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There Is a Secret World Concealed Within This One

The Lives We Lead and the Lives We Wish We Led

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This world, the so-called “real world,” is just a front. Pull back the curtain and you’ll see the libraries are all filled with runaways writing novels, the highways are humming with escapees and sympathizers, all the receptionists and sensible mothers are straining at the leash for a chance to show how alive they still are... and all that talk of practicality and responsibility is just threats and bluffing to keep us from reaching out our hands to find that heaven lies in reach before us.

You can taste it in the shock and roar of a first, unexpected kiss, or in the blood in your mouth that instant after an accident when you realize you’re still alive. It blows in the wind you feel on the rooftops of a really reckless night of adventure. You hear it in the magic of your favorite songs, how they lift and transport you in ways that no science or psychology could ever account for. It might be you’ve seen evidence of it scratched into bathroom walls in a code without a key, or you’ve been able to make out a pale reflection of it in the movies they make to keep us entertained. It’s in between the words when we speak of our desires and aspirations, still lurking somewhere beneath the limitations of being “practical” and “realistic.”

When poets and radicals stay up until sunrise, wracking their brains for the perfect sequence of words or deeds to fill hearts (or cities) with fire, they’re trying to find a hidden entrance to it. When children escape out the window to go wandering late at night, or freedom fighters search for a weakness in government fortifications, they’re trying to sneak into it — for they know better than us where the doors are hidden. When teenagers vandalize a billboard to provoke all-night chases with the police, or anarchists interrupt an orderly demonstration to smash the windows of a corporate chain store, they’re trying to storm its gates.

When you’re making love and you discover a new sensation or region of your lover’s body, and the two of you feel like explorers discovering a new part of the world on a par with a desert oasis or

the coast of an unknown continent, as if you are the first ones to reach the north pole or the moon, you are charting its frontiers.

It’s not a safer place than this one — on the contrary, it is the sensation of danger there that brings us back to life: the feeling that for once, for one moment that seems to eclipse the past and future, there is something real at stake.

Maybe you stumbled into it by accident, once, amazed at what you found. The old world splintered behind and inside you, and no physician or metaphysician could put it back together again. Everything before became trivial, irrelevant, ridiculous as the horizons suddenly telescoped out around you and undreamt-of new paths offered themselves. And perhaps you swore that you would never return, that you would live out the rest of your life electrified by that urgency, in the thrill of discovery and transformation — but return you did.

Common sense dictates that this world can only be experienced temporarily, that it is just the shock of transition, and no more; but the myths we share around our fires tell a different story: we hear of women and men who stayed there for weeks, years, who never returned, who lived and died there as heroes. We know, because we feel it in that atavistic chamber of our hearts that holds the memory of freedom from a time before time, that this secret world is near, waiting for us. You can see it in the flash in our eyes, in the abandon of our dances and love affairs, in the protest or party that gets out of hand.

You’re not the only one trying to find it. We’re out here, too... some of us are even waiting there for you. And you should know that anything you’ve ever done or considered doing to get there is not crazy, but beautiful, noble, necessary.

Revolution is simply the idea we could enter that secret world and never return; or, better, that we could burn away this one, to reveal the one beneath entirely.