

A NIGHT AT ELAINE'S

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I WAS THINKING THAT I MADE a terrible mistake in the twenty-five years I've known Norman, probably one of many, but the one I'm thinking of now is that I should have recorded everything he ever said to me. I want to share with you a night, I recall, from the early mid-eighties, a night we spent at Elaine's [restaurant]—one of many nights we spent at Elaine's, and this was a night not unlike the others. Norris and Norman arrived and Diane and I arrived together. Norman entered first. Norris and Diane, both unbelievably tall, beautiful women, flanked him, and here he is walking into Elaine's.

Now I'm in the back, so I can actually watch everybody watch. And Norman subtly, not too obviously, is taking it all in. And loving it. We would sit down. Diane and Norris being thin, could huddle at the table and put their chairs close together. Norman and I, not having that physique, couldn't get too close. So our conversation was, of course, louder than theirs. Norman and I would talk; that is to say—Norman would talk and I would listen.

And so I heard how plastic is ruining the world: "If we could just somehow extract all of it, get that plastic out of our lives, it would be a clear, clean, vivid universe. Another thing, those damned commercials. No more commercials. There shouldn't be any more commercials." If you've ever watched television with Norman, as soon as the commercial comes on, he goes nuts about the commercial, making the commercial triply unpleasant. And then, of course, "those atavistic, soulless, grasping, greedy entities, corporations." Now there he may have actually hit a bull's-eye.

These were the conversations we had had, and we were having one of those that night. I don't know if it was at Plastic Time, or Intermission Time, or Corporation Time, but at some point Norman becomes distracted. He looks away and then looks at Norris and Diane. He smiles and he says, "My God, you're so beautiful!" No segue at all. Then, his blue eyes gleamed, he looked at Norris, and said, "Baby, I love you."