

# DRIVING MR. ALBERT

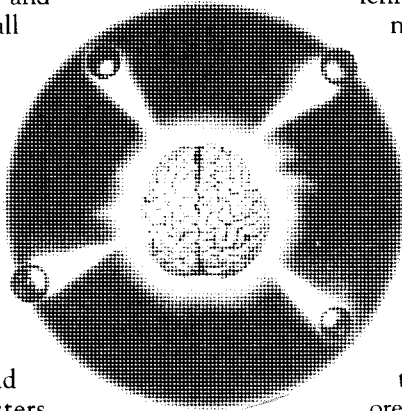
A TRIP ACROSS AMERICA WITH  
EINSTEIN'S BRAIN

BY MICHAEL PATERNITI

PRINCETON, NEW JERSEY.  
FEBRUARY 17, 1997.

**I**n the beginning, there was a brain. All of the universe was the size of this brain, floating in space. Until one day it simply exploded. Out poured photons and quarks and leptons. Out flew dust particles like millions of fast-moving birds into the expanding aviary of the cosmos. Cooked heavy elements—silicon, magnesium, and nickel—were sucked into a small pocket and balled together under great pressure and morphed with the organic matter of our solar system. Lo, the planets!

Our world—Earth—was covered with lava, then granite mountains. Oceans formed, a wormy thing crawled from the sea. There were pea-brained brontosauri and fiery meteor showers and gnawing, hairy-backed monsters that kept coming and coming—these furious little stumps, human beings, us. Under the hot sun, we roasted different colors, fornicated, and fought. Full of wonder, we attached words to the sky and the mountains and the water, and claimed them as our own. We named ourselves Homer, Sappho, Humper-



dinck, and Nixon. We made bewitching sonatas and novels and paintings. Stargazed and built great cities. Exterminated some people. Settled the West. Cooked meat and slathered it with special sauce. Did the hustle. Built the strip mall.

And in the end, after billions of years of evolution, a pink two-story motel rose up on a drag of asphalt in Berkeley, California. The Flamingo Motel. There, a man stepped out onto the balcony in a bright beam of millennial sunlight, holding the original universe in his hands, in a Tupperware container, and for one flickering moment he saw into the future. I can picture this man now: he needs a haircut, he needs some coffee.

But not yet, not before we rewind and start again. Not long ago. In Maine on a bus. In Massachusetts on a train. In Connecticut behind the wheel of a shiny, teal-colored rental car. The engine purrs. I should know, I'm the driver. I'm on my way to pick up an eighty-four-year-old man named Thomas Harvey, who lives in a modest, low-slung 1950s ranch that belongs to his sixty-seven-year-old girlfriend, Cleora. To get there you caroom through New Jersey's exurbia, through swirls of dead leaves and unruly thick-

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ets of oak and pine that give way to well-ordered fields of roan, buttermilk, and black snorting atoms—horses. Harvey greets me at the door, stooped and chuckling nervously, wearing a red-and-white plaid shirt and a solid-blue Pendleton tie that still bears a waterlogged \$10 price tag from some earlier decade. He has peckled, blowsy skin runneled with lines, an eagle nose, stubbed yellow teeth, bitten nails, and a spray of white hair as fine as corn silk that shifts with the wind over the bald patches on his head. He could be one of a million beach-bound, black-socked Florida retirees, not the man who, by some odd happenstance of life, possesses the brain of Albert Einstein—literally cut it out of the dead scientist's head.

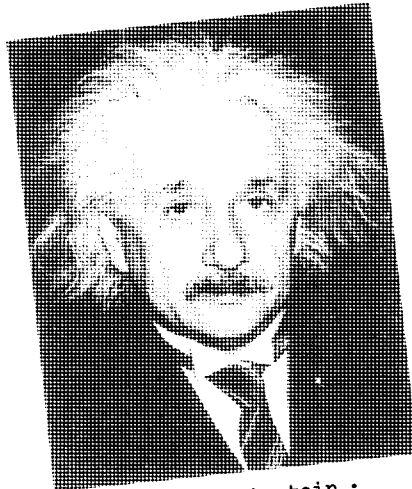
Harvey has stoked a fire in the basement, which is dank and dark, and I sit among crocheted rugs and genie bottles of blown glass, Ethiopian cookbooks, and macramé. It has taken me more than a year to find Harvey, and during that time I've had a dim, inchoate feeling—one that has increased in luminosity—that if I could somehow reach him and Einstein's brain, I might unravel their strange relationship, one that arcs across this century and America itself. And now, before the future arrives and the supercomputers of the world friz out and we move to lunar colonies—before all that hullabaloo—Harvey and I are finally sitting here together.

That day Harvey tells me the story he's told before—to friends and family and pilgrims—one that has made him an odd celebrity even in this age of odd celebrity. He tells it deliberately, assuming that I will be impressed by it as a testament to the rightness of his actions rather than as a cogent defense of them. "You see," he says, "I was just so fortunate to have been there. Just so lucky."

"Fortunate" is one word, "improbable" is another. Albert Einstein was born in 1879 with a head shaped like a lopsided medicine ball. Seeing it for the first time, his grandmother fell into shock. "Much too fat!" she exclaimed. "Much too fat!" He didn't speak until he was three, and it was generally assumed that he was brain-damaged. Even as a child, he lived mostly in his mind, building intricate card houses, marveling at a compass his father showed him. His faith was less in people than in the things of the world. When his sister Maja was born, young Albert, crestfallen, said, "Yes, but where are its wheels?"

As a man, he grew into a powerful body with thick arms and legs. He liked to hike and sail but spent most of his life sitting still, dreaming of the universe. In 1905, as a twenty-six-year-old patent clerk in Bern, Switzerland, he conceived of the special theory of relativity and the equation  $E=mc^2$ , a supposition that all matter, from a feather to a rock, contains energy. And with his theories that predicted the origin, nature, and destiny of the universe, he toppled Newton and nearly three hundred years of science. When the first glimmer of relativity occurred to him, he casually told a friend, "Thank you. I've completely solved the problem."

So complex were his findings that they could only be partially understood and verified fourteen years later. Then, of course, Albert Einstein instantly became famous. His mischievous smile beamed from newspapers around the world. A genius! A Nobel Prize! A guru-mystic who had unlocked the secrets of God's own mind! There were suddenly hundreds of books on relativity. Einstein embarked on a frenzied world tour, was feted by kings and



Albert Einstein

emperors and presidents, gamboling into the world's most sacred halls in a sockless state of bemused dishevelment. He claimed he got his hairstyle—eventually a wild, electric-white nimbus—"through negligence" and, explaining his overall sloppiness, said, "It would be a sad situation if the wrapper were better than the meat wrapped inside it." He laughed like a barking seal, snored like a foghorn, sunbathed in the nude. And then took tea with the queen.

Everywhere, it was Einstein mania. People named their children after him, fawned and fainted upon seeing him, wrote letters inquiring if he really existed. He was asked to "perform" at London's Palladium for three weeks on the same bill as fire-eaters and tightrope walkers, explaining his theory, at the price of his asking. "At the Chrysanthemum Festival," wrote one German diplomat stationed in Japan, "it was neither the empress nor the prince regent nor the imperial princes who held reception; everything turned around Einstein." A copy of the special theory of relativity in Einstein's scrawl was auctioned off for \$6 million. And the *New York Times* urged its readers not to be offended by the

fact that only twelve people in the world truly understood the theory of "the suddenly famous Dr. Einstein."

In the years to follow, Einstein's fame would only grow. He would vehemently criticize the Nazis and become a target for German ultra-nationalists, who waited outside his home and office, hurling anti-Semitic obscenities at him. When they made him a target for assassination, he fled to the United States—to Princeton, New Jersey—and became an American citizen. He was called "the new Columbus of science."

David Ben-Gurion offered him the presidency of Israel (to everyone's relief, he declined). His political utterances were as good as Gandhi's. Before Michael Jordan was beamed by satellite to China, before Marilyn Monroe and the Beatles and Arnold Schwarzenegger, Albert Einstein was the first transglobal supercelebrity.

In the last years of his life, he was struck with frequent attacks of nausea, the pain flowering between his shoulder blades, culminating in diarrhea or vomiting. An exam revealed an aneurysm in his abdominal aorta, but Einstein refused an operation and anticipated his own demise. "I want to be cremated so people won't come to worship at my bones," he said. On the night before he died, April 17, 1955, lying in bed in Princeton Hospital, Einstein asked to see his most recent pages of calculations, typically working until the end. His last words were spoken in German to a nurse who didn't know the language, though sometime earlier he had told a friend, "I have finished my task here."

The next morning, April 18, when the chief pathologist of the hospital—our Harvey, then a strapping forty-two-year-old with Montgomery Clift good looks—arrived for work, Einstein's body was laid out, naked and mottle-skinned, on a gurney. "Imagine my surprise," Harvey says to me now. "A fellow up in New York, my former teacher Dr. Zimmerman"—and an acquaintance of Einstein's—"was going to do the autopsy. But then he couldn't get away. He rang me up, and we agreed that I'd do it." Harvey says that he felt awe when he came face-to-face with the world-famous physicist, the voice of conscience in a century of madness, who had bewildered the world by suggesting that time should be understood as the fourth, and inseparable, dimension. Now he lay alone in the pale light, 180 pounds of mere matter.

Harvey took a scalpel in his hand and sliced Einstein open with a Y incision, scoring the belly, the skin giving like cellophane, then cut the rib cartilage and lifted the sternum. He found nearly three quarts of blood in Einstein's

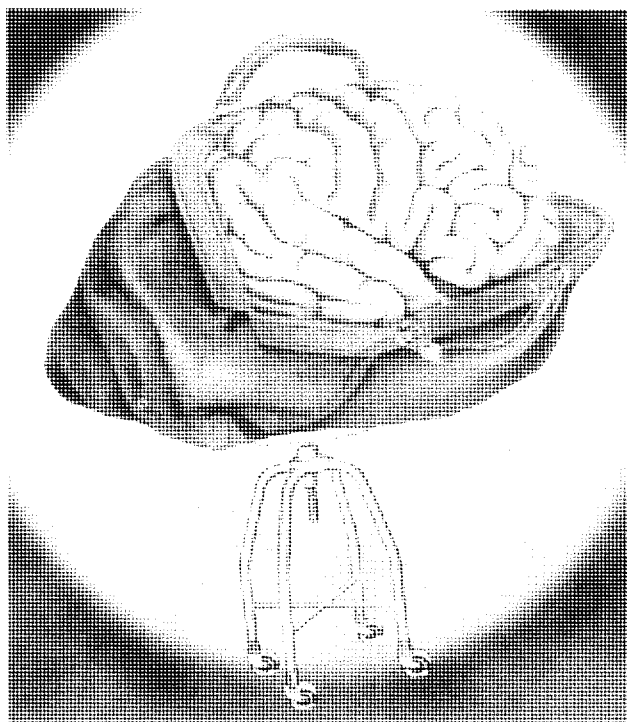
peritoneal cavity, a result of the burst aneurysm, and after investigating his heart and veins concluded that, with an operation, the physicist might have lived for several more years, though how long was hard to tell "be-

Who's to say what inspired Harvey to remove Einstein's brain—greed or beneficence, pettiness or awe?

cause Einstein liked his fatty foods," in particular goose scratchings.

Working under the humming lights, his fingers inside Einstein's opened body, juggling the liver, palpating the heart, Harvey made a decision. Who's to say whether it was inspired by awe or by greed, beneficence or mere pettiness? Who's to say what comes over a mortal, what chemical reaction takes place deep in the thalamus, when faced with the blinding brightness of another's greatness and, with it, a knowledge that I/you/we shall never possess even a cheeseparer of that greatness?

Working quickly with a knife, Harvey tonsured the scalp, peeled the skin back, and, bearing down on a saw, cut through Einstein's head with a quick, hacking motion. He removed a cap of bone, peeled back the meninges, then clipped blood vessels and bundles of nerve and



the spinal cord. He reached with his fingers deeper into the chalice of the man's cranium and simply removed the glistening brain. *To keep for himself.* Forever. In perpetuity. Amen.

What he didn't count on, however, was that with this one act his whole world would go haywire. Apparently, word got out through Zimmerman that Harvey had the brain, and when it was reported in the *New York Times* a day later, some people were aghast. Einstein's son, Hans Albert, reportedly felt betrayed. Harvey claimed that he was planning to conduct medical research on the brain, and, in an agreement eventually struck with Hans Albert over the phone, he assured that the brain would only be the subject of medical journals and not become a pop-cultural gewgaw, as the Einsteins most feared. Sometime after the autopsy, Harvey was fired from his job for refusing to give up the brain.

From a dark room in a secret location, Harvey retrieves two glass jars that are filled with Einstein's brain

Years passed, and there were no papers, no findings. And then Harvey fell off the radar screen. When he gave an occasional interview—in articles from 1956 and 1979 and 1988—he always repeated that he was about “a year away from finishing study on the specimen.”<sup>1</sup>

Forty years later—after Harvey has gone through three wives, after he has sunk to lesser circumstances, after he has outlived most of his critics and accusers, including Hans Albert—we are sitting together before a hot fire on a cold winter day. And because I like him so much, because somewhere in his watery blue eyes, his genial stumble-footing, and that inflexible cloak of hunched integrity that falls over the old, I find myself feeling for him and cannot bring myself to ask the essential questions:

Is Harvey a grave-robbing thief or a hero? A sham artist or a high priest? Why not heist a finger or a toe? Or a simple earlobe? What about rumors that he plans to sell Einstein's brain to Michael Jackson for \$2 million? Does he feel ashamed? Or justified? If the brain is the

<sup>1</sup> According to newspaper accounts following Einstein's death, mystery immediately shrouded the brain. Dr. Zimmerman, on staff at New York City's Montefiore Medical Center, expected to receive Einstein's brain from Harvey, but never, in fact, did; Princeton Hospital decided not to relinquish the brain. Harvey, however, also decided not to relinquish the brain and at some point removed it from the hospital.

ultimate Fabergé egg, the Hope diamond, the Cantino map, the One-Penny Magenta stamp, “Guernica,” what does it look like? Feel like? Smell like? Does he talk to it as one talks to one's poodle or ferns?

We conclude the visit by going out for sushi, and over the course of our conversation he mentions a handful of people he hopes to see out in America before he dies. “Yessir, I'd really like to visit some folks,” he says. They include a few neuroanatomists with whom he has brain business, some friends, and, in Berkeley, Evelyn Einstein, Hans Albert's daughter and the granddaughter of Albert. Harvey has wanted to meet her for many years. Although he doesn't say why, I think he might be trying to face down some lingering guilt, some late-in-life desire to resolve the past before his age grounds him permanently and, with his death, the brain falls into someone else's hands. Perhaps, too, he wants to make arrangements for someone to take over the brain, and Evelyn is going to be interviewed for the job. Whatever the reason, by the meal's end, doped on the incessant tinkling of piped-in harps and a heady shot of tekka maki, Harvey and I have somehow agreed to take a road trip: I will drive

him to California.

And then, one afternoon soon before our departure, Harvey takes me to a secret location—one he asks me not to reveal for fear of thieves and rambunctious pilgrims—where he now keeps the brain. From a dark room he retrieves a box that contains two glass jars full of Einstein's brain. After the autopsy, he had it chopped into nearly two hundred pieces—from the size of a dime to that of a thick turkey neck—and since then he has given nearly a third of it away to various people. He flashes the jars before me but only for a second, then retreats quickly with them. The brain pieces float in murky formaldehyde, leaving an impression of very chunky chicken soup. But it happens so quickly, Harvey so suddenly absconds with the brain, that I have no real idea what I've seen.

When I show up at his house a few weeks later in a rented Buick Skylark, Harvey has apparently fished several fistfuls' worth of brain matter from the jars, put them in Tupperware filled with formaldehyde, and zipped it all inside a gray duffel bag. He meets me in his driveway with a plaid suitcase rimmed with fake leather and the gray duffel sagging heavily in his right hand. He pecks Cleora good-bye. “He's a fine Quaker gentleman,” she tells me, watching Harvey's curled-over self shuffle across the pavement. He rubs a smudge of dirt off my side mirror, then toodles around the

front of the car. When he's fallen into the passenger seat, he chuckles nervously, scratchily clears his throat, and utters what will become his mantra, "Yessir . . . real good." And then we just start driving. For four thousand miles. Me, Harvey, and, in the trunk, Einstein's brain.

TOWARD COLUMBUS, OHIO.  
FEBRUARY 18, 1997.

**W**e morph as one. Even if we are more than a half century apart in age, he born under the star of William Howard Taft and I under the napalm bomb of Lyndon Baines Johnson, if he wears black Wallabees and I sport Oakley sunglasses, if he has three ex-wives, ten children, and twelve grandchildren and I have yet to procreate, we begin to think together, to make unconscious team decisions. It seems the entire backseat area will serve as a kind of trash can. By the time we make Wheeling, West Virginia, it's already strewn with books and tissuey green papers from the rental-car agreement, snack wrappers, and empty bottles of seltzer, a hedge against "G.I. upset," as Harvey puts it. An old rambler at heart, he takes to the road like it's a river of fine brandy, seems to grow stronger on its oily fumes and oily-rainbow mirages, its oily fast food and the oily-tarmacked gas plazas that we skate across for candy bars and Coca-Colas while the Skylark feeds at the pump. By default, I take charge of the radio—working the dial in a schizophrenic riffle from NPR to Dr. Laura and, in between, all kinds of high school basketball, gardening shows, local on-air auctions, blathering DJs, farm reports, and Christian call-in shows. Harvey is hard-of-hearing in his right ear and, perhaps out of pride or vanity, refuses to wear a hearing aid, so I've brought tapes too, figuring he might do a fair amount of sleeping while, as designated driver, I might do more staying awake. I've got bands with names like Dinosaur Jr., Soul Coughing, and Pavement, and a book-on-tape, *Neuromancer*, by William Gibson. Harvey himself is partial to classical music and reads mostly scientific journals and novels by Kay Boyle.

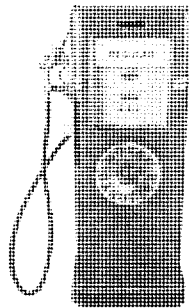
And although we are now bound by the road—Einstein's brain, Harvey, and me—he studiously avoids all discussion of the brain. Earlier, however, he ticked off twelve different researchers to whom he had given slices of the brain. According to Harvey, one of them, Sandra Witelson from McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, organized his ephemera and articles on the brain into a scrapbook, and he

turned over nearly a fifth of the brain to her. "She has one of the biggest collections of brains around," he says, proudly. "She gets them from a local undertaker." (Later, when contacted, Witelson said that Harvey's assertions about her were "incorrect.")

In most cases, Harvey has made it sound as if he himself handpicked these people after reading their work, though by some of their own admissions, a number of them had contacted him first. One neuroanatomist, a Berkeley professor named Marian Diamond, had written a paper claiming that she had counted in Einstein's brain a higher than normal number of glial cells, which nourish the organ. The only other paper written to date, by a researcher at the University of Alabama named Britt Anderson, stated that Einstein had a thinner cortex than normal. "You see," says Harvey enthusiastically, "we're finding out that Einstein's brain is more unusual than many people first thought." But a professor of neurobiology at UCLA, Larry Kruger, calls the "meagre findings" on the brain "laughable" and says that when Diamond herself delivered her paper, the audience found it "comical," because "it means absolutely nothing." (When I asked Diamond, a woman with impeccable credentials, about this, she claimed that Kruger had "a lack of inhibitor cells" and said, "Well, we have to start somewhere, don't we?")

Despite my expectations that Harvey will sleep a good deal, what I soon realize is that he's damn perky for eighty-four and never sleeps at all. Nor talks much. In this age of self-revelation, he eschews the orotundity of a confessor. He speaks in a clipped, spare, almost penurious way—with a barely perceptible drawl from his midwestern childhood—letting huge blocks of time fall in between the subject and the verb, and then between the verb and the modifier of a sentence. He pronounces "pleasure" *play-sure*, and "measurements" *may-sure-mints*. When my line of questioning makes him uncomfortable, he chuckles flatly like two chops of wood, "Heh-heh," raspily clears his throat, then says, "Way-ell . . ." And just steps aside to let some more time pass, returning to his map, which he studies like it's a rune. Through the window he watches Pennsylvania pass by: its barns and elaborate hexes, signs for Amish goods, the Allegheny Mountains rising like dark whales out of the earth, lost behind the mist of some unseen blowhole. He watches Ohio all pan-flattened and thrown back down on itself. And he blinks languidly at it. But never sleeps.

I admit: this disappoints me. Something in me wants Harvey to sleep. I want Harvey to



fall into a deep, blurry, Rip Van Winkle daze, and I want to park the Skylark mothership on top of a mountain and walk around to the trunk and open it. I want Harvey snoring loudly as I unzip the duffel bag and reach my hands inside, and I want to—what?—touch Einstein's brain. I want to touch the brain. Yes, I've said it. I want to hold it, coddle it, measure its weight in my palm, handle some of its 15 billion now-dormant neurons. Does it feel like to-fu, sea urchin, baloney? What, exactly? And what does such a desire make me? One of the

of the future while cautioning us against the violence that lurks in the heart of man. "I do not know how the Third World War will be fought," he warned, "but I do know how the Fourth will: with sticks and stones."

To complete his American deification, Einstein has been fully commodified and marketed, earning millions of dollars for his estate. Bought and sold back to us by the foot soldiers of high capitalism, Einstein's name and image are conjured to sell computers and CD-ROMs, Nikon cameras and myriad baubles. In fact, a Los Angeles celebrity-licensing agency handles his account.

But why so much commotion over a guy with sweaty feet and rumpled clothes? The answer is perhaps found in a feeling that Einstein was not one of us. It seems we regard him as being supernatural. Because he glimpsed into the very workings of the universe and returned with

God on his tongue, because he greeted this era by rocketing into the next with his breakthrough theories, he assumed a mien of supernaturalism. And because his tatterdemalion, at times dotty, demeanor stood in such stark contrast to his supernaturalism, he seemed both innocent and trustworthy and thus that much more supernatural. He, alone, held the seashell of the century to his ear.

Einstein is also one of the few figures born in the last century whose ideas are equally relevant to us today. If we've incorporated the theory of relativity into our scientific view of the universe, it's Einstein's attempt to devise a kind of personal religion—an intimate spiritual and political manifesto—that still stands in stark, almost sacred contrast to the Pecksniffian systems of salvation offered by the modern world. Depending on the day's sex crimes and senseless murders, or the intensity of our millennial migraine, we run the real risk of feeling straitjacketed and sacrificed to everything from organized religion to the nuclear blood lust of nations to the cult visionaries of our world and their various vodka-and-cuckoo schemes, their Hale-Bopp fantasies.

Thus Einstein's blending of twentieth-century skepticism with nineteenth-century romanticism offers a kind of modern hope. "I am a deeply religious nonbeliever," he said. "This is a somewhat new kind of religion." Pushing further, he sought to marry science and religion by redefining their terms. "I am of the opinion that all the finer speculations in the realm of science spring from a deep religious feeling," he said. "I also believe that this kind of religiousness . . . is the only creative religious activity of our time."

To touch Einstein's brain would also be to touch the white dwarf and the black hole, the

Even today, we regard Einstein as supernatural. He, alone, held the seashell of the century to his ear

legion of relic freaks who send Harvey letters asking, sometimes begging, for pieces of the brain? One of the pilgrims who come from as far away as Japan or England or Australia to glimpse it?

For Harvey's sake, I act like I haven't given the brain a second thought, while he encourages stultifying state-long silences and offers the occasional historical anecdote. "Eisenhower's farm was in these parts, I believe." Or, "In the days of the canal . . ." The more the idea persists in my head, the more towns slip past outside the window, the more I wonder what, in fact, I'd really be holding if I held the brain. I mean, it's not really Einstein and it's not really a brain but disconnected pieces of a brain, just as the passing farms are not *really* America but parts of a whole, symbols of the thing itself, which is everything and nothing at once.

In part, I would be touching Einstein the Superstar, immediately recognizable by his Kramer-esque hair and the both-at-once mournful and mirthful eyes. The man whose apotheosis is so complete that he's now a coffee mug, a postcard, a T-shirt. The face zooming out of a pop rock video on MTV's Buzz Clip for a song called "MMMBop." A figure of speech, an ad pitchman. The voice of reason on posters festooning undergrad dorm rooms. Despite the fact that he was a sixty-one-year-old man when he was naturalized as an American citizen, Einstein has been fully appropriated by this country, by our writers and moralists, politicians and scientists, cult leaders and clergy. In the *fin-de-siècle* shadows of America, in our antsy, searching times, Einstein comes back to us both as Lear's fool and Tiresias, comically offering his uncanny vision

Big Bang and ghost waves. To ride a ray of light, as Einstein once dreamed it as a child, into utter oblivion. He imagined that a clock placed on the equator would run more slowly than a clock placed at one of the poles under identical conditions. Einstein claimed that the happiest thought of his life came to him in 1907, at the Patent Office in Bern, when he was twenty-eight and couldn't find a teaching job. Up to his ears in a worsted wool suit and patent applications, a voice in his mind whispered, "If a person falls freely, he won't feel his own weight." That became the general theory of relativity. His life and ideas continue to fill thousands of books; even today, scientists are still verifying his work. Recently, a NASA satellite took millions of measurements in space that proved a uniform

"Is what safe?" Harvey asks back, gelid eyes sparking once in the dark. He doesn't seem to know or remember. He's carried the contraband for so long he has come to consider himself something of a celebrity. No longer defined by the specimen, he has become the real specimen. A piece of living history. On tour. In his glenplaid suitcase, he carries postcards of himself.

Inside his motel room with the brain, Harvey gathers the sleep of the old. Next door I am exhausted yet wide awake. I am thinking of the brain, remembering that after more than 8 million people had marched to their deaths in the fields of Europe during World War I, Einstein's theory of relativity allowed humanity, in the words of a colleague, to look up from an "earth covered with graves and blood to the heavens



distribution of primordial temperatures just above absolute zero; that is, the data proved that the universe was in a kind of postcoital afterglow from the Big Bang, further confirming Einstein's explanation for how the universe began.

It would be good to touch that.

We disembark that first night at a Best Western in Columbus, Ohio. As we open the trunk to gather our bags, I watch Harvey take what he needs, then leave the gray duffel there, the zipper shining like silver teeth in the streetlight.

"Is it safe?" I ask, nodding my head toward the duffel.

covered with the stars." He suddenly appeared on the world's doorstep, inspiring pan-national awe and offering with it pan-national reconciliation—a liberal German Jew who clung to his Swiss citizenship and renounced violence. What better way to absolve oneself of all sins than to follow a blameless scientist up into the glimmering waters of time and space?

Another contemporary of Einstein's, Erwin Schrödinger, claimed that Einstein's theory of relativity quite simply meant "the dethronement of time as a rigid tyrant," opening up the possibility that there might be an alternative



Master Plan. "And this thought," he wrote, "is a religious thought, nay I should call it *the* religious thought." With relativity, Einstein, the original cosmic slacker, was himself touching the mind of a new god, forming a conga line to immortality through some wrinkle in time. "It is quite possible that we can do greater things than Jesus," he said.

That, finally, was Einstein's ultimate power and hold on our imagination. Eternity—it would be good to touch *that* too.

KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI.  
FEBRUARY 19, 1997.

**A**cross Indiana, Illinois, and Missouri, beneath scudding clouds and clear shots of sunlight, the chill air fragrant with manure and feed. We pass over the chocolate, moiling Mississippi, drive near the towns of Emma, Bellflower, Peruque, and Auxvasse. We stealth through shadows thrown by crop dusters and Greyhound buses, up against wobbling 53-foot truck trailers full of movie videos or broccoli or industrial turbines and, at one point, a flatbed with a Vietnam-era helicopter strapped to it. On this bright, windy day, we see the outbuildings and barns of the Midwest, where farmers stand in small circles eyeing their fields like nervous, hand-wringing fathers, repairing their threshers, turning the speaking soil, in what's yet invisible, speaking in incantations: feed and fertilizer, moisture content and till depth. With each day's work, with each field-side conference and hour alone in the air-conditioned cab of a supertractor, they will silently appeal to the circadian rhythms of some higher power for a perfect calibration of sun and rain, as well as for the perfect ascension of market prices to deliver a bountiful harvest. On the radio, we get the farm reports: lean hog futures down five-eighths; feeder cattle futures up a half. Corn futures and soybean and cocoa, up two-eighths, down a third, even. January sugar and March corn; September rice and December cotton—all of them attached to a momentary price that may right now be making someone rich as it bankrupts someone else.

"Look at that cow!" exclaims Harvey.

And it is quite a cow! On this, our third day together, something is beginning to happen out here between us, the three of us. Time is slowing, it seems, or expanding to fill a bigger sky, a more open landscape. The got-to-be-there self-importance of the East, its frantic floodlight charge, has given way to a single lit parlor lamp. And under it, a cow or one silver tree in the wind or the rusted remains of an old tiller seems

more holy, even mythic. It's not that the Midwest lacks bustle; it's just that away from the cities, the deadlines are imposed by the earth and its seasons. I slip off my watch and feel myself beginning to slow into Harvey time.

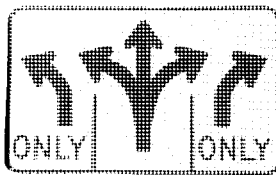
We are, in fact, retracing Harvey's route when he came west from New Jersey in the 1960s, after eluding those who themselves desired the brain. Within weeks of Einstein's death, after it was reported that the brain had been taken from the body, a group of leading brain researchers met in Washington, D.C. It was an august, winning collection of men: Doctors Webb Haymaker and Hartwig Kuhlenbeck, Clem Fox and Gerhardt von Bonin, Jerzy E. Rose and Walle Nauta. And necessarily among them, but perhaps regarded with a tinge of condescension, this slightly awkward, nervously chuckling half-doctor, this Irregular Sock, this pathologist from a small-town hospital connected only by the same name to the hallowed halls and elite eating clubs of Princeton University. When Webb Haymaker, who represented the U.S. Army, demanded the brain, Harvey simply refused to hand it over.

Heh-heh. When Haymaker got angry, Harvey didn't budge. And now who laughs last? Who's dead, each last one of them, and who's out here busting for California with the brain, inhaling Frostees and baked potatoes, Hoovering Denny's pancakes and green salads and chicken noodle soup?

"Harvey didn't know his ass from his elbow from the brain," says Larry Kruger, who at the time was a postdoctoral fellow with Jerzy Rose at Johns Hopkins. "Harvey refused to give up the brain even though he wasn't a neuropathologist, and then all bets were off. I mean, what were you going to do with it anyway? I heard he kept it in his basement and would show it to visitors. I guess some people show off a rare edition of Shakespeare. He would say, 'Hey, wanna see Einstein's brain?' The guy's a jerk. . . . He wanted fame and nothing came of it."<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile, Harvey bristles at such suggestions, regards himself as destiny's chosen one, the man who forever belongs with Einstein's brain, for better or for worse. In a way, it is a tale of obsessive love: Humbert Humbert and

<sup>2</sup> Later, when I visit Kruger in Los Angeles, among the clutter of his office, which includes an oversize book entitled *A Dendro-cyto-myeloarchitectonic Atlas of the Cat's Brain*, he's a bit more judicious. "What [Harvey] did is probably illegal," he tells me. "I guess he must be a slightly strange guy. . . . Had he been smart, he would have given it up and moved away from it, but he was grandstanding, and I presume he paid a price for it."





his Lolita. But Harvey sees it more prosaically: "Yup, I was just so fortunate to be the one to walk in the room that morning," he repeats again and again. Prior to that April morning in 1955, Harvey's life hardly augured greatness as much as stolid servitude and an abiding curiosity in science. He had met Einstein only once, to take blood from him, and, expecting his usual nurse for such a menial chore, the ever-lustful scientist saw Harvey and blurted, "You've changed your sex!" Summing up his years as a pathologist, Harvey says, "It was great to try to figure out what killed someone."

Sawed-off statements like these initially make it easy to, well, feel underwhelmed by Harvey. In part, it is simply Quaker modesty, a respectful reticence, beneath which glimmers a diamond-sharp, at times even cunning man who has survived over four decades with the brain. Harvey grew up in a Kentucky line of dyed-in-the-wool Quakers, then moved to Hartford, Connecticut, when his father got a good job with an insurance firm. Later, he attended Yale, where he contracted tuberculosis, spent over a year in a sanatorium, and when he returned, gave up his dreams of doctoring and turned to pathology because "the hours were less demanding." He lists that year of sickness and the later revocation of his medical license as among the greatest disappointments of his life. Did he pay a price for the brain? Perhaps. He was soon fired from his job at the hospital and divorced from his first wife. In the next years he drifted through jobs at state psychiatric hospitals and medical labs, another wife, and then picked up and moved west to start a general practice in Weston, Missouri, which eventually folded. Later, he lost his medical license after failing a three-day test and was forced to work the late shift as an extruder at a plastics factory in Lawrence, Kansas. All of it after the brain, perhaps because of the brain.

Nonetheless, a life isn't one paragraph long, and we might also consider Harvey a happy man, with each move maybe feeling himself to be on to the next adventure, with each wife and child perhaps feeling himself loved. Still, I try to picture him standing before Einstein's body—in that one naked moment.

Only occasionally can you glimpse through the embrasures of an otherwise perfectly polite person to see the cannons aimed out, only in a certain glint of light do the eyeteeth become fangs. We are driven by desire and fear. Only in our solitary hungers do we find ourselves capable of the most magnificently unexpected sins.

LAWRENCE, KANSAS.  
FEBRUARY 20, 1997.

In the heart of America, a psychic vortex. We cruise through a neighborhood of picket fences and leafless trees, parking before a small red house, a four-room Sears Roebuck with bookcases of paperback horror fiction and wax skulls. Here lives Harvey's former neighbor, the soon-to-be-late novelist William S. Burroughs. Shuffling across the front porch, Harvey clasps his hand, enunciating loudly, believing that the eighty-three-year-old Burroughs is equally deaf, which he isn't, then

Harvey's critics are all dead now, and who's out here busting for California with the brain, inhaling Frostees?

climbs up his arm until they are in a startled embrace, the two of them as pale as the marble of a Rodin sculpture. "REAL, REAL GOOD TO SEE YA!" Later, Harvey quaffs glasses of burgundy until he turns bright red; Burroughs, himself a bowed and hollowed cult hero and keeper of the Secret—his cheeks dimpled as if by the tip of a blade, a handgun in a holster over his kidney—drinks five Coke and vodkas after taking his daily dose of methadone.

"Have you ever tried morphine, Doctor?" he asks Harvey.

"NO. NO, I HAVEN'T," yells Harvey earnestly.

"Unbelievable. In Tangiers, there was a most magnificent, most significant drug . . . went there just to have the last of it. Last there ever was. Tell me about your addictions, Doctor."

"WELL, HEH-HEH . . ." But then Harvey keeps quiet about the brain.

Burroughs lights a joint and offers it to Harvey, who demurs, smoke swirling around his head like a wreath of steam from a Turkish bath.

"DID YOU BECOME ADDICTED BECAUSE YOU FELT PAIN?"

"I wish I could say that, Doctor, but no," says Burroughs, considering. "I became addicted because I wanted more."

Later, when the two soused men face each other for a good-bye on the tippy front porch—for no apparent reason, Burroughs now calls him Dr. Senegal—the writer lowers his voice and delivers a farewell chestnut, one that Harvey receives with a knowing nod, though it isn't clear he actually hears it.

"What keeps the old alive, Dr. Senegal," advises Burroughs, "is that we learn to be evil."

And then we are out in the night, in a downpour, Harvey trundling toward the car for

When one drives long enough with Einstein's brain in the trunk, time bends and accelerates and overlaps

what feels like a small eternity. Behind him Burroughs sways, curling and unfurling his arms like elephant trunks, then assumes a position of Buddhist prayer—pale, delirious, still.

TOWARD DODGE CITY, KANSAS.  
FEBRUARY 21, 1997.

We wake in Lawrence to a nuclear-powered snow, driving horizontally, starting the windows with ice, piling up until the Skylark looks like a soap-flake duck float in a Memorial Day parade gone terribly wrong. Everything is suddenly heaped in the frigid no-smell of winter, cars skidding, then running off roadsides into gulleys. The snow falls in thick sheaves, icicles jag the gutters. It feels like Lawrence is going back to a day, 500,000 years ago, when it was buried under hundreds of feet of ice.

We take shelter in our adjoining rooms at the Westminster Inn, are slow to rise. When we do, Harvey is bright-eyed and spunky as we find the good people of Kansas doing what they do in a blizzard: eating pancakes. The Village Inn Pancake House Restaurant is packed: college students and retirees, all flannel-shirted, how-are-ya's ricocheting everywhere, steak-and-egg specials zooming by on super-white plates. Some of the old men wear Dickies workpants and baseball caps with automotive labels; the undergrads sport caps emblazoned with team names or slogans like WHATEVER or RAGE or GOOD TO GO. Even in the no-smoking section everyone smokes—one of Harvey's pet peeves.

Our routine in restaurants follows a familiar pattern: Harvey meditates over the menu, examining it, dissecting, vectoring, and equating what his stomach really wants. I get a newspaper and usually skim through the first section before he's ready. Even as James Earl Ray is planning to go on *The Montel Williams Show* to plead for a new liver and two teenagers are indicted for the murder and dismemberment of a man in Central Park, there's an ongoing exis-

tential debate raging in Harvey's head: salty or sweet, eggs or waffles with maple syrup.

Occasionally, after a particularly deliberate order, he'll deliberately change it. Our waitress is a pathologically smiley K.U. student, well-versed in the dynamics of a breakfast rush, the coffee-craving, caffeine-induced chaos of it all. She waits as Harvey takes a second look at the menu. It could be that an actual week passes as he clears his throat a couple of times, then ponders some more, but she smiles patiently and then chirps back.

"Eggs over easy, bacon, wheat toast, home fries. More coffee?"

This town was once the setting for a Jason Robards made-for-television movie called *The Day After*. In it, the sturdy people of America's Hometown were blown to smithereens in a nuclear attack, and the few who survived wandered in a postapocalyptic stupor, in rags, bodies flowered with keloid scars. That Lawrence would become connected in the nation's psyche with nuclear devastation and that Einstein's brain, the power that unknowingly wrought the bomb, rested here for six or seven years is a small pixel of irony that seems to escape Harvey. When I ask him about it, he says, "Way-ell, I guess that's true." And starts laughing.

The truth is that Einstein himself was confounded by the idea that his theory of relativity had opened up a Pandora's box of mutually assured annihilation. In a 1935 press conference, in which he was asked about the possibility of an atomic bomb, the physicist said that the likelihood of transforming matter into energy was "something akin to shooting birds in the dark in a country where there are only a few birds." Four years later, however, the Nazis had invaded Poland, and Einstein, the celebrated pacifist, signed a letter to President Roosevelt advocating the building of an atomic weapon. When the letter was personally delivered to Roosevelt, the President immediately saw the gravity of the situation—that if the Americans had just thought to build a bomb, perhaps the Nazis, with great scientists such as Heisenberg, were well on their way to completing one—and ordered his chief of staff to begin immediate top-secret plans that led to the building of an atomic weapon. Sometime later, on a mesa in New Mexico, rose the Town That Never Was, Los Alamos, and, under the guidance of Robert Oppenheimer, came Little Boy and Fat Man, the bombs that would eventually decimate Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively.

Einstein, who was thought to be a Communist sympathizer by the FBI and an untrustworthy, outspoken pacifist by the Roosevelt Administra-

tion, was not part of Oppenheimer's team. In fact, he had nothing to do with the bomb whatsoever, though even today his name is connected to it. The letter to Roosevelt haunted him and his family and, in one case, incited a physical attack against Einstein's son, Hans Albert. Writing to Linus Pauling, Einstein called the letter the "one mistake" of his life. When the bomb was dropped on Hiroshima—on August 6, 1945—Einstein heard the news after waking from a nap at Saranac Lake. "Oy vay," he said wearily. "Alas."

When Harvey and I loop back on Interstate 70 heading west, the snow has slowed to mere ticks. In this single day, we will live through four seasons. Which can happen if one drives long enough with Einstein's brain in the trunk. Time bends and accelerates and overlaps; simultaneity rules. Heading north now to Lucas, Kansas, and a tourist spot known as the Garden of Eden, a spring wind suddenly whips across the prairie. Borne along on it, we rack up our first speeding ticket.

My strategy has been to keep the Skylark at 75 or 80, scanning the road for cops, and when feeling luxurious or bored rotten to push it to 85 max. Which is precisely what I get nailed for—85 in a 65-mile-per-hour zone. In the police car with the state trooper, I don't defend my actions, the greed of speed. "Where you boys going in such a hurry?" he asks. Glancing through the windshield of the cruiser into the back window of the car, I can just make out the silver crown of Harvey's head, and I'm overcome with the desire to confess. It's not exactly as if we have a dead body in the trunk, but it's not as if we don't either.

For some reason, though—perhaps out of self-preservation, for fear of losing the brain altogether—I simply say, "California." The trooper writes out the ticket, warns me against trying to go 85 again in his state, and sets me free. When he turns off the road in the opposite direction, I hike the speedometer up to 80 and hold it steady.

We drive south to Dodge City, the Oglala aquifer under our wheels, huge cow-uddered clouds overhead. On the radio: steer calves and heifers for sale, Red Angus bulls, yearlings with good genetics and quality carcass. Later, Bobby Darin singing "Beyond the Sea," Harvey tapping a finger on his knee, the brain sloshing in its Tupperware. In this happy moment, we could probably drive forever.

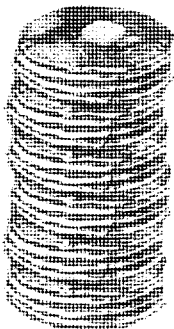
By twilight, a nocturne of autumn rain on the roof of the Skylark. We pass a pungent nitrogen plant, itself like a twisted metallic brain. Water towers gleam in the silver light like spaceships, telephone poles pass like crucifixes, and grain elevators rise like organ pipes from the plains.

Out here, too, just before Dodge City and a most delicious slab of Angus fillet, before a night at the Astro Motel and a dawn that brings a herd of 18-wheelers hurtling for Abilene, we see a rainbow and come face-to-face with Harvey's blighted ambition. "I remember more rainbows in Kansas than any other state," he says, blinking his moist eyes at the brilliant beams of blue and green, orange and yellow. "I used to try to photograph rainbows, but they never turned out."

SOMEWHERE EAST OF  
LOS ALAMOS, NEW MEXICO.  
FEBRUARY 22, 1997.

**A** confession: over the last days, at truck stops and drive-thrus, at restaurants and random road meetings, I've kept our little secret—that we've got Einstein's brain stashed in the trunk—and it's taken its psychic toll. There have been moments when I've been alone with the brain—Harvey in a rest room or visiting a friend—when I've opened up the car trunk and looked in, pinched the cold zipper between my thumb and forefinger, but then couldn't bring myself to unzip the duffel and unsheath the brain. Too much of a violation, an untenable breach in our manly society, even as Harvey covets for himself the gray matter upon which our private Skylarkian democracy is founded. In fact, we've been together now for nearly five full days, and he won't show me the brain. When I bring it up in conversation, he doesn't want to talk about it. When I ask him what parts of the brain we're traveling with exactly, he says he doesn't know and changes the subject. It is as if I am trying to find the secret center of his power. Which I am.

Leaving the Astro Motel the next morning, I unexpectedly spill my guts at the front desk, as I return our room keys to the manager. I tell him we've got the brain in the trunk, adding that we're headed to California to show it to Einstein's granddaughter. The manager, an affable, middle-age man, stops for a moment and looks at me sideways, realizes I'm serious, and tries to be hospitable. "Einstein, huh? That guy knew something," he says, folding his arms, shifting his weight. "That guy really did have a brain. But I wouldn't have wanted to live with him. You know . . . a little weirdy." He spins his finger in a cuckoo circle around his ear. "I have a nephew who is kind of a genius, but he hasn't flaked off yet. I met a guy in California who was so smart he couldn't talk. He sure could tell you how to look at the moon, but he couldn't tell you how to tie your shoes."



I'm not sure that I feel better, though I know that, in his way, he has tried to help. But does he scribble down our license-plate number as we leave?

In Liberal, Kansas, we eat at a glassed-in coffin of a restaurant called Mr. Breakfast. Old folks arrive in old, rusted Ford pickups, chain-smoking, hacking phlegm. Swab runny eggs with Wonder-bread toast, gulp mud-water coffee. Looking around—Harvey among the chorfing, anonymous throng—one discerns that this is not a bunch racing toward the millennium, that the millennium is in fact only a construction of the coastal power elite, a media-and-marketing event. Frankly, out in America, you get the feeling that America is dying. And along its highways and byways, the country seems less ready to leap into the future than it is already clinging to a sepia-toned past when America stood as the unencumbered Big Boy in a Manichaeian world of good and evil, capitalists and Commies. Even the neon oasis-pods of the interstate—the perpetual clusters of Wendy's, McDonald's, Denny's, and Burger King—are crowded with people strangely reclaiming bygone days, connecting themselves to some prior eating experience, reveling in the familiar.

We gas down into Oklahoma (through Tyrone, Hooker, Guymon, and Texhoma) and then the Texas Panhandle (edging the Rita Blanca National Grasslands, through Stratford, Dalhart, and Nara Visa)—all of it flat, with oil rigs like metronomes. I've taken to photographing Harvey by various signs and monuments along the road, and when we drift by a huge wooden cowboy with two guns blazing out across the empty plains, Harvey poses between his legs. By the New Mexico border, the wood-frame farmhouses have transmogrified into adobe. In Tucumcari, almost on cue, there is red dirt and tumbleweed. We drive through ruts and washes, over tableland and mesa. Here the hills are testicular, the ancient mounds mons-like, but all of it has a dead, washed-out sexuality, decayed from a time when this place was overrun by dinosaurs. We climb the crags that rim Pajarito Plateau to Los Alamos—the gridded, repressed hothouse that wrought Little Boy and Fat Man. In the rush of cacti, my frustration with Harvey's Humbertness, with his protective zeal when it comes to the brain, has bled into a kind of benevolent respect, an idea that Harvey actually may be a revolutionary hero. For wasn't he



the one who thumbed his nose at the great U.S. Army doctor, Webb Haymaker, upped the establishment, and legged it out West on an end around with the brain? Maybe he thought he was protecting the brain from the so-called experts, or saving the brain of one of the world's greatest pacifists from the clutches of the U.S. military. Wouldn't that make him the perfect Einsteinian hero?

After all, Einstein himself had nothing but disdain for authority, spent a life shirking it. In a letter to his friend Queen Elizabeth of Belgium that described the stuffy hierarchy of his adopted hometown, Princeton, he said it was "a quaint and ceremonious village of puny demigods on stilts."<sup>3</sup>

Perhaps this is why Harvey felt that Einstein's brain, one of the most powerful engines of thought ever on earth, deserved a committed curator, an unpartisan keeper, an eccentric brother whose sole purpose would be to unlock the biological secrets of Einstein's brain by placing it in the hands of a chosen few. Einstein himself had called his brain his laboratory, and with it had pondered the blueness of sky, the bending of starlight, the orbit of Mercury. And maybe, if Harvey knew nothing else, he knew enough to make sure that Einstein's brain didn't get sucked into the maw of the System.

This is my line of thought as we zag through saguaro and scrub brush, in the shadow of the Jemez Mountains. When I look over at Harvey, he has momentarily nodded off for the first time all trip. I've sort of nodded off, too. On a straightaway, I look at the speedometer: we're going 115 miles an hour.

LOS ALAMOS, NEW MEXICO.  
FEBRUARY 22, 1997.

**A**t Los Alamos, we visit the Bradbury Science Museum. Not unexpectedly, the first exhibit is Einstein's letter to President Roosevelt. Harvey stands before it, nodding seriously, then moves on. The museum is a three-room pavilion walled with text and grainy black-and-white photographs that detail the scientific, as well as human, challenges of

<sup>3</sup> An accomplished philanderer, he also flouted the conventional morals of his day. "Einstein loved women," Peter Plesch, whose father was a close friend, once said of the physicist, "and the commoner and sweatier and smellier they were, the better he liked them." To live so completely in his head, he held the real world close—women, sailboats, a sudden meal of ten pounds of strawberries.

building the bomb, while lionizing the patriotic men and women who contributed to the Manhattan Project. But the museum—and the culture of Los Alamos as a whole—is most glaringly defined by what its curators seem to have selectively forgotten about the bomb.

For what the Bradbury Science Museum doesn't show is an August 1945 morning in central Hiroshima, trolleys packed with people, thousands of schoolgirls doing community service in the streets. It doesn't show the B-29, the *Enola Gay*, floating above at 31,000 feet, then releasing four tons of metal through the air, Little Boy. It doesn't show the side of the bomb with its autographs and obscene messages (one starts, "Greetings to the Emperor . . .") and emblazoned with the crude naked likeness of Rita Hayworth.

What the museum forgets to show is the forty-three seconds of utter silence, the time it takes Little Boy to drop on the city, and then perhaps the loudest second of the twentieth century, a blast that equals 12,500 tons of TNT. It doesn't show ground zero, at Aioi Bridge, the birds incinerating in the air, people flaming like candles, others swelling like bronze Buddhas. And this is just the beginning.

It doesn't show the firestorm that soon pulverizes the city, the atomic winds that turn into a tornado in the north part of town. The nine of ten bodies dead within a mile of the blast, the 200,000 people who will finally be counted dead, and the black, sticky rain, carrying radioactive fallout, that beats relentlessly down on the survivors. It doesn't show the naked man, skin hanging from his body like a kimono, with his eyeball in his hand. It doesn't show the 70,000 rubble buildings and the people trapped beneath them. Afterward, it doesn't show Nagasaki and the 140,000 more Japanese who will die in like fashion. One can spend hours in the museum—as Harvey does, finally exiting, exhilarated, buzzed about the wonders of technology—but this devastation remains invisible.

We spend the night at the ranch of some friends of mine near Cerrillos—a thirtyish couple, Scott and Clare. We share a terrific meal, and Harvey is particularly animated, fired on red wine, talking at length about the brain, about how he came by it and how, after fixing it with formaldehyde (his one mistake was injecting the brain with warm formaldehyde instead of cold formaldehyde, thus hastening its denaturation), he photographed the brain. "It's a real treasure," he says. "I've gotten to meet many famous people, many who knew Einstein."

Later, I leave the room to make a phone call, and when I return Harvey and Clare are alone at the table, flushed with excitement, absolutely twittering about the brain. They lower their voices when I come in, raise them when I leave again. Later, I feel compelled to ask Clare some questions: What is Harvey's magic? Does the brain turn her on? Does she feel hypnotized? "He's a very, very interesting man," she says. "And for some men chivalry is not dead. Did you see him pull out my chair for me before dinner?"

Before bed, we take a hot tub. I'm confident that Harvey will sit this one out, but, no sir, he doesn't. Shambles out in a borrowed bathrobe

Out here in America, one sees that the millennium is only a construction of the coastal power elite, a media event

and swim trunks, dips a toe in the boiling water. It's a pretty chilly night, stars glazed in the sky like cold coins on black ice, and it's hard not to worry about the physiological ramifications of dropping an eighty-four-year-old body into 104-degree water. But Harvey just throws himself in like a heavy stone. "OH, OH, HEH-HEH. WOW, THAT'S HOT. WOW, WOW, WOW!!!" We simmer for a while, and, chitchatting over the bubbler, it slips out that, in my earlier absence, Harvey opened the duffel for my friends, unpeeled the Tupperware top, fingered chunks of the brain, expansively answered questions. This hits me hard. In fact, I take it as a personal injury. I want to say something about how unfair it is that I would have driven 2,000 miles so far and not been allowed to examine the brain, while my friends, doing nothing but being their friendly selves, got to see the brain instantly. But when I look over at Harvey, he has his eyes closed, in a wonderful trance, his pale body streaming out from him underwater. I wait for as long as I can take it really, expecting to outlast him, as a kind of revenge. But damn if he doesn't seem to gain strength. Finally, grudgingly, I lift myself from the tub, from its magic eternal spring, and splosh inside, leaving him in the dark waters, keening softly with pleasure—ahhh, play-sure—alone beneath the cosmos.

NEAR KINGMAN, ARIZONA.  
FEBRUARY 23, 1997.

We reach one of those strange moments in the course of every road trip, exhaustion spilling into a kind of ecstasy,



towns darkly flashing like trout in a river. All things—the strains of “Wild Horses” on the radio, the galactic motion of driving, the purple night—seem like one perfect, unalloyed thing, haunted through. Like Charles Lind-

In a Las Vegas casino, I ask a dealer about Einstein. “Haven’t seen him in here tonight,” he says. “Sorry, pal.”

bergh, who believed that there were spirits riding with him over the Atlantic Ocean, we feel the presence of ghosts. Approaching the Hoover Dam, I stupidly pass a VW Bug and by the hairbreadth grace of God just barely avoid a head-on collision with a lumbering truck. Its lights, broken out like jewels on the grill, spell MARIANNE, the name of my mother.

LAS VEGAS, NEVADA.  
FEBRUARY 23, 1997.

The city is a coronation of shimmering brightnesses, like so much shattered glass thrown by the fistful over a sandy floor, a high-desert Hong Kong of possibility. “Sunday midnight is our busiest time of the week,” says the woman who checks us in to the Excalibur Hotel/Casino. “There’s no freakin’ explaining it.” We’ve driven to Las Vegas in a dopamine infusion of orange light, nerved on Coca-Cola, gorged on pizza, the Skylark smelling vaguely stale. The brain sloshing in the padded cranium of the trunk. On I-40 in Arizona, we passed a Navajo woman in a Ford pickup listening to the same radio station as we were, pounding out a drumbeat on her steering wheel. Later, an embalmed moon, Hale-Bopp like a pale teardrop. When Einstein once visited the Hopi Indians at the Grand Canyon, they honored him with an Indian name, the Great Relative, and presented him with a headdress.

And now, in the casino at midnight, we stand amid ballyhooing hordes of pale-skinned Easterners and leather-skinned Westerners, bikers and accountants, cowboy-hatted and big-haired and bald as cue balls, imperial on free drinks, soaring on the oxygen-enriched air pumping into the casino to keep people awake, everyone taking a stab at Instamatic riches. Harvey seems overwhelmed, his sensibilities so jangled that he schlepps straight up to one of our cheesy eighteenth-floor rooms—rooms that are tricked out like a cardboard-castle set for a

high school production of *Camelot*. He refuses help with his luggage, has the brain slung over his shoulder in the duffel, tosses it in the closet.

Wide awake, I go back downstairs and roam all night, remembering that Einstein put little faith in games of chance. About quantum mechanics, a theory that allowed for unpredictable outcomes, he once said that God does not play dice with the universe. Yet Las Vegas is all about dice. And all about a perverse kind of hope too. One man at a five-dollar blackjack table, a short, tightly bundled guy who smells of lime after-shave, is abstractly addressing the male dealer in gambler clichés and porn-movie dialogue. “Oh yeah, baby! . . . Yeah, baby! . . . Give it to me! . . . Hit me! . . . Oh yeah! . . . Hold right there! . . . Feels good!”

Soon, he is sitting alone. As are others like him. These are men so sunk down inside themselves that they don’t give a prostitute working the place a second look when she cozies up to them. Personally, I’m feeling pretty good, lose some quick money at the roulette table, and then, feeling a little less good, regroup in the Minstrel’s Lounge. Maybe I’ve been alone with Harvey too long, probably I need friends, but I find myself asking an older couple about Einstein. The man looks at me suspiciously. “I don’t know anything about him really, and I don’t care one way or the other. I’m just trying to have fun,” he says in a Yankee accent.

“I don’t know anything either,” chimes his wife cheerfully. “Just that he was a genius or something.”

After the hot-tub revelation, I no longer feel compelled to keep our secret. I am traveling with the man who owns Einstein’s brain, I say, and we are going to California to show it to Einstein’s granddaughter. The man folds his arms and looks at me straight on. “Whatever makes you happy,” he says.

At an empty blackjack table, I ask a dealer, a Korean guy with a mustache, about Einstein. “I don’t know anything about him,” he says, “but that man over there should be able to help you.” He points to his manager, a white guy with a mustache. He barely lets me finish before responding. “Haven’t seen him in here tonight. Sorry, pal.”

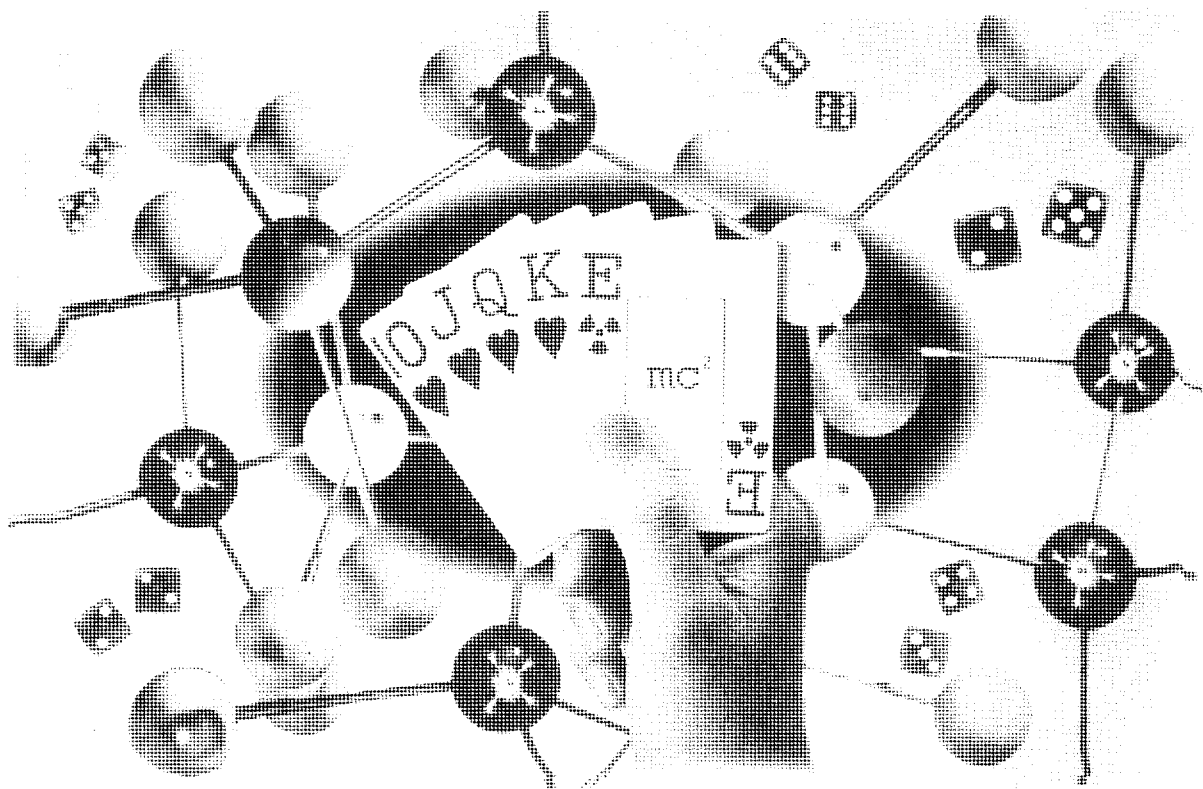
I try again, with the friendliest-looking man I can find. He’s middle-age and round-bellied, like his group of friends, all wearing Bucky Badger sweatshirts. I smile at them, ask their pardon, phrase my question more carefully this time.

Mr. Badger furrows his brow. “Why do you want to know?” he demands. “Has anyone ever told you about  $E=mc^2$ ? Has anyone in this casino bothered to tell you that?”

I explain that in fact no one has, that I myself am traveling with Einstein's brain. At the mention of the brain, he doesn't miss a beat, becomes impatient. "Let's bury the damn brain and be done with it," he says, as if he's been in on the debate since day one.

I try one last time, a cocktail waitress with a tornado of blond hair. She stands in a short black-and-gold dress, looking like someone's risqué aunt in age denial at a wedding. When I ask her if she happens to know what Albert Einstein is famous for, her jaw drops. "You're kidding?" she asks. "You must be kidding me. Is

We pause at a bank of slot machines. A group of grandmothers from Iowa give Harvey a quick once-over, then go back to their spinning lemons and limes and sevens. I pull a couple of coins from my pocket. "For good luck," I tell him. Until now, Harvey hasn't been keen on gambling, but for my sake he slides a quarter in the slot machine and reluctantly pulls the lever. In a way, however, Harvey has been a high-stakes gambler all along, having risked everything on one bet many, many years ago. And even though his slot windows display only unmatched fruit, he leaves the casino with his



there a hidden camera around here? You're the fifth guy to ask me that tonight, and frankly I'm offended." Her voice is pinched with anger. "You know what? I do know who he is..." She and I have known each other less than twenty seconds, and yet it feels as if we've lived a lifetime of emotions. "He invented the atom bomb, and I happen to think he's terrible."

In the morning, Harvey and I go for breakfast. There are huge lines trailing out of the Roundtable Buffet and Sherwood Forest Café, and so we watch a juggler dressed in green tights work the crowd—"Oh boy, whatta juggler!" says Harvey. Later, we gather our bags and head through the casino for the castle door. As usual, Harvey refuses help with his luggage, has the brain slung over his shoulder.

own jackpot safely stashed in the gray duffel, his step oddly light as he slips over the Excalibur's rich purple carpet and out into the blinding sunlight and sandpapery air.

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA.  
FEBRUARY 24, 1997.

Down through the brown, low-slung, burned-out flats of the Mojave, passing the Soda and Cady Mountains, along Ivanpah and Silver Lakes, powdered white and dinosaur-bone dry, through the broken-winged, blue-shadowed towns of Baker and Yermo and Barstow, by the world's largest thermometer (electronically measuring temperatures to 140 degrees), then up over Cajon Summit—all of it



like a grim, parched-mouth, sun-bleached day-after-Las-Vegas hangover until suddenly Los Angeles explodes in a flash of lush green palm trees and red taillights at rush hour, the California sky tilting ultraviolet over the Pacific. Harvey reads from the map the whole way, literally reads to me like it's the story of Job. We

NO fewer than five U.S. law firms and as many abroad police the licensing and representation of Einstein, the Concept

pass a Chanel-eared Asian woman, driving a red BMW with a vanity plate that reads 2SUCESS. It seems every car here gleams with its own declaration of erotic or financial prowess: 8MILL; ORGAZ; MONEY. On the radio, we get an action-news update about a disgruntled circus clown who's stolen a car, busting for freedom on I-110. And, packed in, moving five abreast, having apparently passed our desirable exit some miles ago, we're completely lost for the first time all trip.

When we finally escape the highway, we're somewhere in West Hollywood, though we are looking for Santa Monica and the ocean. At a gas station, I approach a stocky, balding guy in short sleeves and a tie. He works for Kodak as a field engineer. He gives me directions and then asks where I'm from. Once he's registered our vitals, the expression on his face looks like a billboard for the country of the dumbfounded. "No fuck, you got Einstein's brain right over there?" he says. "No fucking way. Right in that trunk? The car with the little old man? Are you making a fucking movie of this? Holy fuck." He pulls out a business card with a picture of himself on it, sporting a full head of half-synthetic hair. "That was in my Hair Club days," he says, without hesitation. "You gotta put me in this fucking article. I'm the guy who gave you directions to the ocean. Einstein's fucking brain! What the fuck next? Aliens, right?"

About five blocks down, we realize that Hair Club has given us bum directions. We drift to the curb and ask help from the first person who appears on the other side of our rolled-down window: a cross-dresser in body-hugging, black leather with thin, shaven legs that seem six feet high and a tiara of some sort in his hair. He's an attractive woman and knows it and acts like he's been expecting us, bends into the window seductively, and gives precise directions, then says, "Hurry now, y'all don't want to miss that romantic sunset over the Pacific."

After a half block, Harvey glances once over his shoulder. "Well, we sure asked the right person," he says, with no irony intended. We drive the brain down Sunset and Wilshire, Rodeo and Hollywood, and finally hole up in Santa Monica.

We've come to L.A. so that Harvey can meet one of the doctors to whom he once sent slices of Einstein's brain for research. Yet Harvey can't seem to reach him—can't recall his name when I ask. Meanwhile, I've made plans to meet Roger Richman, the president of his own celebrity-licensing agency and the man who represents the beneficiaries of the estate of Albert Einstein, which it-

self is presided over by Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Richman polices trademark infringements, hawks trade shows for Einstein contraband, and decides just how the image of the physicist will be used in advertisements and on merchandise around the world. When I first called Richman from Kansas and told him that I was heading his way with Harvey and the brain, he was curt. "The brain is at the Smithsonian," he said. "And I'd rather not have you bring that man along."

And although the brain has never been near the Smithsonian, actually, and is authentically still in our trunk, I'm forced to make up some polite excuse when I leave Harvey—something about seeing a friend. I drop him at the beach, where he finds a senior center and spends the day writing postcards, making pals, playing cards. Then I guiltily head over to Richman's Beverly Hills office.

Richman, fifty-three, is a big, powerful man with big, powerful ideas and a full head of thickly parted, natural hair. He wears an Izod-type green short-sleeve shirt. He greets me by saying, "You got the brain with you?" And then he starts laughing.

He ushers me into his office, a spacious, cluttered room strewn with unlicensed celebrity products, and before we begin our interview he puts a tape recorder next to mine, turns it on, and, in this most self-referential of cities, announces that he is taping for the autobiography he intends to write someday. "I would like to say that I'm a marketing genius," he announces.

Richman proceeds to tell me the illustrious history of Richman. How, eighteen years ago, the son of Bela Lugosi sued Universal Studios for a percentage of profits made from the image of his father as Dracula. And although he lost the lawsuit, the judgment contained one paragraph stating that whereas the studio owned the rights to Dracula and the family did not

have a right to control Lugosi's image, no one else had the right to appropriate it either. With that one paragraph, Richman set off for swap meets, stalking the stalls, picking up all kinds of items that illegally appropriated the images of dead stars. Then he went after the infringers on behalf of the families.

In 1983, he drove to Sacramento with the sons of John Wayne and Harpo Marx and the grandson of W. C. Fields, and together they argued for a celebrity-rights act, which legally assured that no one may use the name, voice, or picture of a deceased personality without permission from the family. Then the group made the same argument in New York State, where they were called "a group of tribal headhunters" by a lawyer representing Time Inc. "It was the proudest moment of my life," Richman says.

What he's become in these past two decades is the Upholder of Dead Celebrity, the Protector of the After-Image. Among the estates he has recently serviced are those of W. C. Fields, Louis Armstrong, Jimmy Durante, Sigmund Freud, Mae West, and the Wright brothers, as well as a personal favorite of mine, Basil Rathbone. It's easier to have dead clients, Richman confides, because they don't cancel a million-dollar dress deal when they get a better offer for a clothing line of their own at Kmart.

Of all his clients, Einstein is the biggest. Richman employs five law firms domestically and as many abroad to police him, paying up to \$40,000 a month for their services. He shows me a stack of papers, dictionary thick. "All of these are Albert Einstein infringements," he declares proudly. He shows me a famous photograph of Einstein sticking his tongue out. "We never allow this picture to be used," he says fussily. "You know people come back to me and say, 'Who are you to say that we can't use this when he stuck his tongue out and he knew photographers were there?' and I say, 'Hey, I'm running a public trust; it's incumbent upon me to protect these people.'"

Richman won't reveal how much money he and Hebrew University make from Einstein, but he admits it's more than from any other client. When I ask if the figure is in the millions, he simply says, "I wouldn't say *millions*." I remind him that Einstein never allowed his name or image to serve as a product endorsement during his life. "Money only appeals to selfishness and irresistibly invites abuse," the physicist said. "Can anyone imagine Moses, Jesus, or Gandhi with the moneybags of Carnegie?" So wouldn't he object to himself selling Nikon cameras now? Richman dismisses this idea out of hand and assures me that all the profits go to scholarships at Hebrew University.

Then, to show me just how bleak a world without Roger Richman can be, he leads me to a large cardboard box across the room. It's full of black-market desecrations—"horrible, horrible stuff," Richman says. A greeting card with Mae West urinating through an hourglass, one of Marilyn Monroe snorting cocaine. There's John Wayne toilet paper ("It's rough!—It's tough! And it doesn't take crap off anyone!") and a vial of Elvis's sweat ("Now you can let his perspiration be an inspiration") and a box of cotton balls emblazoned with the words BRANDO'S BALLS. But the *pièce de résistance*, the *succès de scandale*, is wrapped in paper with rubber bands around it. "I always keep him in his house," says Richman. "I never take him out."

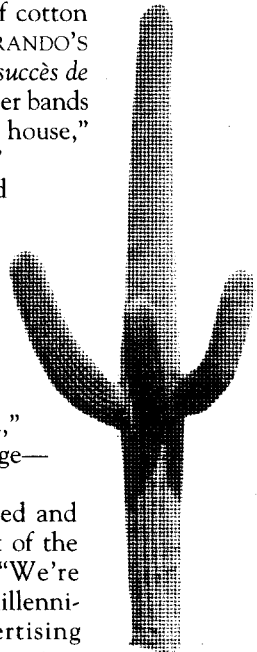
Richman places it in my hands, and I unwrap it slowly to find eight inches of hard rubber topped by the smiley-faced head of President Ronald Reagan. It was this very dildo that Richman waved on the floor of the California statehouse to make his point—"I HAVE HERE IN MY HANDS A SEXUAL DEVICE," he bellowed to the shocked assemblage—and that pleases him.

Once the Gipper has been wrapped and replaced in the box, we tour the rest of the office. And Richman gallops on: "We're planning a major celebration of the millennium. We're doing mailings to advertising agencies reminding them that it's coming, that we represent all these people, that they should be celebrating this past century."

In order to put his own client list in perspective, Richman recently called the Screen Actors Guild and found that about 18,000 actors have died in this century. "How many are marketable today?" asks Richman, throwing his arms open in apparent disbelief. "Twenty! These are the most talented people that ever lived... but most people are here and gone forever. You know, you have your fifteen minutes of fame and that's it."

Finally I ask Richman why our country is overly obsessed with celebrity today, why celebrity, as much as a Vegas jackpot, has become the Jell-O mold of the American dream. He begins by quoting Thoreau: "The mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation."

"They'll never be an Elizabeth Taylor," he says. "Their hopes are their dreams and their dreams are on TV and their dreams are watching these beautiful chests walking into the Academy Awards in gorgeous gowns and they live for that. That's why Communism failed. [It] never gave people any hope. That's why democracy has been so successful. The American dream, it's based on hope... as long as you have money, you go right to the top."



He continues. "When I travel into the heartland of America—I go backpacking a lot—and talk about what I'm doing, oh, these people, they won't let me shut up. They just ask question after question after question. I'm like a hero to them. Around here, no one cares. Dead stars, oh, forget it. You're an agent for the dead, you're a joke, c'mon."

Harvey, snorkeling through his suitcase in our hotel room, has left the brain on top of the television

But Richman is convinced that he's having the last laugh, in no small part thanks to Einstein, who's gone global. In Japan, Einstein's image is used in a commercial for a video game called 3DO; in Hungary, his mug is plastered on billboards for a local telephone company; in South Africa, he advertises insurance. "He's the most widely recognized human being that ever lived," declares Richman. "In China"—where Richman has recently brokered a deal for Einstein T-shirts—"they're limited to one child per family, and every single parent calls their one child 'my little Einstein.'" He smiles at the thought.

"China is a cultural wasteland," he says emphatically. "They've never heard of John Wayne. They've never heard of Steve McQueen. They've never seen any of their movies. But Einstein, they know."

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA.  
FEBRUARY 26, 1997.

Harvey is to give a talk on Einstein's brain in San Jose. Before we left Princeton, he rooted through the letters he keeps in a shoe box—letters from an oddball collection of fans and groupies, critics and psychos, everywhere from Denmark to New Zealand, everyone from angry rabbis demanding the brain for burial to elegiacal schoolkids cutely waxing juvenile about trying to figure out relativity—and called a woman named Sarah Gonzalez, someone he doesn't know but who had written to him a few years ago randomly asking for a piece of the brain. When she heard from Harvey, she felt that the Lord God had intervened on her behalf. Ever since his call, she has been busy informing San Jose of our arrival, contacting the mayor and the local media, trying to set up a dinner party for leading lights in the community, and arrang-

ing for Harvey and Einstein's brain to visit with students at Independence High School, one of the biggest in the country.

Gonzalez has reserved us rooms at the Biltmore Hotel, but when we arrive around 2:00 A.M., out on some industrial edge of San Jose, there is only one available room left, with a single bed. "Why; I'm sure it's a big one," says Harvey with a nervous chuckle.

I ask for a cot. And by the time I roll it into the room, the gray duffel is up on the television with the weather on and Harvey is snorkeling through his suitcase, each item of his clothing—his silk pajamas, a 49ers sweatshirt, his slippers, and a dress shirt—wrapped in cellophane. He has brought two suits for tomorrow, neatly folded like big bat wings in his case, a black winter worsted wool and a baby-blue leisure-type suit that puts me in mind of a carnival barker or a midwestern aluminum-siding salesman.

I collapse on the cot, and no sooner do I hit the pillow than I'm wide awake. But I keep my head buried as Harvey putters about the room. I can hear him running water in the sink, clearing his throat, ironing. I can hear him rustling through his cellophane-wrapped clothes, then perusing his various articles on Einstein, preparing for his lecture. I can hear something that sounds like an electric toothbrush. Before the sun rises, he finally beds down, and his breathing slows and then grows deeper like a river running into pools. Instead of snoring, there's a sweet lowing in his theta-gasps for air, and finally it puts me to sleep too. When I wake to the crunching of Harvey eating caramel corn, it's 8:00 A.M., and he's half-dressed, having opted for the black suit with black suspenders and a gray turtleneck, though the weather is verging on summer. Sarah Gonzalez calls and announces that she's in the lobby, nearly an hour early. While Harvey primps, I go to meet her. She's the only person at the bar, busily doing something with her hands. When I come closer, I realize that she is pressing on a set of acrylic fingernails. For a moment, she doesn't notice that I'm standing there, and we both admire her handiwork. When she looks up, she seems surprised. "Oh," she says, extends an automatic hand with half new nails and half bitten ones, and peeks around me for Harvey and the brain.

Sarah Gonzalez is a short, pretty, quick-moving Filipino woman with black-and-gold sunglasses and an ostentatious emerald car. In her mood and mannerisms she reminds me of a brushfire in a high wind. She personifies the immigrant's dream. A former executive secretary,

she is now the president of her own company, Pacific Connections, which markets biomass energy conversion—or, as she puts it, “turning cornstalks to megawatts.” Next week, she tells me, she will be in Manila meeting with the Filipino president, Fidel V. Ramos, in hopes of bringing the gift of energy—more lights and televisions—to her country of birth.

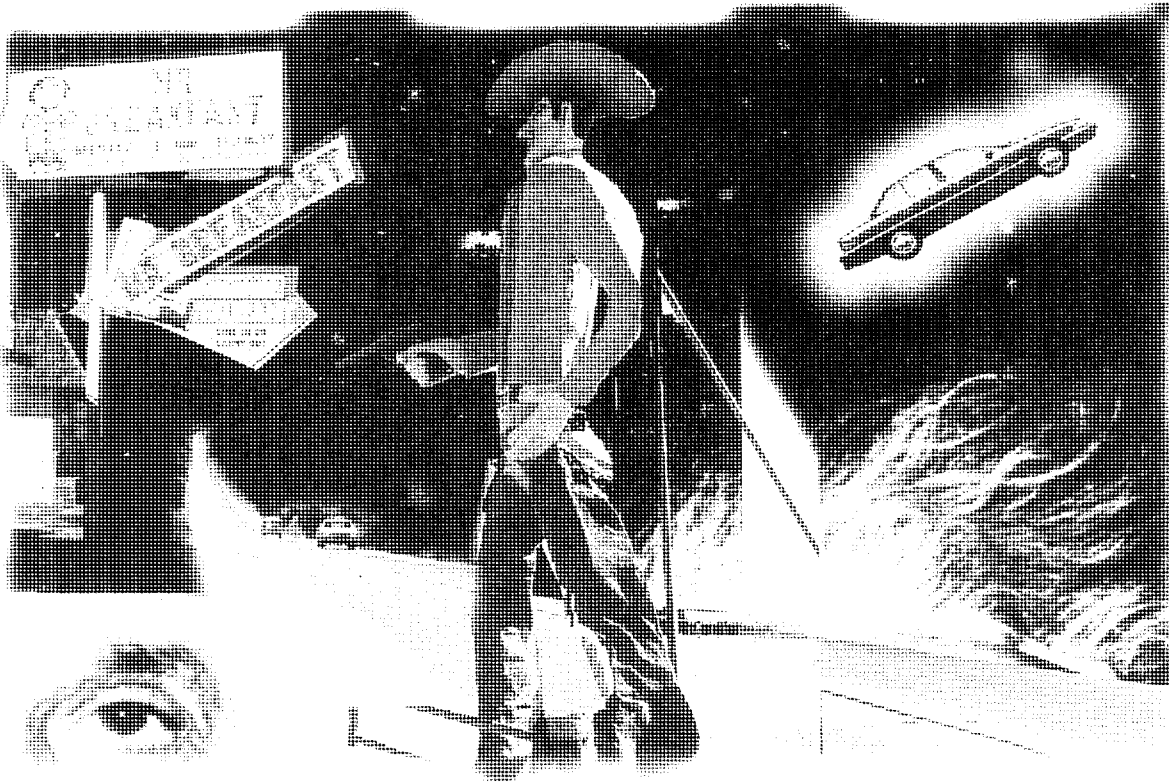
When Harvey comes chugging out, she blanches, then starts forward. “Dr. Harvey, I presume,” says Gonzalez, clucking and bowing her head, “I can’t believe there is someone living and breathing who was so close to Einstein.” Harvey has removed the brain from the gray duffel and now holds the Tupperware con-

his own suit, by comparison, dull and aged; there’s a tiny hole in one knee of his heavy suit pants. He clears his throat repeatedly and starts to chuckle. “Do you know a fella named Burroughs, William Burroughs?” She’s never heard of him. Harvey tries again.

“Where does Gates live?”

“Bill Gates, Dr. Harvey? That would be Seattle, I think. Isn’t that right, Mike? Seattle, Mike?”

“I thought that fella lived right here in Silicon Valley,” says Harvey, hawkeyeing the streets suspiciously. A little later on, Harvey’s more at ease, sets himself chuckling again. “Those are the funniest looking trees,” he says.



tainer in his hand, though the plastic is clouded enough that you can really only see urine-colored liquid inside. Suddenly, it feels as if we’re not fully clothed. Even as Harvey palms the brain in the lobby, I feel a need to hide it. Gonzalez herself doesn’t notice and rushes us into her Mercury Grand Marquis. She’s a woman who enjoys the liberal use of first names. “Mike, what do you think of this scandal, Mike?” she asks. “This—how do you say?—campaign-contract scandal, Mike?” She is perhaps the most persistently friendly person I’ve ever met.

Harvey sits in the front bucket seat, sunk down in the fine Italian leather, the fabric of

“They are palm trees, Dr. Harvey,” says Gonzalez.

We are given a brief tour of “old San Jose”—a collection of Day-Glo houses that look brand new—then stop at Gonzalez’s house, a comfortable though tightly packed bungalow on a cul-de-sac where she lives with her husband and five children, two of them teenagers. A full drum kit is set up in the living room. One gets the impression that when this house is full there’s probably nothing here but love and a hell of a racket. Meeting her husband, I retract her title and claim him as the friendliest person I’ve ever met. “Oh, Dr. Harvey, what does it feel like to be you?” he asks. He serves us cook-

ies and milk. Finally, after photographs have been taken on the front lawn, we start to leave. Harvey reaches down and lifts a pinecone from the perfect, chemical-fed turf. He holds it up, admiring its symmetry, and for reasons of his own pockets it.

Then we drive to Independence High, where we are picked up by a golf cart at the front entrance and whisked a half mile through campus. Harvey delivers his lecture in a dim, egg-cavern room flooded with students and the smell of bubble gum. Some wear baggy Starter sweats or jeans pulled low off their hips or unlaced high-tops; some have pierced noses or tongues or eyebrows. Some are white or Asian or Latino or African American. A number of boys have shaved the sides of their head and wear mop-tops or Egyptian pharaoh dos; a number of the girls have dyed hair, all colors of the rainbow.

The teachers shush everyone, but the hormonal thrum here defies complete silence, and there's a low-level sputter of laughter like a car chuffing even after the ignition's been turned off. And then suddenly Sarah Gonzalez is introducing Harvey, the gold of her glasses flashing success, and Harvey, shaped like a black candy cane, is stumping to the podium, looking every bit the retired undertaker. He clears his throat and chuckles and then clears his throat again. He runs his hands up and down the side of the podium and focuses on a spot at the back of the room, rheumy-eyed,

squinting. These are the thirteen-, fourteen-, and fifteen-year-olds of America—hundreds of clear eyes reflecting back at him, brains obsessed with Silverchair, Tupac, Blossom, and Brandy—and Harvey seems at a loss, begins a droning, discombobulated, start-and-stop remembrance of Albert Einstein almost as if he's talking to himself.

"The Great Scientist would eventually come up with the equation  $E=mc^2$ , and how he did that I'll never know, heh-heh . . .

"He was a friendly person. Real easy to talk to, you know. Wore flannels and tennis shoes a lot . . .

"I was just real lucky to be at the right place at the right time . . ."

Einstein's animated face is flashed on a screen, Harvey's impassive one beneath it. When Harvey senses he's losing his audience, he tells them about the autopsy, about the Great Scientist lying on the table and how his brain was removed. "He liked the fatty foods, you know," says Harvey. "That's what he died

of." He starts slowly for the Tupperware and the entire audience lean forward in their seats, crane their necks, hold their collective breath. For the first time, there is complete silence.

He pops the lid and unabashedly fishes around for some of the brain, then holds up a chunk of it. It's almost like a dream—illogically logical, shockingly normal. My first real glimpse of the Tupperware brain and it is with three hundred other strangers. One girl squeals, and general chaotic murmurings fill the room. Kids come to their feet in waves of "ohhhhs" and "ahhhs." The smell of formaldehyde wafts thickly over them, a scent of the ages, and drives them back on their heels.

Harvey natters on, but no one is really listening now, just gasping at these blobs of brain. "I took the meninges off. . . . This is a little bit of the cortex. . . . He had more glial cells than the rest of us—those are the cells that nourish the neurons . . ."

They are transfixed by the liver-colored slices as if it were all a macabre Halloween joke. They are repulsed and captivated by the man whose fingers are wet with brain. Sarah Gonzalez stands up, slightly disheveled, flushed in the face. "Children, questions! Ask Dr. Harvey your questions!"

One swaggering boy in the back of the room raises his hand, seemingly offended: "Yeah, but like, WHAT'S THE POINT?"

Harvey doesn't hear, puts his hand behind his ear to signal that he doesn't hear, and a teacher sitting nearby translates: "He wants to know what the point is," says the teacher politely.

Harvey hesitates for a second, then almost seems angry. "To see the difference between your brain and a genius's," he shoots back.

The crowd titters. A girl throws a high five at her best friend. "Dang, girl."

The old man is cool!

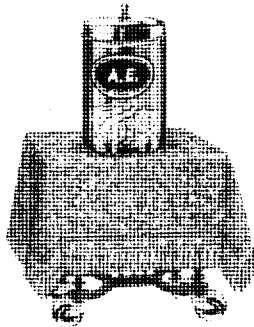
Another boy in the back stands. "I was told, like, Einstein didn't want people to take his brain."

Again the teacher translates, and as soon as Harvey processes the question he bristles. "Where are you getting your information?" he says.

"My world-government teacher," the boy says.

Harvey ponders this, then responds, as if it's answer enough, "In Germany, it's very common to do an autopsy and take the brain out."

When the period ends, the students storm Harvey and the brain. They want to know how long he's had it (forty-two years). If he plans to clone it ("Way-ell, under the right conditions someday, I suppose it might be done"). Whether an evil dictator such as



Qaddafi might try to get his hands on it ("Heh-heh-heh"). I try to get close, but the crowd is too thick, the crush to see the brain too great, and so I stand on the edges with Gonzalez. Even as Harvey gambols outside later, a few students come up and a boy says, "Yo, man, where you going next? Can we follow?" Harvey flushes with triumph, stammers that he doesn't really know where he's going now, as Sarah Gonzalez leads him to a seat in a waiting golf cart.

When we pull away, I wonder what we must look like to the students waving good-bye. Harvey rides shotgun as always, with the Tupperware brain on his lap—a man beyond their own grandfathers, someone from a different dimension in space and time really, lit down here for a weird moment at Independence High, then away again, vanishing on a golf cart down the cement superstring sidewalks of their world.

BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA.  
FEBRUARY 27, 1997.

**W**e've reached the end of the road. Evelyn Einstein greets us at the door to her bay-side apartment complex in a black jumper, wearing two Star Trek pins and globe earrings. Nearly a head taller than Harvey, she is a big-boned fifty-six-year-old, though looks younger, with a short bob of brown hair. Due to a series of illnesses over the last few years, she walks in small steps and breathes heavily after the slightest exertion. She gives off an aura of enormous sadness, though her powers of humor and forgiveness seem to run equally as deep. Despite the distress that Harvey's removal of the brain caused her father—Hans Albert—and the rest of the family, she has invited him to her house.

Evelyn is known to be the adopted daughter of Hans Albert, though the circumstance of her lineage is a bit clouded. At least one doctor, Charles Boyd, tried but failed to match the DNA of Albert's brain matter and Evelyn's skin because of suggestions that Evelyn might actually be Albert's daughter. And although Albert's DNA was too denatured to decipher, the attempt led to something of a row. Even as Evelyn characterizes Boyd's theory as "unfortunate and unfounded," however, her resemblance to Einstein, the mirthful play of light in her heavy-lidded eyes and the Picasso shape of her face, is uncanny. Evelyn herself ruefully says, "If you believe in what Albert said about time, then I'm really his grandmother anyway."

From her light-filled living room, you can see the skyline of San Francisco, Angel Island rising from the sun-flecked blue bay; Mt. Tamalpais lurking in the distance. Among artifacts and antique clocks, Evelyn offers us seats.

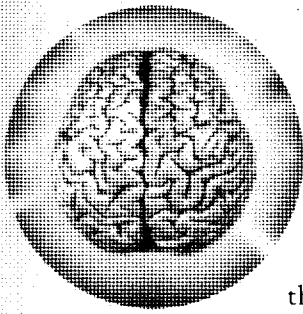
The high school students insist on knowing if Harvey plans to clone the brain. "Heh-heh-heh," he says

We have come a long way and yet it feels like Harvey would like to be anywhere else but here. Evelyn sits down. I fall onto the plush couch. Harvey remains standing.

Evelyn tells us about what it was like to grow up as an Einstein, how her life became an exercise in navigating the jagged shoals of her family. Her father had inherited a degree of his own father's cold distance—she refers to her grandfather only as Albert or Albie—and Evelyn found herself shipped off to school in Switzerland. She came back to Berkeley for college, had a bad marriage, lived for a year on the streets, then later worked as a cop in Berkeley and afterward with cult members and their families. She has very few remembrances of her grandfather. Most of the letters he'd once sent her were stolen.

As she says this, Harvey still stands frozen in the middle of the room, speechless. Evelyn does what she can to politely ignore him, asks me innocuous questions about the trip, waiting for him to sit, too. But he doesn't. He just stands there, his arms limply at his side. He breathes more quickly. Somewhere in his head, virulent, radioactive cells of what? guilt? proliferate and mushroom. He stands awkwardly in the middle of the room and just won't sit, can't sit, holds the brain in its Tupperware, trembling in his left hand. Having arrived here, does he now have second thoughts? Could he ever have imagined, those forty-two years ago, when he cut the brain from Einstein's head, that he would now be standing here before Evelyn Einstein with it in his hands?

The fourth time that Evelyn offers him a seat he takes it. He laughs nervously, then clears his throat. "Real good," he says. Evelyn is talking about cults, how frightening they are and how what's most frightening about cults is that it's you and I who end up getting sucked in, how easy mind control really is. "All my friends say I should start one," she says, joking. "I could channel Albert. I mean, when Linda Evans channels Ramtha she talks like Yul Brynner.



It's just hysterical. If this broad can channel a 30,000-year-old guy, I can channel Albert."

Having summoned his courage, Harvey abruptly pulls out a sheaf of photographs and slides with cresyl violet stains of axons and glial cells, then plunks the Tupperware on the table. "Ah, brain time," says Evelyn, and Harvey just begins talking as if he's talking to the youngsters at Independence High School again. "This is a picture of the brain from different aspects, olfactory nerve, and so forth." He pulls out a photo of Einstein. "I like to show this picture because it shows him as a younger man, you know, when he first came over to be an American. So many of the photos you see of him are when he was an older man."

"I have a lot when he was young," says Evelyn.

"You do? I'll trade you some," says Harvey.

"Did you autopsy the whole body?"

"The whole body."

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After all these miles, all these days on the road with Harvey, at last I am alone with the brain!

"What was that like?"

Harvey pauses a moment, clears his throat. "Why, it made me feel humble and insignificant."

"Did he have a gall bladder? Or had they taken it out?"

"I think he still had a gall bladder. Heh-heh. Yeah, his diet was his nemesis, you know, because he lived before we knew what cholesterol did to the blood, so he probably walked around with high blood cholesterol, much of it being deposited in his blood vessels. That aorta, that was just full of cholesterol plaque."

Evelyn nods. "Yeah . . . well, of course, the European diet . . . my father and I would fight over fat. When we got a ham, we would cut off the fat and fry it, then fight over it. Bitterly." Evelyn smiles.

"And all that good goose grease," chimes in Harvey.

"Oh yeah. Well, in those days goose . . . well, goose is actually a lot safer than beef, a lot less cholesterol."

"Oh yeah? I didn't know that."

"It's a family that just adored fat," she says.

"I used to eat in a little inn up in Metuchen, New Jersey, where your grandfather would

spend weekends, and they had these cheeses, you know, full-fat cheeses and nice wines."

"I don't know if he was into wines," says Evelyn.

"I never saw him drink it myself," says Harvey, forgetting, then perhaps remembering, that he met Einstein only once. "Well, the innkeeper had a good supply of wine, and I thought it was for your grandfather. Maybe it wasn't."

There is some talk about the size of the brain. Evelyn contends that at 1,230 grams it qualifies as microcephalic according to the 1923 edition of *Gray's Anatomy*—that is, smaller than normal—but Harvey insists that the brain was normal size for a man Einstein's age, given the fact that brains shrink over time. He lets her see some slides but seems unwilling to open the Tupperware. When I ask him if he'd show us pieces of the brain, he seems a bit put out, uncaps the lid for a moment, then almost immediately lids it. He offers Evelyn a piece—to which she says, "That would be wonderful"—then, curiously, never gives it to her. Evelyn seems perplexed, as am I. After all of this, it seems, Harvey has decided that there will be no show-and-tell with the actual gray matter.

"I'm amazed they didn't work with the brain earlier, right away when he died, actually," Evelyn says. Harvey gets uncomfortable again, stiffening into his pillar of salt. The words slow as they come from his mouth: something about the fissure of Sylvius, occipital lobe, cingulate gyrus. All of it a part of some abstract painting, some hocus-pocus act. "It took us a while," he says finally.

And then, as we make plans to leave soon for dinner, Harvey abruptly ends the meeting. "Well, it's been a real play-sure," he says, taking us by surprise. And then he explains: earlier, in San Jose, unbeknownst to me, he made a call to his eighty-five-year-old cousin in San Mateo and now insists that he must go spend the night there, assuming that I will take him more than halfway back to San Jose in rush-hour traffic. But to come this far for only half an hour? And besides, Evelyn has made reservations for us all to have dinner. But nothing sways Harvey. I suggest that his cousin join us or that we visit his cousin in the morning after rush hour. Harvey stands firm; then I stand firm. After 4,000 miles of driving, I, for one, am eating with the granddaughter of Albert Einstein. Harvey gets on the phone with his cousin and says loudly enough so that I can hear, "The chauffeur won't give me a ride."

Ever the rambler, Harvey decides to take public transportation—BART—and then have



his cousin pick him up at the station. And so he does. We pile into the Skylark and drive to a nearby station, Harvey in the back seat with the brain. Although Harvey and I will meet again tomorrow for a visit with Marian Diamond, and although we will share a heartfelt good-bye as I drop him off at the train station again (he on his way to the airport to fly back home, me off to visit friends), this parting feels like the real end of our trip. At the station, Harvey opens his case and presents Evelyn with a postcard: a black-and-white photo of himself looking pensive in a striped turtleneck, his ear the size of a small slipper, gazing sleepily at some form in the distance, some ghostly presence. "That's a very nice one," she says politely.

"Yessir," says Harvey. "Couldn't have been happier to meet..."

It all seems so anticlimactic, but so appropriate. So-like Harvey. And then he's off with his suitcase full of cellophane-wrapped clothes, caught in a river of people drifting toward the escalators, spilling underground, the silver tassel of his hair flashing once, then his body going down and down into the catacomb's shadow.

It's not until after Evelyn and I have had dinner that we realize the brain is still with us. In fact, it's still sitting on the car's back seat in its bubble of Tupperware, lit by a streetlight, slopping in formaldehyde. It has been there for three hours, as Evelyn told me over dessert about the ugly schisms and legal battles inside her family for letters left behind by "Albie." Given Harvey's well-documented guardianship of the brain, given the fact that Einstein seems to be Harvey's invisible friend, it seems impossible that he's just forgotten it, but then maybe not. Maybe, through some unconscious lapse or some odd, oblique act of intention, he has left it for us. A passing of the brain to the next generation. My giddiness is now rivaled only by my sudden paranoia. What if it gets ripped off?

"He left the brain?" says Evelyn. "Does he do this often?"

"Nope," I say, and suddenly we are smiling at each other.

We don't look at it right away—right there in full view of the strolling sidewalk masses—but drive back to Evelyn's apartment by the bay. I stop in front of the building with the Skylark idling. I reach back and take the Tupperware in my hands, then unseal the lid, and, in the domelight of the car, open the container.

After all these miles, all these days on the road during which the vengeful gray duffel taunted me; I am finally afforded the inspection I was denied back in New Mexico. The bits of

Einstein's brain are pouched in a white cloth, floating in formaldehyde. When I unravel the cloth, maybe a dozen golf-ball-size chunks of the brain spill out—parts from the cerebral cortex and the frontal lobe. The smell of formaldehyde smacks us like a backhand, and for a moment I actually feel as if I might puke. The pieces are sealed in celloidin—the liver-colored blobs of brain rimmed by gold wax. I pick some out of the plastic container and hand a few to Evelyn. They feel squishy, weigh about the same as very light beach stones. We hold them up like jewelers, marveling at how they seem less like a brain than—what?—some kind of snack food, some kind of energy chunk for genius triathletes. Or an edible product that offers the consumer world peace, space travel, eternity. Even today, the Asmat of Irian Jaya believe that to consume a brain is to gain the mystical essence of another person. But to be absolutely honest, I never thought that, holding Einstein's brain, I'd somehow imagine eating it.

"So this is what all the fuss is about," says Evelyn. She pokes at the brain-nuggets still in the Tupperware, laps formaldehyde on them. A security guard walks by and glances at us, then keeps walking. There is, I must admit, something entirely bizarre about Evelyn messing around with her grandfather's brain, checking his soggy neurons. But she seems more intrigued than grossed out. "You could make a nice necklace of this one," she says, holding up a circular piece of brain. "This is pretty weird, huh?"

Watching her in the cast of domelight—an impression of her sadness returning to me, the thrill of adrenaline confusing everything—I'm overcome with a desire to make her happy for a moment. Without thinking, I say, "You should take it." Then I remind her that Harvey had offered her a piece earlier but had never given it to her. "It belongs to you anyway," I say. Weeks later, on the phone, she'll tell me, "I wish I'd taken it." But now, sitting back in the teal velour of the Skylark, she says, "I couldn't."

Instead, she puts the pieces back in the Tupperware, closes it, and hands it to me. She gets out of the car and heavily walks herself inside.

Which leaves just me and the brain.



• Dr. Thomas Harvey, as he appears on his own postcard •

THE FLAMINGO MOTEL.  
FEBRUARY 28, 1997.

We drive the East Shore Freeway to University Avenue—skirting the bay, all black and glassed-over, San Francisco on the other side like so many lit-up missile silos—and then head toward Shattuck Avenue. Although I'm exhausted, I suddenly feel very free, have this desire to start driving back across America, sans Harvey. On the radio, there's a local talk show about UFOs, an expert insisting that in February 1954, Eisenhower disappeared for three days, allegedly making contact with aliens.

Although there is no convention that we know of in Berkeley, we soon find that all the inns are full. All the inns but the Flamingo Motel—a pink, cement, L-shaped, Forties-style two-story with a mod neon rendering of a flamingo. A fleabag. But it's enough. A double bed, a bathroom, a rotary phone. Some brother partyers have an upstairs room at the far end of the motel and are drinking cases of Pabst Blue Ribbon. As I carry the brain up to my room, they eye me, then hoot and toss their crushed cans over the banister into the parking lot.

Inside our room, we are hit with an industrial-size wallop of disinfectant. The room is the size of a couple of horse stalls with a rust-colored unvacuumed shag rug scorched with cigarette burns. A few stations come in on the television, which is bolted high on the wall. *Nightline* is getting to the bottom of the sheep-cloning business. It's been a long day, and yet the brain has got me pumped up. I try to make a phone call, but the phone is broken. I try to write some postcards, but my pen explodes. By some trick of the room's mirror, it seems that there are lights levitating everywhere. Finally, not quite knowing what to do, I go to bed. I put Einstein's brain on one pillow and rest my own head on the other one next to it, fewer than four inches away. Just to see. I've come 4,000 miles for this moment, and now all I do is fall asleep. Light from the road slips over the room—a greenish, underwater glow—and the traffic noise dims. I can hear beer cans softly pattering down on the pavement, then nothing.

It's possible that in our dreams we enter a different dimension of the universe. On this night, it's possible that I suddenly have three wives and ten kids and twelve grandchildren, that I've become Harvey himself, that I open up bodies to find more bodies and open those bodies to find that I'm falling through space and time. It's possible that, in some fifth dimension,

I am Robert Oppenheimer and Mahatma Gandhi, Billie Holiday and Adolf Hitler, Honus Wagner and Olga Korbut. I am Navajo and Cambodian and Tutsi. I am Tupac Amaru and NASA astronaut. I am a scatterling, I am a billionaire, I am a person in a field in North Dakota about to be abducted by a UFO. It's possible, too, that I am nobody, or rather only myself, slightly dazed and confused, curled in a question mark in a pink motel with Einstein's brain on the pillow by my head.

When I wake the next morning, craving coffee, there is only the world as I know it again—the desk chair in its place, the wrapped soap in the shower, the brain sitting demurely on its pillow, the Flamingo still the Flamingo, with cigarette burns in the rusty rug. There's a sudden grand beauty to its shoddiness.

When I step outside into the bright early-morning sun of California, I have the top off the Tupperware. And although later I will return the brain to Harvey, I am for a brief moment the man with the plan, the keeper of the cosmos. Do I feel the thing that all totems and fetishes make people feel? Something that I can believe in? A power larger than myself that I can submit to? Salvation? Have I touched eternity?

I'm not sure. The beer cans strewn in the parking lot make out the rough shape of America, surrounded by pools of sudsy, gold liquid. And the birds have come down out of the sky and they're drinking from it. Even now, the universe is filling with dark matter. We are slowing down. Snowballs the size of jumbo trucks are pelting our atmosphere. Perhaps a meteor has just been bumped into a new flight pattern, straight toward Earth, and we won't know anything about it until it explodes us all, as meteors once exploded the dinosaurs.

But I am here now. In the now now. Day has come back up from the other side of the earth, the birds have come down from the sky. There are flashes of orange light, the air is flooded with honeysuckle. I feel something I can't quite put my finger on, something euphoric but deeply unsayable. Is it love or just not hate? Is it joy or just not sadness? For a moment, all of time seems to flow through the Flamingo, its bright edges reflecting the past and the present, travelers packing their bags and rivering into some farther future. We are always driving with our secrets in the trunk, amazed by the cows and rainbows and palm trees. And do I dare to think that there will be no ending of the world, of America, of ourselves? I do. I really do. For in some recurrence, in some light wave, in some shimmer of time, we are out there now, and forever, existing, even as surely as Einstein himself continues to exist, here in my hands. ■