wake up.

Music: "Honeymoon in Cortez."

The next morning, Sailor goes to the office and checks out.

After he pays, the bubbly college girl working the desk asks, "And will you be going home today, sir?"

He looks at her like she just landed from Mars.

Back in the room, Alice is doing her nails.

She's looking at this little card on the table by the bed.

Right under where it says, "PLEASE LET US KNOW HOW WELL WE SERVED YOU," the maid has written a little note ... then drawn a heart around it in ballpoint pen.

WOMAN:

*we are all travelers in the wilderness of this world,
and the best that we can find in our travels is an honest friend.
please fill out this card for me.
thanks you.
enjoy your stay.
i am keeper of this house and your friend.
sincerely,
cha cha*

NARRATOR:

Beneath the heart is a ballpoint drawing of a tiny sailboat on water that looks just like upside-down birds.

Sailor sticks his head in the door.

"Let's wing it, ANGEL ... we're almost there."

She takes his picture.

That night, Sailor and Alice get to Cortez.

Jabo and Chic are already there.

They meet.

Drone. Crash. Roars. Music out.

"Who is it?"

"Who is it?"

The two stories collide ...

Crash. Thunder.

... and pass through one another.

WOMAN (*whispers*):

Who is it?

WOMAN (*louder*):

Who is it?

Wind moans. Ocean sounds.

NARRATOR:

After the murder, Jabo and Chic escape Colorado.
They are wearing Sailor and Alice's clothes.
The Buick is parked in the rocks, and Jabo is shooting at the cops.
He's losing his tattoos.
Chic ignores him and paints her nails.
She snaps some pictures of frightened desert life.
Bugs and lizards.
Birds.
Her fingers are red.
She has on the blue kimono.
After the shootout they flee South ... again toward Juarez.
Chic wants to photograph dead animals.
Outside, in a small town known only as LOVE TEST
Chic blows holes in Alice's suitcase with the pistol.
Jabo sits on the fender of the Buick and smokes.
New ships sail across his arms.
Fish jump out of his back.
He's getting Sailor's tattoos.
Mountains rise straight up.

Music: "Parts: Jabo/Street Walkin' Woman" (man's voice):

Gonna take my life
Right outta my mind
Gonna lay it down
On the border line

Gonna make myself
Help myself
To a little
Me

Ocean sounds. Wind. Seagulls.

They discard all of Sailor and Alice's belongings to the desert.

On the road again, they become apprehensive with one another.

Jabo anticipating POSITIONS ON THE DESERT:

Dog style

Missionary style

Her on top

69

Anal

3-way

With whipped cream

etc.

Music: "El Camino" (instrumental).

Chic reflecting.

Later

inside a small hotel in El Paso, Texas

they argue.

Ocean sounds. Wind. Seagulls. Music: "El Camino" continues.

Every room is filled with sand and high winds.

But it's silent.

Tumbleweeds fly around on fire.

And outside, sacks of burning clothing float down the river

and burn along the freeways

and four silhouettes RAGE behind the hotel shade.

WOMAN (*whispers*):

Who is it?

NARRATOR:

The next day

finally

on the BRIDGE

they part.

Thunder. Ocean fades. Music: "El Camino" continues.

WOMAN (*whispers*):

Carlotta.

NARRATOR:

Chic changes her name to CARLOTTA ... and disappears

strolling down the Avenue of the 16th of September.

Two children squat by the edge
and a fish flops on the concrete by their feet.
A woman walks backwards up the banks.
Jabo is on the bridge.
He's dressed like a sailor.
He looks straight down into the water.

He sees the perfect ship.

Music: "El Camino" continues, then fades.

END

DUGOUT

VOICES

Terry Allen: *C*

Jo Harvey Allen: *N*

Katie Koontz: *P*

C is a man's voice

N is narrator

P is a woman's voice

PLAYERS

Terry Allen: *vocals, keyboards*

Lloyd Maines: *pedal steel, guitars, dobro*

Richard Bowden: *fiddle, mandolin, cello, trumpet*

All text and music written by Terry Allen in August 1993, © 1993 Green Shoes Pub. Co., except "St. Louis Blues," by W.C. Handy; and "The Sweet By-and-By" Joseph P. Webster and S. Fillmore Bennett.

Produced by Terry Allen, Don Caldwell, and Lloyd Maines. Recorded by Don Caldwell at Caldwell Studios, Lubbock, TX. Edited and mixed by Alan Crossland.

C:

An empty room. Dead center. She's sitting in the only chair. Roses lay in her lap and make a pile like blood around her feet. Four windows, one in each wall, are open. Wind blows every curtain straight out ... white as sheets of ice ... rigid and parallel with the floor. Only her fingers move ... easily and in a rhythm ... like she was playing a piano. Her mouth is painted ... she smiles ... red. And you can almost breathe ... the goddamn "St. Louis Blues."

Dugout.

Music: "St. Louis Blues" (piano).

P:

He was sitting in the backyard looking at his hands. They were huge and gnarled ... ancient. Every finger had been broken more times than he remembered ... every knuckle jammed into knots ... every bone in each, shattered, splintered, and cracked in two. She watched him from the window ... and came out, thinking he was sad.

"What are you thinking about, honey?"

He looked up at her ... then grinned.

"I was thinking about all of it. Every damn second. How I wouldn't trade any of it for nothin'."

Six months earlier, they told him it was hopeless. The cancer was all over his body. She was with him and held his hands. He looked down, then at her ... then at them.

"Well," he said ... "I guess that's the way the ball bounces."

This was in the spring ... 1959.

C:

He flew out in a great high arc through the air. He was six years old and landed in the Missouri River.

“Swim ye lil’ sumbitch ... swim or drown!”

His pa’s voice ... giving the lessons. So, he did ... paddlin’ like a dog and hatin’ that voice and hatin’ that water and runnin’ the two together inside his life forever ... but forever also, never forgetting the shocking joy of that sudden flight through the air in the great high arc ... and, back on the banks, the first true knowing that he would never doubt his own body again.

“Whatever hell happens now ... the lil’ sumbitch can swim.”

His pa’s voice in the year 1892.

N:

Outside.

A half-dugout stuck half-in and half-out of the side of a small Oklahoma hill. The air is black with dirt and the year is 1905.

Inside.

A large man looks down and clenches his fists over a wood box that holds a newborn baby girl. Her mouth is open in a tiny black scream and the blood of birth still runs off her body. He stares at the tiny wet red sex. This is three of what will be his five children, and he would strangle it right now if his wife wasn’t there watching him ... weak, but smiling. He thinks it is wicked and godless ... a creature of the devil ... and he will wrestle with that in his heart the rest of his life.

Outside.

If there is a sound, it is something jagged and metal ... banging and tinkling ... banging and tinkling with the cries in the wind.

C:

The doctor pounds on the door. A blizzard slams daggers into the north wall of the house. He was eight years old, and his neck was swollen big as a bucket. The doctor stomps his boots three times, then walks over and looks right down his mouth.

“They gotta go,” he says.

His pa puts a long black-iron poker on the fire. His ma looks at him from over her shoulder where she stirs lye with a big wooden ladle. When the poker glows, his daddy calls his brother.

“Hep me hold the lil’ sumbitch down.”

They hold him, and the doctor shoves the glowing poker slow and deep into his throat and burns out his tonsils. His body went rigid from the pain, but he didn’t make a sound. He just pictured the giant spoon ... whirling around in the lye.

“Boy’s got some bark,” the doctor says before he leaves.

A week later his neck was down, but his mouth is still blistered shut. After that night, he never said more than he had to to anybody.

This is in Missouri on a farm in the winter of 1894.

P:

Outside.

She is five years old, and it is the Texas Panhandle of 1910. She wears a white dress and is sitting on the front seat of a covered wagon. The poppa sits beside her holding the reins to two mules in one hand and a bullwhip flying from the other. His face is dark and furious and the whip curls out of his fist like a snake. Deep bloody trenches groove across the animals’

backs. She is looking away from him at her brothers and sisters skipping beside the wagon in the tall grass. Her hand covers her mouth ... and her eyes are huge ... like she's giggling.

Inside.

The momma sits on a wood box sewing. She has a sweet angelic set to her mouth. Her hair is up in a tight bun. In her lap is a hand-tinted photograph of a three-year-old. The girl in a white dress. The eyes are huge with black rings around them and the mouth is frozen ... curved downward, deep blurred and terrible.

If there is sound, it is the momma ... humming:

“In the sweet by-and-by ... that beautiful shore.”

N:

It is 1958. They have been together longer than they were ever with anyone else. It is late at night. They lay in separate beds and talk about their lives. The stories come up ... one by one ... and great spaces open up and move in and out between them. She says a person has to dig into the heart of everything ... and what little gets dug out is all there is ... or will ever be. He says he remembers every game. She says she remembers every single song.

And it no longer is just about the two of them ... it's all of it. Most of which can never be said. It just lays in secrets in the dark ... like the black gap between the two beds that holds their hands.

It has nothing to do with growing old.

C:

A lot happened in the summer of 1895.

In May, he never went back to school after the third grade. The teacher ran off with a ballplayer from St. Louis. He didn't know what a ballplayer was, but he knew he liked him. Teachers were scarce in Missouri. In June, he got his first ball glove. His pa, mystified by the unusual configuration of the thing, traded a plug of tobacco for it from a tonic drummer. He thought it to be a cushion or perhaps some kind of hat. He tried out various other speculations on it ... none of which worked worth a damn, so he said:

“To hell with the sumbitch.”

... and threw it in the barn. The boy found it. He didn't know what it was, but it set well with him. He liked holding it and looking at it. He liked the feel of his fingers inside it. In July, his older brother, who'd never told him nothing, told him it was a ballplayer thing ... a catcher's mitt ... and then told him the ball being played was called baseball, a game made up by the famous Mr. Thomas Alva Edison during one of his rest periods in between inventing the electricity light. Things snowballed after that. By August, he'd seen his first exhibition game at a county social ... had begun to practice diligently and learned most of the basic rules, and, before the first blue norther hit in late September, had already played in twenty-five seven-inning games. He didn't care who invented it. He knew he could do it, and he knew it beat hell out of farming.

“Can't hit for shit ... but the lil' sumbitch can throw.”

Even his pa learned the game.

P:

Inside.

The poppa is down on his knees ... big hands thrown out before him, crushed white with prayer. But his head is up, twisted rigid to the right. His mouth is wet, and his eyes bulge with revelations. A full-bodied woman is playing the piano. Her dress is black, and he is studying her ass move on the bench. The church is nearly empty.

If there is sound, it is hissing.

Outside.

Steam spews from the engine. The platform is mobbed with people, and banners wave. A brass band is playing. Two blacks jump high, kicking their heels in the air. They both look like Uncle Sam and hold tiny flags. Blue smoke hangs over the barrels of pistols. The boys are on the train ... jammed out the windows, waving and leaning to kiss the girls. Every mouth is wide open.

C:

“Yer pa spent three day down in a dugout dirt trench full of blood up to his chin ... couldn’t even raise his head, because they was more lead shot in the air then they was air. Said in a field once after a fight, he seen more human guts layin’ in the dirt then they was blades of grass. So ye let him be, boy ... ”

He’d dogged his pa about it ... dogged him about the war. But he’d clam up ... just go on about whatever he was doing or walk away. But he kept doggin’ him. Finally, his Ma jerked him up by the arm and carried off into the field.

“He warn’t no murderin’ redleg trash like that James clan. He served with honor with the Tennessee Volunteer. Three his brothers warred for the Yankees, but yer pa and his baby brothers warred for the cause. Day they left, they stood right out there in town road solemn as preachers and shook hands ... shook hands and went off different directions to kill one another ... brother ’gainst brother. Them was dark days. When they left, they own pa ... yer grandpa ... was so disturbed he kilt their ma ... shot her in the heart ... then kilt his own self with a ball in the mouth. Whole family got kilt ... ’cept yer pa ... an’ he wouldn’t say nothing, nary a word ... for four year after he come back from it. I’m the only one he ever talked it to ... an’ after it was all out he said, ‘That’s it ... it’s out, an’ it’s over, an’ it’s did, an’ I aint sayin’ it ’ere to no livin’ soul agin.’ So boy, let him be ... them was terrible dark days.”

P:

Inside.

Her tongue is hanging out. Her eyes are blank. She is naked ... spreadeagled in a broken bundle of hay. A pair of bloodied knickers lay in a wad near a stall. The livery is empty ... except for one pale horse. Deep red welts bubble up along her arms, her throat ... across her stomach and the insides of her legs. Strings of vomit pool and cake across her flat boney little chest. She is thirteen years old ... and drunk as a skunk.

Outside.

A photographer covers up his head and looks out the camera.

Up close and centered to the left ... the shadow of a figure running is blurred, black against the wooden slats outside a livery.

In the middle and slightly to the bottom, a crowd of people wave at a great black train covered with flags ... pulling away.

In the distance, far to the right and near the top ... the dark silhouette of a man in a flatbed wagon with what appears to be a piano tied to the back. Even at this distance, the man seems excited ... frantic even, as he whips a horse whose head is lost, disappeared off into the edge.

Inside.

The photograph, sepia-toned and centered with a white border on black paper ... held with tiny black corners glued down with spit. At the bottom, someone has written in a small, but elegant script:

summer of 1918, our boys go to war.

And under that, in the same slanted hand:

while they take their leave, we make the windows slick from crawling out at night.

If there is sound, it's a piano.

N:

It is 1957. He is at the kitchen window. She had been gone three days. He never knew what to do. He just waited. He knew she was probably out drinking. The piano in the living room was not enough. He understood it. She was a lot younger than him ... but he still had the feeling. So he waited.

Sooner or later she always got home.

C:

He squat down and looked at it. His dog was hung up in the fence. The face was gone except for one eye and part of the head. The part with that spot like a musical note. The dog had got tangled up in the wire and cut off all the blood to three of its legs. They'd gone green and big as gourds by the time he'd found it. He loved the dog, but had shot it straight away. He didn't even pet it.

Years later, it turned into a bedtime story.

"Daddy, tell me again 'bout that dog."

So he'd sit down on the edge of the bed in the dark and tell what a fine dog it was ... until his older brother had murdered it. And he'd tell this brother said he'd found the dog all hung up and sufferin', so he shot it out of its misery ... but tell he never believed a word of it, because his brother was a damn born liar and had also always hated the dog anyway. Then say he'd never liked his sumbitch brother ever since ... and end the telling by saying the only one of his brothers he ever did care anything about at all was the younger one who got his head knocked off in a car wreck in 1930.

"My real brothers played ball."

Then it was "goodnight," and the door shut behind him. The only bedtime story he ever knew.

But back then ... he just squat down and looked at it. He was twelve years old, and it was 1898, and Teddy Roosevelt had just whipped Cuba.

Later, he walked back to the house, and his pa was butchering a hog. His ma spooning out the brains into a frying pan.

"Fight'n a bunch of Mexcans ain't no war ... hell, it ain't even no fight ... Missionary Ridge an' Lookout Mountain ... them was fights."

His pa was mutterin'. It always made him jittery to kill stuff.

Over supper, he told them about his dog. His brother laughed.

P:

In 1922, she sits at the piano. She is seventeen years old. The woman in black from church sits with her ... very close on the bench to her right ... pointing at notes. She leans away from the woman ... far left, toward the low end. The woman has huge breasts and will only teach hymns. She's a sweet person, but a religious fanatic. God is always swarming out her mouth. She has hideous breath.

Later, in nightclubs during the 1930s, she'll giggle.

"Kid, this is why I always play way down in the bottom ... every time I go up past middle C, I can still smell that ol' biddy's breath."

And it was true. Down in the bottom, her left hand could raise the dead. But not all true ... because on the high end, her right hand made the dead men dance. It was solid pure greased lightning.

In 1923, she catches the poppa and the woman in black by surprise on the love seat in the parlor. She's tickled ... but she never tells.

In 1924, the woman in black helps her get a scholarship to a religious school far away. It is a music college in Dallas ... secretly endowed by the Church of Christ ... "An' probably the Ku Klux Klan," she says later.

In 1925, she discovers jazz. One month later, she is expelled for getting caught playing barrelhouse piano in a juke joint down in deep Ellum.

"Who caught me?" she said.

A Dean of Discipline tells her she is the first young lady ever expelled from their institution.

"This jazz is a terrible wickedness," he says, "but a white girl playing it with Negroes is unspeakable!"

When he hears about it, the poppa will cut deep slashes across the tops of his hands with a razor. He cries all night.

It was awful ... and she was thrilled. Six weeks later, she is enrolled in a beauty school in Ft. Worth, has a waitress job, and is rehearsing her own band.

She is 20 years old.

N:

They'd come late at night ... all through the late '40s and early '50s. They'd come scratching on the screen, pounding on the door ... shooting fireworks off in the yard. Old ballplayers and old musicians ... come to tell their stories. She would cook and giggle and play the piano like a house on fire, and they would all sing and drink ... and talk loud and colorful around the great deep gaps inside of their lives. And when it was over they would all hug each other and cry ... then get in their cars and drive away.

They'd come late at night, turning their memory into a story, until 1955. After that, most of them were dead.

C:

Outside.

A baseball diamond. There are no foul lines. The invention of foul lines will change the game. Men who can hit only extreme left or extreme right will be eliminated for those that can hit within the confines. Foul lines are the last great change ... much more than lights. But this is before that. The newest invention on this day are two narrow rectangles cut into the ground ... one approximately twenty feet off the first base side, one approximately twenty off the third base side. Each are about three feet deep and have a flat wooden bench running the length of the trench down inside. They have been invented for the players' comfort and safety while they are not on the field of play. They look like graves ... and for several years will be called just that. When the game is over, they will be deep with blood, spit, whiskey, tobacco, and mud.

Inside.

He is sitting on the bench. The year is 1903, and he has just grounded out to short. He is in Enid, Oklahoma, catching his first game with the farm club for the great St. Louis Browns. He is seventeen years old, and it is probably the happiest day of his whole life.

In the grave ... his first dugout.

P:

Colorado and Prohibition are in full swing. She is twenty-eight years old at the piano. She has long black hair and a red sequin dress. The speakeasy is full of ballplayers. Her band is long gone. She is smoking a cigarette and plays alone in the lounge.

She doesn't care much for sports, but the players are nice. Some of them are kind of dumb, but they tip good. Her day job is playing an old ragtime upright at the last silent movie house in Denver. Sound has taken the world by storm. She isn't licensed to do hair in Colorado. She is trying to get home to Texas.

C:

They only had one baseball in Enid. It was a cheap club. If somebody hit a long one out over the outfield, they had to stop the game and both teams go hunt for the ball. There weren't any fences in Oklahoma ... just weeds. He'd been a busher now going on six years. All his fingers were broken a hundred times, but he stayed in the game. He had seen the great Ty Cobb once ... saw him take out a second baseman with high spikes in the face. The whole infield was covered with blood. It impressed him. That's the only way the game is played ... with heart and for blood. Nobody made any money.

P:

She is on the rebound from her second husband ... a drunk newspaper man who swept her off her feet in Dallas and took her to California. It went straight downhill for five years. She didn't mind the liquor, even tolerated a black eye now and then ... but she had despised the jealousy and left.

Her first husband is dead.

She drinks some now herself.

She misses her band.

N:

They meet at the railroad station. He's a lot older, but she likes his big open grin.

"Hi there, sunshine," she says.

Instead of going on where they were going, they go to supper. They like each other's hands. She is recently divorced, and his first wife recently dead. It is the summer of 1942, and, as usual, America is at war. They are married six weeks later.

He gives her a small ring with tiny diamonds. She gives him one son. They will live together for fifteen years. Both of their lives will never be what they are again.

C:

When the season was over, he had to find work. Mostly he did carpentry or sold hardware. One winter he worked in a slaughter house. He hated the pigs screaming and quit after three days. He never ate bacon again.

He started collecting spoons as souvenirs from all the towns he played in. They had little pictures of famous landmarks on them. At night, he'd lay them out on the bed in the hotel and look at them. It always made him feel better. He saw the first electricity light, the first horseless car, the first aeroplane ... and many other first-time gadgets. He thought they were all just play-pretties ... "None of 'em'll stick," he said.

He was thirty-two years old when he finally went up to the Majors. The summer of the Great War of 1918. He could still catch like a wall and throw like fire, but he couldn't hit. It was the damn foul lines. He was up for only one year, then shipped down to Houston. They made him a player/manager because of his age ... so he ended up making a name in the Texas League. During the 1920s and 30s, it was the meanest of them all.

P:

The Denver Post Tournament is in its third day. She has a date to the game with a sax player. From the bleachers, she watches a woman in a black dress down in the money seats lean over the wire and kiss a big rough-looking catcher. It's her old piano teacher.

"God, I hope he's holding his breath."

She gets so tickled she pees her pants.

That night in the lounge, she sees the two of them again. She is playing, and they are dancing. For some reason the moment is so perfect ... she just tears up the goddamn "St. Louis Blues."

The name of the speakeasy is on the wall behind her. In the glittery letters, it says THE SATIN DUGOUT.

But the Denver cops, naturally, call it THE FOUL LINE.

C:

He married a Catholic woman. He was mystified by the religion, but seldom saw her. When he wasn't playing or managing ball, he hopped freights. He said it was to find work, but mostly it was to go see something else. She died of cancer of the throat in 1940.

Once he told a young busher with a promising arm, "Your life just turns into a bucket full of stories ... with a little bitty hole in the bottom."

P:

"Or a bucket full of holes ... with a little bitty story in the bottom," she told him years later.

Giggling.

N:

He is cussing the Yankees. It's the final game of the World Series. He is cussing the television. Baseball should never have been put on television. He cusses the players. All they care about is the money. The pitchers take forever to throw the damn ball.

She can hear him from the kitchen. His brother is with him. He says he has come to say goodbye ... but she doesn't like his eyes or the way they look at her. She pours a small whiskey.

The Yankees win. The television is off. The game is over. He is seventy-three years old.

He talks two hours with his brother. The brother will never mention what was said.

She comes in and takes his hand. It's time. Her fingers move lightly over his big knuckles like she is playing the piano. He feels himself suddenly come loose ... and fly out in a great high and familiar arc. And in some infinite and secret place, she flies away with him.

Music: "St. Louis Blues" (piano).

END