

January 8

Dear Nance,

How was your trip back to school? I really felt sorry for you—because you had to get up so early on New Year's Day, I mean—but I figured the flight back wouldn't phase you too much since you were probably still high anyway. That was a fantastic party, huh? I spent the day very, very quietly and didn't even *look* at anything stronger than tomato juice.

Hey, do you remember Steve Record? I think he was a year ahead of you in high school. Currently he's going to Harvard and is playing the mod-rebel role. I met him on the train last week coming back to Boston. I was sitting there, still rather shaky from all those Zombies or whatever they were, when all of a sudden I looked up and there was this MAN standing by my seat staring at me. After about thirty seconds I finally figured out who it was and asked him to sit down, but, like zow—what a shock! He's really changed—he's wearing his hair long (like down to his shoulders) and very dirty now. Would you *believe* that? Steven Record—the librarian's son? Amazing. Actually, once you get used to him he doesn't look half bad. He's taller and much thinner—remember how fat and rosy his cheeks used to be? Well, now they're hollow and pale. He could be on the stuff—his eyes kind of had the look. I didn't ask—thought he might be sensitive about it or something. He had the Harvard uniform on: corduroy hip-huggers, garrison belt, Dylan boots, an old scroungy sweater and a plaid muffler. No coat. He looked rather blue around the lips. He kept thumbing this paperback he had with him called *Zen and the Fallacy of the Third Pillar*. I think it was part of the act because he really didn't know much about Zen. We did have a rather fascinating conversation though. He told me all about some Socialist workshop he'd just been to in Columbus, Ohio, of all places. He kept saying, "The town, of course, is out of the question, but there are some *fascinating* people there. Really *fascinating*!" We didn't get far with that topic since the only person I'd ever met from Columbus was a traffic cop who stopped us there once, so Steve started telling me all about good old H.U. and all his problems with it. He's only a sophomore, but already he's changed his major three times—started in biochemistry, switched to metaphysics, and finally landed in finite math. He's not really happy with the school and would like to transfer, but, as he says, "Where do you go

from Harvard?" Indeed! He said he'd been looking into a small school in Vermont called Thunderhill or something quaint like that. It's small (enrollment: 110), isolated (the closest town is Danby—population: 500), but is fantastically liberal. Classes meet something like once a semester and the rest of the time is devoted to independent study in any field you want (probably in trapping or spearfishing or something). I asked if they had good facilities, and he admitted that it wasn't accredited yet, but, "After all," he said, "what's a diploma anyway? Just a piece of paper. Doesn't really matter." Fantastic.

At this point he suddenly changed the subject again and asked if I'd like to go to a military reception at the Naval Shipyard with him. (I was wearing your fuchia mini-skirt and striped poorboy and I think they kind of grabbed him. By the way, I borrowed them from your suitcase before you left.) "A military reception!" I exclaimed. "Are you putting me on?" Somehow I just couldn't feature him in any other uniform than the one he had on. He quickly explained that he wasn't the military—his father was. His father's a big man with the Navy, and they were throwing a bash for him because he's the commander of the ship that's picked up the most astronauts or something. I guess Steve's mother had given him the old either-you-go-or-I-take-away-your-credit-cards bit, which, as we both know, is a very potent argument for going. Anyway, it sounded like it might be a good little happening, so we set the time and place. I know what you're going to say—"But he's younger than you!"—but God, Nance, the kid looks at least thirty-two! I mean, together we look like an ad for "Alice In Wonderland Meets Daniel Boone" or something. Besides, what's physical age anyway? Just a number. Doesn't really matter.

Well, Friday night arrived and old Steve zoomed up right on time in his roommate's '65 Jag—white, five-speed, disc brakes, wire wheels—really tough car. I had Betsy answer the door and I made my grand entrance a respectable seven minutes later. Since I'd never been to a military reception before, I was rather unsure how to dress, but I guess I did all right, because Steve seemed pretty impressed. I had on my silver *laimé* pants suit with those wild bauble earrings you gave me for Christmas and Betsy's silver iridescent trenchcoat. Actually, the outfit was just right, because Steve was wearing houndstooth slacks and a double-breasted jacket with epaulets, a crazy flowered tie and a really tough Carnaby cap

which made him look not quite thirty-two anymore. Bets said we really looked out of sight, which is what I thought, too.

When we got to the reception it was already in full swing, and I could tell right away that it was going to be a quiet evening. There wasn't a band—always a bad sign—and everyone was just standing around drinking martinis. Besides that, we were the only ones there under fifty—all the men were admirals and captains and things, and their wives were all pudgy, grey-haired mother images who were playing some middle-aged role which I could never quite psych out. Steve's father was there, of course, and by the time we arrived he was already half looped. When he saw us come in he got all excited—turned a wild shade of purple and started yelling something I didn't quite catch. Steve seemed to understand, though, and said maybe we shouldn't stay too long, but Mrs. Record got his father calmed down, and after a while he even came over and talked to us. He really looked quite distinguished in his uniform—like the captain of the ship on that old Gale Storm TV show—remember that? He's nice, but not anything like Steve at all. Steve says they haven't agreed on a single issue since he was twelve.

They had an open bar, which is always nice, but unfortunately, the bartender was rather inhibited. He was a tall, white-haired old guy who looked like he'd come with the bar when the place was built about three centuries ago. He reminded me of the old peasant (Firs?) in the *Cherry Orchard* that time we saw it in New Haven. Anyway, Steve started ordering all these far-out drinks like a Sancho Panza Smash (Ever have one? They're fantastic!) which the poor old guy just didn't dig at all. After about fifteen tries we finally gave up and just got scotches and water. In the middle of the room there was a huge table shaped like an anchor which was piled with all kinds of shrimp and oysters and sausages on crackers. They also had a big bowl of fried chicken legs. All the admirals' wives, sprayed, polished, and encrusted with diamonds, were standing around trying to look terribly, terribly elegant while eating these chicken legs wrapped in green paper napkins, which, of course, was impossible—what a show that was! There was one Dorothy Killgallen-type in a horrible gold brocade who was trying desperately to eat hers without smearing her lipstick. She looked much like a horse reaching for an apple or something—she'd pull her lips way back, stick her teeth out, then take a tiny little nibble. She had a problem, though, because the skin kept sliding off in big chunks—

she was amazing, simply amazing.

As I said before, we were the youngest ones there, but we mixed right in with all the brass. We got into a really interesting discussion about navigation with one old guy who had about fourteen rows of ribbons on his chest. Steve was thinking of majoring in navigation before he switched to metaphysics, so he knew quite a lot about it. I asked the admiral (or whatever) about that problem we had with the lightning last summer, but he wasn't much help—I don't think he was too big on sailboats. After a while another officer who looked like Captain Bligh came over and the two of them started a wild alphabet soup conversation about God-knows-what. It was like: "When do you leave for FOCC?" "Don't know yet. It's supposed to be TMSP but I heard a rumor about MONM." "Really? Think you'll get FOBC or POBC?" "Are you kidding? From FOCC? I'll be lucky to get 5-K instead of 16-Q which isn't even likely since I'm only TXC and you almost have to be 3RT." Steve and I caught onto this right away and tried it for a while. "This is a PLP, huh?" "Yeah. But TL, you know." "Hey, let's CTS LF, OKBY?" The other two started giving us unfriendly stares so we dropped it and just sort of drifted away in the general direction of the bar, which we discovered was closed. This is always a sure sign that it's time to go, so we quickly and unobtrusively exited stage right and roared off to the Pumah, which was where the action had been all along.

All things considered, I certainly can't say much for my first military function. I was rather disillusioned after all I'd heard about dashing uniforms and reckless, rakish officers—they're greatly overrated, take it from me. I'd say the best part of the whole affair was that there was a real live Vietnamese general there—I'd always wanted to see one in the flesh. They look just like their pictures, though.

Well, that's about all the action from the home of the bean and the Navy. As you can see, there's not a lot happening here besides Ed Logue and redevelopment. Have a swinging finals week, kid, and TIB!

Militantly yours,



(Joan O'Sullivan)