



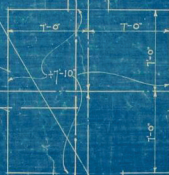
TRIPWIRE

7

NOTE:-
THEATRE IS SYMMETRICAL ABOUT
THIS DIMENSIONS GIVEN ON ONE
SIDE APPLY TO CORRESPONDING
SECTION ON OPPOSITE SIDE

NOTE:-
WIDTH OF AISLES IN MAZE IS 3'-5\"/>

NOTE:
- PLANTING & PATHS BY OWNER -
- ENTIRE AREAS PLANTED WITH TREES,
SHRUBS & VINES EXCEPT WHERE MAZE &
THEATRE ARE SHOWN
- FRONTS OF STAGE WALL, THEATRE
SEATS & STEPS COVERED WITH CLOSE
CLIMBING, TRIMMED VINE
- CONNECTING PATHS TRIMMED THROUGH
PLANTING



140 Boxes of No. 2100

AXIS A-A'

RACHEL ZOLF

The Light Club of Vizcaya: A Women's Picture

Director: Josiah McElheny

Narrator: a woman photographer, here played by Zoe Leonard



[A story told in voiceover, as monologue.]

[heightened voice, slightly affected]

So many ideas sound to us like a fairy tale, when they are not really fantastic or utopian at all.

[slight shift in voice, straight up, Scheerbartian]

The hot sun set.

The stars rose.

The waiters dressed in white finished setting the tables for supper.

The lanterns were lit—like every evening—on the east terrace that looked out on the bay.

In the shadows surrounding the terrace, ladders and tools and mounds of dirt and stone rested; sculptures waited to be placed. A pile of hand-carved shells shuddered in the wind.

It was Vizcaya, what might well have become the grandest house in all America.

Frannie and I sat with the house's designer and impresario, Paul Chalfin, wearing his customary bright sash and colored trousers. Next to him sat his perennial assistant and companion, Louis Koons. Across the table was Chalfin's tutor in design, the mother of American interior decoration herself, Ms. Elsie de Wolfe. And beside Elsie was her companion, Ms. Elisabeth Marbury, literary agent of Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. Ms. de Wolfe said:

“You know, Mr. Chalfin, there is too much light here during the daytime, and too little at night. During the day, one sleeps, makes one's toilet, reads a little, and prepares for the evening's entertainment. If there were only more light at night! The moon and stars do not shine brightly enough for my taste. They are splendid—the stars—but too far away. And I suffer from an addiction to light.”

“I know very well why you say that,” returned the designer who would take all credit for Vizcaya, claiming the architect only did the plumbing, “You are an interior decorator by day but an engineeress by night. So you would like to introduce large electrical installations here. But the night would not get much brighter from that. And the starry sky would no longer have its full effect. On the ground light disperses too easily. Electrical light will illuminate an enclosed space, regardless how large. But in the open air, no artificial light can ever be expansive enough.”

“What do you mean by that?” said Ms. de Wolfe. “The word engineeress is so keenly reminiscent of coiffeuress or directress. It sounds so odd. But never mind. Indeed, you are right. But are we obliged to only light these stifling halls?”

“No,” the designer interrupted her in a lively fashion, “I mean—yes—I actually just wanted to speak in jest. It is still so hot and humid.”

“I would like to take your jest quite seriously!” said Ms. de Wolfe—and just as she said this, Jupiter became glittering and bright.

“Well,” the designer went on, “if you want enclosed spaces other than great halls, then, dearest lady, I can only recommend that you illuminate a mine and move in there.”

Ms. de Wolfe jumped up.

And quickly she said:

“That is a refreshing idea, but I have an even better one. At the same time as you construct the great Mound in the garden, why not utilize the round empty space beneath it? It is not too warm and not too large. You said yourself that the garden grottos will be ideal sites for romantic afternoon assignations. You know what, Mr. Chalfin? Right now during supper we will found the Light Club of Vizcaya. Oh! I have the most fantastical plans in my head.”

“At any rate,” said Chalfin, “this plan promises lively evening entertainment. I am completely at your disposal as architect, even

though I fear that this plan will soon burst like a soap bubble.”

“Please, Mr. Chalfin,” said Ms. de Wolfe with an angry frown, “don’t be afraid too soon. It is always early enough for fear later. Gentlemen are always fearful. That is not a sign of courage. We women are less fearful. That is why world history will be moved forward a little by us alone. What would become of the world if the courage of women did not exist?”

They both laughed knowingly, then Ms. de Wolfe ordered ten bottles of champagne, and rose to inaugurate the affair with a speech. The servants were already pushing the gauze screens together—as protection against the mosquitoes.

“The hunger for light,” said Ms. de Wolfe, smiling, “is the most outstanding sign of our time—and not the worst. In my opinion, we all suffer from light addiction. It is the most modern of diseases.

“Therefore,” the woman continued, “I desire to illuminate the circular space that frames the ground below the Mound, in such a manner that it will leave all of you flabbergasted.

“We will celebrate light parties there day and night. There will be electrical light—behind the color-clouds of Tiffany-glass. We will construct the Light Club of Vizcaya from top to bottom in Tiffany-glass and iron. Large pillars of light made from Tiffany-glass will run through the entire club—vertically, horizontally, and also at angles. Like in the above-ground villa, there will be no lack of grand hanging lamps with a thousand bulbs in all the main corners of the club. Architectural matters shall be arranged by you, Mr. Chalfin. As all of you know, he builds only glass palaces. They are appropriate for temperatures beneath the ground. Fire is impossible.”

There was silence. Ms. de Wolfe had Madeira Crème brought to her, lit a cigarette, and spoke:

“I declare that within the passage of one year—today we record as July the first, 1916—the entire glass club will be complete. We will enter it through the swimming pool and exit via the Mound. Glass opens up a new age. Without a glass palace life becomes a burden.”

The mood became very gay.

Ms. de Wolfe said, “Now we want to treat everything with great seriousness—and in writing. Mr. Chalfin has a stake in this enterprise. And suffice it to say that what Mr. Deering doesn’t know about pecuniary and other matters won’t hurt him. You will see what the energy of the ladies’ world can achieve. Colored glass destroys all hatred.”

The debate about the club’s establishment and secrecy continued until dawn. Every third word was: Glass!—Tiffany-glass!

The next evening we watched Ms. de Wolfe set off with Mr. Chalfin, Mr. Koons, and Ms. Marbury—driving past the piles of construction supplies to the dark Mound meant to be bright within a year’s time.



And it became bright.

We six gathered again on the east terrace at Vizcaya in July 1917. Ms. de Wolfe ordered us all to accompany her immediately to the bright round space whose location under the Mound's surface was to stay a complete secret. We took off all our clothes and entered the swimming pool above which hung a stone figure of Vulcan, god of the forge, unceremoniously being flung out of heaven. Caryatids and herms gazed suggestively as we swam through the secret underground pathway below the fountains and grottos. The two boy mermaid figures held their expressions, while Leda wrung the stone swan's white neck. The coquettish shepherd continued bringing his game to the coquettish shepherdess's bared breast.

Finally, we emerged wet and breathless over the threshold into the Light Club of Vizcaya. And there we found a circular glass palace below the raised surface—completely bright—dispelling all darkness. Light permeated the Universe. Everything was true and full of light in the highest degree—all the light behind Tiffany-glass.

A very—very—quiet light colony it was in those bright depths.

The color-clouds of the Tiffany-glass glowed intoxicatingly.

[slightly affected voice]

So many ideas sound to us like a fairy tale, when they are not really fantastic or utopian at all.



[loose, laconic voice]

After my mother died, I was cleaning out her house and found the journal of my great-great Aunt Mattie in the attic. Or at least a remnant of a journal of hers. It looked like someone tried to burn some of the pages within the book, which seemed to span the years just before and through World War One.

Mattie Edwards-Hewitt was probably the person who most inspired me to become a photographer. She and her girlfriend Frances Benjamin Johnston were well-known architectural photographers at the beginning of the twentieth century, about the only women doing that job then. They were based in New York, but traveled around the country for work. Frannie also became well known for her portraits of writers, artists, and intellectuals. Mattie and Frannie were part of a lively coterie of New York creative types. Their friends Elsie de Wolfe and Bessie Marbury, who called themselves The

Bachelors, held a weekly salon at their East 17th Street apartment, where all sorts would show up, including Sarah Bernhardt, Alice Austen, Isabella Stewart Gardner, and Oscar Wilde. Mattie and Frannie seemed to have had an interesting life together until they broke up in a public spat just before Christmas 1917. When I found the journal, I didn't know much more than that about their relationship. While there were books written about Frannie's life as a photographer, there wasn't much written about them together, and my family didn't talk about Frannie when they talked about Mattie.

I should say Mattie's journal was really more of a scrapbook, a hodgepodge assortment of commentary, confession, clippings, lists, letters, and philosophical ramblings. Though her name was clearly marked in handwriting on the inside cover, the journal opened with a letter by someone else that was pasted onto the first page. It had a few burn marks on it but was still legible.



[change voice to J. D. officious]

Dear Mr. Chalfin,

Do you realize that it will soon be five years since you and I hitched our horses together? In all that time except for intervals for food, water and flirtation you have given your time, labor and thought to me. I have understood very well. I know that the work you have done has been very well done and that you have given your whole soul to it. We really understand each other pretty well. I know that you are likely to be hurt when I don't mean to hurt you and you know I am likely to be irritated when you don't mean to irritate me—this among other things. But for something that can hardly happen our house is going to be a triumph—mostly your triumph. In my mind (opinion) there is much sympathy between us. We ought to have even more.

Yours sincerely,
J. D.

[regular loose, laconic]

My initial perplexity as to who J. D. and Chalfin could be was alleviated a few pages on in the journal, where I found an article pasted in from the July 1917 issue of *The Architectural Review*. It described a pseudo-Venetian Renaissance fantasy palace called Vizcaya, built among Miami's mangrove swamps for the famous agricultural machinery magnate James Deering of Chicago. Mattie must have been hired to photograph the finished house, because she's credited on the photos in that article. The piece also names Paul Chalfin as the house's associate architect and designer, and describes his flamboyant touches that marked the mansion's pastiche of historical styles. The letter about hitched horses started to make more sense.

Another journal entry, marked Christmas Day 1916, seemed to allude to the elaborate grand opening of the finished villa:

A whistle shrilled. A light flashed on. All activity ceased and silence descended on the great estate. The rooms of the huge palace lighted up one by one. In the terraced gardens, scores of Japanese lanterns began to play a symphony of colors. On each side of the marble stairway leading to the main door of the palace, servants in gold-faced uniform affected by European armies of the 18th century, approached ancient cannons, lighted fuses in their hands. Again the whistle sounded and the two cannoneers, acting as one, applied fuses to the touchholes and the cannons boomed in unison as the yacht's gangplank went down, and onto the landing stage stepped—not a king in royal raiment—but a little man in a high silk hat and a high stiff collar.

I felt compelled to know more about this strange place and what it and its people had meant to Mattie. I looked on the web but only came up with Vizcaya's most obvious history:

[change to mildly booming advertising-type voiceover]

Vizcaya means many things to many people. What will it mean to you?

With its phenomenal human-made and natural resources, Vizcaya was built in the 1910s, a decade in which Gilded Age cultural standards were enlivened by the irreverent spirit of the dawning Jazz Age. It also introduces visitors to Miami's place in this history—a time when America's wealthiest industrialists created lavish homes inspired by the palaces of Europe.

In that day, people lived with more self-reliance, more confidence, more hope; greater magnificence, extravagance, and elegance; more careless ease, more gaiety, more pleasure in each other's company and conversation, more injustice and hypocrisy, more misery and want, more sentiment including false sentiment, less sufferance of mediocrity, more dignity in work, more delight in nature, more zest.

For decades, Vizcaya has been a diplomatic seat of Miami-Dade County, having hosted some of the world's most renowned dignitaries—such as Queen Elizabeth II, Pope John Paul II, President Ronald Reagan, and King Juan Carlos I and Queen Sofia of Spain—and major international events—such as the Summit of the Americas, the signing of the Free Trade Agreement, and activities associated with Art Basel. Numerous movies have been shot at Vizcaya, including *The Woman Game*, *The Money Pit*, *Bad Boys II*, and *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*.

Not promoted in the marketing copy was the fact that since 1985, the Vizcaya museum's faux-Baroque gardens had hosted a huge gay circuit party bacchanal called the White Party as a fundraiser for AIDS research. Organizers billed it as “a chance to escape to an altered world.” Scenes from the party where 2500 men in white descend on Vizcaya are described in a 1996 *New York Times* article: “In a small garden shrouded in darkness, men stood alone or walked through a topiary maze, cruising for partners.” An enthusiastic partygoer adorned with white angel wings says: “Being in a room with thousands of beautiful gay men can be a very empowering experience. Of course, the narcissism can be intimidating, and for outsiders the debauchery is hard to understand. But only a community so acquainted with grief could sustain this level of celebration.”

I went back to Mattie's journal to look for more about this altered world that Vizcaya engendered. All I could find in the journal were fragments of opaque text on charred pages:

[use same Scheerbartian voice as opening story, but slightly modulate in places to bring in a level of uncertainty, perhaps "madness"]

If we want our culture to rise to a higher level, we are obliged, for better or for worse, to change our architecture. And this only becomes possible if we take away the closed character.

.....

She said, "I desire to illuminate the circular space that frames the ground below the Mound, in such a manner that it will leave all of you flabbergasted." The new environment, which we thus create, must bring a new culture.

....

Normally we live surrounded by transparent walls which seem to be knitted of sparkling air; we live beneath the eyes of everyone, always bathed in light. We have nothing to conceal from one another.

....

I no longer believe that I am one of the agents of all this—some Other within me is responsible. Perhaps such a passive state is best for all artists and inventors—so that the Other within us can act most easily and effectively.

.....

But higher knowledge! The greatest work is nothing without the Sublime. We must always recognize and strive for the unattainable if we are to achieve the attainable. We are but guests upon this earth

and our true home is only the Sublime: in merging with it and in subordinating ourselves to it.

....

Finally, we emerged wet and breathless over the threshold into the Light Club of Vizcaya. And there we found a circular glass palace below the raised surface—completely bright—dispelling all darkness. It is no longer possible to keep apart the inside and outside.

....

There are ideas of molded clay and ideas molded of gold, or of our precious glass. The woman who sees the splendors of glass every day cannot have ignoble hands.

....

If nothing comes of this story then it will be proved once again that salvation is only to be sought in the imagination. With the utopias, generally speaking, humanity has made itself look a bit silly. Yet all the games of potentates are nothing compared to this story. It makes everything possible.

....

Always and again this pathetic “if”!

[loose, laconic voice]

I felt stunned by what I had read. What glass palace? What utopia? I knew from my limited research that the Mound was the centerpiece of the Vizcaya garden, a raised semi-circular structure built of state-of-the-art modernist

concrete and steel and covered with grass and trees to shade the house from the unforgiving Florida sun. Could there possibly be some kind of room filling the space below the Mound with colored light? Was this the Light Club of Vizcaya? Who was part of the club? Mattie obviously, and probably then Frannie. Chalfin and Deering? I had read that Chalfin was openly gay, and they seemed close in that earlier letter. But why would Deering need an underground fantasy palace when he already had a real one above?

I decided to travel to Vizcaya myself and see if I could discover evidence of this glass spa where queers bathed in light instead of water. Supposedly half of the Vizcaya site had been sold off to the Catholic diocese after Deering died, and the magnificent gardens decimated by a hurricane in 1926. I suspected that the light club would have been flooded out then. But I still felt drawn to Vizcaya. Even if it was in ruins, perhaps something would still reveal traces of Mattie's life. I brought along my camera as a kind of divining scope.



The house itself was indeed baroque, perhaps not in the best sense. Its stuffed rooms didn't interest me much, but the view out the east loggia to the bay was lovely, and the Barge, a breakwater structure in front of the Venetian-style water entrance on the east side, was an amazing, troubled wreck. I'd read about how workers had to perform breast reductions on Stirling Calder's sculptures on the Barge because the women's plentitude so offended James Deering's sensibilities. But when I visited the Barge it was the rooster bones strewn on the ground with remnants of tags still attached that most struck me. Perhaps they came from a cock fight for money or a Bahamian Obeah ritual. Deering always wore his signature white silk suits when he visited the Vizcaya construction site, where a thousand workers were molding his fantasy from the jungle. Supposedly the workers, many of who came from the Bahamas, used to make sure that "Mr. Jimmy" got splashed with a little cement each time he walked by. They were subtle about it, maybe a little less subtle during their failed union drive.

I ended up spending considerable time in the Vizcaya archives, where I discovered close to 20,000 letters written in relation to the house, many between Deering and Chalfin. There were almost as many photographs, though only a few stylized pictures of the two of them. It turned out that Mattie had photographed the whole process of constructing the palace and grounds, so that Deering could monitor its progress from Chicago. I went through the albums of Mattie's photos, and the gorgeous hand-drawn blueprints of the building, looking for elements that may have pointed to the building of the light spa. Was this the engine that dug below the Mound? Was this the turbine that lit it? Was this the generating station that started things off? Was this a model of the constructions that would hide the entrance to the palace of glass? Did this worker know about the light spa? Was this the swing the lovers sat on in the secret orchid garden after emerging from paradise below? Was James Deering really so clueless—perennial glass of whiskey in one hand and cigarette in the other—that he

didn't notice his guests stealing away to this spectacular space literally under his nose? His cultural scope was certainly limited. In one of his letters to Chalfin, he wrote, "There are two things, both of them the work of a single man, which excite my admiration. One of them is Webster's Dictionary and the other is this house." In the archive, Deering, who supposedly suffered from debilitating pernicious anemia, was variously described as colorless, meticulous, pedestrian, sedate, dyspeptic, proper, fastidious. One guest, well-known portrait photographer Nell Dorr (who referred to herself as Chalfin's sister-in-law because she was married to the brother of Chalfin's boyfriend, Louis Koons), "wondered if Mr. Deering ever took off all his clothes at the same time...even to bathe." In an interview with silent movie star Lillian Gish, who visited Vizcaya with Dorr and later hired Chalfin to decorate her apartment in "waves of sunshine," Gish describes Deering this way:

He was an astringent little man. I don't think he was really comfortable with his guests. I remember very clearly the night we were there. It was an April night and the gardens were full of fireflies. I was probably very romantic and I can remember that I wanted to get into a gondola and ride on the canals. It was such a lovely night. But we were taken right in after a look at the gardens to see a movie. It was a movie about microbes and germs. Can you imagine that? I suppose he thought it was entertaining. I had the impression that he was a man who wanted to have beauty around him in his house and gardens, but that he didn't know what to do with it. He wasn't able to live with it. It was simply there.

In a series of rather poignant letters, Deering asked Chalfin for a private place on the grounds "where I could be by myself and get away from all visitors...where my presence would be unknown to any and everybody, where there would be no telephone, so that if I were there the answer could always be that I was not at home." He suggested that this place could be

built beneath the Mound, but Chalfin dissuaded him, which makes me think that Deering may not have been let into the Light Club. Though I did discover certain, perhaps unconscious, clues to the spa's existence in the endless to-do lists Deering would write to Chalfin. These breathless declarations resembled a surrealist poem:

[voice can modulate in poem for various emphases]

There should be many hooks

I don't like green

Where should birds be located

I used to be much amused with the toboggan

No water in lily pond that kills lilies

Fences should protect us from visitors

Where do we want thermometers and their character

No bedroom should have a ticking clock

If it is possible to stop flapping it should be done

The seat to my WC is marred by wire netting

More light is needed. More light!

Drapery conceals the unicorn table

What lies undiscovered today may well be discovered anon

More colored light! must be the watchword

I do not understand the mutilation of the marble tub

My motto is “J’ai Dit,” I have spoken

Some skillful person should learn why one telescope always
points toward heaven.

[back to loose, laconic voice]

I wasn’t surprised when I read that Deering had an immense admiration for Germany, as it exemplified his idea of order and discipline. He seemed displeased by the relative disorder of America. I’m sure it’s all Chalfin’s doing that the Latin inscription over the main entrance to Vizcaya’s house translates as “Accept the gift of pleasure when it is given. Put serious things aside.”

I found a telling letter that Chalfin wrote in 1911 to Gertrude Whitney, the socialite founder of the museum that bears her name. He was in Europe with Deering spending a fortune buying pieces for the house:

Dear dear person you seem so much more part of me than anything that is here—nearer than a shirt or shoe. Where are you? It has been wonderful to storm through all the fine tissue of the world—to bathe in the champagne and to dine through all the moonlight, to tear through villages in search of flagrant sights, and to look at things and people from the “have” plane. It

is harder to obliterate fineness than to acquire it—like dying in the midst of health. It has paid so well to share the hack carriage with a blind fiddler and a plough boy all one's life—

I don't forget how near speech thought rises in you—you who know what you feel. But do you know, I'm always finding out things as if I were putting the pages of a book together and reading each of the pages out of order before putting it into its place.

Really I mean to say that while I'm being dragged about by my perfectly amiable Mr. Pipp I feel awfully enslaved. We entertain all the time with Chicagoan splendor and international business snobbery. I'm rather the lady of this house—a motherly youngster.... I've done nothing but efface impressions.

A seemingly changeable man, Chalfin's tone was quite different when he rhapsodized in an article published in 1935 about the little house on the top of the Mound called the Casino:

What is a casino for? For two to steal to, for one to dream in or perhaps to weep; for three to sing and for eight to dance in.... In a casino there must be ways for a gallant who should not be found there, and the eminent person who would side step a bone or a tale of bad luck. There must be a kitchenette and running water, a fireplace and light weight chairs a plenty. A casino held itself a household in miniature, was a play house for an hour, the great establishment with all its etiquette abbreviated and curtailed, but unbroken....

Of course I wanted to see the spot where all this playing around might have happened, and Vizcaya's archivist was kind enough to give me a tour of the Mound's secret doors and windows and also through the tiny eighteenth-century rooms of its Casino. We squeezed our bodies down the tight spiral staircase that led to the grotto below the Mound and could have led to the

light spa. No matter how many places I looked for entrances, though, I couldn't get into the Mound itself. Every door and window led to another wall.

After we returned to the cramped archives room, I stumbled upon a portfolio of sketches by Chalfin, mostly attempts at old master style drawings, but it also held a reproduction of a painting by Florine Stettheimer. The print shows a picnic where Edward Steichen is photographing Marcel Duchamp, while in the distance Chalfin embraces the Marquis de Buenavista against a tree trunk. Small world indeed. I wonder what they all talked about.

The portfolio also contained a print of a lovely, sensual watercolor by John Singer Sargent of a group of Bahamian workers sunbathing nakedly on Vizcaya's sandy beach in a quiet pastoral moment away from the backbreaking work of building a fantasy palace in a swamp. Did these workers know about the Light Club of Vizcaya? Did Sargent? Lillian Gish? When Thomas Edison visited Vizcaya, did he notice the excess of electricity that must have been in place in order to light the spa? An extra turbine under the Mound or special electrical lines running through the gardens under the fountains? Probably not—the little cabal probably succeeded in keeping the whole thing very secret for their own multilayered reasons.

An interview with Vizcaya garden designer Diego Suarez provides an obvious clue to at least part of their motivation. Here's Suarez's description of Chalfin, with some commentary by the interviewer:

Chalfin was absolutely the worst pansy I have ever seen. He had a secretary (ugh!). He used to kiss him goodbye—he was always kissing his hand. This man was a despicable individual.... [Chalfin] had a house on Lexington. He kept Koons there. [Mr. Suarez then made a face showing great disgust with such

a homosexual ménage.] I don't like to talk about it. [Further expressions of disgust.] You are a man? I am a man. I'll tell you—but it is not something you would want to put in a book. It is not a thing I care to dwell on...even now. You see, Chalfin was a man with very peculiar tastes. You are a man. Do I make myself clear?

By far the most important find in the archive was tucked away in Chalfin's portfolio, a little book, I guess a novella, in German called *Der Lichtklub Von Batavia: Eine Damen-Novелlette* by a writer named Paul Scheerbart. Now, I'm your typical monolingual American, but even I could pronounce the word that looked like Light Club. And the inscription was in English, "For dear Paul, and for our dear bright dreams. Not more light! – 'more colored light!' must be the watchword. Love, Elsie." Was this Elsie de Wolfe addressing Chalfin? I knew from my research that Chalfin had apprenticed with Elsie in New York, and that she had decorated Deering's Chicago home. But how would Elsie know about the light club?

Flipping through the text, I found a few English translations in the margins, including: "You will see what the energy of the ladies' world can achieve." I looked up Scheerbart, who was this pre-World War One German expressionist writer obsessed with the potential of glass architecture to save civilization, and who wrote utopian novels with flying zeppelins, celestial bodies, and perpetual motion machines that didn't make much sense after 1914. Scheerbart supposedly died in the arms of his wife, who was curiously known as The Bear, and it was rumored he had starved himself in protest over the war. Did Mattie know about this Scheerbart story and concoct her own light club from it? Did Chalfin or de Wolfe? I'm not sure. Perhaps a utopian story like Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Herland* can be written at the same time Vizcaya is being built, as a stunning example of the enlightened, if somewhat eugenic, energy of a women's world, but a sparkling palace for queer sex just can't come to light, even as a

representation of some rich guy's unconscious. Maybe I don't need to say that Gilman's mad, stifling palimpsest, *The Yellow Wallpaper*, could come next. Maybe it's not a coincidence that Frannie did a portrait of Gilman in her room. It also may not be a coincidence that Chalfin went blind in an old folks' home. Is something clear when you understand it, or when it looms up startling you? Mattie may not have been so sure. Here's the last entry I could make out in her journal:

[voice a little dreamy...]

On the horizon of a story is found what was in the beginning: this naïve or native sense of touch, in which the subject is submerged in astonishment, wonder, and sometimes terror before that which surrounds it. The path has been neither made nor marked, unless in the call to a more distant future that is offered by and to the other in the abandonment of the self.

Thus a new birth comes about, a new dawn for the beloved and the lover. The openness of a face which has not yet been sculpted. Not a mask given or attributed, but an efflorescence that detached itself from its immersion and absorption in the night's most secret place. Not without sparkling. The light that shines there is different from the one that makes distinctions and separates too neatly.

How to preserve the memory of the flesh? For what is or becomes the site that underlies what can be remembered? Place of a possible unfolding of its temporality? Burial ground of the touch that metabolizes itself in the constitution of time. Which will always remain on the threshold, even after entering into the house. Which will remain a dwelling, preceding and following the habitation of any dwelling.



[back to loose, laconic voice]

Me, I wonder if there is a model for utopia that encompasses its own doubt, considers its own inevitable faults and failures, exposes its messy seams while being conscious of the danger of imposing on all the plans of a subjective few. The possibility of rejecting utopia as a blueprint, while preserving it as a dream.

My mind drifts to Frannie's great article from 1897 on "What a Woman Can Do With a Camera," how "a woman who makes photography profitable must have good common sense, unlimited patience to carry her through endless failures, equally unlimited tact, good taste, a quick eye, a talent for detail, and a genius for hard work." She describes all the DIY elements you

need, including a room to transform ideas into images:

If a good-sized room with several windows in it is available, it is quite easy to make it “light-tight” by pasting several thicknesses of yellow post-office or ruby paper on the panes, stopping up the chinks with flaps of dark felt, and if necessary using yellow cloth curtains. A room so darkened should be tested for light-leaks before it is regarded as a safe place in which to handle plates.

Once the light-tight room has been lovingly prepared, “On the outside of one window, in a sheltered box, place your lamp. A steady even light is of the greatest importance—in fact, it is absolutely essential.”

[Fade out picture to black.]