

Reenactment

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Like all media junkets, this one needed patience and inevitably birthed an existential crisis or two. Our Airbus had landed at the little airport in Catarman, Northern Samar, 45 minutes ago, but the municipal government's coaster, which the organizers' many earnest emails said would come and take us to our hotel, was still nowhere in sight. Tom—my pro bono photographer for this assignment—had been obsessing over his ponytail, tying up then undoing it, as he would when exasperated.

"Is it their first time?" asked a man whom I recognized as a popular travel blogger. "So unprofessional."

The lifestyle editor of a popular daily (circulation: 500,000) glared at him. "They did Panagbenga and Dinagyang this year," she called out. "They do this sort of thing all the time. Everybody knows that."

"Everybody," agreed a young reporter for a news website, keen on not being lumped together with the blogger. "They also did Sinulog, right?"

"This airport," someone from a fashion magazine observed, "so quaint 'no?" A drop of water fell on her head from the roof gutter, left over from the rain this morning. She looked around if anyone had seen and discreetly ran a hand down her hair.

By "quaint," perhaps she meant that the airport's perimeter was lined with residential houses. Deplaning, you could feel beady eyes watching you from windows and makeshift stoops. As soon as the airport closed at

dusk, the sole runway was opened to wingless vehicles.

The photographers, who always bunched together in one group, were enveloped in a marbled haze of cigarette smoke. Their bulky equipment were in bags either slung around their necks or parked next to them in futuristic-looking suitcases with innumerable compartments.

“You only brought one camera?” a young photographer with one such suitcase asked a well-known wires veteran.

“If you’re really good,” answered the bearded front page regular, “no need for those fancy things.” He let out a long drag in the face of the dazed youngster, like a cockfighter to his prized pugilist.

“Is someone, like, calling them *na*?” a whiny voice from behind the pack asked.

I looked at Tom, who smiled, not missing a beat. The many ways people could toe the line between interesting and annoying had always surprised me. Tom and I, we had formed a friendship in college that was almost hermetic. A year after graduation, we were always shocked at all such strangeness outside, like Japanese guerrilla fighters who had valiantly stayed in the hinterlands, refused to surrender to the Americans, then came out 50 years later to a crowded McDonalds in the foothills of the Sierra Madre.

Some would call it misanthropy.

Our group was conspicuously large, easily more than 30 people now gathered at the narrow drop-off area in front of the airport. The tricycle drivers who had earlier offered us rides to our hotel had since given up, and were now crouched to the ground in a semi-circle for a fresh round of *cara y cruz*.

The organizers for this trip were a PR company based in Manila. The head of the firm had flown ahead of us to Catarman, ostensibly to get acquainted with the place. As publicity people were wont to do, they had been generous with their reminders via text and calls and email, a persistence that had bordered on neurotic, and which now made their MIA status puzzling and irksome.

“Gosh,” the whiny voice slurred, “so *tagal*.”

Making a bunch of media people wait when you want them to write glowing reviews of your event wasn’t a good idea. Lifestyle beat reporters

were notoriously cliquish. Maybe even more cliquish than the high-and-mighty Malacañang press corps or the uppity business reporters with their suits and incomprehensible jargon.

Soon a bus bearing the smiling face of a balding 50-something man appeared near the gate, which was visible from the drop-off area. There were hoots and cheering from the group, and again Tom and I looked at each other. The gratitude that I felt for him—that he was here, that I didn't have to endure this alone like so many gruelling assignments—hit me so that I gave his arm a slight pinch.

“What?” he asked, smiling, but he knew.

The bus stopped in front of us and blocked the sun.

As I expected, there were giveaways on-board to compensate for the delay, to pacify. A loot bag, made of abaca and bearing the town seal, had in it a packet of rice krispies, a couple of pili bars, and bottles of assorted fruit jams. At the hotel, predictably owned too by the mayor, the staff wore *baro't saya* and, one by one, they placed synthetic orchid garlands around our necks. In our rooms, there was a plate of lanzones and rambutan beside the press kit. A personalized welcome note, supposedly from the mayor himself, misspelled my very simple name.

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Furious knocking on the door woke me up; my chest sunk even before I opened my eyes.

“It's OK. It's OK,” Tom kept reassuring me as we made our way across the hotel lobby, seconds after I splashed water on my face and grabbed my notebook and pen. “They made us wait earlier remember?”

On the bus, there were polite smiles as we made our way to the back-most part. A veteran of the beat who wrote for a major publication might shrug off the tardiness with a joke, but for someone like me, who wrote for a fledgling *Village Voice*-type weekly (circulation: 10,000) and was new to the group, it was a serious offense. “Ay, sleeping beauty,” piped in a bald effeminate man in a screaming orange shirt, his neck still adorned with the purple synthetic flowers. I gave him a weak smile.

“Tabloid people,” I whispered to Tom, who hadn't stopped fiddling

with his hair.

“OK now that we’re complete” announced a mestiza lady with a pointed look in my direction, “a brief background of what’s going to happen for the next two days. If you’ll look at your press kit—”

I looked at Tom, who started to chuckle. “How do you keep your job?” he asked.

“There is some historical information there which you can use for your articles,” the lady said. There were also quotes from the mayor, but just to be safe we should run all quotes by them before sending to our editors. The governor of Eastern Samar would be there with a short speech before the highlight—an “artistic interpretation of the Balangiga Massacre.”

“This will be followed by,” she went to the next page of the guide in her clipboard, “a street dance competition, a grand fireworks display, then a free concert by Sarah Geronimo.”

“Do we have to stay for the concert?” asked the travel blogger. “I would prefer to go around town to look for interesting tips for my readers.”

“All 34 of them,” someone shouted from the back, drawing laughter from all over.

“You have to stay through the entire thing,” volunteered another from the front row. “It’s how media junkets work.”

“But it’s Sarah Geronimo,” said the blogger.

I yawned as a heartfelt defense of Sarah Geronimo’s vocal prowess commenced.

“How’s Katrina?” I asked Tom.

“She’s OK,” he said. “Experimenting in the kitchen. Last week she made a weird pasta dish with capers and tomatoes and kamias—”

“Preparing for motherhood?”

“Don’t even joke about that.”

“Thanks for coming,” I told him.

He shrugged. Tom wrote the script for a major network’s late-night news program, while Katrina was part of the research support team for the country’s top broadsheet. Unlike me, they stayed painstakingly on the path set out for journalism majors.

“This will be fun,” Tom said, as a silver-haired society columnist got

up with some effort to point a bony finger at the blogger. “—and that’s what’s wrong with *your* generation,” he concluded, followed by a spattering of applause.

A discussion on what went wrong with the country after Marcos was about to ensue when the mestiza lady looked at her watch and calmly called out “OK, settle down now. Settle down.” The murmurs not subsiding, she raised her pen then shouted, “Oy!”

Even the driver turned to listen to her.

“The flights we booked for you guys tomorrow are in the late afternoon, so you have the whole morning to explore. Any questions?”

From the back row, someone asked, “Will Sarah hold a presscon after the concert?”

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For a first job, lifestyle writer wasn’t so bad.

Sure, it wasn’t the hard-core Woodward and Bernstein stuff we had imagined. None of the gruesome dark alley stabbing and formalin-smelling morgues of the police beat, the scandal-rich material of the senate, the self-importance of op-ed. Thankfully I was absolutely devoid of any delusion of grandeur. I knew I could not change the world.

Not in this manner at least. Not in the four pages of the lifestyle section that I needed to fill weekly. Mondays to Wednesdays were for gathering material and writing. I would turn everything in to my editor by Thursday, and by Friday the issue was put to bed. A few months into the job, I was starting to get the hang of things. There was only so much wisdom you can derive from art exhibits and fashion shows, and I felt I was now ready to do something experimental and possibly even insightful, something un-lifestyle-like. Samar would give me that chance.

Once, in high school, our history teacher asked our class how the revolutionaries won against Spain. Joel Garcia, a lanky math whiz who didn’t know any better, raised his hand and proudly answered, “Because the Americans helped us, Ma’am.”

Mrs. Co, a sophisticated woman whose plump face and shoulder-length bob made her both cute and respectable, stared at him for a few

moments before her expression crumpled as if she had squeezed a calamansi into a cut in her arm. “What?” she screamed. She had long been famous for the shower that had her front row students constantly wishing for an umbrella. That time, a torrential downpour like that year’s Typhoon Rosing sprayed on Joel’s terrified face. We ended up finding out that Mrs. Co had marched in the anti-US bases rallies. “You know what we used to shout then?” she asked. Without waiting for an answer, she went to the blackboard and wrote “IMPERYALISMO” and started chanting. At this point Joel had started to redden and appear ready to burst into tears, which he did the moment the sound of Mrs. Co’s heels had faded in the hallway.

“Know your history, Joel!” which Mrs. Co had repeated many times throughout the ordeal, would go on to be one of the catchphrases of our batch.

“*Patintero* after class?” he’d ask.

“Know your history, Joel!” we’d chorus.

Mrs. Co had also written “Balangiga” on the board that day, and we witnessed one of the most inspired moments of pedagogy in our young lives—although Mr. Pechardo’s droning algebra lectures and Mrs. Felices’s dull grammar lessons weren’t exactly worthy competition. That the Balangiga church bells remained in American hands infuriated her and, later, us.

It was why I had been excited about this assignment. My editor told me a PR company emailed her about a “cultural event” in Samar centered on the Balangiga Massacre. “Well, this looks promising,” she had said with a torturous chuckle. “Mind if I go anyway?” I asked, to which she gave one of her indifferent shrugs. “If you can find a pro-bono photographer again, sure.” I called Tom, who said yes.

“We’re almost there,” the mestiza lady announced now. Tom was sleeping against the window, an open paperback on his lap. Outside, the commercial establishments in the town proper of Catarman had given way to an open highway surrounded by fields and, farther still, verdant mountainside, the same hinterlands, I could imagine, where Filipino troops sought refuge following the massacre after orders were given to turn Samar into a “howling wilderness.”

Like a mirage, a huge structure emerged in the horizon. Cars and tricycles were making a beeline to the stadium entrance, while a couple of uniformed cops lazily directed traffic. Seeing our bus and the grinning face

of their mayor, the people on the roadside threw our vehicle vague glances. “Built just last year,” the mestiza lady said. “Wow ‘no?’” I’d like to think that behind her creased forehead was the same question that was on my mind; namely, how could one of the poorest provinces in the country afford a monstrosity like this?

In an unpaved lot behind the stadium, our bus maneuvered through sloppily parked red plates and found a spot. “OK, people,” the lady announced, as the engine died and Tom yawned awake. “We’re here.”

“Game?” I asked Tom.

“Game,” he answered.

Beside the parking lot were small tents and stalls that sold everything from shawarma and rice cakes to vegetarian burgers. One booth had counterfeit Adidas and Nike jackets displayed up front, beside shirts with the word “Balangiga” in atrocious red font printed on them. I thought of getting one for Katrina.

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The governor’s speech must have just passed the 30-minute mark when we realized with the requisite horror that it was not going to end soon, and we were trapped. Why am I here? I wondered, my mind swirling with delirious thoughts of teleportation and parallel universes, fantasies involving my bed at home, a bag of Lays, and an episode of *Survivor*.

Some of us in the covered bleachers were fanning themselves senseless. The others in the crowd were cramped in wooden benches in the upper section, while some kids were slumped on the surrounding fields, like fish laid out to dry.

“You OK?” I asked Tom, who, in his boredom, must have taken a photo of every angle of the sweaty governor. The official was making his speech from a podium in a makeshift stage across the bleachers; in between, a concrete basketball court where much of the program, we assumed, would take place.

“Sorry it’s taking so long,” I told him.

“Nah, it’s OK,” he lied. In his mind, he was probably re-evaluating his idea of what a lifestyle reporter did.

“Our province,” the governor was saying, “is a modest place with a rich history of heroism. And with the help of our stakeholders—”

“Jesus Christ,” groaned the lifestyle section editor. “I’m not prepared for this.”

Sensing the toll this was taking on the media people, the organizers produced paper plates of pancit from somewhere and started passing them around. I was nearly finished eating when the governor coughed—“Excuse me, excuse me”—followed by a prolonged coughing fit. As feedback issued from the mic, the audience held their breaths, no doubt praying for something along the lines of a non-fatal choking accident.

Alas, an aide managed to produce a glass of water and after a few energetic gulps the governor’s baritone—“Thank you, Mila, thank you”—sounded invigorated, as if ready for another hour of meaningless rhetoric on the nation. The crowd groaned as Mila, the aide, smiled from the sidelines. I’m sure at least 1,341 people—official gate attendance as of last checking—hated fucking Mila in varying degrees.

More droning minutes passed.

“The program says he has 15 minutes,” said the mestiza lady, looking nonplussed herself. In a much lower voice, she added, “But let’s see anyone try to stop him. See that security detail?”

The governor continued, “We have a lot of problems, they say. Why do this program of celebrating Balangiga and not focus on education? Health? But history is also important to us. Because without it, where would we be?”

“In my office in Salcedo,” the editor said, “actually getting some work done.”

“I hope the street dance competition is better than this,” said the blogger.

“Anything is better than this,” someone remarked.

“I hate my life,” yawned another.

The aged columnist had fallen asleep on the shoulder of the poor magazine intern.

“So without further ado—” the governor said, and the words seemed to hang in the air. The reporters tentatively sat up in attention while the photographers all stood up, except for Tom, whom I had to nudge from his

seat-bound stupor. He quickly joined the phalanx that had started to walk toward courtside.

Applause interrupted the confused governor in mid-sentence and didn't stop until he was back in his seat, basking in the thunderous ovation, no doubt congratulating himself for the great, great job.

A group of men then entered the basketball court carrying to the center a long wooden table, around which more than 20 Caucasian men in fatigues took their places. Someone who was probably the event director gave the sound booth in front of the audience area the go signal. A minute or so later, however, there were still no sound emanating from the huge amplifiers placed equidistantly around the stage.

"Jesus Christ," someone said.

I looked for Tom in the throng of photographers and found him dangerously near one of the speakers.

The director was on his way to the sound booth when the shrill and unbearably loud recording of a clanging bell surprised everyone and had hands frantically covering astonished ears. I saw Tom jerk back, scratch his head and, when he had recovered, fix his ponytail.

Through a wince, locals dressed in either dirtied shirts and cotton pants entered the court brandishing bolos and daggers, mouths open in a soundless scream. With contrived elegance, they began hacking the unmoving American soldiers one by one.

"Camo uniforms wouldn't be used until World War II," the columnist said, "so clearly there was time travel involved here. Brilliant."

"It's an *artistic* interpretation," someone noted.

The group murmured their assent.

Soon all the Caucasian actors were on the ground, their coats splashed with dye that was more purple than red, more pesky ink stain than oozing blood. The Filipinos were still raising their weapons in glorious victory when some of the dead Americans started getting up, eliciting some laughter from the crowd. Realizing their mistake, some lay back down while others completed their exit to courtside, where the furious director awaited them.

The applause was lazy, unsure. The reenactment gave way to a modern dance number featuring the same actors. By the tenth minute of

the medley, the governor was seen trying to leave discreetly, but he was mobbed by a dozen people or so, a moving whirlpool through the crowd.

After the performance, a children's choir entered the stage and began singing something sad and unintelligible.

"There was this festival in Isabela," one of the photographers said. "It rained and all the kid performers were soaked. You know what the governor there said? 'Don't worry. We will distribute Biogesic after the show.'"

"You think Sarah Geronimo's already here?" someone wanted to know.

I sent a text message to Tom, telling him to meet me by the stadium gate.

*

The waitress had taken our orders and had been on her way to the kitchen when I told Tom, finally, a moment, a moment unsullied by any murderous thought.

Booze joints were the same throughout the archipelago, he said. This one, a block away from our hotel, was as accommodating and cozy as they came. An always-occupied videoke machine made conversation difficult, but that was part of the deal.

"Are you sure this is OK?" he asked.

"What?" I shouted. "That we escaped? I already have a story. Don't worry."

He smiled, perhaps, like me, recalling how we sneaked out of the stadium and paid 300 pesos to a bewildered stranger idling by a parked motorcycle to take us back to the town proper.

"You know those articles," I said, "that are supposed to be about one thing then somehow always end up being about the author."

"I hate those," he snapped, just as I said, "I'll write something like that."

"Those articles annoy the hell out of me," Tom added.

I told him, well, I felt I was now ready to annoy my readers—"All seven of them," he interrupted, laughing—and my high school history teacher

would join me in the task.

I'd do a good job, I thought, maybe even better than the rest of the junket who had stayed in the stadium and were now probably asking themselves why there had to be suffering in the world, in general, and, in particular, why they had to sit there and watch all the "festivities."

"What's your story about?" he asked.

Something about the past, I said, our constant attempts to relive it, to negotiate with its being done. Something about reenactments, how they were always destined to fail anyway. "Something like that," I told him.

"Promising," he said gravely, eyes narrowed as if in deep thought.

"Fuck you," I said, and we laughed so hard that the waitress bearing our beer bucket stepped back, slightly afraid. *Manileños*. She opened two bottles and gave us a nervous smile.

As what typically filled vacant moments, he rattled off names of vaguely familiar people from college, one or two still in touch, approached when in need of special favors, thrown a smiling nicety in the chance encounter at the mall. What time did to relationships, and quickly. Years ago, these people occupied prime positions in our lives and phonebooks. They were a text message away. We drank on birthdays and when somebody was heartbroken. We toasted to graduation, to the great beyond. Today, they were recalled only through tremendous effort.

"Tom," I said.

"Yes, Alvin."

"When did you realize we'd be, you know, like this?"

"What?"

"You know." I smiled, wanting desperately to say, "Like this."

He looked perplexed. Once, in Baguio, where he grew up, he had told me he sometimes thought that, maybe, we were together in a past life. "Maybe 'no?'" he had asked, his eyes mere slits in his reddened face. Absolutely drunk in the middle of Session Road, he had then slurred, "If you were a girl, we would probably be fucking right about now." That night, we slept on his childhood bed. His pillows smelled fervently of detergent.

I took a long swig of my beer. His face was awash with red and green psychedelic lights, blinking in step with the 80s ballad blaring from the tireless videoke machine.

“Do you think,” I said, “things would have been different if Katrina didn’t come along?”

“Alvin,” he said. He opened my next bottle for me. “There’s something I need to tell you.”

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Outside the beer joint, we heard a distant crackling sound and saw fireworks in the outlying horizon.

It had been such a joy to be away from the junket that I could now imagine our bus with some amusement, as it now probably awaited everyone’s tired, heavy-footed return. Even the indefatigable mestiza lady must be running low on energy, having to endure the six-hour program while catering to the needs of the restless, always spoiled members of the Fourth Estate.

“We’re thinking of naming him after you,” Tom said.

“It’s a boring name,” I told him. “Don’t punish the kid.”

“I like boring sometimes.”

“Anyway,” I said, blinking away the subject, “what do you want to do now?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “What can we do here?”

“I think I saw a pool hall somewhere.”

“Not in the mood.”

“Hungry?” I asked.

“Not really.”

In every out-of-town assignment, I would always plan to explore the new surroundings, take long, leisurely walks along acacia-lined boulevards and unfamiliar streets. Constantly, I’d imagine relishing the anonymity; the overheard, unintelligible conversations. But once work was over and I had the night to myself, something would creep in. Laziness, maybe. Fear. Most of the time, I would end up ensconced in my hotel room, safe and bored and hating myself for never being brave enough.

“How about a nice walk?” I asked.

“Shit,” he said. “I was supposed to call Katrina at 8.”

"I'll see you tomorrow," I said, walking away.

It was only half past 9 but this part of town was all but ready to call it a night. A jeep or tricycle would pass by every now and then. There were parked tricycles in a far-away corner, lit by a lone streetlamp.

A few moments later, I spotted a small convenience store and entered it. I made my way to the coolers and got myself an ice cream cone. When I got to the counter, a Caucasian man was paying for a bag of Lays.

"Are you going to finish all of that?" I asked him.

He turned around and looked at me, and I noticed that he was wearing a soiled camo coat. "Yeah, I think so," he said, the beginning of a smile tentative in his lips. He took his change.

"You're one of the performers!" I cried. I paid for my ice cream cone and tore off the wrapper. It was cold and sweet, a swift comfort to the bitter remnants of the beer in my mouth. "This is so good. You want some?"

"No thanks," he said, "see you 'round." He began to walk away, hands inside his freshly opened bag of chips.

"Wait, where are you going?" I called out, catching up and putting a hand on his shoulder.

He turned around, dislodging my hand. "Excuse me?"

"Where are you going?" I touched him on the side of his arm, gave it a little squeeze.

He looked at me, then at his arm.

I squeezed again.

"Are you messing with me?" he said. His face moved a few inches away from my own and I could smell that he'd had a little to drink, too. He was so close that I could note the burst of freckles on one side of his nose, on his flushed cheeks. He lingered for a few seconds, his eyes never leaving mine. I blinked after a while, before he walked away.

I couldn't move for a minute or two, until I heard a squeak from the counter. "Are you OK, sir?" the teller asked. I tried to smile at him, then ordered my legs to move, move, move. I spotted a trash bin, into which I tossed the ice cream cone, half-melted and sticky in my hand.

Outside, another man who looked like a local stood by the door, his face with a pompous expression that was his attempt, I supposed, to look older than he really was, which was probably 20, give or take a year. The

next thing I knew, wind was hitting my face in a cold, almost painful up-draft. We were on a scooter, my hands were on the stranger's shoulders, and we were traversing the empty streets of Catarman at what must have been 100 miles per hour. He slowed down after a while then parked in front of a spacious open-air drinking place. Inside were plastic tables and white monobloc chairs that for some mysterious reason had been painted black. We took one near the gate so he could keep an eye on his scooter.

"You always do this?" he asked, and I nodded even if I wasn't sure what "this" was.

The alcohol did its job and our conversation, a bottle or so later, achieved a certain level of regularity. He asked about my job. I asked about Catarman. He asked if I had a boyfriend. I lied and said yes, he was in the hotel, sleeping.

After a while I asked him if he knew a place, and he nodded. My hand had been up, requesting for the bill when I heard a loud rumble of an engine that sent a strange sensation in my tummy. "Is there another way out?" I asked. He shook his head.

And so in the sluggish frame-by-frame manner in which all dreadful things transpired, members of the junket started pouring into the place. Still leading the pack was the mestiza lady. I wasn't sure if she had seen me, but any attempt to duck or hide would probably be silly so I looked at her, expecting a wave or a teasing smile. Her glance seemed to linger over our table for a few moments, before she faced the group and started counting. The rest were probably too tired to even look around.

"There's 28 of us all in all," I heard the lady shout to the waitress. Her arms were spread vigorously, which must have been her gesture for "big room." She repeated it many times, as if the waitress were deaf or dumb.

"Videoke!" someone shouted, prompting acquiescent cheering. Soon they were out of sight, led away by the waiter down a stone pathway to a cottage behind the bar. My companion was finishing the last of his beer.

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Aboard the plane the following day, I had offered Tom the window seat; he said no. Now he was telling me to move my body so he could see this spectacular show that the heavens, in this last-minute explosion of dying light, was throwing. The horizon was bleeding a cascade of colors, bluish hues on top then the shades descended into red and vermillion. The bed of reed-thin clouds looked aflame, the sun making quite an exit.

The mestiza lady beamed at us from across the aisle, a sharp change from the cold shoulder she had given me this morning when we rejoined the group for breakfast. “Hey,” she had said, her voice coarse, pointedly scooping the last of the bacon. “Ay, *wala na*. Sorry.”

But a photograph of Tom’s had landed on the front page—above the fold—thanks to Katrina, making all of this a huge PR success, thanks to our team. There was no accompanying story save for a one-sentence caption, but that was good enough. Tom and I sat back, basking in the endless stream of congratulations, including profuse hosannas from the mestiza lady.

“How late were you out last night?” Tom asked, flipping through the in-flight magazine.

“Oh I just got myself a nice ice cream cone,” I said. “Helped me sober up.”

The place the stranger knew was a drive-by motel tucked in a secluded little street. A garage room cost around the same as a bucket of beer, although the attendant seemed peeved at the interruption of his sleep. The walls were pink, and a sign taped on the wall said, “Bed stains. Fine: P100.”

In the endless shifting on the bed to find more and more pleasurable positions, I had found my face buried in a pillow, and my nose was confronted with the familiar scent of detergent. I untangled myself from his arms and sat up on the bed. Confused, he asked what was wrong. I shook my head and lay down. “Tired,” I said, “that’s all,” pulling the filmy blanket over my body. “Sorry.” There was a pained deliberation in the way he lay down beside me and, like a child, wrapped a tentative arm around my torso.

“You seem a little out of sorts,” Tom said now.

“Just thinking about stuff,” I said.

“Always thinking,” he said.

“It’s OK.”

“What?”

“You can name him after me,” I said.

The newspaper bearing Tom’s photo was being passed around our section of the plane. Around the country people passing by newsstands would only see the close-up of a blonde, blue-eyed man in excruciating, obviously contrived pain. In the bleachers, unseen in the photo, hundreds were laughing at the silliness of the attempt to reenact, the imperfection, I decided, of memory.