

*From the Notebook of
Aurora Jones*

*The Emerald City.
Some night this year.*

Dear me,

Tonight of all nights, there are piggels in the rafters, and the candles won't stop dancing. I think it's hilarious, but Quilla's already getting dizzy. And I don't have time to waste.

"STOP!" I tell them. "JESUS CHRIST!" The piggels giggle. The candles prance. It's hard not to laugh, but inside I'm uneasy. Wouldn't surprise me if Quilla's picking up on that, too. My poor little pen squirms in feeble protest; I hold her steady, reassuring but firm, popping her pointily-elegant head in and out of the lavender ink-rose blossom, then back to the page.

Again and again, I repeat the maneuver. "Sorry," I tell her. "I gots to do it. A girl needs to write, and a deal is a deal." But I'm not so sure that she understands. (Point of fact, I'm not so sure I understand, either. This writing compulsion. This need to set down. And not only that, but to measure up, too, while I'm pouring out my soul.)

I mean, it's not like Oz is crawling with expatriate writers. And it's not like anyone *cares*, of course, but ... oh, god. The crux is this: I'm pretty sure it's March by now, which means that Gene's probably on his way; and though I am utterly, *thoroughly* stoked — I am, I really am, can't you tell from my voice? — I must admit it's dragging up a few issues for me.

(Now STOP that! Damn piggels! They're nuts!)

Like, just for instance, this matter of Time. According to his letter, it's been, what ... *over two years* since I totally lost track, threw up my hands, gave up on the calendar chase and gave into the long trippy slip-stream-of-consciousness that is Oz in the moment to moment. It's been good. Very good. I have learned much by cutting loose.

Now, suddenly, I'm calling all that into question. I'm remembering that, christ, I'm almost fucking *twenty-five!* That was the year that I swore to myself I would make my mark in the world or die. All the wrongs would be righted. All the truths would be told.

It seemed so important.

Why doesn't it now?

Or maybe it does, and I'm just in denial. Or I just don't remember. Or maybe I do. When I write about this, it sure yanks me back hard.

When I think about Gene, it yanks even harder.

Gene and I met on the Internet, in the banner year **2000**: a couple of wacky e-mail freaks and part-time online 'zinesters. His 'zine was called *Exploding Clown Experiment*. Mine was called *Wait My Ass*. Both of them were intensely first-personal accounts of whatever the fuck happened to pop into our heads.

The point was that we were both compulsive. Anything that happened, and anything that *didn't* happen — in our minds, in our lives, in the greater World Outside — was totally fair game for our poisoned word processors. It was a trait we shared in common with just about every other lunatic both driven and alienated enough to go to all that trouble; but for some reason, we cracked each other up. Became fans of each other. And, very quickly, became electronic friends, bonded by our written words.

The fact that we were both Lost Angelenos made it easy for us to meet, though we put it off for a very long time, mostly through sheer inertia. The clincher was a tribute to Little Jimmy Scott at the Wiltern Theatre, in the spring of **2002**. The fact that Gene was a fan of Jimmy Scott's music — loved it as much as I did, and maybe even more — was all I needed to know.

We went to the show. Had a blast. Hung out some more. Got high and fucked around a little. Snapped out of it. Went "whoa." And

laughed: the best possible response. Came out the other side of that, not as boyfriend and girlfriend, but with total affection and appreciation for each other.

I love Gene a whole big bunch.

But we are all mirrors to each other; and what Gene reflects back — in my mind, right now — is the urge to catch up and just get it all down. To leave a record of my cranial trail, regardless of what happens to us, it, or me.

Of late, I have been lax in chronicling: a whole lot more do than tell.

Gene makes me remember how much I love to get it all in writing.

I size myself up in the Old Faithful Mirror: that gorgeous magick object I have mounted on the wall. It sees through souls, and tells no lies. It has no bias of its own. The too-big eyes reflected there, the too-large lips, are the ones I've always had. The body is my body. Perhaps I haven't changed a bit. Between the pink and blue lights of the floating piggels and the multifaceted firelight flicker, I feel like I'm back at a plug-in party: alone in my room, locked in cybercast transmission, desperately throwing myself at some weird projected abstraction of happiness. Like a dope. Not even fooling myself.

But this is the thing. *I am not in the world.* I'm in Oz. I'm in Oz. And I'm not even stoned. It's not like I'm sitting around in a room, dreaming dreamy dreamdreams that are just veiled excuses. It's not like I didn't make love to that dragon. It's not like I haven't been getting around. Every second I've spent here, awash in walking symbols — learning warrior tech from the Winkie King, conversing with the dinner plate, repainting Scarecrow's head — has been magick in action. *Astonishing* action. I mean, I always wanted to talk with the trees. Now I talk with the trees all the time.

Gene has never had that conversation, much as he's always wanted one. Back in the world, that shit just doesn't happen. Back in the world, it's banal as all hell. The magick is stunted. There is no belief. It's as gray as the day that cyclone scooped up Dorothy Gale.

But now I'm in a place where imagination matters. Where magick is a given, and its fruits are everywhere. And while I don't have any new, improved powers — I can't flap my arms and fly, I can't shoot fireballs

out my ass — *the magick I always knew I had* is appreciated here, and that is SO GRATIFYING. Every day, I can hardly believe it.

I mean, sure, I work in a Mexican restaurant; and sure, I sometimes have to moonlight as an artist's model. But there's never BEEN a restaurant like the Emerald Burrito; and you haven't LIVED till you've posed nekkid for a roomful of sweaty Munchkin artistes.

Fact is, everybody in Oz has got some kind of job, even if it means farming goomer cream (yeesh). I could even live with that, as long as I had wildness in my life. You get a spark that's called a soul, you wanna believe that it's worth something. And it is. It truly is.

At least in Oz.

And here I am.

So I guess I'll just stop agonizing, and wait for Gene to come. Maybe he'll like what I'm writing enough to think it's worth smuggling back. It doesn't have to be Jack Kerouac, Jr.'s *On the Yellow Brick Road*; I'll just call 'em as I sees 'em, and let posterity sort it out.

At the very least, we're gonna have some fun. This is one vacation he'll never forget.

(Okay, Quilla. That's it for tonight. I'm gonna blow out the candles.)

And, piggels?

GOOD NIGHT!!!