

A BAKER'S DOZEN PLUS

NEW AND SELECTED POEMS AND PROSE

by EDWARD BONETTI

Norman

There's some new stuff in
here you might like. The
book should be out in August,
near the first.
The best
Ed Bonetti

A matching grant from patron Kenneth Torelli
helped make this book possible.

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"We're all isolated in our minds; where we come in touch with other people is through our affections, our sympathies, our animosities; we don't even know ourselves well enough to tell another person exactly what we are."

Joyce Cary

TO PROVINCE TOWN, TO FRIENDS.

~~SHORT FICTION~~ ~~SHORT FICTION~~ ~~PROSE~~

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DUPLOITY

"You're skinny," she said.

"I'm lean," he said. "I'm in good shape."

He stared down at the sidewalk.

"Your hair is gray too."

"I know."

"You look older."

"Fifty-seven."

SHORT FICTION

"Really? I would never guess, but..."

"But what?"

"I don't know. Something different about you."

"Business maybe."

"People change."

"So they do. So they do."

"In fact, you look more ugly than the last time I saw you twenty years ago."

"Really now?"

"Really," he said. He turned away from her, got a better grip on his suitcase and crashed her skull to-

Nowhere. I told this using the word
"battered," but in the end I left it with
original. It comes on the page as it seems
all at once. The word "battered"
about things happen.

DUPLICITY

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"Fifty-seven."

"Really? I would never guess, but. . ."

"But what?"

"I don't know. Something different about you."

Sadness maybe."

"People change."

"So they do. So they do."

"In fact, you look more ugly than the last time I saw you twenty years ago."

"Really now!"

"Really," he said. He turned away from her, got a better grip on his suitcase and ~~crushed~~ ~~her~~ skull in.

Mormon, I tried this using the word
"battered," "bashed in," then went back to the
original. It comes on the reader, or it seems to,
all at once. The word "battered"
shows things down.

RAIN

Johnson turned onto Lexington Ave. and headed for the Seventy-Second Street subway station. It started raining. When it increased to a downpour he stepped into a doorway and pulled his collar up against the wind.

The raining continued heavily. Johnson listened to its spatter on the sidewalk and on the street. He stood back in the doorway and watched the faces going by. To those he could not see under their umbrellas he gave imaginary features while he waited for the rain to stop.

After some five minutes or so of waiting, during which time he became bored with his game, the rain came down even heavier, and the sidewalks were near deserted.

The flow of traffic slowed. The automobiles and trucks appeared and disappeared through sheets of rain. Johnson moved further into the doorway and looked out. From time to time a horn sounded, and a few people ran from one curb across to the other while Johnson watched morosely, his thoughts sluggish and bored. "I hope she isn't home," he said to himself. He watched a lady making her way through the traffic holding a newspaper over her head. "Would like to leave her," he thought as the lady bumped into a fender, tripped, regained her balance and finally made it to the other curb.

The traffic moved a little forward. Johnson watched the cab and the two men who had called to it standing apart from each other by some ten feet on the curb. He wondered who would get the cab. "She'd never give me a divorce," he thought, and the traffic moved ahead

again with the cab waiting for the two men running towards it through the rain. "Maybe I'll just up and leave. Why not?" And he watched the two men reach for the rear door at the same time. "Can't take it much longer." And he watched their heads bob like corks while they argued--"It's her bickering that gets me"--and Johnson listening now to the horns blaring from the line of cars in back of the cab--and a deepening melancholy began to take possession of him, feeling how useless it was to counter her bickering--and one man was shaking his fists in front of the other's face--"Why do I sit there and take it?"--and Johnson waiting now for one man to hit the other--"Should tell her how I feel"--and the cabbie hollering back at them with his head out the open window--and the horns blaring--and the one drawing his arm up and back--"She'll never change, why should she?"--and the other swearing, shaking his fist--and the cabbie getting out and moving between the two men--"Should stand up to her"--and the first man swinging and missing, with the hat falling off the second man's head--"Oleary was right: have a good fling at life before getting married"--and the second punch landing on the other's nose--"I envy that guy. Made it big too"--and the other bleeding from the nose now--while the cabbie holds the first man back--"But he married into money"--and the crowd gathering in the rain with umbrellas--and the cop appearing from around the corner pushing through the umbrellas to the fight--"Said he never would unless she had money"--and

the cop with his club out and his rain coat glistening--
"Smart move"--and the first swing of the club to the
first man's head--"always made smart moves"--and the
second man swinging--"Got to get out somehow"--and the
crowd screaming--"Should have gone long ago"--and the
fists and the cabbie swinging--and the second man receiving
the club now--"No money, nothing"--and the screaming
and the heads of the men bobbing for the swinging and
the punching--"What in hell can I do"--and the second man's
face smeared with blood--and the cabbie going down against
his cab--and the cop still swinging on both men and the
first one going down bloody--"Stay and take it, I guess"--
and the second one falling forward out of sight--"Can't
stand up to her"--and the cop leaning on the cab in the rain
with his hat fallen off and his hair soaked and matted--
"I'll figure something out"--and the arms of the cop
hanging by his side with the club in his hand--"Yeah,"
Johnson said, "I'll have to figure something out." And
he stepped out of the doorway and walked ~~out~~ with his
head down to the station through the rain.

TUNA

The last job they would give him eighteen hours a day dressing the big bluefin tuna which he had loved with a sadness flopping yet alive from the boats on the concrete floor of the fish house before he took the axe to their heads and to their dorsal fins and tails. . . "Great herds of the sea, Buffaloes, yeah!" And their eyes twice bigger than half dollars with their yellow rimmed blue gray pupils staring up at him from between his legs: "You gotta work faster, kid." Another boat due in half an hour--and Tibbs chopping and gutting and watching the leather-red shine of the hearts tough-as-the-world still beating in the mess of entrails on the floor: "No blood as red as dead as tuna blood is red." Yeah!--And the feel and swing of the axe handle after ten hours capable of cleaving a head free from the body with two strokes one on each side behind the gills: "Getting it, kid. Gotta be faster, though. Less fucking around with the fish. Just clean 'em. Don't look at 'em. Clean 'em."--And the bloodsoak of entrails: the yellows and the greens blood-red on the gray-white of the stomachs; sacks and convolutions of tissue too and organs mixed heaped red and green and purple tubes and tendons silver-white of the sea and livers glistening brown-red and smooth: "Clean 'em, kid, just clean 'em."--Blood-red of fluids in the grain of the concrete and on his boots; blood splattered in dots and smears on his yellow slicker overalls and on the sleeves of his rubber coat: "Keep looking at your sleeves and it's all over, kid. Clean

'em. That's all you have to do is clean 'em"--blood on his face too and wet, and caked in his hair: "You're slowing down, kid. I dunno."--blood in his eyes and the big tuna heart beating at his feet watching it pulse as it died; irregular snaps and quivers, the leather-red expansion of muscle as tough-as-the-world slower now and he kneeling over and down and the time between the pulses lessening with Tibbs on his knees and holding the heart in his hand like a kitten, massaging it with the rhythm from its last pulse and waiting; waiting for another expansion, another quiver, pulse, contraction, movement anything that would bring it back and the hand on his shoulder the sound of his own crying in his ears for the mystery was lost in the last beat of the heart he still held in his hands: "You're through, kid. Sorry. Pick up your pay and beat it"--and down the pier then with the blood of the tuna still on him through the files of tourists his eyes wet and his hair blowing the knapsack on his back and a ten dollar check in his pocket.

WIDOW

The lawyer sat on the edge of the cot with his briefcase beside him. He had a worried look on his face. Outside stood the ~~gar~~ guard leaning against the wall, his arms folded, his eyelids drooping.

"I want you to relax," the lawyer said calmly, "and tell me exactly what happened."

Francis drew the back of his hand across his mouth. "Limby could tell you better than I," he said with some agitation.

"I'm sure ~~he~~ he could," the lawyer said. "But he's dead. Now take your time and explain it as best you can."

"Well, ~~as I told the police~~ like I told the police, I think Limby knew she wanted to be murdered."

"How do you know ~~that~~ that?"

"I don't know it. It's just a feeling."

"Limby was a painter. Wasn't he?"

"Yes, and a damn good one too. In fact he had sold three seascapes just before taking the job for that old widow."

"Then he didn't make his living painting?"

"No. He did odd jobs to stay alive."

"What kind of a man was he? Outgoing?

Reserved? A loner? What?"

"Moody, I guess. And somewhat of a loner."

"Did you ever work with him before this?"

~~XXXXXXXXXXXX~~

"Before what?"

"Before the death of the widow?"

"Once."

"When?"

"About a year ago."

"What did you do?"

"We painted a house."

"Were the people satisfied with your work?"

"Yes."

"How were you doing on this job?"

Francis took in a deep breath and leaned back with his
shoulders against the wall. "I was pretty much on my own," he

went on slowly. "All the shingles are different in
width. You ~~xxxx~~ shouldn't nail two of the same
width next to each other. You've got to ^{stagger} ~~stagger~~ them,
but when you get the hang of it it goes right along."

"The work was going well then?"

"Yes."

"Was the widow satisfied?"

"I don't know. She didn't seem to care about it. She just hung around the outside of the house most of the time. She'd come out and look up at us. And she'd smile and then go back into the house. Once she brought out a lawn chair and just sat there smiling and looking up at us."

"Did she talk to Limby at all?"

"A few times."

"What did they talk about?"

"I don't know. She'd motion to him to come down every now and then in order to help her with something, like opening a window she said was stuck that Limby found not to be stuck. Once she came walking around the side of the house holding a shingle in one hand and waving the other motioning Limby to come down. She mimicked like she was hammering the shingle onto the side of the house. Then she'd go back in, and in an hour or so ~~she~~ she's step out from behind the lilac (that grew on the front lawn, bus~~h~~ and motion Limby to come down from the roof ~~again.~~ again."

"Was Limby annoyed at this?"

"He didn't seem to be at first. But I remember he came back up on the roof once, and I saw a kind of

servility in his face. It was unsettling to see him look like that."

"Servility? Why servility?"

Francis looked away for a moment. Turning back to the lawyer he said: I don't really know if it was servility. But as I told you, and this is my own feeling about it, I think Limby was suspicious of her since the first day we went to work, and I think that when you're suspicious of someone you're servile to them and they have an authority over you."

"Do you think she had an authority over Limby?"

"I'm certain of it."

"It's an unusual certainty." the lawyer said.

"I don't mean about authority, but about the idea it suggests that she wielded some kind of hex over Limby that you choose to call ^{servility} ~~authority~~. But go on."

"One time she climbed up the ladder and ~~fix~~ got on to the scaffold. She stood there looking at Limby without saying a word. When she got back down Limby followed her as if he were in a trance. When he ^{about a half hour later} came back on the roof he told me she wanted to die. He seemed a little strange, I remember, and when I asked him why he felt that way he turned and stared at me while at the same time he drove a nail right into the roof with his hammer. One quick swing, and he said it's in her breath. Then, when we took our lunch break

on the roof he ~~xxxx~~ sat there with his legs crossed under him and ate with sweat pouring out of his face, staring off into nothing it seemed. And his jaw began to work on that sandwich like he was chewing on a bone. When he stopped chewing he said, 'It's in her breath. She wants to die' ^{and} ~~and I can smell it~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~

The lawyer shifted himself on the cot. "Despite what might have been Limby's intuitive sense of her wish to die, she might have died in self defense."

The lawyer got off the cot and paced the cell floor. "As it stands now," he went on, "your prints were on the gun. ~~xxxxxxx~~ Along with the two bodies you were the only one in the room when the police arrived."

"I called the police," Francis said.

"I know that, but ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ^{still} we have to prove ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ your innocence," ~~on the basis of~~ ~~accidental homicide~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~

Francis shook his head in agreement.

"Let's take it from her side then," the lawyer continued. "Did you notice anything else that was peculiar about the old lady? Something that could be

corroborated by her neighbors, a delivery boy, anyone?"

"Yes," Francis answered, "but I don't know who could corroborate it."

"What do you mean?"

"Well I asked to use her toilet once and she said, 'Yes, you may indeed use my toilet,' but it was in the way she ^{said} ~~said~~ it that was strange. Her face seemed to go blank and she turned away. And when I was in the bathroom I could hear her on the other side of the door listening. She was trying to breath quietly, but after a while I could hear her panting. Then she went away and I could hear her muttering in the kitchen which was adjacent through a doorway to the bathroom. She was saying something I couldn't make out. At first I thought she was talking to Limby, but when I heard him hammering on the roof I knew she wasn't. Anyway, her muttering went on, and it got louder, and I heard her say distinctly over and over, 'Oh my God. Oh my God. Oh my dear God!' She said it with a kind of pleading as if she had been denied her deepest wish and wanted another chance to make the ~~my~~ wish again. When I came out of the bathroom I could see her through the window standing in ~~xxx~~ the yard looking up towards the roof."

"How long were you in the house?"

~~"About twenty minutes, I guess."~~

~~"Does that include the time you were on the crapper?"~~

"~~No.~~" All told I was in there for about *four minutes*.
~~three-quarters of an hour.~~

"Was 'nt that kind of long?"

"I looked around a bit."

"Why?"

"Because nothing in the house seemed real."

"Can you explain that?"

"There were a lot of figurines that had been placed on all of the shelves and window sills, with ~~a~~ precision, it seemed. Each one in its place not to be moved. ~~xxxxxx The room looked like a stage set assembled for actors who would never show up.~~ She had small cups ~~xxxx~~ and sauces, antiques I guess, placed everywhere too. All different colors and designs on them. Some of these were on the sills and on the frames half way up the window. She had about a dozen on the mantle over the fireplace. And there was a small table set up with them in front of the fireplace with chairs all around the table like a child's play set. There was something strange about the furniture too."

"What was that?"

"I don't know; it's vague, it's just a feeling I had looking at it. Like if I tried to move it it would resist and stay in place. The rugs ~~xxxx~~ seemed the same way. They were ^{braided} ~~braided~~ rugs and they seemed like

they were nailed to the floor, ~~but you knew they~~
~~were~~ ^{and} ~~weren't~~. There was a large oriental vase, I remember,
 that stood on an oak table ~~by~~ by the ~~large~~ fireplace
 at one end of the living room. When I ^{passed} ~~passed~~ it she ~~saw~~
 saw me looking at it, and as if to draw my attention
 away ~~from it~~ she coughed a little, as if I shouldn't
 dally. Well there was a blonde wig ^{draped} ~~draped~~ over the top
 of it and it had a foul smell to it ~~like~~ like an old
 trunk smells that hasn't been opened in a long time."

"When did you first talk to the widow?"

"When I came down from the roof that time to ask
 if I could use her toilet. "

"Did you hear her use that phrase again, 'God, Oh
 my dear God?'"

"Yes".

"When."

"The day she killed Limby."

"How do you know she killed him?"

"I saw it happen."

"The report says you ran into the house and found
 her standing over Limby. That doesn't constitute
 eyewitness evidence." Does it now?"

"I guess not!"

"Then why do you claim you saw it happen?"

"What I mean is I was outside when I heard
 the shots that killed him."

But the prints on the gun are yours." How do you account for that?"

"I took the gun from her."

"You say you were outside when you heard the shots. Now tell me exactly what took place from the time she said 'Oh God' until you heard the shots."

"We were taking a lunch break in the shade of a red oak growing on her front lawn. She came out of the house, closed the screen door behind her and stood looking down at us from the front porch. 'God,' she said, 'Oh my dear God.' This time she said it with a kind of joy, an exhilaration, and her eyes seemed glazed over."

"Where was Limby?"

"He was sitting on the grass right next to me."

"Go on."

"After she said that Limby got up as if he were in a daze. He was chewing the last of his sandwich and ^{his} jaw went into that grinding rhythm again like he was chewing on a bone. She smiled at him. Then she turned back into the house and he followed behind still chewing with that look of servility and hate on his face. They were in there for ~~about~~ ^{before} about twenty minutes. I heard the first shot, ^{and} then three more one right after the other. I got up and ran into the house. In the living room I saw Limby ~~xxx~~

stretched out on the floor face down. She was standing over him. The gun was in her hand by her side. I could see blood seeping through the back of Limby's T-shirt and coming out the back of his head. I knew he was dead with all that blood so I didn't make any attempt to help him. Even bend down to look at him."

"Did she say anything?"

"No. She just stood there for a while. She seemed to be looking right through me. Then she raised the gun and pointed it into my face."

"How far away was she standing?"

"Maybe six or seven feet."

"How did the gun get into your hand?"

"Well, my first impulse was to get out of there. But she moved closer to me, and began repeating that phrase again, 'Oh my God. Oh my dear God.' She repeated it over and over just standing there. Her smile seemed to deepen in her face, I remember. And she began biting her lower ~~max~~ lip until she drew blood. I didn't know whether she was going to fire or not. She walked over to me very slowly and when she was right in front of me I reached out and grabbed both of her wrists and bent her arms back towards her. She had a surge of strength then, and she forced me back towards the doorway of the living room, all the

while swearing through her teeth that she hated Limby and would kill me as she had killed him. While we struggled, the gun suddenly fired and the bullet went into her throat. She went down and she began to laugh, and while she lay on the floor looking up at me she laughed through her own blood for about a half a minute before she died. When it was over the gun was in ^{my} ~~her~~ hand. I put it down on a small table nearby, found her phone and called the police."

In a tone that indicated no certain ~~the~~ belief in what Francis ~~told him~~ had told him, the lawyer asked: "You're telling the truth?"

Francis looked intensely at him. "Yes," he said "It's the truth. Everything I've told you here is the truth."

"Then I think we have a case," the lawyer said. He got up, reached for his briefcase, and motioned to the guard to open the cell door.

A CASE IN POINT

The two women, dressed in identical denim jackets and faded blue jeans, parked their Land-Rover above the high-water mark, got out and ran down to Mason. He stood exhausted now by the rear wheel of his Kontiki camper that had spun into a mud hole where the lay of the beach sloped abruptly into a spread of sand flats. Some fifty feet out beyond the flats an oncoming tide drove before it a ridge of surf.

The two stared at Mason while he explained the reasons for his predicament. Neither seemed to hear what he had to say.

"Do you think all that talk was necessary," the tall one asked. Her voice had a deep hollow resonance as if it came through the end of a metal pipe. She was heavysset with husky shoulders. Her straight blond hair was cut short. Her eyes, severely veined and watery, seemed on the edge of popping out.

Mason looked at her. "I've got to get out of her is all I'm trying to say and I need help to do it."

"Giving you help is hardly a concern of ours," the short one said. She spoke with the tempo of an hysteric. She stood with her hands at her sides, rigid as wood, her

muscular legs swelling in her jeans. She too had close-cropped, straight blond hair.

While the tall one watched Mason, the short one bent down and studied the condition of the wheel. She gave a quick arrogant tap to the half-exposed hub cap and stood up.

"He literally ruined a good piece of beach," she said.

Now the tall one bent down to have a look. "I wonder," the tall one said, looking, "I wonder if he realizes the time it took for nature to..." she rose slowly, wiping mud from her ^{elbows} ~~elbers~~ "...for nature to have made these alluvial deposits?"

Something of confusion and anger flushed into Mason's face. He looked at the surf apprehensively, "I might know what you mean," he said, turning back to them. "But when the tide runs over my crime it'll smooth it out. Now either give me a hand or get someone who can. There ain't much time," he added.

"It's obvious he understands nothing," the short one said.

"Like the rest," the tall one said.

"Who in hell are the rest?" Mason said.

"That isn't the case in point here," the tall one continued.

Mason felt a dryness spreading in his throat. "Damn it," he said, "it won't be in another twenty minutes, if that's what you mean."

The tall one stuffed her hands into the back pockets of her jeans and walked the length of the camper. She studied the chrome-plated weather stripping, the glaring aluminum walls, and the brandy ^{name,} KONTIKI, a bold face row of slanted, four-inch golden decals above the door at the rear. KONTIKI. She stared up at it. Nodding her head disbelievingly, she turned and came back, forcing a quick ^{smile} ~~smile~~ that vanished the moment her lips went shut.

She looked into Mason's face. She pointed to the buggy tracks and the sign ^{that} ~~the~~ enforced their use, "Up there, big boy..." she said, shaking her finger. "Up there is where you and your junk heap are supposed to be...in the tracks. You hear?"

"And if you had stayed up there," the short one said, accenting every syllable, "you wouldn't have gotten stuck down here."

There was a silence. Then with a sudden meanness the tall one said, "Do you know we have reason now to let you sit?"

"Until the tide taks you and your camper," the short one countered... She glanced at her friend. ~~The friend~~ ^{back} ~~glanced at her friend.~~ The friend glanced back at her.

"It makes little difference to me," the tall one said.

"Christ almighty," Mason said, "I don't believe it."

They smiled at each other and Mason knew they meant it. They would let him sit.

He thought a while. Finally, he said, "You're right, ladies. I should have stayed in the buggy tracks. Now that's elemental, and you have my deepest apology for that." He looked at the breakers boiling in. "But the flats appeared so untouched," he continued, "that I had to feel their existence under me." He paused and looked straight at them. "I ask you, can you blame a man for that?"

There was a tight silence this time. Then from the tall one, "Why didn't you walk down? Tell me that."

"Well, actually," Mason said, "I was going to. In fact, I stopped first and got out." He pointed. "You see that huge gray log. That great, monumental log up there? Yes? Well, I sat on it and looked out over the ocean, and it seemed to me that eternity was symbolized in the expanse of blue right to the horizon. I said to myself, 'Mason, the color of eternity must be blue.' I tell you truthfully, ladies. It was a strange and beautiful feeling that came over me, and I had to get closer."

The two glanced at each other. Mason picked up his shovel, drove the blade into the sand and went on, "I can understand your concern for the purity of the beach," he said, "Yes, purity and peace. Two most significant elemental things." He looked out over the water now, his face an expression of solemn detachment, his head raised reverently. "Human roots," he said. "Roots of elemental purity crawling

from the deep. But there are times, ladies, when nature takes no part in her drama. It's as if...as if she stepped aside sometimes to let things go on their own." He turned to them dead on and asked, "Do you ^{believe} ~~believe~~ that?"

A tense silence. Mason smiled softly. "Ladies," he said, "I can tell that you do not believe it. Yes, indeed, you are as you say, a case in point."

It came on them like a wind, as his voice trailed off. There was not so much as an utterance from either when the blade of the shovel came down, first on the head of one, then the head of the other. Both fell like trees.

With the use of their Land-Rover, Mason hauled his camper free of the mud. He stood parked now in the buggy tracks that would lead him out to the main road.

Looking back, he mused on shards of driftwood, on wracks of kelp interspersed with sheaves of tangled weeds, and on the dead gray logs laid out randomly along the contours of the high beach. He listened to the surf pounding. He heard the freshening gusts of wind and sheets of sand rasping against the walls of the camper. It was all familiar to him, yet a dreary lassitude spread through ^{him,} ~~him.~~ Now his eyes followed the high-tide line. Some twenty yards into the water beyond it, he saw the roof the Land-Rover awash in roils of foam. Immersed in the breakers falling near shore he saw the two bodies flopping hopelessly. With his eyes still on them he

pulled in a deep breath of sea air. In a while his lassitude passed, and in a reassuring voice he said, "It's elemental. Yes, indeed, it's all pure and elemental." He smiled, settled back in his seat and drove off.

FEVER

It was mid-September and Nat Seeever's luck had been good, with seven stripers taken on bait and three on plug. They were adequate fish for this late in the season, averaging ten pounds, some slightly more. He knew after he had taken his second fish within minutes that he had found the feeding hole of a school holding close to the warmer water near shore. He would wait then for two hours, when the next tide would be full. If he got any strikes, or if he caught another, he would fish for two more hours after full tide, and then go to sleep. It would be a little over four hours of fishing, but it would be easy work, for he would have a full moon. The wind was lessening, and the water offshore to the hole would be calm. The ground swells too had decreased since the night before, and they would give little surf to work against when he made his casts.

Seeever stood now above the beach in the dusklight looking seaward. He smiled, stroked his stubble of beard, and felt again the need to look at his fish. When he reached his camp in a grove of scrub oak and pine some fifty yards back from shore, he fed three small logs to his fire, sat down cross-legged before it, and looked at the stripers lying on a sheet of tarpaulin spread alongside his jeep.

After four hours out of water they were still in almost perfect condition: there was no odor, no visible decomposition. They were still as perfect in form as if he had just pulled them from the sea. He watched the play of the firelight on their bodies. He studied the lateral lines of dark and light scales along the sides, receding and converging into a taper, and the taper fanning out acutely into the winglike shape of the tails. They lay stiffly, side by side, a row of pointed heads ^{each} ~~each~~ with its one eye open to the firelight, the pupils clouded milky with fluid, but the stare insistent and frozen as if from a bead of glass. The belly of the nearest one exposed to the light of the flame was crystal white, and its composite pattern of interlocking scales glistened like slivers of bone. "Bone," Seever said, and he got up, not fully standing, his knees still bent, and moved within reaching distance of his fish. He drew his finger along the head of one and traced the outline of the eye, then continued tracing carefully along the head to the jaw and along the lower lip to the partly opened mouth. He pulled down on the lip and inserted his finger deep into the mouth. Farther back in the throat he could feel the tightness of the narrowing gullet and the cold residue of fluids. With his free hand he rubbed his stubble, smiled, and looked into the stare of the fish below his face, his finger now moving in and out of the mouth slowly. "Still moist," he said. "Even to the gullet. And no smell yet." He withdrew

his finger, hearing the quick snap of suction close the gullet. He stood up, and walked out of the clearing to check once more on the weather.

The moon was now full to its rim, lifting out of the horizon like a stone disk above the water. A few stars were visible to the north, but a cloud bank had risen and swept up darkly to the clouds that still held motionless on the horizon inland. "It might be overcast," he said, "but it'll make no difference to me." Yes, they were in there, and overcast or not they were his for the taking. He would fish until he got them all, fish until he fished the ocean clean; if necessary, until he collapsed. He had been bit since his first fifty-pounder taken four months earlier from a chartered launch out of Cuttyhunk. Then a week later, he felt the need to fish again as he had felt the same need some years before to hunt black bear in Maine. At that time he had felt it like a purge in his bones after he had brought a female down with one shot through the base of her neck and watched the huge mass of fur, muscle and head rise like a statue under the limb of an oak tree; watched the labor of her movement and the thick head rearing still upward with her mouth open in the circle of his scope; yes, watched the movement as if in a trance and felt his pleasure begin in an instant that held him full with excitement and laughter, a sound of laughter that was severe against the sound of splitting wood when she took the limb in her teeth, groaning still upward

in her last movement, before he shot again, then again and again until his rifle was empty and he had brought her down, brought her five hundred pounds crashing down with the limb still in her teeth. Then—a week after Cuttyhunk and his first striper—he knew he had been bit; and he fished alone now as he had hunted alone whenever he got the chance.

Seever was no amateur after Cuttynunk. He took a fifty-pounder out of the Cape Cod canal on a monofilament line of forty-five pound test. He carried a picture of the bass balanced in his right hand held above his head; and his raw muscular arms, his small waist and bulging buttocks, his long thick legs, even his hands with their thick fingers, all indicated a strength that could have pressed three hundred pounds, a strength that could have broken a man's back with ease, or if concentrated in his fist held like the head of a mallet at his side, could have shattered a jaw.

The stripers Seever caught on the next tide in the flood of moonlight that he had wished for averaged over twenty pounds. He had worked farther out over the hole and had pulled in four. Later in camp before going to sleep he loaded his spool with a line of thirty-five pound test. He resolved that he would go to an even lower weight if the fish got bigger. He would go to the lowest limit of what line he had, which was twenty-pound test, and he planned to use it on his nine-foot rod. The decision to use the lighter tackle was not impulsive; it was made after he figured his chances

against the increasing easterly wind and the heavier surf that had developed on the falling tide just before he quit. It had been made for the same reason as his decision earlier in the year before Cuttyhunk: When his excitement for hunting had ceased, he knew he lacked the purpose and need for making repeated easy kills. The lighter tackle now, he reasoned, would prove his new ability against the odds of the heavier fish.

The following night, before the tide was full, he caught his biggest fish on the thirty-five-pound test line. It read exactly forty pounds on his scale. He fought it for near to an hour and a half, standing waist-high in the surf. At times the sea broke against his chest, and the sand beneath his feet was carried away in the backwash, leaving him balanced on the heels of his boots as if he stood on a floating rail. But Seever had worked his fish carefully, playing its weight delicately through the feel of his rod, feeling the stretch of line to its mouth and to the barb of the hook holding in the mouth. As he worked up and down the beach in the driving surf, he thought too of the hook holding deep through the fish's upper lip and protruding hard between the openings of its nose; thought he could see the eyes of the fish move like turrets of light in the murk of the water, staring like beads of glass on the curve of steel it had swallowed. Yes, Seever had worked his fish carefully, lost his footing once and went under. But he held on, came up

and regained his balance without having let go of the rod. He felt then the initial force of the fish's mass and anger, and he felt his own anger while he reeled in, bucked the sea with his big chest and shoulders, sending just enough delicate pain to the hook when the striper had turned, feigned back toward shore and headed out again tiredly for the last time against the drag of his reel. And as the fish tired, so Seever's anger diminished and his laughter spewed from his soaking frame like the roar of a fire, high and severe above the roar of the surf as if he had conquered a nightmare of devils. The nex night he went to his thirty-pound test.

The fish Seever had caught after five nights of fishing amounted to sixty school bass, twelve twenty- to thirty-pounders and the forty-pounder. He had caught three large skate about three feet across, which he had pulled in only to retrieve the hook. He considered the skates useless, and the lack of excitement he experienced when he caught them, the time wasted in removing the hook which wast taken deep into the gullets, was not worth the loss of bait. Neither did he ^{have} ~~have~~ any luck with the lighter tackle in taking a striper bigger than his forty-pounder. All of this, the skates and his increasing dissatisfaction with small fish, had triggered his anger and at times cramped his ability to make his casts accurately over the line of surf to the hole.

The fish he had caught—except for the forty-pounder, which he had carried up above the high-water mark and had

covered with wet seaweed—were left on the beach. The six that he lived with in camp were thrown out into the clearing beyond the grove. Those he had left out in the open, torn at during the day by gulls and terns, were mutilated out of ~~shape~~ ^{shape} and shredded through to their entrails.

In his activity of fishing, keeping camp, and digging for bait while he waited for the tides, Seever was unconcerned with the carcasses lying along the beach, and by the end of the week the odor of rotting fish hung palpably in the air. But he worked the hole methodically at each tide. If he landed a striper over his forty-pounder he would go to the limit of his tackle, fish until he landed a bigger one, and then leave.

So Seever fished for two nights before he landed a striper that weighted forty-eight pounds. He had little difficulty and took it within an hour in a low rolling surf. After this he went to his light tackle. He caught school bass and a few more skates and several large cod and flounder which he threw up with the others. While he fished the daytime tides, the beach behind him was alive with yelping gulls, terns, and sheldrakes that had landed to feed on their way south. Against this background of noise, and in the stench which now carried even to his campsite, Seever fished and he waited.

It was twelve-thirty in the morning. The half-moon shone through an expanse of open sky and lit a path across

the water. In front of him, as if powdered with a fine covering of snow, the beach was visible in the light. Inland he could see the range of dunes like mounds of chalk, and the marshes spreading black to the inlet where he had dug more bait that afternoon. He stood fixed now above the beach, with his pole at his side and his gaff-hook hanging from his waist. His rubber waders, his boots, and his parka glinted in the moonlight. The vertical mass of his frame, with its thick head and face raised above his chest, was like a silhouette of wood, immobile and singular on the lay of the sloping beach and against the shifting expanse of water in front of him. With his pole held off the sand, and the stench of the rotting fish laced heavily in the force of the breeze that swept about him, Seever moved down the grade of beach across some five feet of remaining flats and entered the water smiling. It was three hours before full tide. With a minimum of ground swells the surf was irregular, running no more than a foot high over the flats and tonguing smoothly up to the edge of sand that marked the beach behind him. Once in the water he made his first cast toward the hole, and after an hour's fishing, he landed three. From their size he figured they weighed at least twenty pounds. His anger increased and he considered them as useless as skate.

There was no warning. When the fish struck it struck totally, bending the rod down to its butt end. Seever leaned forward to release the tension. "The drag must have jammed,"

he yelled. "If the bastard's gone, Ill . . . " The drag had jammed, but he had it working in seconds. The line drew taunt down through the eyes of the rod, with four feet or more of it spinning off from the spool of the reel, and he knew he still had him. He let the line pay out over his finger, and felt the heft of the butt end in his hands. From this he calculated the fish to weigh at least sixty pounds, maybe a little more. He then cranked the reel until the line took up against the drag. When he secured his footing, he began ^{the} ~~to~~ play.

Seever gave the fish no advantage, gave it no more tension of line than enough to give himself the feel of its position in the dark somewhere out beyond him. Once he thought of moving up on shore, playing the fish from there and then gaffing it while still in the backwash; but he resolved finally to work it first over the line of the breakers some fifty yards out and then move up to the beach when it started its final run seaward from the shallow water near shore.

After two hours had passed, the fish was still in the water. Seever began to feel the stiffness in his arms, the cramping muscles of his legs, and the increasing inflexibility of his wrists each time he eased back on the rod. But he continued to work carefully, rhythmically, moving with the fish down-surf when it fought for more line. His head was matted with soaked hair, his shoulders and chest laboring beneath his parka slicked smooth with water, and all of him, the head rearing high above his chest, the laboring shoulders,

and the arms braced out straight from the shoulders to the gripped hands around the butt end of the rod, all of him down to his waist and to his buttocks that showed hard against the strain of his waders in the backwash—all of him contiguous with the movement of water about him. And now as he reeled in on each downstroke of the rod he cursed aloud to the increasing wind and to the spray, lifting like pellets of sleet out of the driving surf. But he knew it would not be long. The fish was tiring.

When a half hour more had passed he could see the striper lying half up on its side in the crests and wallowing closer to shore on each successive wave. Seever let it come then, reeling in slack until he saw it leap out of the water, arching from the end of the leader down, a curve of muscle and scales flashing once in the moonlight, then turning seaward in its leap. When it fell to the water Seever was laughing, and again his laugh was severe and high above the roar of the surf. "Bastard, I've got you," he yelled, and he moved up backwards out of the surf onto the shoreline. When the striper began its last run in the shallow water, he was ready. He started to give it line, all the line its run would take, no tension, no heft or pull, no weight, all slack and freedom on its run seaward before he would take it back with one final pull on the rod.

When the drag jammed again, Seever had only seconds to make his choice. Within the period of those seconds, and with the anger swelling in his chest, he followed up on his

first choice: he let go of the rod, and in one movement was in the water with his arm around the striper's girth and his ^{free} ~~fre~~ fist like a sledge coming down upon its head. He wrestled it; it shook under him, bounding like a coil spring snapped free from its mounts, slapping the sand with its tail, flanks, belly and head, its eyes like chips of crystal in the moonlight flashing on the angle of its stare. And as Seever fought his fish in the shallows of the surf he felt its weight of sixty-five pounds or more in the wash of sand, gravel and stone when the sea pulled back to leave it higher yet than the first shock of land against its flesh.

The first blow of his gaff-hook cracked deep into the striper's head. The second blow was halfway down when the wave came up. It rose hissing, broke, and then fell with a suddenness that held Seever immobile and useless under its weight. When it receded the fish was gone. The rod, too, with its tangled line was gone, and he stood in the wake of the wave's backwash exhausted. He felt the pain now in his right arm just below the elbow. When he ^{saw} ~~was~~ the sleeve of his parka ripped open, he knew he had been cut. He knew with anger too it had been the horny, spikelike cartilage in the striper's dorsal fin that had cut him. In the moonlight he could see the slash and his blood pulsing out of it. He stared absently. "I should have killed him," he said. He gripped his arm and applied pressure, and without picking up his gaff-hook, he headed back to camp.

The next morning after packing his gear into the jeep, Seever returned to the shoreline and picked up his gaff-hook. Then he walked to the ridge of the beach where it sloped upward a few feet into a mound of compass grass, holly and tangled briar. In one movement he swung up the bank and stood in the grass, his eyes narrowing and his jaw set hard above the lapel of his open jacket. The cut in his arm throbbed under its dressing, but it was not unbearable. He looked a long time over the spread of sand below him. He could see the forty-pounder uncovered now and rotting, and the torn carcasses of the other stripers putrefying. His eyes held a while on the cartilage that had turned yellow in the open sides of their heads. Seever smiled. The odor of dead flesh hung like a shroud above the beach. Along the high-water mark he could see mounds of seaweed and the bones of the flounder and cod, and kelp and the weed mixed with sand, more mutilated fish and the black casings of skate eggs. Overhead a few remaining gulls hawked intermittently, soared and dipped in the sunlight. He looked up at the gulls. After a while, as if he had forgotten something, he faced the beach once more and smiled again. "I slipped," he said. "That's all." Then he turned away and with his gaff-hook and chain swinging from his fist, he walked through the briar, through the grasss, back to the grove of scrub oak and pine, to his jeep.

BEGINNER'S LUCK

They had shot by in schools, hit fast and vanished, leaving the water lulled. By mid-afternoon they started hitting again, and Thorson, although a little tired, went after them with a fervor. He didn't see the father and son come up.

The two looked at him while he kneeled on the granite stones of the jetty baiting his hook. Each was the replica of the other, thin-boned and lanky with hard blue eyes and stiff red hair.

"We've been watching you," the father said. He wore a black coat sweater with leather patches on the elbows. His white shirt underneath, soiled gray and opened at the collar, exposed the blanched hairless skin of his chest.

"You've been having a lot of luck," the boy said. He was about seventeen. A lock of hair covered one eye. A baseball cap with a softened peak lapped down on his forehead. His eyes, when Thorson looked at him again, seemed unreal in the pallid face. It was as if two lusterless beads had been stuck in a plate of porcelain. His cheap plastic-housed reel, like his father's, glinted in the sunlight.

The father motioned to the boy with his head. The boy, without taking his eyes off Thorson, reached into his bait can and lifted out a handful of Thorson's oil smelts.

"Put them there," the father said, pointing to a chink in the granite. He turned to Thorson. "They don't seem to like no jigs so we thought we'd borrow some bait."

Thorson finished baiting his hook. He stood up.

"That is, if you don't mind," the father added.

Thorson cast out. "I don't mind," he said. In a while he worked another fish, its belly tilted half up on its turn, swimming at a right angle to the line slicing the water, like the fuselage of a small jet. The father watched. A slow thin smile spread across his drawn face.

"Some have it, some don't," he said in a clipped nasal voice. "But we gonna show we have it too."

On his first cast the line fell short, plunging like a rock into the water. On his next cast the bait let go, landing some ten feet beyond the line's drop. In a swirl of broken water it was taken on the surface and the fish, visible for an instant, turned in a flash of sunlight and shot away. Eyeing Thorson, the father cursed through a row of broken teeth, and cast again.

The three fished from a section of the jetty where the granite flattened out for some ten feet in length. More than once their lines tangled. The father and the son used inordinately heavy sinkers and hooked bottom on all but a few of their casts. Once, in his attempt to pull free under

his father's directions, the boy varied the angle of the line by walking back and forth along the ten feet of granite, pulling nervously on his rod and tripping over Thorson's bait can. Finally, he pulled free, and disregarding Thorson's suggestion to use a lighter sinker--or none at all since the fish were hitting near the surface--he drew the rod back over his head in a sweeping arc and cast again; but the line backlashed on the spool of his reel and snapped in towards the jetty, the hook end passing less than an inch under Thorson's eye.

"God Jesus Almighty," Thorson said.

"He created all the creeping things," the father said.

"He created all the fish and fowl too," the boy said.

"So you don't own the ocean," the father said.

"And he don't own the fish in the ocean either," the boy said.

"So the worthy will inherit shit," Thorson said.

Cramped by anger in making his casts effective he considered calling it a day, but as he reeled in, the fish struck with a jolt. He adjusted his drag and began the play.

Carl Thorson hadn't fished in five years. It wasn't because he lacked the time. His interest had simply faded. Feeling the presence of the father and the boy like a weight pressing on him, he could remember those long hours in the past, fighting surf on hopelessly deserted beaches. He could remember the small miseries that could taunt one

while casting into empty water, waiting for that one consummate strike that would make it all worth it. He could remember that the fish had been sizeable at times, like the raging ten-pound blue he had fought for near to an hour with critically light tackle in a biting wind off the Jersey coast one late September. Taking a glance at the father and the boy, he remembered now, with embarrassed modesty, the fifty-five-pound prize striper he had landed at Montauk Point.

Watching, the father and the son stood like two spectral shapes on the huge granite slabs of the jetty. When they saw the fish break water, their mouths dropped open. A solid pound or two, the big mackeral hung in space on a node of light, fell to the water, sounded and headed out.

"He's got the luck for the big ones too," the father said. He smiled through a fierce silence and waited. The son beside him stood no less fierce in the replica of his mold.

At first, Thorson understood the feeling that came over him only in its vaguest physical sense, like the pull of gravity on a stone. Working the fish, he tightened his grip on the butt of the rod as if it were the handle of an axe. If I land it, he thought, they'll hate me for it. Applying more drag, he snapped the tip of the rod as he would have snapped the end of a whip. But the line held, and the

feeling seemed as ponderous in him as the rocks he stood on. "Either way, then," he muttered ~~through~~^{through} his teeth.

"Either way and the bastards lose." Thorson held the rod with one hand and, with the other, drew the knife out of the leather sheath slung at his side. He reached out to cut the line, but the boy, who had moved in close to stop him, lunged for his hand.

For an instant that seemed incomprehensible, there was the glare of metal in the sunlight as Thorson pulled the knife back and felt the tendons in the boy's wrist ~~met~~^{melt} against the blade. While the boy sunk to the granite, the knife, as if by its own force, rose in his hand again and leveled at a point just above the father's heart.

The small group had collected around the prostrate boy. Thorson stood off to the rear and watched the dressing of the wound in silence. The two policemen had been called by a local who had seen the accident. After their questioning, the boy was lifted onto the stretcher. He looked directly at Thorson, and as if to make his pain visible to them all, his eyes narrowed accusingly in his bitten face. The father, too, had looked at Thorson with the same intolerable stare. But Thorson, unable to meet their eyes dead on, gazed absently at the knife lying on the granite.

As the small procession made its way down the long stretch of stone to the waiting ambulance, he picked up his knife and stood alone on the huge granite slab of the jetty and watched. He watched the stretcher sway between the glaring white figures of the ambulance attendants. He watched them work into position at the rear of the ambulance, watched the stretcher slide in and saw the massive red and white door slam closed behind it. He watched the father too, a gaunt figure in his black sweater and long black pants, turn suddenly toward the jetty on the pivot of his thin waist, hesitate before the opened door of the police cruiser, turn suddenly again, bend his gangling frame and stoop inside. With a joy that seemed to nibble in his chest now, he watched the ambulance and the police cruiser disappear into a grove of trees that hid the road. All of this he had watched with an inkling of remorse fading through him like a dying shiver. The fact that no charges were brought against him meant nothing to him. Still he felt a little confused, but eating the fish he was sure would cure that. He was sure, too, it would cure any memory of rage, which even now had ^{diminished} ~~diminished~~ to a trembling in his hands. He picked up his gear, slung the sack of mackerel over his shoulder and headed for shore. He did not look back.

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PART OF THE DEAL

The dwellings of the neighborhood had been built around the foot of the hill. ~~which~~ ^{The hill itself} had become a refuge for the boy years after he had first been taken there as a child. It rose from sea level rocky, broken and cleaved, into a broad plateau-like field of stunted grass about two hundred feet above the waters of the adjoining bay. The boy would often wander alone now through the shallow cut ravines there, and through the little brush-filled valleys. Sometimes he would lie under the maple trees that grew on the grassy slopes, and look down upon the oaks that stood like monumental columns at the base of the hill. When his mood inspired him, he would make his way to the summit and sit on a boulder and look dreamily out over the bay, or walk quietly along the foot paths that would take him into the solitude of secret grottos, private windless hollows and the open knolls.

Now the woman and the boy sat on a knoll under a maple tree on this hill overlooking the bay. To the north they could make out a group of small irregular shaped islands lying like shadows in the glare of the morning light. Eastward, they could see the expanse of the harbor spreading out from the bay and to the open sea beyond. Earlier they had watched the sun rise out of the sea. They had watched it through a veil of thick haze. It rose gradually above the horizon like a disk of smouldering light, moving up through the haze into the reddening glow of a cloudless sky. The two had watched this in silence.

The woman, who ^[was] ~~as~~ ^{five} about forty years old, had long blonde hair and large blue eyes. Her face was lightly tanned and her cheeks were ^{pocked} ~~pitted~~ and hollow. There were wrinkles about the corners of her mouth and although her lips were minutely cracked in places and thinly shaped, they protruded slightly and were well defined. She had been brought to the summit of the hill the preceeding night by five youths, all of whom were known to the boy, who had gone to the hill earlier after spending a hot and breezeless day at home. His father, who had sat drunk at the kitchen table with his bottle of Four Roses beside him, had periodically reviled the world and the injustice of war in a loud, sobbing voice. The boy had listened to his father's outbursts from behind the closed door of his

room just off the kitchen. He had listened not so much to the familiar condemnations as he did to the painful recollections of a man who could not rid himself of grief, a grief which had taken hold two years ago when he learned that his eldest son had been killed during the **TET** offensive in Vietnam.

Some minutes after dawn the woman had commented with feeling on the glow in the sky the light of the sun had produced before it rose above the horizon, and on the sunrise itself. She told the boy that she and her husband, now dead, had spent the two weeks of their honeymoon in a cottage on the coast of Maine. She said that during those two weeks it had become a ritual every morning before breakfast to watch the sun come up over the water. If it was overcast they would have their breakfast on the little screened-in porch and look quietly out to sea. With her husband sitting beside her, she said, this had created in her a peace which she had never felt before, and she told the boy that her honeymoon had been the happiest time she had ever known.

The woman wore her wedding ring on the middle finger of her left hand. Her husband, who had been a merchant seaman during World War II, had purchased the ring in a pawn shop four days after they had met, and on the next day they were married by a justice of the peace.

This was three months before the war had ended. A short time after their honeymoon her husband shipped out with a convoy bound for Europe. On the night before he left the states, she went on, she removed the ring from her ring finger, gave it to her husband and had him place it on the middle finger of her left hand. She told the boy that she once believed in these make-shift rituals. It was her own way of seducing Lady Luck, she said. While her husband did as he was asked, she prayed that he would return to her unharmed. Then and only then, she said, when she held him in her arms again, she would have him place the ring on its proper finger. When she received the news three weeks after his departure, that his ship had been torpedoed in the North Atlantic, and he had perished with the entire crew, she fell into an acute state of grief. She began to drink heavily, she said, and after a year of almost continual drunkenness, she had made the attempt to kill herself by taking an overdose of phenobartital. There had been other attempts following this, she went on, but always, someone, usually her aging mother with whom she now lived and had been since the drowning of her husband, had made the discovery.

The boy had become enthralled by the woman's story. Their conversation had begun an hour or so before dawn when ~~she~~^{she} woke from a drunken sleep under the overhang

of a rock where the youths had left her. The boy listened intently to each word she spoke. She went on to say that she had exchanged letters with the mother of her husband, and in one letter, the mother included a picture of herself and of her own husband sitting in wicker chairs on the porch of their house. It was a small house in the country under some trees in Pennsylvania, and there were chickens running loose. The woman remembered another picture that showed grassy fields spreading to a line of rolling hills in the distance, and one of a vegetable garden with a white fence around it in back of the house. She told the boy that when she saw these snapshots her enthusiasm to move to Pennsylvania with her husband after the war was over became very strong. Her mother-in-law told her that when she visited her in the fall as she had planned, she would show her how to put up preserves from the garden. By the time fall arrived she had been notified that her husband had been lost at sea. Shortly after this, her correspondence with the mother ceased. It was never taken up again.

The woman got up on her feet now, wavered a moment and regained her balance by placing her hand against the tree.

"I'm a little shaky," she said. "Been drinking too much and talking too much."

"I didn't mind listening," the boy said.

The woman looked out over the bay. "What do they call this place?"

"Rock Hill."

"It's beautiful up here. It makes me feel like a bird."

The breeze began to freshen and the woman's hair whipped about her head and face. "I feel as if I could fly into all that blue up there and never come back."

"I've felt that too," the boy said.

The woman turned to the boy, her hand brushing back the hair from her face.

"How old are you?"

"I turned seventeen two months ago."

"It was the first time for your friends last night wasn't it?"

"Not for all of them."

"It would have been for you. Right?"

"Yes."

"You were afraid?"

"I was afraid for you."

"Is that why you walked away?"

"I didn't want to watch them maul you around."

"I wasn't mauled." the woman said. "When they picked me up I decided to come up here with them and have a few beers. Given them a run for their money so to speak." She paused a moment, spread out her fingers

and looked at her ring. "Did you consider that I might have enjoyed what they did to me?"

"I didn't care whether you enjoyed it or not."

"But you stayed after they left and waited until I woke up. Why did you do that, for an old slut like me?"

"I don't know."

"You're a strange kid."

"I'm not strange," the boy said.

He stared into her face now only inches away from his own and he felt no condemnation for what she had let herself do. There had been a full moon, and its light had illuminated the rocks and the trees whose shadows lay flat and still like cut-out silhouettes on the grass and on the slopes leading down from the knoll where he had sat on a boulder watching. She had stood naked like a marble statute in the light, and when she lay back down he watched them mount her in their turn one by one. He watched the quick, firm pumps of rounded buttocks in the moonlight between her outstretched legs: the boy's having their first go. And then another took her and another while the others stood over her waiting.

Six twigs had been taken from a bush and drawn by each of the youths. The boy had drawn the longest and then reneged on his luck. He chose to do this not out of fear nor out of his inexperience, but faced with the willingness of a woman, a stranger at that made

more strange by her glaring female nakedness had filled him shame and because of this he could not bring himself to do it. So he had withdrawn quietly into the shadows and sat on a boulder in the moonlight watching, filled with reproach for the youths less shameful than he in facing the ordeal of their first lay.

"Why didn't you take your turn. Tell me," the woman asked. Her voice was low and deep now.

"Couldn't do it," the boy answered.

"You were afraid?"

"No."

"You were."

"No."

"Are you afraid now?"

"No I'm not afraid. I'm not afraid of anything."

"That's good," the woman said. "It's very good that you feel like that."

In a while, against all of the ploys with which he had so many times before imagined it being done to him, it began to happen, and in a short time and without intent it suddenly went beyond him in its own marvelous flow.

Presently it ceased with the calming of a dying wind, and through him spread a bemused lassitude. His breathing levelled off. He stared absently up into the tree and through and beyond the mesh of the leaves and the branches. He closed his eyes against the glare of the sky through the leaves and listened to the wind in

the trees.

After a time the boy opened his eyes, and breathing languidly, took in a breath of the freshening breeze.

For a long while there was a silence between them. Then sitting up next to him, the woman finally spoke.

"I had to do it that way," she said. "The other way wouldn't have been good for you now." She swept a strand of hair from her eye. "You don't feel bad about it, do you?" she asked.

"I'm not sure," the boy said.

"Embarrassed?"

"A little I guess."

"Was it the first time for that too?"

"Yes."

"You were a virgin both ways then. Now you're only half a virgin," the woman said, and she laughed softly.

"Half a man," the boy said. He sat up and leaned back against the tree.

The woman put her hand on his cheek. "There's time to become the other half and you won't have to rush it," she said smiling. "It's part of the deal."

"What deal?" the boy asked. He hitched up his jeans, secured his belt buckle and looked into the woman's eyes.

"You'll grow up and become a man. If you have

the luck you'll grow old and then die." she smiled.

"That's the deal, and there's no way out of it."

"I never think about dying," the boy said.

"You're right not to think about it." the woman said. In her voice now was some hint of despair, and a wan, exhausted look came over her face. "Your youth is hope enough for you," she added. "It makes your life worth living."

She got up quickly on her feet and took in long deep droughts of ~~the~~ sea air, then walked to the edge of the knoll. She stared over the roof tops of the dwellings that spread out from the base of the hill, and beyond them to the bay, an expanse of shimmering blue water under the glare of the sun. Eastward along the line of the horizon beyond the bay and the islands, she could see the cloud-like shroud of a fog bank easing inland before the wind.

The boy studied her while she stood outlined perfectly against the open blue sky. He could see that her body was yet supple and compactly sheathed in her tight dress that luffed in the wind above her knees. In the sunlight, a wild flurry of yellow hair streamed back from her head. The boy ~~mused~~ on the wisp and shine of her hair in the light. He mused too on the smooth-white of her bare legs and the rounded press of her buttocks against her dress.

After some minutes the woman suddenly turned and looked back at the boy from across the grassy space of the knoll.

"Have you ever known anyone who has died?" she asked.

"Yes," the boy said. "My grandfather died when I was about two years old."

"You couldn't have known him very well."

"I didn't."

"I meant someone you knew."

The boy shifted himself against the tree, rubbed the back of his neck and drew up his knees. His fingers pulled nervously at the grass between his legs. After a while he spoke.

"My older brother was killed in Vietnam." The boy did not look at her. "He was a Marine," he said.

"How old was he?" the woman asked, walking towards the boy.

"Twenty."

"It's cruel."

"I guess it is."

She knelt down next to him. "How did your family take it?" The boy looked at her and said nothing.

"You don't want to talk about it?"

"No," he said. "It's that I ~~did not ever~~ ^{never saw} see my father cry before."

"You have other brothers?"

"One older sister," the boy said.

"You're the baby."

"Yeah," the boy said. "I'm the baby."

"Do you love your family?"

"I don't know." The boy looked away and then said in earnest, as if he were trying to resolve some long buried complexity. "I think about my father a lot."

"If you think about him you must ^{have} ~~hold~~ some love for him in you."

"Is that the way it is?"

"I'm not sure, but sometimes it's good to talk about how you feel."

"It would be difficult."

"Try."

"It would make no difference to try."

"We feel bad things inside of us sometimes," the woman went on, "and it's not our fault that we feel them."

"I don't feel anything bad inside of me," the boy said.

With this he got to his feet and walked to the edge of the knoll. The fog was rapidly drawing itself in over the bay, and the dark massive shapes of the islands north of the bay were partly visible through the shrouded light. Above the fog bank, the cloudless

sky was like an inverted bowl polished blue in the sun. The boy looked up at the sun, his eye squinting.

"It should be about eight o'clock in a few minutes," he said.

The woman sat down and rested her back against the tree.

"All time is the same," she said wearily. She pulled up her knees and added with a grimace;

"It has no meaning."

The boy stared down at her: "It does," he said, and he felt now that he somehow should have brought himself to talk to her about his father. He felt that he should have told her those things he had thought so much about when he would see him sitting alone at the kitchen table like a figure cut from the stone, his bottle of Four Roses near to empty beside him on the table, the glass in his hand gripped with the fierceness of a claw, and his head slung low against his chest, half sleeping, half awake with thoughts the boy would never know, words he had waited to hear from him and had not heard; ~~(her perhaps would never hear)~~ and of the long patient suffering of growing up in the shadow of an older brother whom he had loved beyond his capacity to understand, and loved even now in his intolerable memory, the first of his father's progeny, favorite son of the father gone forever like her husband drowned at sea.

And he remembered too that on the morning his mother received the telegram informing her that her son had been killed in action in the service of his country, she had called the shipyard and asked that her husband be sent home; and they waited, the three of them in the kitchen, in a numbed and unbroken silence, his mother, his sister, and himself, unable to bring themselves to tears until his father arrived bewildered and stricken out of his senses by the dreaded catastrophe. Then he had seen it. He was at once filled with awe when the face of his father, upon entering the house, seemed to transform itself into a mask of sudden hatred that he knew his father could not then nor would ever resolve. Then the weeping began among his mother and sister, he remembered, while his father stood dazed and mournful by the kitchen window staring out. And he had watched him from across the space of that small kitchen, a space which seemed to him then to be interminable, had watched his father's trembling fists rise to his eyes and heard the first deep mysterious sobs enter his throat and then burst out of him with a child-like wailing of pain and all the embittered sorrow of stark and irretrievable loss. It was a sound he would remember always. It seemed to move throughout the small kitchen with the force of a wind; and he could not quell the burning ache that began

to swell in his own throat after¹he heard it, for his sorrow was not like that of his father's for whom at that moment and from then on he would feel a strange and inexplicable pity and a sorrow too that he could not name. It was a sorrow he could not name even later when he went to the hill that night and knelt down beside a boulder not far from where he stood now, and prayed to God with all the will he was able to bring to bear upon his invocation, prayed that he too might cry and be filled with grief, prayed until the slow, wet morning light broke through the darkness and he rose from his knees dejected and wandered home unfull-filled and in despair. He looked at the full grown woman with her head leaning back against the trunk of the tree, this woman who had thrilled him so profoundly, her knees drawn up, her eyes closed and her hair damp and plaited by the fog invading the hill, and he wondered if she would understand him if he told her this.

He walked over to her and said gravely and with a little sadness: "I've changed my mind."

A dreamy stare came into the woman's eyes: "Changed your mind about what," she said, her voice barely audible.

"I'd like to talk to you now."

The boy went silent, and then without looking at her said: "About my father."

The woman rose to her feet and stared off into

the fog. She said nothing. The boy thought of what she had told him earlier. After considering each word carefully he forced himself to repeat it to her, and in a firm but hesitant voice he said:

"We feel bad things inside of us sometimes and it's not our fault that we feel them."

The woman gave no reply. The boy stared directly at her, waiting for her to speak. In the foggy light the webbing of veins in her eyes seemed to swell with blood. In a faltering voice she answered him, her lips trembling.

"I should not have said that."

"I understand it."

"I know," the woman said. She turned away, and as if she were talking to someone other than the boy, she spoke into the fog, her voice low and distant:

"What I did up here I let myself do for no other reason than simply doing it," she said.

The boy moved closer to her. "What you did to me?"

The woman turned and faced him, and in the same low, distant voice she said, "It was different for you."

"Why was it different?" the boy asked solemnly.

"Because the other way would have been a lie as it was with your friends, and for some reason I didn't want you to have it that way. Not your first. Not with

me." The woman paused, and then added: "And I don't want to talk to you about your father."

"You did it for yourself," the boy said forlornly. "Otherwise you'd listen to what I want to say."

The woman looked ~~directly~~ into his eyes. She said with intensity: "I'm not the one to listen! I don't have the right!"

After the woman said this she seemed to hear the sound of her own voice come to her from out of the fog. It was as if some shred of memory had returned to her over the lapse of exhausted years: each word was distinct and recognizable to her as her own, but separate from her as though she had not spoken them, and a sudden dread came over her. It was a feeling at once familiar, and she knew that its reason was no longer outside of her as she had imagined it to be before this day, on this hill, with this boy. It seemed now to tighten like a fist within her, and she was gripped by a sullen almost numbing disgust. "Some one who could give you something back would have the right!" She cried out. "God not me!" And with this she turned abruptly -- the shocks of her hair flailing about her shoulders and across the darkening lines of her face -- and sobbing heavily, ran through the grass to the edge of the knoll.

Holding back in himself a mounting rage, the boy watched her as she stood as if frozen in place, staring

into the failing light and into the wraiths of fog that enveloped her. In a short time, feeling his rage go out of him, he looked away sadly and went on moodily down the path and headed home.

From the lower branch of a medium-sized oak that grew a short distance from the knoll hung the ropes of a once useable swing, the wooden seat of which had long since broken free. When the boy returned to the knoll late that afternoon and walked into the vicinity of this tree, he stood in the grass for what seemed like a long time unable to move, for he could see that her shoeless feet swayed no more than six inches above the ground. Near the tree, with its contents of paper, bottles and cans strewn in the grass, lay the overturned trash drum she had used as a platform.

From where he stood, fixed and muted by the sudden dismay that came over him, and with his face gone bloodless, he could see her blue eyes staring rigidly from her pallid face, still clear and seemingly alive with sight in the misty breeze. Her mouth was partly opened and a residue of spittle had eased over her lower lip which had fallen slack just below her teeth. Her arms, appearing much longer to the boy than they actually were, hung at her side in a strange and reposing limpness. All of this, and the ~~awesome~~ stillness in her gently swaying body, elongated into outrageous

proportions by the rope that stiffened upwards to the limb from her titled head, filled him with fear. He wanted to run but he was unable to move. He wanted to cry out in his disbelief but he was incapable of speech. For a time he had no thoughts of her. It was as if she were an apparition he had come upon hanging from the limb of a tree, a stranger familiar to him only as a nightmare would have been familiar to him after waking from its haunted throes.

How long he stood in the grass looking up at her he did not know. A sadness spread through him, and what he wanted to say to her about his father had no significance for him now. He began to think of what had taken place between them, and the more he thought about this the more he became angry with himself because he could not help her. There was no magic he could have used to call back the moment when he had first set eyes upon her, for he would have told her then and from his heart, that he was not like his friends and he had no need of her in the way that they had need of her. In his anger and sadness both, he could not think into words the things he wanted to say. He wanted to tell her now that he was sorry for all she had suffered in her life. He wanted to tell her that there had been hope enough for her as she had said that his youth was hope enough for him. He wanted to

say that he had understood the reasons for her own sorrow too, and that he would do anything or give anything of himself to bring her back in some better way; but he knew there was no voice that could reach her now and a feeling of remorse came over him that seemed to tighten like a muscle in his throat.

Moving closer to her, ~~for what ever purpose or reason he was unable to comprehend,~~ he stared up into her deadened face that held him fixed ^{and} muted still. Then his eyes followed curiously down along her bare arms to her lifeless fingers and the ring, and what she had told him about herself came back to him in a flood of detail. He thought of her husband drowning at sea, ^{and} of the mother and the father in the picture sitting in their wicker chairs on the porch of the little house. Of the garden too he thought and of the preserves she never learned to put up, and in the fear and confusion that came over him now, he turned from her stare and fled from the knoll, stumbling into the head of the path that led down the plateau.

He ran on past the shrouded maples and the gray wet boulders. He stumbled again in his wild stride, scrambled to his feet and went on past the first few towering oaks that grew midway down the slope, his breath roaring out of him, his feet digging into the surface of the path, and of themselves it seemed, pumping

in a frenzy that drove him head-long onto the base of the hill. Once at the base he fell exhausted to his knees, and tears came into his eyes. He raised his head slowly and looked back up the slope towards the knoll. With a frightening suddenness he heard himself cry aloud: "Slut! You miserable old slut!" ^{But} ~~and~~ the sound of his voice wailed momentarily like an outcry of grief among the rocks and the trees, echoed up into the hill and ~~then~~ died away to a silence through the mist.

THE BLOOD OF THE BLOOD

CHAPTER I

He said that, "Yes," after uncertain whorish
 night, dark but not doubly twice alone. Part looking
 at it where he the bleeding eyes of his sister. Look-
 ing at it, looking down it told me in his bleeding heart
 like a man of the world. He was a man of the world of
 his world, looking down the world looking down as if
 down the world had filled his room, came through the win-
 dows, came through the crack under the door while she lay
 sleeping in her bed like a red of yellow flax. Pale
 cheeks, dark, beautiful cheeks full of shadow. Lovely,
 lovely, almost red, lovely and "yes", as if she should pay
 for the pain of his heart.

FROM THE JOURNAL OF COSMO PIKE

"Yes," he said, "Should I pray, Should I pray?"
 (a whisper of guilt, I thought. The wall of
 his eye, looking down, as "yes" would be the presence of
 that face of a man's world.)

"REPENT: My guilt," I said. Repentance: that
 side of guilt where face is a wall. Cain up, Part.
 No more whorish night. No more to soften the touch.
 REPENTANCE: Yes. Repent of all guilt. Horriment in
 the blood. The new life. "REDEMPTION perhaps." I
 looked into those sad bleeding eyes. I knew the solu-
 tion was at hand.

COSMO COUNSELOR SPEAKSOF PARF

Parf said that, "Yes." After uncountable whorish nights that left him doubly twice alone. Parf looking at it square in the bleeding eyes of his mirror. Looking at it, looking upon it laid out in his brooding heart like a slab of iron, doubly twice alone in the silk of his memory, looking though the early morning blues as if doom-bad-news had filled his room, come through the windows, come through the crack under the door while she lay sleeping in his memory like a reed of yellow flax. Pale slender neck. Mournful cheeks full of shadow. Lovely, lovely doomed-bad beauty and "yes", as if she should pay for the pain in his heart.

"Cosmo," he asked, "Should I pray. Should I pray?"

(An admittance of guilt, I thought. The wall of his ego crumbling, no longer solid in the presence of that reed of slender beauty.)

"REPENT! Why not?" I said. Repentance: that side of guilt whose face is a smile. Chin up, Parf. No more whorish nights. No lies to soften the touch. REPENTANCE. Yes. Solvent of all guilt. Merriment in the blood. The new life. "REDEMPTION perhaps." I looked into those sad bleeding eyes. I knew the solution was at hand.

His head dropped lower. His mouth poured forth the blood of his soul. Three days after this bullshit, three days of trying to trap the lie in his dream, three days of disreputable thinking about her, thinking about the slender yellow reed who had slept in his bed, he still had the image in his mind of that tight round ass; that young tight round waspy ass, that butter-cup ass held in his palms, firm as a ripening melon.

Later. Sitting across from me at the table by the window: the marsh filling up under the light of a sparkling afternoon; the eel grass green as green is green; a solitary cloud no bigger than a young girl's breast on the edge, on the edge of that glorious moment, on the edge of that momentous moment, that fascinating momentous moment of becoming a girl-girl: a cloud soft as air swelling white-pure and fair under a sky clear and blue as liquid crystal, his eyes rolling back and again in his mournful agony. Poor, poor Parf, again thinking of her warm neck, yes, the warm line of her slender neck; the quiet mouth -- a sullen shadow there turned slightly down at the corners -- he laid back the truth that he had loved her in that mystery of touch and slow tenderness of blending
311 slow tenderness and joy it was in the webbing of it all, and he said he

came. He said that he came to know that it was loving at times out of a kind of incognito laxity. Poor Parf, pouring out the juice of his gut.

Poor Parf, pouring out the hair of his gut. "THE FIRST RECOGNITION THAT I HAD," he poured, "THAT IF A WOMAN-GIRL CAN'T GIVE AIN'T NO MAN TO GIVE IT EITHER!"

I said, "Oh, great tender girl-girl." The feeling of being just that, he said. Hold it, I said. You don't have to go that far, Parf. We both know the virtues of diversity, of variations of mood. And the word rang in his brain. Parf's tortured brain ringing GIRL. Girl-girl. The word ringing in his brain with the incarnate quality of the sound becoming that in his brain. Girl. It was a sound of all perfection he said he could hear in his brain. Girl. Girl to be girl is in the sound of the word. Easy Parf, I said. Quality of all perfection, he went on, of what it is to be GIRL YOU'LL NEVER KNOW, he said. Easy, sucker-buddy, I said. But he went on like a mumbling hobo caught in a trance in the biting wind of some forgotten Ohio town thinking of how it could have been. Girl. It was in the sound of the world, he said.

"WORD, Parf," I said.

"Yes, Yes, world of it," he said.

"Is it said with the tongue, Parf? Quality of all

perfection said with the tongue?"

"YES, GIRL!" THE WORLD OF IT. THE SOUND OF IT
CURLED FROM THE PRECISE TIP OF THE TONGUE!

"THEN IT'S WORD, PARF, WORD."

A few hours after dusk we decided to sit by the fire
and I watched the firelight play across the sad lines of
his face. Yes the firelight played, the firelight shone
in the lines of his face. He went silent. (They all do
that. Always looking for a way out. Poor Parf.) I put
my hand on his shoulder.

Let me tell you something, sucker-victim. You're
leaky but not sunk. But I say this in contrast to the
bruised ligament of your love affair; in contrast to that
young tight-assed love affair that drove you into counseling
with me; in contrast to that toothless guy, whomever or
wherever he might be, in his oil-soiled green khaki work
shirt and trousers, unshaven of course, who like you lives
in a constant shadow, driving his ratty nineteen fifty
seven Buick breathing rot from it's rear end. In contrast
to this, Parf, I ask you, when you find yourself crying your
culp among the rocks, who is going to save you?

COSMO COUNSELORSPEAKS OF CATSAND GRIEF

Parf, there was once a woman who loved her black cat. It would stretch out under the willow tree that shaded the green slope of her lawn, where it would take on the lines and sheen of a seal. Once she saw it lying in the approximate center of an irregular patch of sunlight whose beams shot down between the leaves and branches of the tree. As she watched it, and as the love she felt for the animal rose in her chest like a wave of peace, a white moth of the cabbage variety (as if it had taken form out of the air itself) fluttered like an apparition into the rays of light. She watched this too, her feelings heightened by the illusive beauty of the moth. Her cat was no less unaware of the movement. It turned its black head, looked up with its perfectly round innocent yellow eyes gleaming, and sprung into the arc of a sudden leap. Its haunches glared in the light. The backbone curved at an angle to its tail which moved like the end of a lashed whip. Then turning from the chest and moving upward, the neck extending and the yellow eyes flashing in the turn; the muscles rippling under its ^[fur]~~fur~~ and the legs giving leverage to the leap; free of the ground now,

moving upward with its front legs a pair of reaching arms, and the paws opening, and the claws exposed at the top of the arc; all of this, Parf, ^{was} a scene of extraordinary beauty, and the girl sat watching, filled with an inexpressible excitement. Within a distance of less than an eighth of an inch, the right front claw of the cat missed the little moth who continued on through the rays of sunlight and went its way. Then at that moment in its leap when all motion stops, that moment Parf, when gravity ceases, when the upward moving body has dissipated the force of its propulsion, neither rising nor falling, ^[hung] ~~and~~ as it were in space at the precise instant before the moment of descent, a bullet ~~of unknown origin~~ shattered the little skull in mid air. The cat dropped like a wet rag into the approximate center of the irregular patch of sunlight where it lay as still and quiet as a pelt. Now the pain the girl experienced, Parfo, well it was as if her heart had been cleaved in two by the sudden change of feeling from joy to acute horror; a change of feeling occurring so quickly, that its effect upon her, no less damaging than a sudden hammer blow on the head, had caused her to grimace in such a contorted way, that a hammer blow would, in fact, have produced the same effect. In the

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presence of this glaring absurdity her face, drained of its blood, took on the pallor of a corpse. What light remained was in the illumination of her eyes whose frozen stare had fixed on the body of the dead cat as though she had looked upon the image of the devil.

Now, whether it was the loss of her cat, Parfo, or because of her grief, or her sorrow or because of the effects of that terrifying moment when chance had combined with fate, or somehow had worked mysteriously in its own way to bring about the death of her cat; or whether it was her destiny to have let the cat out some minutes before her neighbor across the lake decided to target shoot, whatever it was, Parf, from the moment she had seen the accident she lived under the pressure of mental decay. It was as if her blood had gone dead in her veins. There was nothing in our repertoire of treatment that could have helped her. She simply slipped into a silence from which she never recovered."

COSMO COUNSELORSPEAKS OF ~~ART~~~~AND~~ CARLO PALCHINI

Once Parf told me in a flood of tears, in a rush of sobs, in a heart-rending outburst of self-deprecation that he had, since his early childhood, been obsessed by the idea that he would someday be a painter. (While he spoke, the sound of his words seemed to come from the far end of a tunnel. It was a monotonous emission of sound, a continuous droning from the heart.) Gradually he leveled off and sat talking calmly to himself, ~~as~~ ~~if in a trance.~~ He talked of his first set of crayons. He stared at the marsh. And I wondered if he could see the panorama of his youth in the richness of its colors: in the cool greens, in the crystalline blues, and in the russet shades in the banks of the peat moss. In a while, he remembered with a clarity so vivid in detail that I was able to see in my own mind's eye the first picture he ever drew with the deliberate intent of its being his first masterpiece. It was a picture of a naked female aborigine standing in a green pasture-like clearing, backed by a wall of tall yellow reeds. The picture, he droned, was copied from a National Geographic magazine that he had found in a neighbor's trash can.

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"Parf," I said again, this time with warmth, my heart going out to the poor sucker-buddy, with his drooping lids and his red-tinted eyes staring at the marsh swelling blue in the light.

"Parfo," I said, "Pour yourself another vodka and let me tell you a story I heard before the days of the jagged ear. There was once a man named Carlo Palchini who had come to this country from Italy during the immigration of 1890. Like most immigrants he took whatever jobs he could get. He dug ditches. He laid rail in California. He worked in the coal mines of Pennsylvania and labored in sweat in the pit mines of Missouri. He had few needs outside of food, clothing, and shelter, so he ate meagerly and clothed himself in garments that were repaired year after year. Carlo was a contemplative man with a gentle nature. He was easy-going, lived as a hard-working, clean living immigrant and saved like a miser. One day, in his 45th year, he quit his job as a file clerk, the last job he had held, drew a portion of his savings out of the Chase Manhattan Bank, savings amounting to no less than forty-five thousand dollars, and bought a dairy farm in southwest New Jersey. He married and had two sons. His wife, twenty years younger

than he was, died during the birth of her second child. Now one night, Parfo, some fifteen years after the death of his wife, Carlo Palchini was gripped by a sudden hatred. He struck the eldest son and banned him from the house forever. The younger son, on his own account, left the house three days after his brother's departure and for the remaining ten years of the old man's life, neither of them ever saw him again. Now listen carefully. It was not known what had caused the outburst of the old man's hatred. After the departure of his sons, he was seen by few in the small town located near the farm, for most of his business with the outside world had been carried on from behind the massive front door of his home. A smaller door, two feet square, was cut into the larger door at the bottom and through this were passed the necessities the old man needed to stay alive. Finally, one February when winter had enveloped the house on all sides with drifts as high as the second floor windows, Carlo Palchini, on the final day of his ordeal, lying on his back on an old brass rail bed in an unheated room of the old house, with his cat on the bed beside him, died as naturally and completely as an echo heard briefly across the expanse of a deserted valley. It was as if his life had

been nothing more than the tail end of an anxious dream."

Parf sat drooping in his chair. His watery eyes stared at the fire, ~~and~~ at the dancing yellow flame. There was an agonized look on his haggard face. My heart went out to him again, and again with warmth I said: "A nature walk, Parf, enriches the blood. Imagine: clusters of green trees. Every leaf a light, each reed of grass a razor in the shimmer of a mid-day sun. Think of it: azure haze over summer fields. The sound of an insect. A bird chirps once beyond the rise of a hill. Stillness and the slow heat of high noon. Silence, and the fierce heat of metal shimmering through the haze. Porfidio. Nature boy. Think of it, sucker-buddy, Palchini's life nothing more than the tail end of an anxious dream."

Parf raised his weary head and looked into my eyes. His lips moved but he was unable to speak. ^{In a while} ~~Finally~~ he asked solemnly, "Why, Cosmo?"

"I don't know why, Parf," I said quietly. "And it would make little difference if anyone did know why. ← As I say," I went on, "It was a story I heard before the days of the jagged ear; but now as it was then, all the facts are the same -- all except one."

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I looked directly into my sucker-buddy's bleeding eyes and took a sip of vodka. "It was a chicken farm he bought," I said, "not a dairy farm."

"God, Cosmo," he asked, "why'd you do that?"

"Because if he had bought a dairy farm," I said, feeling the ^[weariness] weariness of a man who realized after fifty-five years that there isn't anything worth a shit but the illusion that it ain't always going to be the same, "I wonder if he would have died a happy man." "Parfidio," I said again, and again with warmth and again my heart going out to the poor sucker-buddy with his drooping lids and his red-tinted eyes staring at the marsh swelling blue in the light, "Parf, pour yourself another vodka, drink it, and then, get out! I'm getting drowsy."

PARF SPEAKS TO COSMO OF
A JOURNEY INTO MODERN ART

I could hear the sound of Parf's breathing and his old musty Dunhams with their thinning white soles shuffling on the wood of the stairs. I had the feeling that in him today was a deep and lonely weariness, for his steps were erratic, one after the other and then a misstep; then silence and rest, then on again until I could feel his presence behind the door, waiting. Good sucker-buddy Parf. Feeling always one or more of the essentials of being alive. I waited for his knock. There was nothing. I coughed once. Still no answer. When I got up and started for the door, there were two faint taps and then silence. I went to the door and opened it, and there he stood with his head lowered into the collar of his olive drab army surplus trench coat, his face stubbled with hair.

"Cosmo", he said looking up. "I've got to talk to you."

"Come in Parf, come in", I said turning back into the room. "And close the door. There are more flies in here than on a mountain of ~~shit~~ **dung**. Did I ever tell you old buddy that the only living things I have come to despise are lice, flies, and people who accent too many 'R's?"

"I'm serious, Cosmo."

Parf closed the door and took his chair near the fireplace. He looked into my eyes.

"Cosmo", he said, "there's something I've got to get off my chest..."

"I believe you and I know whatever it is will be told with precision and truth."

"Don't be sarcastic, Cosmo."

"I'm sorry Parf, but I had a bad night of it. Too much booze, too many cigarettes, and an empty bed in which I couldn't sleep. This morning? A gut full of rot. You know the pattern."

"Give the booze a break, Cos."

"We won't go into that, okay. Each to his own private flaw." I poured myself a drink and then poured one for Parf, handed it to him, and sat down. "What is it you have to get off your chest?"

Parf took a sip from his glass, sighed once, and settled back in his chair with his coat still on. He didn't seem as weary now.

"I went to a party a couple of days ago, Cosmo," he said excitedly, "and things happened there that I couldn't understand."

"What things?"

"Well, for one thing I fell in love."

"You'll always be falling in love. It's part of your charm. A gift."

"You're not being serious, Cosmo."

"I am. Go on with your story."

"Well I went to this party and I fell in love with a young girl who was there with her mother."

"How old was she? The daughter, I mean."

"About nineteen."

"Interesting."

"She was suspicious though and when I looked into her eyes and told her that she was beautiful, she looked at me with disbelief."

"Coming on like that probably made her shy."

"She wasn't shy, Cosmo, because a girl like that had heard it all, even at nineteen she had heard it all, one way or the other, and there isn't anything anyone would rather hear than something different about themselves, Something about themselves, they never have heard before."

"True."

"And I knew what it was I really wanted to tell her but I couldn't put it right in my head to say it. It hadn't taken on a meaning I could say aloud. Right in front of her. Right there with everyone around, and if I could have said it I would have without caring who heard."

"Bravo."

"You don't believe me."

"Of course I do. Go on."

"Well, there was a lot of talking and laughing and I drifted off across the room and kept an eye on her and her mother, who was dancing with some young guy wearing a string of beads around his neck and a wide open blue shirt that showed some fuzzy red hair on his chest. Then the daughter started dancing and I had a jealous feeling because she was laughing too. But it wasn't the kind of laugh that had a natural sound to it, Cosmo. It was the kind that comes from the throat. Real laughing seems to come from inside the chest somewhere and flows out of you. Anyway, the girl was having a good time, ~~all right~~, but each time I looked at her she had that suspicious stare in her eyes, and she didn't smile back at me, and I began to feel things about myself then that I didn't like: standing there and thinking that she looked at me as if I were nothing to her. But I started wondering. If I was nothing to her, I thought, she wouldn't have looked at all. She wouldn't have looked suspicious when I told her how beautiful she was. So there was something happening inside of her but I couldn't figure out what it was.

"I was nervous so I got myself another drink and started talking to this guy with a pointed beard that was as white as snow. His head was shaped like a dome, and was completely bald and tanned smooth like the color of good leather. He was about seventy. He said that he played tennis and jogged seven miles everyday. He was in excellent shape. And you could see it, too. His chest was broad and he was muscular and lean about the hips and waist with strong looking legs and muscular arms that were as tanned as his head. He wore one of those tight fitting short sleeved polo shirts with red and black stripes, the kind you see in the L.L. Bean catalogs, and white ducks that were spotless and held up by a black leather belt with a huge polished brass buckle shaped like a scallop shell, and while I stood there listening to him, Cosmo, I glanced down at his feet and he was wearing leather sandals and they weren't the cheap kind. You could see they were hand made and his feet were immaculate and as evenly tanned as the rest of him. He said that he didn't drink or smoke and had once sailed a forty foot sloop alone across the Atlantic. Now the guy wasn't arrogant. Don't get me wrong; but there was something about him that made me wonder, a kind of odor about him that I never smelled before. A kind of unused smell

that reminded me of the inside smell of a new car. And there was something about his eyes too and the way he looked to the side and smiled while he talked, like he wasn't talking to me or anyone in particular, but talked just loud enough so that I was the only one within a few feet who could possibly hear him. But as it is at a party, people mingle against their wills; listen to things against their wills. So in a while a group formed around this guy and began listening to him talk to me about sailing. One guy who thought he knew something about boats stopped the old guy in mid-sentence over a point that evidently was critical to good sailing. He was a thin-boned guy about thirty-five, with a pointed face and a harelip that made him sound like he was talking through his nose. His hair was tied back into a little pony tail about three inches long that looked like the end of a shaving brush. Now I don't know a thing about sailing, Cosmo, let alone boats, but there is something in a person's way of saying a thing that shows he knows what he's talking about. And there is the lack of the same something that shows he doesn't know shit about what he's saying. Well this guy with the pony tail seemed to me to know less than what he was talking about and the old guy kept trying to get a word in, but the young guy, with one hand in the back pocket of his jeans and the other

holding his glass up in front of himself with his little finger stuck out, pointing at the old guy, kept it up until the old guy just stood there shaking his head up and down in agreement to whatever the younger guy said. When I couldn't take it anymore, I walked across the room and stood there looking back at the table where the drinks were and the old guy was still moving his head slowly up and down and the harelip guy was still doing all the talking.

"Now about the girl who I said was beautiful. I'll say it to this day, Cosmo. When I told her that, I meant it with all of the truth I could feel. I meant it from my heart. This girl and her mother both had full lips and wide mouths and perfect white teeth. They both wore those bell-bottomed pre-faded blue jeans and white sneakers with blue trim along where the sole meets the side of the sneaker. And while I watched them I had the feeling that I had to know all about them because I wanted to be fair with myself and not think anything about them that maybe wasn't true. Usually when you look at people you make quick judgements about them without having the facts. But if there's something that strikes you or captivates your imagination, you sometimes feel good about them right off or you want to know more before your head starts to make its own opinions. Maybe it's a certain quality of the lips or a smile, or the size and color of the eyes, or that touch of magic

that sometimes seems to live in certain faces, but whatever it is, Cosmo, it can start you forming opinions, and when you're moved in the way I was moved by these two women, especially the daughter, you want to be sure of yourself because anything you might think or feel about them can be as opposite to the truth as a cat's tail is to its head.

"So I began to watch every move each made. For awhile I tried to listen to everything each said, but then I felt it wasn't important to watch or listen to either of them separately because they were so much alike in the way they were dressed and in their movements and speech that one seemed to be the reflection of the other. I guess most people aren't that much different on the outside anymore anyway. Maybe the crust on top is getting thick and it's hard to get through."

My sucker-buddy took another drink from his glass. There was a distant stare in his eyes. He placed the glass down on the table and remained silent.

"Go on with your story," I said.

He looked over at me as if confused. "Where was I, Cosmo?"

"You were talking about crust."

"Crust?"

"Yes. It's the crust on top that's getting thick you said."

"Right. Well for the next half hour or so I just spored around and listened to the other guests, from time to time keeping an eye on the mother and her daughter. Once I went to the table for a refill and the daughter came up on the other side and poured herself a drink. She didn't look at me at first, but there was that sly smile on her lips and two white teeth were visible between them. She was humming softly, some tune I didn't recognize and I didn't know whether to break in and ask what it was, maybe get a conversation going just to get the feel of it, or just play aloof like she was doing and wait until she spoke first. But then I began to study her with a new curiosity because her eyes now seemed to be set deeper in her head and they were darker too and appeared to be set further apart. And her hair, well in the beam of sunlight that ^[came] ~~came~~ through the window behind her, it took on a strange texture like it was made of black gossamer. And her shirt was open now two or three buttons down the front and where the tan of her flesh ended there were two thin crescents of skin that were pure white. I couldn't take my eyes off her, Cos. She kept humming while I looked at her. She kept humming with that sly smile on her lips and when I smiled back, she raised her glass and looked at me with as much warmth as she would have shown to a dead tick.

"Then, Cosmo, the party took on a different mood. The music stopped and people began mingling in groups. There was no talking. It seemed like they were waiting for the arrival of a corpse. Then that old guy with the tanned head? Well he walks to the center of the room and stands there with his head down and his hands clasped in front of himself as if he were in some kind of prayer. I tell you, Cosmo, there was a silence that seemed as final as death. Then this guy begins taking off his polo shirt, moving his hips around and around like he was doing the hoola, but it was a slow snakey movement and his head kept turning from side to side even when it was under the polo shirt. He finally got the shirt off and when he did his face looked like a mask of bone. And then he started laughing and the sound of his laughter was like the growling of a dog. As I said, this guy was well built and he had a way of making his chest muscles quiver. He stretched out both arms like he was trying to fly and snapped his hands up and down all the while making his chest muscles quiver. When he stopped gyrating he just stood there. Then all of the people lined up and walked past him, and as they did they bent down and Kissed his ~~ass~~ ^{ass} ~~rear~~. It was like a ritual, Cosmo. After they took their turns, they went back and stood against the walls. Now I began to get nervous again, because next the girl and her mother walked out into the center of the room

and began kissing each other. The old guy took off his white ducks and lay them on the floor in front of the daughter. I couldn't believe it, Cosmo. Everything was taking place in a dream. No one seemed to notice me. Suddenly the old guy bent over and grunted loose right there in the center of that room in front of everyone."

"God, Parf!"

"I was horrified, Cosmo. But what then took place shook me with the force of a bullet, for the daughter and the mother, one following the other on their hands and knees, crawled side by side to the old guy's pile and put their hands into it."

"That's sickening."

"I know, but listen: while the mother and the daughter were christening themselves with feces, the other guests filed by the old guy and one by one kissed his ass again, even the guy with the pony tail and harelip."

"Insane!"

"I was full of nausea, Cosmo. Yet I couldn't bring myself to leave. Then the daughter began painting her face all around until it was splotched with the old guy's excrement. When she put her finger into her mouth, I passed out."

"No wonder, Parf. How long were you out?"

"I don't know. When I woke I was sitting in a wooden chair in the middle of that room and no matter how much I tried to lift my arms or myself out of that chair, I couldn't do it."

"Drugged?"

"I don't know. My senses were still working and my thinking was clear, but now there was in me something that made me want to know these people. To be one of them. To immerse myself in everything they knew about each other."

"Hypnotized?"

"While I was passed out?"

"They, or he, could have waked you, put you under, and told you to forget that you woke. Simple, Parf."

"No. These people had power but it wasn't hypnosis."

"Witchcraft?"

"I don't know, Cosmo, but whatever it was I found myself wanting to do whatever they asked, whatever would make me feel part of them."

"Did they ask you to do anything?"

"When I say asked, Cosmo, I don't mean with words. It was a kind of urge I had to do anything that would make me feel part of them."

Parf went silent, took a sip of vodka from his glass, and lowered his head.

"How did you feel in the sight of all those eyes?" I asked.

Parf raised his head slowly. After awhile he said, "Cosmo, I tell you it was as if I stood condemned before gods in whom I had never believed. I felt condemned to something I knew was horrendous but I liked it."

"A very descriptive tale, Parf, an account you may have embellished."

"It's the truth, Cosmo, every god damn word of it is the truth!"

"A scatological circus. Tell me, did you ever find out who these people were?"

"Yes. I learned that the old guy was a retired banker who dabbled in the arts. What I had witnessed was an initiation rite. Once you became a member you could further your career through the connections this guy had. At least that's the understanding I got after listening to him talk."

"What did you do after finding yourself sitting in that chair?"

"What could I do? I just sat there numbed, but I still had this feeling of wanting to belong."

"It was probably group pressure, Parf. A strong force among some people."

"Evidently it is because they knew I was a painter and that my work wasn't selling too well. I found this out later too. I guess after I passed out, the ceremony ended. They thought I wanted to join the cult when all I really wanted now was to get my hands around that young girls ass."

"You sound lustful, Parf. I thought you fell in love with her."

"I did, but after watching her with that old guy's crap, I began to feel a hatred for her. Still, I grew so hard I could almost smell it. In fact, when I moved my buttocks I rubbed against myself and I came. I came right in my pants."

"You had a frottage."

"Whatever it was I can't understand it even now. But it felt wonderful. It was like having a wet dream, Cosmo. It was exciting and peaceful, yet there was something strange about it."

"Tell me, Parf, what advantages were the girl and her mother seeking?"

"I couldn't find out much about them, only that the girl was some kind of sculptress and her mother was pushing her work."

"And the guy with the pony tail?"

"He was a writer. At least he called himself a writer. Jimmy Rizz told me about him."

"Who is Jimmy Rizz?"

"He was the guy who brought me there. Unusual little man who can play the piano like it's going out of style. He does Italian recipes that are out of this world."

"He told you about the pony-tail writer?"

"Yeah. Jimmy said he was 'egregious!' That was the word he used."

"He meant outstandingly bad."

"Yeah. That's what Rizz said. He said he was egregious and 'nugatory.' What does nugatory mean, Cosmo?"

"It means trifling. Evidently the guy writes badly about trifles."

"Hm. Well anyway, Rizz said he was looking for a publisher. I guess he was willing to stick his nose in crap in order to find one."

"Like the grasshopper in Faust who was always looking for dung to stick his nose in!"

"I read Faust years ago."

"You recall then, he was a magician and alchemist portrayed by Goethe who sells his soul to the devil in exchange for worldly power."

"Now that you mention it, I do remember."

"It seems to me that your friends had similar designs. They were seeking artistic powers though they might have been lacking in substantial gifts."

"They're no friends of mine, Cos. I was just an onlooker."

"You're right, Parf. Forgive the insult. In any case whoever those people were, they obviously composed a cult of scatophagians."

"Scato what?"

"Scatophagians, those who indulge in scatomaney, the act of divination based on the examination of feces. What you witnessed most likely was in many respects an act of foretelling, or an attempt to control future events, like ~~the~~ success in one's career."

"I never thought about it that way, Cosmo."

"It's perplexing, Parf, but from what you told me I'm beginning to see why a willingness to sample excrement in exchange for good connections in this modern world is believed by many to be of exceptional value to their careers. More than likely it ^[is] ~~it~~, and it's sad, Parf. Very, very sad."

In a short time Parf fell asleep in his chair. His head was lowered to one side and his breathing was slow and steady. I looked at his quiet face with its stubble of gray beard, and its large bulbous nose and puffy red cheeks marked by the webbing of blue veins. His black, unkempt hair was graying at the temples, yet it was thick and curly and full at the brow, which gave him an appearance possessed it seemed of a boyish charm. His hands rested on his lap, one on top of the other, and the thick stubby fingers of the top hand were scarred across just below the knuckles as from some misbegotten slash that had severed the flesh in one precise cut. The fingernails were chipped and broken in places ^{and} stained with gesso, and red and blue pigment was lodged beneath

them. They were hands that in the past had felt no little share of labor, with their ~~old~~^{aged} calouses tough as leather swelling about the edges of fore finger and thumb; hands marred and wrinkled now but which seemed still strong and worthy in their repose. Looking at them was as if I looked upon the ledger of an open history. There was yet much that I did not know about Sergio Parf, but from his hands, I was able to surmise the character of a man who could have made up at least a segment of his past. Although this was only a surmise, it hinted at many facts which were later verified by what he told me.

I reached for the bottle, opened it, and poured myself another drink. ~~I sat quietly, staring out over~~^{I walked over to the window and} the marshlands. The tide had slipped out during our talk and the muddy-gray surface of the creek bottoms gleamed like metal under the heightening sun. Here and there along the banks of the creek, under a flawless blue sky, a residue of sea water formed patterns of shimmering light; and above the banks, through the ~~plushy~~, cool green of the eel grass, reaching across the expanse of the marsh to the edge of the bay, sultry, ~~intermittent~~^{intermittent} gusts swept in from the south like winds through a field of wheat.

FROM A NOVEL IN PROGRESS

PATHEA LIVING

BOLLETT P 86

Father Letino was a short, frail, balding man in his late thirties-early forties. His concern for his parish and the people who composed it was shown both in his intensity to maintain the Catholic faith among his flock and in his out-going sympathy for anyone, Catholic or not, whose life was afflicted by those unspeakable sufferings that seemed to touch upon them without reason. But even in this regard he had some reservation as to the possibility of convincing Ciro Bertucci that the Catholic faith in God was a valuable adjunct to one's life. Many times throughout the years following Bertucci's first heart attack (and preceding the outbreak of the war), he would call upon his apostate in the afternoon, and over a glass of wine, bread, hot vinegar peppers and cheese, all of which became an irresistible treat for the good father, the two men would eventually draw their discussions into the realm of the Almighty. Yet, despite these sometimes tense excursions into the sacred mysteries, Father Letino had to admit to himself that Bertucci never once showed signs of being an outright atheist: nor did he ever once hear Bertucci so much as utter an opinion on life itself, whenever their conversations probed into the nature of ^{the} universe, that was devoid completely of religious feelings. So it was during these discussions that Father Letino finally came to see the peculiar though often and logical reason Bertucci was able to evade upon his own arguments, and over

Father Letino was a short, frail, balding man in his late fifties, ~~(?)~~. His concern for his parish and the people who composed it was shown both in his intensity to maintain the Catholic faith among his fold and in his outgoing sympathy for anyone, Catholic or not, whose life was inflicted by those unspeakable sufferings that seemed to touch upon them without reason. But even in this regard he had some reservation as to the possibility of convincing Ciro Bertocci that an abiding faith in God was a valuable adjunct to one's life. Many times throughout the years following Bertocci's first heart attack ~~X~~ and preceding the outbreak of the war~~X~~, he would call upon his apostate in the afternoon, and over a glass of wine, bread, hot vinegar peppers and cheese, all of which became an irresistible treat for the good Father, the two men would eventually draw their discussions into the realm of the Almighty. Yet, despite these sometimes testy excursions into the sacred mysteries, Father Letino had to admit to himself that Bertocci never once showed signs of being an outright atheist; nor did he ever once hear Bertocci so much as utter an opinion on life itself, whenever their conversations probed into the nature of ~~its~~ meaning, that was devoid completely of religious feelings. So it was during these discussions that Father Letino finally came to see the peculiar though sound and logical acumen Bertocci was able to exert upon his own arguments, and over

a period of time, the good Father realized that Bertocci's cynical view of the world did not in any way dampen the force of his reasoning; nor did his insistence that Father Letino's God was an unfair and faulty one, weaken his fundamental belief that there was indeed a God, but a God so complex and illusive of one's comprehension that only a fool or a priest would ~~(take it upon himself to)~~ offer proof of his existence.

In so far as Father Letino held at his command a knowledge of religion in general, gleaned from years of study as a Jesuit, his historical facts relating to miracles were inveighed against repeatedly by Bertocci's practical and outrageous contradictions, whose examples Father Letino was no less at a loss to account for in the real world. And it was this phrase, "the real world," spoken in pure Italian by both men, and laced with just enough emphasis and sarcasm on Bertocci's part, that caused Father Letino to sit before his opponent speechless, sometimes hovering near to the outbreak of rage.

One afternoon, while both men had drunk beyond their capacity to express themselves without raising their voices, or on Bertocci's part, without slamming the table with his fist, Father Letino, with his own kind of sarcasm, related the details of a particular miracle that had ~~once~~ taken place in the "real world" in front of the granite steps of his church. He no more than uttered the last word of his

last sentence when Bertocci's eyelids widened in a surprise as startling and palpable, it seemed, as the deadening silence that fell between the two men like a slab of iron. Bertocci, raising himself out of his chair ~~X~~and with his head lowered almost to his chest~~X~~, began to pace back and forth in front of the table. He began to wonder too, how it came about that Father Letino knew of the experience he had while he stood before the steps of his church pondering whether or not he would go in and confess the hatred he felt towards Domenick Sardo. In a while it came to him: it was his wife who had told Father Letino, for it was her, and only her, he remembered, to whom he had related the incident of the flowering plants and the pealing bells, which, he told her, was an hallucination. Composing himself, Bertocci went back to his chair and sat down. A smile came to his lips. He placed one hand on top of the other and leaned forward on the table, staring rigidly into the eyes of Father Letino. In Italian he said, his voice calm and steady, "I know of my own ignorance in some things of this world, so I do not question them; but I know too of the ignorance of others."

"You do?" Father Letino asked. He smiled and adjusted his glasses.

"Yes, Father Joseph~~X~~ Letino. I know of the ignorance of my wife who told you of the miracle I witnessed. . ."

Bertocci hesitated a moment, and then went on, "the miracle

I witnessed in the real world outside of your church."

He raised the glass of wine to his lips, and while he drank, his eyes stared hard across the table into the smiling face of Father Letino. Placing the glass down, he continued, his voice still calm, but with a tone of increased sarcasm: "There are no miracles in the real world," he said. "There are things that happen, yes, which one can see and call miraculous, but it is miraculous only to the one who sees. What my wife told you was not what she had seen but what I told her I had seen. So is it not true that what I witnessed was a miracle for me only, if it was a miracle, good Father Letino?"

Father Letino looked away from Bertocci's stare, wiped his lips with the back of his hand and spoke.

"In one sense, yes, Ciro," he said.

"And in the other sense?" Bertocci asked.

"In the other sense?"

"Si. In the other sense?"

"It is in the other sense a miracle that. . ."

"I will help you, good Father," Bertocci broke in. "That I saw the flowers in your urns bloom ^{in October} ~~in winter~~ was a miracle for my wife too, yes?"

"Yes, it is so," Father Letino answered, his voice low and hesitant. "Through you," he added slowly, "she learned of the miracle you had witnessed in the same way

we have come to know of many historical miracles. They are the undeniable facts of history passed down to us from those who have experienced the miraculous powers of God."

"In that sense, Joseph~~h~~ Letino," Bertocci replied with emphasis, "it is a matter of belief in what one reads in your books of history! Yes?"

"In some cases perhaps, Ciro Bertocci."

"In the other cases!" Bertocci emphasized again.

"In the other cases it is beyond mere belief!" Father Letino exclaimed. "There is no ^{debt} ~~about~~ that miracles have occurred." He raised his half empty glass and drank quickly of the wine. "As an example," he went on breathing heavily, "there have been witnesses on many occasions at Lourdes who have seen the inflicted cured before their eyes. Up until this very day, Ciro Bertocci, these miracles still go on."

"Your witnesses see what they want to see, good Father. And the infirmed are cured by the powers of their own belief, not by the powers of God!"

"Their 'own beliefs' as you refer, are based on their faith in God. So it is not unusual that one can be cured of one's infirmities through one's faith in God."

Bertocci laughed with derision: "If what I told my wife was a lie then her faith in God makes it a truth!"

"What you told her was the truth."

"What I told her was the work of my imagination."

"An hallucination, you say. Is that no so?"

"Si, a trick of the mind."

"That could be so."

"Then you agree. It was in my mind, si, in my imagination where the flowers bloomed and the bells of your church rang with such force."

"I cannot agree to that, *Ciro Bertocci*."

"Because of your faith, you believe or disbelieve in things of the real world if it is convenient to your religious world."

"That is not so," *Father Letino* said softly.

"If it is not so, good Father, tell me, who in the first place caused the suffering of those who were cured at Lourdes, and why were some cured and others left to suffer for the rest of their days in the 'real world':"

"I cannot answer that question, *Ciro Bertocci*."

"Because of your faith?"

"Because it is a mystery."

"So there is no convenience in mystery?"

"There is no logical proof or no material evidence on which I can base the meaning of mystery." *Father Letino* drank again and emptied the glass. He went on, somewhat louder now: "nor is there anything in the real world upon which I can base the meaning of faith, for faith resides in the nature of one's soul."

"Still you have your faith in the real world, yes?"

"Si, I have faith."

"And you believe through your faith or through my wife that what I saw before your church was a miracle?"

"Through both."

"That is no answer."

"You can not conceive of this because your own faith has grown weak."

"I have the feeling that you speak the truth, Father Letino. The truth that I have weak faith; but my senses are not those of a fool." Bertocci raised his glass calmly and drank. "You believe now in miracles through your faith or through my wife, I can not understand which. And you are ~~no~~ fool. I ~~saw~~ ^{say} I have the hallucinations through my imagination, and you ~~saw~~ ^{say} I witnessed a miracle through my senses that tells my 'weak faith' that what I see in the real world is a miracle. Who is right I wonder?"

The two men went silent. After a while Father Letino got up from his chair, wavered a moment on his feet and spoke: "I must go, my good friend; but again we will talk about this subject of miracles."

Outside, under a low thick moody-gray overcast, a chilling stillness hung in the late afternoon air. From the red brick chimneys of the two and three story wooden dwellings that lined both sides of the deserted street,

thin blue columns of wood-smoke rose up, diffusing like mist into the upper shadows of the clouds. Father Letino, standing on the cement sidewalk and feeling the quick bite of the chill on his hot cheeks, steadied himself against the fence of Bertocci's front yard. He buttoned his overcoat. He adjusted the collar around his neck. He looked up at the darkening sky. He had drunk too much, he thought to himself. He had eaten little, too, since morning, and the digesting cheese and bread, the hot peppers and wine combined, swelled in his stomach with a disheartening nausea. After emitting a series of loud relieving burps, and with his eyes still on the sky, he reeled momentarily forward, regained his balance by holding onto the fence, and began walking slowly towards his church, thanking the Almighty for keeping the street bare of any parishoner who, he was certain, would have referred to his unsteady gait as that of a drunk. Looking up at the sky once more and offering a short prayer of thanks for the deserted street, he continued on his way, his thoughts now centered on the seriousness of the discussion he had just concluded with Bertocci.

As he walked, Father Letino's memory took him back to the time when he was a young boy of ^{twenty}~~ten~~ in Sicily. One night, he ^{remembered}~~remember~~, he had overheard his father and mother talking by the fire in the hearth, about an apparition which had been witnessed by three children in a field outside of a small village in Portugal. He remembered he

had listened quietly from his cot in the darkness, while his father related the story of the miraculous occurrence which had reached him by way of rumor. In less than three days, rumor or not, he recalled, the story of the apparition had spread throughout all of Sicily and throughout the mainland of Italy. It was said by some that the vision of the Holy Mother, who had appeared to the children in a ball of light above a tree, was the work of the devil. Like his father, others considered the occurrence a trick of the Pope and went about their work in the fields no less atheistic than they always had been. But the majority of the peasants in the village, whose population numbered upwards of two hundred souls, (~~and in the villages near the coast of Sicily to the interior,~~) revered the apparition as a God-sent miracle, a wonderous indictment of the devil and of all the evil and death he had wrought upon the world.

(~~A paragraph on the war in Europe here (1915-16).~~

~~Young~~
~~Little~~ Joseph~~X~~ Letino believed then, as he did now, in what his mother believed, and for all he could remember of those years past, his mother's devout faith in God had been shown in her rigid adherence to all of the tenets of Catholicism; while his father, who had never been baptized because of his own parent's indifference to religion, believed only in the crucifixion of a man called Christ. Although he was not an atheist, his unyielding

denunciations of the Papacy and the Catholic faith were not unlike those of Bertocci's.

So, as a ^{young boy} child, Father Letino, through his mother, was initiated into his belief in miracles, and as he walked toward his church, his senses now piqued by the fresh air, he could remember his mother taking him aside and telling him that his father was not an evil man because of his disbeliefs. She told him that a day would come when the entire world would learn of the miracle that had taken place in Portugal, and that his father, by the power of his own hidden faith, would come to believe in God as she herself believed.

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This was in ^{when} ~~By~~ May of nineteen seventeen ^{at that time} most all of Western Europe had been ravaged by war, which still continued in its carnage. Already over three hundred thousand Italian soldiers had been killed on the Insonzo front in the mountain regions of Venezia-Guilia in the north. It wasn't long then before the young Joseph Letino began to hear stories told by certain peasants in his village, peasants whose sons were combat soliders in the north, that during the previous winter months many men had frozen to death in their sleep on the icy slopes near Gorizia. He had also heard stories that told of amputations of toes and fingers, of legs up to the hips, and of hands and arms that had blackened from frost-bite and from wounds that had gone unattended in the freezing weather. He heard of the deaths of othermen who were too weak to escape the rocky crevaces they had used as sanctuaries against the relentless artillery bombardments, which in the end had decimated the strong and the weak alike. He heard too of the impossibility of preparing one's self against the sudden blizzards that swept down without warning through the mountain valleys and gorges above Caporetto. Although he had heard similar stories during the two preceding years, and had then, despite his young age, suspected that the details of the various accounts had

been exaggerated, he never the less listened carefully now to all that he heard. With a quiet sadness coming over him then, the young Joseph Letino, accompanied by his mother and sometimes by his father, would attend the burial of soldiers whose bodies returned to the village in heavy wooden caskets that had been carried by donkey cart from ~~the rail station~~ ~~at~~ Catania.

Now because of his birth defect, ^{which had caused an arterial ~~injury~~} the Italian government ^{arm} in 1916 ~~(give exact date here)~~ had classified the young Joseph as unfit to serve in the military. Despite this rejection, he decided to volunteer in a medical unit serving on the front, and he made this decision after giving much thought to the main purpose of a soldier: not wanting to take the chance of ~~of~~ having to kill another human being, he resolved to serve his country by helping to alleviate the suffering of those who were inflicted by the cruelties of war. The recruiting officer had informed him politely that this might not be possible, since one's hands and arms in a sense contributed to the make-up of those necessary tools with which one administered aid to the wounded. Disheartened but not discouraged by what the officer had told him, he was still possessed by the hope that he would somehow find a way to satisfy his desire.

As it was, since the first battle of the Insonzo River, which began in the early summer of 1915, three sons from a nearby village, and one from his own, had been severely

wounded. Of the three, two had later died from infection, and the other from his own village, only a few years older than himself, had suffered the loss of sight in both of his eyes. Throughout the region, the victim had come to be known as The Blind Veteran of the Insonzo. Without hesitation of any sort, Joseph Letino had taken it upon himself to donate part of his time to the needs of the veteran's father, whose vegetable gardens and olive groves lay some two miles east of his own father's land. Since the death of his wife the previous year, the blind veteran's father had barely managed to maintain his gardens, and more than half of his olive trees had died because of the absence of necessary care. For two years, then, after his own chores had been completed for the day and the sun was high in its zenith, one could make out the young Joseph Letino walking through the fields on his way to his neighbor's farm.

During the early spring, young Letino would help with the planting of tomato seedlings. Later in the fall he would contribute labor to their harvest, after which they were cleaned, sliced and put out in the sun to dry on wire-meshed trays. He would help with the cutting of feed hay, and the harvest of apples from the dozen or more trees that grew in the fields and on the slopes of the nearby hills. When the shadows of approaching dusk slipped in over the fields, the young Joseph and the blind veteran's father would return to his cottage. Each evening, as they drew closer through the

failing light, they could see the figure of the blind son sitting motionless on a wooden stool by the cottage door, his head tilted towards the sound of their approach, and his milky eyes rolled back in his head as if staring into the darkened horror that had brought about his infirmity.

Once inside the cottage, the three would sit at the table and eat of the food the blind son had prepared; and this, the preparation of the evening meal, was taught to him by the young Letino, first by leading him by the hand around the small room, and then by guiding his hands to the necessary objects that hung from wooden pegs or rested on the shelves along the cottage wall. He taught the veteran how to use the table as a pointer as well, and he did this by carving ten groups of notches about one quarter of an inch deep along the outer edges of the table top. There were two groups on each end near the corners, the first group having two notches, and three groups on each side several inches apart. By counting the number of notches through touch, he explained to his blind friend, the table could be used as a starting point that lead to familiar parts of the room already explored, and to the location thereabouts of the objects needed for the various chores. Looking back in time now, Father Letino remembered with a smile and a sense of lingering pride, that in less than a week, The Blind Veteran of the Insonzo, although hesitant at first, was able to move about the cottage with the facility of one who was able to see.

Joseph Letino's father did not care in the least whether his son served his country or not, either as a combat soldier or a medical volunteer; but the man suggested in any case that his son talk to the priest who made his call on the village once every month in order to say mass and collect alms for the church in Palermo. The priest, the father explained, because of his wide travelling experiences throughout Sicily and the mainland, was bound to know of someone who could help him in his desire to serve in the war. As it came to pass, on the following collection day, young Letino approached the visiting priest, and with ^{him} ~~his~~ discussed the possibilities of serving in the medical corps despite his infirmity. Father Letino could not now remember the name of the priest, but he did remember his writing a letter of introduction that he later presented to a Major, Carlo Orlandi, stationed in Reggio on the mainland, who was in charge of recruiting volunteers from the southern regions of Italy, including Sicily. When the priest finished writing the letter and gave it to the young Letino, he went on to say that both men and women were greatly needed in the field hospitals behind the front lines in the north, especially in the region of Venezia-Guilia. Of this, he went on to say, he was certain, but whether or not the boy would be paid for his work he could not say. To this the young Letino had answered quickly; he said with enthusiastic pride that

he had himself saved enough money over the past three years to support his needs on the mainland for at least a year. The visiting priest went on to explain that if he served in a unit that supplied room and board, and he knew of some near the larger cities that did not, there would be less of a drain on his savings. He added too that living conditions were not always suitable to one's tastes, not even behind the lines of the combat areas. With this he blessed the boy, wished him a safe journey to Reggio, mounted his ^{donkey} ~~mule~~ cart and went on his way.

After the tenth battle of the Insonzo began on the twelfth of May, 1917, the news having reached his village two days later, Joseph Letino, before leaving for Reggio with his letter of introduction, decided to make a pilgrimage to the church in Paterno, situated about ten miles to the west. Once in Paterno, he would pray for The Blind Veteran of the Insonzo and for the Italian and Austrian soldiers too, asking in his prayers that their suffering be lessened through the mercy of God. Along with these invocations and with as much importance to him, he would ask God that Major Orlandi accept him as a medical volunteer.

When the elder Letino learned of the boy's plans-- and he learned of them through his wife's enthusiastic agreement with her son's desires--he broke into a heightened rage. He exclaimed in a voice that seemed to growl as it

rose in pitch, that it was sinful in the ways of the world to pray for the enemy, the Austrian soldiers, although ~~his~~ senseless prayers could not cause a change in the will of a God who probably did not exist. In support of her son, the boy's mother retorted loudly in the sharp dialect of her region, and with clear and simple articulation, said that in the eyes of God there was no difference between the suffering of an Austrian soldier and an Italian one. In the same high pitches voice, she gave force to the idea that all humans were alike when their bodies suffered the grip of pain, and when the fear of death came over them like a pall that would not lift no matter what remedy of mind or body was called upon to alleviate its agonizing persistence. And to this she added--her hands flailing with each emphasis she placed on her words--that even a belief in God could not always quell the heaviness of this fear. Her round face bore down at her husband who sat at the table by the hearth, half mumbling, half speaking in a voice that quavered against her condemnation of him. She said that his disbelief of the Almighty was not enough to hide from her his real fear of the powers of God and of the sudden completeness of death. The elder Letino raised himself out of the chair as if by the tension of a spring and looked into the eyes of his wife, his lips quivering on the edge of what he was about to say. Before the sound of his words issued from his throat his wife again condemned him for his stubborn arrogance and for his faith only in the ways of the world.

The following morning, when the sun's light began to spread across the expanse of the fields and into the valley below the village, young Joseph, with the food his mother had prepared wrapped in paper and packed into his rucksack, made his way through the grass to the donkey path that would take him down to the main road. At the head of the path he stopped and turned towards the field that lay some fifty yards east of the cottage. He could see his father moving over the field on his way to the four milking goats, each of which was tethered to a pole on the far edge of the family's vegetable garden. Before milking the goats, it was his father's way of treating them to an early meal by feeding them all of the fresh weeds and any yellowing leaves and stems he could trim from the various plants. It was his father's ritual to do this, and it was his ritual too to milk the goats before taking up any other task for the day. The boy had watched the motions of this ritual from the cottage window every morning since he could remember. It was a chore the father insisted on doing alone.

Now the boy watched the easy movement of his father's figure course slowly through the dewy spring grass, and through the glow of the early light shimmering on the wet tips of the blades. The morning air, which had come up from the valley during the night from the seas beyond Catania, was fresh and cool, and it held within its misty texture the heady scent of pine, ~~of orange groves~~ of eucalyptus trees and of the sweet odor of the sea.

The boy had not spoken to his father during the morning meal. His mother too had remained silent while she served them and then packed the boy's rucksack with sausage, fruit and bread. The boy had kissed his mother, and as he was about to kiss his father on his way through the door of the cottage, the elder Letino stepped quickly outside and stood facing the upper pasture in which lay the vegetable garden he would tend.

Before making his descent down along the donkey path to the main road, the boy looked once more across the fields and saw his father standing motionless now against the background of the hills. His shape was in the likeness of a silhouette that appeared to have been cut from stone. The profile of his head, with its cap tilted to one side, and the slope of the shoulders and the sharp line of his arms hanging down on each side of the coated torso, and the baggy trousers seemingly cut off below the knees by the slight rise of ground behind which the silhouette stood, was to the boy an image that drew from him not rage or hatred, not enmity devoid of love; nor was it indifference the boy felt, although it had been a semblance of indifference and rage that had begun to peak in his own heart the previous night, while he lay in the dark on his wooden cot listening to his father's condemnation of what he had chosen to do. The boy stood now with the same conviction of mind that had led him to that choice, whose meaning either reached

beyond his father's understanding or was smothered by his arrogance, as his mother~~ed~~ believed that it was. Now the image of ~~this~~^{his} father, standing in the wraiths of that morning light alone against the hills and the distant peak of Mt. Etna beyond him, drew from him only the saddened hope that what composed the shape of this silhouette was much more than the mere components of body and flesh; for the substance of the shape was in part a substance of himself, and he knew full well that his father was possessed of his own soul, of his own ways and of his own kind of fear.

As the boy watched his father enter the garden, he listened to the wide, languid silence that pervaded the hills, ~~and was opened up briefly here and there by the echo~~^{to} ~~of bird calls.~~^{and} He looked down into the valley, ~~now~~. He could see the plush, shadowy green of the trees where the light of the sun spread out above them, and reached up along the slopes of the hills and into the draws and crevices of exposed rock that punctured the light above the grass. And he saw where the sun shed its light on the rounded tops of the knolls that seemed to lumber upwards among the trees in the mist. Looking once more at his father, the boy said a prayer for him. He asked god to forgive him for his ways. Then blessing himself, he gazed down the donkey path towards the main road, and as a feeling of peace came over him, and relinquished to him a sense of his father's worth and goodness, he took the first step of his pilgrimage to Paterno.

For Father Letino, it was no effort of the mind to recall the experience he had on his way back to his village from the church in Paterno. On his journey to the church, while he walked along side of the road under the heat of the sun and in the dusty air of high noon, he had become weak, and so decided to eat of the food his mother had prepared. He turned off the road into the low brush, and found refuge in a stand of eucalyptus trees whose overhanging limbs shut out^{the} heat of the relentless sun. On his return from Paterno, the sun had descended behind a ridge-line of hills to the west, and although he was less than half way to his village, he again grew tired, entered the same grove, and using his rucksack as a pillow, fell into a deep slumber.

When he woke and opened his eyes, the young Letino could make out the webbing of starlit skies between the leaves of the trees. Further to the east, below the edges of the overhanging limbs, he could see the full moon rising like a disk of glowing crystal that caught the glinting peak of Mt. Etna to the north in the spread of its widening light. Standing up, and with a chill working through his clothing to his flesh, he rubbed his shoulders with his hands and took in draughts of the night air. When he exhaled, a burst of mist bellowed from his mouth into the gleaming moonlight, swirled up in front of his face and disappeared. Fully awake now, the boy calculated the approximate time by estimating the height of the moon above

the ~~mountain peaks~~. Realizing it was near to nine o'clock, there suddenly passed through him a mounting concern for his mother and father, for they had expected his return two hours earlier. If he had not reached the village by nightfall, his mother told him, she would ride the ^{donkey} ~~mule~~ down to the main road and continue along it until she met him on his way back from Paterno. The boy's worry now centered on whether or not his mother had passed him while he slept, and if she had, how far towards Paterno had she gotten. Uncertain as to what he should do, he slung the rucksack over his shoulder, and made his way through the brush to the main road.

In the direction of his village, and under the wash of this glaring moonlight, the road stretched away and narrowed upwards like a ribbon of talc that turned and disappeared into the shadows of the hills. On each side of him, rising from the edge of the road, he could see the serried line of the tree tops against the open sky, ~~and~~, ^Aabove the line of the trees, the stars gave forth a brilliant, impinging light that flickered cold and endless beyond the bowl of darkness under which he stood.

Turning his head slowly, the boy looked back towards Paterno. In this direction above the road, and beyond the glare of the moon's light, the heavens were darker still and the stars shone with a light that seemed to pulsate in

its descent, each shaft distinct and separate from their countless number. Staring up at this preponderous expanse of starlight, the boy was filled with wonder, for of all he had ever seen of the heavens at night, and of all that had been read to him by the tutor who visited the village each week, and of all the stories he had read himself or were read to him by his mother--in which the heavens had been aptly described and exaggerated into his imagination--he could not remember one that was the same as this which reeled above him now. It began to bristle with increasing intensity. It was as if the light itself had become palpable, as if these reeds of sparkling light were being cast down before him to shatter like crystal upon the moonlit roadway. In a while the boy felt a warming sensation of peace come over him, and a silence fell over the trees and the road and hushed itself about him like the folds of delicate lace. And this lace began to pulsate around him, filling him with rapture. Then like a whirlwind, out of which came a voice that beckoned him, it seemed to contain him within itself and carry him upwards, filling him now with awe in his ascent.

While riding her mule along the deserted moonlit road, the mother paused now and then to call out the boy's name only to hear the sound of her echo return to her from out of the chalky darkness. Squinting her eyes into the powdery moonlight, that formed her shadow on the ground

astride the mule, she could see where the road declined and made its turn towards Paterno. At the crest of the decline, she got down from the mule and called into the murky blackness where the moon had not yet cast its light. Again she heard her voice echo among the trees and the hills. When her echo diminished, she listened to the silence that spread like a shroud throughout the darkness. She looked up at the sky, ~~now~~ ^{She} and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. As if suddenly fixed to the ground upon which she stood, by the force of what she saw, she stared with disbelief at the widening canopy of sparkling starlight that seemed to spill into the valley before her. It shone intensely from the tips of the trees that stood like spires in the moonlight beyond the turn of the road, and it gleamed like metal from the leaves with a luminescence she never before had seen nor imagined.

Under the immensity of this starlit night the woman stood dumbfounded beside her mule. She blessed her self with frantic movements. She said the Hail Mary aloud. As her lips moved with each uttered sentence of the prayer, her breath formed coils of mist in the night air, rose to her face and expanded like wisps of cytaline light in front of her eyes. With her hands held together now, palm against palm, and her fingers pointing upwards beneath her raised chin, she began to tremble. But there was no fear in her. There was no fear of the night, nor of God to whom

she gave reason for this strange, illuminating shower of light. Blessing herself again, she prayed for the safety of her son. She prayed that peace might come to the world, and asked God to forgive her husband for his heathen ways. And as she prayed, a slow, gusty wind scented with eucalyptus and pine, and the musky odor of incense, wafted up from the valley and rippled the leaves of the trees and the low brush that lined the road. With a suddenness that startled her, this wind increased in force and lifted a cloud of dust that veiled itself about her, and for a moment, shut out the glaring night. Then the veil of dust swept itself away in a softening roar, and she stood alone with her mule under the brilliance of the heaven's light and in the quietude of the hills.

Mounting her mule, the boy's mother went down the sloping turn into the darkness. At the bottom of the slope, where the road flattened out, she looked once more up into the heavens. Through the darkness that enveloped her she could see the same countless number of stars whose radiant glow splayed down in glittering shafts, each shaft distinct and separate from the other, each gleaming now from a common ball of light from which she turned her eyes away, got off the mule, kneeled down upon her knees and prayed again.

When Joseph Letino's mother came upon the footprints imbedded in a layer of dust on the side of the road, she was not certain they had been made by her son. In the moonlight, though it shone onto the gravel ~~(of the road)~~ and glistened intensely from the brush and the trees on either side of her, they did not stand out clearly, for the outline of one shoe crossed the outline of the other, making a series of small broken patterns of sole, heel and toe. Letting herself slide from the back of the mule, she squatted down, and with one hand placed flat on the ground beside her, studied the shapes of the prints. Looking to her right near her hand she could see another set of prints pointing towards the brush that grew near the opening of the grove. Rising to her feet, she made her way to the low brush to the grove, where she found her son lying on his side, his knees pulled up close against his chest, his head resting on his rucksack, and his arms crossed with each hand holding tightly to the opposite shoulder. Kneeling quietly beside him, the mother gently placed her hand on the boy's cheek and waited calmly until he woke.

On their way back to the village, the sky was not as deeply lit with starlight as it had been when the mother approached the crest of the hill and then descended into the darkness of the valley. The moon, now nearing its zenith and full to its brim with light, cast its glow

across the sky, dissolving in its rays the once crystalline shine of the stars. Yet the effect the heavens had made upon the woman persisted in her memory, and she prayed silently while her son sat tiredly on the mule making its way towards the village. Once inside the cottage she wrapped the boy in a woolen blanket and sat him by the hearth. Despite his attempt to stay awake and relate the story of his dream, his mother insisted that he remain silent until morning, and with this young Joseph Letino fell soundly to sleep by the hearth.

By the time Father Letino reached the granite steps ^{of} before his church, the memory of his return from Paterno and the brilliance of that starry sky those years back, was as clearly defined in his mind as any significant memory he chose to call upon whenever he kneeled alone each morning before all of the alters of all the churches he had ever pastored. The meaning of the heavenly sign that came to him through his dream, if it was a dream, filled him in his youth as it did now with an almost overwhelming sense of the reality of a God. And in so far as his mother had witnessed the same phenomena, he could not help but attribute its occurrence to the power of the Almighty. He reasoned that if it were not a showing of God's power, deliberately expressed for the benefit of himself and his mother, it would have been no less a showing of the power

of nature alone; and if it had been this, dream or not, then it was no different than the will of God impressing itself upon nature to create a sign indicating He had heard the boy's prayers spoken in the church in Paterno.

Father Letino remembered his father's disagreement with these conclusion; and he remembered, with no lapse of memory, the discussion that ensued the following morning when his father returned to the cottage after feeding his goats. His mother had finished her explanation of the sign, and she said little more to convince her husband of something in which she had already invested the feelings of her heart. But the elder Letino--chewing noisily on the apple and cheese his wife had placed in front of him on the table, and which he then cut into small rectangular shapes, putting the rind of cheese and apple into a separate bowl for his goats--stared at the movement of his fingers and knife as he made degrading references to what his wife and son believed was a miraculous display of God's heavenly powers. The gist of his own reasoning regarding the sign had been founded on his knowledge of natural atmospheric conditions. The boy's mother did not deny her husband the truth of this knowledge, ~~because~~ She was aware of his practical and somewhat scientific interests in the nature of things. She also respected, out of a kind of inkling dread, his more than casual interest in the powers of black magic and the evil eye, mallorca. Along with his reputation throughout

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the region as a shaman of sorts, who was able to wield his influence over the esoteric powers of the occult, he was more than fairly accurate in his interpretations of natural signs and in his predictions of weather on the basis of them. His record for weather predictions, for instance, in a region where the climate was generally stable and mild throughout the seasons, ~~save~~ for the summer months when the oppressive heat of the sun during the day was cooled by onshore winds at night that came up through the valley from Catania, ~~had~~ gained him such a notoriety that he was now behooved to give advice not only on the rearing of children and goats--depending on the phase of the moon when they were conceived--but on the planting of crops, the crossbreeding of chickens and the exact time to the minute when certain varieties of grapes were to be hand-picked for the making of wine. It was known that for a small stipend--usually in the form of wine or other needed commodities--and by the use of various charms including finger nails from his own hands, bits of wood threaded on strips of leather, dried snake skins, bones from slaughtered goats, animal and human urine mixed carefully in a clay pot, and tufts of hair taken from a corpse and tied to the ends of various shaped roots from carob trees (~~bush~~), he could stimulate a failing crop of tomatoes or grapevines into near immediate rejuvenation.

Over the years then, the elder Letino's reputation had grown into a rumor that expanded beyond the real

practicality of his methods. None the less, entire crops of seedling ~~tomatoes~~ had more than once perished in wind storms he had predicted within days of their arrival. Several times, Letino had forewarned all within communicable distance not to plant their crops until one week after his predicted storm would strike. This abstaining period, he explained, would allow the soil to recover from the painful beating the wind would wield upon it. Those farmers, and there were more than a few, who did not heed his advice, planted their crops and watched helplessly four days later as ~~the leaves turned yellow, dried up on their stems and~~ *seedlings* fell to the ground under the ~~effects left by the~~ *force* of the predicted wind.

Now in his self taught knowledge of weather, ~~he was~~ *the elder Letino was* also capable of predicting whether or not it would rain in the hills--a rarity in the region during the summer months--on in the village at the foot of the hills; or he could tell one if the skies would be clear or overcast on certain days. In the latter prediction he would always give an accurate percentage of cloud cover, as indicated by the distance between his outstretched arms. And the amount of rainfall he would predict was never greater, though it was sometimes less, than its corresponding notch, a series of which he had meticulously carved one half inch apart on the inner wall of a deep wooden bowl he kept in an open field.

So the elder Letino was not without some basis on which he founded his conclusions regarding the heavenly phenomenon witnessed by his wife and his son. He explained to them that there were sudden temperature variations in the upper atmosphere, and the passage of air currents through them laden with moisture sweeping in from the seas beyond Catania, had caused the light of the stars and of the moon to intensify and so behaved as it did. His wife went about her chores as he talked, giving him something less than her full attention. As he continued, the young Letino, reading studiously by the hearth, lifted his eyes from his book, looked sarcastically at his father and went back to his reading. Chewing rapidly on the bread and cheese, and sipping intermittently from his glass of wine, elder Letino went on to say that such natural phenomenon was not unusual, and if they were more observant of nature rather than blindly pious in their outrageous beliefs, they would be able to understand the reasons behind such occurrences. Occasionally he would look up from the table, and with his knife waving about in his hand, interrupt his talk and condemn both his wife and his son for their dogged ignorance. Against the hopeless demands of his wife that he finish his blasphemous explanations and get along with his work in the fields, the elder Letino took an abrupt turn in his denunciations of miracles and went into an immediate discourse on the phenomenon known as St. Elmo's fire. He

began by saying that it was not St. Elmo but St. ^{ERASMUS}~~Erasmus~~ who had been pushed into obscurity by the whims of religion, while it was ^{ERASMUS}~~Erasmus~~ and ^{ERASMUS}~~Erasmus~~ alone after whom the phenomenon had been originally named. He exclaimed further that he did not believe either saint could bring about the effects of fire, and he set forth ^{the}~~his~~ reasons for his belief in the details of a story that drew suspicious looks from his wife and son. Still he continued in a boastful way to relate the experiences he had while sailing from Trapani ⁱⁿ~~and~~ Sicily to Gagliari in Sardinia when he was a young man looking for work. He said with marked arrogance that even at an age so young he had found, by reading various books, that St. Elmo's fire was caused by charged particles adhering to the rigging of ships during thunder storms at sea, and that the same phenomenon appeared at the tops of spires and trees on land under the same conditions. These particles would glow with a mysterious, eerie green light. But there was no mystery in the light for him, the elder Letino declared, and he went on to say that on the second night out of Trapani, a sudden storm lifted with a raging wind, drawing the seas into a frenzy of waves and foam that battered the ship continually for more than two days. On the succeeding night, devoid of all light under a blackened sky, he had gone below on his own account and out of a curiosity laden with fear, to inspect the condition of the vessel's lower most planks. With lantern

in hand he went down into the bilge and waded hip-high in sea water over the cross beams of the hull. As he had expected of the aging vessel, he found two garboard planks parted more than an inch at their seams and easing away further and further from two broken ribs. Making his way up through the hatchway to the main deck he saw the rigging ablaze with St. Elmo's fire. Assembled beneath the glowing maze of rigging, the entire crew and passengers were praying on bended knees, while the captain stood like a fear-struck angel of God on the pitching quarter deck, his bearded chin raised towards the fire of St. Elmo. Awash in the foam left by each breaking wave that pounded over the vessel's heaving deck, the crew and passengers prayed in unison to be spared the impending catastrophe that was about to wield itself upon them. Letino, throwing the lantern over the side, made his way slowly along the windward rails. When he reached the quarter deck the storm abated as if on command of God himself, and the seas wallowed gradually into a murky calm. Letino went on to say that the crew now looked up at the glowing rigging. He said he could hear their mumbled voices thanking the Almighty and St. Elmo for this miraculous cessation of the sea's wrath and power. With this he got up from the table: "But I would not let myself be blinded by their beliefs," he said boastfully. He went on then to relate to the captain and the crew in his best Sicilian tongue what he knew of the mechanics of weather,

and he told them there was nothing unusual for the storm to end as if God had suddenly impressed his will upon it. It was instead a change in pressure that caused the storm to end, and St. Elmo's fire was nothing more than electricity combined with weather, thus causing the rigging to glow with phosphorescent light. Here, he emphasized that St. Elmo or God had given no sign that they had saved the vessel from sinking, for even as he spoke, the rigging still glowed brightly with green fire, while the vessel was taking on water through her opened seams. Unless St. Elmo himself secured the garboard planks with his own two hands, Letino told them, they would all perish in the godless deep. Upon hearing this the captain no longer concerned himself with St. Elmo's fire, nor with the confusion that was beginning to spread throughout his guileless crew, some of whom continued to gaze up into the sparkling green that highlighted the outline of the rigging. While some shifted nervously on their knees, looking first at the captain, then at the elder Letino, who stood with both hands upon his hips and his head raised arrogantly, the captain ordered two men to inspect the planks below. Letino now peered over the heads of the frightened crew beyond the leeward rails. In the distance a spot of green light showed through the darkness like the flicker in an emerald eye, bobbed out of sight, came up again, made an arcing descent as it moved, dipped further down and rose once more in its progress

toward the stricken vessel. The captain and crew now turned their eyes on the gleaming light beyond the rail. Indeed it was a ship, Letino explained to his wife and son. It was the real saviour of these adventitious survivors, a real ship floating on the same real water that was rapidly filling the enclosure of their vessel.

Letino went on to relate that the captain of the sinking vessel ordered his men to seize him and tie him securely to the higher rail of the now listing hull. While Letino claimed he offered no resistance to the ropes being slung around his waist and chest, the captain descended the ladder leading down from the poop, moved cautiously across the sloping deck and stood face to face with this outrageous blasphemer who had dared to insinuate his sacrilegious denial of the power of St. Elmo and of God.

By this time, a portion of the anxious crew and a dozen or more bewildered passengers were huddled together along the upper rail, still fearful of the impending disaster. Of the six life boats yet to be lowered, only two had been readied, and of these, it was impossible to make the swing over the higher starboard side of the hull.

The rigging continued to glow with its eerie light. In the distance off the port side both the green and red running lights of the oncoming vessel were clearly visible, and the dark, shadowy form of its hull steamed closer through the murk.

The sounds of the excited voices calling to the oncoming vessel echoed throughout the darkness, Letino recalled, and the captain, fearful of an outbreak of disorder among his crew and passengers, gave a succession of unheeded instructions that dissolved like a whimper into the cacophony that swept about him. Turning his eyes again on the elder Letino, and with his lantern held only inches away from Letino's smurking face, he condemned him to the eternal fires of hell, struck him once across the jawbone with his fist, and proceeded in his attempt to maintain order among his crew. As the rescue vessel drew closer, with her rigging and hull outlined against the blackness out of which she came, it made a slow turn to the left, showing again the one, glaring green eye of its starboard running light, flickering brighter now than St. Elmo's fire in its proximity to the stricken vessel.

Letino said to his unattentive wife that the Captain's blow has sent him into a realm of darkness, and by the time he returned to his senses, more than half of the crew and passengers who had jumped over the side had been hauled out of the water by lines thrown out to them from the rescuing vessel. The seas having calmed into roils of lazy black swells, made this an easy task out of the otherwise chaos of bobbing heads and arms that floated about the sinking hull.

With her masts raked at an angle to the oily seas, the glowing rigging began to extinguish near the lower sections at the rails, submerging as they were beneath the surface of the water. Suddenly, with a hefty, wracking thud that shook the vessel from stem to stern, she bottomed out rock-hard, rolled slightly once to port in a wash of sea water that swept up to Letino's chest, rolled back and settled up to her rails on an even keel. Then, as if on command of some unseen force, St. Elmo's fire went out. The rigging stood black, and a deep silence pervaded the surrounding seas.

Now on the deck of the rescue vessel, Letino went on, he could see the faces of the crew and of the sodden survivors in the glow of the lanterns. They appeared to him to have frozen in place when St. Elmo's fire went out. After what seemed a long time of bewilderment, they slowly raised their faces to heaven, blessed themselves and went back to their task of hauling survivors from the surface of the deep.

At this juncture in his story, the elder Letino sat down in his chair, drank the remainder of his wine and filled his glass once more. Peering steadily at him from across the small room of the cottage, his wife, placing her hands on her hips, admonished him for his lies in a rapid succession of harshly spoken words, her voice rising with a distinct, bitter intonation that caused her husband's

hands to suddenly shake as he raised the glass to his lips. Spilling wine onto his wrist and shirt front, he turned quickly around to face his wife, and swore to all of the gods that might be, that his story was true, despite any doubts she could use in her worthless accusations against him. With this he went on to say he would continue his story until all the facts were explained, and if it was necessary to speak to an empty room he would do so. Yes, he said, he would speak to an empty room if necessary, but it was his right, he said in a loudening voice, to demand her to listen to him as he had listened to her while she spoke of the unlikely miracle she claimed to have witnessed. Again his wife countered in her rapid Sicilian tongue. She said he was a man held up by worthless beliefs and would some day fall into the truth of God when his beliefs crumbled beneath him like a sheaf of sticks. Shaking her finger at him, she warned him not to waste his working time on the explanation of a lie, while his goats waited for the squeeze of his fingers on their teats. The miraculous power of the Almighty, she said in a tone of sharpening sarcasm, would find no reason to prove itself by filling a pail with goat's milk, especially for an arrogant fabricator of imaginary facts.

As it turned out, the elder Letino concluded his story by saying the captain of the stricken vessel had ordered his men to leave him lashed as he was to the starboard

rigging, less the devil that worked through him cause harm to befall the vessel that had saved them. For three days then, Letino claimed, he survived the blistering heat of an oppressive sun, went without food or water, until on the morning of the fourth day, a vessel off course, sighted the grounded hull and rescued him from certain death. With a haughty zeal then, he got up from the table, and under the doubting stares of his wife and son, picked up the milking bucket by the door, and left to tend his goats, his voice still audible as he mumbled a series of harmless curses to the forces that ruled the capricious ways of the world.

Four days after his pilgrimage to Paterno, young Joseph Letino ^{sat} ~~say~~ proudly at the reigns of his father's donkey cart. With his letter of introduction wrapped in heavy parchment, and stuffed neatly into the front pocket of his trousers, and with his father sitting on the cart beside him, he leaned over and kissed his mother good-bye. He was off to Messina by way of ^{bus} ~~railway train~~ (??) which he would board at Catania some twenty miles to the west.

It had taken ^(over five) ...X... long uncomfortable hours to reach the ^{bus} ~~train~~ station at Catania. During the journey, the elder Letino had carried on an incessant conversation with himself that delved into subjects ranging from politics to religion, and from the falsity of saints to

the recent apparition of The Holy Mother, which included his deep suspicions levelled at her authenticity. He did not once look at his son while he talked. Since the boy had made up his mind that the miraculous powers of God were real, he was not interested in what his father had to say. His curiosity was centered instead on the city of Messina, and when he heard a pause in his father's otherwise on-going conversation, which at times hovered near to a tirade, he would ask a question or two about the life and habits of the people who lived there. But his father, having visited the city some ten years earlier to receive a pittance that had been willed to him by a rather well-to-do uncle, recalled nothing of his experience that was of interest to the boy.

And so the journey had continued, and the cart rattled and lurched along the steep, winding trails leading down from the hills and over the rocky paths that eventually took them to the main road heading west to Catania. Once, after the donkey had drunk from² nearby stream that pooled its waters in a grotto of lava ~~that protruded between~~ ^{shaded by} small pines and eucalyptus trees off the main road, it refused to take on its task again. The boy's father jumped down from the cart and pulled forward on the leather halter. He then slapped the animal with two vicious blows on the side of the mouth, and swore and spit at the sky. Still the donkey would not move. The father then searched wildly for a limb with which he could beat

the animal. A short distance from the grotto he found a branch of pine near to three feet long, and at one end, almost an inch thick, tapering into a half inch or so at the other. Running back to the cart, and taking hold of the thicker end of the branch, the elder Letino began *beating* first the flanks and then the head of the stubborn donkey. The animal's furry hide quivered under each successive blow of the limb, ^{and,} pulling its head up in quick repeated jerks, it bared its yellow teeth in agony.

The boy sat calmly while his father's rage mounted with each swing of limb. Then in a while, he felt the first pull of anger in his own blood; his legs and feet ~~stiffened~~ ^{stiffened} against the wood of the donkey cart, and the muscles of his arms and shoulders grew tense against the fibers of his cotton shirt. He turned his head away. He closed his eyes for a moment and blessed himself in the sign of the cross. He turned back to his father whose unintelligible gruntings, interspersed with curses and condemnations, filled the little grotto with fearful reverberations.

The more the father beat on the donkey, the more the staunchy animal refused to move. It stood solid in place like a boulder beside the stream, its front legs firming up, and its muscles tightening from the shoulders down to the first bony joint above the hooves. Now the hooves began to lift and dig into the parched, rocky soil, first

one then the other, and its head bucked painfully against its halter.

The animal's sweat began to show now in swirling patterns through its fur, lathering the straps of the leather harness along its flanks. The father's grunting grew louder too, and so did the donkey's. And the boy listened with fear and confusion to the deep, throaty whine of the mule and to the strangely human almost maddened, high-pitched tones in the deathly curses and condemnations issuing from his father's throat. This shrieking cacophony of human and animal sounds combined, seemed to rise about him with the force of some senseless turmoil, mixing as it did like the stormy howl of two opposing winds.

And the turmoil continued until the father threw the limb ~~and~~ ^{end} over end in a shallow arc across the stream. Clenching his fist, which appeared like a hammer-head at the end of his bare arm, he punched the animal once in the rib cage and once on the side of its foaming mouth. Breathing heavily and still muttering his heated curses, he wiped the sweat from his face with the back of his fore arm, and as ribbons of blood and saliva spilled thickly from the animal's lips, he threw himself back on the ground. Holding on to his fist with his good hand, he gave one finishing condemnation to all of the beasts of the world, swore at the donkey once more, and exhausted from the

failing effort of his raging ordeal, rolled over onto his stomach and fell asleep.

Father Letino remembered that the cry of the donkey had reached far above the pitch of his father's voice; that it had wailed distinctly and painfully beyond any sound he had ever heard before. And he remembered that it did not take long either--after he had reached the mainland of Italy and was shuttled from town to town, passing through villages by rail, by donkey cart again, by military ambulances and trucks, until he reached the field hospital near Codroipo in the north--before he heard the pain in the moaning of the wounded. He had heard too the pain in the near dead and the dying, and unlike the pain in the crying of the donkey, he gradually came to recognize in the sound that lone, human cry for help that seemed to come from somewhere deep and mysterious in the soul of one who did not want to die. Yes, it did not take long before he heard this in the suffering of the men and in the awkward, frightened youths who were no less younger than himself. He had listened to these sounds first with fear, and in his attempt to avoid them he had turned his head away. After a time, these sounds of the maimed and the dying overcame his fear. They took on a quality that blended into the composite of sound that he learned made up all of the sounds that were natural adjuncts to the turmoils of war.

At this point in his duties he had no longer been afraid. He had listened in wonderment to the shameless tremors of fear in the calling voices, in the begging and in the admittance of absolute need and helplessness. It did not take long either before he was able to recognize those shades of horror in a face that a dying voice could not call back, those pitiable, haunted shades that invaded the faces of the hopeless. And in a kind of amazement and fear combined, he began to ponder the rich, bloody-red of the freshly opened wounds and the once near perfect symmetry of an arm or leg which had been blown away to leave a bleeding stump. Then too, as if in a trance, he would see the incongruity in the near-perfect innocence of human flesh so unnaturally ripped open to the world, like a jagged rent in a once near-perfect sheath of silk. And least, in his own mounting horror, that would itself diminish in time, he would begin to sense that peculiar, rank, ~~near-sweet~~ disgrace which seemed to rise irreverently like an aura from the stiffened dead bodies: and he saw these bodies, he remembered, lying in solemn rows before the church outside of Udine waiting for shipment by rail and by truck to the identification depot in Portoguararo to the south. He saw them coming in from the front lines in Gorizia too, wet and soggy in their uniforms, piled randomly one on top of the other on the horse-drawn wagons that grined over the broken rubble of

stone in the streets below the window of the room he had occupied overlooking the square in Codroipi. Yes, the things young Joseph Letino had seen and heard as a boy had produced in him a sadness unlike any he had ever felt, and he knew it would possess him always.

Young Joseph had sat in the donkey cart not saying a word. His compassion for the donkey and his disgust for his father caused him on that day to vow against committing any act of cruelty as long as he lived. In the prayer of the Our Father--which he began to repeat to himself and which he later continued to repeat after he boarded the ~~bus~~ ^{bus} ~~train~~ at Catania, and sat alone by the window looking out at the passing countryside--he seemed to hear in the cadence of his silent words another voice that verified his vow.

Under the rays of the hot sun now he watched the stream flow out of the grotto into the glaring light. While he prayed, he thought of the children who had seen the apparition in Portugal, and of the miraculous shine of the stars on his way home from Paterno. Understanding the possible meaning of the apparition from what his mother had told him ~~(the starry skies)~~, he decided now to interpret the occurrences in his own way. It was, he reasoned, not only an indictment of the devil and his evil which was rampant in the world, but an indictment too of the cruelty that human beings exerted upon one another. This kind of

cruelty, he concluded, while his father woke up and rose to his feet, dusted off his trousers and put his cap back on his bald head, was not the work of the devil. It was the work of human beings overcome by their own evil. And contrary to what he would learn in the seminary in ...X... Father Joseph Letino would hold tenaciously to this belief throughout his later career as a priest.

These thoughts about cruelty blended into the silent rhythm of his prayer, and made his anger less critical of his father. The boy discontinued his prayer then, and asked the Almighty outright that his father be forgiven for the pain he had brought upon the helpless donkey.

Before taking up his prayer again, Joseph looked beyond the grotto where the stream turned in a soft arc and disappeared into a mesh of low, thick, ~~bristly~~^{bristly} bushes growing along the rocky edge of its shallow banks. His eye followed the curve of the stream. He watched the sunlight play on its rippling surface. Where it turned into the shade of the shrubs he could see a cross, no more than three feet high, that had been erected from the branches of a pine. Portions of the rough graying bark had peeled away from the wood of the branches, and the splintered ends of the cross-piece had dried of its sap and in places had fallen to the ground. Looking at the cross and then at the pieces of bark and wood that lay scattered among the stones, the boy blessed himself and was suddenly

relieved of the anger he had felt towards his father, who by now was making his way up onto the seat beside him.

~~(NOTE: His father does not see the cross. It is either an apparition for the boy alone or his father is lying.)~~

Resuming his prayers, the boy's eyes followed the winding road that dropped slowly out of sight into a broad stretch of green, open plain. In the distance beyond the plain, and almost at eye level with the cross of pine, he could make out the uneven array of pale, white buildings and a church spire shimmering through the blue haze. It was Catania.

Father Letino turned the corner onto the Avenue. In the distance he could see the white, stucco walls and the opened beam spire of his church. Through the chilling mist a few parishoners were visible coming down the granite steps, while a group of six young girls dressed in heavy long coats and colorful scarves ascended and went inside. The traffic along the avenue that ran past the church had thinned out since his departure earlier that afternoon, and only now and then could he hear the blare of an automobile's horn, or the slow, hollow, clop and rattle of a horse-drawn wagon. He stopped a moment and took in a full breath of the misty air. In its odor he could smell the weedy scent of eel grass that rose from the creeks of the marshlands south of his church near Bertocci's house, and of the open

sea. The breeze, what there was of it, had backed to the east. By nightfall it would be a steady on-shore wind, he thought, and the temperature would more than likely rise. "Less coal to burn," he said aloud, and continued on his way.

By now, Father Letino's pace was a steady one. The walk from Bertocci's house had done him good. He mulled over the memories he had of the war, and again, as he had done so many times in the past, he thought of the last night he had spent behind the front lines outside of Udine. It was the first of November and the battle of Caporetto had already begun. On that night, he remembered, throughout the darkening hours that made their slow tread towards morning near to unbearable, the shelling had gone on without let up. The quaking sound of the explosions had rent the air for miles like the rumble of continuous thunder, shaking the wooden frame of the hospital tent and billowing the canvas inward as if by the force of a cursing wind. The deafening sound, he recalled, had shut out all of his thoughts but the thought of where the next shell would hit, and this frightening anticipation had made him feel as if he might already be dead and he need only to open his eyes to see his body gone. But the young Letino did not open his eyes. While he lay on the wooden planks of the tent floor he pulled his knees up against his chest and held his head between his hands. Then, under the relentless shelling had been removed, were stitched, and then sealed

sound of the air-borne shells, that seemed to fall like slabs of rock one after the other when they hit and exploded, the young medical volunteer prayed with all of his heart and felt the sudden flow of urine spread over his inner thighs.

Four days later, lying on a cot in the hospital in VERona, the young Joseph Letino opened his eyes. But it was not until he was able to hear and the numbness in his body had dissipated that he learned he had become the subject of much talk. He had suffered a broken right collar bone, severe shock, and deep, tearing wounds from bomb fragments that had penetrated almost to the bones of his left calf and hip. Because of what he had gone through, the powers of God were invoked by doctors, nurses and orderlies alike, in order to account for what they believed to be his miraculous survival. Some indeed referred to him as "the devine survivor," for one out of the three successive artillery shells had exploded no less than four yards in front of the hospital tent in which he lay huddled and shivering with fear, killing all fifteen occupants but him. In the tents on either side, no one survived the following two direct hits, the number of dead from the three tents totaling forty-five.

It required ...X... days for his collar bone to fully heal. His left hip and calf, after six pieces of shrapnel had been removed, were stiched, and then healed

faster than his collar bone, and this enabled him to leave his cot for short walks on crutches around the ward. Of the effects of the shock? He would be reimbursed of its cause in weeks of hellish nightmares. The events of the bombardment would come back to him in all of its clarity of detail and sound. He would relive in his sleep and in his unoccupied wakeful hours, that paralyzing instant before his entire body had lifted from the wooden floor of the tent and smashed into a fallen beam which had leaned rigidly at an angle above his head. And he would hear again the muffled cries of the wounded men lying helpless on their cots, unable to escape the same, hopeless catastrophe that had rained down upon them only a week earlier on the front lines at Caporetto; and after the first shell had hit at a distance beyond the tent, he had seen the sullen resignation come over the shrouded face of his patients, for they knew the bombardment would continue, that the shells would fall closer to the target the enemy had deliberately chosen until the small medical unit was completely destroyed.

The days and weeks the young casualty had spent in the hospital in Verona then, bore on with vivid memories. He need now only to close his eyes to see the drawn, pitiable faces of those Austrian youths standing before the firing squad against the steep rise of a snow covered hill, senseless with fear, dumbfounded by the comprehension

of what was about to happen to them. He would recall again too, while he lay on his coat staring up at the white plaster ceiling of the ward, his own impulsive ways on the front. In one ^{incident} ~~incident~~--perhaps too foolish, perhaps too youthful in his exuberance to prove himself--he had disregarded in mind but not in body, the rapid succession of ripping machine-gun fire, taking any form of cover he could find, while he crawled on his stomach towards the moaning soldier who lay tangled in a web of twisted barbed-wire, with both hands sheared off at the wrists. If he thought deep enough now, Father Joseph Letino would see again those handleless arms reaching up like the stubs of broken tree limbs, bleeding darkly into clods of chopped snow mixed with the gravel of frozen earth.

Once healed, the young Letino was sent home to his village with his right arm in a sling and a slight limp in his left leg. On the day he was discharged, he remembered, he had been given a reconditioned uniform that had been tailored by two nurses who had treated him. They had carefully taken off several inches from the jacket at the waist, and had cut and trimmed the trousers to the proper length. Since the leather shoulder strap came over his right shoulder and crossed his chest down to the leather belt at this waist, it was decided by the doctors that the harness-like belting would put undue strain on his injured collar bone. The elimination of the leather belt then, and

the shoulder strap, which would not have been visible behind the arm sling, did not detract too severely from the over-all appearance of his uniform. But in order to insure adequate circulation to his left leg and foot, the puttees were not used. At first, the uniform had made him feel as though he were in some way different from the other casualties; but thinking back to that day waiting to board the train for Rome on the first leg of his journey home, the scene he had witnessed was no longer the orderly image he had had of rigid soldiers standing at attention, their buttons glinting in sunlight, their boots shining like burnished metal, and their puttees wound evenly in a spiral over the hump of calf muscle beneath; nor was the slow, dazed commotion of men boarding and unboarding the coaches reminiscent of parades of uniformed combat soldiers turning in unison with precise timing on command by the lead officer. It was none of this; neither was it the irregular line of helmeted troops in full pack bouncing along the trails on their way to the front, nor the elongated symmetry of truck convoys with their rounded tarpaulins moving like the segmented body of a snake winding up the mountain roads. All around him it was now a disarray of the once orderly picture of men in arms; and he had seen the beginning of this disarray on the front, and here, on a stretch of platform, amid the discordant, bustling activity brought on by the hapless occurrence of

previous pain and suffering, the discharged soldiers were no longer possessed of high purpose. They were no longer soldiers driven by fearless intent nor lifted in spirit by the force of pride or of willing sacrifice. He saw in the faces around him, as it no less showed in his own, a weary absence of passion that spoke of the defeat of one's former purpose a warrior. They were all survivors but no longer warriors. They were all of the bandaged maimed, the young Letino thought to himself, the bedraggled and permanently crippled survivors whose only luck had spared them a more lethal fate. Looking down the platform, he could see men being lifted on wheelchairs into the coaches. He could see others who had come in on the train from the front line on the Asiago Plateau being carried on stretchers or limping on crutches to the waiting trucks and ambulances. And he watched the helpless blind being led by conscientious nurses, and some hand-in-hand, one behind the other in a chain led by an orderly who moved cautiously through the jumbled heaps of rucksacks, suitcases and bundles made of heavy cloth tied with rope, all of which was piled with no regard for content among the shifting crowds of men, most of whom wore uniforms composed of whatever military raiment they could find or was given to them. They were the bedraggled and the maimed, he thought again solemnly, the remnants of a useless ^{toil} ~~teit~~ upon which he had then waged his deepest conviction of evil.

Standing on the deserted sidewalk, Father Joseph Letino looked up at the cross on the spire of his church. In the weakening light of the oncoming evening, and against the scudding cloud cover above it, it stood out like an image of gold embossed on the surface of a darkening sea. Staring up at it, he realized again as he had in the past, that it was to him in all truth a symbol of human worth that transcended both choice and destiny. Yet, even so, after all the years of his devotion to what he believed to be God, perhaps a God that was singular only to himself, he wondered whether he had been deceived in his choice to accept the vows of his calling. And of this possibility he could not say one way or the other. It made little difference now if he had, he thought, and little difference if he had not, for he was certain in his heart of hearts that he had received a series of possible callings when he was a youth, that were clear enough in his own mind then, and in the influence they had upon him that led him into becoming a priest. Although the evidence of these callings were not so pronounced as the cross of pine and the unusual behavior of the heaven's light on his way back to his village from Paterno, that strange, potent immensity of ^{celestial}~~spectral~~ light that might have been nothing more than the content of a dream, he could not discount them as a

sign of God's will; and the fact that he was the sole survivor among forty-five souls who perished under an artillery bombardment those years back, could or could not have been proof of God's intercession to spare him. Still, while he gazed up at the golden solidity of the cross atop the spire of his church, standing out as it did against the rolling mass of clouds that had thickened and merged into the raw, gray light of dusk, he asked himself if one could ever be free of doubts, especially when an action is taken which is based on what one believes to be true and defines a way of life for the rest of one's life?

August 1935

Bernard was buried in a Catholic cemetery located about eight miles from his home. The funeral, having been paid for in part with the money Philomena Bernardi had been able to save over the past two years, and what money was given to her out of the savings of her daughters, took place on a bright, clear, sunny morning. In the relatively halcyon air, and in a mood lifted by the self-acknowledgment that she was powerless against the events that had befallen her and her family, the complexion of her cheeks became rosy, and she smiled softly at the small cluster of women who waited outside of her house for the funeral procession to begin. Her eyes were clear and without tears, and when she spoke in response to those who approached her with their consolations, her voice was distinct and unobtrusively polite in her quiet resignation.

On the day after her husband had died, Philomena Bernardi had made the decision to wear a new silk coat which had been given to her some years before by an older sister now deceased. (The coat had been given to her by her sister, who had been very kind to her.) On the day she received the coat her sister told her that it was a gift whose meaning could be renewed whenever she wore it, and so that wear it only on occasions that held a special kind of happiness for her. In this way, she

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On the ~~(night?)~~ day after her husband had died, Philomena Bertocci had made the decision to wear a seal skin coat which had been given to her some years before by an older sister now deceased. ~~(Description of the coat here.) (Her reaction when she first sees the coat.)~~ On the day she received the coat her sister told her that it was a gift whose meaning could be renewed whenever she wore it, and so must wear it only on occasions that held a special kind of happiness for her. In this way, the

sister explained, the comfort and warmth derived from the coat would remain in the soul long after it was taken off. This was the power of the gift, its meaning. Now Philomena, having told this to all the members of her family, including her husband, who had laughed openly in a derisive condemnation of his sister-in-law's superstitions, brushed the garment carefully and hung it in the deepest side of the closet in her room. Occasionally, when her housework had been completed for the day and the ~~(winter)~~ evenings weighed upon her for reasons that were outside of her comprehension, she would secretly take the coat out of the closet, put it on and strut back and forth in front of the bureau mirror, happily bemused by her own image wrapped within its sheen of silken fur.

One evening, Bertocci entered the room and found his wife standing before the mirror dressed in her fur coat, her left hand on her hip, her elbow pulled slightly back and her head raised in a pose befitting a woman thirty years younger than herself. She had furled the thick black collar up to its fullest height from the shoulders so that only a mere tuft of her graying hair was visible above it. On this particular night, after she had posed from several different angles, she felt the presence of someone standing behind her. Looking around ~~in fright~~ she fixed her eyes upon the face of her

husband, who in turn held her fixed with his own eyes, ~~coupled as they were to a sneering grin.~~ In the sudden, nervous shame that came over her, Philomena turned away, ~~guiltily from her husband's stare, and like a child caught in the act of some forbidden game,~~ lowered her head and began furling the collar of her cherished fur coat slowly down.

Her husband had not said a word. He laughed quietly in a subtle, jeering way. Then, shaking his head from side to side in mock bewilderment, he went mumbling out of the room. With tears coming to her eyes, Philomena Bertocci took off the coat, and then, folding it into an almost precise square, she adjusted the sleeves one over the other like two handless arms and placed it in the bottom drawer of her bureau.

Now on the day following the death of her husband, and resolutely ignoring the fact that her husband was dead, she took the coat from the bureau drawer, put it on and stood once again before her image in the mirror. Instantly, she could see clearly where the crease of the folds had scored deep into the fur to the hide, forming irregular patterns of intersecting lines on each side. ~~of the garment~~ The fur itself, having given up its natural oils, had desiccated near to the point of brittleness. She tried repeatedly to smooth out the lines by passing her palm up and down along her thighs and waist, but it was no use:

once her hand was taken away, the lines reappeared. Feeling a gnawing disappointment now, she hurriedly took the coat off, wrapped it in three layers of newspaper, tied the bundle with cotton string and instructed Robert to bring it to the furrier whose address she had found sewn to the inside of the right sleeve.

With a note stating she must have the coat by the next day ~~(evening)~~ in order to wear it to her husband's funeral--no matter what the cost--she gave her son the exact two-way fare for the trolley car, and from the can in which she kept her savings, she counted out three five dollar bills, estimating quickly what the cost might be to bring the coat back to its original condition. Wrapping the bills into a packet-like bundle of heavy brown paper that she cut from a shopping bag, she tied this also with string and put it into the pocket of the boy's shirt. Then buttoning the pocket nervously, though with some feeling of relief, she instructed her son ^{once} ~~one~~ more and sent him off.

Until noon of that day, while arrangements were being made for her husband's funeral through the efforts of Father Letino, who had taken it upon himself to look after the family during their travail, Philomena Bertocci could not rid her thoughts of the possibility that her coat would not be ready for the funeral. ~~(Expand here)~~ Her movements about the kitchen were desultory. She was unable to concentrate on the details of the wake that would

take place that night. On the afternoon of the previous day, Father Letino had explained these details to her. At that time Philomena had come to the end of her brief but genuine period of grief. And while the good Father sat at the kitchen table pondering the future of the Bertocci's family, she very conscientiously prepared a meal of left over spaghetti and a few morsels of bricciolli, which she reheated and then served with an unusual and charming alacrity. It was, Father Letino thought, as if the woman's mind had given up all of its memories relating to her late husband, and the indifference she showed towards the impending funeral, after Father Letino, having finished his meal, warmly gave instructions concerning it, was as devious an occurrence to him as any occurrence that might have taken place under the influence of the devil. Sitting upright in his chair now, and with his hands resting one on top of the other on the table, he asked Philomena cautiously and in a quiet tone if she felt well. Philomena, who went on washing dishes at the sink, did not reply. Father Letino went on to explain to her that grief can show itself in many ways. He said too, in a more serious tone, that the effects of grief upon anyone who denied its power to redeem them of their suffering, could be ruinous to one's soul. Grief felt for anyone departed, he continued as simply as he could, is one way that God reminds us of our own mortality; and to feel it,

though not necessarily to show it, is good for the maintenance of one's soul, which is, in itself, immortal. This was true, he said, no matter if the soul was a good one or an evil one. Father Letino concluded his explication by suggesting to Philomena Bertocci that she would not be the worse off in the eyes of God by giving more thought to the maintenance of her soul, and she could do this by preserving in her mind the memory of her late husband. Philomena's response to this was at once direct, and speaking in a clear, steady English she said: "I am not evil and I am not good. I will feel what I feel and my soul will feel it in the same way." Upon hearing this, the good Father Letino, while shaking his head from side to side, slowly removed his glasses, blinked his eyes once and looked down at the table, his brow crimped into rows of deeply lined furrows. "Philomena," he said, "I am confused by your reasoning." He looked up from the table, put his glasses on and stared at Philomena Bertocci, who went on scrubbing at the sink without speaking. Father Letino again offered what he thought was an appealing suggestion, but first he said imploringly: "God is a forgiving God. And if you have ever felt resentment towards your husband do not despair." He paused and went on: "Pray to God instead to be forgiven for those sins committed in thought, Philomena, for it is one's thoughts which bring on one's feelings."

Philomena stared over her shoulder at Father Letino. Her eyelids widened and a mischievous smile came to her lips. Father Letino, considering the magnitude of what he had just said, waited for an answer, his fingers tapping lightly on the surface of the table. Philomena, still smiling, lifted the wash cloth out of the sink and turned fully around. She stood before Father Letino holding the cloth in her left hand at eye level as she would have held the neck of a chicken before slitting its throat. With her right hand she squeezed the bottom end of the cloth that hung down from her clenched fist. In an instant, its contents of water and soap combined, gave forth an effusion of bubbles that coursed down her thick bare arms like two frothy veins, collected at her elbow in a pod of suds, and dripped from there to the floor. Father Letino squinted hard behind his glasses. He wondered what the relation was between the question he had asked and the antic he had just witnessed. Was Philomena hiding her grief behind the guise of frivolity, he wondered. Was she denying her God given soul the opportunity to make its natural response to her husband's death? This last question began to hamper his composure. He tapped the table now with an increased tempo. His breathing increased, too, and a redness flushed into the skin of his face, as he posed to himself two of what he considered the most critical of all questions: was Philomena losing her sanity; or if not this, was she

possessed by the devil: It did not take long to rule out the first question, and despite the rarity of such an occurrence, he quickly considered the strong possibility of answering "yes" to the second. So Father Letino stood up slowly, and with his trembling hand extended towards her, he made the sign of the cross and blessed Philomena Bertocci. ~~(Philomena's reaction here.)~~

It was not long into the afternoon when Philomena's mood became sullen. Her preoccupations with the coat and with the success or failure of the errand on which she had sent her son, shifted now to those of her husband. She thought of the embarrassment he had caused her when he first discovered her posing before the mirror. She thought of the hatred that had suddenly heightened within her on that day too, a hatred that was simple in its cause, but near to overwhelming in its tenacity, for even now, in its refusal to leave her, she felt its torment as she had felt the sudden, dulling emptiness that had come over her upon learning that her eldest son had been killed by his own hand, and she prayed to rid herself of it.

At first, kneeling before the statue of St. Anthony, which she had moved to the side of the bureau in order to see her image (in the fur coat), her prayers would not come. And she looked mournfully up into the yellow flame of the candle flickering in its cushion of ~~wax~~ ^{wax} below the rim of the red glass holder that stood at the statue's

base. In a while her lips began to move and she began to pray. She prayed for the soul of her deceased son and for the souls of her daughters and her remaining son. And after a short time, during which she tried not to think of her family at all, nor of the maintenance of her soul, as Father Letino had suggested, she prayed forcefully to be forgiven of her hatred, and especially of her scheme to wear her fur coat with pride, to show that she no longer cared that Ciro Bertocci, her husband, was dead.

- 1) ~~The son returns home from the furrier.~~
- 2) ~~The coat is beyond repair. (Reasons for this)~~
- 3) ~~The furrier gives Robert a note stating he will rent Philomena Bertocci a coat for the funeral. (Cost?)~~
- 4) ~~Philomena accepts the cost of the rental. (Five, ten dollars for three days? Get the facts on this: the cost in nineteen forty-two)~~

In the mounting contempt the daughters felt towards their mother for what they believed to be her disregard for their father's death, by wearing the fur coat, they could not now look her in the eyes; nor when they spoke to her could they speak without turning their faces away. The mother in turn gave them no attention, but she told them once and once only in a stern though reassuring voice that their father was gone, and if they could accept this fact it would be the best of any consolation that could be offered to them. If they could not accept this, she went on, in Italian, then time would pass and with it would pass both the memory of their father and the grief they felt so deeply now. For a while, this advice seemed to quell the resentment of the daughters; but as the hearse leading the small funeral procession approached the tall, wrought iron gates of the graveyard, and the orderly array of gravestones came into view beyond the stone wall that bordered the cemetery and the slope of the little hill where Bertocci was to be interred, they looked sadly at their mother in her fur coat and broke into a series of choking sobs. Robert, who had withdrawn into his own shroud of grief only a few hours after the body of his father had been carried up from the cellar and then taken to the funeral home, was now sobbing, though almost inaudibly, and tears began to show in his eyes. The boy sat on the small

utility seat? ~~Find out what they call this seat~~ of the limousine with his back to the rear side window. His head was slung low. His chin nearly touched ~~his chest~~. ~~(the~~ the upper part of his chest). His fingers were tightly meshed together on his lap. Now and then a slight tremor passed through his small frame. Once, as if something had jarred him from within, he looked around and stared momentarily at his mother, and then lowered his head again in a wave of sorrow that seemed to take all of his strength in his attempt to conceal it.

Philomena sat calmly between her two daughters. She looked ahead over the rear of the front seat, past the black, peaked cap of the chauffeur to the hearse, which had turned into the gateway and was making its climb up the rise of the hill towards the sight of Ciro Bertocci's grave. Although Philomena emitted the muffled sounds of some unintelligible prayer when the limousine made its turn through the gateway, her composure was otherwise relaxed and the rosy flush had not left her cheeks. Occasionally, with a delicate motion of her right hand, she would adjust the finely meshed veil that shrouded her face and position the black velvet hat more securely on her head. The collar of her coat was periodically adjusted too, by drawing the lapels snugly around her throat or pulling the lower portion of the garment carefully over an exposed knee. In her appearance and in her calm deportment, there seemed to be

a quality of dignity about her that even now would not yield itself to grief, and in her face behind the veil, there was an expression of quiet relief.

Yet the closer the limousine got to the summit of the hill where the broken earth showed through the heaps of stone and snow bordering the open grave, the sobbing of her two daughters increased, but not so much in the level of sound as in the short, wrenching intake of air which caught in their throats and rendered them breathless like children gripped in the fitful throes of a tantrum. Their faces blended red now, and the veins swelled full under the flesh of their necks. In an instant, when their breath could be contained no longer, it erupted in walls of sorrow that caused the mother to look first at one daughter and then the other with a chilling disgust, her lips held hard together like wires, and her eyes narrowing unapprovingly from behind the shadowy mesh of her veil.

"Quiet," she said angrily, and in Italian, added: "Look upon this death as a sign. Do you understand? A sign for all of us that we too will die and our lives will be forgotten!"

Philomena Bertocci stared intently through her veil into the eyes of her daughters. "Do you understand this?" she asked again, her voice becoming lower now and sympathetic in its tone.

The daughters said nothing. Gradually their sobbing diminished to intermittent sighs until a curious and haunting quietude pervaded the enclosure of the limousine, as it drew to a stop behind the parked hearse at the top of the hill.

The six hired pall bearers gathered at the rear of the hearse. The funeral director guided the limousine carrying the family into position about ten yards behind the hearse. This done, he opened the rear door and assisted the Bertoccis one by one as they stepped out onto the frozen ground. Father Letino had driven his own car to the graveyard after borrowing the necessary ration coupons from the sexton of his church. ~~(Develop this earlier. Coupons were required when one bought gasoline, and the good Father never seemed to have enough.)~~ ~~(The funeral procession begins in front of the church. Father Letino is inwardly affected by his memories of his conversations with Bertocci, and the miracle Bertocci witnessed. He feels deep regret for not having told Bertocci that he, Bertocci, did indeed experience a miracle the day he visited the church.)~~

He had driven four neighbors with him who had maintained a casual friendship with Philomena Bertocci, despite the vexations her husband had caused them over the years. He drew up in front of the hearse, parked, and in a fashion similar to the funeral director, assisted his passengers one by one as they stepped out of the door of

his car. (~~Description of the four mourners here; their relationship with the Bertocci, feuds, retaliations, resolutions~~)

The ^{small} ~~little~~ group of people waited silently now for the casket to be taken out of the hearse. Philomena Bertocci stood in front of her children, her head raised more than normally and her hands held together in front of her. Regina and Angela, who seemed to have taken their mother's advice to heart, at least for the present, stood quietly side by side looking moodily at the ground.

Robert stood to the rear and gazed wistfully beyond the rows of headstones to the open grave that would receive the remains of his father. In a short time, the vision in his mind of his father came over him with a persistent clarity; he could see his father sitting on his stool in the wine cellar; could see his worn, saddened face in the dim light of the bulb above his head, and his trembling hands raise his last glass of wine to his lips a few moments before his head dropped to his chest and his shaking frame lurched forward onto the footlocker. And again the boy heard his father's last breath give forth from his throat too, heard it sound deep and mournful in his throat as if it had tried to call out some final claim of rebuttal for all that had not been right, for all, it seemed, that had weighed upon him alone; and as the boy pondered the different shapes of the gravestones and looked

up at the leafless branches of the frozen trees in the sunlight--the bare, elegant bones of the trees that stood along the pathways separating the plots of the dead--he wondered even more so now of the mystery of death than he did when he had watched them carry the body of his father up the cellar stairs and followed them into the kitchen, and from there to the parlor, where they placed the stretcher on the floor and covered the body with a sheet, and pronounced his father dead. And he saw now as he did then, the deepened sockets of his father's eyes, saw the sunken cheeks and the bold prominence of the nose impress themselves from beneath the sheet into a mask of bone. Yes, in his own kind of sorrow, while he stood in the balmy air that wafted among the trees and the headstones of the cemetery, he wondered even more so now of the mystery of death than he did when he had first seen the telling lines begin to etch deeper into his father's face, and witnessed, in his own secret way, the man's strange sorrow, the heaviness of his grief, and saw that lone, shadowy figure that seemed to possess him more and more with futility and regret on each succeeding day following the dreadful news of his son. Yes, even more so, the boy was now capable, ^{of wondering} ~~despite his youth, to wonder~~ of the mystery of death whose cryptic clues he could sense in the names of the dead and in the dates of their birth and death chiselled with final precision into the face of the gravestones, a final cryptic

allegory of time the boy was able to comprehend: a solemn history of strangers no less once alive than his father was only ~~two~~ ~~(three?)~~ days ago.

And in a while another feeling welled up in the boy. It was a feeling that was new and yet tender in its force and in the mood it casued in him; for he felt now the desire to take his mother and sisters in his arms and comfort them.

~~He wanted to cry out to them and tell them that all was~~ STET

~~right, and that what he had seen in the gray stubble of beard on his father's face when he was alive, and in the worn, stubby fingers of his hands, and what he had sensed in the musky odor of his winestained sweater and saw in the creases of his bent and broken slippers,~~ Yes, he wanted to

tell them that in everything he saw in his father was now right and justifiable though he could not put this into words when he had first seen it. And with this new feeling the boy's heart seemed to ride within his chest, while through him passed a joy as inexplicable in its cause as his own surprise at himself for having reasoned such thoughts.

And the boy gazed once more across the tops of the headstones, and he looked once more over the snowy ground to his father's open grave upon which he closed his eyes in deep by remorseless regard, opened them, and looked to the pall bearers who stood dignified in a line, three on each side of the casket, which they had just removed from the hearse and were about to carry to the grave.

VIVA

The night was living on its toes in Provincetown, dancing high over the wide sky of Commercial Street, the gay, the tourists and dreamers soaring into a weekend of life and jazz and a slow, inevitable drowning in the hot yet lanky-thick fever and glint of middle America. We had arrived on the spur of those unforgettable moments fed by destiny or chance, or if not this, then it was a moment fed by the optimism that life hidden somehow is psychic choices: a subliminal dream of love and excitement for whatever human touch we imagined secretly to be at the end of the reach.

It was nineteen fifty-nine and the early years of William Ward's Provincetown Review, Daniel Bank (Not Dead Yet), Harriette Johnson, Ernesto and long-legged jovial Buster Clafaro and John Thomas, Waller, pondering his breakthrough again into literary heights, and some whose names live in the tomb of one's mind. And yes, it was the last year allotted to Harry Kemp: Post of the Times, about whom this short critique will strive to elucidate, given the doubts that one has about his own nature when laboring to define the character of another. So it will be short, for space demands it, and the dimensions of Kemp as man and poet are too complex for one who knew him only as a symbol of all

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that was loved in Provincetown: the lead actor in my own play of dreams, the kind Shaman who lived in the dunes and whose way of life filled the well of my own innocence with envy, yes, envy for his slow human melodies and scents of old Bohemia.

I had met Kemp four or five times, but on each occasion the man behind the mask was illusive as a fly. In his presence you listened and held back the probes of your interest that might have touched the real center of his personability, a privilege reserved only for the elite, his coteries, or for no one. To consider Kemp a great poet is a matter of choice. To consider him an artist is no choice at all; it is a necessity annealed from his act of life. And if romance lies on the other side of reality as the common stock of good human beings live it, then in the classic sense he was the true romantic: The drift of his poetry was always upward, reaching like a hand to the heavens of one's soul. But to find the seed of Kemp's own furies in his work—and who is without furies who has take quill to paper—is hopeless. So my judgment here is optional, but I'll take the option in good stead and compare him to the inward journey taken by his friend, O'Neill, a poet whose gifts are unavoidably pointed to the inside of one's reality, and it took O'Neill most of his life to get on the inside of himself, or at least expose his judgments made on personal conflict that was the nut-meat

of his drama, his dialectic. Kemp sang the celebration of his dream while O'Neill brooded on the edge of the abyss.

Yes the last time I saw Harry Kemp the night was dancing and flying to heaven in the Old Colony. Kemp sat at the table with no less than six young beauties admiring his output. They could see that shadow of soul in Kemp that only the feminine eye could reach. They, like all of us, were enthralled by the man and poem mixed. Yes, the night was living on its toes and Kemp was part of that electric urge despite his bad leg and his old age. His play was on, and I wondered what it was in the teeth of history that had ordained this man-poet of dunes with grace, or the human lie that endows greatness to some who never wished it or who fight it off for whatever else might burn inside of them. I sat and looked into his kind, old face and felt the presence of one who had gone the limit with style and whose style was now irrevocably infused with the labor needed to keep it going until death made its cleavage from the living and once dead, so too the secret that gave it force. If art is somehow rooted in the romance of the living, then to know Kemp was to know life as art. O'Neill, on the other hand, either by choice or by the pull of spirit yet untouched by the analytical probe, left Provincetown for the same reason that might have kept The Poet of the Dunes polarized here as a celebrity of outward color. O'Neill feared the celebrityism that gradually enveloped

Kemp in an aura of priesthood on whose shoulders sit both the muse and the antimuse. Passion given up to one is passion that never illumines the other; both are jealous of the same light. Kemp balanced or unbalanced the scales. Who really knows? Only he did, and perhaps that knowledge came on those precise and sometimes frightening moments when one's head first touches the pillow for the night. His passion for life was given up to life. He was the last of the classic romantics to move over these streets. His poetry, like O'Neill's plays, start at the same point: To order fantasy in the loneliness of arrogant definition without standard in a world they were never part of. Sight-seers both and harbingers of truth, and if deprivation holds one back from the leap into the moments of now, then deprivation is the source of the deepest insights, and for the poet, his craft denies that leap. Kemp had then, when I met him, the innocence of virginity and a flare for verbal promiscuity. Whatever trick of the human trade one has in his tool box, or in the craft of his personality, it was all there full to the hilt in Kemp as I knew him. It was there, indeed, and it was a craft, and it was beautiful in the deepest sense of whatever hope lingers on the edge of the brain of one who needed to love.

So that trip to P-Town in the late fifties was
ordained by the good ^{muse} ~~use~~ of destiny; I had met the Poet of

the Dunes at the end of my reach. The touch was physically slight but the image went deeper than sumliminal dreams. Kemp still walks in the mist of one's thoughts, a gunny sack over his shoulder, limping into the night. Romantic? Yes, romance of life, and possibly the killer of the dream. It is the trigger on the brain that haunts the present, or draws the future into the mold of the present, draws it to the self—sometimes too close to the actual abyss of the self—so that time becomes style and life becomes a living rose; the open heart of one's inner life that no one sees, a purpose in itself indeed of rich blood and rarity of beauty given to it by the grace of old age and time gone by, yes, given to it by the zap of the romantic who never touches the core of life but lingers on: the dirty old man of eternal love. Harry, a little bit of time left over, living his life as art, a dangerous game to aggravate the muse, and yet the only game perhaps for the real poets of the dream, the poet-actor who lives behind his mask with the presage of his own history, and the bones of memory dance in the legends of the living who give it voice. Kemp, a true genius of the fruit ...and the fruit was love.

A RANTING

I wanted at least one spread-out rolling week alone in the dunes that had filtered their good grace into the hearts of O'Neill, Harry Kemp (bless the old dog's soul) Dos Passos, Mailer (whenever he had the time to get there) and so many others. When I looked over the Peaked Hills—what was left of them twenty years ago—I was filled with the same grace. For the first time I saw the sea like a mammoth eye in the sun holding my soul like a jewel welded to its stare. The exact date is illusive, but the experience never left me. The memory had not died in the following years of bumming around and hanging on. In the fall of seventy-one the experience seemed telescopic, a vision in reverse spread out in the present—as close as one can get to the pivot of the present—and it lay out clean and blue and high as the sky that met it line for line, wedded on the arch of the horizon. Yes, it was the sea, and no money of the world could deny me ownership of what I saw then and have since loved with heart. Yes, it was the sea in seventy-one, the eye of the sea beyond the Peaked Bars rising with dune grass and hill. It was the great wet saucer of the world and plaything of the winds. It was everything that one needed most after the brain had been hammered by anger and doubt. It was the

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anodyne for the soul when the quality of life in an increasingly abstract world had reached its lowest ebb in a seemingly intolerable abstract mood of depression, the cause of which is beyond one's reach sometimes and beyond the exertion needed to rid one's self of it. Yes, it was the eye of the sea and everything that the eye could take in—granted that the inner eye had lost no sight—less the benefits of drugs and those Mad Ave gurus, those shit-peddlers of the soul.

The cabin I took looks down from a hollow across to the Western end of the Peaked Bars. Its name appropriately is Euphoria. It is owned by Hazel Hawthorne, a great dame of no few memories of O'Neill and Kemp, Agnes Bolton and John Reed—the list goes on—and whose heart is not without its quality of soft mystery endowed to it no doubt by years of proximity to the spirit of grace one could find only in a town embraced by the dunes she loves. A little further West, down a stretch of sloping beach, there is a low tide pool of crystalline water, mirror-like when the wind is down and a veritable lake of energy when the wind is up. Around the cabin there are bushes of rose hip, ivy, bayberry and dusty miller growing with soft nobility among the reeds of compass grass. It is peaceful at Euphoria. Yet there is something untouchable in one's self, something inexplicably private and unsettling in the feelings when night lifts and the sun plays on the compass grass and on the slopes of the dunes

facing West and when it shines on the scrub oak and pine and on the rugged texture of greenery that dissolves into shadows and darkens totally when the sun finally sinks. It is a feeling as deep as the air in September is sharp and one can stand in the light of dusk chilled only in a way that evokes the lost security of primal fire: the logs of drift wood muttering hot in the little stove sitting like an old granny as warm as a touch in the one-roomed cabin filled with heat. There is the glow of a hurricane lamp on the table by the window. In the flicker of light one studies the planks of the walls and is taken back by the pull of blood and the ghosts of former lives who took tools to the wood, or the axe to the trees of the wood. Yes, the old fierce pull of memory somehow not your own fingering the circuits of the brain, reading the message of a million years of flux and growth and death that sings no lost melody of life still interred in the grain of every plank, beam and piling of Euphoria.

And it sweeps up from the sea too, this memory. It rises and falls with a silence that booms like a comber crashing in the head. No electronic dirge here! No voice of the middle class kid touting Folk and still wet in the pants, singing the evils of Capitalism and packing it away in the Chase Manhattan Bank! No cry of the barker selling the wares of history so short-lived as a hit record! No impertinence of time either: an esplanade of silence here,

with more sound than a thousand rock festivals exploding the myth of dreams for the market place suckers hipped and taken at every turn of the emotions. But there is a fear. It is the fear of nature that has been ripped out of most like an appendix before the real absolutes: the details of the earth.

Yes, it is nature coming out of the North here ripping loose from the sea turned black, shaking the ghosts from sleep, hanging on the edge of a lull, then breaking through like an explosion of tails whipping the walls of Euphoria dancing on her pilings, leaning and jumping against the ~~renegade winds~~ ^{edicts of the}. And it rained throughout the night: No ordinary rain that pelted the roof in torrents of sheet-wind rife with the open sea. And on the third to the fifth day it raged like a maniac, but the good cabin held. On the morning of the sixth the seas rose higher in the light. And clouds! Monumental clouds in the clearing sky swelled with the dreamy moods of childhood when one lay in the grass and sent his fantasies soaring to those high dignities! And then, standing on the worn steps of the shack and lifted like a whisp into the great bowl without moving so much as a tendon in the finger. There! Up there! High on the mighty cloud sheeted home, making full to the southard with sails bellowing and a bone in her teeth, taking me and the shack in the tail of her wake! Great buffaloes yes, these clouds, and the faces of a million nights and days come to drink at

the well! And the sky a lake of blue mist hard as glass and cool, cool-blue as water to the lips; so cool to the lips of the eye! And the compass grass is singing, Oh happy days, Oh happy happy days!

It is nineteen seventy-one, and the day ~~that~~ the sky rang on the lid of the eye and beat with the rythm of a heart, and the Mad Ave gurus of death were still piling their merdes as high as the Walls of Jerico: a history gone ape in the hearts of the duped. A ^{thing} ~~think~~ in itself and for itself is the essence of the Peakeds. The thought of this went buzzing in my head like a moth against a lit pane of glass. It was hard labor for days after leaving Euphoria to look back on seventy-one, down the trail of its histroy. Yes, on the last night in the dunes it was a cup of rose hip tea and the scent of ^{bayberry} ~~bayberry~~ on the pillow. I knew that the storm inside of me had only deminished. It would rise again from somewhere in the blood. So before we are all counted out, nestle in on detail with the Peaked Hill and Euphoria sailing into the night. Nestle deeper with the warmth one can feel in the closeness of his favorite cat, and to sleep, before it's gone.

"A Night At The Beach"

~~Edward Bonetti~~

As I had done for a dozen or so consecutive nights, I stood alone under the trees that grow on the little slope near the path that leads up to the former site of what my generation called "The Shelter" (no longer there) at Savin Hill beach. There was a mysterious splendor to the full moon on this particular night. It rose to its zenith around midnight, difusing the sky with a light that seemed to have the texture of softly glowing talc. Awash in recollections, I stood with my back to the granite block boarded on four sides by a waist-high wrought iron fence. The bronze plaque commemorating the end of WWII and its heros is no longer bonded to the granite. Like the Shelter, it is gone.

So there he stood, in the quiet charm of moonlight, the silent wanderer, the drifter come back for a few hours to consider a memory or two while standing on the exact point from where, some eighteen years before this night, he had made his departure and had not yet won the world.

Now there are specific images that are roved into the pattern of one's memory, indelible there as a paint stain on a work bench in the cellar, as durable as an old pair of shoes whose mystery somehow overcomes good sense and aching feet, yet you can't throw them out. And there is perhaps no source of memorable experience,

at least for this writer, that is as effective on the senses as those private, inner connections one can make with the beauty of the night, despite the terror that night might hold for some of us.

In the glow of this magical luminescence then, I thought of my own past, of my youth and nights without terror, and of the six kids I had talked with earlier that evening while the moon rose out of the horizon like a porous wafer tinted orange in the expanse of a cloudless sky. We talked of an impending curfew at Savin Hill beach, and of the raid, which had been spurred by public drinking, that took place some two hours earlier. ~~Now there are a few kids who are insensible enough to put down a~~ police officer doing what his duty demands of him. On this night the police were following up the complaints made by people whose dwellings stand only sixty or seventy feet from the parking area where the kids hang out. But the young need the night as my crowd did during the heyday of our exuberance. Yet in the conviviality of being together, there will always be one or two punky bearers of anger whose brain cells are flooded with booze, as my own has been from time to time, but whose compulsions go back to the realm of the diapered babies they once were. Still, noise and anger don't necessarily go together with being young, and who among us would warrant in any world the use of chains to haul off a random drunk?

The polemics ended, and we six who lingered under the beauty of the night sky talked of healthy risk in an uncertain world, and of all good possibilities of things to come in life. And those bright, young lovely faces turned up to this older man and listened to him tell of the romance that came to him years ago from across the waters of Savin Hill Bay on the ripple of the wind at night; and of what the beach meant to him during his youth: an anodyne for the heart, the place he needed most at night after his brain had been hammered by anger and doubt during the boredom of long, meaningless summer days.

At that moment when the last kid turned into the shadows and headed for home, I looked into the moonlight as I had done some fifteen or twenty years before, when one particular girl had turned her small brown shoulder to my lips and listened to my dreams of things to come. Why should there be danger for the young to have a romance with the night, I wondered now? What real danger is hidden in one's choice now to walk freely along the beach arm in arm simply to feel the lonely heat of a full moon with someone you love, or to let your ear follow the sound of a trailer truck heading somewhere on the open road of the expressway devoid of traffic at two in the morning; yes, to let yourself hear the big, hefty whine of tires rolling into the night with that sense

of time and place of other worlds yet to be discovered, as one used to hear romance and promise of good things to come in the lonesome yet soothing wail of a steam train at night?

Yes, Savin Hill beach was to me an emporium of sensation, as it is now for those kids I talked to. It is not so strange then that in some of us small consequences of certain experiences might produce very private and sometimes very large effects on the soul. And at this very moment, I can smell the sweet, heady scent of citronella coming off the flesh of that small tanned shoulder in moonlight that shone some twenty years ago. I can remember too that this girl listened with no lack of true concern to the outpourings of a heart as young and romantic as her own under the glory of that particular night sky over Savin Hill beach, a sky which seemed to us like an inverted bowl studded with diamonds not beyond our reach. And no freaks we two that night. No dippy insensibilities drew us up to our waists in the falling tide. Like two seraphs, we waded quietly through that purple beauty while the moonlight sparked in each successive wave that touched us. Yes, I can remember that we walked to the pier called Tar Wharf, which appeared to us then like the vertical rib cage of a beached leviathan that had perished alone on the flats. And we walked beneath its wooden beams smelling yet of the scent of creosote, and beneath the weed-matted planks with the points of sixty penny galvanized spikes

protruding through the split grain like the heads of deceased bullets. And the slow shadows of that August night came falling in upon us, and the shafts of moonlight slanted in through the brute complex of hewn timbers ancient and worn in the iron-like angles they created. Yes, it was night, and there was terror in its beauty, yet we felt dumbfounded and paradisaical as though we had roamed within the primordial confines of some littoral forest, leafless and alone.

So the night deepened towards morning, those two or three weeks ago, and the expressway that rims the inner portion of Savin Hill beach was a barren utility of modern times. But it was peaceful, and the cry of an early gull echoed once through the silence, then diminished. I stood looking in the direction where Tar Wharf used to stand and had the feeling there will come a night when I'll dive to the bottom of the bay and with my bare hands disinter one or two of the old stubs of the pilings of Tar Wharf in whose grain I know there is enscribed the initials of two former young lovers, and of a singular, lonely young hero of his time who instead of personal obscurity in an increasingly fragmented world, opted for simple immortality by the mere carving of his name into the same wood.

And, before turning for home, I wondered if there could be at least one footprint that had impressed its shape into the soft tar of the planks on some bristling

summer day while one fished for mackerel, and then after dark, had cooled and hardened in precise detail from heel to toe, the walker somewhere oblivious now to the fossilized proof of his or her existence unseen on the plank beneath the accumulated silt of the bay.

~~Night! What a necessity for all of us, young and old.~~

"Savin Hill, A Place Revisited"

~~By Edward Bonetti~~

What is the catalyst that can trigger those memories whose source is buried somewhere in the neighborhood of one's youth? Is that mysterious ingredient hidden in the moody shrouds of fog that can sweep across the expanse of Dorchester Bay on those marvelously haunted nights, or in the sweet, vegetal scent of the open sea that comes in on an easterly breeze? Consider too those subconscious odors one sensed as a kid, those lone, musky odors that rose from the weedy creeks of the marshlands only a few hundred yards from home. Perhaps the necessary catalyst is in none of these. Perhaps its a special kind of psychological magic instead that can bring on such images in the mind of plushy eel grass near the bogs where one lay dreaming as a boy on those lonesome, yet precious mid-summer afternoons. So intense then, during one's formative years, could be the simple wet bark of the trees, which grew along the sloping streets up from the salt marsh, and what sanctity there was in the movement of the dampened leaves which seemed to breathe in the wind one upon the other after a calming rain. Even now, some fifty years later for me, one's memory can be triggered by the magic in those awesome downpours that come leaping out of the west like demons, hammering the sky into the color of gun steel. What wild beauties they are indeed, beauties who can wag their tails and make their call upon the neighborhood rife with harmless terror.

Yes, there is time and memory in the rocks and in the boulders of Savin Hill itself, tumbling up from the adjoining bay in boulders cleaved and broken, wet-gray in the rains, some sheared smooth and clean in the glare of the sun's light. Stolid they are, and massive to the child's eye: a cascade of glacial deposits that had turned upside-down in the throes of its formation. What a mystery it was for a kid to stare upon those rocks, those rounded, silent hulks of half-buried dinosaurs rising out of the earth and out of the grassy heaps among the trees. And what a panorama of memories come back to the mind's eye, as far as the real eye can see, from the summit of that hill!

It is said that the drifter is one who lives without roots. If this is so, then he may live without those elements in the anatomy of memory that connect the emotions to the past. In this sense, the drifter has no ties with the past, which can, at times, cause fearsome inklings in the mind of how things could have been and ought to be now. In the least he might live without friendships either, for which some of us unnecessarily labor in order to keep the bond, or without those thrifty alliances made in good faith and later, much later, could have died in the gloom of obsessions or in the decay of needed promises unfulfilled. Still, there might be some glory due the drifter. He could be that wanderlust hero of the world whose uneven history is cut off from behind on each successive day of his life, but whose soul

might be more at ease with the undying sense of its token past than is the soul of the home-bound lush pushing fifty with his hope of good things to come running thin. Who can say?

There is a man I know who was born and raised in a small town about forty miles ~~west~~^{west} of the suburbs of St. Louis. He's fifty-seven now. He's paunchy, short and loveable, with thinning gray hair. He's the classical romantic, the happy-go-lucky clown who lives not without his serious moments, and after five or six drinks to loosen him up, he's off on a talking marathon, a non-stop tour through the days of his youth replete with candid descriptions of the girls he loved, of baseball games in the local park, of busted lips and black eyes won in fist fights that began as quickly as they ceased, of crazy, unusual friends too, living and dead, and of ~~timeless~~^{timeless} wonderous nights of revelry when the world seemed to be ~~dancing on its toes~~ and the skies over the town spilled its torrent of stars, ~~lit for the pirouettes of the zany.~~ He's a drifter, yes, always on the go but never broke. He's a man whose heart is swollen with good memories, who can tell a slew of ripened stories that are sentimental to boot but in such a way that the ear still listens in the wake of the tale. He's been around. He's seen it all, and what fascinates me about him most are the nudging similarities in our lives, and in the elements of experience that are different in time and place but not in the intensity of significance they hold for

each of us. A drifter he is, a hero come out of the past but who "can't go home again," a romantic whose mind is still keen with the lore of his former neighborhood and of the people and the things that he loved there.

SCHEFF

Thirty years of coming
back home and you can
still remember the
streets running on past
the houses: the black top
streets with the children's
scribbles of chalk on the
black New and selected for
eyes and nose and the half-moon
crescents of chalk for the
sailing mouths: thirty years
and you can still remember
the slow clapping horses and
the wagons they pulled; the
steel runners of the wheels
grinding through the gravel
in the yellow dirt and raising
dust like a thin mist: thirty
years of coming back home
and you can still remember, and
you have not yet won the world.

000000/100

STREETS

Thirty years of coming
Back home and you can
Still remember the worn
Streets running on past
The houses: the black top
Streets with the childish
Scribbles of chalk on the
Black streets: triangles for
Eyes and nose and the half-moon
Crescents of chalk for the
Smiling mouths: thirty years
And you can still remember
The slow clopping horses and
The wagons they pulled; the
Steel runners of the wheels
Grincing through the gravel
In the yellow dirt and raising
Dust like a thin mist: thirty
Years of coming back home
And you can still remember, and
You have not yet won the world.

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BONETTI 184

FOR TOM McAFEE, ~~(1972)~~
FROM A LETTER THAT WAS NEVER SENT

"There is no central mourner"
when the good poet dies,
but in his dying
you become him
and feel the pain he felt,
and for a while
the memory of him
will rob you of your pleasures.

Dear Tom,

I have been thinking about the good times we had together

And of my former wife with her iron will to put up with me.

Give her my love if you see her,

And R.P. and Dethrow, McKinley and Rap, Boze Taylor, Bob Dyer and more.

And the nights I camped alone

On the banks of the Missouri River in Easley:

Give those nights my love,

And the good booze,

And the food and the laughter

In the small house on Gordon St. in Columbia,

Give it all my love. I remember it all:

I remember sitting drunk at the kitchen table once,

With car grease in my hair

Talking about the writers of the world with you,

And after the storms on those dripping nights

Drinking outside on the porch

Watching the lightning spill

Through the convolutions of cloud cover moving north,
And I wondered at times
Why I could not go along with the storms,
Dissolve into the wind and go,
Then weary in the morning
When the sun came up like a knife across my throat.
Is that old knobby apple tree still there in the yard,
And the little shack behind the house,
The peaked roof shack I used as a work shop,
With its gas heater sitting squat in the corner?
I rebuilt my first engine there,
From gear to bearing, from beginning to end,
My knuckles raw with ambition.
It was in that shack, Tom, where we agreed
That memory can be a crime against the self;
Yet, I still live with the memory of that tractor I found
Lying over in the hollow among the weeds outside of town.
We talked about it one day in August.
We were sitting in a bar that had that slow OK atmosphere
Of a New York cocktail lounge in the late afternoon
That we both liked.
I can not remember the name of the bar,
But I can recall the image of you
Indomitable as a cat with your drink in your hand

Leaning back in your chair.
You seemed to listen between your thoughts.
You seemed to hear only the segments of the tale I told
Of pistons and cranks, of rocker arms, of push rods and lifter bores
And what I had planned to do with the engine of that tractor.
But you heard the sound in every detail explained,
You lovely, inimitable, closed-mouthed son-of-a-bitch:
You understood all the while all the connections
Of all the threads in the pattern of my lofty scheme.
And I always held to the idea
That only in the mind of a child
Could innocence rule the simple truths.
The tractor was a nineteen forty-one Ford, you remember,
The last model built before World War II.
It was a four cylinder painted red,
And there was rust on the metal
Through the paint in patches along the block.
It had massive rear tires high as my head,
With V-shaped treads thick as my arm,
And tie rods and torsion bars too
That could match the tensile strength of an oak.
And the molded beauty of that staunch, rear-end anatomy
Of cast iron gear casings
That carried the machinery of its power:

The muscle torque of fifty stallions or more.
What rugged elegance!
What a royalty of metal and bone!
And you listened.
Tom, the man who told you this was a happy man.
In three weeks time he had brought that tractor back,
A fossil hauled from the weeds brought back from the dead:
New cylinder sleeves inserted, the head planed, the valves reground,
All the parts precision smooth and assembled one by one.
It was a clean mating of surface clean against surface,
Flawless to the eye.
What joy!
What style and determined will, it seemed.
What precious vanity!
It was as if some other world had formed itself around the man
While he worked the parts in the little shack,
And there were no despairing days after the work was done.
Yes, he can remember still the wooden bench
With its back-board of hanging tools
Forged for singular purpose,
And in their use you wondered
If the grip of his hand on a wrench
Was no less sure than man's first grip on a shard of stone.
What vanity!
But he got that tractor going,

Got her moving over the fields plowing the earth,
 The hefty folds of Missouri earth turned up by the blades.
 A month or two later, Tom, that man sat alone in that lounge
 And reasoned in the coolness of those fancy dim lights
 That time is a bleeder, a heartless murderer;
 But there was a kind of time
 In the closure of his small house
 After each day he had worked in his shack
 When he could laugh at the world
 And show that his life would be meaningless without garlic
 Because he knew that the humor in terror and in Time
 Could be easily proved in the sauces he made.
 And you seemed to know this too.
 Yes, what precious vanity.
 Do you remember, Tom?

"There is no central mourner"
when the good poet dies,
but in his dying
you become him
and feel the pain he felt,
and for a while
the memory of him
will rob you of your pleasures.

SEASONAL

It is the first day of spring
And I feel the contours of
Winter in my bones.

My window is open
To the thrashing sunlight
Falling across the room

Through motes of dust.
(My brain is harrowing
with its dreams, I had

Nightmares.) Mother!
Dear mother, I feel your hands
warm against my breast.

Linger as you would among
The trees.
The world drills on
As uncertain as death.

In this month of the year
It is the lilac trees
Which beguile me when they bloom
And burst their scent upon the wind.

THE WAKE

He had read the telegram as if
he knew the shape
of final incidents.
And the shape of it: the closed,
gold-handled coffin,
the silver candelabra burning
behind the unavoidable silence
of his unwed sister draped in black,
whom he had not grown to know
beyond the tone of kinship,
who had for years nursed the father
to his final hour,
gave only half a clue
to what lay inside the coffin.
She stood like a shadow by the door
to meet the mourners one by one,
while he watched the faces of
the simply unfamiliar,
the odd, the old near-blind
who had come to see the dead,
had come to know it all
through mere necessity.
And when he fled
to catch his plane,
he remembered only this: his father,
whom he had known in the brutality
of his dreams,
was at least a quiet man.

ANA

I

Ana, he starts from the memory of your frail composure,
and from this
tells you it is not unusual
that during these hours heaving toward night
his hands begin to shake:
He is corrupt with fear.

He would ask you: "Why do I tell you this,
and what brings on this pomposity of the will to ask
in the first place?"

Is it something other than the will,
the child in him that never died,
as he is so much spoken of
but is never explained?

(Ana, through the image he has of you
he can see his mother's kitchen filled with sunlight.
He can hear her linen curtains luff
in the salt breeze coming in from the marshlands,
and the laughter of small children
in ~~the~~ other rooms of the house where he grew up.)

II

Day and night, dear girl,
he has sat by the window of his room facing the open bay.
It is morning now.
The sun is no more than two hours above the hills of Truro
to the east.
The surface of the water is still.

It gives off the glare of burnished metal.

During the course of these progressing hours
he has been watching the sun above the hills
and its light reflecting through the window
from the surface of the water.

At the same time, Ana, as on any morning,
he can hear the gulls searching the sky,
echoing through the haze across the water from Long Point.
He can see too the scattered flocks that have lifted
and are flying toward him like shadows
through the misty splay of this early light.

He can also hear the broken cries of other birds he can not name.
He can hear a boat horn's diminishing blast.
He can hear the links of a chain somewhere beyond the pier
to the west,
rattling over the sheave of an uncoiled block,
and the muffled drone of a trawler's engine too,
yet husky and wide in the haunted calm of this windless air.

There is much more than this that he can see and hear.
There is much more that he can remember:
For instance, Ana, he still retains the memory
of standing on a hill in Truro once,
watching the sun come up from behind the darkened waters
that marked the ledge of the open sea.

On that morning, dear child, his mind ached with treacheries
committed against itself the night before.

What those treacheries were he can not explain.

That is, Ana, if there were a kind of contrition
that could make them void

he would name them here.

But for what ever reason he can not explain them,

It would not be in the explanation anyway,

It would not be in what he can hear or see

on these particular mornings

that would redeem him of them.

Instead, as it was on that morning hill in Truro,

it is as if he were someone else watching him,

It is as if he were someone he does not know

who sees too that child who watches unexplained.

III

I'm sure, Ana, that he tells you this

because he has given himself to himself too many times

to wonder anymore

of the things that live outside of him;

and he has come to learn the cruel details of the past live in the wind.

(But I have heard him say, Ana, "Stay precious to yourself.

Let those details rage there in the wind.

Let the turmoils heighten there.

You are among those of the present now.

You are the same to them as their sameness is to you.

They, like you, are alone."

174
Yet there are times, Ana, when he is like a barren tree.
When this is so,
he is rooted to the slope of some nightmare hill
where his bones slake off shards of broken stone
before the edicts of this wind,
and he suffers.)

IV

Child,
more and more,
when the seas rise up
and divide into separate voices against his window,
to speak in a language he understands,
but has no name,
he takes to reading old books about things,
and in this he feels a mellowing comfort.
Sometimes he reads about the history of flying.
He studies the pictures of the old planes.
There are three he especially likes:
The Sopwith Camel,
The Spad,
and the tri-winged machine painted red
with the black iron cross emblazoned on its sides,
flown by the Red Baron during the first world war.
But of these I have mentioned, Ana,
he built the models, Spad and the Sopwith Camel
when he was a boy of twelve.
(When he thinks back to those years, dear girl,
he remembers himself at his work table
under the rafters of his attic room

1 - 1 - 1 1 9 5
glueing the air-frame of balsa wood
pinned down on the paper plans.
He can still smell the odor of dry balsa, Ana,
and the sweet reek of glue extruding from its leaded tube.)

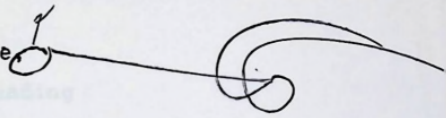
V

As often, child,
if the sea's trebled voice
becomes too anxious in his thoughts,
he reads aloud from an old technical manual
on radio receivers and "thermionic valves,"
better known to most as "vacuum tubes,"
but listen to the sound in the words that describe them:
"diodes," "triodes," "tetrodes," "pentodes,"
old and classic sounds, Ana, that define the elements of their use.
And there is another book about things,
which he keeps on a shelf alone
for hellish nights by the stove
where he can sit and read
and grow empty of fear
and the voices from the sea are calmed.
It is an automotive manual of the nineteen forties
depicting exploded drawings
of manual transmissions,
drawings whose parts are juxtaposed,
as if he could bring them together by thought,
for their complexity, Ana, like thought,
of simple principles of levers and gears,

of rugged assemblies of bearings and shafts,
all of precision and of rounded shape,
save for the angled teeth of the gears,
forms the simple particular of things to the working whole.

VI

Yes, precious child,
someday within your comprehension will be
all of a whole
the things you will see and hear,
more ageless than his fear,
more rugged than the planes and the vacuum tubes,
but all of them things about things,
and of things,
from the simple nomenclature of your past.



BREAD

for a young wife

It was a simple thing to do.

Most of the things she used

Were dusted with flower beneath the cabinet:

The wooden spoon, the bowl,

The metal sifter with its green wooden crank,

And a cracked but useable rolling pin.

I did not see her during those minutes

Of doubt and decision that must have preceded it

As if it were a movement clean

And natural

As brushing a hair from her eye.

And it was done:

From the movement of her fingers kneading

As she would knead a role of linen on the edge of a rock

To the oven door open, when it was done,

And the four loaves cooling

Like huge brown eggs

On the table before me.

FROM A TRAIL

THE WAY

Don't that walk we were to have together,
That walk in the forest,
I can feel it now the leafy ground underfoot,
The sun I was to see,
Going up along the slope
In place to the most protruding.

A RARE KIND OF KNOWLEDGE

For Kay Karnes

I watched you one summer afternoon
Quiet as an unaccountable shadow
sitting on a wall of hand-picked granite.
I watched you standing on a hill once too,
While your devastation grew.
Then on a day, somewhere into fall,
After your season had ended,
After your devastation had grown enough,
You learned of the shape of the hill
And the builder of the wall.

FROM A DREAM

For Gray

About that walk we were to have together,
That walk in the forest,
I can feel it now: the leafy ground underfoot,
You and I arm in arm,
Going up along the slope
We stop to look upon the rock protruding,
Its mica chips like diamonds in the sun.
And below the rocks the pond
And the young, cool white birch
Reflected in the glazed light,
Reflected from the water.
And moving up now to some small plateau:
Among more birches, among the pines, among the oaks,
Moving up among the trees
Not saying a word to each other,
Censured somehow by our secrets.
What are the secrets, I wonder.
And we move further still towards the top of something,
Darkened by the cluster of trees.
We stop again.
We look at each other and turn our faces away.
We look in separate ways.

THE FIGURE

Across the open marsh from the road
I saw the figure of a woman standing singular
Against the trees that rose with the hill behind her.
My eyes held the figure fixed,
Like a shadow in a gown against the trees.

A wind lifted out of the barren silence.
It lifted and ruffled the eel grass.
It swept over the trees and diminished.
Above the hill,
The cry of a gull ripped through the murk
Of a darkening sky,
Then faded.

I listened to the barren silence.
I breathed in the misty scent of the brackish creeks
And the lone, weedy musk of the bogs.
I looked for the woman's reflection among the trees
Inverted perfectly below the hill
On the surface of smooth water:
I could not find her.

Beyond the figure,
Somewhere beyond the figure of the woman
Standing singular against the trees on the hill,
I heard the sound of a child's low wailing.

SHE

for Rue

She said:

And so it goes when one meets one's self

Coming the other way,

Each with her own vision.

You get scared.

You do all kinds of things to change your life

And nothing ever happens.

There were a few more yards to go.

The road was sandy

and they could yet see the sea.

Then below them, the hollow,

and a bar-wreck left unburied

in its bowl of brine.

They entered wordless, with no love,

and when she lay back down,

before the seaweed came,

only the sky was visible

and the eyelid at the corner of her eye.

THE LOVERS

The only value of guilt
and its mystery
is its way of evoking
the truth of what tries
to remain unsaid;
and in this it protects
the mind from insanity.

There were a few more yards to go.
The road was sandy
and they could yet see the sea.
Then below them, the hollow,
and a car-wreck left unburied
in its bowl of briar.
They entered wordless, win or lose,
and when she lay back down,
before the sweetness came,
only the sky was visible
and the laurel at the corner of her eye.

205
SAVIN HILL

This hill grinding upward
Is a cruel measurement of time:
Broken glass shimmers in
The stubbles of old weeds;
Beer cans testify to
Nights of rusty glory,
Shit spatters the rocks;
The earth is broken, the trees
Maimed! Release my rancor?
On what?
Should I eviscerate the trees
And suck the juice from their roots?
Or shackle my bones to the ancient rocks,
A forlorn Prometheus?
The east wind cools me, the odorous
Wind from the sea refreshed.
It is this which saves.
Is there a witness?
Am I alone among the rocks
Fevered with a madness
On the highest point of the city?
My life falters with remorse for
This hill where my youth lies
Buried in memory. I stand
Helpless to the seasons as
The trees without buds,
Leafless, their black branches
crawling skyward . . .

LIP SERVICE

Above the Bronx,
A thunder-head convoluting big as the world,
With a spattering of rain on his forehead,
Tired man in his thirties,
Standing beneath this monster:
Then into 161'st street & the earth
Of New York under,
To sixty eighth & out.
Walking head up now:
Beyond the buildings,
A lumbering crescent moon
That gave him the feeling
It was pain ~~enough~~ enough
Concerning the snape of cloud or moon,
Or hearing the East River spilling
Its New York truths,
Or concerning one's face in a window,
Or an ebony goddess with eternal hips,
Her legs smooth as hewn wood:
He could have learned it by looking into one face,
Or her's ,
But having looked,
Know he would never learn it.

TRURO

for Lynne

A sky of clouds and winter held

The sea lay furrowed by thunder.

Rose with the fields long virgin

Swept tall in dusk through the swollen dunes.

We walked from hollows

Blind to the east wind and the cry of the gulls.

When the scarab bums in the belly of the fish

When the wave bleeds its terrors on the pier's back

When the heart shows the moon its crude rebellion

When the pleasure dies

And that eyes like quarters stare

Through the stale-stark wires of the sea.

WINTER, PROVINCETOWN

A weltering head of sea;
 Pheasants quiver in the bush.
 Clouds are lambent split by thunder.
 Gone are the sabbath-mourning virgins
 Who moved in silence through the swollen dunes.

This is the crowned instant of the season
 When the scarab burns in the belly of the fish
 When the worm bleeds its terror on the piper's beak
 When the hawk claws the moon in crude rebellion
 When the glammers die
 And Ahab's eyes like quarters stare
 Through the whale-stuck wires of the sea.

THE MOUNT

(The / Day / Part / Partured.)

June 12, 1985 on Coast Guard South

In Southern, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

Prose came hard and a few

who never wished to

because it was it came

looked as it were already

within the better of their words.

PROVINCETOWN, MARCH 9, 1985

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue beautiful day.

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

What a bright blue

THE ARTIST

(For Jimmy Parr, murdered,
June 22, 1969 on Coast Guard Beach
in Eastham, Cape Cod, ~~Massachusetts~~)

Praise comes hard and a few
who never wished it
denounce it when it comes
locked as it were already
within the battles of their canvas.
Better there than reason
behind the praise and color of a wing,
a piece of driftwood
and the locked mystery of the sea
unloosened by his hand.
No mystery now but there is the praise
~~and~~ the battle,
praise for the objective:
You said you praised the objective,
but only temporary as you knew
the shape of a feather was temporary.
Listen! "Wingate". Say it!
It was in the sound of his name!
There was a feather in his name!
"Wingate!"
Like some reef hidden below the wind at sea
where his gulls flew.

James Wingate Parr!

We praise you and what you gave beyond the objective:

a shell no more a shell for you gave it,

a gull whose wings were frozen,

a log burnished gray by wind and the weeds of the sea

graying delicate as death and flight.

Wingate! there is flight in the sound of his name.

Don't take it lightly or him.

He knew the shape of a bird.

THE PARTY'S OVER

TO A GULL

Only the gull is white,
soaring,
the arc of its flight
is no more invisible
than wind lifting its bones,
whiter than its lift
of muscle and wing
whose one visible beat
turns its belly up
before it is gone.

THE PARTY'S OVER

After all the talk

And all that conversation

Is gone dead in the grain of the wood,

There is nothing

Of any absolute

That can bring it back.

I used to see him

With smoke on the sleeves of his coat,

His eyes red with sight

Beneath a street lamp waiting,

His hand moving with the rhythm of an ear

Gripped through the lining of his pocket.

THE LONER 1

They said he was a strange guy,

That he had a slow tongue

In the vernacular.

He never swore,

Although he panted like an engine,

His teeth held hard

On the idea of love.

I used to see him

With mucous on the sleeves of his coat,

His eyes red with sight

Beneath a street lamp waiting,

His hand moving with the rhythms of an eel

Gripped through the lining of his pocket.

← THE LONER II

Night of curious sounds
of voices
of rain
of the baffling spattering rain upon the windows
of the pulling of blood in the veins
of the insect's wail
of the steel upon steel of gear and axle mesh
of the loose phlegm in an old man's throat
of the lingual juice and juice of the lungs
of the ratchet and pall of the earth unclicking
of the clacking of heels on the concrete stepping
of the quiver of hips and arms high-swinging
of the quiver and snap of thighs high-stepping
of the moisture of woman
of the secret openings moistened
of the rattling wad of nipple and the ilk of hair
of the vagaries of scent
of the snapping of calves in the wide night
of the wide thumping night
night of the wind-licked moon
lugubrious night of disillusion
night of the fitful stars and affirmation
night of orgasm and fink
night of the genital touch
night of the fetal hush and the ox-horned moon
ponderous night;!
brain tearing night! 

A PASSING QUESTION

What is that kind of silence,

The silence one hears

At night alone in a room?

Something in the darkness

ETHNIC CLUE

I mind it

when guys

in a bar

say:

"You

greasy

guinea

prick."

Then there's danger.

Watch out!

A PASSING QUESTION

What is that kind of silence,
The silence one hears
At night alone in a room?
Something in the darkness
Behind the eyes?

You hear something

in that roar,

don't you?

Yes,

the rattle of a nerve gone bad.

JET FIGHTER

You hear something
in that roar,
don't you?
Yes,
the rattle of a nerve gone bad.

PICK UP

So we go home and go to bed,
 and I put it in you,
 and we fuck,
 and you come,
 or I come,
 or we try to come,
 or you might come,
 or I try,
 or you try,
 and we try again,
 and who comes?

AFTER HAVING BEEN EXPOSED TO BITCHERY

No man can betray another man
through a bitch: it is her nature
as woman to betray man. She is able
to betray soley because she is a bitch.

The last
thing
in the world then,
I would attempt now,
is to write anything
which would not
communicate exactly
how I feel.

GOBBLEDYGOOK

Inside up my down
 When ~~two~~ times two is once
 I saw whiskers on a cat's nose
 Striking down the sun,
 Bur rather to think on some riddled rhyme
 In the upness of my whims
 I'd rather catch a playmate of the month
 Scratching her butt
 With one long finger all the way up it
 Reaching for that big one.

ALONE

Tonight,

Some salad of Romain

And Spanish onions sliced,

With Italian dressing

Mixed with the chopped Monarch of them all:

GARLIC!

Four cloves or more!

Then a fillet of Haddock Vinha d'alhos

And a bottle of Montrechet,

Tussle up in bed

With a book on

"Scatter Propagation of Electromagnetic Waves"

Another glass or two of wine

(Maybe more,)

And read,

While my cat sleeps

Beside me.

CAT POEMS

ABSOLUTION

I will hold to my animals.
In the beginning and in the end
That is all I have ever had.
And all I will ever have.
I will hold to my animals.

A STYLISH, OF THE

The Daily News

She had an intense interest in the world of animals.

She had an intense interest in the world of animals that rode them.

The first time in the night when

When the night breeze rustled through

From the north and west.

When the night breeze rustled through

ABSOLUTION

I will hold to my animals.

In the beginning and in the end

That is all I have ever had,

And all I will ever have.

I will hold to my animals.

A STATEMENT OF FACT

for Emily Cat

She had no chance against Steelbelt Radials.

She had no chance against the metal beasts that rode them.

She died alone on the night street

Where the savage traffic flattened her:

Bone, muscle and fur,

Flattened to a bloody pelt.

FRIDAY, A CAT

He was like a little stallion.

He went out one day and he never came back.

He was black.

He was sleek.

He was young,

And he was always happy.

A PASSIONATE RATIONALE

for Gray

I believe
there is a consciousness
of itself and for itself
that lives
in the tip of my cat's tail.

THOUGHTS AFTER A LONG CONVERSATION WITH MY CAT

She

doesn't know

precisely

what I say;

but she knows

absolutely

what I mean.

5-1217, 220
AN EXPLICATION FOR SCAMP, ~~A FAVORITE CAT~~

No more than eight years had beat in her^{feline} heart
And no more than what I knew could satisfy
The possibility that she might have already known.
But I said: You cannot ask a storm
To come on a particular day,
And we will never know why they come as they do,
But when this is so a night,
When I'm alone in this house with you,
And you are sleeping where you will,
It seems the storms are particular:
They are of themselves, like you,
And I lie down,
I listen
And I sleep.

SIMEON, A BLACK CAT

for Deborah

I felt at times that we knew of each other's will,
Though the separation of his world from mine
Attended the insoluble difference.
Not always sure of knowing,
Nor moved by doubts,
I wondered how much there was in his form to know,
And in the parts that made up his form
And the shapes he made of himself
Inseparable among the shadows of the room
Where the bed stood,
And he upon it, sleeping.