Excerpt from Patti Smith's *Just Kids;* Her experience with the era of Jim Morrison, Jimi Hendrix, and Janis Joplin at the end of their time.

taken by the same old guy, and at Robert's insistence I climbed aboard his stuffed pony.

We stayed until dusk and boarded the F train back. "We're still us," he said. He held my hand and I fell asleep on his shoulder on the subway home.

Sadly, the new picture of the two of us was lost, but the picture of myself astride the pony, alone and slightly defiant, remains.

Robert sat on an orange crate as I read him some of my new poems.

"You should let people hear you," he said, as he always did.

"You're hearing me. That's enough for me."

"I want everyone to hear you."

"No, you want me to read at one of those wretched teas."

But Robert, not to be denied, pressed me, and when Gerard Malanga told him about a Tuesday open mike moderated by the poet Jim Carroll, he made me promise I would read.

I agreed to try, choosing a couple of poems I thought suitable to perform. I can't remember what I read, but I certainly remember what Robert wore, a pair of gold lamé chaps he had designed. We had some discussion about the matching codpiece and decided against it. It was Bastille Day, and I jokingly predicted that heads would roll when those poets checked him out.

I instantly took a liking to Jim Carroll. He seemed a beautiful person, slim and sturdy with long red-gold hair, black Converse high-top sneakers, and a sweet disposition. I saw in him a mix of Arthur Rimbaud and Parsifal, the holy fool.

My writing was shifting from the formality of French prose poetry to the bravado of Blaise Cendrars, Mayakovsky, and Gregory Corso. Through them my work developed humor and a little swagger. Robert was always my first listener and I developed a lot of confidence simply by reading to him. I listened to recordings of the beat poets and Oscar Brown Jr., and studied lyric poets like Vachel Lindsay and Art Carney.

One night after a terminally long rehearsal for *Island*, I bumped into Jim, who was hanging outside the Chelsea eating a water ice. I asked him if he wanted to come along and go for a bad coffee at the doughnut shop. He said sure. I told him I liked to write there. On the next night he took me for bad coffee at Bickford's on Forty-second Street. Jim told me that Jack Kerouac liked to write there.

It wasn't clear where Jim lived, but he spent a lot of time at the Chelsea Hotel. The following night he came home with me, and wound up staying in my side of the loft. It had been a long time since I really felt something for someone other than Robert.

Robert felt a part of the equation, because he had been instrumental in introducing me to Jim. They got along really well and happily nothing seemed unnatural about us staying next door to Robert. Often Robert stayed at David's, and he seemed happy that I was not alone.

In my own way, I devoted myself to Jim. I laid a blanket over him as he slept. In the mornings I got him his doughnuts and coffee. He didn't have much money and he was unapologetic that he had a modest heroin habit. Sometimes I would go with him when he scored. I didn't know anything about these kinds of drugs except from reading *Cain's Book*, Alexander Trocchi's account of a junkie writing on a barge plying the rivers of New York while junk plies the river of his soul. Jim shot stuff in his freckled hand, like the darker side of Huckleberry Finn. I looked away, and then asked him if it hurt. He said no, not to worry about him. Then I would sit by him as he recited Walt Whitman, kind of falling asleep sitting up.

While I was working during the day, Robert and Jim would take walks up to Times Square. They both shared an affection for Forty-second Street's netherworld and found in their wanderings they also shared an affinity for hustling, Jim for drug money and Robert for rent

money. Even at this point Robert was still asking questions about himself and his drives. He wasn't comfortable being identified in terms of his sexuality, and questioned whether he was hustling for money or pleasure. He could talk about these things with Jim because Jim wasn't judgmental. They both took money from men, but Jim had no problem with it. For him, it was just business.

"How do you know you're not gay?" Robert would ask him.

Jim said he was sure. "Because I always ask for money."

Toward the middle of July, I made my last payment on my first guitar. Held in layaway in a pawnshop on Eighth Avenue, it was a little Martin acoustic, a parlor model. It had a tiny bluebird decal on its top, and a strap made of multicolored braid. I bought a Bob Dylan songbook and learned a few simple chords. At first they didn't sound too bad, but the more I played, the worse it sounded. I didn't realize you had to tune a guitar. I took it over to Matthew, and he tuned it. Then it occurred to me that whenever it got out of tune, I could find a musician and ask them if they wanted to play it. There were plenty of musicians at the Chelsea.

I had written "Fire of Unknown Origin" as a poem, but after I met Bobby, I turned it into my first song. I struggled to find some chords to accompany it on guitar, and sang it for Robert and Sandy. She was especially elated. The dress sweeping down the hallway was hers.

Death comes sweeping down the hallway in a lady's dress
Death comes riding up the highway in its Sunday best
Death comes I can't do nothing
Death goes there must be something that remains
A fire of unknown origin took my baby away

Being in *Island* gave me the notion that I had a knack for performing. I had no stage fright and liked to elicit a response from the audience. But I made a mental note that I wasn't acting material. It seemed being an actor was like being a soldier: you had to sacrifice yourself to the greater good. You had to believe in the cause. I just couldn't surrender enough of myself to be an actor.

Playing Leona sealed the unfounded perception of me as a speed freak. I don't know if I was much of an actress, but I was good enough to get a bad reputation. The play was a social success. Andy Warhol came every night and became genuinely interested in working with Tony Ingrassia. Tennessee Williams attended the final performance with Candy Darling on his arm. Candy, in her desired element, was ecstatic to be seen with the great playwright.

I may have had bravado, but I knew I lacked the warmth and tragic glamour of my fellow actors. Those involved with alternative theater were committed, slaving under mentors like Ellen Stewart, John Vaccaro, and the brilliant Charles Ludlam. Although I did not choose to pursue their direction I was grateful for what I learned. It would be a while before I put my experience in the theater into action.

When Janis Joplin returned in August for her rain date in Central Park, she seemed extremely happy. She was looking forward to recording, and came into town resplendent in magenta, pink, and purple feather boas. She wore them everywhere. The concert was a great success, and afterward we all went to the Remington, an artists' bar near lower Broadway. The tables were crowded with her entourage: Michael Pollard, Sally Grossman, who was the girl in the red dress on the cover of *Bringing It All Back Home*, Brice Marden, Emmett Grogan of the Diggers, and the actress Tuesday Weld. The jukebox was playing Charlie Pride. Janis spent most of the party with a good-looking guy she was attracted to,

but just before closing time he ducked out with one of the prettier hangers-on. Janis was devastated. "This always happens to me, man. Just another night alone," she sobbed on Bobby's shoulder.

Bobby asked me to get her to the Chelsea and to keep an eye on her. I took Janis back to her room, and sat with her while she bemoaned her fate. Before I left, I told her that I'd made a little song for her, and sang it to her.

I was working real hard
To show the world what I could do
Oh I guess I never dreamed
I'd have to
World spins some photographs
How I love to laugh when the crowd laughs
While love slips through
A theatre that is full
But oh baby
When the crowd goes home
And I turn in and I realize I'm alone
I can't believe
I had to sacrifice you

She said, "That's me, man. That's my song." As I was leaving, she looked in the mirror, adjusting her boas. "How do I look, man?"

"Like a pearl," I answered. "A pearl of a girl."

Jim and I spent a lot of time in Chinatown. Every outing with him was a floating adventure, riding the high summer clouds. I liked to watch him interact with strangers. We would go to Hong Fat because it was cheap and the dumplings were good, and he would talk to the old guys. You ate what they brought to the table or you pointed to someone's meal because the menu was in Chinese. They cleaned the tables by pouring hot tea on them and wiping it up with a rag. The whole place had the fragrance of oolong. Sometimes Jim just picked up an abstract thread of conversation with one of these venerable-looking old men, who would then lead us through the labyrinth of their lives, through the Opium Wars and the opium dens of San Francisco. And then we would tramp from Mott to Mulberry to Twenty-third Street, back in our time, as if nothing had ever happened.

I gave him an autoharp for his birthday and wrote him long poems on my lunch break at Scribner's. I was hopeful he would be my boyfriend, but as it turned out, that was an improbable expectation. I would never serve as the source of his inspiration, though in attempting to articulate the drama of my feelings I became more prolific and I believe a better writer.

Jim and I had some very sweet times. I'm sure there were downs as well, but my memories are served with nostalgia and humor. Ours were ragtag days and nights, as quixotic as Keats and as rude as the lice we both came to suffer, each certain they originated from the other as we underwent a tedious regimen of Kwell lice shampooing in any one of the unmanned Chelsea Hotel bathrooms.

He was unreliable, evasive, and sometimes too stoned to speak, but he was also kind, ingenuous, and a true poet. I knew he didn't love me but I adored him anyway. Eventually he just drifted away, leaving me a long lock of his red-gold hair.

Robert and I went to see Harry. He and a friend were deciding who should be the new keeper of a special gray lamb pull toy. It was child-size, on wheels, with a long red ribbon: the Blakean lamb of Allen Ginsberg's companion, Peter Orlovsky. When they entrusted it to me I thought Robert would be mad, for I had promised I would harbor no

more sad refuse or broken toys. "You have to take it," he said, placing the ribbon in my hand. "It's a Smith classic."

A few evenings later, Matthew appeared out of nowhere with a boxful of 45s. He was obsessed with Phil Spector; it seemed like every single Phil had produced was in it. His eyes darted nervously across the room. "Do you have any singles?" he asked anxiously.

I got up and rummaged through the laundry and found my singles box, which was cream-colored and covered with musical notes. He immediately counted our combined collection. "I was right," he said. "We have just the right number."

"The right number for what?"

"For a night of one hundred records."

It made sense to me. We played them, one after another, starting with "I Sold My Heart to the Junkman." Each song was better than the next. I leapt up and started dancing. Matthew kept changing the sides like some deranged disc jockey. In the middle of it all, Robert came in. He looked at Matthew. He looked at me. He looked at the record player.

The Marvelettes were on. I said, "What are you waiting for?"

His coat dropped to the floor. There were thirty-three more to go.

It was an infamous address, having housed the Film Guild Cinema in the twenties, and a raucous country-western club hosted by Rudy Vallée in the thirties. The great abstract expressionist artist and teacher Hans Hoffman had a small school on the third floor through the forties and fifties, preaching to the likes of Jackson Pollock, Lee Krasner, and Willem de Kooning. In the sixties it housed the Generation Club, where Jimi Hendrix used to hang out, and when it closed he took over the space and built a state-of-the-art studio in the bowels of 52 Eighth Street.

On August 28 there was a party celebrating the opening. The Wartoke Concern handled the press. It was a coveted invitation and I received mine through Wartoke's Jane Friedman. She had also done the publicity for the Woodstock festival. We had been introduced at the Chelsea by Bruce Rudow, and she showed interest in my work.

I was excited to go. I put on my straw hat and walked downtown, but when I got there, I couldn't bring myself to go in. By chance, Jimi Hendrix came up the stairs and found me sitting there like some hick wallflower and grinned. He had to catch a plane to London to do the Isle of Wight Festival. When I told him I was too chicken to go in, he laughed softly and said that contrary to what people might think, he was shy, and parties made him nervous. He spent a little time with me on the stairs and told me his vision of what he wanted to do with the studio. He dreamed of amassing musicians from all over the world in Woodstock and they would sit in a field in a circle and play and play. It didn't matter what key or tempo or what melody, they would keep on playing through their discordance until they found a common language. Eventually they would record this abstract universal language of music in his new studio.

"The language of peace. You dig?" I did.

I can't remember if I actually went into the studio, but Jimi never accomplished his dream. In September I went with my sister and Annie to Paris. Sandy Daley had an airline connection and helped us get cheap tickets. Paris had already changed in a year, as had I. It seemed as if the whole of the world was slowly being stripped of innocence. Or maybe I was seeing a little too clearly.

As we walked down the boulevard Montparnasse I saw a headline that filled me with sorrow: *Jimi Hendrix est mort. 27 ans.* I knew what the words meant.

Jimi Hendrix would never have the chance to return to Woodstock to create a universal language. He would never again record at Electric

Lady. I felt that we had all lost a friend. I pictured his back, the embroidered vest, and his long legs as he went up the stairs and out into the world for the last time.

Steve Paul sent a car for Robert and me to see Johnny Winter at the Fillmore East on October 3. Johnny was at the Chelsea for a few days. After his concert, we all met back in his room. He had played at Jimi Hendrix's wake, and together we mourned the loss of our guitar poet, finding comfort in talking of him together.

But the next night we would meet in Johnny's room to console one another again. I wrote but two words in my diary: Janis Joplin. For she had died of an overdose in room 105 of the Landmark Hotel in Los Angeles, twenty-seven years old.

Johnny plunged. Brian Jones. Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin. He immediately made the *J* connection, as fear and grief merged. He was highly superstitious and worried that he would be next. Robert tried to calm him but said to me, "I can't blame him. It's pretty freaky," and he suggested I read Johnny's cards, which I did. His tarot suggested a swirl of contradicting forces, but spoke of no imminent danger. Cards or no cards, Johnny didn't have death in his face. There was something about him. Johnny was mercurial. Even as he fretted over the deaths of the J-club, frenetically pacing the room, it was as if he could never sit still long enough to die.

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I was both scattered and stymied, surrounded by unfinished songs and abandoned poems. I would go as far as I could and hit a wall, my own imagined limitations. And then I met a fellow who gave me his secret, and it was pretty simple. When you hit a wall, just kick it in.

Todd Rundgren took me to the Village Gate to hear a band called the Holy Modal Rounders. Todd had made his own album, *Runt*, and was on the lookout for interesting things he could produce. Big acts like Nina Simone and Miles Davis would play upstairs at the Gate, while the more underground bands were booked in the basement. I had never heard the Holy Modal Rounders, whose "Bird Song" was featured in *Easy Rider*, but knew it would be interesting because Todd usually gravitated toward the unusual.

It was like being at an Arabian hoedown with a band of psychedelic hillbillies. I fixed on the drummer, who seemed as if he was on the lam and had slid behind the drums while the cops looked elsewhere. Toward the end of their set he sang a song called "Blind Rage," and as he slammed the drums, I thought, This guy truly embodies the heart and soul of rock and roll. He had beauty, energy, animal magnetism.

I was introduced to the drummer when we went backstage. He said his name was Slim Shadow. I said, "Glad to meet you, Slim." I mentioned to him that I wrote for a rock magazine called *Crawdaddy* and that I wanted to write an article about him. Slim seemed entertained by this idea. He just nodded while I started my pitch, telling him about his potential, how "rock and roll needs you."

"Well, I never really thought about that," was his laconic reply.

I was sure *Crawdaddy* would accept a piece on this future salvation of rock and roll, and Slim agreed to come over to Twenty-third Street for an interview. He was amused by my mess, and sprawled out on my mat and told me about himself. He said he was born in a trailer and spun quite a yarn for me. Slim was a good talker. In a happy role reversal, it was he who was the storyteller. It was possible his tales were even taller than mine. He had an infectious laugh and was rugged, smart, and intuitive. In my mind, he was the fellow with the cowboy mouth.

In the following evenings he would appear late at night at my door with his shy and appealing grin and I would grab my coat and