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PREVIEW

FRAGMENTS OF DISSOLUTION

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A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Department of English  
University of Texas at El Paso

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In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

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December 1976

UMI Number: EP01293



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FRAGMENTS OF DISSOLUTION

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## Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Dr. Pat Carr, my mentor, whose encouragement and guidance made it possible for me to complete my thesis.

I also wish to thank Mr. Frank Fugate and Dr. Charles Elerick for their outstanding help.

~~A~~nd thirdly, I wish to dedicate whatever aesthetic ideals can be found in my book to my beautiful wife, Ninfa.

PREVIEW

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## A PLACE OF STILLNESS

The dirt road ran perpendicular to old Highway Eighty, rambling on for a good two hundred yards before leading into a circle of trees which surrounded a thirty-year-old farm hours. The road was lined by telephone poles. The circle of trees stood out in contrast to the flat fields which encircled it. It resembled an oasis transplanted from the desert. The farm hours was not visible from the highway and appeared secluded by silence as well. Behind the farm house there was a garage and an old building, resembling a barn, which housed the water pump that kept the flow of water to the house constant. The water had to be hauled in a tank, pulled by a truck and deposited into a subterranean well. The dirt road snaked through the circle of trees, around the other buildings and then proceeded several hundred more yards, passing small adobe buildings which had been used to house the cheap Mexican labor when this place had been a successful cotton growing area. The road then split into two and ran in opposite directions along a large irrigation ditch which in turn ran parallel to railroad tracks that seemed to come from nowhere and ventured off in the same direction.

In the circle of trees there was a solitary owl whom nobody had ever seen and only a few had heard. In the irrigation ditch lived a family of muskrats. Grasing in the sparse grass of the fields were some twenty cows protected by one enormous black bull. Dove, hawks and other birds



flew into the circle of trees with regularity, and an occasional tarantula attracted by the feces of the cows could be seen traversing the expanse of the front of the house. A snake once glimpsed in fear was immediately identified as a rattler. Inside the house a family of mice was multiplying at an alarming rate. The tiny patter could be heard in the walls. And also within the house lived a family of three. A young couple and their three-year-old boy.

The only people who passed the house were the water reclamation people whose job it was to measure the amount of irrigation water being used by the different farms and the utility men who brought the gas for the winter months, measured the electrical usage, and fixed an occasional faulty telephone wire. The house was so well insulated that the couple seldom heard anything until there was a loud knocking on the front porch door. Then the door was opened and it was usually the friend of the husband. Together they did insane things. They set on fire piles of tumbleweeds causing flames to rise twenty-five feet in the air. In the cool night air their bonfires became eerie with the two men dancing about, while feeding the raging flames more tumbleweeds. They were Druids dancing wildly in the wilderness.

At other times the friend brought his motorcycle and they drove over the dirt road slipping in the soft sand and falling off as the cycle bucked them high into the air after

hitting a large rut. The friend also brought his BB gun and together they made life miserable for the muskrats who hid from them as soon as they heard their approach. Neither man would ever destroy living things; they only enjoyed the sadism of annoying these poor bewildered animals. They shot out the windows of the old adobe buildings and explored the garage behind the house, discovering an old bone corset. Sometimes they would chase the lizards, seeing who was the best at trapping them. When the friend would leave, the husband would occasionally borrow the BB gun and go to the irrigation ditch and wait for the muskrats by himself. Eventually a train would pass by on the opposite side and he would shoot the hollow freight cars that passed in monotonous repetition. At night he felt justified because the train came like some prehistoric animal with one glaring light preceeding it and a deafening roar that frightened his sophisticated twentieth-century mind. During the daylight hours he felt like a mischievous little boy and wondered if the train engineer did not view him as a fool.

He would also use the BB gun on the bull. This he told no one. He viewed the cows and bull as the most ignorant animals he had ever seen. Perhaps it was because they never seemed to acquiesce to his presence. So, with a vengeance he took the BB gun and shot at the enormous testicles of the bull which he hit with an amazing accuracy. Much to his chagrin the bull did not even respond. After such a shooting

spree he would become introspective and try to fathom the reasons for this peculiar action. He didn't know, but somehow he felt that it was due to his marriage which enveloped him like the trees encircling the house or rings of stillness centering on a drowned rock.

One night--it must have been close to midnight--he was reading incantations to conjure Beezlebub. The stillness outside, the lonely light from which he was reading and the suspicion that his family were really not sleeping created a sense of uncertainty within him. He had bought the book on sale as a lark because it interested him with its drawings of pentagrams and its formulas of magic. Attempting to conjure the devil, he finished the last line of the incantation with a melodramatic flair when he heard the sudden loud moo of a cow outside. A moment later, composed, he lit a cigarette and then laughed. Minutes later he put out his cigarette and went to his bed.

She lay asleep, oblivious to his presence, and he suddenly felt terribly alone. With trepidation he put his hand on her arm, hoping that she would turn to him and hold him like his mother had. Instead she stiffened and told him to leave her alone. He turned and bundled himself up. He resembled a fetus. Then he fell asleep.

One day he awoke and there was a vast silence. No one was there. She had left with the boy. For several weeks he remained at the house, but then the loneliness and isolation

became too oppressive. What had once been tranquil now became forlorn. He kept thinking of the time they had all danced naked in the front of the house with the rain pouring in a rhythmic patter on and around them, his little boy squeeling with laughter and bravado and her beautiful form supple and glistening in its wetness.

### THE COMBINATION OF PIECES

They converged upon El Paso, a winter day, when the horizon was empty, the rays of light shallow and diffused, to begin a new life, a life that would divide for Tony into directions that were simply unmotivated but ranged onward, bleakly into the circumstances of fate; perhaps intersecting again at a later date into new horizons which only the future would unravel for better or worse.

Tony and his parents had been on the road for three days traveling from the East Coast to this utopia, a mecca of sunshine, and smogless skies that draped in a gossamer azure and proclaimed an open abrazo to new settlers. And they, the settlers, who had left the seasons of green as Prometheus had had to, they chained their souls to the stark and calloused background of El Paso which bound itself inextricably to Tony's soul and baptized him in the introverted depression of his teen-age years.

El Paso genuflected around the mountain that clawed into its very vitals. The city then expanded and curved into wings around the intrusive claw. The highway came and

went, accenting the mountain's presence, giving tourists the stark vision of the mountain and its surrounding barrenness. The Rio Grande flowed surreptitiously through the city, giving an artificial semblance of life to an aridness that was more pervasive than just the vision of its landscape. Yet, within the confines of this soulless place, people leved the richness that is life-giving birth, making love, demonstrating affection, laughing, hating and dying--and here Tony comforted himself in the green of the few trees that joined limbs in aged neighborhoods, where he was reminded of the cyclical forces that seemed buried in his primordial unconciousness.

Through the years Tony learned to accept the positive within his environment. He felt the wide open distances and let his mind reel to the sharp colors that streaked the skies in their myriad combinations. He let the engulfing heat boil his blood and the cold winds whip his bones, reminding him of his own vulnerability. The sand and dust that caked his flesh brought forth the will to live as it too whipped the soft flesh of childhood and prodded the man out. And he even conquered on a cloudy day when he climbed Mt. Franklin, ascending through the mist, to reign supreme in a sunlit blue sky over a vast panorama of clouds that hid all their secrets from him with their white facade.

Tony learned as we must all; then his path crossed with

another as her birth was also brought about by the intersection of lives converging upon El Paso. It was Francisco Torres who brought forth this possibility, made by finding his new wife within the recesses of the tropical belt. He found her there because she was his first cousin and he was spending his vacation away from home in the country of his forbearers. By train, through the desert shrubland, through the hills that rolled on into incredible waves, he moved forward, back into a lost history that he vaguely recollected through his mother's milk and the few, inarticulate stories of family history, until he arrived at the small Mexican town whose name is easier forgotten than remembered.

Francisco journeyed back several times more to woo what was forbidden by the church's sanctions on incest. Eventually the determination and obstinacy of the blood's incest triumphed along with the mordida that found its way into the coffins of the church's respectability. Francisco triumphed because he brought to her the vision of a new world, new places and the escape of poverty and ignorance from which they were both bred. They traveled to Juarez where they married. Then they crossed into El Paso where she settled down into having the twelve children that were her future. And he, he settled into the alcoholism which was his destiny from the moment he began to drink the wine and beer with his friends, shortly after he dropped out of the seventh grade.

Anita Torres was conceived on the night of one of his many drunken and self-indulgent searches for the warmth and love which beguiles the emptiness of existence; conceived in a woman who was growing to hate her husband because she could not understand, only condemn, the violation of all that was meant to be orderly in her life. Hate grew into indifference because after Anita there were eight more and the human spirit is not capable of enduring hatred for so long a period.

Upon the genetic ladder, Anita was different. Tall, slim with large eyes that attracted rather than penetrated, she had the air of a wounded and suspicious girl. It was obvious that her plainness of face would grow into beauty. Strange how nature can weave and fuse the flesh aesthetically, when the original clay from which the material was spawned is so marred. Like the arid desert, man's beauty is at times manifest only in the charm of its golden sunsets which lives in memories' dissolution.

Tony met Anita at the University where she was trying to carry her mother's dream of escape a step further. She was trying to cross the rigid social delineations that Tony had so negligently ignored and discarded because he felt no better or worse than any other human being. They met through a mutual friend who introduced them in the SUB of the University over cokes and the intellectual conversations that are part of the maturation process and only serve to fill the vacuum much as the wind fills the void and is soon

dissipated. They did not see each other again for over a year. Then they met at the University theater where they watched a movie, while rubbing elbows together in the sheltering darkness, each electrically aware of the other and yet aware that this boldness was somehow only tolerable because it was so eccentric, while any other overture would have been rejected immediately. After the movie they parted, she leaving with her friends and he by himself into the tepid night, afraid and angry at not having extracted some sort of commitment to meet again. Besides he had no money or car, but still he knew her name and he could find it if he really wanted to.

That night he drifted off thinking of her face, a face that was gentle, beautiful and virginal. He couldn't remember the shape and folds of her body except that it was lithe and tall, but it was the face that excited him. Still he knew he wouldn't call her. He was too afraid and unsure of himself.

Tony lived in the basement of an old home in Sunset Heights. The heights was an area of significant historical import. At one time it had housed the rich and wealth of El Paso. But at later stages it went through a metamorphosis until the stately homes became only shells of their former grandeur. Eventually the neighborhood became a haven for students with its cheap rents and homes dissected to accommodate them. There was still the vestige of grandeur in the atmosphere, but a poverty had settled over the area. The



home which Tony lived in was owned by a fortune teller who rented to students. Here the happy warbling of numerous birds lightened the oppressive weight of the old buildings withstanding time. The University was only a half-mile in the distance and Tony was trying to complete his senior year. He was drifting through this final year the same way he had drifted through the other three. It was as if he had no purpose to his life but to simply fill the vacuum of his future progress with such socially acceptable directions as going to school. He did not contemplate the future. After school he did not know what. He was involved only with the present.

His apartment was in the basement and he shared it with two other young men: Craig a student like himself who was escaping the monthly child support payments of a recently acquired divorce in Florida; and Jesse, a young, politically conservative relative of the fortune teller, who smoked pot and worked for the railroad and took forty-five minute showers to cleanse the body and soul from the sins of the day. What made them intimate was the shared fear of the large cockroaches that first stalked and then attacked their uneasy sleep; and the threat of death manifest in the large boiler which supplied energy to the decrepit old home and became a precarious, explosive force to the three. All were aware that if the building inspector had discovered their living quarters, next to the nefarious boiler, the

fortune teller would have been slapped with a huge fine. But for the cheap rent and the life of a student, none complained. Besides, there were two meals thrown in made up of mostly beans and tortillas which kept their bodies pointed in the right direction. Tony and Craig learned to eat this staple as one eats steak and potatoes. Jesse was a Mexican-American and so had no learning problems.

The basement was always dark because the fortune teller was a stickler for shutting the electricity. It was also difficult to smuggle in girls because any noise was immediately interrupted by a grave and righteous fortune teller disturbing her own visions of the future to lecture one of the three about the fact that her home was not a whore house but an establishment of long-standing integrity. As a consequence, none of the three spent much time in their section of the house except to change, shower and sleep.

Tony spent most of his time upstairs watching the steady flow of people who were eliciting some sort of hope for the future from the fortune teller. Tony had a morbid fascination with the tragic aspects of people's lives, and so he would sit hour upon hour scrutinizing the motley group of people who came seeking answers. There were also young teen-agers who visited with regular frequency the fortune teller to fill their needs for new thrills. No one seemed too concerned about the dollar charge for the fifteen-minute consultations except the fortune teller whose eyes clicked

like slot machines and Tony who was now so intolerably poor that he would have been grateful for just a fraction of her take. Tony's poverty stemmed from his need to be totally self-sufficient which in turn stemmed from a breach with his parents over who was the real executor of his life.

Tony watched the people as they waited on the old couch for their turns to hear the future. The old man who was the fortune teller's husband sat in the opposite corner watching the television, smoking one cigarette after another sometimes interrupting his senile thoughts to comment upon something to Tony. The people sitting on the couch would invariably giggle to themselves, obviously embarrassed by their own presence and the old man's foolishness. Occasionally the old man leaned over, cigarette hanging from the corner of his mouth, to pet his huge dog, a cross between a Chow and something else. The dog took the routine of all this in stride by simply lying in a lethargic heap until the door bell rang. Then he would bark ferociously as another customer ambled by Tony who opened the door like a bellhop. This was the atmosphere that filled Tony's world during this time.

Several days after Tony and Anita had rubbed elbows at the University, he was talking to Craig.

"I met a really good looking chick last night." Craig grinned to himself as he mouthed the words.

"Who and where?" Tony asked not really caring, but merely to anticipate Craig's need for some conversation.

"The Society Club."

"I thought that's where all the blacks hang out?"

"I don't know about that, but she was tall and beautiful. She seemed kind of skinny. She was a Mexican."

"Really?"

"She goes to the University at night. She has long brown hair."

"What's her name?"

"Anna or something. Why the big curiosity, Tony?"

"Could it have been Anita?"

"Yeah, maybe that's it. Why?"

"I met somebody like that a few days ago. What did you do with her? Did you get any?"

"Nothing. She was real right on."

Tony seemed content as if by this gesture he knew she was saving herself for him. But what had she been doing at the Society Club? The chicks that go there go to get fucked he thought. "Are you sure that's the place on Alameda street?" he said.

"I'm sure of the place. It was full of niggers."

"Can't you use another word?"

"How about jiggs?" Craig grinned.

"Fuck you. Tell me what she looked like."

"I already told you, tall, skinny, just like peaches and cream."

"I wonder if it's her. Sure sounds like it."

"Why don't you call her?"

Tony seemed startled by the suggestion and Craig smiled ironically. The next day after searching and calling ten wrong Torres families he reached the right one.

"Does Anita Torres live here?"

"Yes."

"Well, could I speak to her please?"

"One moment please." What would he say to her? He hadn't bothered to think out an explanation for calling.

"Hi, this is Tony Breugle. We met at the movie last Friday at the University I was..."

"Oh, hi, I remember. How did you find my number?"

"I must have called ten other Torres families. The phone book is full of them."

"Yes, I know. We have a lot of relatives."

"Not that many. Listen, I was wondering if your not doing anything, if we couldn't see another movie together. I enjoyed the last one."

"That would be nice."

"That's great. There's only one problem. I don't have a car. Do you think you could meet me at the University?"

"Let me see if I can borrow my father's car again. If I can I'll meet you in the lobby of the student union theater. Ok?"

"That's great. You know you're swell."

On their third date he thought how ironical. If it hadn't been for Craig's conversation he would most probably have been back at the apartment again opening the door for the seekers of the future. But there he was driving her brother's car in the Lower Valley, through the green and fertile fields, children of the Rio Grande, with her at his side. He had by now discovered that it was another girl that Craig had met at the Society Club and it was Anita who was now at his side. He had had a tremendous amount of gall in asking her to meet him for their first date, but she had complied and for this he was thankful.

The Upper and Lower Valleys are the only green areas of El Paso if one doesn't count the residential neighborhoods that stand out as embattled acres confronting the desert. As the Rio Grande flows through the city, it fertilizes the land which has wrought fortunes for many farmers. Cotton, alfalfa and wheat give life to otherwise dead terrain. Tony and Anita drove through the farm roads finally stopping by an irrigation ditch obscured by the massive growth of weeds and bushes.

They got out of the car and walked parallel by the empty moist ditch talking as young lovers will. In reality it was he who did the talking and she who did the listening because this was what they were both best at. They held hands, intertwining their emotional onsets that were soothing and demanding expression in sexual love. The sun was shining

brightly and the heat was oppressive because of the moisture of the ditch, Tony was perspiring, but the discomfort was negligible so intent was he on her presence.

Impulsively and authoritatively he pulled her to a halt and then swung her around to him pressing his lips gently and sultrily against hers. Her body folded neatly into the contours of his large athletic frame and his arousal masked the reality that she was relatively inexperienced. So involved was he that she might have been a sexual neuter and he would have been unaware.

Tony, as unsure as he was of himself, knew when to take advantage of what was his and at that moment she was giving of herself to him. The kiss lingered and it was Tony who finally drew apart from her because she was a need that had to be devoured with the eyes. Pulling her away from him at arms' length he search her eyes for approval, for resistance, for any sign to tell him of some kind of conclusion on her part. He discovered nothing. He saw that she looked at him with eyes filled with fear, suspicion. He translated this as an incertitude about the essential reality of her own existence. Then before she could resist, Tony pulled her blue tank top up to her arm pits and then unhooped her bra. It had all happened deftly and he could see embarrassment, fear and absurdity in her eyes. He saw that she viewed his eyes with alarm as they widened with an intent that he could not completely discern. She seemed helpless to resist his head

as he bent his long neck and began to suck forcefully on her nipples. When he finally pulled his head away he looked into her eyes and she reciprocated with confused awe. His eyes darted to her large well-shaped breasts with their reddish tinged nipples and at that moment he was in love. She was the aesthetic image of sexual passion for him.

He looked at her again and could see that she was still embarrassed, and so he helped her pull down her bra and shirt. She was speechless as he pressed her against him and she could feel the force of his sexual arousal. He stopped himself from going any further with her because he understood that she was naive and besides he had a tremendous need to respect a woman. There had been so many prostitutes in his life and so many quick fucks from the girls that he never saw again and had no desire to. Pressing his head to her forehead he looked down into the cleavage of her breasts which excited him so much. It seemed to him that love hung from two breasts that he needed to suck into oblivion. He wanted to melt into the sensual flow of the sperm as it demanded an explosion into orgasm, the nebulous, disjointed spheres of surrealistic flotation. He looked again at her eyes.

"You have the most beautiful breasts I've ever seen." He said this fatuously and she seemed unable to answer except with a bewildered smile.