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CONTENTS

PART ONE (A). *The Yamanote* 13

CHAPTER 1. KANDA-TOKYO 15

Lang hadn't wanted to come to Tokyo; but once he got here – well.

CHAPTER 2. YURAKUCHO-SHIMBASHI 35

Roberta was already here, you know; she'd lived in America, had done Europe, she and Lang, they were going nowhere standing still and falling – he couldn't see it – she needed a change – there was a job available – here – maybe: and so she came.

CHAPTER 3. HAMAMATSUCHO-SHINAGAWA 59

Lang never wanted to come here; he had a passing, a professional interest in Japan, but winters get pretty gray in Vienna, or so I'm told, and the few letters from Roberta only added to things being that much more up in the air, too far for his comfort and he couldn't abide that couldn't abide being the vague-gray Lang at a loose end, and so he had to find out, to settle all one way or another – and so he came.

CHAPTER 4. GOTANDA-MEGURO 76

Roberta'd been here six months; she was feeling comfortable here, feeling herself, making her own way; as for Lang's imminent arrival she was ambivalent, curious and felt I suppose she didn't really have a choice but to "welcome" him, put him up for a while, see what developed – and so he got the little living room – until he up and left.

Lang didn't even pay attention to Tokyo at first, he wanted something from Roberta but it wasn't coming; and then he simply didn't like her life here, didn't like where she was living, somewhere between Shinjuku and Nakano and Yoyogi, "honcho" no less, he called it "nondescript" and she said yes, yes she thought it was wonderful for having no character, and one simply doesn't say something like that to Lang, no way, and anyway, after all, he'd brought all his Euro-baggage and had no idea what he was getting into and she already into it, she was settled, the woman was moving she was becoming a real Tokyoite – and then besides, he didn't like her friends. Oh, and the party.

It wasn't easy but eventually Roberta had to ask Lang to leave and he was glad to, glad to get out, glad to get away from her for a while at least, at least to clear the air; so he found himself a place in Kichijoji, which he didn't like either, all those foreigners, the discomfort of the easy living of it all, he thought (at first), at first he thought he'd be west of everything she or at least her Tokyo represented, but eventually, soon enough really, he came to like it, came to praise the place's "charms" as he said – god he can be so condescending! – he came to see something of what all she'd been telling him: ha!, Lang came to like Tokyo – Tokyo was alright.

PART TWO. Tozai! Tozai!! 147

PART ONE (B). The Yamanote 161

So there was Lang in Kichijoji, and enjoying it; it wasn't Roberta's Tokyo and so it felt like a kind of truce; she had no interest in the west, and so Lang could feel like a pioneer, he'd made his discovery – and then she made her move – it wasn't against him so much as it was for herself, she'd found a place she could finally call "home" – she moved to the low city, you know,

the old city – nothing could have surprised Lang more, but Roberta was happy really, happy, she loved her new/old Tokyo – Roberta'd made her last move.

Lang came to love Kichijoji, but it was only his own, he felt only more distant from Roberta, isolated, and after all he'd come here for her for them to see how or what they were, what they were going to do and there she was an hour's train ride away and she happy rarely leaving her home her neighborhood – and so he became jealous of it all, jealous of the city for what it had done to her – had done to him.

Roberta's Tokyo – they'd meet once or twice a week, she chose the places, the classical café in Nakano, tempura at the Hilltop Hotel – you know, the writer's hotel – they carefully avoided anything further West and ... and eventually they extended their borders, began to explore Nishi-Ogikubo, Kokubunji – and he began to explore the city more, both directions, came to be intrigued as she'd known he would and hoped he would, the Lang she knew, the Lang she suspected – Lang, liking almost all of Tokyo, her Tokyo, hers his.

Lang was changing, it was clear to us all, and Roberta liked it, liked this Lang, a Lang she'd always suspected; and Lang liked her: she was an unsuspected Roberta, a neglected Roberta, and a Roberta she too acknowledged she had neglected ... a Lang and a Roberta they both needed to know, to acknowledge, and more – a Roberta he'd long refused to see and one he now had no choice but – but for now they stay united on separate sides of the city – they have no choice but.

And then Lang had to return to Vienna for a few months, there was no choice, an unfinished job, a previous commitment, I forget what but there was no choice – we all felt sorry about it, not knowing what would develop – Roberta seemed to take it alright, and I emphasize the "seem" –

apparently they wrote and spoke regularly ... but she was never sure if he'd return – and then she surprised us all, she visited him, they got away and were together – wherever they were .

CHAPTER 12. UENO–AKIHABARA 324

Roberta returned to Tokyo; Lang finished his work – there it is – here they are!

NOTE

Many Japanese names occur in the course of this novel. Most are either people or place names, or the names of things such as food items or pieces of clothing. The reader really need not worry about their pronunciation or meaning – some will be familiar, some are explained in passing, others are not. However, two do require some orientation. *Yamanote*, commonly called “The High City,” is that westward area arcing around Shinjuku, and traditionally the wealthier and more modern side of the city. *Shitamachi*, or The Low City, is the older, more plebian and traditional side of the city, arcing east around the Imperial Palace and extending as far as and beyond the Sumida River. In this book they are also often opposed as the East and West sides of the city – but even those distinctions are questioned, as the reader will see. Yamanote is also the name of the train line that makes a loop around most of the central wards of the city (though not the entire city) – embracing both *yamanote* and *shitamachi*, twenty-nine stations in all, but here reduced to twenty-four. This Yamanote is what is referred to by the titles of the chapters that comprise Parts One A and B of the book.

Tokyo is a city where one learns to gaze only at the immediate prospect, blotting out what lies beyond.

– Edward G. Seidensticker

Outside and inside abolished, talk can now begin: at last, at last the dialogue.

– Julio Cortázar

Our language can be seen as an ancient city: a maze of little streets and squares, of old and new houses, and of houses with additions from various periods; and this surrounded by a multitude of new boroughs with straight regular streets and uniform houses.

– Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, I, 18

We drink coffee with cream while suspended over the abyss.

– Andrei Bely

It's funny how some things make you think of other things.

– Carole Lombard

PART ONE (A)

THE YAMANOTE

Chapter I

KANDA-TOKYO

Lang hadn't wanted to come to Tokyo; but once he got here – well.

we began walking somewhere around sunset

– Hey! This building wasn't here yesterday.

across the city

– Say it again: the two most beautiful words: sunset, –

to Shinjuku and Roberta's party around Midnight

– Better lost in Tokyo than found in any other city.

and then further west, talking our way

into the

Sun-

r

i

s

e

!

* * *

Rich and strange, strange and rich, Marianne muses, and once more rich and strange. Oh, Tokyo, damn you! Where am I? Here, yes, and one more step – there. Now I'm here, now there. Rich and strange you are, Marianne, a here and there myself. Bless you, Tokyo. Walking in step like a waking dream. A girl in her dreams talking to herself.

* * *

- Oh, come on, it's not modern at all, all this brick, that wood. And look at those dives right under the tracks, that *yakuza*-type over there eyeing me – what a racket!
- Still, if we can stay steady –
- As she goes!
- On yer feet!
- Aye aye, Sir!
- Tokyo Station should be just ahead.

But Hiromi does not “stay steady,” thinks a detour will help, and though the tracks are generally still in sight, she and her friends have lost their way. She stares in the window of a shop selling medical equipment – all of it made of glass.

- Orange Card, IO card, and why “SF Metro” card? – this isn't San Francisco.
- And mine's all run out, now it really looks like we have to walk.
- Well, try to enjoy yourself, Dear.
- Eh?
- That's what my Granny used to tell me every morning when I left for school.
- Let's see, she says, as she finds the page in her compact Tokyo map-book. This must be that real old bridge; homeless people sleeping there now around all these banks. My city!
- And mine!
- Mine too!

* * *

Tanizaki's Dream: Orderly thoroughfares, shining, newly-paved streets, a flood of cars, blocks of flats rising floor upon floor, level on level in geometric beauty, and threading through the city elevated lines, subways, street cars. (But see also Tanizaki on Asakusa: “Its constant and

peerless richness preserved even as it furiously changes in nature and in its ingredients, swelling and clashing in confusion and then fusing into harmony.”)

* * *

Van Zandt is himself, that is, as he is now, though in the dream he is back in high school in Amsterdam, where he sees a classmate, Jenny, blonde and thin, whom he wishes he were not too shy to approach. (VZ often has this dream, and it is the one he hates most, because it reminds him of that long period that no one would ever guess now when he was shy and inarticulate, and rarely spoke to a female.) He sees the school auditorium; it is the night of the senior prom (and this scene looks as if it were taken from an American teenage genre film ((VZ in fact never attended any such dance; in fact, had never even known of the thing till he saw *Carrie*.)) The prom goes on, people dancing, and Van Zandt feels lonely. Then all the girls are told to get on stage. It's time for “boy's choice,” instead of the usual “ladies' choice.” VZ asks Jenny to dance. They walk away (however much one would think the occasion demanded a dance). She takes his hand. They walk out of the auditorium and in the dark alley she stops and kisses him. He is surprised. They are walking through Akitsu, in Kiyose, in northeastern Tokyo, just there at the border with Saitama Prefecture. There are white box houses with pink motorcycles for Mom and that always mean the suburbs. The suburbs, a Frankenstein for the 1990s, with the rent of a 4LDK two-thirds of a 1LDK just west of the Yamanote. On a wall someone has spray painted the title of a favorite song “*kimi ni mune kyun kyun*” by YMO. There is much greenery, a clear stream – he sees fish in it as he peers from Maebara Bridge. And then in the dream where he sees the long rows of houses that look like military barracks (did he live in one once, see them in a home movie? ((these are private plots))), he sees a map made of books, and in a park public art the likes of which one does not usually see in Tokio: a “Peace Monument” (Showa 49), abstract, steps, two monoliths almost meeting as if hands closed in prayer. VZ and Jenny go to the house of some friends. They are no longer in high-school, but as they are now – or as he is and she as how he dreams of a girl whom he hasn't seen in fifteen years. Jenny takes him into a corner and kisses him, forcefully, deeply. Her hand reaches down and grabs his crotch. Then Van Zandt is walking swiftly, muttering to himself, “How could this happen? How could my trip be so suddenly cancelled?” It is another city, another time. He walks into his home; the entire family is there,

but everyone is busy and so they ignore him. (Throughout this last scene his siblings are as they are now, and all scurrying about the room.) VZ's mother appears. Her hair is cut very short (like Falconetti's, but that's where any resemblance ends). She rushes up to her son, sobbing, "Why do they all say I'm guilty? What have I done? I'm not guilty. I swear. You believe me, don't you?" And then VZ awakes.

In the background of VZ's dream, as in the following dream, he hears the black death lyrics of Howlin' Wolf: "Smokestack Lightnin' shines like gold / I found my baby layin' on the cooling board // Don't you hear me talkin' Pretty Mama // Don't the hearse look lonesome rollin' 'fore your door / She's gone - oowhoo - won't be back no more."

In Kazuo's dream he is walking in Akitsu, turns, and there is a valley, and a river below. A group of people are happily swimming, gambling. They are all strong swimmers, and the image is an almost ideal one of human physical grace. There are some steps, a large rock, a bridge down-river. It is a short, idyllic dream. And then Kazuo wakes.

* * *

Kazuyoshi Miura: Murder in the Media

With very few exceptions – most notably the Abe Sada story of 1936, known to most people through Nagisa Oshima's film *In the Realm of the Senses* (1976), and the Imperial Bank Robbery of 1948 – murder in Twentieth Century Tokyo has been an unexciting affair. In recent years there have been the usual sushi-knife slashings, the occasional dismembered body parts (in one case, in thirty-four separate bags just around the corner from the author's home), and the fortunately more rare true horror story (infanticide, cannibalism). One pop star ("idol") did throw herself off of a building – to include suicide for a moment – after being jilted by another singer; that may have been "romantic" of her, but the jilter himself was so uninteresting, so predictably "cute," hardly worth the adolescent gesture. Even with the brief wave of copycats, that story too soon lost public interest. A much more talented singer, Yutaka Ozaki, took a few pills too many one night mixed with too much alcohol and was found in the street next day near his home – no, contemporary murder has little glamour and less imagination these days in Tokyo.

Perhaps the most interesting modern murder was that of Kazumi Miura, a murder that was allegedly set up by her husband Kazuyoshi.

While having some interesting complications, the case is especially compelling for the huge role the media played in it – or roles, for it has doted on Kazuyoshi Miura as much as he has courted it; it has also been attacked by him in court; and eventually it was the media – or one of its representatives – that cracked the case open. The story of Kazuyoshi Miura is a particularly relevant tale for our times.

Los Angeles, November 18, 1981. The clothes importer Kazuyoshi Miura, age 34, and his wife of two years, Kazumi, 28, are on their "second honeymoon" in Los Angeles. (The Miura's have a young daughter.) While taking photos in a parking lot – Miura will claim he just happened to spot a possible advertising location – Kazumi is robbed and shot in the head, and her husband in the leg. Kazumi falls into a permanent coma, and two months later returns to Japan. Within a year of the shooting she dies. Despite some suspicions, the Los Angeles Police Department is helpless – no evidence, no suspects.

On March 31, 1994, Miura, by now 46, is sentenced to life imprisonment for conspiring to murder his wife. He is so judged on circumstantial evidence, the judge saying that it is "logical to assume" that Miura was the mastermind behind the death of Kazumi. The judge describes Miura as being "selfish and cold-blooded," a man who has shown no signs of remorse over the death of his wife.

The murder plot was simple enough; Miura is said to have hired an employee to do the job, including shooting Miura himself. Miura's testimony however was shot through with holes (if we may be pardoned the expression). To take only one important example: Miura claimed that the assailants fled in a green car; witnesses of the scene – though not of the murder – saw only a white van. The suspected assailant had hired a white van the day before the murder.

Miura is also believed to have made two other attempts on Kazumi's life before his final success. Three months earlier in Los Angeles, Miura had asked a former mistress and porno actress to kill Kazumi in Tokyo in August 1981 by bludgeoning her with a hammer. The actress did so, but Kazumi recovered. He is also supposed to have asked two former employees to kill Kazumi.

With Kazumi's death, Miura collected one hundred-fifty million yen in insurance money.

Apart from the details, Kazumi Miura, sadly, is lost in the story. The murder was one thing; the "follow-up" was another.

Crimes involving Japanese abroad are big news in Japan. While still

in Los Angeles, Miura was holding interviews with the press from his hospital bed. He was an immediate media favorite and national hero for the fortitude with which he bore his pain and loss. Like a good Japanese, he even sent letters to President Ronald Reagan, the Governor of California, the Mayor of Los Angeles and the U. S. Ambassador to Japan decrying the violence of the American way of life. He even had photos of his daughter distributed, bearing the caption, "Give Me My Mommy Back!".

For two years Miura was off scot-free (and rich). In the autumn of 1983, thanks to a tip concerning the insurance payment, a team of reporters from the weekly magazine *Shukan Bunshun* began to investigate him. The following January it ran a series of articles detailing Miura's past, which included: three marriages; seven years in prison for more than one hundred petty robberies; assorted other crimes (arson, assault, possession of a sword); and the story of a former employee and lover who had suddenly "disappeared" after having received 4.3 million yen in a divorce settlement. (The money had been taken out of her account shortly after she had "left the job" in March 1979; her body was later found in May 1979 in Los Angeles).

The police reopened the case.

The articles were called "Bullets of Suspicion." Miura responded with a book called "Bullets of Information." From then on there was no let up. Articles and interviews flowed back and forth. Miura courted as much as he evaded the media. It was a mutual affair. He was said to have charged anywhere from five to fifty million yen per interview. He signed an exclusive contract with one television network to film his latest marriage – he was engaged within six months of Kazumi's death – in Bali in April 1985. He even played himself in a movie. As one Los Angeles detective remarked, Miura was "pouring gasoline on the fire."

Finally in September 1985 Miura and the porno actress/would-be murderess were arrested for the August 1981 murder attempt. The arrest was broadcast live on television. (As many arrests are in Japan, the police tipping the media off shortly before.) The woman confessed. (She received two-and-one-half years.) In May 1987 Miura was finally sentenced to six years. In October 1988, after further investigations by the LAPD, Miura was charged in Tokyo with the murder of Kazumi. (So too was his accomplice, the man in the white van who did the actual shooting. He was eventually acquitted for insufficient evidence.) Now the Miura-media tug-of-war grew in fury. He began to sue newspapers and magazines for libel. And not only did he defend himself, he usually won. He even sued one paper for writing that he sued too often! By summer 1994 he was involved in 230 different suits. Of the first hundred

cases, of which he won seventy, he was awarded more than thirty-three million yen in damages.

Unrepentant and litigious to the end, Miura blames all his misfortunes on the very media whose willing darling for a time he was.

* * *

Yes, I believe it's perfectly alright if he loves the city as he says he does. Who am I to doubt him, or to deny him? No love can be judged. I can't agree with Roberta, for example, who simply calls him "mad." But then perhaps she is intending a pun. I don't know, but in this case I do doubt. No, I only wonder what the nature of his love is (again, without in any way judging it). It can, after all, be as rough a city as it can be a tender one. And we know that while he usually treats us all rather fairly – I really have few complaints, and most of those small – he can, well, have his moods. But can his love match the city, then? Can his love be strong, consistent over the years and adapt to the changes that must inevitably occur? Is he a faithful partner? (He does say this has been his most successful relationship – his relationship with the city, that is.) Is he capable, by my standards, of loving the city lightly, softly? It does seem to me sometimes that he is a bit too aggressive in his declarations of love, as if he were afraid of any doubt making itself known. Perhaps even an unconscious doubt. He seems occasionally to press his love, to forward his suit, to crush the city to his heart. Well, we shall see. In the meantime, too, the evidence of his love lies all about us. – So the kindly Kazuo.

* * *

Hiromi and friends had begun somewhere around sunset, somewhere east of Kanda, on the way to Roberta's. They finally made it to Tokyo Station without too much discomfort. Then to Marunouchi where she sometimes worked at the Palace Hotel.

- Ohh, give me the huddled homeless 'stead of all these three-piecers.
- So, this is where they all come from, eh?
- All those banks we just walked past, rich Japan – ecch!
- Bricks for brains.
- Yeah, but some of 'em are gold-bricks.
- No way!
- Sure, why do you think they call us rich?
- Whadda'ya' mean, call us rich? I ain't rich, you ain't rich.

- I mean we Japanese.
- We Japanese?
- Ok, the country.
- But the station is kinda' nice, you can take a bath after watching a porno movie. And it's made out of brick. Kind of Euro-looking.
- Gee, just think of it too, the old man – just over there – asleep for a thousand years –
- No, that's that monk guy on Koya-san.
- Whatever, still the Emperor ...
- ???
- ... asleep, I tell you, for a thousand years. Strange family.
- Yeah, and all that money.
- And he can't spend it! It's all locked up somewhere.
- Him too – locked up at home.
- Hey, Michiko-san!
- Yeah, Michiko-san, wanna play tennis with us?
- Hey, Michiko? Come on out and play!
- Oh, why doesn't she answer?
- Who's that knocking?
- Go away! Go away!
- We'll blow your door down!
- Michiko!
- Michiko-o-o-!
- Think of it, guys, we're just walking around here, lighting cigarettes, making stupid talk, and Michiko's over there all alone –
- – trying on her hats.
- One after the other.
- Hat after hat.
- All of 'em the same.
- But to her, don't ya' think, they're all different?
- Could be.
- Do you think she knows how to rumba?
- Michiko-o-o-o-o-!

* * *

Jeez (VZ thinks to himself), they just pee all over the place. There's this lady in my neighborhood, everyday, the same time she takes her dog out for a walk. They always stop at the same spot, she lays some tissue down on the sidewalk, the dog shits on it, she wraps it up, puts it in a plastic bag, puts that back in her purse, and walks the dog home. Really,

I've seen it. I also saw a woman jack her dog off once. And you've heard about how mothers relieve their sons when they're tense about their exams? A-fucking-mazing. Jeez.

* * *

The Way

clouds are torn
a skirt is worn
sentences form

live near the sea;
sleep before sunrise

* * *

“What is this shit? This movie isn't moving!”

And thus Roberta created the great wall in her relation with Van Zandt. For two or three years they'd talked at least three or four times a week about his Tokyo film. She'd seen him overcome every financial and linguistic disadvantage that the city could offer; seen him hire his small staff (the photographer's assistant who took the lead, and whom he never touched); helped him choose the twelve select sites; had even provided him with his title. And tonight he was finally showing the film. He'd chosen a small gallery in Yanaka, wanted to be near the River and away from the uptown artsy crowd. Many friends had come, plus the few art and film people he respected in Tokyo. And then her shout, exactly thirty-six minutes into the 144-minute film. He shut the projector off, mumbled an angry apology-cum-explanation (“The point is that the excitement of the city is in the stillness of the images, the man, the woman and their location in the various sites are both a praise and a critique of the city”) – and made his exit. Roberta and Van Zandt didn't speak again for a month. No one could intercede. She felt horrible, of course, but stood her ground – “The film really was not interesting. I only wanted to excite him, to make him go further; really, he could have done so much more. That wasn't a city he'd filmed, it was two machines – three if you include the city,” she explained herself too late. When they did meet again, he smiled her apology away. They didn't speak of the film again, or what new project he might be working on.

And work on he did. Stealthy, alone. (The photographer's assistant stayed enlisted, however. She was beautiful in that early 80s Tokyo sort of way, that slow, smooth walk; that curt pout that belied a real friendliness; that readiness to help on any experiment.) He remade the film, all of it, new locations, new setups; it was the same film as before but different, new. It premiered in Amsterdam, and then made the circuit of competitions and festivals. He figured she'd come across an article about it someday, and then the regrets would flow – and the pride, and friendship, restored. And so it came to be. (And she did see it when it played six weeks at Euro-Space.)

He called it

Guys and Dolls
A VZ Film

It's shot in black and white on color stock. It's stark, radiant (bright blue and gold aureoles around some images), sometimes bursting into flames at frames' edges, the film falling apart as it reassembles itself, with briefly caught glimpses of texts and maps in the background. The story may be about a woman trying to find a man in some buildings; or a conversation among friends (the only dialogue in the film, and in color); or maybe it's about sexual (re)union; or even possibly irreparable separation and the impossibility of union and conversation. Or maybe it's just about two people walking around the city, looking at this or that building. But it is Tokyo – VZ's Tokyo – Tokyo as film.

The "story" is simple enough. As is the structure: twelve scenes, each twelve shots and minutes, preceded by a brief prologue, and with an interlude between scenes Six and Seven. But this structure is not so very strict, as there seem to be some "miscellanea," unaccountable items scattered about that at first mislead the viewer, but are in fact a somewhat charming chaos that alleviates the order.

PROLOGUE

We see the feet and hands of people on a not very crowded train at about two in the afternoon; glimpses of magazines, of dozing heads at shoulders; print advertisements all about, flapping in the train's aisle; the soundtrack is the regular rhythm of a Tokyo train, like the sound of any Ozu train. A station name is called; the train comes to a halt. We see the torso of a man (somehow we recognize that he is a foreigner) suddenly jerk awake, he quickly gets off the train, leaves the frame, and we

see in his now abandoned seat, a large, black portfolio. Cut to a Japanese woman, slightly tall (by Japanese standards), dressed in a black *Commes des Garçons* suit with white blouse; short, bobbed hair; a round face, big cheeks. an almost childish face but for her eyes that speak experience. Her movements are lithe and determined. About 27 years old, she has had some experience of Europe, and is not wary of foreigners. She quickly reaches for the portfolio and then calls to the man ("Excuse me!", we see her lips say), but too late, the doors have closed. She opens the B-4 size portfolio, leafs through the black and white photographs quickly – twelve photographs of twelve different buildings, or Tokyo "sites" – notices there is no address or further identification, but seems to recognize most of the places, and then – close-up – makes a determined face: she will find her man!

The camera slowly zooms in on the first photograph.

SCENE ONE: RIKUGIEN GARDEN

The Woman enters the garden, after losing her way somewhat. Left or right? It is obviously one of those gardens that requires a certain knowledge of the Chinese classics. With its wayward paths, its "empty center," hills and valleys, and its ease and immediacy, it is like a miniature and metaphor of Tokyo: if the city were a garden, she thinks, it would be Rikugien. It offers refuge – a bench; transport – some stepping stones; memory – elderly couples; plus an occasional sight of the buildings and madness just outside. She crosses the thin stream of legend, reads the old poem ("wakasekogakubekiyoinarisasaga ..."), sheds a wistful tear (she has a grasp of the classics) – and knows that she is alone. It's closing time; the attendant tells her that a "tall, foreign gentleman" has just left.

* * *

And then I thought to myself of those many unexpected signs – a chance meeting, an appointment cancelled, a woman's rejection in so few words – and time is given, restored, a surprise and display of something quick and solid; the path redirected, honest now – I never expected the meeting, was unprepared for the appointment, didn't really want the woman – and for a moment joy, an opportunity, as if I have been promised something more now, and the path is that much more – just a bit, but oh so much! – opened. And I stop and wonder to myself, am I equal?

* * *