

4.

This morning I get drunk and write my parents a letter. It's Saturday, the 17th of the month, and there's this grimy snow outside and Jesus! it's cold. A couple days ago my mom tried to phone from California, wanting to know if I was coming home for holidays, but I just told the operator nobody by that name lives here anymore. It's the first time I've ever spent this long away from home. There's this slushy stuff all over outside that's starting to freeze hard and slick as steel. CUNY is coated and everything's shut down, even the Computer Center. Coming from California, I've never seen weather like this, nor a city this big this ugly.

"Dear — and —," I write, as though my parents' names are something to be filled in later like a form letter, "this morning I got up and it was —. The weather outside is — and the thermometer says —, although I'm not even sure it's — anymore. Some fun, huh?"

Quickly I stuff the sheet into an envelope and mail it downstairs before I lose my nerve. I'm nineteen years old, in a strange city going to a strange school and the only reason I'm here is to get the hell away from my family. I recall a certain French novel in which this guy undergoes an experience quite similar to mine, except he's living in Algeria and kills a stranger. Which makes me think of the Tribe—adolescent undergoing the ritualistic coming-of-age, together with that mandatory adolescent renunciation of the family unit...

But even putting it into latinates like this doesn't help.

On the wall behind me is a poster of an Indian warrior sitting on his sturdy Indian pony. His naked Indian arms are spread wide to embrace the utter beneficence of his Indian world – I reach into a drawer beneath the poster, shake a round yellow pill from the bottle then count how many left. The Health Center’s closed and won’t be open again till next week. Let’s see, I do the math, at ten megs per every six hours –

It’s Christmas, but after awhile it doesn’t matter anymore.

Then around noon the sun pokes through the smudged-looking clouds and I figure what the hell and do up all the rest of today’s, and then start in on tomorrow’s too.

